



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2016; 2(11): 295-299  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 12-09-2016  
Accepted: 13-10-2016

**GSV Prasad**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of History  
National Defence Academy  
Khadakwasla, Pune, India

## **Nehru and linguistic states: The merger and the bifurcation of Telugu state**

**GSV Prasad**

### **Abstract**

The demand for demarcation of provincial boundaries on linguistic basis was not a new proposition in India. In pre-independence days, the Indian National Congress had supported the demand for the linguistic demarcation of provincial boundaries at its annual sessions in 1920, 1927, 1928, and 1937<sup>1</sup>. When Independence finally came Gandhi thought that the states of the new nation should be defined on the basis language<sup>2</sup>. Nehru was also appreciative of the linguistic diversity of India. In an essay of 1937, he wrote that “a living language is a throbbing, vital thing, ever changing, ever growing and mirroring the people who speak and write it”. And “our great provincial languages are no dialects or vernaculars, as the ignorant sometimes called them..... It is axiomatic that the masses can only grow educationally and culturally through the medium of their own language.”<sup>3</sup> That was the reason Congress formed its provincial committees based on language rather than existing provinces for example Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee, Utkal Provincial Congress Committee etc. This division was contrary to the administrative divisions made by the British during the period. So before independence, the commitment of the Congress leadership towards the creation of linguistic provinces (states) was unanimous and firm. But after Independence, the newly-born nation was confronted with more critical challenges like partition of the country on communal lines, the staggering problem of the refugees and the difficulty of integrating the princely states after the lapse of British Paramountcy.

**Keywords:** Bifurcation, Telangana, linguistic, states reorganisation commission, constituent assembly

### **Introduction**

In post-independent India, language was considered as the prime criterion in the reorganization of states. After more than sixty years, the decision to create the Telangana state has proved beyond doubt that language alone cannot be a factor in the creation of new states. Issues like, size, economic disparity (viability), social and cultural differences are equally significant factors and as creation of Telangana has demonstrated can be more pressing factors to sideline the linguistic criteria. In the back drop of many new developments, it is pertinent to discuss the creation of a Telugu-speaking state, its subsequent bifurcation and Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru’s views on the issue of reorganisation of states.

The demand for demarcation of provincial boundaries on linguistic basis was not a new proposition in India. In pre-independence days, the Indian National Congress had supported the demand for the linguistic demarcation of provincial boundaries at its annual sessions in 1920, 1927, 1928, and 1937<sup>[1]</sup>. When Independence finally came Gandhi thought that the states of the new nation should be defined on the basis language<sup>[2]</sup>. Nehru was also appreciative of the linguistic diversity of India. In an essay of 1937, he wrote that “a living language is a throbbing, vital thing, ever changing, ever growing and mirroring the people who speak and write it”. And “our great provincial languages are no dialects or vernaculars, as the ignorant sometimes called them..... It is axiomatic that the masses can only grow educationally and culturally through the medium of their own language<sup>[3]</sup>.” That was the reason Congress formed its provincial committees based on language rather than existing provinces for example Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee, Utkal Provincial Congress Committee etc. This division was contrary to the administrative divisions made by the British during the period. So before independence, the commitment of the Congress leadership towards the creation of linguistic provinces (states) was unanimous and firm. But after Independence, the newly-born nation was confronted with more critical challenges like partition of the country on communal lines, the staggering problem of the refugees and the

**Correspondence**  
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Assistant Professor  
Department of History  
National Defence Academy  
Khadakwasla, Pune, India

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Framing of a new constitution, disturbances in Kashmir, framing and execution of various policies for economic development were other challenges before the new government under the leadership of Pandit Nehru. Hence, in the immediate aftermath of independence, Nehru did not prefer reorganization of the states on the basis of language. He said, the country now faced 'a very critical situation resulting from partition'. New 'disruptionist tendencies had come to the fore'; to check them, one had to underline 'the security and stability of India' [4]. Though Nehru was not completely against the creation of linguistic states, he wanted to postpone the new administrative divisions as much as he could. He believed that India was yet to consolidate itself as a nation in real sense i.e. in terms of strong economy, education, health and in all other important sectors. Partition had been a bitter experience as India had lost more fertile land and less population to Pakistan. The death of Gandhi was yet another blow not only to the Congress party but also for the whole nation. In Gandhi, the nation had lost a father figure who had been instrumental in keeping various sections of society, opinions of people and interest-groups under one roof. So, Nehru felt, creating lingual states would have been detrimental to the unity of the nation as it could have led to further secession. Nehru was more a realist and wanted to prolong the demand as much as possible.

For Nehru, language was not a simple communicative device but a deep cultural symbolic order of a society. His vision of new independent India rested primarily on creating economically viable and politically integrative states with a proper balance maintained between territorial size of different regions and the national sovereignty and unity of the country. This reluctance on Nehru's part was further supported by people like Vallabhbhai Patel and C. Rajagopalachari. Rajaji insisted that 'further fissiparous forces' had to be checked forthwith [5]. In order to subside or reduce the intensity of public demand for the creation of linguistic states, Nehru resorted to popular weapon in the hands of the government i.e. 'Commission-ism'. It all started with the appointment of a committee of jurists (Dhar Committee) by Constituent Assembly which recognized the force of popular sentiment—the strong appeal that the demand for linguistic sentiments made on many of our countrymen—but concluded that that in the prevailing unsettled conditions 'the first and last need of India at the present moment is that it should be made a nation....' [6]. The demand for the creation of lingual states was seen here as an obstacle to the idea of nation building. It favoured reorganization of states on the basis of administrative convenience rather than linguistic considerations [7].

The outcome of the Dhar Committee report was not appreciated in many quarters and there was widespread discontentment among large sections of the Constituent Assembly. To calm down the discontentment among people, a fresh committee consisting of Nehru, Patel and P. Sitaramayya popularly known as JVP committee was formed. The Committee revoked the seal of approval that the Congress had once put on the principle of linguistic provinces. It argued that 'language was not only a binding force but also a separating one'. Now, when the 'primary consideration must be the security, unity and economic prosperity of India', 'every separatist and disruptive

tendency should be rigorously discouraged' [8]. Primarily the overall objective of all the commissions including JVP Committee was to slow down the things for some time and drag the situation as long as it could. Nehru's reluctance for the creation of linguistic states was temporary and he knew it very well that in the long-run, formation of linguistic states could not be prevented. In the prevailing scenario, his reservations compelled him to keep his ideas of reorganization of states on linguistic basis on hold.

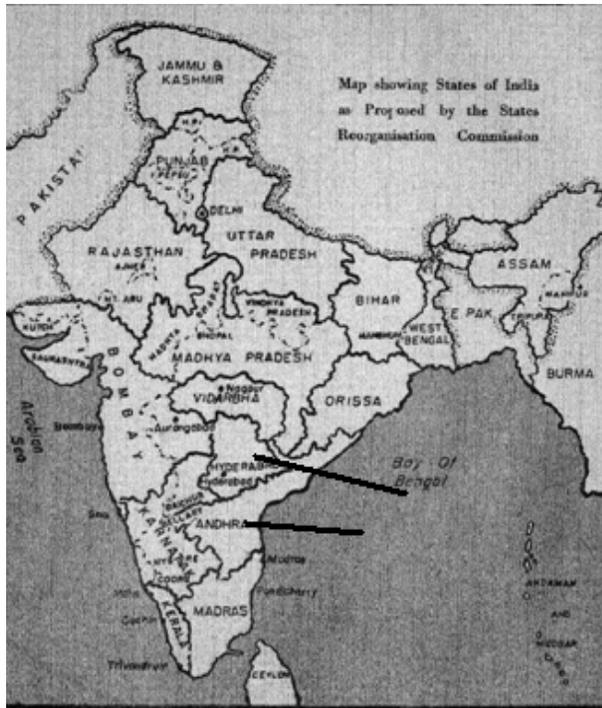
The JVP Report was followed by popular movements for states re-organisation all over the country which persisted with varying degrees of intensity till 1960. The Telugu - speakers in Madras province formed the Andhra Pradesh Committee to have a Telugu Speaking State. Nehru conceded the legitimacy of this request, but also regarded the re-organisation of territories as dangerous as it could lead to disunity. There was a very real danger that the political system could become so fragmented as to forestall the emergence of a powerful India. He and his colleagues therefore delayed action on the re-organisation of the states. However, in face of widespread agitation for creation of states on linguistic basis, Nehru was forced to change his mind. On 19 October 1952 a popular freedom fighter, Potti Sriramulu undertook a fast unto death over the demand for a separate Andhra and died after fifty eight days [9] (October 19 to December 15, 1952). His death was followed by three days of rioting, demonstrations, hartals and violence all over Andhra [10]. The government immediately gave in and conceded the demand for a separate state of Andhra which finally came into existence 1<sup>st</sup> October 1953 with Kurnool as its capital [11].

Probably Nehru had an inkling of the chain of events that followed Sriramulu's death. Contrary to the popular belief that Nehru conceded the demand for separate Andhra only after the death of Potti Sriramulu, on as early as 12<sup>th</sup> December 1952 (three days prior to the death of Potti Sriramulu), he had hinted in a letter to Rajaji that "the time had come to accept the Andhra Demand. 'Otherwise complete frustration will grow among the Andhras, and we will not be able to catch up with it' [12]." Had Nehru announced, the creation of Andhra state on the same day, the death of Potti Sriramulu could have been avoided. As understood from his letter to Rajaji, it goes without saying, that his handling of the Andhra issue was largely coloured by Rajaji's opinion on the matter. The success of the Andhra struggle encouraged other linguistic groups to agitate for their own States or for redrawing of their boundaries on a linguistic basis.

The growing popular demands for the creation of more linguistic states forced the Union Government to appoint States Reorganisation Commission on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1953 (SRC) to make recommendations in regard to the broad principles which should govern the solution of linguistic problem. The SRC was appointed under the Chairmanship of Justice Fazal Ali, the then Governor of Orissa and with two other members H.N. Kunzru, member of Council of States, and K.M. Panikkar, the then Ambassador of India in Egypt and the Commission was required to submit its report to the Government of India not later than 30<sup>th</sup> June 1955. This period was subsequently extended to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1955 [13]. The Commission recommended the reorganization of the whole country into sixteen states and three centrally administered areas (as shown in the map). However, the government did not accept these recommendations in toto.

While accepting Commission's recommendation to do away with the four-fold distribution of states as provided under the original Constitution, it divided the country into 14 states and 6 union territories under the States Reorganization Act 1956 [14].

#### Map showing States of India as proposed by the States Reorganisation Commission [15]



The SRC proposed for the creation of sixteen states including creation of Hyderabad and Vidarbha. But the Nehru Government did not accept the proposal in toto and recommended to create only fourteen states excluding Vidarbha and Hyderabad. Genesis of the problems of Telangana can be traced back to this point. The SRC was not in complete favour of merging Telugu speaking areas of state of Hyderabad with the proposed state of Andhra. The Commission proposed that Hyderabad should be reconstituted on the following lines:

- Apart from the districts of Raichur and Gulbarga, the Marathwada districts should also be detached from the Hyderabad State.
- The residuary State which should continue to be known as Hyderabad should consist of the Telugu-speaking districts of the present State of Hyderabad, namely Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Warangal (including Khammam), Karimnagar, Adilabad, Nizamabad, Hyderabad and Medak, along with Bidar district, and the Munagala enclave in the Nalgonda district belonging to the Krishna district of Andhra.
- The residuary State of Hyderabad might unite with Andhra after the general elections likely to be held in or about 1961, if by a two-thirds majority the legislature of the Hyderabad State expresses itself in favour of such unification.
- The Andhra State should for the time being continue as it is, subject to certain minor adjustments [16].

Finally, going against the recommendations of the SRC, the Telugu-speaking areas of Hyderabad State were merged with Andhra State and thereby the State of Andhra Pradesh came into existence on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956. In fact the merger was outcome of a meeting that was held on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1956 at Hyderabad House in New Delhi when the States of Andhra and Hyderabad existed as two separate units. This meeting was popularly known as 'Gentlemen's Agreement' represented by prominent personalities of both States including Chief Ministers [17]. The then Chief Minister of Hyderabad State, Burgula Ramakrishna Rao wrote a letter to U N Dhebar, the President of Indian National Congress a few months before merging of Telangana with Andhra State where he stated that "my estimate of the views of the people of Telangana is that the people by majority would desire Telangana to remain a separate state. There is a strong section of the people holding the other view, that is in favour of Vishalandhra, but the majority is decidedly in favour of retaining Telangana as a separate province as recommended by the SRC [18]".

The merger was agreed upon more or less at 'representatives-level' in Hyderabad House, New Delhi without taking the view of common people into consideration. The 'Gentlemen's Agreement' promised a separate development programme for the people of Telangana as it was backward on account of Nizam's rule. As the leadership of new State of Andhra Pradesh failed to keep this promise, there was a movement in 1968 for a separate state of Telangana which was defused by making P V Narasimha Rao (from Telangana) as Chief Minister. In fact, the seeds of break-up were sown during the formation of Andhra Pradesh itself. Was this merger a political calculation or an emotional decision based lingual and cultural feeling? Gautam Pingle cited that with 30 per cent of the vote in Andhra (1955) and 31 per cent in Telangana (1952) in Communist hands was the Congress concerned of the outcome in the coming general election in 1957? After Avadi meeting where the Congress adopted socialism as a credo, Moscow's new friendliness and the experience of defeating the Andhra Communists in 1955, did the Congress think merger would eliminate the Communist threat once and for all from both the states? So, did the party's political argument eventually tip the balance? [19]

There is a strong possibility that motive of the of Congress in merging two Telugu speaking areas was to make a large vote bank in the newly-created state in order to reduce the influence of Communists. It is also likely that Nehru wasn't quite supportive of the idea of splitting Hyderabad. On the issue of splitting Hyderabad State, in 1954, Nehru had opined that it was "injurious to Hyderabad and would upset the whole structure of South India". "It would", he added, "be very unwise to do anything that would destroy the administrative continuity that has been achieved in Hyderabad after so much effort [20]". But again as early as 21 December 1955, he told the parliament that he would still like the State of Hyderabad not to be disintegrated, but "circumstances have been too strong for me. I accept them [21]". Thus, the reason for change in Congress stand was to gain political advantage. When Nehru accepted the fact that the creation of linguistic states was unavoidable, he decided to make the most out of it, which might perhaps, had led to the merging of Telangana with Andhra.

As a whole, the linguistic division of India has worked relatively well for India. There has been friction at the

edges, conflicts about towns and villages on the border, but had these states not been created, the conflicts would have been much more serious. In the context of the challenges of the 1950s and 1960s, the creation of linguistic states was an effective solution. But must it be a permanent one? Do the new challenges of inclusive development and good governance call for a further redrawing of the map of the Republic? That is the question raised by the movement for a Telangana state. Those who articulated these demands do so, on the grounds that they represented populations whose livelihood needs and cultural aspirations were denied dignified expression in the excessively large states in which they were part of.

Language ceased to be prominent factor in the demand for the creation of new states in the era of post lingual state formation. Throughout recent history, the Telugu people have been divided: the Telangana Telugus had lived for nearly 400 years under Muslim rule while the Andhra Telugus had been ruled for 150 years by the British. Fiscal imbalances between the regions, fears of the Telangana educated class at loss of employment opportunities and the general uncertainty of the Telangana people who had lived under invasion/liberation of the Nizam's State by the Union and consequent military rule for four years (1948-52) - all contributed to a general uneasiness. Even the differences in vocabulary and accents divided and identified the two Telugu populations, as did their social and other everyday practices [22]. Pacification of Telangana region after 1968 separatist movement led to the Jai Andhra Movement in 1972 opposing *Mulki* rules and demand for a separate Andhra State. This was an opportunity for both regions to bifurcate the State peacefully into two. A Constitutional Amendment [23] and a presidential Order on Public Services, 1975, [Government of India, 1975] were issued to protect Telangana's legitimate employment opportunities. Employment guarantees renewed in 1969-75 again proved as useless as the earlier ones and successive government committees revealed this [24]. A detailed report was issued by the State Government on the implementation of the Presidential Order and the consequent G.O.Ms. 610 [25]. The successive Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Congress Governments accepted the recommendations of this Report and a Legislature Committee was set up to monitor and ensure their effective implementation. A study of these reports indicates that the will to be fair was simply not there which was acknowledged by the Legislature in its attempt to correct the distortions of the past and ensure justice.

Though the major objective of SRC was to propose for the creation of linguistic states, the commission was very careful while making such recommendations. It had taken into account other aspects like education and economic backgrounds of the region etc. For example as far as merger of Telangana region with Andhra State was concerned, the SRC expressed the following apprehensions. "One of the principal causes of opposition of Vishalandhra also seems to be the apprehension felt by the educationally backward people of Telangana that they may be swamped and exploited by the more advanced people of the coastal areas. In the Telangana districts outside the city of Hyderabad, education is woefully backward. The result is that a lower qualification than in Andhra is accepted for public services. The real fear of the people of Telangana is that if they join Andhra they will be unevenly placed in relation to the people of Andhra and in this partnership the major partner

will derive all the advantages immediately, while Telangana, owing to its less developed status may be converted into a colony by the more-enterprising coastal Andhra [26]." Thus, there was disintegration in integration itself.

Successive governments failed to clear the apprehensions of people of Telangana region. The separatist tendency of the people was only pushed under the carpet and it didn't completely disappear. This issue resurfaced again in 2009 with K Chandrasekhar Rao under Telangana Rashtra Samithi banner went on for indefinite hunger-strike on 29 November, 2009 demanding creation of Telangana. The Centre budged and came out with an announcement on 9 December, 2009 that it was "initiating the process for formation of Telangana state". But the Centre announced on 23 December, 2009 that it was putting Telangana issue on hold. This fanned protests across Telangana with some students ending their lives for a separate state. The Centre then constituted a five-member Committee on 3 February, 2010, headed by former judge Srikrishna, to look into statehood demand. The Committee submitted its report to the Centre on 30 December, 2010. Telangana region witnessed a series of agitations like the *Million March*, *Chalo Assembly* and *Sakalajanula Samme* (general strike) in 2011-12 while MLAs belonging to different parties quit their membership of the House [27]. And finally, under Andhra Pradesh re-organisation Act 2014, on 2 June 2014, the State of Telangana emerged as 29<sup>th</sup> and second Telugu state of Union of India.

It was primarily as a mark of protest against internal colonization of Andhra and a perceived sense of discrimination that the Telangana people searched for an alternate identity divorced from their co-linguists. The people of the new state are hopeful that they will have better employment opportunities and the new government will work hard to fulfill the aspirations of the people by improving their living conditions through ameliorative measures. The government is expected to preserve the unique identity of Telangana in matters of its culture, traditions, art, architecture, theatre, folk etc. On the other hand the residual Andhra Pradesh that has its economy in debt after the bifurcation (because major contributing factor to GDP for the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh came from Hyderabad alone which is now part of Telangana) and has a burden to start everything right from the scratch, invest in infrastructure in form of a new Capital city to Legislative Assembly and a Secretariat. It is going to be a herculean task ahead for Mr. Naidu to manage running the new state with the scant resources available at his disposal. Riding on the slogan, '*Seemandhra into Singapore*', Naidu promised a world class capital city and a coastal industrial belt. He also promised to set up a software industry like the one at Hyderabad. All these new projects involve a lot of government land, which again is a daunting task considering the topography of the new Andhra state. A major portion of the land lies in the deltaic region of Krishna and Guntur, where the new capital is expected to come up. Many people would not like to part away with their land, given their skyrocketing price. It needs to be seen how Mr. Naidu manages SEZ's or whether he will come up with public sector industries.

There is something uncanny about Telugu states being created in 1953 and 2014. Both were political decisions taken after their leaders adopted fast-on-to-death strategy to

compel the central government to give in to their demands. While in the first instance, the leader on fast sacrificed his life for creation of Andhra, Chandrasekhar Rao not only successfully coerced the government to create Telangana but also managed to form a government in the state sometime later. (The same techniques have been adopted in other states but without much success, for e.g., Vidarbha) The success of Telangana has again raised the question of reorganisation of states in India. Due to regional disparities and unequal development, marginalized people in other states like Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Harit Pradesh in UP, Gorkhaland in Bengal, Kosala in Odisha are clamoring for separate statehood. There is a general expectation that smaller units of administration would make the government more accessible to the people, make better use of resources and would work more sincerely towards preservation of distinct local cultural identities. But at the same time, if unequal development and discrimination are the criteria for creation of new states, then where should one draw the line? Regional disparities and cultural differences do exist despite the creation of smaller states.

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