



# The Boy Who Said No

*G. K. Rao*

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## **The Boy Who Said No** G. K. Rao

From the Author's Preface. This story is set in a remote district of India. The action takes place in a village, and I have attempted to make it as typical a village as possible. Villages in India are very different from those in Europe, for instance. For one thing, they are on average much more densely populated. Depending on location, the population of a village may be about 5,000 or more, making it a small town by Western standards.

Road connections even in this day can be quite poor, sometimes no more than a track made by the passing of vehicles, from carts to tractors and trucks. As for telecommunications and electricity, large parts of the rural and even semi-urban areas are not served at all, and power supply is at any rate fitful and capricious.

Opportunities for advancement are few and cornered mostly by those who have the most in the first place. Many of the traditional crafts are dying or dead, and the craftsmen have no choice but to put their hands to unskilled labour. Some, but not all, migrate to the cities, but this still leaves a surplus of labour.

Unless one is exceptionally resourceful, sporadic unskilled labour with long periods of joblessness is the normal condition of most people. Social security is almost completely absent from most lives, although the Public Distribution System does try to reach out. Like all government-controlled systems, this one too is prone to major abuse, and in any case it still addresses those who have cash in hand.

The land is generally over-worked and parcelled out in small lots for the major part. Subsistence farming is the general rule, except in those parts assured of year-round irrigation, and here conditions favour the owners of the larger tracts. Capital is scarce and precious, again available to those who already have capacity. It is thus the old story of the rich getting richer, etc.

This is the backdrop to the book and the actions of its various characters. Here I must mention that organisations such as the Brothers are not figments of the imagination. In Andhra Pradesh some districts have had a strong Marxist presence for as long as three decades. This is equally true of Bihar and Bengal as well. These groups often operate at will in the rural areas of many other States as well.

They are not, generally speaking, mainline communist controlled, but ideological breakaways. In many cases they serve as a valuable counter-poise to the official machinery, which sometimes goes to the extent of tolerating them. The senior members of these groups have been underground for most of their adult lives. The case of Kondapalli Seetharamiah is one such. Wanted by the police of his State for more than thirty years, he had no great trouble evading them. Indeed, one of these groups was in the Eighties called the Brothers by the people whom they claimed to serve.

They represent, in historical terms, an extremely old tradition of rebellion against a tyrannical authority and people (the shirtless ones) are quite tolerant of them. The dacoits of the Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh border have been long called baghi (rebels) by the locals. They often enjoy tacit support against the police.

Given this background, I feel that the unfolding of events in the book is reasonably realistic. Of course, it should be clearly understood that the plot does not refer in any way to a real event. It is the product of imagination, including all the characters. But these people could be found in any village, and this course of events could have taken place anywhere in India. Note on language: The language used is English, with no

attempt whatsoever to make it look as if it has been translated from another language. I have used the normal idiom with which I am best acquainted because it is easiest to me. It seems to be dishonest to fake up an idiom and a slang that does not exist, especially as even with the best care it will still end up like one or other regional variation of English, defeating any attempt at authenticity by argot.

The reader should therefore consider it as just another English novel, and pardon the few unavoidable local words such as dhoti and lungi for which there are no English equivalents as far as I know.

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