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Division of States: Good or Bad?

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Abstract

The last few years have seen a constant tug of war between the champions of smaller states and larger states. There have been persistent demands for the creation of separate states of Telangana in Andhra Pradesh, Vidharba in eastern Maharashtra, Bodoland and Gorkhaland in the North East, etc. Mayawati even proposed to divide Uttar Pradesh into four smaller states-Purvanchal, Bundelkhand, Awadh Pradesh and Pashchim Pradesh. But what makes this a Burning Topic this year is that on 3 October 2013, Union Cabinet approved the creation of a new State of Telangana by bifurcating the existing State of Andhra Pradesh. On 6 December Union home ministry sent the Telangana draft bill to President. On December 11, President reviewed the bill and sent it to Andhra Pradesh state assembly to elicit its views; gave until January 23 to respond.

Keywords: Telangana, region, division and western U.P.

Introduction

Not a very bright thing to do as there have been huge protests ever since in the State Assembly with the assembly dissolving everyday without any progress. We should know that Telangana comprises of 10 districts, including state capital Hyderabad (proposal is to share it for first 10 years). The region accounts for 119 of the state's 294 assembly seats and 17 of 42 Lok Sabha seats. Whether we get Telangana or not, are secondary and out of scope of this discussion. What is important is this move has started a rage of protests and filled new hopes in the minds of activists voicing for separate states all over India. But, how does making a separate state make their life any easier or the governance better? Let's debate on this topic – Is Division of States good for India?

Points in Favour

- A) More targeted governance:** Division of states means that every state will have its own leaders. Looking at the bigger picture, this means that a government who had to formulate policies for 5 crore people, will now have to do the same for only 2 crores. By simple maths, there will be more efficiency in the administration and less pressure of performance on the governance. Better administration fuels growth.
- B) Proximity of capital city:** It is a known fact that the capital city is where the people of the state go to air their grievances as all major government offices, judicial houses like state high courts and political quarters are housed there. A new state would more often than not, mean a closer capital city and thus provide relief to the people. This cannot be said about larger states. For e.g. : If a citizen in western U.P. were to be heard in any of the state commissions or courts, he has to travel over 600 km to Lucknow, spending large amounts of money in an attempt to get justice. Thus, reduced distances between the state capital and peripheral areas would improve the quality of governance and administrative responsiveness and accountability.
- C) Proper utilization of central funds:** In a larger state, the problem is that the allocation of funds by the centre can never be evenly distributed. So some parts stand to lose and thus remain backwardly developed, while the part which holds maximum political affiliate gains. Dividing states definitely solves this problem.
- D) Increased Growth Rate:** According to planning commission data, Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for Chhattisgarh rose from 3.1% average growth over 1994-95 and 2001-02 to 8.6% average since 2004-05. Even Uttarakhand shows similar trend (4.6% to 12.3%). Also, the industrial sector in Chhattisgarh grew at 13% over this 5-year period while the growth rate was only 6.7% for Madhya Pradesh. With an efficient and more targeted administration, growth is inevitable.

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- E) Better Living Standards:** Per Capita income of people in Uttar Pradesh rose from Rs.9721 in 2000-2001 to Rs.17349 in 2010-11. The same for Uttarakhand rose Rs.14932 to Rs.44723, much better than its mother state. Over 2004-09, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand have done a better job in reduction of poverty than their mother states reducing the poverty rates by 14.7% and 6.2% respectively while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar could manage figures of 0.9% and 3.2% respectively. These figures speak for themselves.
- F) Demand for Telangana valid:** Farmers in Telangana have lost irrigation water and witnessed major power cuts. Within the current statehood, Telangana has remained backward and issues have not been sorted out, majorly due to a biased government. Many people think that Naxalites in the Telangana region have a role to play in the region's backwardness. But the truth is, their movements have gathered momentum due to the lack of progress. As the area has been constantly neglected, systematic theft of natural resources has taken place. Division is a necessity here.

Points Against

- A) Division vs. governance:** Much more than the size of a state, it is the quality of governance and administration, the diverse talent available within the state's population, and the leadership's drive and vision that determine whether a particular state performs better than the others. Devolution of powers to the grass root level and an accountable bureaucracy is what you need for governance, not division. If that was the case, Jharkhand should have been a developed state. But that is far from true. Corruption in mining licenses and Naxalites haunt the state. Both Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand account for 68% of insurgent attacks.
- B) Reduced Self-Sustainability:** A small state is likely to face limitations in terms of the natural and human resources available to it. Moreover, it will lack the kind of agro-climatic diversity required for economic and developmental activities. All these factors would only make it more dependent on the Centre for financial transfers and centrally-sponsored schemes. Taking example of Telangana, post division, Telangana would become a landlocked state by losing out on major ports, coastline, golden quadrilateral and major railway freight corridors.
- C) Cost of Infrastructure:** A new small state may find itself lacking in infrastructure (administrative and industrial), which requires time, money and effort to build. There is massive amount of infrastructure needed for building up new capital and to make new states self-sufficient. Mobilizing capital required for such big infrastructure setup is a herculean task, which will add more pressure on the already dwindling fiscal reserves of India. Rather a systematic and planned approach for development within the current state can handle the issue of growth better than division.
- D) Hurts unity:** If states are divided on the basis of religion, caste, creed, language, culture etc, the whole idea of making "One India" as laid down by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel goes down the drain. Such divisions causes more hatred amongst the states, which is not favorable for inter state tourism as well as trade. India is a museum of cults and customs, creeds and cultures,

faiths and tongues, racial types and social systems. Dividing India on such fragile factors can only lead to anarchy. We cannot go back to following "Divide and Rule" policy of the British Era.

- E) Telangana, a political move:** All the so called "neglect" issues are fuelled on the backdrop political measures. It is the vote bank politics that is misleading people. What is the guarantee that once Telangana is carved out of Andhra Pradesh, people of that region will meet all their ends? There are every chances that later on people from North Telangana would not like to be ruled by leaders from South Telangana or the vice versa. Division is not a solution, but a beginning of a new problem.

Kothari believes that analyses of India's federal structure and processes have for too long been dominated by accounts of the workings of the Union and its constituent units. He strongly suggests that we must go beyond these Centre-State debates, which can present a sterile and overly 'mechanistic' view of federalism, and move towards an analysis of the more fundamental dialectic between the state and society. This is supported by a more 'organic' view of federalism which would argue that Indian society is itself federal, and locates the weakness of the system in the poor politicizing of that federalism. From this perspective, the regional movements of postcolonial India can be seen as one expression of the increasing political engagement of different, and often marginal, social groups, who are demanding a more participatory and decentralized polity. However, there are a number of problems with this agenda for a more 'rationally' organized map of India. First, under present administrative and government structures, the new States would require an expensive multiplication of capitals, Assemblies (State parliaments), Ministries, Courts and other accoutrements of government. The ideal scenario would envisage that the reorganized States would facilitate enhanced economic growth through more effective and efficient development measures - an expectation that is by no means assured. Second, in terms of democratic functioning, these regional mobilizations, like other social movements, can mask partial and elite interests and manipulations, even, or especially, in marginal areas. Again there can be no automatic assumption that a new State would lead to greater social or political justice. A third problem concerns the impact that the creation of smaller, more culturally and linguistically homogenous States might have on fanning regional or ethnic chauvinism. India has a long history of 'sons of the soil' movements, which although diverse in form and nature, usually aim at the exclusion of 'outsiders' from the State/region through expulsion, or privileging the 'native' population through the setting up of a system of preferential politics to guarantee their 'rights' to employment, land and political power. None of these problems are inevitable or inexorable, and the various outcomes of territorial reorganization would be highly place specific and context-dependent. However, these general concerns suggest caution must be exercised.

The BJP-led Government which oversaw the creation of the latest three States offered the public little detail on its reasons for their decision beyond rather vague references to administrative efficiency and improved democratic transparency and responsibility. In March 1998, for example, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was

quoted as being, 'of the view that the formation of these three States was necessary for the proper development of these areas' (Deccan Herald, 31 March 1998). L.K. Advani, the Home Minister, stated that in general he favoured smaller States in the interests of growth and development: 'The rationale behind this decision was the administrative problems created because of the very large size of the States of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh' (Times of India, 11 June 1998). But despite the political rhetoric, the evidence suggests that most parties are not motivated primarily by the developmental and democratic merits (or demerits, in the case of opponents) of greater federal decentralization, but by considerations of short term political expediency. In some cases, the electoral benefits that might accrue to the parties over this issue seem to have outweighed any consideration of the financial, social or political viability of the States. With regard to Chhattisgarh, for example, it has been suggested that: Nothing except electoral arithmetic seems to have prompted the entire spectrum of political parties relevant to Madhya Pradesh to support the formation of a separate Chhattisgarh State ... privately the leaders of almost all parties admit that the move is devoid of any logic and could prove detrimental to both the States (Deccan Herald, 10 September, 1998).

In the next section the relationship between political opportunism and the creation of new States is taken up in detail, and is situated within broader changes in the Indian political landscape. The differences between Nehru and Indira Gandhi's regimes in relation to regional demands have been persuasively analyzed by Paul Brass (1994). He argues that whereas Nehru generally sought to distance the Central Government from the regional struggles in various States, and arbitrate only in the last instance, Indira Gandhi chose to meddle dangerously and sometimes subversively in regional and other issues. This, Brass suggests, resulted in escalating levels of bitterness and violence, and paradoxically, given Indira Gandhi's centralizing desires, was associated with the increasing ineffectiveness of the Central Government in managing conflicts. As more regional parties began to erode Congress dominance in the States (and then at the Centre), Indira Gandhi's government increasingly lost the ability, as well as the desire, to act as neutrally and 'above' State politics. Although we must be careful not to draw too stark a divide between the rules of father and daughter, a decisive feature of the last thirty years of Indian politics has been the entry of the central government into the hurly burly of State politics, and often in a poor position to negotiate or manage the situation.

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