

## POLITICS AND PROCESSES OF TELANGANA STATEHOOD MOVEMENT: A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*The movement for a separate Telangana state has been hailed by many intellectuals as a democratic struggle of the people of a region against political domination and economic exploitation. The central government's decision to create a new state is seen as an official recognition of the people's aspiration for identity and self-rule. Interrogating such perceptions, this article examines the process by which a Telangana identity has been constructed and throws light on different factors that contributed to it. The Telangana identity is built partly on fact, and partly on half-truths, prejudices, and false hopes. Apart from intellectuals, the resurrection of the regional identity has been facilitated by the opportunism of political parties, in particular, the unjustifiable inaction of the left. There have been several movements to revoke the merger of Telangana and Andhra, major ones occurring in 1969, 1972, and 2009. The movement for a new state of Telangana gained a great momentum in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the fast initiated by Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao the Chief of Telangana Rashtra Samithi on November 29, 2009. On 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2009 the Government of India announced the process of formation of the Telangana state. Violent protests led by people in the Coastal Andhra and Rayalseema regions occurred immediately after the announcement, and the decision was put on hold on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2009. The movement continued in Hyderabad and other districts of Telangana. There have been hundreds of claimed suicides, strikes, protests and disturbances to public life demanding separate statehood. After many struggles, the state of Telangana was officially formed on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014, Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao was elected as the first chief minister of Telangana, following elections in which the Telangana Rashtra Samithi party secured majority. Hyderabad will remain as the joint capital of both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for a period of 10 years.*

**KEY WORDS:** Regional Politics, Telangana, Telangana Rashtra Samithi

### INTRODUCTION

The idea of a linguistic reorganisation of states in India owes its genesis to the Telugu people who were the first to invoke a common linguistic identity to pressure the central government to create a separate state of Andhra out of the Madras Province in 1953. Three years later, they sought the merger of Andhra state with the Telangana region of the erstwhile state of Hyderabad to form the new state of Andhra Pradesh (AP).

The architects of the idea of Vishalandhra (Greater Andhra) were not unaware of sub-regional sentiments, but were eager that all Telugu people unite on the basis of a common language and culture, and build a democratic and progressive state (Sundariah, 1999). It is disheartening to see that such a state, formed with considerable goodwill and hope, is about to be bifurcated. The decision of the union cabinet to form a state of Telangana is interpreted by many political leaders and activist intellectuals as the logical

culmination of the struggles and aspirations of the region's people for identity and self-rule. The decision has, however, roused passions and public protests in other parts of AP, now referred to as Seemandhra, and compelled people to come out in support of Samaikyandhra (United Andhra Pradesh). Alongside agitations and counter-agitations, an interesting political debate is taking place in the state between proponents and adversaries of the Telangana movement. Against the background of these movements and debates, Telangana identity and interrogates the premises on which ideologues have sought to justify the movement for a separate state.

AP comprises three distinct sub-regions – Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema, and Telangana. Given differences in historical, cultural, geographical, and developmental experiences, sub-regional identities have persisted in the state since its inception. But these sub-regional identities thrived alongside the overarching linguistic identity common to all Telugu people. Despite the reservations of some Congress

leaders, the majority opinion in Telangana in 1956 was in favour of creating AP. The communists, who then had considerable public support in Telangana, were openly in support of the idea of Vishalandhra. The formal decision to merge with Andhra to form AP was taken by the Hyderabad legislative assembly after considerable deliberation on its pros and cons(Gautam,2010,p57-65).

However, a decade later, the state witnessed competing sub-regional movements demanding a separate Telangana and a separate Andhra (Sen 1970; Gray 1971, 1974; Dasaradha Rama Rao et al 1973). Prime Minister Indira Gandhi refused to yield to the sub-regional demands and enforced a compromise by initiating a six-point formula, followed by the 32<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, 1973, incorporating Clause 371-D(Retrieved from [www.aponline.gov.in/apportal/HomePage.links/PresidentialOrder/Presidential-order.pdf](http://www.aponline.gov.in/apportal/HomePage.links/PresidentialOrder/Presidential-order.pdf).)

### HISTORY OF TELANGANA

The Telangana Praja Samithi (TPS), formed in 1969 to fight for a separate Telangana, was dissolved and its leaders rejoined the Congress Party in 1971. Different leaders from Telangana such as P V Narasimha Rao, Jalagam Vengala Rao, Marri Chenna Reddy, and T Anjaiah became chief ministers of AP. In 1982, following the public humiliation of Chief Minister Anjaiah by Rajiv Gandhi, who was then only a Congress leader, N T Rama Rao (NTR), a popular Telugu film actor, roused public passions by appealing to Telugu pride and self-respect. In about six months, his Telugu Desam Party (TDP) rode to power, ending the monopoly of the Congress. Although NTR was from coastal Andhra, he and his party received overwhelming support from the people of Telangana. Efforts were made during his tenure as chief minister (January 1983 to September 1995) to encourage the use of Telugu language. Tank Bund, facing the famous Hussain Sagar Lake in Hyderabad, was beautified by commissioning statues of well-known personalities associated with Telugu history, literature, culture, society, and politics. During this period, linguistic identity overshadowed sub-regional identities(Srikanth,2011).

It was during N Chandrababu Naidu's time as chief minister (September 1995 to May 2004) that Telangana sentiments surfaced again with K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) forming the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001. Initially, the TRS, which advocated a separate Telangana state, was written off as an insignificant force. But, by entering into electoral alliances with the Congress in 2004 and the TDP in 2009, the TRS increased its clout and emerged as an important political player in AP. The growth

of the TRS compelled leaders from Telangana in the other dominant political parties – the Congress, TDP, Praja Rajyam Party (PRP) and Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) – to express support for a separate Telangana. However, electoral compulsions and internal pressures forced the PRP and YSRCP to ditch Telangana and identify with the Seemandhra region. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India (CPI), and some CPI (Marxist-Leninist) (ML) factions began supporting the Telangana movement, the CPI (Marxist) and the Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist) (SUCI-C) stood for a united AP. The Lok Satta Party took the position that it did not matter whether AP was united or bifurcated; what mattered to the people was good governance ([www.loksatta.org](http://www.loksatta.org)).

Role of Intellectuals contributions of Keshav Rao Jadhav and K Jayashankar need special mention. After the failure of the 1969 movement, when Telangana politicians virtually gave up the demand for a separate state for about three decades, these intellectuals continued to defend the idea. Jadhav, who taught at Osmania University, was actively associated with the 1969 movement. Unable to accept the accommodative politics of the TPS leadership, he began organising alternative political platforms to achieve a separate Telangana state. After the TPS merged with the Congress, he worked among students, mentoring the Telangana Liberation Students' Organisation (TLSO) and the Telangana Students' Federation (Jadhav 1997, 2010). Jayashankar, who held high academic positions in and outside AP, became an ideologue and strategist of the TRS. His close association with Osmania and Kakatiya Universities enabled him to influence several Telangana intellectuals and students through his persuasive talks and writings.(Jayshankar,2006)

In particular, the support and active involvement of left-oriented intellectuals and artists such as Gaddar, Vimalakka, Allam Rajaiah, and Kodandaram helped the movement garner public sympathy. Telangana was once the site of a historic peasant rebellion and had fostered the Naxalite movement. But the left gradually receded to the margins in the region, partly because of opportunistic politics (CPI and CPI(M)) and partly due to factionalism and the state repression. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the rise of revisionism in China further weakened the left parties. Many intellectuals disassociated themselves from party politics and began supporting human rights and identity movements. Some such intellectuals and artists in Telangana joined the Telangana movement. Outside the TRS, these individuals formed separate organisations and helped

popularise the idea of Telangana among students and the youth. Some activist intellectuals supporting Ambedkarism also lent their support to a separate Telangana, strengthening sentiments for it among scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST) and backward class (BC) students in the region (Andhra Jyoti, 28 September 2013).

Course of the Movement KCR and his TRS were instrumental in bringing Telangana back to the centre of political discourse in AP. But the real impetus came after more and more intellectuals, students, and youth began identifying with the movement and participating in it. Joint action committees were formed among political parties, students, government employees, lawyers, journalists, and other groups to help unite and coordinate the activities of different sections of the people in Telangana. Under these committees, people were mobilised for different types of protest – strikes, rasta rokos, dharnas, mass processions and rallies, gheraos, civil disobedience, vanta-varpu (cooking on the streets), cultural programmes, and political meetings. In the name of reasserting the cultural identity of Telangana, the traditional Bathukamma (goddess of life) festival, where women offer flowers to a goddess and seek her blessings to become good housewives, was organised and celebrated in public with the blessings and support of Telangana ideologues and activists. Along with long-established Bathukamma songs, which have patriarchal overtones, new ones on the plight of Telangana and in praise of those who died for the cause of a state were composed and sung in public celebrations ([www.telugulyrics.org/](http://www.telugulyrics.org/)).

The movement's leaders consciously use the local dialect in speeches and in writings. Some important landmarks in its recent history include KCR's indefinite fast in November-December 2009, which forced the central government to declare that it was beginning the process of forming a separate state; the million march organised by pro-Telangana groups on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011, which ended on an ugly note with the demolition of statues of Telugu luminaries from Seemandhra (Someshwar, 2011); and the Sakalajanula Samme (all people's strike) in September -October 2011, which continued for nearly a month with different sections of people in Telangana joining it. The increasing politicization and participation of different groups, suicides by hundreds of students, police atrocities, and the opportunism of political parties and politicians have given a boost to Telangana sentiments and made more and more people identify with the movement.

There were mass protests and police repression during the Telangana movement of 1969. But what has made

the recent movement more appealing and enduring is the supporting role played by communication technologies. Earlier, the dominant modes for transmission of ideas were newspapers, public meetings, pamphlets and books. But the growth of information technology (IT) and the electronic media has revolutionised communication. Easy access to the internet, the growth of online social networks and newspapers, the popularity of websites such as YouTube, and the proliferation of 24x7 television news channels have come in handy for the politicians and ideologues of Telangana. Sitting somewhere in Hyderabad or in some corner of a city in the US, it is possible to communicate ideas, information, and views to people in the Telangana region. New technologies enable people in AP and outside AP to become consumers as well as communicators of ideas and information passed on to them. In addition, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Telangana Development Forum, Telangana Resource Centre, Telangana Jagruthi, and Telangana Information Task Force are actively involved in disseminating the idea of a separate Telangana ([www.telanganaResourceCentre.org/](http://www.telanganaResourceCentre.org/)). Further, films based on issues related to Telangana such as Jai Bolo Telangana and Bathukamma, the launch of Namaste Telangana newspaper and the V6 TV channel, and songs, videos, and documentaries associated with Telangana on YouTube and other websites have helped in promoting a Telangana identity among the people of the region.

### THE REGIONAL IDENTITY

The narratives of Telangana ideologues justify the movement as a struggle for identity and autonomy, and rationalise it as a struggle against domination, exploitation, discrimination, deception, and humiliation. Considerable data is presented to validate these claims. However, a close look shows that some of the basic assumptions on which the Telangana identity is built are not that solid or uncontested. As in the case of ethnic identities, the construction of regional identities involve the selective emphasis or erasure of facts and memories; interpretations and misinterpretations; and contestations and claims. In recent months, especially after the Congress Working Committee decided to concede the demand for a separate Telangana, there has been intense debate in AP about the basis of a sub-regional identity. Critics point out that Telangana ideologues close their eyes to the linguistic and cultural similarities among all Telugu-speaking people. They ignore the fact that earlier kingdoms, including the princely state of Hyderabad, comprised not only the Telangana region, but also other Telugu and even non-Telugu-speaking areas. To strengthen the Telangana identity,

they have to show that linguistic identity was never strong in Telangana and that the term “Andhra” is something alien to the region. But this necessitates overlooking another fact: that social reformers and leaders of Telangana named the first library they built during Nizam’s rule the Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam; that the organisation that brought together the people of Telangana against the Nizam’s rule was Andhra Maha Sabha; and that many progressive-minded Telugu people in the then Madras presidency sympathised with and supported the Telangana peasant struggle (Prathapa, 2012).

To rationalise their demand for a separate Telangana, the movement’s leaders argue that they are not separatists. All they ask for is a demerger, not separation. This is based on the assumption that there was a political entity called Telangana state before 1956, which was forced to merge with Andhra against the will of its people. This myth hides the fact that what there was before 1956 was Hyderabad state, which included not only the Telangana region, but also Marathi and Kannada-speaking areas, and also that the city of Hyderabad was the capital of Hyderabad state, not the capital of Telangana. It also obscures the fact that the decision to join Andhra to form AP in 1956 was taken in the Hyderabad legislative assembly, and that at that time many in Telangana, including communist party leaders and sympathisers, were all for Vishalandhra. The allegation that Telangana was forced to join Andhra because of manipulation and lobbying is negated by the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) Report, which says, “Important leaders of public opinion in Andhra themselves seem to 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 is primarily for the people of Telangana to take a decision about their future” (<http://www.trchyd.org/>).

The contention that the Telangana region remains underdeveloped and neglected because of neglect and manipulation by Seemandhra politicians and capitalists is vital to the logic of a separate state. So, its advocates have had to reject the report of the Srikrishna Committee (SKC) in January 2011, which showed that many districts in Telangana are comparatively more developed and better irrigated than those in Rayalaseema and the north of coastal Andhra (Rao, 2011, p33-36).

With a partial demolition of the argument of economic underdevelopment by the SKC and some scholars, Telangana ideologues began emphasizing the cultural identity and democratic aspirations of the people to justify their plea

for self-rule.<sup>20</sup> They argue that Telangana’s dialect and culture are looked down upon and that Telangana people are always shown as villains and comedians in mainstream Telugu films, ignoring the fact Telugu films also make fun of the dialects, culture, and people of Rayalaseema and the northern coastal districts. For that matter, one sees people in developed areas considering their dialect and culture superior to others in all linguistic communities. This was so even in the erstwhile state of the Nizams. The Telangana movement’s leaders overlook that the democratization of culture, not political separation, could be a better solution to such problems. Middle-class Anchor As with other identity movements, the Telangana identity also needs the construction of an “us” and “them”. Apart from demonizing the other, the “us” has to be projected as a homogeneous group. To perpetuate the belief that all the people of Telangana have identical interests and views, advocates of a separate state play down internal differences and contradictions. They make light of the truth that a majority of the Muslims in Hyderabad are not very enthusiastic about the idea of a separate Telangana, and that in the recent panchayat polls, the TDP, which is seen as anti-Telangana, won more seats in some districts of the Telangana region than the TRS, which has been pushing for a separate state. No one gives a thought as to why the working class, the peasantry, and the minorities in the Telangana region are not as animated about the movement as the educated urban middle class. While attacking Seemandhra politicians and capitalists, Telangana ideologues have had to see to it that the opportunism and incompetence of their own politicians and the exploitation by Telangana landlords, contractors, and businessmen do not become issues of concern to the common people of the region. To counter the claim that the city of Hyderabad belongs to all Telugu people, the Telangana advocates argue that their attachment to Hyderabad is historical, cultural, emotional and spiritual, while the Seemandhra people have only material concerns and motives. The possibility that even Seemandhra people could be emotionally attached to the city, which has been the capital of AP since 1956, has been left out of the identity discourse. It is also necessary to understate the percentage of Seemandhra people living in Hyderabad city and reject any proposal for a referendum to ascertain if the people of Hyderabad want to be part of a Telangana state. While blaming the coastal capitalists for capturing public land and promoting their industries and real estate businesses, it is essential to omit that some capitalists and real estate businessmen from the Telangana region have also purchased government and agricultural land at cheap rates, and that the difference between the two are of degree, not of probity and

the lack of it. While censuring the regimes of NTR, Chandrababu Naidu and Y S Rajasekhara Reddy as neoliberal, no word can be spoken against Narasimha Rao, “the son of Telangana”, under whom India gave up its socialist garb, openly endorsing and embracing the neo-liberal policies of privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation. True, multistorey buildings, flyovers, amusement parks, and metro lines have destroyed the environment and idyllic surroundings that were once the hallmarks of the city of Hyderabad.

### FORMATION OF TELANGANA STATE

On 30 July 2013, the Congress Working Committee unanimously passed a resolution to recommend the formation of a separate Telangana state. After various stages the bill was placed in the Parliament of India in February 2014. In February, 2014, Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 bill was passed by the Parliament of India for the formation of Telangana state comprising ten districts from north-western Andhra Pradesh. The bill received the assent of the President and published in the Gazette on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2014.

The state of Telangana was officially formed on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2014 Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao was elected as the first chief minister of Telangana, following elections in which the Telangana Rashtra Samithi party secured majority. Hyderabad will remain as the joint capital of both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for a period of 10 years.

### CONCLUSION

In many ways, the identities are similar to the manner in which ethnic identities are created. Glorifying the past; exaggerating concerns about real or imagined deprivations, alienation, and identity; disparaging the other and constructing boundaries to separate “us” from “them” are common to both processes. Like other sub-regional identities, the Telangana identity is constructed partly on fact and partly on opinion, hearsay, prejudice, and false hopes. One need not deny that some of the districts in Telangana are underdeveloped and the people of Telangana lag behind the coastal people in education, employment, and economic development. It is true that politicians did not make efforts to develop all parts of the state and sub-regional imbalances exist. It is also true that adequate efforts were not made to promote positive interaction among the people of the three regions in AP, thus not eliminating feelings of superiority and inferiority. Liberalisation and privatisation have added to insecurity among the educated youth, making them see people from other regions as competitors and enemies.

However, regional identities and movements need not necessarily be the only solutions to the problems that Telangana or any other region faces. Realistically, one cannot expect opportunistic parties and politicians, who look for short-term political gains, to handle sub-regional problems in a mature and humane manner. But it was still possible to address most of the socio-economic and cultural problems if the left parties had succeeded in educating and mobilising the masses in all the three regions to fight for solutions to them. They could have reconciled internal differences and disparities between the people and sub-regions through democratic movements. They could also have communicated to the people that it is not only parts of Telangana, but also the whole of Rayalaseema and parts of coastal Andhra that are underdeveloped, and that there is little that Seemandhra politicians have done for their districts and people. The left parties could have played a proactive role in ensuring positive socio-cultural interactions between the people of different regions, thus teaching them to acknowledge differences and respect the dialects, literatures, and cultures of everyone. They must unite to fight against the problems of poverty, high prices, unemployment, and underdevelopment, all of which have been made worse by the neo-liberal policies pursued by the state and central governments. Unfortunately, instead of looking at issues from a class perspective, the dominant left parties and intellectuals have adopted the logic and language of the regional intelligentsia. The CPI, which once stood for Vishalandhra, changed its stand on the Telangana movement on the ground that all successive governments in AP have overlooked promises made to Telangana and that the people there are so alienated that they cannot be convinced to remain in AP (Reddy, 2013). The CPI (ML) factions such as the CPI(ML), New Democracy and CPI(ML)-Liberation speak more like spokespersons of the Telangana people. By attributing a progressive character to the movement for a separate Telangana, they help in promoting false hopes of being able to solve the basic problems of poverty, landlessness, unemployment, and unbalanced regional development without doing away the capitalist character of the economy.

Finally, 29<sup>th</sup> state of Telangana bill was published in the Gazette on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2014 with 10 districts, after many struggles, the state of Telangana was officially formed on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2014 Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao was elected as the first Chief Minister of Telangana, Hyderabad will remain as the joint capital of both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for a period of 10 years.

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