

The Movement for Telangana: Myth and Reality

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The movement for a separate state of Telangana reflects a long-standing demand for autonomy in social, economic and political matters, a call that has been denied for over half a century even as the region has continued to suffer within the larger state of Andhra Pradesh. Many myths and counter-arguments are being peddled by those wanting to retain the status quo.

Subsequent to the announcement by Home Minister P Chidambaram on 9 December 2009 about initiating the process for a separate Telangana state, a number of wrong notions are being peddled about the history, politics, development of Andhra Pradesh and its people. This note is an attempt to correct these misconceptions by bringing the actual recorded facts to the attention of the public so that issues can be discussed in a rational and democratic manner.

(1) Myth about Potti Sriramulu and Present-day Andhra Pradesh: Potti Sriramulu struggled for the separation of Telugu-speaking areas from Madras Presidency to form an Andhra state. More specifically, he fasted in 1952 for a separate Andhra state with Madras as its capital. This proposal of T Prakasam was rejected outright by C Rajagopalachari, the then chief minister of Madras Presidency. While the proposal for linguistic states was accepted by the Calcutta Congress Committee in 1934, the proposal for the formation of a linguistic state of Telugus was approved by the Madras assembly in 1937. It was only after the death of Potti Sriramulu that the movement for a separate Andhra intensified. Andhra state was formed in 1953 with Kurnool as its capital and T Prakasam as its chief minister.

The political evolution of Hyderabad state under Nizam's rule took a different direction. Telugu, Urdu, Marathi and Kannada-speaking areas and people were part of Hyderabad, a princely state. It went through political turmoil when the Nizam refused to merge with the Indian union at the time of independence in 1947. The Razakars, the armed militia of the Majlis, violently opposed the merger. At this time Telangana also witnessed an armed peasant struggle against feudal oppression led by the Communist Party. In September 1948,

the Indian army undertook what is known as "Police Action" putting an end to the Nizam's rule and merged the Hyderabad state with the Indian union. The "Police Action" also suppressed the peasant struggle. It must be noted that Muslims were a part of the struggle against the Razakars. Shobullah Khan, the editor of *Imroze*, a progressive journal, was assassinated by the Razakars. After the merger, the Congress won in the first elections in Hyderabad state held in 1952 and Burgula Ramakrishna Rao became its first chief minister. Rao's government brought progressive land legislation in the form of Hyderabad Tenancy Act that gave protection to tenants. By 1956, there was substantial progress in land reforms in Telangana.

(2) Merger was against the Wishes of the Telangana People: When Telangana was merged with Andhra state in 1956, there was much resentment against the influx of people from other states, including Andhra region. These migrants began to occupy most civil services posts. From 1948-52, many from Andhra state got jobs in Telangana as English education and experience in British administrative procedures gave them an edge over the local people. They also obtained false *mulki* (nativity) certificates to settle down and bought vast stretches of land. In 1952, the Hyderabad state witnessed a major student agitation, known as the Mulki agitation. It began in Warangal but soon spread to all the other areas, forcing the Hyderabad government to appoint a committee to look into violations of mulki rules. The demand for Visalandhra that gained momentum at this time was described by Nehru as inspired by a desire for imperialist occupation of land (*Indian Express*, 17 October 1953).

The first States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) also did not recommend the merger. Consisting of three members, Justice Fazal Ali (chairman), Hridaynath Kunzru and K M Panikkar, it recommended that Telangana could remain a separate state for five years, i.e., till 1961. At the end of this period, if two-thirds majority of elected representatives agree to the merger of the two regions, the merger could take place. There was opposition to the merger

This is a condensed version of an appeal issued by the Hyderabad Forum for Telangana and which was signed by a number of teachers, intellectuals, political activists and artists.

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by a section of the Congress. The then chief minister, B R K Rao too expressed apprehensions about the merger as Telangana and Andhra were two different cultural formations. Telangana was cosmopolitan with a composite culture of mingling different linguistic groups and had developed a distinct identity of its own.

It was in this background of widespread resentment and apprehensions of Telangana people that the debate on Visalandhra took place. Telangana was merged with Andhra state to form Andhra Pradesh, much against the wishes of the people. The fears of Telangana people were sought to be allayed through the "Gentlemen's Agreement" which stipulated that:

(a) Opportunities for employment in the public services, admissions to educational institutions for Telangana students to the extent of 1/3 of the total admissions in the entire state. Or admissions to Telangana colleges should be restricted entirely to Telangana students. This was to protect the educational and employment opportunities of Telangana people against the onslaught of more educated and opportunity-seeking Telugus from the coastal Andhra region.

(b) After the proportional sharing of expenditures by both the regions, the balance revenues would be spent on the development of Telangana. This was to ensure that the resources of Telangana would be spent within the region that they would not be diverted.

(c) A Regional Council would be established to ensure all-round development of Telangana.

It is untrue to say that Telangana people or B Ramakrishna Rao favoured a united Andhra; it is precisely because of their fears that the Gentleman's Agreement was formulated. Development was the promise given at the time of founding Andhra Pradesh to the people of Telangana. This has not been translated into reality till date.

(3) Telangana was an Independent, Viable, Revenue-Surplus State at the Time of Merger While Andhra State was Not: Andhra had a financially difficult existence during 1953-56. Telangana as Hyderabad state was popularly known, enjoyed a comparative revenue-surplus. Andhra state had low per capita revenue. Comparatively, Telangana had higher land and excise revenues keeping it in a financially comfortable situation. The SRC argued that Telangana would be a stable and viable unit with an area of 45,000 sq km, a population of 1.13 crore and an annual

revenue of Rs 17 crore. It had such a surplus on its revenue account that it was sufficient to finance irrigation projects. Considering the lag in education and employment levels, the commission felt that a merger with coastal Andhra would result in diversion of resources, employment and educational opportunities for the Telangana people.

Telangana was neither poor nor backward as it indeed had rich resources. However, it lagged behind due to the absence of English educational facilities and employment opportunities under the Nizam. If the merger had not happened, under their own government, the Telangana people would have attained similar educational and employment standards that people from coastal Andhra had. C H Hanumantha Rao has pointed out that the recently formed states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand have achieved higher rates of growth than the targeted growth rate – 9.2%, 11.1% and 8.8%, against the projected rates of 6.1%, 6.9% and 6.8%, respectively (Eleventh Plan). There should be no doubt that Telangana would prosper as a smaller state.

(4) Telangana was Promised Opportunities and Resources, But Never Received Its Due Share: Telangana has not received its due share in investment allocations, and the surpluses from the region (the difference between what ought to have been spent and what has actually been spent) have been diverted to other regions. The accumulated surplus based on the estimates of the Lalit Committee (1969) – given the task of determining the surplus due to Telangana for the period is November 1956 to 31 March 1968 – exceeded Rs 100 crore in 1969 itself and its present value would be Rs 2,300 crore (see Hanumantha Rao, 2005, for more details). The revenue from Telangana region (excluding Hyderabad) has formed more than half of Andhra Pradesh's total income in recent times (2003-04 to 2006-07). Seventy-five per cent of the total sales tax revenues and 66% of total excise revenue comes from the Telangana region. Revenue from coal comes entirely from Telangana and at least 44% of income from forest resources comes from the region. Thus, it is evident that Telangana contributes a higher share of revenue to Andhra Pradesh, but

the expenditure on the region and its people is far less (Rao and Shastry 2009).

The regional committee that was supposed to ensure all-round development of Telangana was abolished in 1973. The reports of the Bhargava Committee (1969) set up by the central government under Indira Gandhi to assess the revenue surpluses of Telangana to investigate into the actual expenditures on Telangana have never been made public.

(5) Telangana Is Growing under Its Own Steam, But at a Huge Cost: Growth is taking place in Telangana. This is also established by A P Human Development Report, 2007. The districts of Karimnagar and Warangal have recorded fairly good agricultural growth. But the growth has been achieved at a high cost. Unlike coastal Andhra, especially Krishna and two districts of Godavari and Guntur which have canal irrigation, in large parts of Telangana, 70% of irrigation is through groundwater and deep tube wells (Subramanyam 2003). The numerous promised but incomplete (e.g. Ichchampalli, Dummugudem, Srisailem Left Canal), under-fulfilled (e.g. Sriramsaagar) or abandoned (e.g. Devanuru) irrigation projects have meant that individual farmers have to make a much greater investment in agriculture. For instance, if we look at the relative share of 806 thousand million cubic (TMC) feet of Krishna water among the different regions of Andhra Pradesh, which is decided according to the proportion of river flow area and cultivable land in each region, Telangana projects have been allotted 266.83 TMC of water against a due share of 552 TMC, but receive much less. Mahboob Nagar, known for its very high levels of distress

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migration and perennial drought, should have got 187 TMC of water but has received nothing till now. Coastal Andhra receives several times more than its due share of 99 TMC. This is to the detriment of Rayalaseema too! Farming has become risky in Telangana, as indicated in the large number of suicides by farmers. Telangana accounts for as many as two-thirds of the total number of suicides reported in the state between 1998 and 2006. In recent times, Telangana has been allocated a higher share in expenditure on irrigation (55%) than its share in population (41%). However, compared to coastal Andhra, the unit cost of irrigation is much higher in Telangana (as it is situated on the Deccan plateau) as lifting of water requires huge investments in pumping machinery and power.

The promise of “development” was always made to Telangana people whenever they rose up against the unequal treatment that was meted out to them. The Gentlemen’s Agreement (1956), and the Six-point formula (1973) and the Regional Development Board (2006) given

at different phases of Telangana movement all promised development. (For text of the “Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1956: Proceedings of the Meeting Held at Hyderabad Guest House, New Delhi, 20 February 1956” see Annexure III in Bharath Bhushan and N Venugopal, ed., 2009.)

Many promises have remained unfulfilled, some of which are the following:

- Regional Councils, Mulki rules, Sub-committees for the development of backward regions.
- President’s Order on Public Employment (or, more accurately, The Andhra Pradesh Public Employment (Organisation of Local Cadres and Regulation of Direct Recruitment) 1975) issued on the basis of a six-point formula to undo the injustice caused in the matter of Telangana recruitment following the Telangana agitation in 1969.
- GO 610 (1985) – issued to repatriate all the non-locals appointed in Telangana to their respective native zones and appoint local candidates in the resulting vacancies.
- Girglani Commission’s recommendations

(2004) – set up to determine the deviations from the presidential order.

• Grievances, remedial measures, and safeguards (Summary of Final Report of One Man Commission, (SPF), Sr J M Girglani, Hyderabad 2004 – <http://www.telangana.org/Papers/article16.asp>).

The list of betrayals of agreements and dilution of safeguards for the protection of Telangana and its people is painfully long. Strangely, from 1973, what the Telangana people were arguing as a matter of right to self-respect got converted into an issue of “developing backward areas”. Within this paradigm, a uniform approach for promoting accelerated development of backward areas became the strategy of the state. With this move, the state successfully nullified the special status for Telangana region accorded earlier due to the historically specific conditions of merger. Telangana got equated with all other backward regions of the state. It became easy to project it as an issue of development and backwardness without any reference to questions of justice and above all to its self-respect.



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Considering the nature and history of development that occurred in this region, the questions that come up are – in whose interests have this development taken place? Who have been the beneficiaries? What role did the people of this region have in these decisions? These are political questions for the settlement of which democratic self-rule is crucial. It is this that the advocates of the separate state of Telangana are struggling for.

(6) Telangana's Struggle for Self-respect and Self-rule Is 50 Years Old: Telangana Rashtra Samiti's (TRS) emergence denotes only the latest phase in the movement for statehood for Telangana. It started with the mulki agitation in 1952 when students protested against the huge influx of outside people into government services in the region. Three students died in police firing. In 1968-69, the movement for separate Telangana lasted nearly a year in which 369 people were killed in police firing. The current phase gathered momentum with the decision of TRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) to a fast unto death. When signs of his withdrawal followed soon after the commencement of his fast, university students all over Telangana came out to join the struggle, followed by numerous other sections and their associations. While KCR decided to continue his fast, it is these sections that continued the movement in its various forms. The struggle for a separate Telangana has become a broad democratic movement, not confined to a single leader or a party.

Culturally, Telangana has never been integrated with coastal Andhra. Telangana Telugu is absent in the school textbooks of Andhra Pradesh because it is considered inferior to coastal Andhra Telugu, and its literature is constantly devalued. Marginalisation of Urdu, the official language till 1948, has not only led to the neglect of Muslims and their habitations, but sidelined them from the domains of history and culture. Linguistic jingoism of coastal Andhra is also manifest in the culture industry which shifted its base to Hyderabad from Chennai due to the promotional policies of the state government. During the last 20 years, the Telugu film and entertainment industry dominated by coastal Andhra capital has consistently

portrayed Telangana people as either villains or comedians. Belittling of Telangana culture, language and life has become the norm in Telugu films and television. Their failure to incorporate the rich culture of the region where they are located and whose labour supports the industry is indicative of the large-scale failure of the project of emotional integration that was sought to be achieved through the formation of Andhra Pradesh.

While the struggle for a separate Andhra was based on the ideology of linguistic nationalism, the demand for Telangana statehood is against internal colonisation in the name of linguistic unity. Telangana consciousness is shaped by the recognition that in an unified state their distinct language, culture and history have been erased and the interests of their region severely undermined. It is this consciousness that underlies the past and current movements for a separate Telangana state.

(7) Hyderabad, an Integral Part of Telangana: At the time of merger, Hyderabad was the fifth largest city in India, with underground drainage, two major public hospitals, many other super speciality hospitals, one large university, well developed road and railway network – these were put in place by the Nizams. The city could boast of a cosmopolitan culture with Tamilians, Marathis, Telugus, Persians, British, French and North Indians living alongside Muslims of various persuasions. Irrespective of origin, many were conversant with Urdu or its local variant, Deccani. This long history of living with many cultures gave the city a culture of openness, where even the coastal Andhra migrants feel included. Due to these reasons, Ambedkar recommended that it should be made the second capital of India. It is precisely for this reason that all the major politicians of Andhra state, including T Prakasam coveted Hyderabad as a capital.

The policy of “development” of backward areas in the districts of Telangana got concentrated only in surrounding districts of Hyderabad. While industrialisation in Telangana took place due to the initiative of the central government, deindustrialisation picked up speed during the regime of Chandrababu Naidu. Several public sector undertakings were closed down even

though they were not sick. There was a boom in real estate and speculation. Land obtained from surrounding villages for industrial development was turned into colonies, leased out on nominal prices or donated to industries, especially the film and IT industries. Recently, in the name of Greater Hyderabad more mandals of Rangareddy, Medak, Mahboobnagar and Nalgonda have been merged with Hyderabad. Nearly 600 villages have been merged with Hyderabad so far. In this entire expansion, misleadingly called “development”, what happened was expansion of corporate capital-driven privatisation. The local Telangana people gained little, either in education or employment or health. They, in fact, have lost their land and livelihoods. Over the last 20 years, public investment has fallen while profit-driven enterprises have grown.

Conclusions

When the separate Telangana state is achieved, it will have to live up to its democratic promise, especially towards dalits, Muslims, women and backward castes. A review of the dominant economic policies of special economic zones, alongside an increase in public expenditure on health, education and housing will have to be underscored. We think that it is a tremendous opportunity for people and movements in non-Telangana regions to initiate such changes in policies and envision their future afresh. In view of the huge impending tasks in Telangana and Andhra, we appeal to all democratic parties, organisations and people to desist from distorting facts and provoking unhealthy sentiments so that the Telugu people may live peacefully in two separate states in the near future.

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