

# Some Contemporary Trends

*A seminar in Hyderabad discussed a broad range of issues relating to economic, political and cultural trends in Andhra Pradesh with wide participation from representatives of various movements. One prominent strand that ran through the seminar was the general backwardness and poverty in the Telangana region, giving rise to armed struggle and demands for a separate state.*

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On July 12-13, 2003, a two-day seminar on 'Understanding Contemporary Andhra Pradesh', was held by the Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad. The seminar was funded by the southern regional centre of the ICSSR. Scholars and activists from various regions, institutions and organisations of Andhra Pradesh participated and presented papers dealing with a broad range of issues. In what follows, we give brief excerpts from all the papers that were presented in the seminar.

The purpose of the seminar was three fold. Firstly, to bring together various viewpoints on the emerging economic, political, and cultural trends as an edited volume for young researchers to work on. Secondly, it is obvious that despite various people's movements, the process of democratisation of civil society is rather slow and disappointing due to the increasing tendency by these movements of indulging in self-arrogating discourses. This seminar was an attempt to bring together all such activists and intellectuals who are part of these movements around the table for an open dialogue. Lastly, it intended to bring about an alternative discourse on economic and political issues in order to have some positive impact on the state's policy-makers.

The introductory paper began with a presentation by V Ramakrishna, who covered 'Modern Andhra History'. He pointed out that the transition from medieval to modern Andhra occurred during the rule of the Kutub Shahis and Asafjahis from 1687 to the 1950s. He pointed out that the rule of the Kutub Shahis was marked by the introduction of Andhra to European markets, and the spread of foreign trade. The Kutub Shahis were Shia Muslims and this period saw

the spread of Sufism, which preached religious harmony. The Kutub Shahi rule saw the rise of various dissent and reform movements including the Bhakti movement, Vemana's and Veera Brahman's works. This period was also witness to a boom in artisan-based production and many of those belonging to the lower castes were brought into the fold of mainstream economic activity thus initiating a process of change in the rigid caste hierarchy. The Asafjahi rule, on the other hand, saw competition amongst the European economic powers. During this period the regions of Rayalaseema, Telangana and coastal Andhra, which constitute today's Andhra Pradesh state, were ruled by different rulers. While the coastal Andhra region was directly under the British and referred to as sarkar districts, Rayalaseema was under the Polygar system and Telangana was under the Nizam. This partly explains the regional inequalities of today. While the company rule in coastal Andhra led to western education, in Telangana feudal structures continued to be strong. The rise of the institution of dubashis (translators) also paved the way for various reform movements, including that of Gajula Laxminarasimham, who advocated education for women. The roots of the Madras Jana Sabha, which was the basis for the emergence of the Congress Party-based national liberation struggle were also seen in the reform movements of Andhra.

The second presentation was by G Haragopal, who spoke on the 'Political Economy of Andhra Pradesh'. He stated that in 1611, when the British East India Company first entered Andhra via Matchlipatnam, there was great demand for Indian cloth in the international market. All the European powers were competing for Indian cloth. With the collapse of the Mughul empire, the British had an ideal

context to conquer the Indian market by other means. Simultaneously, the invention of the powerloom facilitated mass production of cotton cloth in Manchester, Lancashire and other places. This cloth was then dumped in the local market. To create demand for their cloth, local artisans were systematically destroyed by levies and physical coercion. In 1852 the Krishna-Godavari anicut was built leading to the emergence of a vibrant peasantry and a new social force that led to social reform movement and later to anti-colonial freedom struggle. With the revolt in 1857, the British crown took over and entered into a compromise with the local feudal elite. Not many structural changes took place in rural areas all through the feudal regime in the Telangana region. Retarded economic development, coupled with a tyrannical feudal rule, led to the Telangana armed struggle in the 1940s. This paper also pointed out that during the 1960s, green revolution in the Krishna-Godavari anicut benefited the coastal region. This created a new surplus. Movement of capital from the coastal region to backward Telangana created new tensions, giving rise to the demand for a separate state for the Telangana region. This was also a period when leakages from public expenditures and diversions from agrarian surplus into unproductive sectors took place, giving birth to a lumpen class which constitutes the social base of the present ruling elite and is also the social force behind the economic reforms process with its nexus with global capital.

In the session on 'Dalit Movement', K Ilaiy presented a paper on 'Telugu Nationalism: The Unknown Visions', which was an analysis of contributions to literature by various dalit scholars and their relevance to the construction of Telugu nationalism. He argued that if we read Telugu literature, we find that the colloquial Telugu was discriminated as being 'Sudra Bhasha' and Sanskritised Telugu has been eulogised as being superior. This is because most of the knowledge generators were brahmins, who only translated Sanskrit texts into Telugu. They have not contributed anything original. It might therefore be argued that there is not one nation in India but several sub-nations. And these sub-nations are represented by non-brahmin castes. Ilaiy moved on to analyse the writings of non-brahmin scholars including Molla, Vemana, Potuluri, Muddu Narasimham, Tripurneni, and Jashua. He argued that one finds an altogether different symbolism in these writings. There are more

references to production, instruments of production and to labour in these texts unlike in the Sanskritised writings. He therefore concludes that the non-brahmin writings have reflected these sub-nations constituted by the oppressed.

The third session was on 'Gender Politics'. The first paper, by Vasantha Kannabiran, was on 'Feminist Movement in Andhra Pradesh'. She said whenever the question of gender is posed, it is presumed to be a moral question. However, she did not agree that gender was a moral question. She maintained that it was a political question. It was a question of who controls the body of women. In most of the traditional narratives, woman has been portrayed as wealth. And the patriarchal hegemony of men controls her body and her procreation functions. This has been the basis for the feminist movement. Commenting on various phases of the feminist movement, she pointed out that the huge anti-arrack movement was a spontaneous one which, however, could not sustain itself. The anti-arrack movement, she pointed out, was neither based on moral positions of the propriety of drinking nor

was it just an outcome of domestic violence. It raised several socio-economic questions including that of poverty, nutrition, health and education. And women were the worst sufferers of these deprivations as the responsibility was theirs in the household division of labour.

Sunitha, who spoke on 'Domestic Violence and Institutional Response in Andhra Pradesh', presented several case studies of domestic violence and how the cases were handled. She pointed out that the behaviour of the formal institutions was hierarchical and often unsympathetic to the victims of domestic violence. It is therefore found in many instances, that victims have been approaching informal institutions including elders, relatives, neighbours, or even the local mafia. She reiterated the need for a cultural change in formal institutions.

Ramchandraiah, who spoke on 'Privatisation of Water in Andhra Pradesh', pointed out that proposals to privatise water had been on the cards for several years. Various vested interests, including global institutions such as the fund-bank combine, place water in a consumerist framework,

reduce it to a commodity and legitimising its marketing. In Andhra, although water is not privatised as yet, increased marketing of bottled and tanker water point towards this. He suggested a boycott of such water. He critiqued the state government's water policy of giving permissions for borewells irresponsibly and thus affecting the water table. He pointed out that while the whole city suffered from drinking water scarcity, the amusement parks gobble up millions of gallons every day. He questioned the rationale of subsidising water for Coca Cola at 25 paise per litre.

Ramana Murthy, in his presentation on 'Shrimp Culture in Andhra Pradesh and Environmental Consequences', pointed out that 15 years of shrimp cultivation in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh suggests that in general there has been an exaggeration of the environmental consequences of this activity. He said that salinity, which is presented as a major problem, is in fact limited only to the back-water cultivation. Since, the predominant cultivation is in the fresh water, this danger is limited. Secondly, he noted that the huge benefits reaped by shrimp farmers had led

to increased commercial activity and general development in the region. However, he expressed concerns over the frequent diseases that hit the shrimps, making cultivation a risky venture.

D Narasimha Reddy spoke about the 'Marxist-Leninist Movements in Andhra Pradesh'. He narrated the birth and phases of the Naxalite movement. Beginning with the Telangana armed struggle and taking a definite ideological shape during the Srikakulam peasant struggle, the Naxalite movement had seen many ideological variations within itself. The movements which began as a united party, split a number of times because of ideological and personality problems. The dominant party that represents the Naxalite movement today in Andhra is the People's War. This party has emphasised the role of armed struggle as its method of achieving political power. On the whole, the movement has been acknowledged for driving feudal lords out of the villages, ensuring freedom of peasants from the blatant feudal exploitation that existed earlier. It is also acknowledged that the impact of the movement can be seen in the rise of wages for landless labour. The movement has also succeeded in redistributing some land and into bringing on to the agenda the question of land reforms. However, there are also critiques about the over-emphasis on the use of armed methods instead of emphasising on ideological and political questions.

Ajay Gudavarthy presented a paper on 'Fragmentation and Solidarity: Contemporary Naxalite, Dalit and Women's Movements in Andhra Pradesh'. He attempted to map the emerging issues within the social movements regarding the possible interrelation between various social movements. He argued that in the context of Andhra Pradesh, the fragmentation of the Naxalite, dalit and women's movements in the 1980s could be conceptualised in terms of three theoretical dichotomies at the material, discursive and strategic levels. At the material level, movements are artificially demarcating separate regional domains such as political and economic by the ML movement, thereby exclusively addressing issues such as wages, and land reforms. Similarly, at the discursive level, there is a bifurcation between theory and practice, and movements thereby are failing to articulate a new language of solidarity. Finally, at the strategic level, the movements are drawing crude classical bifurcations between reform and revolution untenable in the light of the proliferation of multiple sites of

conflicts. However, by the 1990s each of the movements themselves is beginning to experience demands 'internally', which share the concerns of 'external' movements. This emerging internal-external continuum would perhaps provide the social and material conditions to forge a durable social solidarity.

On the second day, presenting a paper on the 'History of Human Rights Movements in Andhra Pradesh', K Balagopal of the Human Rights Forum argued that human rights movements essentially emanate from ethical considerations. Though it is true that political movements over long periods of struggle contribute to the emergence of these ethics, the principles so derived have a universal validity. Thus, although the human rights movement in Andhra Pradesh began as a part of the Left movement, it acquired its own autonomy. Some activists view human rights movements only as complementing mass political movements. However, Balagopal differed with this perspective and contended that human rights movement has an independent legitimate political space.

Seshaiah presented a paper on 'Civil Liberties: Moments in Andhra Pradesh'. Seshaiah maintained that the present role of civil liberties movements in Andhra Pradesh cannot be understood unless we comprehend the history of these movements. He said that since the beginning of the civil rights movements in Andhra, they have never taken the shape of mass movements. They have been limited to the educated middle class. And while mass movements have been engaged in a struggle against structures of exploitation, they faced repression from the state. The state resorted to repressive means that included fake encounter killings and such other extrajudicial means of silencing political dissent. It is, therefore, in this context that civil liberties movements have started to confront the state. This confrontation was informed by the political understanding that those that are powerful in civil society were also enjoying political power. The need therefore was to highlight the importance of the rule of law. Due to pressures from various sections of society, the civil liberties movement got involved also in civil society-related issues including dalit women and environmental issues. This has expanded the scope of the movement.

S R Sankaran, who presented a paper titled 'Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) – An Experiment and Experience', stated that though agrarian movements such as the Naxalite movement have socio-economic origins, state has faced these

movements with repression. And over the years the Naxalite movement resorted to exterminating individuals. A situation has emerged where little respect is shown for the law by state agencies and to people's sufferings by Naxalite parties. It is in this context that CCC emerged as a civil society initiative. The CCC has been focusing on the discourse of violence, and in an effort to resolve the rhetoric of 'violence and counter-violence' has chosen instead to bring people and their issues to the centre-stage by attempting to initiate a dialogue between the state and the activists. The CCC also initiated a debate among political parties, trade unions, teachers' organisations and others, holding meetings to press for the creation of a conducive climate for a dialogue. In response to this initiative, the People's War expressed its willingness for talks. Later, a debate on the issue of violence and resolving the stalemate was carried on in regional newspapers, especially in *Vaarta*. The process went through many ups and downs, generating moments of hope and despair. Sankaran said the overall situation was allowed to deteriorate, primarily because the government did not restrain itself from continuing with fake encounter killings.

In the second session, K R Chowdary made a presentation on 'Globalisation and Agriculture in Andhra Pradesh'. He noted that the recent trends in agriculture point to growing unviability of agriculture as an economic activity. There is a clear mismatch between rising input costs and falling returns to farmers. The shift to commercial crops, especially cotton, has proved fatal for farmers due to unstable international prices. Added to this, increased application of fertilisers and pesticides was done by borrowing money at high interest rates from private moneylenders, later resulting in a spate of farmer suicides. Further, the paper focused on issues like irrigation facilities, corruption in the water users associations and the misinformation campaign about interstate sharing of water to draw political mileage. The paper also argued that corporatisation of agriculture hurts the interests of small- and marginal farmers, reducing them from peasants into labourers.

The second paper, titled 'Social Security Issues and New Industrialisation in Andhra Pradesh' presented by G Vijay, stated that the trends in social security of labour employed in the organised sector changed after the mid-1980s. The present trends were marked by a rising informal employment pattern that systematically reinforce the prevailing caste, class, gender and

regional inequalities. The vulnerable end up in precarious jobs. Better employment opportunities and trade unions have been monopolised by dominant sections. Thus, neither economic activity nor the politics of new industrialisation offer any relief in overcoming vulnerability.

In the third paper on 'Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Andhra Pradesh', M V Vanamala, tried to draw some inferences on SHGs and their relevance to rural development. The study points to the fact that commercial banks are charging a high rate of interest from SHGs even after taking collateral security, while they receive loans from Nabard at nominal rates of interest. However, the meagre amounts lent to SHGs are not enough to start any economic activity. As a result, instead of creating new ventures, the money is only supplementing the activities that already exist. It has also been observed that SHGs have not succeeded in bringing any gender justice. It is, however, maintained that women's participation in public space has increased.

In the third session on 'Tribals in Andhra Pradesh', a paper on 'Criminal Tribes in Andhra Pradesh', was presented by Lalitha. It focused on Erukala tribes, listed as criminal tribes by the colonial British administration. The paper narrated a number of profiles and tried to establish that tribal people have distinct community norms based on culture and social practice. She noted that solidarity as a value still persists, and ignoring all this, an ignorant modern bureaucracy has condemned a community as criminal.

In the fourth session, Venugopal tried to show how various social movements have been reflected in literature and also how social movements have contributed to the maturing of Telugu literature. He pointed out that while in terms of language, form, symbolism and values, earlier generations of literature have been Sanskritised, orthodox, elitist and conservative, various social movements – by posing challenges and often rebelling against the set standards – have been continuously contributing to the democratisation of culture and making art forms relevant to the masses. He referred to various novels and other forms of literature articulating tribal, class, caste, gender, regional and other issues of relevance to contemporary politics of social change.

The second paper by C H Sridhar Rao, titled 'Science Education in Andhra Pradesh', argued that the state has a long history of scientific temper and scientific innovation, dating back to the age of Shatavahanas. In the periods that followed,

increased conflicts and dogmatism took over. These periods led to the Hinduisation of culture. Religion, rather than science, has dominated the perceptions of the common people. However, within this religious articulation of culture there are still elements of scientific reasoning. If these elements can be identified and subverted, there could still be a possibility of imparting scientific temper to the people.

In the fifth session, the first paper was presented by K Jayashankar, titled 'Telangana Movement – The Demand for a Separate State: A Historical Perspective'. It argued that the Telangana region has faced deliberate and systematic neglect, leading to its backwardness. He established this empirically, by providing statistics relating to water resources, poverty, health facilities and employment. He argued that political power has served the interests of the politically and economically powerful Andhra region, neglecting the interests of Telangana. He justified the demand for a separate state.

The final paper was presented by Raghava Chary, the secretary of the Committee Against Famine of Mahabubnagar. It pointed to the chronic drought due to pending lift-irrigation projects, and introduction of borewell technology and observed that one third of Mahabubnagar's labour migrated to various parts of the country and often work as construction

labour. They are recruited by contractors who force them to work as 'non-free' labour. He referred to issues of poor food, low wages, unhygienic work environment, accidents and loss of life and limb and lack of compensation to these workers, and other forms of exploitation. He said the Karuvu Vyatireka Porata Committee ran gruel centres in two villages on an experimental basis and people in large numbers came for the gruel. He noted that from among those who came to the gruel centres, old people and children who were left behind by migrants accounted for the largest proportion. In the discussion that followed, S R Sankaran suggested that efforts must be made to formalise the institution of the labour contractor, thus ensuring that there is enough information to establish liability in the event of accidents or any other injustice. It was also noted that movements need to articulate the paradoxes of development witnessed in simultaneous in-and-outmigration at the level of solidarity amongst the vulnerable than as a conflict.

Efforts are on to bring out a volume containing all the papers presented in the seminar. This volume could be a rare collection of varied viewpoints, proving students, researchers, activists, and others interested with a vantage point to make sense of the complex reality of contemporary Andhra Pradesh. **EPW**