

## Politics of small states in India: A case study of Telangana

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*Creation of new states on the regional, linguistic or cultural differences has always been considered to be detrimental and threat to the unity of the country. Despite strong demands for smaller states, union government has always dissuaded from creation of newer states due to susceptibility towards national unity. India's experiences with smaller states have demonstrated them to be more efficient and they have shown sign of growth and better governance in comparison to their parental states. Foundation of Telangana state has been a burning issue to Indian democracy, which provides a relevant theme for scholarly investigation.*

**[Key Words:** Indian Federalism, small states, Telangana, Governance, Development, Growth.]

### Introduction

In recent years, discourses on Indian Federal system are full of controversies. Demand for smaller states has been a very prominent subject in contemporary Indian politics. Voices for separate statehood have been emerging from different regions, political groups, and cultural identities. Demand for smaller states in different parts of country are such instances but the history of state politics is enough testimony to the fact that such demands fructified in formation of new state when a particular region or identity had a potential support of the ruling political class at the centre. A peep into the history of struggle for Telangana state, very much buttresses this notion.

The main objective of Indian constitution makers behind adopting Federal kind of political structure was to enhance democratic ethos and spirit by recognizing, accepting and defending different regional identities and civil rights in a plural and multi-cultural country. The constitution makers were very well aware of the complex ethnic identities and plural culture of India, which has been the reason for adopting the unitary kind of federal system. The article 1 of Indian constitution declares that "India shall be a union of states" (Bakshi 2001:6), which creates a controversy also whether India is a federal or a quasi-federal state?

Another major characteristic of Indian federalism lies in the Article 3 of the constitution, which provides the powers of formation of new states and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing states to the Parliament (Bakshi 2001:7). According to the article, before introducing the 'Bill' for the purpose in to parliament, the prior recommendation of the President is necessary. The bill should be referred to the relevant state legislature for ascertaining their views, but the important thing is that their approval is not necessary. This kind of features makes it a diverse kind of federal structure, which is quite different from the classical form of federalism.

Creation of the new states on the regional feelings always had been a sensitive issue to Indian state. Vulnerability towards national unity has been a strong factor for hesitation of union government from creation of newer states despite strong demands for it. It was for the first time in 1956, when states were reorganised with language base on the recommendations of state reorganisation committee (The Economic Weekly 1955:1), after mass agitation and proper unrest for the demand of newer states.

The main objective of this paper is to examine the functioning of federalism in India in the light of experiences of the past fifty years. It has two parts; the first part tries to understand the circumstances for demand of a new state, Telangana, while the other part tries to evaluate the justification for creation of a new state. It also aims to explore the possibilities as to how best the federal structure can take action to the changing needs of efficient and effective system of governance within the federal framework of Indian democracy.

### **Creation of the Telangana State**

On 18th February 2014 Lok Sabha passed the Telangana bill for creation of a new, 29<sup>th</sup> state of India, after several rounds of discussion and debate. On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014, Telangana became the 29<sup>th</sup> state of India, consisting of the 10 north-western districts of Telugu origin, while the rest of the state consists of 13 other districts. The city of Hyderabad will continue to serve as the joint capital for Andhra Pradesh and the successor state of Telangana for a period of ten years, following which it will belong to the state of Telangana (Deccan Cronical 2014). Creation of Telangana state has become a very sensitive and complex issue in Indian polity due to rigorous opposition by the people of Andhra Pradesh now to be known as Seemandhra. This incident to divide the state, in spite of state legislature's opposition poses a great challenge to Indian federalism, as it was taken without a consensus among the people of the region.

Telangana, a part of former Hyderabad state until 1956, has been a highly disputed region; ever since it was formally merged into Andhra Pradesh in 1956, which was carved out from Madras state to create a unified region for the Telugu speaking people. To safeguard the interests of Telangana region, a negotiated settlement known as the "Gentlemen's Agreement" was signed on 20 February 1956 between leaders of Andhra and Telangana. Unfortunately, the ill

implementation of these safeguards invoked the people of Telangana region for the struggle for a new Telangana state. Since 1969 there have been protests and “Jai Telangana” movement started for separate statehood to Telangana. In a violent struggle with police over 300 people were killed which sparked a new wave of anger and agitation within the region. In another important development in the coastal Andhra the movement ‘Jai Andhra’ started in 1972 in support of united Andhra Pradesh (IANS 2014).

In a major development in 2001 the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) was organised by Sh. K. Chandrasekhara Rao to revitalize Telangana movement. In a major breakthrough in 2004 TRS fought elections in alliance with Congress, won 5 Lok Sabha and 26 assembly seats. Congress came in to power in 2004 at both the centre and state and TRS shared the power with Congress. The Telangana issue was included in common minimum programme of U.P.A government to satisfy the T.R.S., but very soon, in December 2006, the T.R.S. parted its ways from U.P.A. government blaming delay in carving out the separate state and announced an independent fight for the cause. In a major breakthrough, in 2008, the TDP also announced its support for Telangana demand. Another important chapter included in the struggle for Telangana, when on 29th November 2009 K. Chandrasekhara Rao started fast unto death to fulfil his demand for a separate Telangana state (PTI 2013). In the changing circumstances, the central government became ready to initiate the process for the formation of Telangana state in December 2009, but very soon, as the decision was opposed by the Seemandhra and Rayalseema region, it announced to put the process on hold and appealed both the sides for evolving consensus. In its efforts to cease fire, the centre constituted the five-member committee headed by the justice B.N. Srikrishna on 23rd February 2010. The “Committee for Consultations on Situations in Andhra Pradesh”, submitted its report in December 2010, it advised “that keeping in mind the interest of the greater good, the state must be kept united”, it also suggested six point programme (GOI 2010:425). To find a harmonious resolution to the problem, the Congress party organised an all party meeting in December 2012.

In a major event, in October 2013 amid the protest in Seemandhra, the U.P.A. government decided to carve out the Telanangana state and to prepare the roadmap a Group of Ministers (GOM) was formed. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013, Union Cabinet approved the draft of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill 2013 and sent it to President. Under article 3 of the constitution, the bill was sent to state legislature of Andhra Pradesh to obtain its views. The bill introduced on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013 in both houses of state legislature amid chaos and clashes between supporters and opponents of Telangana state. Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy has already opposed any bifurcation of state and urged the president and prime minister to stop the creation of a new state. On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014, the Telangana bill was rejected by the both houses of state legislature by a voice vote along with disruption (IANS 2014). To protest the division of Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister Kiran Kumar Reddy staged sit-in in Delhi. In a

historical episode, the Union Cabinet cleared the Telangana bill on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014, overlooking the opposition. After President's consent, the bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014. On 18<sup>th</sup> February 2014 the bill was passed by the Lok Sabha (ibid).

In the history of federal India, it was for the time, that in the protest of the bill, six M.P.s of congress from Seemandhra moved the no confidence motion against their own government and their own party expelled them for the issue. The pepper spray attack in the Lok Sabha, against introduction of the bill was another important incident, which left Indian Federalism in to tears (TOI 2014).

### **Need for a new state**

Creation of Telangana state has been a burning issue in Indian democracy, which has posed a great challenge for the future of Indian federalism. People, who, come from Andhra strongly support the united Aandhra Pradesh, while those who belong to Telangana region, blindly hold up the demand for a separate Telangana state, as they find it the only solution to regional disparity faced by Telangana region since its merger with the state of Aandhra Pradesh in 1956. Supporters of Telangana state mention some very strong reasons for the demand. They insist that the demand for a separate Telangana state is not new. The people were never in favour of merger, when the new state of Andhra Pradesh was being carved out, because there was a intense feeling in the region that they will not get their due share in that state. To convince the Telanganites, a negotiated settlement known as the Gentlemen's Agreement was signed on 20 February 1956 between leaders of Andhra and Telangana to safeguard the interest of Telangana region. Unfortunately, the ill implementation of those safeguards, invoked the people of Telangana region for the struggle for a new Telangana state. It was the bitter experiences of the past 58 years in the united Andhra state, which forced people to initiate a mass movement for their own rights (TDF 2010). Supporters of Telangana state blames backwardness and discrimination against the region as the main factor for the demand of separate statehood, they claim that the areas of north Aandhra, Rayalseema and specially Telangana has been not only neglected but also systemically robbed. As a display of this discrimination, they give the example of Nagarjuna Sagar dam. They argue that Nagarjuna sagar dam is located in Nalgonda (Telangana) district but mainstream of the water from the dam is used for Krishna and Guntur (Aandhra) districts. The original dam was supposed to be build much ahead of its present location but the location was changed so that it falls in the Telangana region. Due to the construction of the dam several hectares of Lime stone (used to make cement) mines vanished as part of the dam back waters (Rahman 2010:3) This single factor expose the exploitation of the region that no one cared, even for the natural resources of the region, so how it was possible that rulers of Andhra Pradesh would have any concern for the farmers of Telangana who have been suffering from lack of irrigation water, drinking water and power cut.

One another important reason related with the dissatisfaction of the people of Telangana region is the problem of irrigation. As they mention that despite having, more cultivated areas in comparison to Aandhra, only few Telangana areas cultivate one crop a year and very rarely two crops a year while most of the land does not even cultivate single crop. While in both the Krishna and Guntur district, two crops a year is common and there are times when even 3 crops a year are cultivated just because the facility of canal irrigation system, which is not available to telangana (TDF 2010)

There has been a great problem of unemployment in the region due to lack of new projects and industries. The supporters of the state claim that region of Telangana is rich by natural resources and water; even then, it has been kept backward intentionally by the political leadership of Aandhra Pradesh. Mahaboobnagar, one of the major district of Telangana, where two major rivers Krishna and Tungabharda meets, faces the problem of drought every year and also the problem of drinking water throughout the year, which shows that there has been no water management for the region just because of negligence (World Bank Report 2005). Even one of the major problems related with fluorinated water in Nalgonda district, which posed a great health risk on the innocent people of the region, could not seek attention of the decision makers since decades (Rao 2012).

There had been a great negligence at the educational front also. Despite accounting half of states population, Telangana region had a very less percent of the educational institutions from primary to college level. According “Human Development Report 2007”, the child dropout rate was quite high in Telangana (CESS 2008). “As except in Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts, the provision of education is inadequate in the rest of Telangana, which continues to lag behind Seemandhra” (Rao 2014).

Telangana region always suffered from power shortage, despite the existence of huge unexploited coal resources, while Seemandhra is in much better situation and many of its power plants get the coal transported from Telangana, whereas it would be better to establish the power plants near the coal mines. The current problem of power shortage in Telangana, is also the result of long-standing apathy of the rulers towards the region. Projection of new power plants and economic packages for the region by centre and state governments may be a stimulating factor for development of the region (Rao 2014).

Supporters of Telangana region blame that they were discriminated in recruitment and developmental programmes also in the former Aandhra Prasesh. They indicate the majority of the people of costal Aandhra, who have been dominant in the entire government and its various departments. Even The G.O number 610, which was issued in 1986 by late NTR (then the C M of Andhra Pradesh), and speaks about the share of Telangana employees in Government jobs in Telangana region could not be implemented ever.

These are a few reasons and there are many other factors for which, the people of Telangana region strongly feel that Successive Governments and the

Ruling Political Parties had not been fair to them. Therefore, they deserve an opportunity to make their own destiny by creation of a new Telangana state.

### **Arguments against Telangana state**

Creation of Telangana state has opened a Pandora's Box in Indian federal system. The opponents of Telangana state had leave no stone unturned to convince the central authority against the bifurcation of joint Andhra State. They raise the question that even when the justice SriKrishna committee's recommendations were against any bifurcation of the joint Aandhra (GOI 2010:425), then what led the U.P.A. government forced to take such a crucial decision? The first declaration for a separate Telangana state was made on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009, and then it took three-and-a-half years and a full-fledged mass movement for the Congress to confirm the existence of Telangana, they speculate the politics of vote bank of Congress Party for creation of a new state going against the public opinion of Aandhra Pradesh (Ghia 2014). They openly blame that political opportunism and pragmatism have been the root cause of this kind of action and impartial and objective evaluation of development potential have been denied.

The opponents also feel that the Telangana instance may "weaken" the country and it will spur and further intensify the demands for new states. Their fear seems to be true, as the creation of separate state of Telangana has sparked of demands of new smaller states in other states as well. The regions include Vidarbha in Maharashtra territory; Gorkhaland and Kamtapur in West Bengal; Coorg in Karnataka; Mithilanchal in Bihar; Saurashtra in Gujarat; Harit Pradesh, Purvanchal, Braj Pradesh and Awadh Pradesh in Uttar Pradesh; Maru Pradesh in Rajasthan; Bhojpur comprising areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Chhattisgarh; Bundelkhand comprising areas of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, a greater Cooch Behar state out of the parts of Assam and West Bengal.

Such kind of demands to divide a state on linguistic, cultural differences, or on any such basis is detrimental and a threat to the unity and security of the country. The opponents of Telangana state argue, that it may put endanger our national unity and integrity, the kind of disagreement and chaos we notice, in the creation of Telangana state it may rejuvenate these fears.

Another objection has been raised by the critics of smaller states, who believe that the creation of smaller states constructs more problems than it solves. The kind of political instability, and horse-trading, we notice in the newly created smaller states assemblies like Goa and Jharkhand, it proves the fright. They also argue that bigger states ensure more cohesion and stability in comparison to smaller state's economies, who are more dependent on central government and which can be soft target of multi-national companies and corporations as their resources are easily accessible to corrupt nexus of politicians and mafias.

One important argument is related with the problem of 'Naxalism' in the region, which has been recognised as a hot bed of Maoist rebellions as there

is a notable presence of their, on its border areas and the possibilities of slipping these areas in to hands of Maoists', like Chattisgarh and Jharkhand, cannot be ruled out. Although, this has been a fact that joint Aandhra Pradesh had a long history of Naxalism, but a remarkable reduce in the Naxalite activities has been noticed in the last years. The supporters of Telangana state seem unable to understand the geopolitical realities of the region. As a smaller state, and with limited capacities, it may be a great challenge to handle it efficiently, failing to which may cost serious consequences on national security and integrity.

The opponents also reject the major argument of economic disparity and discrimination as a basic reason for a new state. They argue that there are no much differences in the per capita income of Telangana and coastal Andhra. Although they accept that, the facilities of transportation like rail and road connectivity and agriculture and irrigation services may not be as good as in the coastal region but they blame the topography with complexity of plateau and deep jungles of this region for such drawback. This kind of geographical landscape and drawbacks would remain same even in the new Telangana state. Another important issue is related with financial implications, the partition of property, natural resources and human resources will not be a minor problem (Ghia 2014).

The opponents mention one another economic reason as the new state is landlocked, while jointly with Aandhra Pradesh it would have a long costal area. This is an open fact that the capacities of landlocked regions are limited in comparison to costal areas in the matters of economic opportunities. The costal areas not only known as port cities and centre of export-import but naturally, industrialists, for investment, give them preference also. The opponent blames the supporters of Telangana state to be immature in realising the challenges of geo-sociological realities of development. Eventually they will realise the fact.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning of this century, the size of a state was recognised as an important factor from the development parameters and it was said that smaller size states have better chances of development and governance (Jagannathan 2013). If we look at the Indian experiences we find that smaller geographical entities have shown themselves more efficient and democratic, as the policy makers are not only well aware of local needs and regional aspirations usually, but the linguistic and cultural homogeneity provides them an environment for better implementation of public policies, management and development. Small size of a state provides it an opportunity to get better response to their demands and share in state resources in comparison to bigger states.

From the development point of view, the creation of smaller states has shown their utility. If we look at the performance of the units of the Indian federation, the newer states have shown the sign of growth and better governance in the comparison to their parental states, the data showed in mid-term appraisal of eleventh five-year plan, clearly indicate the differences. The economic performance of the newly created Uttarakhand in growth rate of gross

state domestic product was 10.4% in comparison to 7.2% of U.P. in the year 2007-08. The performance of Chhattisgarh was also better with 11.7% in comparison to its parental state of M.P. which got the growth rate of 5.2% in the same year. While the performance of Jharkhand was not better with just 6.2% in comparison to Bihar (GOI 2011:59) who secured 8.8%.

Experience shows that large and diverse states have not been so advantageous to safeguard the interests of weaker sections, who have the better opportunities to organise and raise their voice effectively in a relatively small and homogenous state because of common culture and an easy accessibility to communicate with each other. Thus, we may expect that the creation of new Telangana state would be more useful in articulating the interests of weaker sections of the state, who constitute the majority of the population and it will reinforce the process of social insertion in both the states. The comprehensive growth of the Telangana people depends on the factor that up to what extent the new government enabling itself for development of a new participatory and responsible social framework (Rao 2014). No doubt, it will have to face greater challenges, especially in the field of land reforms, agriculture, power generation, irrigation problems, and to improve human development index of the region with the resources of a small state.

This is a fact that size is an important factor and smaller states have easier accessibility, they are manageable and reflect the aspirations of the people of grassroots, even then it is not everything, progressive leadership, essential and adequate circumstances are necessary for good governance and positive outcomes. Larger states like Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra etc. have shown better results in comparison to many smaller states.

Today the Indian federal system just does not need smaller states, rather it requires to develop and stronger states. The creation of smaller states would obviously help in achieving the goal of democratic decentralized and development based governance for units. This is also a fact that smaller states without greater economic and constitutional empowerment will serve little purpose. Thus, the final logic behind smaller states is the empowerment of states. So the Union of India, not only needs to concentrate on the creation of smaller units only but to take note of those constitutional, economical and political reforms also, which are necessary for creation of Empowered States of India.

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