

**Report from AP:****“From Nehru to Narasimha Rao there never was a leap  
in favour of the poor”**

K.R.VENUGOPAL

**PART- I**

The basic points of the pro-poor philosophy of TarimelaNagi Reddy as spelt out by him in his statement to the Court of the Additional Sessions Judge here in Hyderabad in July 1978 under the title “India Mortgaged” are:

1. That even after India’s freedom, imperialism and feudalism dominated Indian society and the two super powers of those days, the US and Soviet Union were employing every economic, political and military means to subjugate India. Export of capital to India was disguised as aid. Grants, after some time, were replaced by loans, which changed again from concessional to non-concessional, commercial loans. India’s external debts therefore rose. He shows, with official figures, how the land ceiling laws failed to abolish feudalism; left huge areas of land in the hands of big farmers; how tenancy laws did not help the tenant farmers and gave them no protection. It was even argued by the opponents of land reforms that land ceilings impeded productivity in agro-industries and they encouraged captive farms for foreign monopolies in aqua culture. And MNCs like ITC had medium term arrangements with oil seed farmers which amounted to their ownership. The Community Development Project and the Cooperative movement actually became a handmaid of the rural rich.

2. At best feudal economy was being transformed, but very slowly, into capitalist economy and this slow evolution condemned, as Lenin had said earlier, peasants to serfdom and bondage. This also led to growing attacks by the “upper castes” over the “lower castes” and repressive measures against the peasantry and their sympathiser-”revolutionaries” if they resisted these. And the repressive measures of the State undertaken in defence of the landlords added to the oppression of the peasantry if they resisted their pauperisation. These attacks from both the landlords and the State agencies were particularly brutal against the Dalits, who constituted the bulk of rural and landless agricultural labour. Therefore, TN said: “if the class character of the revolt of the exploited sometimes expresses itself in certain castes, and if the suppression of the downtrodden exploited classes takes the character of a brutal war against certain castes, it in no way obscures the basic character of class struggle”. The origins of this was the betrayal of the national struggle for liberation of the Indian people by the Indian big bourgeois capitalists (collaborating with imperialists) allying with feudal landlords, which struggle otherwise would have at its height swept away feudal serfdom along with imperialism.

3. The objective conditions of deepening crisis continuing to obtain in India therefore favoured revolution but that did not mean that the subjective conditions necessary for the success of revolution would arise automatically, by way of socialist consciousness arising automatically from the workers’ struggles. That political consciousness had to be imparted from outside by the Communist party and if that did not happen, the subjective conditions necessary for an armed revolution to be led by the working class will never be created. Nagi Reddy believed that lessons learned from revolutions all over the world and the struggles of the Indian working class will unite the revolutionary forces in India, and strove hard to bring about this unity.

4. It is most interesting that TN strengthens his thesis by a series of quotations from Gunnar Myrdal’s Asian Drama. Surely, Myrdal was no communist revolutionary. The book on TN has for its Appendix the speech made by him in the AP Legislative Assembly in March 1969 where he announced his resignation from his life as a law maker, disillusioned with the parliamentary path as a way to liberate the masses from their oppression, a path he had pursued for 16 years but one from which he would diverge calling for embarking on a path of revolution. It was a dramatic moment in the history of the AP Legislature even as he finished this speech and made his way out of the house after folding his papers, a house from where he believed no justice or liberty would ever be delivered to the poor. What is poignant about this speech on this occasion is his soulful declaration that even after 2 decades of governance independent India failed to establish

peace in the lives of peasants, farm labour and even the middle classes. So the invitation was not only to the utter poor but also to the middle classes in setting this right. It was a situation of multiple crises, crisis everywhere and the poignancy also lay in his articulation of his sense of complete absence of hope in the policies pursued in Delhi and the states. These policies would only deepen and not eliminate the crises. His conclusion based on a mass of data and information relating to foreign capital operating in every sphere of life in India's planning process through the Five Year Plans was that India was not a sovereign country making her own decisions but serving the interests of foreign capital whether Western or Soviet; and therefore the Indian masses were doomed to servility to both Indian and foreign capital.

5. TN says: whatever the outward changes in political control, nothing essential has changed in our social set-up or in our economic organization. Even his arrest was under the laws made in colonial times! He quotes Gunnar Myrdal: "It should be remembered that economic and social conditions of South Asian countries today are not very different from those existing before disintegration of the colonial power system". He quotes Lenin as saying the bourgeoisie cannot be depended upon to complete a revolution for it believes more in reforms than in revolution; it "is incapable of being consistently democratic". The liberal way we dealt with the princes was nothing but a deal with feudalism and even bribery to buy peace with them which was not necessary. This was of a piece with foreign capital. The "so-called" Indian Constitution was born in sin, of incest, a replica of the 1935 Government of India Act. It was the epitome of the total betrayal of India. Alladi Krishna swamy Aiyar, one of its architects had declared at the time: "We are not starting a Constitution anew after a revolution. The existing administrative structure which has been worked so long cannot be altogether ignored in the new framework". For TN the Constitution of India was intended to perpetuate the existing social and economic foundation of imperialist exploitation and feudal landlordism. The Directive principles were but a sop, prompted by the fear of the power of the masses for revolt. "Economic independence has become a mirage, even after 25 years of proclamation of independence."

6. The Foreword to the second edition points out that with the advent of Narasimha Rao's reforms, the World Bank and IMF dictated economic, trade and labour policies and even budget making. However, Government maintained a facade of freedom by claiming comfortable forex balances by foregoing IMF mechanisms like the Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The public sector's "commanding heights of the economy" actually came to be occupied by the MNCs. Data is given to prove this.

7. This is true even after 70 years, with the Indian economy ridden with "all-round crisis" even as the chapter carrying this title and subsequent chapters in the book argued with facts and figures. TN has rightly criticised the lack of success of the public sector in India even if not always. My own view is the failure of the public sector was because of the lack of transparency and egregious corruption including its wealth being used by the politicians and bureaucrats in power.

8. The treatment of tribal issues by TN in his statement before the court is the high point of his revolutionary effort. It is a disgrace that despite there being a schedule V in the COI the tribes have been so inhumanly treated in this country. The question may well be asked: Why does the Indian State blame and prosecute certain challengers of this state of affairs, carrying arms as violators of law, while no one has been prosecuted for violation of the land ceiling laws by way of their non-implementation? Or no one held to account for their neglect of the Fifth Schedule? The only way to answer these questions is for those in power, whichever party or parties, and those others entrusted with the power and responsibility of legislation and implementation, to sincerely translate the Constitutional mandates under which these laws are made, into authentic reality.

## PART- II

### **What I do not agree with in the book.**

1. It is about the uncritical approval of some of China's actions including the description of India as an expansionist country. This claim is historically inaccurate for Nehru always called for at least a quarter century of peace for India in a complete state of non-alignment so India could clear the backlog of colonial negligence and absence of development. I remember his telling my generation that we could not even afford to sleep given this backlog. Also, the criticism of the Soviet Union's aid to India in the book as being subservient to and strengthening of the interests of the Western powers is unjustified. The approach is heavily balanced in favour of an economic analysis almost to the exclusion of a political and geo political and geo strategic one. Such an analysis has weakened the accuracy of the narrative of the thesis of TN. It is

not clear why the encirclement of India resulting from the containment of the Soviet Union by the United States in the 1950s through a string of military pacts like the SEATO, CENTO and Indo-US military pact to deliver lethal arms to Pakistan who's openly declared object was to annex Kashmir has been ignored in the analysis. I remember Chaudhary Mohammed Ali, the then Pakistan PM openly saying that this military pact with US would settle the Kashmir issue once for all in favour of Pakistan. This Pakistani claim was proven true by the consistent support the West gave Pakistan in the UN repeatedly pillorying India in the Security Council. The Soviet Union alone supported us. Kashmir was an imperative for our existence as a secular nation given our large Muslim population. And none can say Nehru did not believe in India's existence as a secular nation. Similarly, approval of China's view of her border with India and the buffer states. China displayed nationalistic tendencies and even if Nehru was wrong in his forward policy that could have been settled by a militarily superior China by negotiations. Instead China invaded us right into Tezpur in Assam. I know it because I was there. China's support to a religious, fundamentalist Pakistan had nothing to do with revolutionary proletarian philosophy. This truth is confirmed by her silence even today about Pakistani terrorism and other immature actions like the issue of visas on separate white sheets to Kashmiri Indians. Today, China also practices capitalist economics while ensuring the Party's grip over economic decisions. I respectfully suggest that India's external relations had been insufficiently analysed from the external security and geo-political angles and the contemporaneous cold war issues of the time TN lived and wrote. The reference to India's liberation of Bangladesh as an invasion is naïve, vide the book Blood Telegram by the former US consul in Dacca during those years preceding the liberation of Bangladesh. India's relationship with the Soviet bloc was a historic necessity and much credit was due to Nehru which TN has denied him. It was the Soviet Union which helped India build her defence, industrial and scientific muscle.

2. I do not agree with the dismissal of the Constitution of India as a worthless document by TN for obvious reasons. For a civil servant like me the question and challenge have always been: here is a fundamental law for the governance of my country. There is much that is good in this Constitution, especially in the light of its various interpretations of the Supreme Court of India. Even civil servants can expand its mandate in their own way so long as they are within its ambit and under its protection. I think my own work has justified this belief though I have suffered including at the hands of the superior judiciary but that is not the fault of the COI. It is the fault of the feudal and sometimes even the caste prejudices of the judges presiding over the courts. Ambedkar himself had warned us a day before the passing of the COI that its success would depend upon not itself but those who would work it. The Supreme Court has also said that the Directive principles are to be read with the fundamental rights in granting people their rights. They are not just sops.
3. I am somewhat surprised and even disappointed that the book does not refer to the separatist Jai Andhra agitation of 1972-73. That was an agitation of civil war proportions. It was engineered by the rich and politically powerful landlords of AP to defeat the land reforms agenda of Indira Gandhi, a job she had entrusted to PV Narasimha Rao. It should have received due attention in this book.
4. Child Labour should have found a mention in the book.

### **PART- III**

So, where do we go from here in terms of the strategies required to take our country forward?

1. The answer is a national consensus of the conditions as obtaining today on all issues raised by TN and bringing together all parties and other leaders of public opinion for such a consensus. Easier said than done but this has to be achieved as an urgent need. The principle should be that no one is "untouchable" in bringing this consensus about. We need to get someone emerge to do this.
2. The Scandinavian social democratic model could be a good model for us where taxation is fair to the extent of being described as very high. Their health delivery models or of the NHS in UK should be considered as our model rather than a health insurance model.
3. Gunnar Myrdal had said that "the British had good reason to be grateful to Gandhi's policy of non-violence" since "close relations with metropolitan powers were preserved and intensified to the advantage of those powers and to our national, common people's disadvantage. After following the debate on Gandhi's failure to have fought caste during the freedom struggle, and having thought that perhaps he should be given the benefit of doubt, I feel today the so-called satyagraha model actually helped perpetuate a lot of the "culturally" dysfunctional things we see in modern India. We need to examine this scientifically. We need a revolutionary overhaul of the Civil Service in terms of, and in pursuit of, the protection it enjoys in

articles 309-312 of the Constitution by way of training and reorientation in regard to the implementation of the existing laws, and progressive laws to be legislated such as new land reform laws; protection from illegal arrests of the poor; treatment of Dalits, minorities and women and children in relation to their issues in our society; administration's responsiveness to people's security and maintenance of public order. To understand the letter and spirit of the Constitution, in short.

4. From Nehru to Narasimha Rao there never was a leap in favour of the poor. Then we were over taken by the NDA and Manmohan Singh and now, of today, less said the better where the state has surrendered to the industry. This needs a review.

5. Our external relations need sophistication. Our treatment of Nepal has been obnoxious and our fear of China egregious. We have allowed Pakistan to fight a decades long war on our soil. We need to address this but we can do this only if we are united as a country. There has been failure on the part of the Congress party in these respects for decades and equally so by the way the BJP has ruled India. We need to develop a new security paradigm. This calls for the recognition that India's biggest threat is to her unity. The ruling classes have divided our polity over decades jeopardising internal and external security. We need to return to our Constitution to achieve this.

6. The private sector has been inadequately regulated. The only good news in recent times has been TRAI's snub to Zuckerberg. A parallel black economy has been fostered that finances party politics. Crony capitalism has flourished all these several decades of our freedom, with the bureaucracy playing a significant comprador bourgeois role. There exists a nexus between the industrialist, the business man and the bureaucrat with the resulting criminality. The exceptions among the civil servants only prove this rule. On the whole, the Indian corporates have not discharged anything like a corporate responsibility,-economic or social. If they have, we have not heard of them. They should have voluntarily educated and trained and provided placements for the members of the marginalised sections of our society instead of being negative about reservations in the private sector. Much of the prevailing unrest in the country including in Kashmir would not be there if this were done. It can start at least now.

7. Our model of development based merely on aggregated macro growth adopted since the late 1980s is so lopsided that it is unsafe to walk on our streets while those travelling in a car are more safe and secure. Land reforms and proper school education leading to quality skill education and higher professionalism, fundamental food and nutrition security,-all of which are basic to national sovereignty have consistently escaped our ruler's attention. Farmer's suicides are a routine happening, the reason being uneven agrarian relationships that affect every aspect of agricultural life and production and farm incomes. The second green revolution, that is, dry land agriculture is yet to start and the Food Security Act 2013 does not even mention it.

8. In India untouchability is fully alive and kicking, physically and mentally. The Rohit case is the tip merely of this humungous iceberg. A not so silent war is on between small groups of the majority and the minorities but the studied silence of the majority ruling classes is threatening our internal and external security. Bonded Labour and Child labour are alive and well. The latter is nothing but bonded labour but yet we have a toothless child labour law which the rulers fancy at the expense of the more relevant and effective provisions of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. This is because even today the landed ruling classes have a vested interest in perpetuating bonded labour and child labour. All this inflicts multiple damage on the psyche of the marginalised, alienating them from the Indian state threatening its very stability. To restore a semblance of balance, the "Rohit Youth Mobilisation" that we are witnessing in the Indian universities must continue to usher in class equality, excepting that it should be fully led and continue to be led by the students with no part played by the politicians.

9. Mobilisation of the people and national resources to this end is the way to go. As TN said those who really believe they want to change things must help this kind of mobilisation and movements by encouraging them from within the legislature and outside the legislature. As TN concluded in his Assembly speech "Unless people are moved, exploitation and atrocities do not end".

\*\*\*\*\*