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## **Andhra Pradesh: Political Dynamics of Regionalism, Formation of New States in India**

*Delving deeply into the dynamic factors that have led to the creation of language-based sub-national States in India, the author explains the political and psychological basis of the recent bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, a composite State for the Telugu linguistic group, in a context in which the two new entities continue to be dominated by people speaking the same language.*

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The number, names and boundaries of states of the Indian Union have been undergoing continuous change since it became a democratic republic in 1950. The latest in the process of redrawing the internal boundaries of India is the creation of a new state of

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Telangana in June 2014 as the 29<sup>th</sup> state by dividing the state of Andhra Pradesh into two states – Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Formation of states in India is underpinned by several factors such as language, religion, ethnicity, and historical legacy that provide identity to large groups of people of a region who can form themselves into a separate state. Advocates of separate states put forth cultural differences, inter-regional imbalances in development within a state, unequal access to employment and other opportunities, as well as self-respect as grounds for the formation of new states. All these factors combine in various ways to give rise to the demand for separate states. The realisation of such demands depend on the political ideas of the ruling party or coalition at the national level with regard to Indian federalism and nationhood, electoral and political strategy of parties at the national and state levels, and how strongly the regional leadership can articulate the separatist demand, sustain the agitation and make a persuasive case.

It is generally argued that the demand for a separate state for the Telangana region in the erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh came up because of the backwardness of the region, the unequal access to employment for its people and the cultural and political domination of one region over the other. But the formation of the Telangana state could be seen as a result of the very process of development that different regions of India have witnessed over the past six decades, especially after the introduction of the liberalization reforms, with the hitherto backward regions experiencing rapid economic growth and the consequent perception that opportunities for further growth are constrained by the entrenched elite.

The nature of urbanization and the emergence of an elite and middle-class in the backward regions, who are on the lookout for unbridled opportunities for further prosperity, the concentration of political power in a single leader, the importance of holding political power in order to promote businesses and the development taking place around and near capital cities contributed to the demands for separate states, with some of them becoming successful. Bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh could be a classic case of such

a process as it was divided into two states after a prolonged agitation for a separate Telangana state for more than a decade in recent times.

Ironically, Andhra- was the first state to be formed in democratic India in 1953 on the basis of a one language, one state principle, leading to the reorganization of Indian states on linguistic principles over the next several decades. Once again in 2014, it also became the first non-Hindi speaking linguistic state to be divided into two states. It indicates that India has transcended the linguistic principle in the organization of its states, although it does not mean that all linguistic states would be split in the coming years. Argument in support of the continuation of linguistic states has been countered with the argument that small states are more conducive for democracy and governance. It is also argued that while common language continues to be the basis of the formation of a state, it does not mean that people of one language should live in one state only.

## **Regions, Sub-Regions and States in India**

The notions of state and region seem to be in a perpetual flux everywhere in the world, but more so in India. India has been a mosaic of a large number of groups of people identifying themselves by either language, religion, ethnicity or historical past. The existence of major and minor kingdoms over centuries, the way internal boundaries were drawn by the British government, claims of sovereign statehood by some princely states during the period of decolonization and after independence, and demands from people of different regions for greater autonomy and for separate statehood, sometimes verging on secession, show how porous, unstable and overlapping these notions are in India.

In the past 60 years, since India became an independent republic, there have been a plethora of demands for regional autonomy and separate statehood. While most heterogeneous countries experience elements of regionalism in one form or another, mostly in the form of demands for secession from or special rights in the larger nation, in

India this manifests mostly in the form of demands for separate statehood within the nation. The spread, frequency and intensity of such demands for separate states make India home to a peculiar kind of regionalism at sub-national and sub-state levels.

India, according to its constitution, is a union of states. But these states are unlike states in the USA, where they are separated by natural boundaries or boundaries are neatly drawn in straight lines, mostly according to administrative convenience. People of India, like people from other large territories or continents, lived through various stages of its civilization even as they were repeatedly divided and brought together by innumerable kings and rulers. In a country of continental size, different languages, caste systems, religious beliefs and life styles have evolved over the centuries. The British rule institutionalized a modicum of a central authority through force, bureaucracy and law and brought about integration of its land and people through the introduction of English education, transport and communication facilities, and exposure to the outside world. But the provincial boundaries hardly had any characteristics of natural or cultural borders. They were drawn largely in a way in which the British authority had spread and territories were added to those already organised as administrative units. But the historical memories of pre-British and British periods were not completely erased from the minds of people in several regions.

When India became independent from the British rule, it inherited the Governor's provinces, and more than 500 princely states. In the next three years, many of the smaller princely states were merged with the former British provinces or combined to form princely unions like Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Bharat, Rajasthan, PEPSU and Saurashtra; as some of them, like Hyderabad, Jammu & Kashmir, Mysore and Coorg, were left intact. The integration of the princely states in a short span of three years was a magnificent achievement of the Indian nationalist leaders. However, they were unable to redraw the boundaries of the states on the basis of any rational and enduring principle.

The constitution bestowed sweeping powers on parliament to either form new states out of the existing ones or to alter the boundaries of the existing States the way it deemed fit.

The power of parliament to create new states as it deemed appropriate gave scope for the rise of various demands based on regional identities. In the original constitution of 1949, there were three categories of states. Most of these states were composite in character in the sense that they comprised people speaking different languages and who had the experience of a diverse historical past. Very soon, demands for the formation of linguistic states came up. The national leaders opposed and resisted the demand for linguistic states as they were apprehensive that such a measure would create loose forces of national disintegration and disrupt economic reconstruction. But finally they had to relent and concede to the formation of states on the basis of linguistic principle. As a result the three categories of states were abolished and all the states were placed on the same footing. Within a decade, people speaking major languages of the country, with the exception of Hindi, were grouped together into separate states. Thus, the present political map of India appears completely different from what it was when India became independent or when it had emerged as an independent republic in 1950.

The reorganisation of states along linguistic lines was a big innovation in the political history of the country. In hindsight, one can say that this step had contributed to the stability and integrity of the country and over the years led to the consolidation of the federal framework of the polity. While writers like Selig Harrison stressed the potential of fissiparous and disruptive tendencies arising out of these linguistic provinces, others have pointed out that nationalism and provincialism need not be mutually exclusive (Stern, 1964: 38). But now it seems that the country is moving towards a new stage of states reorganisation. It is increasingly recognized that language cannot be the sole cementing factor for people to live in one state. In Maharashtra, several political leaders of the Vidarbha region want a separate state out of Maharashtra even though they all speak the same language. Shared historical background, a sense of commonness, whose geographical boundaries can be marked out from others, and cultural distinctiveness are being put forward as grounds for the formation of states. The question then is: Is India moving beyond linguistic lines in the organisation of its constituent units?

## **Emergence of Andhra Pradesh**

The demand for a separate Telangana State out of Andhra Pradesh had its genesis in the very formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956. The idea that provinces in India should be formed on linguistic lines is almost a century old. Soon after the British Indian government carved Bihar out of the then Bengal presidency in 1912, Andhra leaders launched a movement for a separate province for the Telugu-speaking areas of the then composite Madras Presidency. The first Andhra Conference was held for this purpose in 1913. The leaders of the movement were inspired by the idea of bringing all Telugu people, including the Telugu areas in the Nizam's dominion of Hyderabad, under one administration and promote self-government (Subba Rao 1982; Narayana Rao 1973, 321-23). The leaders of the Andhra movement argued that it was not possible for their people to develop because of the domination of the Tamils in government employment and administrative offices, and an unequal distribution of resources between the Andhra and non-Andhra areas, especially in Tamil areas (Leonard, 1967: 64-65). The Indian National Congress conceded to the demand in principle by forming a separate provincial committee for Andhra in 1917.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after the formation of the Constituent Assembly, a 'Convention on Linguistic and Cultural Provinces in India' which met in Delhi on 8 December 1946 under the presidency of Pattabhi Sitaramayya, recommended to the Constituent Assembly the acceptance of the principle of linguistic and cultural provinces and setting up of the necessary machinery for giving effect to such redistribution. During the drafting of the constitution, the Andhra leaders once again urged upon the Constituent Assembly to make necessary arrangements for the formation of the Andhra province. The nationalist leaders, preoccupied with the integration of the princely states and solving the problems

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: A significant proportion of the Telugu-speaking people in the Tamil areas of the original Madras Presidency (of the British Raj) and the successor-State of Madras in Independent India did not opt to migrate to the newly-created sub-national State of Andhra in 1953. They were not swayed by the arguments about the perceived numerical superiority of Tamils in the government services of the undivided state, and the alleged sub-regional imbalances in the allocation of resources.

created by the partition, were reluctant to address the problem of formation of linguistic states. In December 1948, the Linguistic Provinces Commission set up by the president of the Constituent Assembly, known as the Dar Commission, recommended against the formation of linguistic provinces. The Commission felt that the linguistic provinces would have a sub-national bias and militate against the working of India into one nation. They felt that reformation of Indian states could be taken up only after the Indian nationality was well established, and such reformation, when undertaken, “shall not be based upon linguistic considerations but rather upon administrative convenience” (Narayana Rao, 1973: 208-9).

Although the national Congress leaders wanted to shelve the idea of the formation of linguistic states, the demand for a separate Andhra state did not die down. The communists, socialists and the Congress leaders were unanimous in making this demand. Supporting alongside the peasant and working classes, the communists strengthened their position in the region through their agitations for a separate state. In the 1952 general elections, the communists emerged as the single largest party in Andhra region with 41 seats and the Congress secured 40 seats in the Madras Legislative Assembly. Some of the Congress leaders grew desperate that their future, as well as the future of the Congress, would be bleak without getting a separate Andhra state soon. Hartals (strikes) and disturbances reached a climax in December 1952 with the death of Potti Sriramulu, a social worker and an ardent Gandhian, who fasted to death demanding for a separate province and the government of India decided to create an Andhra State. Finally, the state was inaugurated on 1 October 1953.

The idea of establishing a greater Andhra, by uniting the Telugu-speaking territory of the Hyderabad State and the Telugu area of British India, gained momentum after the integration of Hyderabad with India in 1948. *Visaalandhra Mahasabha* (Forum for Greater Andhra) was formed in 1949 to take all the necessary steps for the cultural, social and economic consolidation of the Andhra people living in contiguous areas split up under different administrations. It demanded the disintegration of the Hyderabad state

and the constitution of greater Andhra with Hyderabad as the capital for the sound administration of the *Andhradesa* (Andhra country) and “for freeing it from the communist menace rampant in Telangana and Northern Circars”. The Hyderabad Congress Committee also unanimously demanded in 1950 the disintegration of Hyderabad and the merger of the Telangana, with the adjoining linguistic areas (Narayana Rao, 1973: 283).

But the nationalist leaders were skeptical about the need and implications of large linguistic states. Jawaharlal Nehru criticized the idea of greater Andhra as bearing a tint of “expansionist imperialism”. This spurred the idea of a separate Telangana state. As the States Reorganisation Commission was constituted in December 1953, this issue agitated the minds of the Hyderabad State Congress leaders. While there was a broad consensus among them on disintegration of the Hyderabad State, differences grew on whether the Telangana region should be merged with Andhra or made into a separate state.

When the State Reorganisation Commission visited Hyderabad in June-July 1954, leading Congressmen pleaded for the formation of a Telangana State. They were supported by trade union leaders and leaders of other small parties. While a majority (seven out of ten) of the District Congress Committees in Telangana, a majority of the Congress delegates from Telangana region in the Hyderabad Congress Committee (73 out of 105) and the MPs favoured a separate Telangana, a majority of members from the region in the Hyderabad Legislative Assembly favoured division of Hyderabad and the formation of Visalandhra (Khan, 1969, 27-29). Yet another section of Congress leaders wanted the continuation of the Hyderabad State with its multi-lingual population. Swami Ramanand Tirtha and Madapati Hanumantha Rao, founder of the Andhra Jana Sangham, supported the formation of Visalandhra. The active supporters of the formation of Visalandhra were the communists and a majority of the leaders of the Praja Socialist Party.



The States Reorganisation Commission summarized the arguments in favour of forming a unified Andhra state and forming a separate Telangana state (GoI, 1955, 101-09). Even today, most of the advocates of the separate Telangana state refer to the arguments presented before the SRC and they feel that they were vindicated by their experience over the past 50 years. The Commission noted that while opinion in Andhra was overwhelmingly in favour of a larger state, public opinion in Telangana had still to crystallize itself. It further observed that important leaders of public opinion in Andhra appreciate that the unification of Telangana with Andhra, though desirable, should be based on a voluntary and willing association of the people and that it was primarily for the people of Telangana to make a decision about their future.

After considering all the arguments, the SRC came to a conclusion that it will be in the interests of Andhra as well as the Telangana area to constitute Telangana into a separate state, with provision for its unification with Andhra after the next general elections, likely be held in and about 1961, if the two-thirds majority of the legislature of the residuary of the Hyderabad state expresses itself in favour of such a unification. The intervening period may provide an opportunity for allaying apprehensions and achieving the consensus of opinion necessary for a real union between the two states. If, however, the development of the environment and conditions congenial to the unification of the two areas do not materialize and if public sentiment in Telangana crystallizes itself against the unification of the two states, Telangana will have to continue as a separate state.

The Congress High Command did not accept the recommendation of the SRC and decided to create the greater Andhra. But in order to allay the apprehensions of those who feared that the interests of Telangana region would suffer in the integrated state, the Congress High Command arranged a meeting of the representatives of the Congress party from the Andhra and Telangana regions in February 1956 in Delhi. These top leaders from the two regions agreed to the formation of Visalandhra by providing certain safeguards to Telangana. This agreement, popularly known as 'Gentlemen's Agreement', provided guarantees to Telangana for the utilization of revenue surpluses in Telangana

within the area, reservation of certain percentage of jobs in government employment, special provisions in educational institutions, to maintain the position of the Urdu language and adequate representation in the ministries.

Thus, Andhra Pradesh emerged on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956, along with several other states. A combined Legislative Assembly with the members from the Telangana region of Hyderabad state and the Andhra Legislative Assembly came into existence. But the joining of the two regions to make one state did not lead to a happy situation for the Telugu people. The distrust and disagreements that we saw at the time of merger have at least persisted, if not grown, over time. The divergent perceptions became more formidable, although their intensity varied from time to time and their political manifestation took different forms.

### **Agitations for Separate Telangana and Andhra States, 1969-1973.**

These differences came to fore during 1969-73. These years saw two militant mass movements, one after the other, with demands for separate states for the Telangana and Andhra regions (Gray, 1971; Seshadri, 1970; Gray, 1974; Bernstroof, 1998). The impetus and leadership for both the separatist agitations did not come from opposition parties but from 'dissident' factions of the Congress. These two agitations are classic examples of how the disgruntled leaders in the dominant party could put the regional identity and a sense of injustice that prevailed among people of different regions to political use. The ways in which these separatist agitations arose and experienced a sudden death reveal the inner dynamics of party politics.

What started as an agitation in Khammam district by a small group of students and employees for 'safeguarding' domicile rules for employment in the Telangana region soon snowballed into a major agitation spread over several districts of the region. By early 1969, the Telangana Praja Samithi (TPS) was established by young lawyers,

teachers and journalists. It set itself the task of coordinating the activities of students and non-gazette officers (NGOs) in the state service. A feeling was generated that the people from Andhra region were dominating in Telangana, cornering larger share of employment and growing rich in the Hyderabad city and around it. The Telangana region and its people were discriminated by the government and that the development of Telangana was only possible if it were a separate state, the leaders argued. The propaganda and agitation took the form of a hate Andhra campaign.

Initially, there were no professional politicians in the agitation. Shortly thereafter, Konda Lakshman resigned from the AP State Ministry and associated himself with the TPS. Chenna Reddy, who was biding his time after he was forced to resign from the Union Ministry following a Supreme Court decision making his election in 1967 invalid, declared himself in favour of a separate state for Telangana and became the leader of the TPS. He nursed a grievance against Brahmananda Reddy, the Chief Minister hailing from the coastal region, that the latter did not come to his rescue when he was entangled in legal problems. A separate Telangana Congress Committee was formed, including some Congress MLAs from Telangana.

During May-June 1969, the NGOs went on an indefinite strike, paralyzing district administration; students boycotted colleges and universities in Telangana. Large sums of money came from different interest groups to sustain the movement. The Chief Minister, Bramhananda Reddy, and the central leadership of the Congress stood firmly against bifurcation of the state as demanded by the agitators. The communist parties opposed the agitation describing it as divisionary, misguided and misled. They saw the problem arising essentially due to imbalances in development between the two regions. A majority of Muslims remained indifferent, fearing that Telangana Hindus were more communal minded than the Andhras (Gray, 1971: 471). Even a majority of the Congress MLAs from Telangana were not in favour of a separate Telangana.

The fears of some in the TPS that professional politicians, who took over the leadership, would use the movement in their factional struggles came true. Soon, the demand for the resignation of the Chief Minister and his replacement by a Telangana Congressman became more important than the safeguards and a separate state. By August 1969, the agitation began to wear out. Chenna Reddy and others sent sufficient indications that they would reconcile if Bramhananda Reddy was asked to go. In the 1971 mid-term elections to the Lok Sabha, the Congress swept up the polls in the Andhra region, perhaps as people of the region rewarded the Congress for not yielding to the separatist agitation. But the popularity of the TPS was evident when it emerged victorious in 10 out of 14 seats in the Telangana region. The High Command, wanting the TPS leaders to return to the party's fold, conceded to some of the demands of the TPS, including the removal of Bramhananda Reddy from the post of Chief Minister. As a result, the TPS merged with the Congress in August 1971. After consultations, PV Narasimha Rao, a Brahmin leader from Telangana without any factional affiliation except his loyalty to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had emerged as the leading choice and became the first Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh from the Telangana region.

The separatist agitation in Telangana and the political response of the central Congress leadership in conceding to their demands gave rise to a feeling of resentment in the Andhra region that the Congress was trying to appease the Telangana people and ignoring the rightful interests of the people from Andhra. The students, youth and employees felt that they were deprived of opportunities in education and employment, even in the state capital. The spark that ignited the brewing discontent in Andhra was the Supreme Court judgment in October 1972 upholding Mulki rules as legally valid. Under the Mulki rules – rules of residency in force in the Nizam's Hyderabad state – no person could be appointed to a superior or subordinate service of the state if he had not been a permanent resident of the Hyderabad state for at least 15 years. While it was welcomed in the Telangana region, students in Andhra reacted swiftly to the judgment by organizing meetings and strikes urging that the Mulki rules should be scrapped if the integrity of the state should be preserved. The Andhra NGOs came out in support and went on an

indefinite strike. At the state level, the relations between the Andhra and Telangana ministers deteriorated and they began to meet in separate regional groupings. The agitation escalated as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Swatnatra Party, and some dissident Congress leaders rallied together with a demand for a separate Andhra.

Some alleged that the separate Andhra movement was funded and fuelled by the feudal elements and landlords of the coastal region, who were threatened by the 'progressive' land reforms initiated by the PV Narasimha Rao government in the state (Gray, 1974). But this is difficult to substantiate. At best, it could be an additional factor to the grievances of the youth and politicians in Andhra. The communists, as in the case of the Telangana agitation, opposed bifurcation. They characterized the agitation as reactionary, as it was aimed to serve the interests of landlords and businessmen. The Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi, once again opposed the demand for state bifurcation. She said: "I stand firmly for an integrated State....There is an overall rationality in the foundation of our States and we should be very careful not to break the foundation of rationality in momentary passions" (Gray: 1974: 183). She seemed to have held the view that regional movements are volatile and temporary, not rooted in deep-seated and enduring mass antagonisms. She ruled out setting up another States Reorganisation Commission because it would "shake the very foundations of the country" and said that the "possible repercussions in other States of the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh would have to be considered in deciding the issue" (Gray: 1974: 187).

A series of meetings between the Prime Minister and the leaders from Andhra and Telangana were held to work out a formula, known as a Six-Point Formula, rendering the continuance of Mulki rules and a Regional Committee for Telangana unnecessary. The Indian constitution was amended to give effect to the formula by inserting a special provision (Article 317D) to provide equitable opportunities for people of different areas of the state in the matter of admission to educational institutions and public employment and constitution of an Administrative Tribunal with jurisdiction to deal with certain disputes and grievances relating to public services.

## **Demand for Separate Telangana: 1990s and After**

Demand for state bifurcation was overshadowed by the political changes that swept the nation and the state in the 1980s. The most important political development of the period was the rise of the state-based political party, Telugu Desam Party (TDP), to power in 1983. It came to power on the plank of Telugu pride and the unity of Telugu-speaking people to build a strong and vibrant Andhra Pradesh. Although there were disputes about the localization of employment and developmental problems of the Telangana region, demand for a separate Telangana did not come up with any vehemence during the 1980s.

It once again came to life with the initiatives of the central leadership to create small states justifying the measure on the grounds of administrative convenience and better governance. In his Independence Day address in 1996, Prime Minister Deve Gowda, announced the formation of Uttaranchal and also assured that other demands for separate states would be favourably considered. In 1997, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at its Kakinada (in Andhra Pradesh) conference, promised the formation of a separate Telangana state if it was voted into power. The party conducted its 1988 Lok Sabha election campaign in the state with the slogan: “Give one vote and take two States”. The spectacular performance of the BJP in the Telangana region – it got more votes than the ruling TDP – unnerved the Congress as well as the TDP.

Internal developments in political parties also gave thrust to the efforts to revive the demand for a separate state. The split of TDP in 1995, and the death of NT Rama Rao (Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh) soon after, compelled a few TDP leaders who left the party to search for a platform to regain their political foothold. In June 1997, Indra Reddy, a prominent leader of the TDP, who fell out with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu after the split, took up the cause of a separate Telangana state. He accused Chandrababu Naidu of attempting to privatize public undertakings only in the Telangana region and of shifting development projects for the Telangana region to Andhra. In the meanwhile, a few left-minded intellectuals and social activists came together from 1996

onwards to once again renew the work for separate a state by arguing that the policies of the state, dominated by Andhra politicians, were responsible for the backwardness of the region and the deprivation of opportunities for the Telangana people and that the development of the region was not possible until a separate state was formed (Simhadri and Vishweshwer Rao, 1997; Jayasankar, 1997).

A big fillip came to the demand for a separate state, when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 1999 initiated the process of carving out the three separate States of Chattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand. Although the BJP had promised the formation of a Telangana state in the 1999 election, it could not do so as the NDA government was dependent on the support of the TDP, which opposed the proposal. The Congress leaders wanted to seize the opportunity to attack the BJP for renegeing on its promise of a separate Telangana. The victory of the TDP in the 1999 Assembly elections made the Congress leaders believe that the Telangana issue would enable them to weaken the ruling party, which looked formidable at that time. The Telangana Congress legislators formed the “Telangana Congress Legislators Forum” (TCLF) to put pressure on the party to come out in favour of a separate state. They presented to Sonia Gandhi, the party president, in August 2000, urging her to pledge the party’s support to the cause of separate statehood for Telangana. The Congress Working Committee discussed the representation of the Telangana legislators and resolved to recommend the formation of a second States Reorganisation Commission to go into the matter of forming more states in the country.

The momentum for a separate Telangana state picked up after K. Chandrasekhara Rao (KCR) launched the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) on 27 April 2001 with a single-point agenda of securing a separate state. Although the TPS was founded and contested elections as a party for the Telangana region, it had a short life as it merged with the Congress soon after the 1971 elections. But KCR’s TRS proved to be different. KCR, who began his political career with the Congress as a student leader, had served as a Minister in the TDP governments of NT Rama Rao and then Chandrababu Naidu. After

the 1999 elections, he was dropped from the state cabinet to provide a berth to Vijaya Rama Rao, a leader from the same Velama community. Dissatisfied with his new position as the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly and also concerned about the problems of the Telangana people for some time, he left the TDP in April 2001 to form his own political party. A gifted speaker, KCR could rouse the Telangana sentiment with his vituperative speeches and mobilization strategies.

In the simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 2004, the TRS and the Congress forged an alliance. Although there was no consensus among its leaders on the formation of a Telangana state, the Congress entered into an alliance with the TRS. Chandrababu Naidu, the president of the TDP and Chief Minister, accused the Congress leaders of entering into an opportunistic alliance with the separatist TRS and said that the demand for a separate state was only to fulfill the self-serving interests of disgruntled leaders in the Congress and the TRS. He said that only a strong, unified and large state could have bargaining power with the centre, to get its due share from central funds and that small states would impede the development of the Telugu people. The Congress countered TDP's propaganda by saying that the TDP itself had an alliance with the BJP, which was responsible for raising the demand of a separate Telangana, and whose leadership publicly favoured bifurcation of the state.

The UPA included the issue of separate statehood for Telangana in its Common Minimum Programme. Subsequently, the UPA formed a sub-committee headed by Union Minister Pranab Mukherjee to consult various political parties to ascertain their opinion on the issue and work towards a consensus. The BJP and the Communist Party of India (CPI) expressed their views in favour of bifurcation of the state. The TDP and the CPI (M) opposed the formation of a separate state. The Majlis party, primarily based in Hyderabad city, had reservations and apprehensions on the formation of Telangana. The Congress leaders were divided on the issue and these divisions broadly corresponded to their regional identities. The Chief Minister, Y. Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR), proclaimed himself neither in favour of or opposed to the idea of a separate state. But there was



widespread perception that he was not in favour of state bifurcation. However, by the time of the 2009 general election, the TDP changed its views and said that it would support the move to form a separate state if voted to power.

YSR did everything in his power to undermine the TRS and weaken the agitation for a separate state. His Machiavellian tactics in handling dissidence within the party and outside, as well as his popularity among the people and the strong loyalties he built among the Congress leaders in both the regions led to a lull in the agitation for a separate Telangana. The demand for a separate state regained its momentum after the tragic death of YSR in a helicopter crash soon after the Congress emerged victorious in the 2009 general election. On 29 November 2009, KCR fasted demanding a separate state. Students in Telangana universities came out in large numbers in support of the call for separate statehood. The Congress came under pressure on the issue in the state as well as in parliament. Senior leaders of the Congress in the Telangana region and a large section of MLAs and MLCs came out openly in support of a Telangana state. On 9<sup>th</sup> December, Home Minister P. Chidambaram issued a statement that the “process of forming the state of Telangana will be initiated. An appropriate resolution will be moved in the state assembly.”

As expected, leaders of all parties in the Andhra region opposed the Home Minister’s statement. The national government took a step back and appointed a five-member Committee, headed by former Supreme Court judge, Srikrishna, to examine the situation in the state with reference to the demand for a separate state of Telangana, to offer solutions to resolve the situation and to recommend a roadmap. After year-long consultations, the Committee came to the view that the State should be kept united but recommended constitutional measures for socio-economic development and political empowerment of the Telangana region by establishing a statutorily-empowered Telangana Regional Council with adequate transfer of funds, functions and functionaries. It did not think the bifurcation of the state to be the most preferable choice, but

mentioned it as the second best option which should only be considered in case it was unavoidable (GOI, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2010, 441-58).

The national leadership of the Congress party finally came to the view that this second best option was the best option under the circumstances prevailing in the state and the electorally precarious situation in which the party was placed. In July 2013, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution recommending the formation of a separate Telangana state. When the bifurcation bill was referred to the Andhra Pradesh Assembly for its opinion, the division among the MLAs was completely along regional lines and was defeated on the floor of the House after a month-long acrimonious debate. But the bill was passed by the parliament in February 2014 amidst pandemonium. After receiving the assent of the President, the state of Telangana was officially formed on 2nd June 2014.

The opposition parties as well as several leaders of the Congress party in the Andhra region accused the High Command of the Congress party, which was a euphemism for its party president Sonia Gandhi, for choosing to divide Andhra Pradesh due to electoral calculations of gaining parliamentary seats in Telangana region as it came to the conclusion that it would lose heavily in the Andhra region. This view was buttressed by the indications that the TRS would either merge with the Congress or enter into an alliance with the Congress once the bifurcation legislation was passed. The Congress leadership also toyed with the idea of forging an electoral alliance or securing post-election support from its splinter party, the Yuvajana Shramika Ryotu Congress Party (YSRCP) that was going strong in the Andhra region under the leadership of Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, the son of YSR and a strong claimant of the post of Chief Minister.

## **Some Issues in Telangana Formation**

The demand for a separate Telangana was articulated on different grounds (Simhadri and Vishweshwer Rao, 1977; Kodandaram, 2007; Revathi and Bharat Bhushan, 2007; Melkote, etal 2010; Hanumantha Rao, 2010: 115-32; Haragopal, 2010; Srinivasulu, 2011). Foremost among them was the argument that the Telangana region remained backward due to neglect by the successive governments of the state, regardless of the political party in power, since they had been controlled, either directly or indirectly, by the vested interests from the Andhra region. They charged that the Andhra region developed at the cost of the Telangana region and the unified state went against the interests of the Telangana region; that the people of Telangana were deprived of their due share in government expenditure on development, social services and infrastructure in the region, educational and employment opportunities; and that political power enabled the Andhra people to reap benefits in a highly disproportionate manner and to reinforce the domination of the elites from the Andhra region.

But the argument that the demand for a separate state stemmed from inter-regional disparities or regional economic backwardness does not seem to hold true if we analyse the patterns of economic development in different regions of the state. The data on various indicators of social and economic development shows that while there was a gap in the levels of development between the Andhra and Telangana regions, the gap had considerably narrowed over the past five decades. The changes in the relative positions of the regions and districts contradict the claims of the advocates of the separate Telangana state on the question of regional disparities. In terms of overall ranking, some of the Telangana districts have surpassed several Andhra districts; and in some aspects the Telangana region has done better compared to the Andhra region since the time of state formation in 1956. Studies show that in 1956-57, all the districts in the Telangana region were in the backward category and most of the districts in the Andhra region were in the relatively developed category. If we look the development pattern over the next 50 years, taking different indicators into consideration, some of the districts in the Andhra region

have stagnated or experienced a downward slide while many districts of Telangana moved up from their previous position (Reddy, 1992; Mahanty, 1997; Rajender Kumar and Rao, 1997; Mitra and Rao, 2009: 595-6120). Another study shows that there was a significant decline in disparities in the levels of agricultural and industrial development, per capita domestic product, literacy and development between Andhra and Telangana (Subrahmanyam, 2003: 517-544). The extensive data gathered by the Srikrishna Committee led it to similar conclusion.

So, the argument that the Telangana movement was a result of the backwardness of the region or growing disparities between regions is unsustainable. On the contrary, it can be argued that the aspiration for a separate state stemmed from a desire for greater development, especially among the emerging elite and the middle classes. The demand for a separate Telangana State was strong in the relatively developed districts. So, the demand for separation did not come from backwardness per se. It is rather development whereby elites and people of a region or different parts of a region become self-conscious of relative backwardness and the desire to garner greater opportunities for further development that breeds conflict. Since the united state was formed with a promise of equal development for all, the demand for a separate state gets articulated in the form of fight against the 'outsider' who now appears far ahead compared to the people of the region concerned.

A second reason often given relates to the relative position of the regions in employment opportunities. As mentioned earlier, in 1973 after the two separatist agitations, a Six-Point Formula was evolved by the leaders of the Andhra Pradesh and the central leaders with a view to provide equitable opportunities to different regions of the state in the areas of education, employment and career prospects in public services. Accordingly, a Presidential Order was issued in 1975 dividing the 23 districts into seven zones. Only a person local to one zone becomes eligible for the purpose of employment or admission into an educational institution. According to the Order, 70 to 80 per cent of posts in the lower cadres of government employment, and 60 per cent in the Gazetted (officer-level)

posts should be reserved to the local candidates. The non-locals should not exceed the remaining portion. In 1985, the Telangana NGOs' Union complained against the violations and lapses in the implementation of the Presidential Order. In October of the year, the TDP government issued a Government Order (GO Ms 610) directing the repatriation of non-local employees, if any, in excess of the levels permitted by the Presidential Order. In 2001, KCR, as part of his agitation for a separate Telangana, raised the issue of non-implementation of the GO Ms 610. The government constituted the Girglani Commission to inquire into the implementation of the GO and to suggest measures to rectify any deviations. The Girglani Commission found that the aggregate proportion of the non-local employees was less than 10 per cent in Zones V and VI that cover the Telangana region, which was much lower than the permissible levels as per the Presidential Orders (Govt of AP, 2001). So, the argument that the demand for a separate state came up due to the deprivation of employment opportunities to 'locals' vis-à-vis the 'Andhra outsiders' does not get much support from facts. However, there was widespread perception among the locals that the Andhra people had a disproportionate share in government employment and many jobs would arise if Telangana becomes a separate state. Such a perception led to a massive participation of educated youth in the Telangana movement.

A third reason put forth was that of cultural distinctiveness of the Telangana region. This seems to have worked as a formidable ground for the agitation demanding a separate state. The post-1996 phase of the Telangana movement went beyond the usual controversies surrounding employment and development. People rallied around the issues of self-respect and cultural distinctiveness. A historical view of the evolution of the Telugu-speaking region may enable us to appreciate these controversies better. Interestingly, unlike many other languages, the language spoken commonly by people of Andhra and Telangana goes by two names that are interchangeable: Andhra and Telugu (or Tenugu). While the term Andhra denotes both geographical area and language, Telugu refers to the language spoken in the two regions. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Telugu language was standardised. The Kakatiyas in the 11<sup>th</sup> century brought almost all the

Andhra people under one rule with Warangal (presently in Telangana) as the capital. They called themselves the kings of Andhradesa and Warangal was known as Andhranagari. Trilinga (the variant or root word for the present Telangana) and Andhra became synonyms (Hanumantha Rao, 1994: 225). During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the rule over different parts of Andhra alternated between the Mughal emperors, the Bahamani Sultans and the Vijyanagara kings. In 1518, Quli Qutub Shah declared independence from the Bahamani Sulatanate and established the Golconda Sulatanate with Hyderabad as its capital. Once again, the Andhra region acquired political unity. In 1724, Asaf Jah, the Mughal governor, declared independence and established control over Hyderabad. His successors, in the Asaf Jahi dynasty, ruled the Hyderabad state until the merger of Hyderabad with the Indian Union in 1948.

The advent of the trading companies from Europe and their political control over the Indian territories marked a tectonic shift in the political history of the Andhra region. By interfering in the succession wars for the Hyderabad throne, the British East India Company forced the Nizam to transfer his powers over the coastal districts (known as Circars) to the Company in return for providing military support and a payment of Rs.7 lakhs as revenue. In 1800-01, a few more districts (presently known as Rayalaseema and Nellore) were ceded to the British. The Telugu-speaking areas, together with the areas annexed by the British in the South with the fall of Tippu Sultan, constituted the Madras presidency. Thus, the Telugu-speaking areas of the composite Madras Presidency later came to be known as Andhra to distinguish the region from others. The Hyderabad state included three regions - the Telugu-speaking districts known as Telangana, the Marathi-speaking districts known as Marathwada, and the Kannada-speaking districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur (Hanumantha Rao, 1994; Sarma and Sastry, 1995).

Thus, the Telugu-speaking people came to be divided between the British-ruled Madras presidency and the Nizam-ruled Hyderabad state for about 150 years. This situation led to two different trajectories of development for the two regions that had a direct bearing on the demand for a separate Telangana state after independence. The construction of huge

anicut on the Godavari and Krishna rivers by the East India Company in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought large tracts in central coastal districts under irrigation in Andhra. Along with it came English education and better transport and communication facilities. Historians show how these developments enhanced trade and commerce and led to the formation of a middle-class in rural areas and educated urban elite in British Andhra. The members of these new classes had launched social reform movements, formed various kinds of associations to further caste and class interests, entered the British administration and new professions, and took active part in the politics of the region, including the freedom struggle (Irshick, 1969; Baker, 1976; Baker and Washbrook, 1975; Ramakrishna, 1983).

Such a process in Hyderabad state was absent for a long time, and whatever was allowed was sporadic and stunted by the Nizam's autocratic and feudal order (Leonard, 1971; Elliott, 1974; Pernau, 2000; Benichou, 2000). Most of the top elite of Hyderabad consisted of nobility drawn from the Muslim military commanders and *jagirdars* (feudal land owners) who traced their ancestry to Turkish and Persian lineages. The administration was filled with people who came from North India, both Muslims and Hindus. There was widespread resentment among the members of the incipient middle-class, who considered themselves to be 'mulkis' (locals or natives) against outsiders. This resentment against the domination of non-mulkis persisted even after the merger of Telangana and Andhra to form Andhra Pradesh. Under Nizam's rule there was very little scope for political dissent and protest. There were no elected bodies at any level. Thus, people of Telangana under the Nizam were not exposed to the democratizing process that Andhra went through under the British rule. The Hyderabad State Congress was formed in 1938, only to be banned shortly after by the Nizam. The communist party was never legal. Initially the communists worked through Andhra Mahasabha, which was formed in 1928, and later waged an armed struggle against the state facing a ruthless repression by the Nizam and his armed *razakaars* (private militia) The first election took place in 1952 when a popular government was formed. Within the next three years, the Telanagana region of the Hyderabad state was merged with Andhra to form Andhra Pradesh which

came to be dominated by the more dexterous political elite of Andhra adept in the working of electoral political processes and representative institutions. There was little time for the political elite to find its feet and flourish.

Thus, as Forrester says, along with an awareness of economic and political backwardness vis-à-vis the rest of the Telugu country, Telangana developed a feeling of distinctiveness based on different political and cultural experiences (Forrester, 1970: 8-9). The different trajectories of development in the two regions over 150 years of British rule in Andhra and Nizams' rule in Hyderabad, at a time when modernity was ushered in Andhra as a result of the British rule, had a long lasting impact not only on the development of material conditions, but also on the cultural and psychological make-up of the people in these regions. Although the two regions were brought together in 1956, these differences remained and grew over time, creating an underlying sentiment for separate statehood. Thus, when the arguments of backwardness and sharing of political power as the sources of separate statehood demand were proved to be insufficient grounds for separate statehood, another argument that a separate state is necessary to protect and promote cultural distinctiveness and self-respect of the people of Telangana came up.

### **Observations on Region, Regionalism and Demands for Separate States**

The formation of the Telanagana state, the way the agitation was sustained over decades, and positions taken by the local business and political elites, and the ways in which the national governments handled the situation lead us to a few observations on the overlapping factors that seem to contribute to the demands and formation of separate States – big, medium, and small – based on regional identities.

Firstly, regional identities get framed and fostered harking back to historical past. Depending on the political situation in the country and within a state, such memories keep coming to the surface – sometimes vehemently and feebly, and on other times



articulated by the social and cultural elite or by disgruntled political leaders. Most of the demands for separate states in the past and in the present thus have deep historical roots: memories of togetherness under governments during medieval and modern India, feelings of domination and subordination, and sentiments of pride and humiliation inherited from the past. For example, advocates of a separate Telangana constantly referred to the glory of the Hyderabad state notwithstanding the fact that they fought against the oppressive rule of the Nizams. In Vidarbha, leaders who demand a separate state refer to the existence of Central Provinces and Berar as a separate state before it was merged with Maharashtra. Those who demand a separate Bundelkhand (parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), conjure up the Bundeli State, which existed from medieval times until India became independent, as it became a part of Vindhya Pradesh in 1950, and later of Madhya Pradesh.

Secondly, cultural distinctness, domination or perceptions of domination of people of one region over another within a state, which some term internal colonialism, and competition for employment and educational opportunities, fuel demands for recognition of regional identities in the form of autonomy or separate states. In the 1950s, the Andhra leaders demanded a separate Andhra State from Madras by saying that Telugus were culturally distinct from Tamils, Tamils dominated in courts and administration, and that Andhra did not get its due share in revenues and employment opportunities. The votaries of Telangana too charged the Andhra people for turning Telangana into an internal colony, and that they were deprived of opportunities for economic advancement, and fair access to employment. Similar arguments were advanced during the bifurcation of Bombay state into Maharashtra and Gujarat, the division of Assam into several states or the formation of Chattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand. The demands for separate Bodoland from Assam and Gorkhaland from Bengal are made on the grounds of cultural distinctness based on ethnicity, fear of domination by 'immigrants', backwardness and neglect.

Thirdly, arguments and agitations for separate States are typically based on imbalances in economic development between different regions. This is often attributed to the neglect

or discrimination meted out to them by the concerned state governments in allocating funds for the development of irrigation, educational institutions, roads and other infrastructure. Although it is debatable whether development, or lack of it, can be attributed to the policies of a state government or to the factors beyond the control of government such as natural endowments, agricultural practices and entrepreneurial abilities of its people and social institutions among others, the perception that their region could achieve greater development if it has a government of its own dominates the thinking of people who demand a separate state.

Fourthly, administrative convenience is advanced in favour of reorganizing the existing large states into smaller ones. As India's population has increased by more than three times since independence and some of the states are very large in population size, it is argued that the creation of small states would bring governments closer to people. It was on this ground that three new states were carved out in 2000: Uttarakhand from Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh from Madhya Praesh, and Jharkhand from Bihar. There are more demands on similar lines. For example, the demand for Harita Pradesh is made on this ground. Suggestions are made to break up Uttar Pradesh into three or four states because it is too difficult for any Chief Minister to govern such a large territory and population.

Fifthly, the strategies of the 'national' leadership to create new states as a way of addressing the tensions in the working of the centre-state relations sow new aspirations or stoke dormant feelings for separate states. Over the past four decades or so, regional parties have become strong and powerful and at times played a crucial role in government formation at the Union level. Mostly, they are controlled by the elites of the region-specific intermediate castes. The presence of the regional parties in major states of India gave a marked specificity to the politics of each state. Some national leaders perceive this as a real or potential threat to the strength and stability of national governments. They, especially the BJP leadership, seem to have entertained a view that in order to arrest federalist tendencies emanating from strong regional parties of the large states and forge a strong national state, the large states have to be broken into small units, which are more

amenable to the Union control. Sometimes the national parties are motivated by the prospects of coming to power in reorganised small states (Tillin, 2013: 167-83).

Sixthly, regionalism is related to the problems of power-sharing among different leaders from different regions within the state. The ebb and tide of agitations for separate states often coincide with the way power-sharing arrangements are worked out. Either the leaders who do not get positions of power or those who are aggrieved that they did not get positions commensurate to their stature then stoke up regional feelings. It is also possible that a political party in opposition sees the regional demands as a way to resuscitate itself or to beat the ruling party at polls.

Seventhly, the emergence of economic and political elite in the hitherto backward regions within the states is a source of political rivalry. Where political power becomes a means to promote their business and other interests, the new elite recognises the importance of holding political power on their own. Notwithstanding the economic reforms that emphasize the primacy of market forces, deregulation and dismantling the regime of permits and licenses, the state in India continues to be the driving force of the economy, especially through the large public expenditure on infrastructure and the public contract works that accrue from it, or the land grants necessary to set up industry and businesses. For instance, the grouse of Telangana separatists was that the big public contracts were awarded to Andhra businessmen, and that thousands of acres of land in Hyderabad were auctioned away at cheap prices to benefit these businessmen. The nature of economic development in and around the capital city, the availability of political patronage, the consequent growth of crony capitalism, and the process of urbanization spur the emergent regional elite to seek opportunities in a state of their own.

Demands for autonomy and separate statehood in different parts of India require careful and objective analysis and need to be addressed at both political and policy levels. To reduce this phenomena to the tactics of political leaders to gain power, or to characterize the movement as one of the petty-bourgeoisie interested to maximize educational and

employment opportunities for themselves or the businesses looking to maximize their interests, would amount to taking a simplistic view of the matter, although all of these do play an important role in shaping the movements for separate states. For example, in 1969-70, the agitation for a separate Telangana was centred around the demand for greater educational and employment opportunities for locals and the implementation of safeguards provided in the “Gentlemen’s Agreement”. In the 1990s, the agitation centred around political and cultural domination of one region over the other. The media and commentators often said that the tussles between the elites of the two regions to gain power are aimed at bolstering material rewards and amassing wealth.

We may also have to understand the emergence of more states, or small states, in the changing nature of Indian politics. We have seen two contradictory tendencies: the attempts to centralize power and the efforts to federalize the polity, mainly in the form of the formation of regional political parties and their rise to power. Secondly, as more and more social sections are brought into the political arena and compete for political power, it becomes difficult to accommodate their aspirations in a centralized political structure at the state level. The demand for small states partly arises from the cultural aspirations of people of a region as well as the political ambitions of its leaders. The central leadership may resort to the policy of creating small states as an antidote to the federalization of Indian policy and to counter the increased presence of regional parties in states. So, the next phase of redrawing the boundaries may not be a result of a concern for development and democracy but driven by considerations of political expediency of the central leadership or claims of different groups of leaders for political power at the state level (Mawdsley, 2002; Tillin, 2013)).

India has passed through two major stages of states reorganisation in the past 60 years: one at the time of consolidating India at the time of independence, and later in the organization of its states and territories during the linguistic reorganisation of states over the next two decades. Now, it seems that the country is passing through a different stage of redrawing the internal boundaries based on cultural identities that were shaped by a

host of factors other than language, such as historical background, ethnicity, social character of a region and problems of power sharing. Vidarbha will be the next candidate for a separate state and more may follow in the coming decades. With the linguistic principle gone with the creation of Telangana, the parliament has to find new grounds for the creation of new states. Perhaps 50 years hence from now, the number, names and boundaries of states of the Indian Union would be radically different from what they are today, as the present political map of India today is drastically different what it was 50 years before.

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