



International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)

A Peer-Reviewed Monthly Research Journal

ISSN: 2394-7969 (Online), ISSN: 2394-7950 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3144 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3145 (Print)

UGC Approved Journal (SL NO. 47520)

Volume-III, Issue-V, June 2017, Page No. 219-226

Published by: Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.irjims.com>

Reorganisation of States in India: Exploring the Factors

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the emerging demands for new states in India. In the process an effort has been made to find out the reasons that led to the rise of such demands. Among all the factors explored, the most significant has been the lack of balanced development of the regions. The paper also focuses on the response of the union and the state governments towards the new states demands. The later part of the paper undertakes the study of two sets of demands- for and against reorganisation of states.

Key words: Bifurcation, new states, regions, state reorganisation, territorial homeland

Modern democratic states house both the majority and minority communities and the decisions are taken by the states by keeping in view both the communities. Many a times, however, decision taken in the interest of majority induces a feeling of deprivation amongst the minority resulting in agitation claiming their rights and one form of such agitation is demand for their own territorial homeland. Such a state of affairs represent an ironical situation where on one hand, the units of states in order to compete with the economic and political forces at international level are integrating and on the other hand, people with their ethnic, cultural and economic gear try to break away. Louise Tillin (Tillin.2013a) observes that the state borders as a form of institution has been underpinned by the patterns of social, political and economic power.

India, thus being a state with diversity has always been under a tight scrutiny of various scholars all over the world. There has always prevailed a doubt about the success of its democracy. There had been uncertainty whether it would be able to cement the diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and regional differences prevailing across the Indian state. Asha Sarangi contends that the 'political categories of nation, state, community and identity are situated within the thick discourse of the states reorganisation process'(Sarangi.2009). Keeping in view the interests of different sections of society, the framers of our constitution had opted for a very sensitive approach towards the issue.

Indian State witnessed bifurcation of its territory on religious basis in 1947 that led to the creation of Pakistan. After partition all efforts were made to keep the units of the state that included British Indian Provinces and Princely states intact. With this aim, the framers of the Constitution went for a centralised federal structure with more powers vested with the union.

India's federal structure is a unique example where the state has been incessantly fiddling with its inner boundaries to uphold its 'unity in diversity'. There has been an upsurge in the demand for the creation of new states that can be witnessed in every corner of the Indian state. Though such demands have not been new ones as the history of India shows ample of such examples where the regions had been demanding separate statehood within the union. The change that has surfaced now is the shift in the nature of these demands. Initially the reorganization was insisted on the basis of language and ethnicity but later the claims were mainly focused on the ground of administrative efficiency and better economic development. In other words unequal development of regions, unequal access to political power and introduction of economic reforms became new premise for such demands. It can be argued that today the regions are not merely political, linguistic or cultural constructs but also possess economic connotation and denotation. Narang (Narang,1995) calls the rise of regional identities as a paradox of modernisation as regional mobilisations have taken place during the period of intense state building, urbanisation, rapid development and modernisation.

The significant aspect of the demand for new states is that it throws a test for the established power structures. It illustrates the thrust on the part of a particular section of society to have better political representation and more claim over the resources which they consider belong to them. Thus by reorganisation of state boundaries efforts are made on the part of a region to get itself upgraded to the level of a state where they would be enjoying the powers and facilities which they assume they were deprived off. The whole process of struggle, however, involves continuous negotiation on the part of minorities in particular and regions in general with the centre on one hand and state on the other.

In 1951 there were 27 states in India which were classified into Part A, B, C and D states. Part A had nine states that included Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Madhya Pradesh (formerly Central Provinces and Berar), Madras, Orissa, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh (formerly United Provinces). Under British rule, these were ruled by the former governors' provinces and after independence by an elected governor and state legislature. Eight of the Part B states were Hyderabad, Saurashtra, Mysore, Travancore, Cochin, Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh, Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), and Rajasthan. These were former princely states or groups of princely states that were governed by a Rajpramukhs, along with an elected legislature. 10 of Part C states included Delhi, Kutch, Himachal Pradesh, Bilaspur, Coorg, Bhopal, Manipur, Ajmer, and Tripura. Jammu and Kashmir had special status until 1957. Part C states included both the former Chief Commissioners' provinces and other centrally administered areas except Andaman and

Nicobar islands. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands was a territory, ruled by a governor appointed by the Indian President.

This number of 27 states got reduced to 14 by the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. In order to implement States Reorganisation Act, Seventh Constitutional Amendment was introduced in the Constitution that received assent of the Indian President on October 19, 1956. This amendment not only involved the establishment of new states by altering the areas and boundaries of the then existing state but also led to the abolition of the Part A, Part B, and Part C states and created certain areas as Union Territories.

The number of Indian states increased to 28 in 2000 with the carving out of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. The number further enlarged to 29 in 2014 with the creation of the new state of Telangana.

The question arises as to what leads to the rise of demands for new states? What leads to mount of such sub-regional movements? In this context following reasons can be listed: First, the rising consciousness among the ethnic minorities and emergence of a feeling that they share common traits that make them distinct from the people of majority community within the state. Second, since the minorities are confined to a particular geographical area, it becomes easier to consolidate their demand. Third, the agitating ethnic minority communities develop a feeling of being discriminated. Fourth, agitating regions are mainly economically backward and hence people develop a feeling of being ignored by the majority dominated state government. Fifth, the agitating sub-regional communities argue that they are provided with the lesser opportunities as compared to the majority residing in the state. Sixth, such movements gain more popularity when carried forward by an efficient and powerful leadership.

Among all the above listed factors that most important had been the lack of balanced development of the regions. Dr BR Ambedkar (Amberdkar.1995) proposed the division of larger states like Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bombay into smaller states so that under-developed regions could achieve better development. India has seen tremendous growth but it has failed to resolve the question of redistribution (Tillin.2013b). Though throughout all the years of Five Year Plans, the key priority had been balanced regional development along with inclusive growth but to trace out objective criteria for the intra-state allocation of resources has been very difficult and thus regional disparity in economic as well as political terms continued un-debated. In addition, the new economic policies adopted in 1991 also sharpened the unevenness of development between various states and also within the regions. The inequalities in the infrastructure facilities and the then existing market conditions led to the concentration of private players in few regions after the reforms. States like Bihar, UP and Orissa failed to attract new investment as these states were backward in terms of infrastructural development while the coastal regions or regions, due to their prime location, were able to attract more investment as compared to the regions having peripheral locations. For instance, Coastal Andhra received more investment, leading to better development, as compared to Telangana region which considered itself as an internal

colony, a victim of various social, economic, linguistic, political and cultural policies pursued by the state and the central government.

Such demands bear out antipathy that persists between various regions within the regions. This is so because in the current set up of the state organisation, the idea of reorganisation of regions within states is not given much attention. This further highlights the less flexible character of Indian federal system. The early decades of Indian independence witnessed the era of one-party dominance in which the state leaders were not powerful enough to challenge the central leadership. Federal relations between the centre and state became prominent only after the decline in power of one-party dominance but this was only at two-tier level. It was after the emergence of multi-party system and surfacing of regional parties that this relation was witnessed at a three-tier level i.e. centre, state and the regions.

In addition, coalition governments at the centre and state levels too have boosted demands for statehood. Coalition governments provide greater voice to the regional political parties in governance as their support is required by the national political parties to form the government at centre. It is noteworthy that these regional political parties support the national political parties as they are aware of the fact that only union government that can fulfil their aspirations of having a new state. For instance, Gorkhas in Darjeeling lent their support to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance with the hope that after coming to power in centre, BJP will create Gorkhaland. In addition, there have also been struggles around the assertiveness and conflicting claims of the identity groups based on the issues of region, religion, language, caste and community. These struggles were also witnessed in the changed mode of electoral representation by which the regions were able to come to forefront and made their voices heard.

Another significant aspect associated with the reorganisation of boundaries is Article 3 and 4 of the Indian Constitution that relates to the provision of change in name and boundaries of the units of state by simple majority of the parliament thus making alteration of state boundaries an easy going process. But this has not been the reality as the issue is more of a political matter and thus makes the whole thing really complicated. On one hand it is seen as a hurdle in the path of unity of Indian state and on the other hand it is seen as a bone of contention between the centre and the states. The regions coming up with the demands of bifurcation of boundaries from their parent states blame the centre government for not listening to their demand and if their demand of new state is fulfilled then the people of the parent state starts accusing the union government for the whole process. This has been recently seen in the case of creation of Telangana state where the Andhra government blamed the centre for playing the political game by acceding to the demand of Telangana. Their rage for United Progressive Alliance government could be easily witnessed in the state assembly elections of Andhra region where the former government was completely rooted out. So the creation of new state requires a great balance on the part of central government amongst state government and regions articulating such demands.

There is a need to make a deep analysis of the study that why such bifurcation demands have been emerging over the period of time and the factors behind such demand. Many regions have emerged within the states that have been struggling to attain their identity and progress. Interestingly in the state like UP voices are not heard from a particular region rather many regions within a single state have been asking for division of UP that includes Harit Pradesh, Purvanchal, Barj Pradesh, and Awadh Pradesh. Another aspect to note is that these movements are not the result of deliberate efforts rather it is the pouring out of long term buried grievances of people. The minorities or the deprived sections of the state search for their own space within the political sphere of the Indian state. Such reorganisation restructures the political map of the Indian state and not only its national boundaries.

The demand for statehood status to the regions provides for an interesting study to understand the patterns of social, economic and political patterns in the states. This is so because the common people are not coming up with such demands themselves, rather they are made to realise about the discrimination being done to them and to their region by the local leaders. Majority of the masses follow their leaders and see the path as shown by them as they have hardcore faith in them. The creation of new states is seen as beneficial to both the regional leaders as well as the masses. For local leaders it serves as an opportunity to gain the power at state level and subsequently become partners in the bargaining game of politics and acquisition of resources. This also opens door for the local dominating caste and class to fulfil their political aspirations. Thus the new state gives rise to a new type of polity all together. For the masses new prospects are opened in public sector, as the new state provides new administrative structure that requires man power to run it thus giving rise to more job opportunities, better educational facilities, health care and infrastructural development.

The states from which new states demands emerge have not been very positive towards them and ample reasons can be explored behind this. First, it indicates failure on the part of the state government to tackle the issue of prevalent regional inequalities and its lack of success to provide welfare and equal opportunities to its entire people within the state. This is not at par with the philosophical goal of the state to provide a good and better life to its citizens. Further, bifurcation would mean division of monetary resources, water resources, assets, natural resources and so on. Thus, the bifurcation of state would hit hard on the economy of the state. Last and most importantly, such a division would also have an impact of the bargaining power of the state at centre. In India the number of seats allocated to states depends on the size of their population. Obviously division of population would have an adverse impact over the number of MPs going to the union government.

As far as the centre is considered, it has shown a different approach towards the reorganisation of states in the past three decades. Unlike the immediate era after independence, now centre is not reluctant to consider such demands and has opted for a more inclusive approach. A number of reasons can be attributed to this changed approach. First, such movements are no longer seen as anti-nation as they do not challenge the territorial integrity of Indian state rather shows a rage against their parent states. They stand

against the regional inequalities prevalent in the state, denial of participation in the administration of the states, lack of job opportunities, poor infrastructure and lack of governance. Thus there seems no threat to the unity of the Indian state. Second reason for the positive attitude of centre can be traced to the changed nature of Indian federalism. As initially discussed, Indian state had opted for a federal structure with strong centre but after 1989, the coalition era begun, which made states the bargaining partners with centre in race for power. Amidst such an environment it became difficult for the union to ignore the interest of the units of the states and regions within.

Debate on States' Reorganisation: In the concerned academic literature, two sets of arguments for and against the demands for the new states are found. Those who are in favour of the idea of the new states tend to argue that smaller states ensures people's greater access and participation in the administration which would in turn deliver prompt, flexible, effective and efficient actions under greater accountability and good governance. Along with the good governance agenda, it has also been argued that the creation of smaller states promotes greater democracy by giving political and economic space to the culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

On the developmental front, the argument is that the smaller states tend to perform better economically than their parent states as evidenced in the case of all the three recently created states. The upcoming demands for the creation of the new states have also got encouraged from the track record of the recently created states. For instance, in 2013-14, per capita income of Chhattisgarh was 58,547 compared with 51,798 of Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, Jharkhand had per capita income of 46131 as compared to Bihar with 31199. Also, Uttarakhand got per capita income of 103716 as compared with Uttar Pradesh with 36250 (Prabhudesi. 2016).

In addition, it has also been argued that at present India is not sufficiently decentralized. So the acceptance of regional demands for separate states would provide space for these regions and would also balance out India's diversity. It is opined that reorganisation of states would make the federation more balanced by making the representation of big and small states more proportionate. Akhtar Majeed (Majeed.2003) highlights the modification in approach among the Indian elite who no longer treats creation of new states as the emergence of narrow identities. He says that if more states are formed, it would only strengthen 'self-rule', 'shared-rule' principle of federal governance.

In contrast, there has been a different set of argument against the demand for reorganisation of states. Though in recent times the demand for new states has been arising for having better governance and socio-economic development but those against such demands questions that what is the guarantee these small states would for sure fulfil its laid objective? Supporting their argument, the critics put forward the example of the small states of North East which were created to enhance development but till date they have not been able to achieve their set goal. Even the state of Jharkhand, after its formation, has entered

into a phase of political instability and leadership crisis and has failed to make a departure in governance and development.

It has also been pointed that the creation of smaller states can pose a risk that it could lead to hegemony of the dominant caste, community or tribe over the power structures. This is so because the excessive regionalism can lead to the phenomenon of sons-of-the-soil. Not only socially but also politically the reorganisation of states can lead to harmful consequences. It becomes difficult for the ruling coalition at the centre to keep satisfy all the demands of the states and if it does not then there is every chance that the coalition may topple down if the state governments withdraw their support.

Another drawback of reorganisation of states is that it ushers in the problems of inter-state water, power and boundary disputes, and apart from the strain on their limited financial resources, these would also call for large funds to build up the infrastructure, establish new administrative staff and so on.

The demand for reorganisation of states has led to a debate among the scholars, politicians and masses about the legitimacy of such demands. Many anxious about these demands have started talking about the balkanisation of India which could pose a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country. Though many others do not see such step as balkanisation or partition rather considers it as a justifiable response to the aspirations of people.

Taking into notice both the arguments and the rising demands for new states, a new issue has emerged regarding the formation of second States Reorganisation Commission and the nature of commission i.e. whether it should be a permanent one or temporary. But the need of the hour is to have such commission which could solve out the problem of reorganising federal India on a fairly rational basis. With the population of the country exceeding 100 crores, there is a scope of forming more states.

Summing up, it can be said that the demand of reorganisation of states has both pros and cons but the significant part of these movements is that they help in deepening the democratic system by emphasising on decentralization and minority representation. This also helps in narrowing down the gap between nationalism and regionalism. It is all because of its adaptation, acceptance and flexibility that Indian democracy became an extraordinary case study to understand the value of unity in diversity.

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