

Reflections on the Peace Process in Andhra Pradesh

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adjustment for 'errors and omissions' is made at the aggregative level, no such adjustment is made at the sectoral level. An alternative which the Working Group recommends is that the 'errors and omissions' be treated as 'statistical discrepancy' and that no adjustment whatever be made to any of the independent estimates (ibid, p 128).

Subsequently, the *Expert Group Report on Saving and Capital Formation* (Chairman: VM Dandekar/Raja J Chelliah 1996) had reported that "the recommendation has been implemented and the term 'errors and omissions' has been substituted by the term 'difference'" (p 52). But, curiously, the system of 'errors and omissions' remains unchanged even to date.

If the above recommendations had been implemented as suggested above, the level of aggregate investment in the economy in 2003-04 would have been only 23.0 per cent and not 26.3 per cent as in the CSO's adjusted estimates. And taking the issue a step forward, the actual domestic saving rate should be placed at 24.8 per cent which is the equivalent of unadjusted capital formation plus 1.8 per cent of GDP

estimated as a current account surplus on the balance of payments or the size of capital outflow. [27]

Note

[Tabulations for this note, prepared by V P Prasanth and R Krishnaswamy, are gratefully acknowledged; so also the efforts of K Srinivasan in inputting the note.]

1 While revision if any made in the estimates prior to 2002-03 are not known, some corroborative evidence in the form of percentage change in 2002-03 contained in the CSO's latest release shows no significant revisions in them.

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to the election phase, citizens' groups, notably the Concerned Citizens' Committee had over a period of five years painstakingly pieced together a framework within which peace could be negotiated, in case the possibility arose. A new government meant the creation of this possibility.

It was not easy reposing confidence in the Congress, given its own notorious history during the Emergency in the state, yet, the people decided to set the past aside and give it another chance. It is also true, of course, that not giving the Congress a chance, meant risking the catastrophic consequences of the TDP and its allies continuing in power. After the carnage in Gujarat and with the TDP's deplorable human rights record in Andhra Pradesh, voting the Congress in and forcing it to be accountable seemed a better possibility. The victory for the Congress was only possible because of the support by different parties (including the Naxalites) and ordinary citizens concerned about the crisis in democracy. Initiating the peace process therefore was not an act of benevolence by the Congress government, but the first step towards fulfilling a commitment on the basis of which it had been given the mandate of the people – one that had 'conditionalities'. We also know that non-compliance with conditionalities, especially where it concerns the people, inevitably results in being ousted from power.

In a state that has the longest history of radical political movements, especially Left movements, Andhra has also had the longest history of the criminalisation of political dissent in post-independence India. Places where political activism is highest, therefore, are in the eyes of the state 'Naxalite infested' areas. Arms, extremist propaganda and extortion are equal and coexisting evils. Political literature, specifically communist literature is censored (sedition sections were used well into the 1970s), and the right to free speech curtailed even while C-grade cinema spreads its poison through a flourishing industry. And yet, although this effort at criminalising radical politics through law and in popular perception has been backed by the might of the state, it has failed to achieve its objective. As a result, the 'rule of law' has been interpreted by the state to mean 'law and order', a euphemism for arbitrary and unlimited police powers.

The popular perception of the Naxalites is far from negative despite the fact that incessant contrary propaganda by successive governments and direct engagements

Reflections on the Peace Process in Andhra Pradesh

Initiating a peace process with the Naxalites was not an act of benevolence by the Congress government, but the first step towards fulfilling a commitment on the basis of which it was given a mandate by the people. It is now time to address several questions pertaining to the entire process that spanned eight months, including the role of the media, the bearing of arms in public, the issue of land reforms and that of 'neutrality' in political matters. The ultimate undoing of a laboriously crafted process of democratisation by a newly elected government is cause for serious concern.

KALPANA KANNABIRAN, VOLGA,
VASANTH KANNABIRAN

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

– Martin Luther King Jr

The peace process that began in Andhra Pradesh eight months ago was the result of several factors that relate to the democratisation of the socio-political fabric over the past decade. It was

an immediate result of the people's mandate given to the Congress and its allies, of bringing peace to the state. It must not be forgotten that one of the key commitments made by the Congress during its election campaign was that it would invite the Maoists and other Naxalite groups to the negotiating table, and create the conditions for the restoration of democracy and the rule of law, in a state where the previous Telugu Desam regime had completely abdicated on both these counts. Even prior

of the police with the press are now on the increase. The people have questions about and criticisms of the specific actions by Naxalite groups, such as killing/abduction of informers, sarpanches and local officials, extortions, etc; they have doubts about the larger meaning of bearing arms since they are the ones who suffer the brunt of the coercion that results from it. But despite these questions and doubts, what was clear at the commencement of the peace process in October 2004 was that the people did not see Naxalites as criminals. The tremendous popular support for the Naxalite leaders, especially the Maoists, who came out into the open for the first time then, was there for all to see.

Neither the government nor the police missed seeing this support, and it is our contention that the ruling party clearly recognised its implications. Nevertheless, the process that had been started had to go on; on that the government did not have an option. But, even as the process continued, the doublespeak began. While the home minister was closeted with the peacemakers working out a timebound blueprint, the chief minister was reported to have made a series of adverse statements to the press in his routine public engagements on the very questions that were being negotiated. On the other side, the head of the police force aggressively took issue in the press with the Naxalites' demand for fair wages and working conditions for police constables. These were not accidental but in fact a sign of things to come.

A month after the conclusion of the first round of talks, the encounters resumed. Naxalites were being hunted down with unflinching regularity even as discussions were on for the possible timing of the second round of talks. The prime minister reiterated the commitment of his government to go ahead with the talks and move towards a peaceful solution in the state.¹ The home minister continued to be in touch with representatives of different groups, seeking their advice and reiterating the commitment of the government to peace. The encounters continued unabated. All those concerned about the peace process, hoped the Naxalites would not pull out, till it reached a point where even that hope became unreasonable. The Naxalites pulled out of the peace process in January.

Even as we came to terms with the gravity of the situation, the state was gripped with the news in the first week of February that the Nallamalla forests had been surrounded

by a 5,000 strong force of Greyhounds who were closing in on the Naxalites and that all the leaders were on the verge of being killed in an encounter. It needed intervention from the highest level to stall what would have been the worst instance of arbitrary state action by any standards. This action and its possible consequences have stunned the people into a kind of paralysis. It is time now to address several questions pertaining to the entire process that spanned eight months.

The first is the role of the media. If the media is to fulfil its watchdog role, what should have been at the forefront of reporting on the issue is the concern for peace. In this process of ethical politics, neither individualism nor romanticism has any place. All parties involved in the process are equal participants and must be represented as such. And in a peace process, there are no adversaries because there is a common and collective interest that binds all the parties. When the Maoist leaders were in Hyderabad, the media was suddenly gripped with the romanticism of the forests and the revolution, so that there was an over-exposure of the teams that came for the talks – the leaders, the women, what they wore, what they ate, driven by the very individualism that this persuasion of politics eschews. Alongside this was the tendency to play up the adversarial mode of politics, in a situation that called for the foregrounding of ethical politics. Instead of focusing on the different parties as participants in the peace process, reporting focused on participants as political opponents, statements of one party being pitted against statements of another. This was

clearly a distortion of the process that was underway, and contributed in no small measure to undermining it.

The second issue has to do with the bearing of arms. The critical issue in the talks with the Naxalites was on whether they could bear arms in public. There are as many views on this as there are groups involved in the process. But what is the reality? The ruling party has legitimate access and entitlement to arms, even military might; in a state where faction politics has come to stay, a leader is one who carries arms and has a private army that is fully equipped with the latest weapons.² Criminal gangs carry arms, cinema actors and members of their fan clubs carry arms,³ Naxalites carry arms. Of all these categories it is only the Naxalites who declare openly that they will carry arms as part of their political ideology. The others not only carry arms but use them at will while pretending to respect the constitutional framework, a pretence that is somewhat like the emperor's new clothes – something that the general public is aware of will but not expose. It is only the common citizen who does not carry arms, because s/he has the biggest 'no-cost' weapon in a democracy, the vote. It is ironic that those who come in through the vote choose to stay on solely by the power of the gun. How in this situation can the demand be made by the state or the police that the Naxalites lay down arms?

For the people, all arms are instruments of coercion, and there is no detracting from that. They are weapons of assault that even when used 'in the interests of the people' are by definition used arbitrarily, and

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therefore unjustly. That the gun gives a sense of power which ordinary participation in politics does not, is true. It is the power of coercion and disproportionate authority. This is a debate that must go on with radical groups in the interests of democracy. The test of course is in the construction of martyrdom. Martyrs are those that die by the gun. In our times political persuasion is largely irrelevant in this canonisation. For instance, if the attempt on Naidu's life in Alipiri had been successful, he would have been immortalised as a martyr, his deplorable human rights record notwithstanding. His escape was a stroke of luck for democracy, because it made it possible for the people to consign him to political ignominy and irrelevance through the vote.⁴ This, for us, juxtaposes the democratic alternative with the bearing of arms for people's causes.

The third question has to do with land reforms, another commitment made by the ruling party, and a demand made by the Naxalite groups in the peace process. For the Congress, land reform is a programme that must be effected by giving pattas to those already cultivating the land without in any way changing existing relations, leave alone transforming them, while for the Naxalites, land reforms are specifically related to the redistribution of land and equitable distribution of resources. There is a fundamental contradiction in ideology and a divergence of interests, with the state finding itself in the uneasy position of having to safeguard the interests of the landed dominant classes (of which it is a part) and the people looking to the Naxalites for the fulfilment of their aspirations. The volume of petitions presented to the Naxalite leaders during their stay in Hyderabad are evidence of this. There is no doubt that, on this count, the initiative must be in the hands of the Naxalites, with the state playing a largely supportive role and other civil society/liberties groups monitoring the process to ensure that intent is realised with absolute transparency and efficacy.

The fourth question has to do with neutrality in political matters. The reluctance to take sides and be seen as partisan can insidiously eat into the core of otherwise vibrant processes. Most often postures of neutrality serve to shield the status quo and keep it in place, which is why debates on political processes, including peace processes, must present extreme positions and evaluate them against the yardstick of human rights and democratic

governance. When political dissenters are under siege by the state, there can be no 'neutral' assessment of state action in relation to them. All parties involved in the peace process must be willing and able to take a firm and unequivocal position against state action and in defence of dissenters. There is, in this context, no question of whether the state is 'justified' in its action, especially if that action violates the core terms of the peace process, viz, ceasefire. There can also be no neutrality or equivocation ('was there provocation?') with respect to uncontrolled and autonomous policing that refuses to subserve political processes and persists in treating politics as crime. For instance, when the Greyhounds surrounded the Naxalites and were closing in on them, there was no possibility of a 'balanced' view. For the police it was only 'the biggest catch' they would ever find; the peace process for them only had nuisance value. For the people of the state and their representatives in the peace process on the other hand, it was an unpardonable error and a breach of faith.

This leads us to the final point. The callous and irresponsible undoing of a laboriously crafted process of democratisation by a newly elected government is cause for serious concern. In less than a year, there has been a negation of the people's mandate in the state. With four more years to go, we need to think seriously about how we will force accountability, transparency and the rule of law on this government, a task that can only be accomplished if the resistance to arbitrariness in governance brings together diverse sections and groups, and if the audible voices of resistance are representative of this diversity. [E]

Notes

- 1 He had a half hour, one-to-one meeting with K G Kannabiran in November and followed it up with a letter to him, to the same effect, in the second week of December.
- 2 Witness the Paritala Ravi phenomenon. Paritala Ravi, a TDP leader was shot on January 24 in broad daylight in Anantapur, even though he was under protection by armed guards who were part of his private army. A faction leader in Rayalaseema, Paritala was known for his ruthless participation in a cult of violence in the name of politics.
- 3 Witness the absurdity of the Balakrishna case. Balakrishna, the youngest son of the founder of Telugu Desam and former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, N T Rama Rao, is a film actor. About a year ago, he was involved in

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a shootout at his residence where an astrologer and a film producer were grievously hurt, and Balakrishna was the only other person present. While it is widely believed that he pulled the trigger, a prestigious corporate hospital shielded him from arrest by providing him shelter on medical grounds and the victims

who recovered claimed they had been shot by unidentified persons. Balakrishna was acquitted last week.

4 As a result, today, the single straw that Chandrababu Naidu grasps at to regain power is the death of Paritala Ravi who ruled by the gun.

such a project, nor the purpose entirely of this piece which is occasioned simply by some learned comment in sections of the media that all reports – of this committee and that commission – are worthless political tools meant to further or hinder some crass interest or the other, and the truth of things such as the Godhra occurrence can never be found). To carry on: there are, however, also those who have found it in them, wittingly or unwittingly, to internalise that text in the Bhagwad Gita which suggests that we discriminate in the momentary here-and-now, between the vile and the not-so-vile, and do our bit on behalf of the latter without seeking to reach after some ultimate consequence, or without confining the ambit of that consequence to the span of our private lifespans. In other words, learn to school our intelligence to recognise that there has been a long line of others before us, and there will be a long line of others after us. So that it were best not to preclude what consequence our honest effort may have in the course of things.

So also of the Godhra event, the Banerjee Report, and the uses to which it has been put. Succinctly, if the Godhra lies could be deployed to win one election, why may not some part of the Godhra truth be likewise pressed to win another?

It is now to be noted that the local Gujarat VHP leader has testified at the Nanavati

History's Mysteries

Finding the 'Truth'

The 'truth' about Godhra appears more clouded with the partial findings of the interim Banerjee Report. Several actors, including the Election Commission, continue to debate the propriety or otherwise of the report's release, and whether citizens will be well served by the dissemination of its findings. In all this, it is 'truth', the search for it, that ultimately makes up an individual's response as to how life should be lived, becomes a casualty.

BADRI RAINA

There has always been a class of thinking people who have been wearied and disappointed by the cussed obtuseness of history to yield up transcendent truths. Nor have all of them been poseurs or charlatans, masking self-interest under an attitude of affected profundity. Through the ages, a good number – writers, artists, other caring people – have suffered (as they continue to suffer) genuine despair at the absence of final answers. Some, embracing contingent contributions to causes dear to them, have opted for often frustrating involvements to the bitter end (a Yeats, a Lukacs, a Sartre). Others have been helped by their angst to produce memorable works of literature and philosophy (a Joyce, a Hiedegger). Some others have concluded their own histories in self-slaughter (a Mayakovsky, a Camus, a Rimbaud, a Virginia Woolf). Many, jettisoning their seemingly fruitless intellectualities, have made submission to the authority of dogma (an Augustine, an Ashoka, a Kafka, an Eliot). And, posited on the other side, not a few rationalists/Marxists, violated by the rugged imperfections of praxis, have found cheerful telos in an alternate god, nature and the market (a Malthus, a Bernstein, a Gorbachev). And yet others have opted to offer learned comment from sanctuaries offered by expert distance (the names here are too many to recite) in the belief that it is worthwhile, after all, to be impartial, even if somewhat

cynical, denoters of partial truths than to sink into silence altogether, particularly if there is some remuneration at the end. Let it be understood that the names I have picked are random rather than inclusive, illustrative rather than exhaustive. (Indeed, were this line of thought pursued in some detail, the procedure could lead to a rewarding compendium of the interfaces between specific histories and individual odysseys. But this is neither the place for

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