

## **Karimnagar: Respect the peoples will and start the process.**

By the time this article is published, the process of elections will be completed. But the results may not be out. It is a foregone conclusion that People of Karimnagar have decisively voted for Telanagana.

I was in Karimnagar constituency with some of my NRI friends for a week. Why I decided to go there on my own? There are three reasons for it a) I wanted to be part of that history making by Telangana people. I had no doubt in my mind even before the election process has begun about the result. So my participation is purely for my own education and just being there to understand it better. b) I grow up in Telangana, I studied in government school of a small village, then government college, then in Osmania all with all public expenditure. I am also part an informal groups which shaped the Telangana conscious for last 15 years c) Just wanted to learn from people what is their perception of Telangana and why they are with this concept called separate state of their own which might or might not bring any benefit to them in near future.

Before getting into some my observations, perceptions it is important to mention here that my observations and perceptions are bound to be influenced by my convictions and belief that Telangana State is good for people.

What did we do?

Every day few of us drove in a vehicle to the villages and stopped wherever we saw some people. The objective was clear to understand the people's mood and their willingness to share their views. We went to interior places; we met people in towns, people of most of the casts, professions and all categories of people including people and members of political parties which are totally opposing the very idea of Telangana. It is very nice feeling that normal people recognised the importance of our presence. Most of the places people offered tea or some thing after discussions, which some times we accepted. Even those who did not agree with us totally agreed that formation of Telangana state is good for all Telangana people. People everywhere wanted us to stay longer and discuss with us about various issues of Telangana. We basically explained what we thought of the this election is , and what are the choices before them.

Our perceptions.

**Telangana people want to live in their own state.** There is not doubt whatsoever that more than 95% of people will opt for Telangana if there is free, fair process of conducting referendum. Even if there is referendum among the political parties which are going to polls on Vishalandra slogan more than 75% of their members will vote in favour of Telangana state. There was not disagreement over Telangana state, but only on who and how that would happen.

Broad description of some specific incidents described below is meant to give some idea of people's mood. Names and places have been deliberately avoided since they are not important.

One evening while returning to Karimnager we stopped at a road side toddy shop, a typical Telangana social gathering, a tradition, a time pass, a place for freak out. Some of our team members, being middle class or influenced by later events in their lives, were so embarrassed that they did not even get out of the car. The person who is selling batani, pelalu said thumping on the ground “this time we will vote for our Bhoomi”. First I thought he is drunk or simply pulling our leg by telling the most irrelevant thing. After repeating two three times on our request asked “Can’t you understand, Bhootalli, where we are born”? He refused to further simplify. Only after getting into car with help of other I could get it.

In Mandal town, before we even got out of the car one old but highly energetic man waving his left hand firmly told “this time car”, we did not even ask him to reveal, nor he had any idea who we were. Narsaiah a thin man in his late seventies, with his white turban, unusual red half baninan with white border at the edges, further told that he is going around telling every one to vote for it. Marks on his feet are distinct that he taddy tapping for long time. When we asked why, reply was clear “This time if we fail, they will think we are fools, not ever worth being taken seriously. We will be finished forever”. Intention and message is clear. Next, people gather, discussion, tea, issues of leadership. A Muslim gentleman, a government employ insisted on paying for tea and he did. Naraiah further stated that power is with those guys, and be careful on the voting and counting day. They can do ‘thondi’ ( cheating) to win. You don’t need to tell us again and again, but come once in a while to assure us. In the same village, about 20 young fellows are sleeping in a line in local congress party election office. When we entered it was dark, all of them sleeping. One got up sensing some new person entering the room. Got up quickly looked at the material, and said we are all for that, but we are singers engaged by congress party to do the campaign. The owner of the house, a staunch congress man, bit old told firmly that he is congress man. He has seen many separate Telangana movements, all are cheaters, we are going to vote for congress and one day they will only be able to get Separate Telangana state. It is one of the few non welcoming gestures we have faced with him.

We visited several villages where weavers are quite active. The sound of looms was new to me. It is very nice feeling that some people are still making cloth in such way. When I was child there used to be many weavers in with manual weaving machines. Here these are power looms with some mechanisation. A neatly dressed gentleman came and greeted us. They are polite, firm, but can not come out openly. Their caste person is candidate. They mentioned that Telangana is more than caste, but some people in the village surely will vote on caste lines.

In another village, the young person on the motor cycle was very critical of TRS leadership, dismissed his efforts. He is TDP, but wanted separate Telangana, but has no confidence on leaders to get it. ‘If we all unite, we can get it, not with these people’. Until then he decided to oppose to TRS.

An elderly gentleman, well read, well informed was reading the paper in his very old bhavanti. The house is typical symbol of rural land lord. Rice was in one corner not in the sacks but as heap. Agricultural implements were in another corner. Three pictures of his father, mother and some one were at the out side of inner house door with plastic flower garland. He told to the local person who took us to him ‘I already told

you that I committed to Jeevan Reddy. I gave my word. I am for Telangana, you all go and campaign, but do not ask for my vote. You can ask any one including people in my house'. His word to his old friend is important to him than his own feelings for Telangana, his own conviction about separate state. His wife standing by one of the poles listening said 'I will vote' indicating to that it is for Car.

We went to the places where women were making beedi's. They are deeply concerned about their future. They too are aware of the Telangana dimension of this elections, but some reserved their opinion to be expressed only on election day.

A School headmaster, a Muslim, who has seen all in 1969 agitation, said 'we can never forget Telangana, we have faced bullets'. He angrily dismissed that Muslims are not going to vote for TRS. He said they too part of Telangana and there was decision by many of them to vote this time, irrespective what the alliance their parties are making. He was polite, emotional and confident that this time it is crucial for Telangana.

As mentioned in the course of our journey met thousands of people. Sure they have problems- symbol on beedis, water for agriculture, dengue fever, poor roads etc. But Telangana was top issue in the election. Some even mentioned that at least due to this issue, some attention they are getting. Otherwise who will come to us. Some have no hope that Telangana state will ever be formed, some felt the betrayal of the past leaders. But all of them wanted Telangana. Most of them thought this election is not about Karimnagar. However, it is very tiny percentage of people we met and it is not scientific method or a sampling enough to make conclusions. But we hope we are not going to be entirely wrong in making these observations.

It is clear that people in Karimnagar has understood the importance of this election and wider implication of its result. It is not about preserving or asserting their caste, religious, sub-regional identity. It is about their Telangana identity. It is about the future of their children and grand children. It is about their water, their capital city, their political power, their language, their places, and their history every thing at stake. They will not get Telangana with this election, but they can send a powerful message to the power circles in Hyderabad and Delhi.

Voting in India is more than mystery. How it works, how the decisions are made, who influences them etc. Indian middle class, particularly English speaking always wanted to analyse it from their narrow perception. Spending time with people of Karimnagar once again re-enforced my faith in Indian democracy with all its faults, confusion and influence of money, caste etc.

In Every election, whenever there are bigger issues- bigger than daily issues- people in India responded to it by making their view clear. During that time people were not influenced by caste, religion or who gave money or liquor. Karimnagar is one more examples where people looked at the bigger issue. Surely, they have lot of issues, they are not going to be resolved by this election. But they very well understood that this election is about Telangana and they are going to express their view on it clearly loudly on behalf of entire Telangana.

So what would be the result?. Surely TRS is going to win. It is not about party or candidate but about Telangana. The results on 7<sup>th</sup> December will only prove a) which party is going to be second b) which national party is losing deposit c) what would be the majority. It is certainly important to know those things as well to know how strongly people of Telangana are feeling.

Certainly Karimnagar elections are not referendum on Telangana. If it was a referendum for Telangana, more than 95% of Karimnagar people would have voted YES for Telangana state. That would be the case in entire Telangana now, and any time after 1969.

If more than 90% of Telangana people want Telangana state, then what is stopping? And for what?. The answer is simple. Those who are benefiting in being in AP. It is rather foolish to say that entire Andhra population is opposing Telangana state. Actually most of the Andhra people too are victims. Only very small number of people have taken advantage of AP and indulged in exploitation of Telangana. In the process Andhra people are also being neglected. Formation of Telangana is very simple administrative issue. It is not division of country, it is not that Telangana by being separate state is asking certain privileges like Kashmir or Nagaland. So even people who are not from Telangana will get equal choices even after formation of separate state guaranteed by our constitution. Separate Andhra too will prosper perhaps much faster.

Then what is the problem?. There are three ways to know if there is a consensus for Telangana- one by conducting a referendum among Telangana people, second political parties asking their own members in Telangana, through a secret ballot, asking all the elected representatives of all the parties asking if they want Telangana state or not through a conscious vote in a secret ballot. The result will be same- Yes to Telangana state. With more than 90% in all. No one build consensus for Telangana state in UP or Assam. You can not and will not build consensus for Telangana with Andhra Politicians. They are part of the problem, they will do anything in their power to stop it. It is even wrong, immoral and anti-democratic to attempt to build the consensus with them. When will YSR, Naidu and Sitaram Yechuri accept for Telangana state. They will never accept to that. That is the point of Telangana people asking for separate state.

Just imagine TDP winning Karimnagar elections? Or even Congress winning it. The interpretation would be that Telangana people do not want separate state and that development is enough. That is what even Digvijay Singh told after visiting Karimnagar that only urban people want a separate state. Karimnagar results will prove that wrong. Telangana sentiment is more in rural areas.

So what is next after Karimnagar? Still there will be delay, there will be interpretations, there will be mud slinging on individuals. But refusal to accept the truth- that is 90% of Telangana people want to live in their own state. How will we know that? Only by conducting referendum. Can our political leadership accept the fact that more than 90% of Telangana want a separate state and start the process. That process should start before it goes out of hand?

Andhra intellectuals too have responsibility. It is impossible to keep 90% of public opinion under suppression. They need to respect the sentiments of people of Telangana. They can start a dialogue with their Telangana counterparts to start the process of division of State in peaceful and dignified way. Otherwise, we all have to take responsibility for consequences which may not be democratic, which we all completely disapprove. Once prolonged neglect of democratic process is continued, people will resort to other methods, which have serious consequences for people of Telangana and Andhra together. We have a duty and responsibility to see that formation of Telangana is peaceful and democratic in best possible manner. That should happen at the earliest in the interest of all of us.

Biksham Gujja

(This article was drafted on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov and edited on 1<sup>st</sup> dec. If the election results are other than what was predicted in this article, author personally will accept that Telangana sentiment is not strong now)