

**Is Economic Inequality a Foundation of Separatist Identity?  
An Examination of Successful and Unsuccessful Movements in India**

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**A paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of Asian Studies on the  
Pacific Coast (ASPAC) in Honolulu, Hawaii, June 15-17, 2007**

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## **Abstract**

One of the consequences of rapid economic development has been an increase in economic inequality. Some scholars of separatist movements have argued that one of the motivations for creating new political units is the desire either to protect, or to acquire, wealth in a situation where territorially-based economic inequalities exist. Other scholars disagree with the significance attributed to economic inequality in separatist movements. The purpose of this study is to attempt to resolve this controversy, i.e., to determine the centrality of economic inequality in the identity assumed by separatist movements.

The question is of considerable importance. The phenomenon of separatism is widespread and a challenge to polities ranging from Hawaii to India. And, a review of scholarly literature on the issue indicates considerable diversity of findings and opinions. In other words, the answer to the question addressed remains in dispute.

After reviewing a variety of scholarly views on the subject, two conclusions and an observation follow: First, there is a wide range of views about the importance of economic inequality in motivating separatist movements. Second, a majority of scholars conclude that it may be very important at times and not very important at other times. The observation is that in reaching their conclusions, most scholars focus on the empirical reality of the economic inequality between the territory seeking separation and the territory from which separation is sought, rather than the constructed reality created by the movement leaders. That leads to the possibility that some of the ambiguity in the findings may be due to the fact that there may be a disjuncture between movement interpretation of the situation regarding economic inequality and the situation depicted by “empirical” data.

This possibility structures the study. The role of economic inequality in three successful movements in India, those which gave rise in 2000 to the new states of Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, and three yet-to-be-successful movements in India, those of Telangana, Gorkhaland and Vidarbha, are examined with a particular focus on two aspects: First, the empirical data available on actual economic inequality between the separatist area and the area from which secession was/is sought, and, second, the image of economic inequality created by separatist entrepreneurs in their creation/activation of movement identity. When the two are compared, it becomes apparent that there is a discrepancy between them. In each case, the movements portray themselves, and are portrayed by scholarly observers, as prompted by, and fighting against, economic discrimination and inequality regardless of the “reality” shown by the formal data. That is, a consistent part of separatist movement identity is being economically disadvantaged—regardless of available statistical information. Since behavior is based upon the perception of “reality,” rather than “reality,” an understanding of the actions of separatist movements may be enhanced by this finding.

## **I. Introduction**

The role of economic inequality in separatist movements has been the focus of considerable discussion. The answers scholars give are not uniform and have led to considerable frustration among those seeking general knowledge. Section II of this paper is a review scholars' contentions about this matter. Two aspects of those works appear to contribute to the varying findings: One is differences in conceptualization of economic inequality and the other is a focus on the "actual" situation of economic inequality rather than the constructed message about economic inequality that is used by leaders in building identity. In Section III, the problems that follow from conceptual variation and the need for consistent meanings are addressed. Section IV is the core of this study. It addresses both the actual situation of economic inequality and the place of economic inequality in the constructed identity of the separatist movements. The conclusion draws upon all three sections to attempt an answer to the question: "Is economic inequality a foundation of separatist identity?"

## **II. Scholar's Contentions/Findings Regarding the Significance of Economic Issues in Separatist Identity and Activity**

The scholarly literature relevant to the research question is divided in its answer to the research question. Some scholars see economic issues as paramount in separatist movements; some do not see them as paramount; and, most contend that they are paramount sometimes and not other times. Thus, the answers seem to be "Yes," "No," and "Maybe." A sampling of the literature illustrates the lack of agreement on the issue.

### **A. Economic issues are very significant**

Those who view economic inequality as important very significant often encompass the notion in broader terminology like "relative deprivation," "the politics of marginality" or "economic issues" and include with it other factors that may play a role, too.

Perhaps, the best known scholar who addresses the issue is Ted Gurr. In Gurr's words, "The politics of identity are based most fundamentally on persistent grievances about inequalities and past wrongs, conditions that are part of the heritage of most minorities in most countries."<sup>1</sup> He argues that "Discrimination and repression against national and minority peoples are a pervasive source of poverty and resentment and provide strong incentives for ethnopolitical mobilization, protest, and rebellion."<sup>2</sup> And, he said, "groups are said to be subject to economic discrimination to the extent that their members are or have been systematically limited in access to desirable economic goods, conditions, or positions that are open to other groups in their society."<sup>3</sup> In Gurr's analysis, then, economic inequality is a basis for identity and the poverty resulting from discrimination includes economic inequality. In other words, economic inequality is an important source of the identity that may lead to separatism.

In the same vein, Beverly Crawford, in *The Myth of 'Ethnic Conflict': Politics, Economics, and 'Cultural' Violence*, says that "the central argument of this volume can

be distilled as follows: Cultural identities can be transformed into political identities when cultural groups are targeted for privilege or discrimination and when economic factors, no matter how ‘impersonal,’ lead to disproportionate hardships among culturally defined populations.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, when economic inequality is such that hardships are imposed on one identity more than another, political actions, such as separatism, may follow. Yet, she contends, “strong political institutions promoting social integration can act as a firebreak and reduce the political ‘charge’ on culture.”<sup>5</sup> If the latter happens, then economic inequality may not lead to separatist actions. That is, strong institutions can trump economic inequalities, though the latter may be a significant motivator for political action.

Edwin Wilmsen writes that “ethnic politics is the politics of marginality. Indeed, ethnicity appears to come into being most frequently in just such instances when individuals are persuaded of a need to confirm a collective sense of identity in the face of threatening economic, political, or other social forces.”<sup>6</sup> It would not be unreasonable to include the growth of economic inequalities under “threatening economic...forces” as an impetus for ethnic solidarity and action, including separatist action.

And, embedded in Viva Ona Bartkus’s writings is a similar contention. She says there are four essential elements for secession: “a ‘distinct community,’ territory, leaders, and discontent.”<sup>7</sup> She says this of “discontent:”

...discontent with its current circumstances within the existing state is necessary to motivate this identifiable unit to demand change, although in any individual case the causes of discontent are not necessarily identical to the motivations for the secession decision. Often the distinct community is bound together by common claims or perceptions of discrimination, neglect, exploitation, or repression, in economic, political, cultural, linguistic, or religious terms.<sup>8</sup>

She prefers “distinctive community” to ethnic group for it is more encompassing. The costs of membership in the broader community are listed under “mortal threats” and “cultural threats.” Yet, her reference to “a distinct community...bound together by common claims or perceptions of discrimination, neglect, exploitation, or repression, in economic...terms” implies that economic inequality may be a factor in solidifying a community that comes to demand separation.

Thus, there are several scholars who view economic inequality as an important factor in the identity of a group, its activation as a separatist movement, or both. Yet, there are other scholars who dispute the centrality of economic inequality.

## **B. Economic issues are not very important**

Metta Spencer attacks the notion of “economic determinism,” i.e., the view that separatism is a response to economic factors. To back up her claim, she and Petr Pithart cite the case of Slovakia’s split from Czechoslovakia where “the outcome was clearly detrimental to the Slovaks’ economic interests.”<sup>9</sup> What the authors show is that

“economic determinism” is not a universal phenomenon. In other words, economic inequalities are not important in *all* cases of separatism.

Bertrand Roehner, on the other hand, is more emphatic about the lack of importance of factors like economic inequality. He says that “The development of separatist movements....do not spring from economic motives....”<sup>10</sup> He suggests the “absence of correlation between economic underdevelopment and autonomist claims....”<sup>11</sup> For what he calls “homeland minorities,” which he defines as those dispossessed of land, language/culture or political power, he contends that

the economic situation is almost irrelevant either as cause or consequence. The feelings of identification with a group are psychological phenomena whose roots lie in geography and history, and have little correlation with standard of living.<sup>12</sup>

Roehner’s contention seems to be not only that economic inequality is unrelated to separatism, but also that generalizations about the relationship between *any* aspect of identity and separatism are impossible. He asserts,

Like the achievement of stardom, the emergence or success of a separatist struggle depends sequentially upon a large number of special circumstances among which are the emergence of a charismatic leader, external support, a favorable international context, etc. Each of these factors in turn depends on a set of more or less random conditions which make any kind of prediction impossible.<sup>13</sup>

He may be right, but the claim that separatist movements do not spring from economic motives is a general claim. If he is right about the complexity of separatist movements and the impossibility of generalizations, one would expect that he might grant that economic motivation might be very important in some particular cases.

### **C. Sometimes economic issues are very important and sometimes they are not**

Implicit in many of the writings reviewed to this point—both those who consider economic issues very important and those who consider them not very important—is the notion that there are other factors that may facilitate or block the impact of economic inequality on separatist identity and action. Indeed, most scholars view such a factor as very significant at times and in some cases and not very significant at other times and in other cases.

Milika Bookman argues that “The importance of economic factors in secessionist aspirations varies widely among the cases. In some cases, the perception of economic injustice has been a very important, if not the single most important, issue that has given the movements substance....,” but this has not been the critical factor in other cases.<sup>14</sup> A difference in the perception of relative economic advantages among regions is the decisive factor. Secessionist activity may develop in either the region that perceives itself poorer or richer. Differentiating among forms of economic inequality, he argues,

the regions that have relatively lower incomes tend to believe that their region receives an insufficient share of capital investment, enjoys insufficient autonomy in the decision-making over their resources or in their representation at the center, is subject to biases in pricing policies and allocation of foreign exchange regulation, and receives a small share of foreign investment, aid, and other forms of foreign intervention. The perception by the population in the relatively high-income regions tends to be that they receive insufficient capital and budget allocations while making high contributions to the central budget. In addition, the population deems to have too small a role in decision-making relative to the region's economic importance, and too little power over their own resources. These regions also tend to demand increased shares of foreign exchange and foreign funding on the grounds that they are often most responsible for the accumulation of foreign currency and, given that their environment is conducive to growth, investment on their territory is most likely to result in growth. Numerous countries in the world contain both high- and low-income regions that have made these respective claims....<sup>15</sup>

To Bookman, the perception of economic inequality may be critically important as a motivator for separatist activity.

Amit Prakash has focused on India when addressing the issue of economic inequality. He says that "In the independent Indian state, various ethnic identities have articulated themselves at different points of time in different ways."<sup>16</sup> He suggests that the post-Independent Indian state's emphasis on development led most identities to have "modified their bases of articulation to include the need for special development measures. Generally, therefore, such articulations have focused on the demand for greater political autonomy for efficient implementation of development policy."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, he suggests that there is substantial difference among ethnic groups in their response to economic inequalities. In his words, State policies "do not precipitate identity articulation and mobilization amongst all relevant categories of population, in the same way that not all sections of the population that face the adverse effects of unbalanced development, mobilize to assert a politically significant subnational or ethnic identity."<sup>18</sup> In other words, the importance of economic inequality has varied over time and across India in mobilizing for autonomy.

Paul Brass, also focusing on India, sees exceptions to the notion that separatism in India is brought about by identities imbued with a sense of economic inequality, but the desire for economic gain may be a part of the identity. He sees ethnicity and nationalism as "social and political constructions. They are creations of elites, who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves."<sup>19</sup> In his assessment of the Punjab crisis of the 1980s, he did not find economic inequality a central element in the identity of those supporting a separate Khalistan. Rather, the movement had to do with the broad struggle for political power in the Punjab and the country at large.<sup>20</sup> Thus, he views

economic inequality as one of many factors that may, or may not, contribute to separatist identity.

Dipankar Gupta views the Khalistan case similarly. He says “the Khalistani demand for a Sikh homeland (Khalistan) was not an outcome of economic factors as it was of political ones. This does not mean that the economic specifics of Punjab are irrelevant but they did not directly contribute to the appeal of secessionism.”<sup>21</sup> He identifies the Khalistani movement as an ethnic movement as distinct from a communal movement, but implies that it may have moved from the latter to the former: “In communal disputes.....there is no telling when an erstwhile insider will be portrayed as an outsider. The Sikh situation illustrates this transitivity in identities rather appositely.”<sup>22</sup> He argues that “...unlike ethnic movements, communal mobilizations do not go on to designate their friends and enemies as insiders and outsiders respectively, within a nation-state context. In a communal situation the confrontation is between rivals who are both *internal* to the system, but make contending demands on national resources.”<sup>23</sup> In the case of a movement for separatism that is communal, economic inequality may be a factor. He says, “The issues that come to the forefront in communal movements are not those of territory or sovereignty, but those of government and administrative handling of the distribution of resources.”<sup>24</sup>

Hurst Hannum takes a somewhat different point of view of the Punjab case. He says: “This economic context is important not only to a general understanding of Sikh grievances, but also to an understanding of the alliance between the Akali Dal and Sikh fundamentalist forces. The Akali Dal primarily represents the interests of the relatively prosperous Sikh agriculturalists....”<sup>25</sup> In general, though, he agrees with Bookman, Prakash, Brass and Gupta that generalizations about the role of economic inequality in separatist identity are not possible. He argues,

A brief survey of ethnic conflicts suggests that economic or class aspects, while they may be important in many situations, cannot by themselves explain the existence or intensity of many conflicts. Separatist or minority assertions are made by poor regions which complain of underdevelopment...; by regions which might well be economically better off after separation..., and those which would almost certainly be less well off...; by economically deprived groups...and economically advanced groups....Indeed, one of the major political struggles within ethnic minority groups is often between those who adopt a more traditional or nationalist attitude and those who link ethnic solidarity with cross-ethnic class or economic issues.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, Hannum argues

it is true that without perceived economic or political discrimination and the resulting weakening of the minority’s position in society, the protection of purely cultural attributes might not become an issue. “[Nationalist] agitation acquires a mass basis, and hence takes on genuine significance, only when minority persons come to realize that the cultural persecution they suffer is accompanied by far

more damaging discriminatory treatment in matters of economic opportunity, educational attainment, and social advancement.’<sup>27</sup>

Ralph Premdas, like these other scholars, recognizes that a variety of perspectives on ethnic groups and secession exist, including a political economy school. He argues that it takes two forms: First, there is the Marxist idea that the struggle for territorial autonomy is primarily a means to distract people from class interests. And, second, there is the case where

Its adherents compile elaborate statistical data to show disparities in the distribution of resources, jobs and privileges among ethnic communities. They hold that when these disparities, which may be caused either by deliberate policy design or by an accident of history, are eliminated, the ardour of the separatists will be diffused and the march to intercommunal harmony will proceed without further digression.’<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, his approach is very broad because he sees a multiplicity of factors involved in separatist movement identity formation

In my own framework, I have divided the causes of secession into two broad categories: primordial and secondary. Primordial causes refer to those cleavages in a society that are deep and serve to define the very identity of a group. Primordial variables are usually part fact and part myth. They include: (i) language; (ii) religion; (iii) race; (iv) values or culture; (v) territory or homeland or region....

Secondary factors are features which have been recently acquired or experienced. They serve as the triggering mechanism of collective consciousness felt by a group as it proceeds to define its demands. Secondary factors can be equally fabricated as well as primordial ones. They include: (i) neglect; (ii) exploitation; (iii) domination and internal colonialism; (iv) repression and discrimination; and (v) forced annexation.

The primordial and secondary factors vary from movement to movement. In some cases, only a combination of a few of these factors are present. In the history of a movement, the claims of a group may change the emphasis from one factor to another.<sup>29</sup>

Premdas contends that generalizing about the preeminent role of economic inequality in identity formation is inappropriate.

Anthony Mughan reaches a similar conclusion about the role of a factor like economic inequality. He says that “whether or not the costs and benefits of membership in the state are distributed equally among ethnic groups” is important. “In the event of their unequal distribution, there is a constant potential for remedial political action on the part of the deprived ethnic group or groups.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, borrowing from Gurr, he suggests a

relative deprivation explanation. He finds that there is support for it in Africa, but not at temporally similar stages in the West. Thus, he says,

From a broad comparative perspective, therefore, a critical inadequacy of the relative deprivation approach *per se* is its inability to explain why similar conditions of deprivation led to the politicization of ethnic social divisions at temporally different stages of the modernization process in Africa and the West.<sup>31</sup>

He suggests that relative deprivation is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition. And, he suggests that looking at the wish and not taking into account the constraints is a source of the problem. Regarding his explanation, he says:

The basic premise of this explanation is that the differences can best be understood in terms of the effect on the distribution of power resources among ethnic groups of regional (ethnically defined) contrasts in time sequence and rate of modernization. When these contrasts serve simply to promote or reinforce one group's disproportionate share of available power resources, as they did in the earlier stages of modernization in the West, political conflict is unlikely to occur. If, on the other hand, no ethnic group is cumulatively favoured by the possession of a disproportionate share of both types of power resource, as in Africa and the contemporary West, the unequal distribution of the goods of modernity among ethnic groups is likely to stimulate political conflict.<sup>32</sup>

Viva Ona Bartkus says there are four essential elements for secession: "a 'distinct community,' territory, leaders, and discontent."<sup>33</sup> She says this of "discontent:"

...discontent with its current circumstances within the existing state is necessary to motivate this identifiable unit to demand change, although in any individual case the causes of discontent are not necessarily identical to the motivations for the secession decision. Often the distinct community is bound together by common claims or perceptions of discrimination, neglect, exploitation, or repression, in economic, political, cultural, linguistic, or religious terms.<sup>34</sup>

She prefers "distinctive community" to ethnic group, or other terms for those engaged in separatist efforts. Perceptions of "discrimination, neglect, exploitation, or repression" of an economic nature is just one of several grounds for the formation of a distinctive community that may seek secession.

Like Bookman, Prakash, Brass, Gupta, Hannum, Premdas, Mughan and Bartkus, Ruth Lapidot views economic factors as but one of many possible factors spurring movements for autonomy. She says "There is no doubt that in the majority of cases the resort to autonomy is caused by ethnic tensions, but other circumstances may also call for the establishment of autonomy."<sup>35</sup> She notes: "Sometimes the reason is economic."<sup>36</sup> And, she suggests that among the factors likely to make autonomy more successful in *solving* ethnic problems, "A rather similar stage of economic development and standard of living in the autonomous region and in the state as a whole may enhance the chances

of success.”<sup>37</sup> Implicitly, she is arguing that economic inequality may be a factor fostering autonomy movements—but, there are many other factors.

The bottom line is that despite disagreement among scholars, most view economic inequality as a possible cause of separatism. Yet, there is widespread ambiguity about the meaning of the concept, whether it is a significant aspect of the identity of separatist movements or whether it is simply a motivation to action, and, the circumstances in which it becomes important. To probe these matters, we turn our attention, first, to the concept of economic inequality, and, second, to the experiences of six separatist movements in India.

### **III. The Concepts of Economic Inequality and Separatist Identity and Activity**

Much of the ambiguity in the literature about the relationship between economic inequality and separatist identity is a consequence of conceptual variation. Such variation is apparent in the meanings given to “economic inequality,” “separatist,” and the group to which the identity is attached. For the purpose of this paper, clarification of the meaning of these terms is required.

#### **A. Variations in the meanings scholars give to the core concepts**

Scholars often include economic inequality within other concepts with broader meaning. Sometimes the concept is differentiated and aspects of it are the forms used. And, some scholars treat it as something manifested apart from “perception,” while other scholars treat it as a “perception.” The group to which the concept of “separatist identity” is applied varies, too. At times it is treated as ethnic, national or sub-national group. Bartkus, as we have seen, suggests it is better to treat it as a “distinct community.” Finally, there are variations in the meanings given to “separatist.” Some view it as referring to any effort to create greater autonomy, some to efforts to create new political units within a country and some to efforts to create a new political unit outside a country.

#### **B. Meanings of concepts in this study**

In this study, *economic inequality* is used to refer to perceived differences in the wealth or the rate of accumulation or loss of wealth by most of one group as compared with most of another group. The perception may, or may not, be based upon “empirical” data. To assume that the “fact” of economic inequality is the same as the perception of economic inequality, we contend, is one of the reasons for some of the ambiguity in answers to the economic inequality-separatism question.

The adjective *separatist* is used to refer to the objective of creating a new political sub-unit out of an existing political sub-unit within a “sovereign” country. And, the new political sub-unit would have constitutional authority equivalent to that of the existing political sub-unit. In the case under study, it refers to seeking to create a new state out of an old state in the Indian federal system. The *group* to which the adjective “separatist” is

attached refers to any collectivity of individuals occupying a common territory. It may or may not be characterized by a common ethnicity, religion or language. Its *identity* as a group is distinguished from other groups by the centrality of its support for the separatist objective. Its membership is in flux depending upon the impact of events and the persuasiveness of separatist leaders. In addition to support for separatism, the separatist identity may entail a variety of other beliefs supportive of the objective. In this study, our interest is in the importance of economic inequality in separatist identity.

#### **IV. Statistical vs. Constructed Data Relevant to the Role of Economic Inequality in Separatist Identity and Activity**

The role of economic inequality in separatist identity and activity is normally determined in two ways:

The first is where scholars approach research through available empirical data sets and examine the relationship between a measure of economic well-being in the part of a state seeking to break away with a measure of economic well-being in the rest of the state to determine whether economic inequality exists. If the presence of inequality was consistently related to the presence of a separatist movement, most scholars would infer that economic inequality was an important factor in causing separatist efforts.

There may be inaccuracies in research based upon such data for two reasons: First, there are questions about the accuracy of the data. Second, actions in pursuit of separation are based upon human perceptions and not upon empirical “reality.” The empirical basis for separatist actions is only indirectly related to the statistical data we have just presented. Just as advertisements on television are meant to create a reality that may be markedly different from what Consumer Reports may consider reality, so politicians, movement leaders, ethnic entrepreneurs and others may convince people that separatism is called for because of the reality they *construct*. One of the basic problems with the development of generalizations about the role of economic inequality in separatism is that the presence and extent of such inequality is contingent upon a perception which need not be grounded in empirical reality. More critical to the role of economic inequality in separatism than the statistical data is the reality constructed about it.

Thus, the second is where scholars approach this type of research question by examining the perception of economic well-being among those supporting separatism and look not at the statistical measures of economic inequality, but at the belief, or lack of belief, that it exists.

A review of statistical data for the three successful separatist efforts and the three yet-to-be successful ones does not show a consistent relationship. Yet, a review of the perceptions of economic inequality in all six cases suggests that economic deprivation to be a basic part of the identity of those seeking separation and a critical *raison d’être* for the separatist movement.

## **A. Relation between the “empirical” and the “constructed” reality of economic inequality**

Observers sometimes equate, mix and use interchangeably the “empirical” and the “constructed” images of economic inequality.

Akhtar Majeed separates and connects constructivist and non-constructivist perceptions when he suggests: (1) that for a demand for a separate state to arise, “There must be the perception of systemic neglect of the region (i.e., a sense of ‘internal colonialism’).”<sup>38</sup> (2) that regions of states in India demanded separation often “as a consequence of ‘mal-development’ and the fear of some that they are being left out. When some ethnic groups move ahead more rapidly than others, parts of a region or state may not develop, leading to a distinguishable underdeveloped region.”<sup>39</sup> “Perception” and “fear” reference constructions people make, while “mal-development” and “some ethnic groups move ahead more rapidly than others” reference “empirical” reports.

Majeed moves back to a constructivist accounting when he writes of “tribal” or “hill people” who may demand separation “if they feel discriminated against and deprived of development, and also if they feel that through resource transfers, others are prospering at their expense.”<sup>40</sup> He suggests this was the case in Vidarbha (Maharashtra), Jharkhand (Bihar) and Chhattisgarh (Madhya Pradesh). It is his opinion that people in these areas perceive “that they have been victims of internal colonialism...”<sup>41</sup> “Feeling” and “perceiving” reference constructivism.

The constructivist accounting may rely more or less on the “empirical” reality. Donald Horowitz suggests that “By far the largest number of secessionists can be characterized as backward groups in backward regions.”<sup>42</sup> He says that in such cases the economic interests of the elites and masses diverge on the question of secession. “Whereas the region as a whole stands to suffer if it opts for secession, educated elites stand to gain from the creation of new opportunities in a smaller, albeit poorer, state.”<sup>43</sup> In such a situation, elites are likely to construct reality from “empirical” evidence that reflects their, rather than mass interests.

Thus, the “empirical” data may influence the construction of belief or perception, yet action appears to stem directly from the latter and only indirectly, if at all, from the former.

## **B. The place of economic inequality in the identities/characteristics of separatist movements/groups**

In our review, we divide the six cases into successful, i.e., those that have resulted in new states, and yet-to-be successful, i.e., those that have yet to result in the creation of new states.

## 1. The successful separatist movements

Measures of per capita net state domestic product are available for the separatist areas of Uttaranchal/Uttarachand, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh are available for a period of time before and after they became states. And, practitioner and scholarly descriptions of the perceptions of the movement are available, too.

### a. Uttaranchal/Uttarachand

#### i. Statistical data

In Uttaranchal, the per capita net state domestic product in the secessionist area was considerably greater than in the remainder of the state. That is, economic inequality existed with the separatist area being richer than the rest of the state as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Uttaranchal/Uttar Pradesh Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices in Rupees

| Territory                   | 1993/1994 | 1995/1996 | 1997/1998 | 1999/2000 | 2001/2002 | 2003/2004 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| New state of Uttaranchal    | 6896      | 8746      | 9961      | 11443     | 13466     | 16982     |
| Rump state of Uttar Pradesh | 5066      | 6331      | 7826      | 8970      | 9320      | 10637     |

**SOURCE:** Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Economic Survey 2006-2007, Table 1.8 Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices. The source of the table is given as “Central Statistical Organisation based on Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments (as on 21-11-2005).”

URL: <http://indiabudget.nic.in>

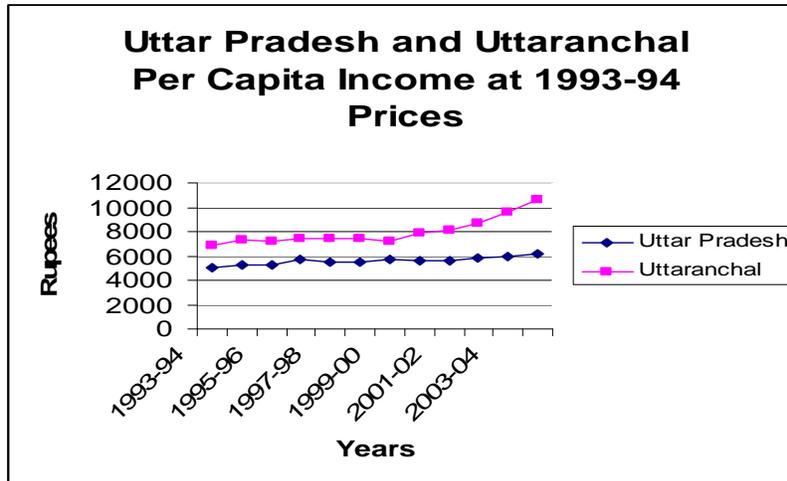
Ironically, the complaint of many in Uttaranchal was that of deprivation, i.e., that economic inequalities were the reverse. In response the Uttar Pradesh government took a number of steps to undermine the secession demands by seeking to raise the level of economic well-being in the separatist area. According to T. N. Dhar and S. P. Gupta,

The State Government initially tried to satisfy the regional aspirations of the region by taking some piece-meal measures such as constituting a Hill Development Board, appointing a separate minister for hill development, creating separate budget heads for hill programmes in the plan sector and establishing a separate department (Uttaranchal Vikas Vibhag) in the Secretariat. In

development departments nodal officers of the rank of heads or additional heads of departments were nominated to look after the developmental problems of Uttaranchal region in their respective sectors.<sup>44</sup>

After separation in 2000, the gap continued to widen in favor of the separatist area as shown more clearly in Graph 1.

**Graph 1**



**SOURCE:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, collected from Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments. See [http://mospi.nic.in/11\\_percapnsdp\\_const\\_9394ser.htm](http://mospi.nic.in/11_percapnsdp_const_9394ser.htm) Accessed May 22, 2007.

## ii. Identity data

The image created by the empirical data of Uttaranchal as a place where income/production was higher than in the rest of the state is not that widely characterizing the area. A review of those views suggests a very different picture and popular identity.

- L K Advani when he was Deputy Prime Minister “said carving out of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttaranchal from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh was justified in view of imbalanced development in those regions....”<sup>45</sup>
- B.C. Upreti observed that the call for a separate state during the 1950s was justified on the grounds that “the people of Uttarakhand were being marginalized by the process of modernization and development.”<sup>46</sup>
- Somen Chakraborty described the Uttarakhand movement as follows: “People are protesting against the deprivation and backwardness of the region. They are raising their voice against the step-motherly treatment of the state government.”<sup>47</sup> He suggests that “It is a culmination of age old deprivations of the hill

communities through the centuries...anger and resistance against the exploitation of hill resources by the outside people.”<sup>48</sup>

- Indu Tewari referred to “unbalanced development” and “uneven growth” as characteristic of Uttarakhand.<sup>49</sup> He notes that Uttarakhand...is a region which in spite of rich natural resources is one of the backward and neglected regions of the country. It has been denied economic justice and hence the development process is almost negligible”<sup>50</sup> In sum, he said, “The grievance of the people was development oriented. Hence the movement is more of a development movement cutting across a variety of ethnic religious and linguistic groups.”<sup>51</sup>
- T.N. Dhar and S.P. Gupta suggest that the call for Uttaranchal was “fuelled by (i) what people perceived as economic backwardness of the region caused by negligence of the State and the Centre (ii) relatively better performance of the neighbouring State of Himachal Pradesh in certain sectors of the economy.... The general belief grew that only a separate State could solve the multidimensional problems of this difficult region....”<sup>52</sup>
- Anil Bhatt in 1995 wrote that “Whereas the per capital income of India is \$330 Uttar Pradesh is poorer still with its per capita income of \$120. Uttarakhand region is poorest amongst the poor with a per capita income of \$89!”<sup>53</sup>
- R.R. Nautiyal and Annpurna Nautiyal note that “the region still merits to be defined as a most backward one in spite of thousand of crores of rupees having been earmarked for it annually.....”<sup>54</sup>
- Annpurna Nautiyal asserts that “Uttarakhand...is one of the most backward regions of India.”<sup>55</sup> She notes that “If we compare the Uttar Pradesh hills with the other smaller states like Punjab and Haryana, we find that they have made remarkable progress in agricultural and industrial production after becoming states. The Uttar Pradesh hills on the other hand are a glaring example of the neglect, apathy and underdevelopment.”<sup>56</sup>

A variety of other aspects became part of the identity assumed by the Uttarachand activists. The area was dominated by Brahmins who were concerned about their future when a 23 per cent reservation was extended to OBCs and about their powerlessness. Zakir Husein suggested that “The early murmurings or the voices of separation...did not represent the deep-rooted economic crisis or agonies of the common people. They merely expressed in the most civilized manner the desire for the preservation of religious, cultural and political identities of the people.”<sup>57</sup>

Thus, economic inequalities, though accompanied by other grievances, were an important part of the self-perceptions of the people of Uttarachand.

## b. Jharkhand

### i. Statistical data

Jharkhand's experience was similar. Jharkhandi complained about economic inequality that was disadvantageous to them and sought a separate state. Though the data on per capita net state domestic product showed substantial inequality, as Table 2 shows, the beneficiary was that area claiming to be economically disadvantaged.

**Table 2**

Jharkhand/Bihar Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices in Rupees

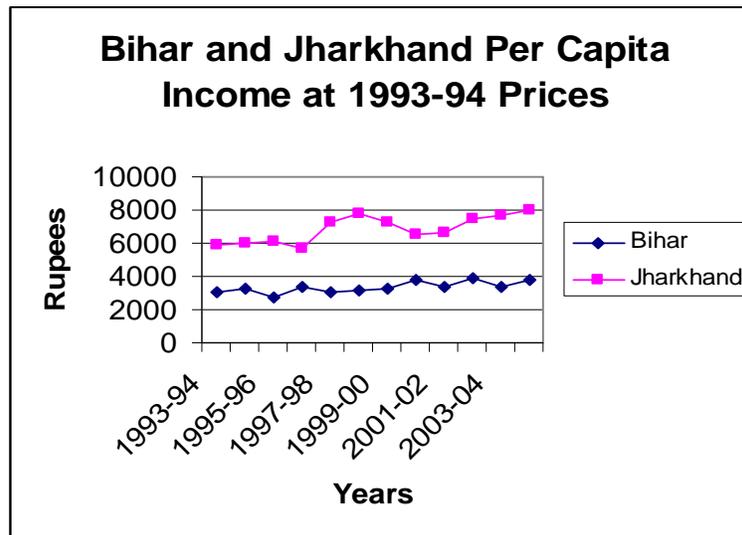
| Territory              | 1993/1994 | 1995/1996 | 1997/1998 | 1999/2000 | 2001/2002 | 2003/2004 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| New state of Jharkhand | 5897      | 6904      | 9581      | 10362     | 10129     | 11999     |
| Rump state of Bihar    | 3037      | 3041      | 4014      | 4794      | 5004      | 5362      |

**SOURCE:** Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Economic Survey 2006-2007, Table 1.8 Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices. The source of the table is given as "Central Statistical Organisation based on Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments (as on 21-11-2005)."

URL: <http://indiabudget.nic.in>

Graph 2 shows more clearly, like Uttaranchal, the gap between the separatist area of Jharkhand and Bihar was present at separation and has grown since separation. The complaints by Jharkhandi about being the poorer partner in a situation of economic inequality are not borne out by the data.

Graph 2



**SOURCE:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, collected from Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments. See [http://mospi.nic.in/11\\_percapnsdp\\_const\\_9394ser.htm](http://mospi.nic.in/11_percapnsdp_const_9394ser.htm) Accessed May 22, 2007.

## ii. Identity data

The social composition of the Jharkhand and Uttarachand movements differed considerably, but economic inequality was important to the identity of both.

Amit Prakash writes that “The subnational movement in Jharkhand is a good example where the ascriptive features of tribal heritage and culture have combined with the poor development profile of the region, to forge a politically significant ethnic identity.”<sup>58</sup> He says “...since the 1950s, the leaders of the Jharkhand movement have increasingly emphasized the declining development profile of the region as grounds for demanding an autonomous state.”<sup>59</sup> Prakash observes: “The Jharkhandi leadership and populace alleged during the field research that Jharkhand has emerged as an internal colony of Bihar and that there exists a north Bihar versus south Bihar divide, as far as development activities are concerned.”<sup>60</sup> He says that the Jharkhandi were especially resentful because of “the fact that the Jharkhand region, with its vast mineral reserves, contributed substantially to the economic well-being of the entire country but was being treated like an internal colony.”<sup>61</sup>

The issue of exploitation was a focus of the observations of Victor Das. He characterized the situation in Jharkhand in terms of a “castle” being built on the graves of the Jharkhandi “by the industrialists, politicians and our ‘nationalist’ government.”<sup>62</sup> He said, “It is true that Jharkhand Movement is basically a protest movement against the exploitations of the indigenous people by the unscrupulous outsiders as well as the

government.”<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, it was his view that a small group of tribal leaders hijacked the movement for personal gain hiding underneath the old identity of an exploited people.<sup>64</sup>

This notion of an identity serving as a cover for actions by self-serving individuals is developed further by S. Narayan. He suggests that in the post-independence period “the exploiters are in most of the cases from the tribals themselves....”<sup>65</sup> Then, non-tribals began to support the movement “because they have their own vested interest. They want to have their share of power in the new scheme of things....”<sup>66</sup> It was his belief before Jharkhand was made a state that “The autonomy or creation of another state is not going to solve the problem of economic deprivation....the Jharkhand movement is yet to touch the tribals very deeply....”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, the economic exploitation of the tribals and their land that was central to the identity projected by the movement.

### c. Chhattisgarh

#### i. Statistical data

Although economic inequality characterize both the cases of Uttaranchal and Jharkhand, though they appear to be richer than the state from which they separated, the statistical data do not show significant difference in the per capita net domestic product between the separatist area of Chhattisgarh and the state of Madhya Pradesh as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Chhattisgarh/Madhya Pradesh Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices in Rupees

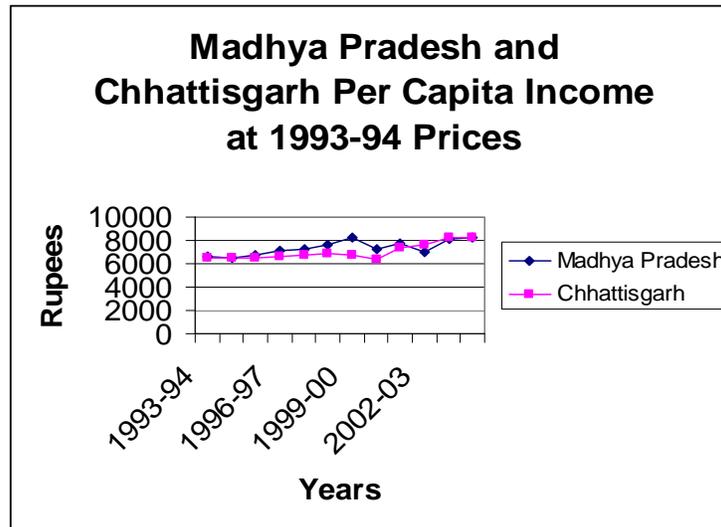
| Territory                    | 1993/1994 | 1995/1996 | 1997/1998 | 1999/2000 | 2001/2002 | 2003/2004 |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| New state of Chattisgarh     | 6539      | 7479      | 9218      | 10405     | 12032     | 14963     |
| Rump state of Madhya Pradesh | 6584      | 7809      | 9440      | 11764     | 12209     | 13722     |

SOURCE: Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Economic Survey 2006-2007, Table 1.8 Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices. The source of the table is given as “Central Statistical Organisation based on Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments (as on 21-11-2005).”

URL: <http://indiabudget.nic.in>

A similar image of the absence of economic inequality between Chhattisgarh and Manhya Pradesh is shown in Graph 3:

Graph 3



**SOURCE:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, collected from Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments. See [http://mospi.nic.in/11\\_percapnsdp\\_const\\_9394ser.htm](http://mospi.nic.in/11_percapnsdp_const_9394ser.htm) Accessed May 22, 2007.

## ii. Identity data

The movement for the formation of Chhattisgarh did not develop into as vigorous a movement as those in either Uttaranchal or Jharkhand. There were similarities with the Jharkhand movement in that more than 30% of the area's population was tribal and mineral resources lured outsiders.

Like other separatist movements, the supporters of a separate state included economic arguments in their justifications. As one writer observed, "A sense of relative deprivation had also developed in the region and people felt that a separate state was imperative for development to take place in the region."<sup>68</sup>

In the early 1990s, Shankar Guha Niyogi, the labor leader and founder of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, wrote "The people want that the Chhattisgarh region should develop."<sup>69</sup> And, he recognized that many saw in the creation of a Chhattisgarh state a route to development and called for support for the effort. Yet, he warned that "Unless the campaign is guided in a definite direction and linked up with the question of the struggles for peoples' liberation it may be diverted into the wrong channels..."<sup>70</sup> Implicit in his view that development may be enhanced in Chhattisgarh separated from Madhya Pradesh, was a view that economic inequality may be overcome through that means.

Guljit Arora suggests that the reason for the movement was set at an early stage, "The rationale for the demand was based on the common identity, backwardness of the region

and massive exploitation of the tribal peoples.”<sup>71</sup> In summary, he said, with a tinge of idealism:

The common peoples of Chhattisgarh largely accepted the theory of marginalization of the region. There prevailed a widespread perception that Chhattisgarh had been exploited and had not received its due place in the country. Given the democratic polity of India, the people’s perception of marginalization of their region attained the highest legitimacy. Thus the creation of a separate Chhattisgarh became imperative.<sup>72</sup>

Although the separatist movement in Chhattisgarh was not as active as separatist movements elsewhere in the country, economic deprivation appears to be an aspect of the identity projected by the movement.

## 2. The yet-to-be successful separatist movement

Similar ambiguities in the character of economic inequality in the separatist areas and the other parts of the state from which separation is sought are shown by the three yet-to-be successful movements.

### a. Telangana

#### i. Statistical data

The regions of the state of Andhra Pradesh are characterized differently by different groups. Many of those supporting the separatist movement of Telangana view them as Andhra vs Telangana, though when they wish to show economic deprivation of Telangana they exclude the city of Hyderabad. They claim people from Andhra were the primary beneficiaries of the industrialization there. Many of those opposing the separatist movement of Telangana will separate from Andhra the region of Rayalaseema, arguing that it is poorer than Telangana (though the figures before 1995/1996 don’t bear this out). Table 4 shows the per capita income of the various regions, suggesting that economic inequality between Telangana and the rest is not great.

**Table 4**

Average District Per Capita Income by Region at Factor Cost at Current Prices for Andhra Pradesh in Rupees

| Region/State                | 1993/1994 | 1995/1996 | 1997/1998 | 1999/2000 | 2001/2002 | 2003/2004 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Telangana                   | 7063      | 9363      | 11438     | 15096     | 17570     | 21243     |
| Telangana without Hyderabad | 6993      | 9252      | 11234     | 14822     | 17109     | 20438     |
| Rayalaseem                  | 7553      | 9955      | 9671      | 12658     | 15749     | 17758     |

|                |      |       |       |       |       |       |
|----------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a              |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| Andhra         | 7541 | 10276 | 11869 | 15481 | 18607 | 22207 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 7416 | 9999  | 11650 | 15049 | 17932 | 21372 |

**SOURCE:** Taken or calculated from “Annexure 2.13, District Per Capita Income at Factor Cost at Current Prices from 1993-94 to 2003-04,” in Government of Andhra Pradesh, *Economic Survey, 2005-06* (Hyderabad, Planning Department, A.P. Secretariat, 2006), p. 164.

## ii. Identity data

Telangana is frequently characterized by supporters of separatism as economically deprived and discriminated against. Numerous observers describe Telangana identity in this way.

- The authors of a pamphlet put out by the Telangana Information Trust says that Andhra treats Telangana as a colony: “It has chained the Telaganites to the Andhra colonizers....” It goes on,

Our deprivations are almost the direct result of the advantages secured by them.

Profit+privilege+usurpation—sums up their position.

Deprivation+Discrimination+Disadvantage—sums up our position.<sup>73</sup>

- K. Jayashanker says that over time “the so-called concept of Telugu Brotherhood has become an empty rhetoric placing the people of Telangana in an extremely unenviable position. Deprived of their legitimate share in the fruits of development, marginalized in the political process and administrative setup, belittled on the cultural and linguistic fronts they are virtually reduced to the status of second-rate citizens in their own homeland. Therefore, the demand for a separate state continues to persist.”<sup>74</sup>

- P.L. Vishweshwer Rao answers the question “Why Telangana State?” as follows:

Because successive governments and the ruling political parties have not only neglected to develop Telangana but have systematically exploited it, denying its share of funds, grabbing its rich, fertile land, exploiting its mineral riches and impoverishing its people. Telangana people have been looked down upon, their language derided, their customs and traditions scorned at, their land grabbed, their houses snatched away. They have been discriminated against in recruitment and developmental programmes. In short, they were colonized in 1956 even as the country threw off the colonial yoke.<sup>75</sup>

- Rao describes, too, the inequalities in many areas, for example, budget allocation:

In terms of budget allocations, the pattern is the same: denial, deprivation and diversion. Based on area and population, Telangana should get 39-44 per cent of the state's budget allocations. But at no point did its allocations exceed 30 per cent. Yet Telangana contributes 42 per cent of revenue to the state exchequer.<sup>76</sup>

- Although the Telangana area contains over 40 per cent of the population of Andhra Pradesh, A.K. Vasudevachary contends that it compares extremely unfavourably with both Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra. The inferior position it occupied in 1971, with 13 per cent, 8 per cent and 8 per cent of the state's industries, investments and employment, seem to have experienced a marginal increase to 16 per cent, 7 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. This is apparently an eye-wash. The increase is attributed to the concentration in Hyderabad, the state capital and cannot be said to be the regional share.<sup>77</sup>
- Three Telugu Desam Party ministers "dismissed outright as baseless the TRS chief, K. Chandrasekhar Rao's oft-repeated complaint that the demand for the separate Telangana was rather forced on them to offset and to undo the injustice done to the region in terms of development over the coastal area."<sup>78</sup>
- Chandrasekhar Reddy who became the general secretary of the Rayalaseema Parirakshana Committee, an organization spearheading the movement for Rayalaseema statehood, alleged that the leaders of coastal Andhra "continued neglect and lack of concern for people of the backward Telangana region that triggered the separate Telangana movement...."<sup>79</sup>
- During the 2004 election campaign, loud-speakers of the TRS "have been blaring out speeches and songs that recount the 'myriad ways of exploitation of the Andhras'" "The songs are laced with slogans like ma neeru tagutunnaru (drinking our water), ma sommu thintunnaru (eating our food), mammalni anagathokkutunnaru (suppressing us), Andhra kodukullara paripondiro (run away, you Andhra people) that is surely not meant to create harmony in the minds of settlers."<sup>80</sup>

These are illustrative of the many expressions of deprivation and economic inequality that characterize the identity of supporters of the Telangana movement. Opponents refute both them and the implication that should a Telangana state be created they would be overcome. Nevertheless, economic inequality is one of several factors characterizing Telangana separatists and encouraging them to act.

## b. Vidarbha

### i. Statistical data

The discrepancy in per capita domestic product between the Vidarbha area of Maharashtra state and the state itself in recent years has been substantial, though the separatist activity has not been very significant during this period. The figures are given in Table 5:

**Table 5**

Average District Per Capita Domestic Product at Current Prices for the Vidarbha Region in Rupees

| Region/State | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Vidarbha     | 16048   | 18122   | 19203   | 21213   |
| Maharashtra  | 22179   | 24248   | 26291   | 28848   |

**NOTE:** All the figures are provisional.

**SOURCES:** Calculated from Government of Maharashtra, *Economic Survey of Maharashtra, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-6* for 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04, respectively, Table 19, p. T-21 for each case.

### ii. Identity data

Vidarbha adjoins Telangana, though it is in the state of Maharashtra rather than Andhra Pradesh. Akhtar Majeed says Telangana and Vidarbha are cases

where economic grievances and demands triumphed over linguistic homogeneity. The emotional commitment to language in a large state may get sidelined when it is perceived that the demographic, cultural, and economic balance is being upset by an ailing regional economy. The assertion of a regional identity may be based on a common history of grievances emanating from an underdeveloped regional economy.<sup>81</sup>

A sense of economic deprivation and inequality has been central to the identity of those seeking to separate Vidarbha from Maharashtra. A few illustrations follow:

- When Vidarbha was merged into Maharashtra a variety of agreements were worked out to assure its fair treatment. Parag Rabade noted that “all conditions in the pact were fulfilled save one – that was of equitable distribution of resources and development. Protests started rising in Vidarbha over step motherly treatment that was and is continue to be given to Vidarbha over allocation of resources and the issue of development backlog has become the central point of dispute.”<sup>82</sup>

- The lack of development was used as a justification for the creation of Vidarbha state. *The Economic and Political Weekly* observed that “Vidarbha is one of Maharashtra’s most backward and drought-prone regions. Yet it boasts rich forestry and mining resources and was once known for its cotton...in 1996 when the Vidarbha demand was raised, Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackeray had vowed to lead the movement for statehood himself if the region’s developmental backlog was not cleared within two years.”<sup>83</sup>
- A reporter for *The Hindu* wrote of the failure of development efforts in Vidarbha,
 

Will Statehood end Vidarbha’s backwardness? If, as protagonists of Statehood claim, the region’s abundant resources- coal, iron, power, agriculture – are enough to sustain it, why is it still underdeveloped? Is it backward only in comparison to the rest of Maharashtra? Five years of a Statutory Development Board for the region and the Governor, under a Constitutional provision, is unable despite his best superintendence, to ensure equity in allocation or reduce the inequity in development.<sup>84</sup>
- In a debate in Maharashtra’s Legislative Assembly on Vidarbha, a Congress member, Mr. Satish Chaturvedi, made “a forceful demand for the separation ‘to end the region’s sufferings like discrimination, indifference and underdevelopment due to apathy of the rulers in Mumbai....’”<sup>85</sup>
- Another Congress member, Vasant Sathe, who had served in the cabinets of former prime ministers Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, “spoke of injustice to the Viddarbha region over the years, which perpetuated its backwardness.”<sup>86</sup>
- Economic hardships in Vidarbha became so severe that 1452 suicides were reported in 2006.<sup>87</sup>

As the statistics indicated, the economic inequality between Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra have increased and this appears to be an important justification for the actions of those pursuing the creation of a separate state.

### **c. Gorkhaland**

#### **i. Statistical data**

The Gorkhaland movement sought/seeks the creation of a state that approximates the West Bengal district of Darjeeling. It is a movement that has become relatively quiescent in recent years. Nevertheless, like most of the movements considered, economic deprivation is not evident from the figures in Table 6. Some economic inequality is apparent, though.

**Table 6**

Estimates of Per Capita Income by Districts of West Bengal at Current Prices in Rupees

| Region/<br>State              | 1993<br>-<br>1994 | 1996-<br>1997 | 1997-<br>1998 | 1998-<br>1999 | 1999-<br>2000 | 2000-<br>2001 | 2001-<br>2002 | *2002<br>-<br>2003 | **2003<br>-<br>2004 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Darjeeling/<br>Gorkhala<br>nd | 7715              | 1051<br>0     | 1506<br>3     | 1533<br>6     | 1967<br>6     | 2099<br>7     | 2200<br>2     | 21749              | 23967               |
| West<br>Bengal                | 6756              | 9857          | 1168<br>2     | 1364<br>1     | 1481<br>7     | 1614<br>6     | 1750<br>0     | 18549              | 20896               |

\*Provisional; \*\*Estimated

**SOURCE:** Government of West Bengal, State Domestic Product and District Domestic Product of West Bengal, 1993-94 to 2003-04 (Kolkata: Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics, 2005), Table 26, p. 73.

## ii. Identity data

In defending itself against the demand for separation of Gorkhaland, the West Bengal government refuted arguments of some of the proponents as follows:

...comparison of the figures for Hill Darjeeling with those for the rest of the state conclusively shows that there is no evidence that this area is more backward or has been discriminated against in terms of allocation of resources. On the contrary, taking the whole of the state of West Bengal into account, despite the poverty in the hills, its position appears to be better than the average in the rest of the state, and decidedly better than the conditions in any other North Bengal district or any district on the western part of the state....In terms of per capita income, its position is fourth among the 16 districts of the state....

Over the years Darjeeling hill areas have been earmarked as priority areas for development. In 1984-85 the per capita plan expenditure in Darjeeling was Rs. 423, compared to the state average of Rs. 124....<sup>88</sup>

As the statistical data presented earlier show, Darjeeling district is not economically worse off than other parts of West Bengal. Nevertheless, the fact that the government felt the need to make this statement suggests that the image constructed by proponents of Gorkhaland was one of economic exploitation and/or hardship.

- Under the title “Sop to Reign in Rebels,” The Telegraph reported in 2006:

Finance minister Asim Dasgupta has announced an increase in the total plan outlay for north Bengal, Paschimanchal and Sundarbans from Rs 77 crore to Rs 104.5 crore. The step is being seen as an effort to rein in separatist forces, which perpetually complain of neglect in the region.<sup>89</sup>

Although the increase was directed at neighboring separatist movements, the centrality of the perception of economic deprivation in the motivation of such movements is clear.

- According to the scholar Atis Dasgupta,

Though he did not include any economic programme in the GNLF [Gorkhaland National Liberation Front] agitation for Gorkhaland, Ghising, in the course of his provocative public speeches in the hills, gave absurd promises on several economic issues of the district and always blamed, without any reliable data whatsoever, the Left Front Government of West Bengal for the economic backwardness of Darjeeling. These provocative speeches, however, were effectively used to form a populist base for GNLF among a large section of the gullible Nepalis belonging to the lower middle class and the poorer strata of the hill population.<sup>90</sup>

- The significance of economic issues is evident despite Ghising's claims to the contrary. Dasgupta observed that during the 1988-1998 period the performance of the GNLF in the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council "has turned out to be unsatisfactory and as the basic economic problems of Darjeeling are yet to be solved with a comprehensive approach, the demand for ethnic exclusiveness in terms of a separate province has recently surfaced again."<sup>91</sup> In other words, the demand for Gorkhaland has resurfaced. Dasgupta goes on to say that "The problem of ethnic identity of the Nepalis of Darjeeling is basically an internal affair of India which is related to the general problem of the uneven development of different nationalities in our country."<sup>92</sup>
- The failure of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) to bring about economic advance brought a new technique: put the area of Gorkhaland under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. What that would do is to provide additional autonomy/powers to the leaders of the reformed DGHC. The Darjeeling district secretary of CPI(M) supported the change. He said, "The move would eventually fulfill the peoples' aspirations for autonomy and would further intensify the development of the Hills.' However, it was categorically made clear that the party was dead against the creation of Gorkhaland, as some organizations cry from time to time."<sup>93</sup>
- Twenty years ago, the West Bengal government seemed somewhat baffled by the GNLF's stand on the role of economic issues in the separatist effort. It said that GNLF claims "the government of West Bengal is only concerned with the well-

being of the people of the plains and have been depriving the hill people of the funds meant for them in the interests of people in the plains,” an apparent reference to state action fostering economic inequality.<sup>94</sup> At the same time the government observed: “While it is ironical that the GNLF leadership has claimed that its agitation had no economic content there are some self-proclaimed well-wishers of the hill population who are unnecessarily trying to add economic dimension to the movement.”<sup>95</sup>

Although the sense of economic disparity may have been somewhat hidden by an ethnic cover, it appears to have been a part of the identity of those seeking separation.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Is economic inequality a foundation of separatist identity? The answers told by the two types of data presented are somewhat different.

On the one hand, the statistical data suggests the following: First, it does not support the claim that economic deprivation is central to most separatist undertakings. Half of the separatist movements considered here had higher per capita income or product than the states from which they sought separation (e.g., Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, Darjeeling/Gorkhaland). Second, economic inequalities between the separatist areas and the states from which they sought separation exist in most cases, though not in all cases (e.g., Chhattisgarh vs. Madhya Pradesh). Third, the vehemence of separatist movements is not always related to the degree of inequality (e.g., Telangana vs. Rayalaseema).

There are problems with the data which weaken any conclusion arising from their use in assessing the centrality of economic inequality to separatism. The presence or absence of a major city will affect the figures. Although many of those who supported Gorkhaland excluded the plains city of Siliguri, it lies technically in Darjeeling district so is included in the figures for the separatist area. Whether or not Hyderabad is included in the figures for Telangana makes a difference in the wealth calculation. Likewise, the inclusion or exclusion of Rayalaseema and the north coast areas of Andhra Pradesh affects the level of economic inequality between Telangana and “Andhra” in Andhra Pradesh. Karimnagar district in Telangana has developed rapidly, yet it voted overwhelmingly in the 2006 By-election for the leader of the separatist party. Although the per capita product and income in Jharkhand may be relatively higher than that in Bihar, it is based primarily on the extraction of resources that does not involve the bulk of the tribal people who became the “face” of the Jharkhand movement. And, calculating per capita income/product is a very difficult task in the first place.

On the other hand, the identity data show that the perception of economic inequality is a characteristic of each of the separatist movements. It was/is used to differentiate the separatist identity from the identity of those of the territory from which separation was sought. The “other” was seen as acting to promote or sustain a favorable economic position for itself at the cost of those seeking separation.

An identity that embodies economic deprivation may unite separatists and divide them from those opposing separation. It also involves an impetus for action. That is, it provides a guide to behavior. That behavior would be actions to overcome the inequality. The leaders of each of the movements sought to instill the notion that the only way to bring equality and/or greater prosperity was to support separatism.

The statistical data on per capita income or product did not uniformly conform to the constructed “reality.” As constructivists have made clear, behavior is guided by perception and not “empirical” reality. So, we conclude that the sense of economic deprivation implicit in the notion of economic inequality is fundamental to separatist identity.

Given such a conclusion, those opposed to separatist movements might be expected to act in two common-sensical ways: First, foster greater development in areas with separatist movements to lessen the ability of proponents to successfully use arguments of economic inequality in their construction of identity. Second, directly alter the perception of inequality in areas where separatist movements have developed/are developing. What seems clear from this examination of the role of economic inequality in separatist identity is that creating equality is not a sufficient condition for undermining support for separatist activity.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, ed., *Peoples Versus States, Minorities at Risk ins the New Century* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000), p. xiv.
- <sup>2</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, ed., *Peoples Versus States, Minorities at Risk ins the New Century* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000), p. xvi.
- <sup>3</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, ed., *Peoples Versus States, Minorities at Risk ins the New Century* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000), p. 109.
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