

Politics of Identity and Redrawing the State Boundaries in India: An Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This article will examine the idea of new states/provinces in India. How India created 16 new states on ethno-lingual, and other lines and accommodate the ethnic groups. The case study of India is focussing on the different factors; including constitutional setup and role of different political parties of India in making of the new state. The following three basic questions investigate the paper's perspective.

Key Words

Re-demarcation, Sub-nationalism, Re-organization, Indian constitution, Ethnic, Identity Politics group, Indian states.

First; what has been the basis of demands for the creation of new states in India? Second; what are the main hurdles in the reorganization of state and what urged the re-demarcation of states in India? Third; what has been the stance of political Parties about the creation of new states in Indian state?

Introduction

The world is known as a global village today. The political system based on ethnicity is still persisting in certain forms. The different aspects of identity in the contemporary South Asian context are caste, religion, language, ethnicity, gender, tribes and politics of the region. These overlaps might create some pluralistic and complex social groups, with different markers and dimensions. These identity markers such as gender, caste, tribe, religion, and language, etc. give birth to visible boundaries. These boundaries differentiate the groups of people from one another. Therefore, some strategies were initiated which were directed towards achieving their political goals in the defined boundaries. For instance, if one powerful group is dominant in another group, the identity crisis starts in the shape of economic disparity and political recognition. (Vira, 2006) If the weak group has a fear that their identity is not secure they will design the strategies to secure it. Thus, in order to overcome the identity crisis, various marginalized groups get support sometimes on ethnic grounds, distribution of resources and sometimes on socio-economic backwardness of the areas. (Zulifqar, 2012)

The regional identity rises because one group has complete control of resources and revenue. The other group fears that their identity is being threatened. Because of the feeling of insecurity and suppression, the sense of grouping and fighting against the dominant group rises. The feeling of deprivation provides impetuous for the oppressed group to organize and save their identity. India and Pakistan had witnessed many examples of these kinds of ethnic and regional identity issues. India is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Since its very inception, the state of India began with dual and a complex vision of identity. (Rehman, 2010) Self-assertion or identities of various ethnic, lingual and cultural groups are the major challenges faced by the state of India since its creation in 1947. The political recognition of culture and language, inter-provincial migrations, allocation of resources, provincial and regional autonomy in the forms of new provinces are the main issues for which the nationalist movements are launched in India.

The Federation of India comprised of 29 provinces and six territories, administrated by the federal government directly as one national territory. There are more than 1600 languages and dialects spoken in India. After a short time of independence, India started the re-demarcation of

the state boundaries on a linguistic basis, which remained all in the state's control. After the independence of India, the task before Congress leaders were to weld a truncated territorial fabric (which would be characterized by enormous ethnic diversity) into a single unified nation-state. (Chadda, 2010) India created more than sixteen new states or provinces after its independence. Ethnic paradigm was the dominant basis for the creation of new states in India from 1947- 2000. However, the paradigm was slightly shifted from ethnic lines to economic, geographical, and administrative grounds after 2000.

The Linguistic Province Commission was appointed in 1948 to reorganize the states on the lingual basis. This act caused a chain reaction of linguistic state movements. (Villiers, 2012) In India, the process of creation of new states is not yet over. The basis of demand for a new state slightly shifted from linguistic line to economic justification and political and administrative basis. In fact, the creation of the new state on ethnic line has drawn India in to civil war, and the creation of new states is unfinished business for India but on the other hand, it is a positive thing and provides flexibility in the Indian federation. (Villiers, 2012) The state of India, the sheer size of the population, owing to its territory, and the diversity of its people faced significant challenges to Indian past independence consolidation. (Talwar and Doyle, 2012) The populations and the size of Indian states reflect the complexity of Indian federation. For instance, Rajasthan is a larger state and it is 90 times larger than the smallest state of Goa. Likewise, the population density of West Bengal is 903 people per sq. km. and Arunachal Pradesh has 13 persons per sq. km. In fact, the reorganization of states on the ethnic basis was the only solution to accommodate the ethnically diverse country of India. (Talwar and Doyle, 2012)

The Rationale for the Creation of New Provinces or the New States

There can be certain rationale for the creation of new states or provinces in the world. There are many states of the world which have successfully re-demarcated the province or state on the ethnic or linguistic line, on geographical grounds or administrative, and on cultural and economic rationales. The most dynamic example is India, which had re-demarcated 16 new states or provinces both on a lingual or ethnic and administrative basis. There is another example of Germany which had successfully demarcated the state and created the namely Lander province on purely geographical line. The Philippines is another vibrant example which created 30 new provinces, all on cultural, lingual, geographical, administrative and geographical lines. Likewise, Nigeria, South Africa, Iran Ethiopia, India, Afghanistan, Switzerland and the United States of America reorganized their states on similar grounds.

To create a federal region is one of the major challenges faced by a young federation in the world. With the creation of a new region or states, there are generally two types of competing objectives at play: (a) to protect the rights of an ethnic group (b) and to fulfill the desire to limit a maximum number of states for the economic, financial resources, administrative affordability. If we look upon the Historiography of re-demarcation of states soon after their inception of states. South Africa, India, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the Philippines are some vibrant examples. (Villiers, 2012)

The present study is focused on identifying the factors behind the emergence and development of issues of states in India. There are some political and constitutional links to the creation of any new state in India as a federal state. This study also reveals the stances of different national and regional political parties of India regarding the creation of new states in India. The rationalization of new states and the changes in the constitution in case of creation of new states are also discussed which is the main theme of this paper. The study also investigate how constitutional setup and political parties give favor to create any new state in India.

Re-demarcation of States in India

India is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual country of South Asia. The states of India are diverse not only in terms of compositions, size, and populations but also in terms of economic ability, territory, and infrastructure resources and ethnically. (Villiers, 2012) India is an ethnically diverse country with spoken over sixteen hundred languages/dialects and more than two thousand ethnic groups. After the independence, M.K Gandhi himself wrote that the Indian government "should hurry up with the re-organization of linguistic provinces" (Ghani). From the very beginning "ethnic conflict" was a great challenge for the leaders of the ethnically diverse Indian state. They tried their best to create structures, processes, and institutions to deal fairly and effectively with ethnic demands and conflicts. (Phadmanabhan, 2011) In December 1952, Nehru government focused to persuade the protestors, who were demanding the formation of Andhra Pradesh state. This led to the formation of state reorganization act in 1953. (Phadmanabhan, 2011)

The great sacrifice of Potti Sriramulu (a follower of M.K Gandhi) will always be remembered in the history of linguistic reorganization of Indian states made in October 1952. He began a fast-unto-death in demanding a separate state for Telugu speaking population by carving out the province of Madras. For 56 days without food, his dramatic death was taken place which used as an instrument in the ethno-linguistic reorganization of states. (Ghani,

2015) In August, 1953; the states reorganization commission was established by Nehru, with Justice Fazi Ali, K.M Panikkar and Hridaynath Kunzru as members to examine the question of the reorganization of the state. During the two year's work, the commission faced with demonstrations, hunger strikes and agitations. Eventually, in November 1956 the states reorganization act was passed by the Indian Parliament which eventually implemented in the form of 'states reorganization act of 1956.' Under this act, 14 states and 5 union territories were setups on the basis of ethnolinguistics and regional identities. This act followed a chain reaction and demanded more new states and separate state within the Indian union on ethnolinguistic grounds.

For instance, in 1960, Gujarati and Marathi speaking populations started agitation in Bombay, and the Bombay Reorganization act was passed and Gujarati and Maharashtra states were created on linguistics lines. Similarly, in 1966, Haryana was created on linguistic lines by dividing Punjab. In the case of Northeast, the Naga insurgency split out and in 1962 the new state of Nagaland was created by detaching three districts of Assam. The creation of Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura in the northeast was taken place in the 1970s on a similar basis. However, the demands of the re-demarcation of new states did not discard there. In west Bengal, Koch Rajbongshis of Cooch Behar and Gorkhas of Darjeeling raised the voices for a separate state of Kamtapur and Garkhand/Gorkhaland respectively. In Andhra Pradesh the case of Telangana and in Assam the case of Bados was prominent. (Ganguly, 2003)

Brief History of Reorganization of Indian states 1956-2000

The history of the reorganization of Indian states divided into three phases. The first Reorganization of Indian states occurred in 1956, second in 1971-1987 and third in 1999-2000. Starting with the First Reorganization of Indian states which occurred in 1956 as Andhra Pradesh became a separate state by merging part of Hyderabad and Andhra. Bombay became a separate state by merging Kutch and Saurashtra forming a union. Kerala was formed by detaching part of Madras and Travancore union. Madhya Pradesh was created as a separate state by merging Vindhya Pradesh union and Bhopal. The Mayor state was created by merging Mysore Coorg and some part of the former state of Bombay, Madras, and Hyderabad. Patiala and East Punjab state were added into Punjab state. The state Reorganization act did not agree to the formation of a separate Punjabi speaking state. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was the party of Sikhs in Punjab and launched a mass agitation and demanded Punjabi speaking Punjabi province and Hindi-speaking Punjab and Haryana. Prime Minister Nehru declared that we are not in a position to deal with such domestic issue as we have threatened with border war by Pakistan. The president Akali Dal, Sant Fateh Singh refused and suspended the strike by affirming that "the country is dear but the Punjabi Suba (State) is dearer". After Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri assured Sant Fateh Singh that after a border dispute with Pakistan they would be given their new state. Hence, Punjab a new state of India comes into being on September 18, 1966, under the Punjab reorganization act no.31. (Phadmanabhan, 2011)

After a decade of the first reorganization, it became clear that language was not a suitable criterion for the re-demarcation of states. The solution was found in the 1970s. In the second Reorganization of state (1971-1987), Himachal Pradesh formed a separate state on January 25, 1971; and Meghalaya, Manipur, and Tripura on January 21, 1972. On April 26, 1975; Sikkim's Kingdom as a state joined the Indian Union. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh became new states on February 20, 1987; and likewise, this was followed by the formation Goa on May 30, 1987. (Ghani, 2015) In November 2000, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under Prime Minister A.B Vajpayee, formed three new states in Northern India. Kumaon and Garhwal/Garhwal, the hill region of Uttar Pradesh became the state of Uttarakhand on November 1, 2000; Jharkhand on November 15, 2000, was carved out of south Bihar. These three newly created states are culturally different and less developed compared to other states. (Chadda, 2002)

The case of Telangana is very recent which demanded a separate state. Leader of the (TRS) Telangana Rashtra Samiti, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, went on 11 days fasting to demand Telangana as a separate state with the capital of Hyderabad. The socioeconomic deprivation and political reorganization were two driving forces behind Telangana case. Andhra and Telangana speak the same language but actually, the economic dimension was the bone of contention between them. Telangana became the 29th state of India on February 18, 2014, by carving out from Andhra Pradesh. On December 5, 2013, the union cabinet approved the Telangana bill prepared by the group of ministers which was presented to the parliament. Eventually, Telangana as the 29th state of Indian was created on February 18, 2014. (Mehra, 2014)

Telangana was created purely on an economic basis. In fact, the paradigm was shifted from ethno-lingual lines to the economic, geographical and administrative line as from 1956 to 2000. As Indian states reorganized on ethnolinguistics and regional identity basis but after 2000, it was shifted to economic or administrative lines. Three important factors can explain the shift in Indian leadership's demands after the reorganization of States. First, culture, geographical differences and regional identity appeared to be a better and valid basis for the political

representation and administrative division. Second, smaller states were to be proposed on the grounds of development and good governance rather on the cultural and linguistic proposal, as was the case in first two phases of the reorganization of states (1956-1987). Third, some communities have also been demanding for their own “territorial homeland, not on the cultural or lingual basis rather on the basis of their dialects. This shift shows the flexibility of Indian state in this regard on one hand and the role of various factors behind such demands on the other hand. (Kuma, 2004)

Indian Constitution and Re-demarcation of States

India is a sovereign, socialist and democratic republic comprising of the union of states. It has a parliamentary form of government. Indian’s constitution was adopted by the constituent assembly on 26th of November 1949 and finally came into force on January 26, 1950. The parliament of India has two houses; council of states (Rajya Sabha) and the House of People (Lok Sabha). (Phadmanabhan, 2011) The official language issue in India was resolved by a compromise which retained English as a link language. The 14 states were created according to the 1956 Act and today 29 states are recognized with 14 languages recognized by the Indian constitution forming the total of 22 official languages. The constitution of India remained ambivalent and ambiguous when it dealt with the organization of diversity. In the chapter on rights, the Indian constitution firmly endorsed the respect of diversity. It conferred the power to recognize diversity on the union. India has approached the issue of diversity by two basic principles: accommodation and asymmetry:

India as an independent country, adopted a parliamentary, federal, democratic constitution on 26th of January 1950. (Chadda, 2002) Constitution provision also endowed parliament with the power to alter the existing one and create new states. Article 2 of Indian constitution decreed that “parliament may by law admit into the union, or establish new states on such condition and terms as it thinks fit”. Article 3 of the Indian constitution “may by law, form a new state by separation of territory from any new state or by uniting two or more states or parts of states.” Additionally, “it may increase the area of any state diminish the area of any state alter the boundaries of any state” and alter the name of any state.” (Chadda, 2002).

Indian constitution provided a very flexible phenomenon for the re-demarcation of states. House of Lok Sabha had a sole authority to re-demarcate the boundaries of the state where it was needed and change the name of the states without consulting the second chamber of the parliament. The linguistic Province Commission was appointed in 1948 to reorganize the states on linguistic lines. (Villiers, 2012) The House of People (Lok Sabha) has a sole authority to create new states, combines the different states, alter the existing states, change the names of any states without the approval of the second House of Parliament Rajya Sabha, or the legislature of the states’ or the government or affected populations by alteration. The re-demarcation of states is required that the president of India must recommend to the Federal Parliament a bill in which re-structuring of states is proposed. Neither the federal parliament nor the president is bound by the opinion, views, and comments of the state’s legislature regarding the re-organization of states boundaries. (Villiers, 2012)

Constitutional Provisions

There are many constitution provisions available in the Indian constitution for the creation of new states, and re-demarcation of states. Articles 2-4 of the Indian constitution mainly deal with these issues. Only a simple majority is needed in the two Houses of Parliament, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the creation of new states and changing the boundaries of existing states. Only central government or president have sole authority to introduce a bill for this purpose and the states also have to be consulted which will be affected. (State, 2015)

However, this constitution followed by the following features when the legislature of the affected states are being referred for this matter; (1) Indian constitution does not contain any specific time period to send the decision back to the center from state legislature (2) the central government have the right to specify the time period with referring to the matter (3) constitution does not contain any information that the state legislature has to agree to proposed alteration/creation of states. It is the parliament who passes a bill to re-organize the state even the affected states accept the proposal or reject (4) the first schedule of the constitution contain the names of the states. Similarly, the fourth schedule of the constitution contains the lists of seats of each state in Rajya Sabha. Any law regarding the creation of new states will affect these two schedules of the constitution. However, article 4(2) of the Indian constitution mention that no law altering or creating any new states will be considered a constitutional amendment. (State, 2015)

These kinds of provisions in the Indian constitution were created when the sovereignty and security of India were at stake. However, over the year, threats of secessionist politics have been reduced. People almost all over the country permeably remarked that they are the part of the greater Indian union. (State)It is the beauty of Indian

federation that it would allow the state to encourage cultural distinctness and accommodate ethnic plurality without allowing any ethnic group to dominate at the federal or national level. (Ganguly)

Indian Political Parties and Re-organization of the States

By the last two decades in India, the party system has federalized and it threw up some new challenges for governance even it gave more space to diversity. Regional political parties have captured power in many states and their regional political parties have played a noteworthy role in the consolidation of federal democracy. While the old established socio-cultural diversity still persists, but it is less threatening than the growing income disparity, which is generated by sectors of economic activity and rapid growth of regions. This thing changed the dimension of demanding of new states from language or cultural lines to economic purposes. (Arora)

Congress, the biggest and one of the oldest political parties of India; has always favored the creation of Telangana province. (Telangana)The political parties system was evolved along with the constitutional provision to manage conflicts and ethnic differences in post-independence India. The congress was the largest democratic “umbrella” organization and it naturally emerged as a dominant political party after independence for two decades. Although, India has adopted a multi-party system; by mid-1960s and onwards, the regional parties were able to challenge the congress by using religious, ethnolinguistic and regional sentiments in the state elections. In 1977 elections, Congress party lost power for the first time at the center, and the small regional parties by making alliances set a government at the centre. For the next three decades, the regional parties and leaders raised. The emergence of right-wing Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), the gradual weakling of the congress both organizationally and politically and the formation of weak government at center contributed a great deal to spend and outbreak of ethnic conflict in India. (Ganguly, 2003)

The Indian national party (INP) was the dominant political party in the Indian constitution and supportive to create the new states on cultural and the ethnolinguistic basis. (Villiers, 2012)

The following factors instigate the creation or demand of new states;

1. ‘Ethnic group’ having fear of assimilation or cultural dilution and unfulfilled national aspiration may spark ethnic conflict or political mobilization.
2. Process of modernization by including the large scale of population migrations.
3. Unequal development or economic disparity in terms of government jobs, facilities, development, etc.
4. Political factors or political reorganization in terms of cultural and language industry etc. (Ganguly,2003)

Telangana Rashtra Samithi, (TRS) was a regional political party of India and had always favorable stance towards the creation of new states in India. TRS has always been demanding Telangana as a separate state till 2001. It finally got the 29th state of India i.e. Telangana on February 18, 2014. The congress has been historically opposed to splitting the Andhra Pradesh state but at the end changed her stance and favored the Telangana state. In the 1999 election, BJP also pledged in its manifesto for the formation of Telangana as a separate state but couldn't do so after coming into power as its coalition partner the TDP (Telangana Desam Party) was not agreed. As the Telangana Desam Party was against the creation of new provinces in India, therefore, it disfavoured the creation of Telangana as a separate state in 2001. (Mehra, 2014)

Conclusion

India had remained a strong democratic country beside its heterogeneous cultural diversity; it has been able to resolve the cultural, language and regional identity issues with the creation of new states. The main factor behind more provinces in India was their constitutional setup. India has a very flexible mechanism as only simple majority needed to alter, create and change the name of any new state in only Lok Sabha. It is not necessary to consult even with the respective states.

In India, the role of political parties was also noteworthy in terms of creating any state. Indian National Party was a dominant political party in the first two decades of post-partition. INP always favored the creation of new states on ethnic, lingual and cultural lines. Indian political parties are more stable and more practical. They always practically favored and also made efforts to create new states on the ethnic paradigm. The Post-2000 paradigm was slightly shifted on economic and administrative lines from ethnic and lingual basis. The creation of Telangana was on an economic basis as Telangana and Andhra Pradesh were both Telugu speaking regions.

On the contrary, in India, neither the Rajya Sabha or the President nor the effected state would have any objection on the decision of Lok Sabha regarding the creation of new States. A bill to amend by an only simple majority in Lok Sabha is enough to re-demarcate of any state. Another thing which strengthened the Indian constitution is the non-intervention of the Indian Army in political and constitutional spheres of India.

In short, it was not an easy task for the Indian government to accommodate ethnic groups on such large extent as Indian state is one of the most ethnically diverse states of South Asia which contain more than 1800 languages and many ethnic groups.

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