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Tiberius Syndrome Policing of Provincial Campuses

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IN the ancient Mediterranean world, whose Hellenistic ruling classes amassed wealth by plundering the labour of slaves and serfs, the labourers occasionally used to go on strike. Not being gifted with democratic constitutions, they hit upon an ingenious method of avoiding the long arm of the law: they would strike work *en masse* and withdraw into the sacred sanctity of temples. This went on for perhaps centuries and no doubt harassed the gentry and the Ptolemies no end, until Tiberius resolved the dilemma by a bold dictat: he declared that temples are not so sacred that the gendarme cannot raid them, and thereby abolished the right to strike by abolishing the strikers' refuge. Thereafter, no doubt. Peace and Order and the Ptolemies ruled in Bliss — until of course the ancient world itself collapsed.

Wisdom is too scarce not to repeat itself. When Vice-Chancellors of our Universities declare that campuses are not sacred (they know why) and hand them over to the police, most of them are no doubt not sufficiently literate to know that they are borrowing from Tiberius, but some kind of racial memory of the ruling classes must be at work. Otherwise it is difficult to account for the bright argument put forward in case after case (with an enchanting air of originality) that once the students pollute the campus with 'dirty politics' the campus can no longer be regarded as sacred. So also the Ptolemies must have thought that once the temples are polluted with the dirty sweat of slaves their sanctity can no longer be inviolate.

As a culmination of this wisdom, these days there is much indecisive talk of setting up a University Security Force to police campuses, and giving magisterial powers to Vice-Chancellors and (perhaps?) even the Professors. The ensuing scenario can be imagined. Students agitate against (say) high mess charges or corrupt administration or perhaps police atrocities on the rural poor (for they refuse to be totally selfish and keep away from Mirty politics'). They take

out a procession and shout slogans. In a pre-emptive bid, the VC issues arrest warrants against the activists of the Students Union; failing that he orders the campus security force to employ lathi charge or tear gas, and may be even fire upon the students. In case all this sounds like alarmist exaggeration, consider what has been happening at Kakatiya University (KU) at Warangal in Andhra Pradesh during the last couple of years.

HEADACHE FOR THE DONOR

Sitting in the police control room one morning at the end of December 1983, wireless messages coming in from jeeps patrolling Warangal town could be over-heard: "I have dropped 4 AP Special Police constables at the Women's College"; "At such-and-such College the students' union President objected to the presence of armed policemen in the corridors and consequently the Principal has asked us to stay outside the gate, but we have refused.." (Response of the SI in charge of the control room; "What is that fellow's name? ... Ah!"); "The picket at the Engineering College has been removed and shifted to such-and-such college since the Engineering College has been closed down indefinitely...", and so on". One could easily slip into the illusion that this is a town under enemy occupation and the Military Headquarters is directing the mopping-up operations.

In setting up Universities in backward areas, the State's purpose has been two-fold, one at the level of ideology and the other at the level of material interest. Ideologically, the reason trotted out is that youth of backward areas must have equal access to higher education' with metropolitan youth; at the level of crass reality, the truth is that 'youth of backward areas' is not a homogeneous category; it contains youth of affluent landlord and contractor families whose demand for equal access to higher education cannot but be granted by the State, and also 'youth of really backward strata in whose case the facility of subsidised school and college education helps to

postpone the dangerous moment when a young man becomes unemployed. In other words, the ideology kills two real birds with one stone. But this happy combination exists in a varying context, and it is the specific context of rural Telangana that has converted the intended benevolent gift of KU into a headache for the donor.

The educational hinterland of KU consists of the troubled districts of Warangal, Karirnagar, Adilabad, Khammam and Nalgonda. Of the 20 talukas declared as 'disturbed areas', 18 are in the three districts of Warangal, Karirnagar and Khammam alone. Never quiet since the uprising of 1946-51, these districts have been the centre of an avowedly violent struggle of the poor and landless peasants since 1978. And this gets reflected in the state of the campuses of the colleges in the town. A sizable number of youth from middle and poor peasant families congregate in the schools and colleges of the town; they are attracted to pro-Marxist-Leninist students organisations, particularly Radical Students Union (RSU). Over the last couple of years, RSU has acquired an unbreakable hold over the students of Warangal; this year it has single-handedly swept the college union elections in the affiliated colleges, and in combination with the fraternal Progressive Democratic Students Union (PDSU) it has captured the University College students union, fighting against a conglomerate enemy whose most formidable component is not another students' organisation, but the police.

CONFLICT CARRIED INTO SECOND GENERATION

The landlords too, of course, send their children to school and college. Unlike the kulak farmers of the Krishna and Godavari delta, who have had modern education for at least two generations, in the case of Telangana feudals, this is practically the first generation to go to college in a big way. This makes them unruly in two ways; one is that they feel deprived and cheated *vis-a-vis* the 'Andhras' and the other is that they are still primarily dependent upon land and therefore fiercely inimical to politics of agrarian struggle. Just as the peasant youth of Warangal have their RSU, the landlords' scions have their own organisation, the patriotic and *dharmic* Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). The conflict between these organisations' is quite literally

and starkly the conflict between the landlords and their farm-labourers carried into the second generation. Left to themselves the Reddy and Velama youth of ABVP would never muster enough following to stand up to the Radicals; but they have the police to fight on their behalf. Herein lies the clue to the policing of the campuses of Warangal town.

This policing cannot be understood without seeing it as part of the ruthless repression of the peasant struggle by the State. The State refuses to see any difference between the peasant struggle and the allied student movement. Just as it treats the peasant struggle as a crime in itself, it treats the student movement also as a crime. This impartiality is unexceptionable since the students themselves do not see any difference between their struggles and those of the rural poor. Every summer, the Radicals go on village campaigns braving persecution and arrest to propagate the message of class struggle among the landless poor, and these campaigns have frequently been instrumental in sowing the seeds of struggle in virgin areas. Indeed, but for this close link between the Radicals and the rural poor, the State offensive against them would not be so hostile.

An oddity worth remarking upon is that this offensive of the State is headed by the District Collector of Warangal. This gentleman, who has had his transfer stayed twice within one year, has much less of the 'steel frame' than the suppleness characteristic of Indian politics in him. He used to be a good friend of the Congress (I) Zilla Parishad chairman when the Congress (I) was in power, (and is now an equally good friend of the district President of Telugu Desam Party. Under his able leadership, which extends from delivering vituperative anti-naxalite speeches while inaugurating blood banks or co-operative societies, to enforcing a totally illegal regimen on the college campuses, the police have taken it on themselves to see that organisations like RSU do not function except in conditions of severe constraints and tension. They have set up an outpost of the Hanamkonda police station in the University College campus, and Special Police (APSP) pickets in the University College hostels. As for the other colleges (constituent and affiliated) and hostels in the town, the police raid them as frequently as if they were hide-outs of underworld criminals. In plainclothes and in uniform they enter

class rooms and examination halls; they beat and abuse the boys in the presence of their teachers. They raid hostel rooms, conduct 'interrogation' at the middle of the night, arrest students, and remove all the 'seditious' and 'objectionable' books, papers and journals in their rooms.

OBJECTIVE OF DRAMA

Colleges have Principals and hostels have Wardens, but these gentlemen never object to this blatant and routine violation of the student's basic rights. Some of them collude with the police because they are ideologically and politically anti-left, some keep quiet because they have their own hidden skeletons which are vulnerable to searching eyes, and the rest are quite simply scared. Whichever way, they are content with the answer (given to them with impolite brusqueness by police sub-inspectors) that since the colleges and hostels are harbouring 'wanted persons' they cannot be regarded as sacred places and so there should be no interference with the police. No one has yet asked the police what a 'wanted person' means, other than that the police want to get hold of him. How exactly a person gets 'Wanted' by the police and what are the consequences of this unnatural desire is best illustrated by a rather shameful example.

There are 24 hostels for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Backward Class boys and girls in Warangal town, run by the Social Welfare department. The residents are all high school students aged between ten and sixteen or seventeen years. Without exception all of them come from poor peasant families, of neighbouring villages; and all of them are sufficiently imbued with the spirit of 'extremist' politics for the police to regard all of them as Radicals. Over the last one year, these hostels (not only in Warangal but also in all the towns of Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad districts) have been subjected to repeated raids by the police. Boys aged hardly 10 to 15 years are beaten, kicked with boots and their belongings are searched. What are the police after? Nothing in particular, it is just part of the combing process to 'root out extremists'. They want a list of names which they will use to fill in bogus case-sheets with. The list may be supplied by the wardens, or else they pick up some kid at random and beat him to 'reveal' some more names. Once these names are obtained, the police implicate

them in some case or other, and to avoid arrest the boys are forced to quit their education and the hostel and perhaps go back to the village.

This is exactly the purpose of the whole drama, for forthwith they are expelled formally from the hostels by an order from nobody less than the District Magistrate and Collector. Here is the operative part of an order sent out by the Collector of Warangal on December 13, 1983 to the Warden of a Social Welfare hostel:

It is brought to the notice of the district administration that the following students who are inmates of Government Social Welfare/Backward Class Welfare hostels mentioned against each (sic) are involved in Criminal cases under Sections 147, 307, 332, 427, 457/C Sections 3 and 5 of Explosive Substances Act. (Then follows just one name, the alleged perpetrator of this varied collection of crimes, who turns out to be a student of class IX, aged perhaps 14 years.) Since the above inmates are involved in Criminal cases they are liable for withholding of all benefits they are getting from the government. Therefore they are hereby ordered to be removed from the hostels with immediate effect,

'WANTED PERSON'

'Wanted person', 'Objectionable material', 'Seditious activity' have all become self-explanatory phrases and proper nouns. The moment these phrases issue forth from a policeman's curt tongue, all thought is apparently stilled and all inquisitiveness suppressed. If you tell then that a 'wanted person' merely means that they have implicated him in a case, and that 'objectionable material' may only mean a piece of paper the police (or the Collector) find objectionable, that just will not penetrate. They will merely repeat in hushed tones, 'But I believe he is a wanted person...'. Let me give another example.

The elections to the affiliated and constituent degree college students unions took place on November 25. Since the Radicals were expected to sweep the elections (as they indeed did) the police did their worst to prevent their campaign, just as they had done last year. A girl student of the University Evening College who was campaigning in the University College campus, was arrested inside the campus and taken to the outpost. The head constable trampled on her feet with his boots and slapped her hard and repeatedly. The University College students union pressurised their Principal to ring up the station and enquire why the girl

had been detained. The first reply the Principal got from the police was that since the girl was a student of the Evening college, it was none of his business why she was detained. When he persisted, he was told that she had 'objectionable material' in her possession. That phrase satisfied him, apparently, for it took much persuading to make him ring up once again and inquire what exactly was the objectionable material she was carrying with her (bombs? knives? axes?). The answer: she had with her some leaflets explaining the manifesto of RSU, and a receipt-book for funds for her organisation! She was let out that evening, but a boy who was arrested along with her was detained in lock-up for seven days and beaten very severely.

This is not an isolated incident but a counter-campaign of terrorisation to prevent the Radicals from winning the elections. Anyone who contested on their panel or actively campaigned for them stood the risk of getting beaten, arrested, tortured, and charged with anything from sedition to attempted murder. These are very serious charges, but very easy to fabricate. For instance, activists of ABVP, fully aware of the protection the police will give them, will attack some RSU boys, who will retaliate. The police will then write down a one-sided complaint on the following lines: "so-and-so plus 30 other Radicals attacked ABVP activists with lethal weapons with the intention of killing them..". And thus at least 30 election campaigners can go into detention for attempted murder. This is exactly what happened at Jangaon, 50 kms from Warangal, last year, as a consequence of which the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Joint-Secretary of the Junior College students union were all in judicial custody at Warangal Central Jail by the time of the annual College day function.

SECOND ROUND

The memory of last year (when two RSV contestants were arrested and had to contest from jail) toned down the Radicals' campaign this year, but nevertheless they practically swept the polls in all but one college in the town. And then the second round of the struggle started, for the police would not give up so easily. Having completed the elections the students union would start its yearly activities, the first of them being the union's inaugural function. Such functions, which used to be addressed by local dignitaries like the Collector or

Superintendent of Police, are used as forum for propagating revolutionary, politics by inviting like-minded speakers. Over the last two years, there has been an intense struggle between the students on the one hand and the police, the University authorities and the Collector on the other hand over this issue. Since last year, the SP and the Collector have taken over the decisive authority and have created the totally illegal rule that functions and lectures cannot be held unless they approve of the speaker. And the University authorities have quite shamelessly collaborated with them. Any function proposed by the students is referred to the Collector for his approval and if he does not approve, the Principal and the Vice-Chancellor refuse to assert their much-vaunted 'autonomy' but instead invoke law and order', that bogey of the middle class, to defend their collusion with the police. As a consequence, not a single function could be held in the University College last academic year, and this year it was found impossible to arrange a lecture by Anil Sadgopal of Kishore Bharati since the Principal happened to be on leave and the Principal-in-charge did not want to take the 'risk'! Some of the Principals of affiliated colleges have exhibited more gumption and attempted to overrule the Collector's dictate, but he has quickly called them to order and disciplined them.

The most effective threat, and one that works like magic, is that anyone who refuses to collaborate will also be branded an 'extremist'. For instance, the Principal of a certain college was a non-collaborator for a long time. To bring him into line, RSS circles conducted a systematic propaganda that he is also an 'extremist'. On December 14, ABVP held a big anti-naxalite rally subsidised by landlords and traders at Hyderabad and submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister which included the name of this Principal as one of the 'extremist' academics. Within one week, the police entered his college, Jathi-charged the students and arrested five of them on a month-old charge of having threatened the hostel warden; the Principal *in* turn suspended/rusticated those students and closed down the college.

There is a cliché that a crisis brings out the best in men. It also brings out the worst in them. If the State decides as a policy to ruthlessly 'root out' extremists, it will discover a surprisingly large number of hitherto unsuspected persons happily or other-

wise collaborating with it. And once the process of collaboration starts, it does not require a district-level officer like the Collector or SP. to discipline highly placed academics and administrators. Last year, a mere phone call from the Circle Inspector of Hanamkonda to the effect that the students union magazine contained 'objectionable matter' was sufficient for the University College Principal to get its printing suspended.

PRE-EMPTIVE ASSAULT

To get to the denouement of our story, this academic year the police decided on a pre-emptive assault. Having failed in their attempt to defeat the Radicals, they decided to create a crisis just as the inaugural functions in the various colleges were about to start in the last week of December. On December 21, the students of Arts and Science College (a constituent degree college of KU) agitated for special buses to their college. They stopped buses in front of their college and deflated the tyres. The police chased them into the campus but the teachers (including the Principal) sent the police out, locked the gate, and persuaded the students to qui ten down. Just as they were succeeding, the police led by two sub-inspectors scaled the walls, pushed aside the pleading teachers, and went on a half-hour's rampage. They beat students in the corridors, inside class rooms, inside the staff room and even in the Principal's room. Some of the boys were chased on to the terrace and they jumped down and fractured their limbs. The girl students jumped the rear wall and ran for life. Two boys were hospitalised, one with a bleeding head and the other with a fractured leg, whereas dozens of equally seriously injured boys must have got themselves treated privately — out of fear that if they went to hospital they would be picked up and arrested. After creating tenor on the campus for about half an hour, the police left with the threat addressed to the horrified teachers that they had better not make a fuss about it, or else....

Unfortunately for their calculations, the staff did make a fuss. All the teaching and non-teaching staff went on an indefinite strike demanding suspension of the two Sis and a judicial enquiry. The Vice-Chancellor, instead of sympathising with his staff and students, closed down the campus in retaliation. He bluntly refused to even condemn the police lathi charge.

The student leaders met him the next day and abused him in quite strong language. It is a measure of the culture of collaboration prevalent on the campus that a tape-record of their conversation is available with the police. The police obtained a complaint of 'criminal intimidation' against the students. That night (the early hours of 23rd), in a mysterious development that recalled to many minds the burning of the German Reichstag, the Chemistry laboratory of the University College got burn down completely, resulting in a loss of Rs 10 lakh. The University and Police authorities immediately declared that it was sabotage, and the local Press called it a 'stab in the back' to the fledgeling University. Without saying so, they all told the police whom to implicate — in case the police were innocent of mischievous intentions. And accordingly, the police FIR mentions student and staff leaders in the 'accused' column.

WHO NEEDS A UNIVERSITY SECURITY FORCE?

The next morning, as the University College students union President and Secretary, along with other students were helping the fixe brigade to salvage the damaged equipment, the same SI who had lathi charged students inside the Arts and Science College campus on 21st came there and in the view of the Vice-Chancellor arrested them. The reason he gave was that *he* wished to interrogate them about the fire, but he locked them up in the KU outpost all night and thrashed them mercilessly. The next day they were taken to Court and charged with 'criminal intimidation' of the Vice-Chancellor! When they came out on bail from jail three days later, the same SI lay in wait for them at the jail gates (a very common habit with the police of Warangal, incidentally), grabbed them as they came out and rearrested them on some old charges of having abused or assaulted some ABVP students. And in all these cases (including the criminal intimidation of the VC), they are sent to the Special Court for naxalites! Not content with this macabre sequence, the VC in turn suspends 15 students for having abused him, and on the Collector's order closes down the campus for nearly one month in two phases.

This denouement has two tail-pieces; one is that the Collector, in confirmation of the true intentions behind the lathi charge of December 21, has called

a meeting of Principals and told them that no functions are to be held in any college; he would not allow even a High Court judge to address the students, for fear that 'law and order' may be disturbed. The other is that the outpost in Kakatiya University is to be soon upgraded into a police station in charge of a Circle. Inspector and the SI who was principally responsible for all these atrocities is to be promoted and posted as Circle Inspector of that police station.

NEW DELHI

Price Stability at Cost of Growth

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BY all available indications, Indira Gandhi and her coterie of advisors are becoming desperate about the coming general election. Though some leftists who have chosen to lobby to bring the two communist parties, especially the CPI, into some kind of a political alliance with Indira Gandhi and arc waxing eloquent about her so-called 'leftist lurch' at the Calcutta session of the ruling party, the general impression is that Indira Gandhi is making a desperate bid to woo the people by reckless populist posturing. This has won political dividends in the past, but there is widespread scepticism about another performance of this type giving her similar returns in future. On the contrary, the Calcutta conclave of opposition parties is seen to have visibly rattled Indira Gandhi and her camp and she is responding to the evolving political situation in a manner which is characteristic of her.

Indira Gandhi's telecast on the occasion of the completion of the fourth year of her government has only strengthened these impressions. A typical comment in this context has been that Indira Gandhi was presenting her defence in the face of the onslaught on her economic policies at the Calcutta conclave of opposition forces. This itself is regarded as a display of lack of confidence. The result is that the speculation about her holding elections to Parliament earlier than scheduled has lost its edge. The so-called measures to hold down prices announced close on the heels of her speech on the fourth anniversary of her return to power should end all such speculation. These measures, which mock her claims of the governments' shining performance, cannot

Thus is a provincial campus policed. With a ruthlessly repressive police and district administration which is willing to violate all canons of law and propriety in maintaining 'order', and a gladly collaborating University administration, who needs a University Security Force and magisterial powers? Institutionalising repression will bring in cumbersome rules and regulations. It is best to invoke the ghost of Tiberius and let the police loose on the students.

obviously be a very happy backdrop for the election.

In her anniversary speech, Indira Gandhi repeated the refrain of Janata misrule from which her government had inherited all the present problems and difficulties. This may have carried some conviction for a short while after her return to power, but to advance this alibi after four years of government is to tax credibility. To rely on half-truths and downright untruth to compare her government's performance with the record of the Janata makes things worse. Take, for instance, her contention that as against the inflation of 23 per cent in 1979-80, which had been a severe drought year and a time of marked political instability and uncertainty her government had brought down the rate of inflation in 1982-83. What she did not care to mention was the rising inflation in the current year. Also, she simply skipped the critical issue in price management which had been so sharply posed by the opposition conclave in Calcutta — that prices of essential commodities for the mass of the people have been rising relentlessly during the past four years and continue to rise despite the bumper crops.

That the price situation is clearly getting out of the government's control was brought home forcefully the very day after Indira Gandhi's fudging of statistics in her anniversary speech. The measures announced for holding the price-line are designed entirely to deflate the economy and depress economic activity. They are classical demand management measures to contain inflation at the cost of development. This marks the inglorious close of the chapter of supply-side economics