

## CHANGING ASPECTS OF STATES REORGANISATION IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*India was reorganised on the basis of the States Reorganisation Committee report in 1956. But it was not able to prevent the demand for new states from coming up. The linguistic basis of reorganisation was not sufficient as new statehoods have been granted on other bases as well. With time it has become completely obsolete as a basis for reorganisation. As a result, there have been many new additions and manifold new demands for states in India. This paper attempts to analyze the basis of these new additions and to suggest a framework to comprehend and appreciate the process of reorganisation in a scientific way.*

**KEYWORDS:** *States Reorganisation, Linguistic Reorganisation, Regionalism, Federalism, Decentralisation, Post-Liberalisation*

### INTRODUCTION

India today consists of 29 states and 7 union territories. But just a decade back the number of states was 25 and if we still go further back, there were lesser states. There are demands for 30 more new states still pending to be granted. These states and union territories constitute the State of the nation India. These petitions and the struggles represent the ongoing nation-making process in India which is a complex phenomenon.

It will be my attempt in this paper to bring out the nuances of this complex phenomenon, i.e., state demands. What are the causes, in what ways are they expressed and what are the responses elicited by the nation will be my focus. Based on this, there are two entry points into probing the various dimensions of the state demands and movements. The primary basis explaining these movements is as an expression of regional assertion. But not all regional assertions (also termed as sub-national) have succeeded in realizing a state for themselves, particularly Vidarbha, Harit Pradesh etc. On the other hand, the latest additions of Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand lack such an intensive movement. These discrepancies are somewhat better understood in the light of federalism which along with democratization of politics and decentralization forms another basis of evaluating these state demands.

### HISTORY OF THE DEMAND FOR LINGUISTIC REORGANISATION

#### Colonial Period

The idea of linguistic reorganisation of the provinces can be traced back to 1903 when Sir Herbert Risely, then Home Secretary in the Government of India, first raised the issue in conjunction with the proposed partition of Bengal. Congress's first evidence of support to the principle came in its opposition to the partition of Bengal in 1905.

The official recognition, however, took place in the Congress session of 1917 where the principle was opposed by a group led by Annie Besant who felt that the issue could wait till the imminent 1919 reforms. It was only in 1920 that, under the leadership of Gandhi, Congress voiced the concerns of the linguistic reorganisation of the Provincial Congress Committees to make the Congress regionally more democratic and plural. This new development immediately got reflected in the resolution made in the Nagpur session of 1920 with a scheme to reorganise 20 Provincial Congress Committees.<sup>1</sup>

Gradually, contestations over hierarchies of language, regions and culture and castes and classes began to be drawn into the national movement. With the movement for provincial autonomy becoming intense, the idea of the linguistic organisation of provinces which would make a province more homogeneous and hence could effectively enhance its autonomy began to gain ground. In 1927 a resolution was sent to the Simon Commission for the linguistic reorganisation of provinces. The Motilal Nehru Report of 1928 also examined this demand in detail and recommended that factors such as administrative convenience and financial viability along with 'people's wishes and linguistic unity of the area' concerned should be taken into account.

### **Post-Independence Period**

Independence brought forth with it the task of nation-making which was underway since the colonial period and state making which was to be dealt with afresh. Moreover, the colonial system of administration of states was an amalgamation of Part A States under the Governor, Part B States constituting of the Princely States and Part C and D territories which were centrally-administered. The rationale behind this organization was the colonial rationale of maximum appropriation of surplus which obstructed the effective functioning of the provinces. The different systems of administration operating in these categories of states also made a union of these provinces problematic. In this way, there was a need for reorganisation of states. But the backdrop of partition, communal riots, rehabilitation of refugees, food security and the fear of disintegration of the country made reorganisation of states a tricky affair. Although the subject of reorganisation had been much discussed by the nationalist leaders, it assumed a new dimension after independence.

The Congress leadership put forth the Nehruvian vision of reorganisation which was much contested by several leaders including Ambedkar. Nehru, like many other Congress leaders of the time, was ambivalent and uncertain about the timing of the reorganisation of states after independence, even though he had supported the idea since his days as a member of the Motilal Nehru Committee. He was of the view that 'first things must come first, and the first thing is the security and stability of India' since it would be extraordinarily unwise to unsettle and uproot the whole of India for a theoretical approach or linguistic division' (Report of the States Reorganisation Committee, 1955). He was not fully convinced of the viability and durability of monolingual states which, in his views, would not be sustainable in the long run. Though he accepted the formation of Andhra province, he warned against a surge in demand for separate states based on an exclusive ideology of language or religion. He wanted 'large states to retain their cosmopolitan character and be capable, in due course of time, to carry forward his vision of socialistic democratic and planned development of different regions and sub-regions of the country' (Asha Sarangi and SudhaPai, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup>These were Madras, Karnataka, Andhra, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Sind, United provinces, Punjab, Delhi, Ajmer, Marwar, Rajasthan, Central Provinces, Berar, Bihar, Utkal, Bengal with the Surma Valley districts, Assam and Burma. Asha Sarangi and SudhaPai eds. *Interrogating Reorganisation of States*, Routledge 2011, p 6

Ambedkar, on the other hand, supported the demand for reorganisation of states on the linguistic basis. He argued that 'a common language and culture would promote unity and stability in the country' whereas a 'heterogeneous population could get divided into hostile groups leading to discrimination, neglect, partiality, and suppression of interests of smaller groups with power remaining in the hands of one powerful group, which would be detrimental to the working of the democracy (ibid.). But he disregarded the thesis of 'one language, one state' and like Nehru favored a strong center to ensure an inclusive developmental polity. He proposed that people speaking one language may be divided into many states as this would prevent the dangerous alliance between class, caste and the numerically dominant language groups which would hamper inclusive growth and development of other minority groups.

In this way, the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of states had become intensely political by the early 1950s. Apart from the political mobilisation behind the subject since the colonial times, Stanley Kochanek attributes it to the sociological change underway since the 1930s within the Congress party which saw the rise in the number of middle-caste landowning elites as its members, who benefitted from the abolition of zamindari especially in the southern and western states of India (Stanley A. Kochanek, 1968). They emerged as the new power elite in the countryside who could be used by the Congress as vote banks in various states. Their caste-class alliance began to find expression in their support for the linguistic reorganisation of states soon after independence.

As a result, the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was set up in 1953 with Syed Fazl Ali, H. N. Kunzru and K. M. Panikkar as its members. It recognized four principles on the lines of Dhar and JVP Committee reports which it felt were important in laying down the recommendations for the reorganisation. These were preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, financial and administrative efficiency and the successful working of the five-year national economic plans. Moreover, the Commission also preferred criteria such as financial viability, political unity, stability, and regional coherence in its recommendations. But even after the SRC submitted its report in 1956 and several states having been reorganised on its basis, the following decades witnessed demands for reorganisation of other states. Maharashtra and Gujarat were created in 1960, Haryana and Punjab in 1966, Nagaland in 1963, several states in the north-east during the years 1970-80 and Goa in 1992 and lastly Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand in 2000.

## **REGIONALISM**

Marxists have long contended that India is not a nation but is a nation in the making consisting of a number of emerging nationalities with different languages and cultures of their own. This was the direct result of Indian being a multi-national and multi-ethnic country (Sajal Nag, 1993). But these nationalities were at various stages of development depending upon the nature and pace of capitalist development that led to the rise of the bourgeoisie, a crucial precondition for a nation, which was the main factor behind nationality formation. This was so because they needed a free market for removing the obstacles like feudal or colonial restrictive regimes which could lead to material gains. Language emerged as a crucial factor for realizing such a market. Guha observed that 'for political ends, the rising bourgeois class made, or tended to make, its own people aware of their distinct cultural-political identity. It managed to invent suitable myths and used idioms and symbols to transform this identity consciousness into a powerful and purposive spiritual sentiment. This was nationalism' (Amlendu Guha, 1982).

In the case of India as pointed out by Guha 'the national movement primarily aimed at pulling down the colonial barriers so that the capitalist transformation of the relevant society could proceed unhindered. Thus, historically viewed, nationalism was and continues to be, more than mere patriotism or love for one's own country' (ibid.). Though the Indian bourgeoisie of the 19<sup>th</sup> century formulated a political programme with a focus on desirable structural changes, and they created mass sentiments in its favor, the sentiments didn't percolate down to the masses like the peasantry. It was only with the rise of Gandhi and the left parties after the First World War that these sentiments of nationalism percolated.

With the increase in the number of participants in the national movement, the bourgeois project came to be obstructed not only by the peasantry and other classes but also from the bourgeoisie from other regions. Moreover, the colonial oppression brought the diverse ethnic elements closer and a process of class formation, transcending barriers of caste, religion, and tribe, started. As a result two streams of national consciousness emerged – pan-Indian and regional. The former Guha points 'was professedly based on observed pan-Indian homogeneities of culture such as a common all-India tradition and history, economic life and psychological make-up and the accepted unifying role of Sanskrit, Persian, English, and Hindustani by turn - and also calculations of advantages of an India-wide market. The other consciousness was professedly based on the relevant region's distinctive homogeneities and demands for substantial or exclusive control by the sons of the soil over its resources and market facilities' (ibid.). The challenge also came from Islamic revivalism which succeeded in the establishment of an Islamic state of Pakistan under the patronage of the British.

Sajal Nag contends that the 'construction of nationhood is a narcissist practice while nation-building was all about building walls around the self and distancing from 'the other' (Nag, 2011). A nation/nationality begins its journey by shedding all the other from its purview thereby viewing and creating a number of cultural groups as the 'other' and even an enemy. This shedding process then continues by excluding the weak, poor and marginalized. In the name of developing 'us,' thus weak and marginal sections are displaced, evicted and expelled not just materially, but also from the frontier of its nationality. Often it is a violent narcissist process. Thus nation-building or nation-creating process is actually an unending one of forming an exclusive elite group in the name of homogeneity.

In this way, nation building is the process of majority building which automatically involves minority persecution and displacement. This process gradually becomes a pattern as each of the minorities constructs a national identity and strives to build a majority for itself. This results in a vicious cycle of peeling and shedding (ibid.).

## **FEDERALISM AND DECENTRALISATION**

Federalism was a change from the unitary colonial regime. It was a courageous move that adopted an unorthodox distribution of powers that 'made purists wince' (Balveer Arora and Douglas V. Verney, 1995). But the strong center perspective persisted due to the turn of events which accompanied Indian independence. On the other hand, it was believed too federal a constitution might encourage other fissiparous tendencies which the union might have difficulty in weathering. Despite the unitary bias of the original constitutional design, 'a remarkable degree of flexibility and pragmatism was worked in it' (ibid.). Pragmatism and flexibility were reflected in the asymmetrical arrangement in bringing out and maintaining the union. This came in handy in integrating states and people who had enjoyed considerable autonomy under the previous system. The constitution also undertook to layer of socio-political realities and created space

for local self-government. This flexible arrangement played a significant role in adapting to the pressures generated by the democratic development. The arrangement also tried to take care of the needs of cultural heterogeneity, social mobility, geopolitical contiguity, linguistic homogeneity and administrative-bureaucratic rationality of the state and wherever it was lagging, it was gradually amended (Sarangi and Pai, 2011).

The democratization of political processes had an impact on the original design. As the rapidly growing electorate discovered the multiple meanings of democracy, demands of states for more power and greater participation in national policy processes were voiced with increasing insistence. But the government did not relent and continued with strengthening the system of controls and the Central intervention 'reached unprecedented levels due to the collapse of democratic functioning within the Congress party'.<sup>2</sup> This gave rise to a qualitatively different type of conflict in three key states of Assam, Kashmir, and Punjab. Arora states 'they were no longer asking for more effective participation in national policymaking, but sought to compel a fresh look at the terms of their participation in the union. Each one of them sought a status commensurate with its perceived importance to the Union, on asymmetrical lines' (Arora and Verney 1995)

After the first phase of reorganisation of states, a number of candidates for statehood were left out. There was an experiment with an intermediate category of an autonomous state for Meghalaya which was short-lived due to the 'premium attached to the status of state'. Apart from the accession of Sikkim in 1975, all the states that came into existence after Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh in 1971 were an up gradation of existing Union territories. But these states were tiny and heavily dependent on the Central assistance for subsistence and hence were awarded 'special category states' status (Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, and Nagaland) which guaranteed them preferential treatment in the distribution of grants and other central assistance. Moreover, article 370 for Jammu and Kashmir and 371A for Nagaland were further commitments to safeguard their autonomy by the Central government.

Within the state, the provision for the establishment of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) is also a way to decentralization. Further, the Sixth Schedule, which covers Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, is another arrangement within the state structure for establishing councils for self-government in autonomous districts. But Scholars opine that it 'represents more of a political rhetoric than systemic devolution of power and functions' (B. K. Roy Burman, 1992) There are also some single-district or multi-district structures at substate, level like the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) etc. which provide a vent to local grievances. The Panchayat reforms in the eighties and the subsequent emergence of Panchayats as the third tier of government to has added a new dimension to decentralization.

Not federalism but a dramatic change in center-state relations and electoral politics is behind so many new state-seeking demands. With the decline of the Congress party and the failure of any emerging political party to take the place vacated by the Congress Party, a shift towards regionalization of politics has occurred. The prevalence of so many diversities prevented an effective opposition to emerge. The rise of coalition politics also has a role to play. Not only has it led to the growing importance of regional parties, whatever their size in the formation of national government but also has

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<sup>2</sup>Jaffrelot attributes this development to Nehru's attempt to counter the conservative leanings of the Congress which was followed by Indira as she tried to emancipate herself from the Syndicate's (the press name for the conservative Congress bosses) tutelage. She legitimised herself with socialist slogans and solicited the support of the left wing of Congress, especially that of the Congress Forum for Socialist Action (FSA) (Christophe Jaffrelot, 2003); Varshney recognises it as the deepening of democracy and attributes the rise of three groups to fill the political space vacated by the Congress in the last decade and a half. They were Hindu nationalism, regionalism and the OBCs (Ashotosh Varshney, 2000).

led to the regionalization of the national parties themselves with the regional branches becoming more autonomous than before. This has increased the feasibility of new state demands as regional parties need grassroots support for themselves. The growing importance of small regional parties at the national level in coalition government has further given impetus to this trend.

In this way, the acceptance of the creation of new states as legitimate political agenda (Emma Mawdsley, 2002) simply points to the manoeuvring for political gains, i.e., vote banks and electoral benefits by the national as well as the regional parties. The announcement made just prior to the 1996 state election by the then Prime Minister Deve Gowda that the center was considering a new state of Uttarakhand is a good example. Emma Mawdsley adds that the one way in which the BJP fought to respond to the challenge of the emergence of lower/backward caste parties in north India was to back these regional movements as it would give them a foothold in the region and accrue political pay-offs in terms of controlling the state governments and their representatives in the Parliament in the Centre.<sup>3</sup> At times promising a new state might prove to be a better strategy than promising development in exchange for votes.

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEW CHALLENGES

The Indian economy, particularly since the mid-1980s and the economic reform of 1991, has been relying much more on the private sector for its growth. The increasing retreat by the government and the increasing expectations of masses that the government should provide the resources to ease the economic pressures of the regions demanding statehood do not fit. State boundaries also come in the way of efficient use of natural resources such as the problems of sharing of river water between states like Punjab and Haryana as well as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Indeed, the increasing role played by civil society, NGOs and self-help groups during the last decades attest to the above fact. They have also increasingly come to channelize empowerment politics which is a departure from political mass movements of the 1980s. The central government is also trying hard through Panchayati Raj reforms to enter the arena of rural empowerment but has broadly not been successful due to implementation bottlenecks. The civil society institutions, on the other hand, being funded by national as well as international organisations have flourished (Samuel Berthet and Girish Kumar, 2011). This phase also saw the emergence of the concept of 'governance' behind the new states' demands, which is a politically neutral concept. It's very neutral nature is problematic. It can very easily mask the global-local collaboration aimed at optimal exploitation of the resources which the new states are endowed with.

In this way states reorganisation and demand for new states has had a long history and had many dimensions which have evolved over time. The State's response too has been changing trying to reflect the contemporary political economy. Global and international concerns, especially for market and resources, are also making their presence felt as reflected in the formation of the latest states. These are the aspects of states reorganisation operating in India.

<sup>3</sup>In Chhatisgarh the RSS controlled VanvasiKalyan Ashram centered in Jashpur and Surguja and other tribal areas rich in mineral resources provided a strong electoral base to the BJP. This was behind the keenness on part of the BJP during the late 1990s to control the proposed state of Chhatisgarh. Sarangi and Pai, p 14

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