

## ANSWERS TO SUKUMARAN'S QUESTIONNAIRE

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1. My family belongs to the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, famous for extremes of drought and 'factionist' violence. My mother's father was a reputed scholar in the brahminical tradition, who taught at the Maharaja's College at Mysore. He had a share of an agharam in Anantapur district, which is notoriously regarded as next only to the desert districts of Rajasthan in its aridity. My father's was a lower middle class urban brahmin's family of Cuddapah. He retired as Branch Manager in the L.I.C of India. Mother conceived fourteen times, had eleven children, of whom three died early. She oversaw the growing up of the surviving eight of us (four brothers and four sisters) as best as she could, for father was typically male in believing that his only duty was to pay our School and College expenses, which was not much because those were the days when Municipal Schools and Government Colleges taught students well and free. As my father used to be transferred every three years, my own education was at various towns across the State. I did my B.Sc at Tirupati and took the degree in 1972. I did my M.Sc and Ph.D from the faculty of Mathematics at the Regional Engineering College (now called National Institution of Technology) at Warangal in the Telangana region. Warangal was a major centre for the famous Telangana peasant uprising of 1946-51, and in many ways the centre of the naxalite movement from the day the movement shifted in the mid-seventies from Srikakulam to Telangana.

2. At Warangal I came in touch for the first time with the naxalite movement. Before that, as an undergraduate at Tirupati, I used to read avidly, bunking my Mathematics-Physics-Chemistry classes and spending much of the College hours in the library of the Sri Venkateswara University. I used to read a lot of History, Philosophy, English Literature, Psychology, Logic and Astronomy. I quickly became an admirer of Bertrand Russell, and a leftist in his mould. My view of communists therefore was that they were good in the heart but dense in the head. It was at Warangal that I came into contact with the naxalite movement, for which the Regional Engineering College was a major centre. Surapaneni Janardhan, one of the first naxalite activists to be killed after the promulgation of Emergency in June 1975, was a student of that College, and so was Cherukuri Raj Kumar, today a Central Committee member of the C.P.I (Maoist). Raj Kumar would often discuss politics with me, but that had no effect on my conviction that communists were good people, but weak in philosophy. What upset my conviction was that I could not comprehend the Emergency within the framework of analysis I had adopted from Bertrand

Russell. It appeared that the Communists had some answer. However, the Progress Publishers literature on Marxism, which is mostly trash, helped me very little in understanding what that answer could be. It was the accidental discovery of D.D.Kosambi that gave me a glimpse of what Marxism could be, and then I sat and read through the three volumes of Capital. However, I was still too much fascinated by Mathematics to think of becoming any kind of an activist. I left for Delhi in 1978 for post doctoral work at the Indian Statistical Institute, a top-class institute for Mathematics, especially of the applicable variety. It was fortunate that I went there because within a year and a half I glimpsed the summits of the subject and saw its most reputed practitioners in India. The glamour the subject held for me wore off and I decided I wanted to be an activist and not a professional Mathematician. I resigned my fellowship prematurely and came back to Warangal. I got a job as lecturer in the faculty of Mathematics at the Kakatiya University and decided to 'work for the movement', which meant the naxalite movement. In those days the common understanding in the State was that working for civil rights was one way, and a very honourable way, of working for the naxalite movement, especially for intellectuals. That is how I became a human rights activist, not out of any understanding of human rights as such, but because white-collar persons wanting to help the naxalites gravitated to the civil rights movement, especially the A.P.Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC). I quickly became General Secretary of that organisation, in the year 1983, for the kind of not very inspiring reasons that decide such matters in communist-linked organisations.

Today, not only I but most of my colleagues in the Human Rights Forum (HRF) believe that insofar as our desire to build a healthy and rounded Human Rights movement and organisation are concerned, the point where all of us started was not the best one. We do not regret it, and we do realise that the kind of work we did and continue to do vis-à-vis the State and the naxalite movement was and is useful, but it was hardly the right starting point. That activity was a strange and unreconciled mixture of two strands of awareness about rights: the liberal notion of inviolability of the person by the State, and the radical notion of the right to make a revolution, which may very well end up with a State that respects no person. Human Rights does respect the liberal notion of individual rights and the radical stress on the right to fight for better society, though it would insist on the one hand that rights of individuals vis-à-vis the State are hardly the whole of the rights we must be concerned about, and on the other that the better society must be in all aspects a better respecter of rights than the present one. But the true philosophical starting point of rights philosophy is neither the one nor the other. It is premised on the right to equal value, worth, status and opportunities of human beings *qua* human beings, which is most

forcefully articulated in the rebel movements against brahminical society and civilisation that have, from the time of the Buddha, given life and content to the notions of humanity and of rights in India.

3. The sectarian origins of the Peoples War Group (now called CPI(Maoist)) are best read from their own accounts. I know very little because I never found it interesting. My own sympathy for the naxalite movement stems largely from its social impact. In this sense the origin of the naxalite movement (and not just the Peoples War) lay in the Rytu-Coolie Sanghams (Association of agricultural labourers) organised by them in the villages. These Sanghams were the nucleus of a multi-faceted struggle: for land, for wages, against *begar* (forced labour, *corvee*), against sexual exploitation of women of poor/lower caste families by the upper caste landlords, against untouchability, for the freedom of the people to resolve disputes amongst them without recourse to the wisdom of the landlord; etc. This activity was and remains the high point of the naxalite movement. Its principal effect was to turn social relations in the village upside down. There was measurable improvement in wage levels, though not much in terms of land distribution. Forced labour came to an end totally. But power relations in the villages changed irrevocably.

If one is then to talk of the 'growth' of the naxalite movement one must spin the tale around the methods of repression adopted by the State to put an end to the success of the Rytu-Coolie Sanghams; the violent methods of response devised by the naxalites, especially the Peoples War, to this; the further violence unleashed by the State; the further violence adopted in response by the Peoples War, and so from one round to another. In the literature of that Party this spiral may well be depicted as their maturation into a truly revolutionary force ready for battle, but that is a matter of opinion. Whoever may ultimately be held responsible for the degeneration of a genuine people's movement into a hit and run battle of half-trained militants against the State, the fact remains that the change did take place, and it drastically reduced the participation of the masses in the activity of the revolutionary movement as envisaged and led by the naxalites, especially the Peoples War. The armed squads took over from the Sanghams as the centre of the movement. Guerrilla struggle against the police and other organs of the State replaced social and economic struggle in the villages. Social and economic issues continued to be taken up, but more by the agency of the armed squads, than the struggle of the oppressed themselves. A poster put up in the villages by the naxalites would often do what a strike or other collective action of the poor would have done earlier. On the other hand, the Peoples War became militarily more and more proficient to the point that even police officers privately admire their military capabilities.

5. I do not know whether the issue is specific to the present or any context. For a human rights activist who believes that the human rights movement has intrinsic worth and is not merely the only revolution the white collar class can do, the context of armed struggle is always problematic. A true human rights activist can never feel comfortable with violence. One who does is not a human rights activist at all. Nor can a human rights activist be blind to the fact that violence has often led to enlargement of justice, though the claim of proponents of violence that all that is good in the world has been won by violent struggle may not be true. Over the years those of us who have taken this dilemma seriously have arrived at a formulation which is not without difficulties but is workable in the sense that it has helped us to retain a realistic sense of balance. That is: when society has so much structural violence built into it, namely the physical violence of the strong against the weak but also hunger, poverty, illiteracy, systematic discrimination, untouchability etc, it does not accord with reason to condemn all political violence. Human rights activists do not support violence, but urge society to understand it. It is realised that the plea to 'understand' carries a certain sympathy for it, but it stops short of support for violence, even for the most clearly unavoidable instances of it. The reason is that there is no way any one who values human life *as such* can say about a particular life that it was fully justified to have taken it. (This is, after all, the ultimate argument against the death penalty). However, this plea to realise that we are living in an imperfect society in which you cannot demand of political means alone that they be perfectly humane, does not extend to keeping silent in the face of evidently unjust, unfair or arbitrary uses of violence by revolutionaries or other varieties of liberators. Such acts have to be openly condemned. In other words, human rights activists do not support violence, but urge society to understand the background to political violence based upon the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised, and to strive to ameliorate the conditions that have led to the violence. But at the same time they condemn vocally all unfair and unjust uses of violence by revolutionaries.

There can be different emphases even within this understanding. Speaking for myself, after two and a half decades of close observance of the consequences of systematic use of violence in the cause of liberation, I have come to the conclusion that violence may some times be a necessary evil, but it is an evil even when it is necessary. One often hears leftist intellectuals speak of creative violence, or the creative use of violence. I am convinced that there is no such thing as creative violence. All violence is destructive. It is a different matter that destruction too has its uses, and may some times be necessary in the sense that the alternatives are much more damaging, though invisibly so. Or that there is no feasible

alternative at all and abstaining from violence may mean putting up with even less justified violence. Nevertheless, violence is inherently inhuman, though not altogether avoidable for that reason.

6, 7, 8 & 10. Talks between the CPI (Maoist) and the Government of A.P is probably a closed chapter, at least for the present. Though there was talk of talks during Telugu Desam rule, nothing happened because Chandra Babu Naidu insisted on the naxalites giving up their weapons before talks could start. This was a totally unrealistic pre-condition since it was nobody's case that the naxalites were desirous of 'coming into the mainstream' and wanted an honourable chance to do so. They were and are content with the way their armed struggle is going on, and it was from the point of view of the common people caught in the conflict between their revolutionary strategy and the State's brutal response to it that the dialogue was mooted by the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), a body of experienced public personalities that set up the task for itself. The dialogue started after the Congress Government came to power because Rajasekhar Reddy's government initially did not insist on that pre-condition. It declared unconditional cease-fire with the naxalites and the naxalites, for their part, reciprocated the cease-fire and imposed no pre-condition at all for the talks. The only contentious issue was whether the naxalites would, during the period of talks, go around sporting weapons, to the non-use of which they had committed themselves. The Maoists insisted on their right not to 'put down weapons' even in that limited sense whereas the Government which made no pre-condition of their giving up armed struggle wanted them not to make an exhibition of their weapons during the period of cease-fire/dialogue. If the Maoists' only apprehension was that they may be attacked by their enemies if they went around unarmed, it could have been answered by the Government informally agreeing to their carrying unostentatious weapons of self-defence, but their real objection was symbolic. This difference, in any case, need not have held up the process of dialogue.

The need for the talks is not some thing that either the Maoists or the Government felt very strongly. Among ruling party personalities it is the local leaders in the areas of naxalite activity that were eager that some dialogue should take place.

However, in retrospect it seems that Rajasekhar Reddy was being very clever. He wanted to appear to be redeeming an election promise without in fact having a different view in the matter than his predecessor. He therefore did not himself at any point say any thing in the matter but let his Home Minister do all the benign talking and the hosting of the dialogue process. After a rather aimless first round which was led by the media more than any body else, Rajasekhar Reddy opened his mouth and started expressing exactly the

same doubts as Chandra Babu Naidu: how can a constitutionally elected Government talk to armed rebels out to overthrow the constitution unless they agree to lay down arms? etc. He simultaneously permitted the police to break the cease-fire and start encounter killings. After that, the talks were no longer possible.

11. The situation is much more serious today than it was in the past. The ban on the Maoist party, *per se*, is not the most disturbing part of it. The ban was there from 1992 to 2004, and if it were not for the accompanying counter-insurgency tactics of brutal suppression, not much physical injury would have been done to the sympathisers and cadre of the Maoists. It is the new form the counter-insurgency tactics is taking that is more worrisome. This is the sudden spurt in the violence of anonymous gangs who describe themselves as 'Tigers', 'Cobras', etc., and attack cadre of mass organisations and democratic bodies perceived as being close to the Maoists, publicly and with impunity. It is true that the 'Tigers' made their appearance first during the rule of Telugu Desam Party, and two civil rights activists, Purushotham and Md Azam Ali of the APCLC were killed in that name in that period. But it has taken an unprecedentedly wide form with the various 'Cobras' that have become active in Congress rule. A shroud of total terror has descended on mass organisations within six months of the break down of the talks between the Government and the Maoists. Teachers, lawyers, journalists – any one known to be sympathetic to the Maoists or even to indirectly serve their ends by talking against State violence, is being brutally terrorised into silence. Not only have individual activists resigned from their organisations, but whole organisations have dissolved themselves to appease these faceless killers. Barring the HRF (and I am tempted to say, touchwood) in many districts there is no other organisation able to speak out against police violence.

The police are quite gleeful. When questioned why they are unable to curb this menace, they declare that persons injured by Maoist violence may be arming themselves for retaliation, and just as they (the police) are unable to curb the Maoists they are unable to curb the counter-Maoists too. There may be some truth in the theory that these gangs consist of some persons injured with or without justification by the naxalites, but that is not the whole story. The suspicion is that in fact many of these 'cobras' and 'tigers' are police personnel. Another component is the criminalised ex-naxalites who have some grouse of their own against their former comrades and are willing to function under the protection of the police. This is a growing phenomenon, and they are the most dangerous and lethal lot of the counter-insurgents. And there are the informers and police agents who have been found out by the Maoists, and whose personal safety requires joining such gangs.

13. Working for human rights at the ground level is always fraught with danger. My first encounter with physical violence was in June 1985 when I was attacked in the bus stand of Jagtial in Karimnagar district with steel chairs and hockey sticks by ABVP boys. Two of their men had been killed by the naxalites and this was the revenge. But even before their men were killed, an activist of APCLC by name Gopi Rajanna had been killed by the Sangh Parivar men in January that year in the same town. Later the same year, on 3 September, APCLC's Vice-President Dr Ramanadham was murdered at Warangal in broad day light. That was in retaliation to the murder of the S.I of Police, Kazipet by the naxalites of the (then) Peoples War. Two more APCLC activists were murdered while I was General Secretary of that organisation, Japa Lakshma Reddy at Algunoor in Karimnagar district on 7 Sept 1986, and Narra Prabhakar Reddy at Warangal on 7 Dec 1991. In the year 1989, I was kidnapped near Khammam while traveling in a bus towards Hyderabad and held hostage blindfolded for two nights and a day, for the release of policemen kidnapped by naxalites. And in the year 1991, I was assaulted at Kothagudem in Khammam district again by criminals set up by the police, beaten all over the face with knuckle-dusters and robbed of the money I was collecting from the local medical practitioners for the construction of a memorial hall in the name of Dr Ramanadham.

14. Globalisation/Liberalisation carries this stupid air of inevitability about it and the feeble mind of the well-fed in search of an excuse for self-indulgence thinks it is the final answer to any lingering sense of guilt they may be suffering from. Since the Human Rights movement, even as it espouses the cause of the oppressed, addresses the intelligentsia and other opinion makers and decision makers to win support for the cause of the disadvantaged, it comes up against this self-sure rock of unconcern. On the other hand, in terms of rights, Globalisation/Liberalisation is a disaster. Not only is it a direct assault on the livelihood rights and other associated rights – such as the right to health, education etc – of the people, withal it comes with a bundle of assumptions about human affairs that devalues equality as a notion, as a value, whereas equality is the central term of the human rights world view. These days any one with a broad agenda of human rights finds that one is running hither and thither without time to settle down to a consistent campaign on any one issue. Such is the wide anti-human sweep of the neo-liberal dispensation.

15. The dalit movement which took birth as a mass upsurge in 1985 was the first frontal attack on brahminism in Andhra Pradesh. Unlike in Tamil Nadu, the anti-brahmin movement was quite weak in this State. That space was taken up by the communist movement, which in some ways has a wider agenda but is a weak critique of brahminism. There was quite a vibrant rationalist/atheist movement, but insofar as it was run by the

sudra upper castes, it had its limitations in taking on brahminism since such castes, namely the kmmas and the reddy, while in theory derided by dharmic ideology, found themselves socially acceptable to brahmins, and on the same side of the fence when it came to denial of equal worth and value to the oppressed sudra communities, and more particularly the panchamas. Moreover, a considerable section of the rationalist movement was Marxist in its broad orientation and that hampered a comprehensive critique of brahminism. Neither the base-superstructure model of orthodox Marxism nor the notions of hegemony and class struggle propounded by those who would save Marxism from the rigidities of that model can adequately deal with brahminism. The 'way of life' that brahminism proudly claims to be must be dealt with and countered as such, and whatever the other limitations of the thought of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar, their merit is that they did so.

This is the significance of the rise of a mass dalit movement in the form of the A.P. Dalit Mahasabha after the massacre of dalits by kmmas in Karamchedu on 17 July 1985. Ambedkar's thought, which was till then confined to small groups, mostly of the Scheduled Caste Employees Welfare Association type, became a mass political ideology thereafter. The Dalit Mahasabha had its high point in the late eighties and continued to be effective in the early nineties. The reason for its subsequent decline has to do with debilities unrelated to any ideological differences or practical problems in mobilising dalits. It should occasion no surprise that the weaknesses that are eating into the vitals of all the progressive movements have not left the dalit movement unaffected. Careerism, corruption, hankering after personal importance, preference for the comforts of NGO-ism as against the travails of struggles, etc., are ubiquitous in the dalit movement as in all progressive movements. At the ideological level, the main block has been the chasing of the mirage of State power. It is common to find dalit ideologues planning SC, ST, BC, Minorities combinations again and again, an exercise that would guarantee them State power if politics were arithmetic. The casualty is the struggle for social change – call it eform or revolution – that was so dear to Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar. That most dalit ideologues in the State are former Marxists has enhanced the attraction of the notion that if State power is achieved the rest of the task of annihilation of caste and varnashramadharma can be completed with ease thereafter.

The upshot is that today there is a plurality of localised 'Ambedkar Associations' agitating at the village level, and a plurality of dalit leaders aspiring for power at every level above that, and little else by way dalit politics. The positive legacy however is that one no longer speaks of caste discrimination and caste domination in whispers. And it is no longer taboo to call brahminism by its proper name.



The dalit movement went through a major crisis when the Madigas raised the issue of inequality within the dalit communities, and sought a separate quota within the SC quota (of jobs and college seats) for the disadvantaged communities among the dalits. Unfortunately, one cannot honestly say that the movement has emerged creditably from the crisis. The fact of further inequality within the Scheduled Castes has not seriously been disputed by any one, but the relatively favourably placed among the dalits – the Mala and Adi Andhra communities in particular – did not take well to the demand of the Madigas. That is understandable if not excusable, but the real tragedy has been the equivocal attitude of the recognised dalit leadership, which is mostly of the Mala and Adi Andhra communities. A magnanimous gesture by them accepting the structural inequality and supporting the struggle of the Madigas for subdivision of the SC quota would have helped save the dalit community as well as the movement from the crisis. But they would not rise to the occasion.

16 & 17. The judiciary in our country has been by and large quite conservative in its social understanding. Even in periods such as the late seventies and early eighties when the impression of a positive change in the judicial mindset gained currency, the change was confined to a few judges, and was not even very consistent at that. Right now the judiciary is all for neo-liberalism. Judges like Satyabrata Sinha of the Supreme Court are openly saying that the ‘changing times’ require a changed attitude on the part of the judiciary, whatever the makers of the Constitution may have intended about the contours of valid government policy. The Courts’ attitude towards reservations is of a piece with this attitude. In this hurry to go long with the winds of change the Courts have been delivering judgements plainly inconsistent with what they themselves have been saying for fifty years.

In the case concerning reservations in private educational institutions we heard from the Supreme Court - and seven judges at that – an argument frequently heard in the bazaar: when the entrepreneur (of an unaided college) has not depended on the Government for financial aid, why should he give seats to students or classes of students identified by the Government? Likewise it was argued in the past: when the owner of a private factory has not depended upon Government aid to run his business why should he obey the Government’s wish that workers whom he has kindly given employment must be given a share of his profits too? Why should he seek the Government’s permission to sack his workers? This argument which has plenty of bazaar logic was rejected by the Supreme Court in case after case arising from labour welfare legislation. The Court said that what can and cannot be asked of private business is determined not by the logic of the business world but by the imperatives of the Constitution. And under the Constitution the freedom

to do business is not untrammelled. It can be limited 'in the interests of the general public'. And that expression has been interpreted to include the furtherance of the Directive Principles of State Policy. All labour welfare legislation has been upheld on this consideration. Why does not the same logic apply to reservations?

The odd thing about the cases filed in the A.P.High Court against reservations for Muslims is this: whenever two Hindus meet and talk about Muslims, the invariable comment is about the willful and wanton backwardness of Muslims, namely that they prefer to send their children to Madarsas rather than modern schools, they keep their women secluded and confined to the house, they look to the Shariat for everything, they prefer the views of mullahs to that of scientists, etc. Yet the moment the Government decided to give them preferential treatment to help them climb out of backwardness the whole of Hindu society was up in arms saying that Muslims are not backward! And at least two judges of the five who heard the case declared, as if backwardness is decided by judicial fiat, that Muslims as a community are not backward.

12. As a lawyer I have argued in the High Court in defence of the sub-division of SC reservation aimed at giving a more equitable opportunity to all the dalit communities. And in favour of reservations for Muslims. We won the first case but a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court upset the High Court's judgement. I have criticised the judgement in an article I wrote in the Economic & Political Weekly. It is an unusually badly written judgement. And we lost the second case. However, in these two cases I was among the many who argued. But there is one case which I argued almost single-handed and succeeded, and which gives me a lot of personal as well as professional satisfaction. Andhra Pradesh has a sizable Scheduled Area (governed by the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution). In the late eighties the State Government (rather, the Governor) issued a series of orders reserving *all* posts at the lower level in various departments that deal with the day to day welfare of the people in the Scheduled Areas for local Scheduled Tribes. The rationale of this reservation was that non-tribals who have no empathy with tribal people cannot be expected to work with requisite dedication for their welfare. Teacher's posts in particular in all the schools in the Scheduled Area were reserved 100% for local Scheduled Tribes. This reservation had a chequered history, going up and down from the State Administrative Tribunal to the Supreme Court, and back over a fifteen year period at the behest of non-tribal teacher aspirants. Finally it came to rest before a Full Bench of the High Court. The State Government took little interest in defending its own order and it was mainly my argument that carried the day.

4. The struggle for Telangana is not merely struggle of a 'backward' region fighting for development. It is frequently shown that way since the urge to overcome backwardness and 'develop' is seen as a legitimate desire. It is true that Telangana has remained backward in terms of many of the usual indicators of development. And it is true that it need not be so since it is rich in resources of all kinds: river waters, coal, forests and good soil. The grievance that it has been kept backward by neglect is therefore widespread. While other aspects of backwardness can arguably be corrected within a united Andhra Pradesh, Telangana will never get its fair share of river waters – of the Godavari and the Krishna - so long as the State is one. One need not endorse all the conspiracy theories popular with the Telangana movement (as with any identity movement) to accept this basic fact. Thus there is quite a rational, unsentimental case for Telangana, for those who don't like mixing politics with sentiments.

But Telangana is also a distinct social-historical entity around which an identity has got built over the years. Telugu spoken in Telangana is distinct and recognisable before one sentence is completed. The cultural idiom too has a distinction of its own. Speaking for myself, I find it perhaps more congenial than the cultural traits of the even more backward region of Rayalaseema to which I belong, and it is certainly more congenial than that of the developed coastal Andhra region which is culturally as ugly as all 'developed' regions are. From the time of the formation of the State of Andhra Pradesh in 1956 by merging the Telugu speaking areas of the old Madras State with the Telugu speaking areas of the erstwhile Hyderabad State, there has been a sizable public opinion in Telangana that has viewed the notion of one-ness of the Telugu people with skepticism. To this day the common people of Telangana routinely refer to the coastal areas as 'Andhra', an appellation used outside the State to refer to the entire State.

My view is that both for rational reasons – in particular a fair share of river waters – and the desire not to let the Telangana identity get submerged in a hegemonic Telugu-ness, the desire for a separate State is fully justified. Having said this, I must express my suspicion of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), the party leading the political struggle for a separate State. Most 'regional' movements are dominated by the upper classes/upper castes of the region, but that is not necessarily a circumstance for condemning such movements outright, though it is a circumstance that calls for caution. Insofar as the TRS is concerned, its rise has resurrected the political prominence of the velamas, reddy and brahmins, the three dominant castes which had been silenced effectively by the naxalite movement from about the early eighties, and the general rise of dalit consciousness thereafter. These communities, apart from partaking of the vicious culture common to the

Hindu upper castes everywhere, are also more prone to the RSS way of thought than is common in the State. Moreover, a very sizable chunk of the Sangh Parivar has directly joined and become part of the TRS, the most prominent being former BJP leader A. Narendra, who is as much responsible as his fundamentalist Muslim counterparts for making a communal ghetto of the old city of Hyderabad.