

## UNITED ANDHRA OR SEPARATE TELENGANA?

### Politics of Regionalism in Andhra Pradesh

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*The paper attempts to encapsulate the political dynamics in the state of Andhra Pradesh, wherein the government is now under tremendous political pressure from parties and social forces, supporting or opposing the demand for a separate state of Telengana. An attempt is made in this paper to give a comprehensive view of the movement for separate Telengana state by throwing light on history, economy and politics in Andhra Pradesh. Given that there is every possibility of a new state becoming a reality in the near future, the paper also tries to predict the likely consequences of the formation of Telengana state on the people of the region.*

#### Introduction

The ongoing movement in Telengana for a separate state has attracted considerable public attention. Unlike the most other regional movements in India, the Telengana movement is not for asserting linguistic and ethnic rights or existence of a distinct cultural community. Ethnically, culturally and linguistically, the people of Telengana are not distinct from the people residing in other parts of Andhra Pradesh (in short, AP). Although there are differences in dialects, all speak the same language i.e., Telugu, read same literature, eat same foods and enjoy same films and music. Yet the state has been witnessing powerful movement in Telengana region, asserting distinct regional identity and demanding a separate state on grounds of economic underdevelopment of the region within AP. The movement provoked public reaction in other regions of the state - in Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra - opposing any government moves to bifurcate the state. Lack of consensus among the Telugu people of different regions of Andhra Pradesh forced the Government of India to constitute a committee under the chairmanship of Justice

B.N. Srikrishna to examine the situation in AP. The committee which heard the views of different sections of the people has submitted its report suggesting five-alternatives, but clearly showing a preference for united Andhra Pradesh with constitutional guarantees for the people of Telengana. This recommendation has not gone well with the people of Telengana, who continued their agitation. The agitation has adversely affected the functioning of educational institutions, administration and law & order situation in the state. This continuing stalemate calls for an incisive examination of the causes, course and likely consequence of the face-off between those agitating for a separate Telengana state and those who stand for united Andhra Pradesh.

#### A Brief History of Andhra Pradesh

The state of Andhra Pradesh has three distinct regions - Telengana, Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. During the British rule, Telugu speaking people did not have a state of their own. While the coastal and the ceded (now called Rayalaseema) districts were then a part of Madras province, Telengana was with the princely state of Hyderabad. The

Telugu speaking people of Madras state fought for a separate state of Andhra, which finally materialized in 1953 after the martyrdom of Potti Sree Ramulu who went on an indefinite fast in pursuit of the demand for a separate for Telugu people of the composite Madras state. The people of Telengana region fought against feudal rule of the Nizam. The Hyderabad State got integrated into India in the year 1949 and it had its first popular ministry after the general elections in 1952. The then Hyderabad State included not only Telengana region, but also Marathi and Kannada speaking regions. In the wake of the recommendations of the State Reorganizing Committee (SRC), which favored linguistic reorganization of the states, there were intense discussions and debates in both Andhra and Hyderabad states as to whether Telugu speaking Telengana region should unite with Andhra state. The people of Andhra region were in favor of unity of all Telugu regions. The then united Communist Party of India (CPI) vociferously advocated the formation of Vishalandhra, one state for all Telugu people. But some sections within Telengana were reluctant to unite with Andhra, as they were apprehensive of domination by educationally and economically more advanced Coastal Andhra people. However, when the matter came for discussion in the legislative assembly, the majority of Telengana legislators then favored unity with Andhra. But as the hardcore leaders supporting separate Telengana state continued to oppose the idea of Vishalandhra, the Congress High Command convened a meeting of the

Congress leaders of both the regions in February 1956 and came out with a 'Gentlemen's Agreement', which gave certain guarantees to Telengana region in matters of revenue, education, government service, employment and power-sharing. A proposal was made to constitute a Regional Council for Telengana. It was also agreed that if the Chief Minister (CM) was from Andhra, the Deputy Chief Minister should be from Telengana and vice-versa and two out of the five important ministerial portfolios would be offered to Telengana. The agreement facilitated the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in the year 1956.<sup>1</sup>

### Turbulent 60's and 70's

Had the Gentlemen's Agreement been strictly followed and all out efforts were made to develop Telengana region so that the people of Telengana no longer suffered from fear of domination and feeling of inferiority, the state of Andhra Pradesh could have by now consolidated itself as a state of all Telugu people. But unfortunately, partly due to laxity of government and partly due to technical difficulties in implementing some of the assurances, the promises made under Gentlemen's Agreement could not be implemented effectively. In the latter part of 1960s, the growing resentment among the people of Telengana compelled them to come to streets and demand for strict implementation of the assurances or for granting separate state status to Telengana.<sup>2</sup> On the other side, the people of Andhra, who had grievances against the Mulki regime, which they felt would made them second grade citizens in their own state, began to

agitate for separate Andhra state.<sup>3</sup> But Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was then the Prime Minister of India, refused to budge to regional pressures and declared her preference for united Andhra Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> Lack of committed leadership, gradual erosion of public support and legal entanglements forced the leaders of both Andhra and Telengana to accept the Six Point Formula mooted by the Central government, which was subsequently accepted with some modifications. The parliament deliberated on the points and passed as part of the 33rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution. In 1978 general elections that followed the Congress won with a thumping majority. Dr. Marri Chenna Reddy, once a dissident of Congress and a founder of Telengana Praja Samithi, was made the chief minister. Dr. Chenna Reddy gave up the demand for separate Telengana state once he became chief minister.

#### Politics in the name of Telugu Pride

Initially for about three decades, there was no viable alternative to the Congress party in Andhra Pradesh. The communist party which was popular in early 1950s lost its ground in course of time. Although there were no major regional parties in Andhra Pradesh, the regional interests were articulated and fought within the Congress party. The Congress high command used to arbitrate the competing regional interests. The state leaders who opposed the high command were humiliated or thrown out of positions within the party and government. One such incident of humiliation of Mr. T. Anjiah, the then CM of AP by Rajiv Gandhi, who was then just a newly initiated leader in

Congress party, sparked the fire. Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, a popular Telugu actor, known for his mythological roles, started Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and challenged the domination of the Congress party by whipping up Telugu pride and self-respect. He could mobilize the support of Telugu people in all the three regions of Andhra Pradesh and ensured that his party won with a thumping majority in the year 1986 to become a first non-Congress chief minister in the state.<sup>5</sup> From then onwards for over a decade, sub-regional demands and movements took a back seat in Andhra Pradesh, irrespective of the parties and persons that came to power.

#### Changing Economy and Power Relations

Economically and educationally the coastal region was comparatively more developed than other parts of AP. The coastal cities like Vijayawada and Guntur developed as cultural and financial centers. The enterprising Kamma cultivators of the coastal region made it big in business and film industry as well.<sup>6</sup> During the Telegu Desam regime, the coastal capitalists started / expanded several business ventures in and around Hyderabad and changed the face of the city of Hyderabad - demographically, culturally and economically.<sup>7</sup> After Chandra Babu Naidu became the Chief Minister, he pursued liberalization agenda with an urban bias. During his regime Hyderabad city became a destination for foreign capital and IT industries.<sup>8</sup> The growth of economic opportunities has attracted the educated people from all regions of AP to flock to Hyderabad city. Resentment against growing clout of the coastal people, led to the

formation of Telengana Rashtra Samithi (in short, TRS) by a dissident Telugu Desam leader, K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) in 2001. In the year 2004 Telugu Desam party was defeated and Dr. Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy (popularly known as YSR), who mobilized the people of all regions of AP against the Chandra Babu Naidu' regime, became the chief minister of AP. Unlike the weak Congress CMs of earlier time, YSR was a powerful leader with mass base. He aligned with TRS to come to power in the year 2005, but soon marginalized it by effectively projecting himself as the representative of even the people of Telengana. During his regime, even Rayalaseema real estate mafia entered Hyderabad on a massive scale and grabbed land in and around Hyderabad city through legal and illegal means, inviting considerable resentment among the people of Telengana. However, as long as YSR was in power, Telengana dissidents could not muster mass support. His populist welfare policies won the support of the people in all regions of AP and he came back to power for the second time in 2009.<sup>9</sup> But his unexpected death in the helicopter accident in September 2, 2009 changed the politics of the region dramatically. The Congress in AP did not have a powerful leader of Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy's stature and the party High Command, which was not willing to hand over the reins of power to his son, Mr. Jaganmohan Reddy, made a senior leader Rosaiah, who despite his experience enjoyed little image and support among the people, as the Chief Minister, only to be replaced after a year or so by another weak person, Mr.

Kiran Kumar Reddy. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Congress governments after the death of Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy, TRS party pitched up its demand for separate Telengana state. The support of a section of the left intellectuals and the participation of the students and youth gave mass color to the movement. The suicide deaths of over one hundred students belonging to Telengana, the militant mobilization of students in Osmania and Kakatiya universities and Mr. KCR's hunger strike in November 2009 forced the central government to come out with official declaration on December 9, 2009 stating that the 'process of formation of state of Telengana would be initiated'. However, the instant opposition of the MPs and MLAs of Andhra and Rayalaseema region to the separatist demands of TRS prevented the central government from giving assent to the demand for Telengana state. In the name of understanding the problem in depth, the central government constituted the Srikrishna Commission and asked it to submit its report within the specified time.

### **Arguments and Counter-Arguments**

Those advocating separate Telengana state present a long list of grievances in support of their demand. They cite how the leaders of Andhra violated Gentlemen's Agreement; how no initiatives were taken to irrigate Telengana districts although both Krishna and Godavari rivers enter AP through Telengana region; how the central funds that the state received because of backwardness of the people and region were misdirected

to other regions; how Telengana youth / employees were deprived of jobs / promotions in Hyderabad; how coastal capitalists began to acquire land in Telengana region and how the arrogant Andhra people look down upon Telengana dialect, culture and people.<sup>10</sup> Those who stand for United Andhra, however, argue that there has not been any deliberate attempt to neglect the development of Telengana. Compared to Rayalaseema region, Telengana is far more developed. Again, not all part of coastal Andhra is developed. There are districts like Srikakulam, which are more underdeveloped than some of the districts of Telengana. Similarly, all parts of Telengana are not underdeveloped. While districts like Adilabad, Mahaboobnagar are backwards, others districts like Khammam and Warangal are considerably advanced. It is pointed out that compared to Rayalaseema region, Telengana is better irrigated through tube wells and lift irrigation projects. Further, construction or completion of more dams on Krishna and Godavari rivers is delayed not because of political reasons, but because of the terrain and technical reasons.<sup>11</sup> If the construction of dams were technically feasible, the critics of Separate Telengana movement ask, what had prevented powerful Chief Ministers like J. Vengal Rao, M. Chenna Reddy etc., who hailed from Telengana region, from going ahead with the projects?

The city of Hyderabad is the most contentious issue in Telengana imbroglio. The leaders of Telengana argue that Hyderabad is an inseparable part of Telengana and they cannot share the city with any others. But the

people in Andhra contend that Telengana cannot claim exclusive rights over Hyderabad city, which contributes to about 40 percent of the state income. Being the capital city of AP, built with the contributions of all people of AP, it is unreasonable to claim that only Telengana people have right over the resources and opportunities available in Hyderabad. Some leftist organizations like Socialist Unity Centre (SUCI-C) opposed to separatist movements pointed out that the Telengana activists are more concerned about the threats emanating from their brothers in other regions and are ignoring the dangers of neo-liberal policies and programmes which are adversely affecting the economy and employment opportunities in the state. They point out that as Labor and Employment Minister in the first UPA government, Mr. KCR did nothing to stop privatization of public sector units and took no initiative to revive the sick industries in Telengana. All these points and counter-points could have been articulated and deliberated across the table with the help of rigorous empirical data, so that all could have identified where things have gone wrong and come out with solutions that could ensure balanced development of all regions in the state. But as emotions overtook reasoning and narrow politics overshadowed political wisdom, each party in the conflict began to address to its own constituency and ignored the need to talk to and listen to the other parties. Instead, the leaders and followers on both sides started spitting venom against each other and indulged in mudslinging campaigns and muscle twisting tactics.

**Persons, Parties and Organizations**

Neither Mr. Chandrababu Naidu of TDP, nor Dr. YSR of Congress was ever sympathetic to the idea of separate Telengana state. They used the issue to their own advantage. But when the central government asked the parties to come out with their stands on Telengana issue, both Congress and TDP leaders split on regional lines. Of late, the Communist Party of India (CPI), which at one time fought for Vishalandhra and branded the Telengana agitation in 1960s and 70s as deviationist, has started lending support to the demand for separate Telengana. Another major left party, CPI (M) continues to give lip support to united Andhra, although it did nothing to counter the Telengana movement. In contrast, smaller parties like Lok Satta, SUCI (C), and Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam Party openly came out in support of united Andhra. Telengana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), which operates only in Telengana region, remained consistent in its demand for separate Telengana. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came out in support of Telengana and promised to vote in favor of Telengana as and when the issue comes up for discussion in the Parliament. The movement for Telengana got boost with the formation of Telengana Joint Action Committees (JAC) of political groups, students, youth, lawyers, employees' organizations and other civil society organizations supporting Telengana. Many organizations and individuals sympathetic to the Maoists came out openly in support of Telengana, giving a progressive color to the demand. Inspired by the movement,

hundreds of students committed suicides and several thousands of youth in Telengana courted arrests and faced police brutalities. Apart from dividing the political parties, the Telengana issue brought divisions within other communities - the Muslims, the dalits and the tribals.

**Present Political Scenario**

The Srikrishna Committee report submitted in December 2010 went against the advocates of Telengana state in more than one way. Its incisive research into different aspects of socio-economic development in AP showed that Telengana is not as underdeveloped as it is made out to be. In all important fields, be it agriculture, industry, irrigation, power generation, education or employment, Telengana region has made considerable advances in recent decades. Although it is lagging behind coastal region, Telengana is definitely ahead of Rayalamseema region. Further the committee felt that it is possible to develop Telengana within the composite state of Andhra Pradesh. Although the report mentions that creation of Telengana state with Hyderabad as its capital could be one of the alternatives, the committee cautioned the government against the problems involved in taking the decision, as long as all the parties do not agree to it. The committee came out in support of united Andhra Pradesh with constitutional-statutory guarantees for the socio-economic development of Telengana region.<sup>12</sup>

TRS leaders rejected the Srikrishna Committee report and insisted that nothing

short of a separate state is acceptable to them. Several intellectuals in Telengana also felt that Srikrishna committee report did not address the issues of domination, loss of trust and absence of feeling of unity.<sup>13</sup> Keeping aside the justification in the name of underdevelopment and economic backwardness, Telengana activists have now started emphasizing on self-respect of Telengana people and their right to self-government. The dominating influence of the separatists did not allow those in support of united Andhra to come out openly in Telengana region. Pressure was brought upon all MLAs and MPs from Telengana from all parties to support the demand for separate Telengana. Coming under intense public pressure, Congress leaders from Telengana also started exercising pressure on the central government to concede to the demand for Telengana, although their counterparts in Andhra region continue to advocate United Andhra. Similarly, even Telugu Desam Party is unable to take a united stand, as its leaders find themselves divided along regional lines. On its part, the central government is delaying taking any decision and is playing the wait and watch game. It knows that conceding the demand for Telengana would lead to multiplication of such demands in different other states in India. It is apparent that the Congress led UPA government prolongs the issue till the next general elections and may take decision in favor of Telengana, if it thinks that the move would serve its political interests. TRS also realizes that Telengana cannot become a reality without the support of major parties in

the parliament. So, it wishes to keep the momentum till the next general elections. However, given several other general issues of importance such as price rise, farmers' deaths, people's movements against corruption, and neo-liberal attacks, keeping up the momentum is not going to be an easy task. There is already a lull in the movement, after the much publicized the Million March programme on March 11, 2011 ended up with the mob that gathered at Tank Bund point in Hyderabad city destroying the statues of the icons that shaped Telugu history, literature and culture. After the Million March mayhem, TRS and Telengana JAC are again making efforts to reactivate the movement through new agitation programmes. Recently Telengana MLAs belonging to all three major parties – Congress, TDP and TRS – submitted their resignations to the Speaker to exercise pressure on the government. On their part, the political leaders and capitalists of Andhra are equally determined not give up their fight easily without a hard bargain. Although many still believe that Telengana state will become a reality sooner or later, one is not sure as to what would be the political and economic costs of the bifurcation or the trifurcation of Andhra Pradesh.

### **Conclusion : What if Telengana becomes a Reality?**

The Telengana movement enjoys considerable support among the intellectuals and social activists not only in the region, but also outside Andhra Pradesh. Many supporters sincerely believe that the formation of a separate state of Telengana would resolve the problems of the people of

Telengana. Hence it is apt to conclude this paper with some predictions about what are likely to follow, once the long cherished dream of millions of people in Telengana is accomplished. The formation of new state of Telengana would result in creation of new legislature, new High Court and a new secretariat. All these creations do help in accommodating some aspiring / unemployed politicians to become MLAs, MLCs and ministers. A few thousands of educated youth may get jobs in the state government sector. Some Telengana based lawyers in Hyderabad may get more clients and some Telengana state government employees get quick promotions. In the new state of Telengana, it is possible to check to some extent real estate mafia from Andhra region grabbing land in Telengana region and resist the extra-economic pressures exercised by Andhra businessmen on the state government to acquire special concessions for themselves. The space left by them will however be filled by the emerging local elite from Telengana region. Can the people of Telengana achieve anything more out of the future state of Telengana? Probably, not! For, it is impossible to drive out lakhs of people from Andhra region already settled and working in private sector. As the Indian Constitution guarantees to its citizens the rights to settle and undertake business anywhere in the country (Kashmir and tribal states of northeast are exceptions), it is also not possible to pack Andhra capitalists off from Hyderabad.<sup>14</sup> The jobs in private sector continue to be guided by market and it is impossible to force the multinationals and

monopolies operating in Hyderabad to provide jobs only for the locals. Neo-liberal policies pursued by successive governments in AP have already led to privatization of several public sector undertakings and closure of several industrial units. That nothing would be done to reverse these economic trends become clear from the fact that none of the main leaders and parties fighting for separate Telengana has any agenda against neo-liberalism. In the context of rapidly changing economy of the state, political separation mean little to the marginalized sections in Telengana excluded from developmental processes.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as Telengana is located in the Deccan plateau, it is difficult to build major dams across the Krishna and Godavari Rivers in Telengana region and the cultivators continue to depend primarily on lift irrigation, the costs of which till now shared by all people of Andhra Pradesh will have to be borne by the people of Telengana only.

Further, given the character of politicians leading the agitation, one can foretell that Congress and TRS would merge sooner or later. Even if that does not happen, it is sure that the left organizations and intellectuals who actively participated in the movement and helped in giving the movement a progressive color are likely to find themselves isolated by the mainstream parties, once Telengana state becomes a reality. As the economy continues to work within capitalist framework, their dream of ensuring balanced regional development and equitable distribution of resources in Telengana would remain mirages. Since the

Telengana agitation does not aim at bringing about any structural changes in politics or economy, in all probability one can say that the basic problems of underdevelopment, unemployment, economic exploitation and police oppression continue to remain. That there is nothing inherently progressive about small states is already becoming evident to the indigenous people in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttarakhand. It will not take much time to the people of Telengana to realize this truth. The only solace that the people of the future Telengana state could have is that they are ruled and exploited not by Andhra capitalists, but by their own indigenous elite.

## Notes :

1. For an overview of the events leading to formation of Andhra Pradesh, see Gautam Pingle, 'Historical Context of Andhra and Telengana 1949-56', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 08, February 20 - February 26, 2010, pp. 57-65
2. Hugh Gray, 'The Demand for a Separate Telengana State in India', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, No. 5, May 1971, pp. 463-474; Mohit Sen, 'Separatism over Telengana', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 5, No. 47, November 21, 1970, pp. 1877-187; G. Parthasarathy, K. V. Ramana, G. Dasaradha Rama Rao, 'Separatist Movement in Andhra Pradesh: Shadow and Substance', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 8, No. 11, March 17, 1973, pp. 560-563.
3. For understanding Mulki regime, refer, M R, 'Mulki Award and After', *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 7, No. 50, December 9, 1972, pp. 2404-2405
4. Hugh Gray, 'The Failure of the Demand for a Separate Andhra State', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 4, April 1974, pp. 338-349;
5. Atul Kohli, 'The NTR Phenomenon in Andhra Pradesh: Political Change in a South Indian State', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 10, October, 1988, pp. 991-101
6. Carol Boyack Upadhyaya, 'The Farmer-Capitalists of Coastal Andhra Pradesh', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 28, July 9, 1988, pp. 1433-1442; also his "Social and Cultural Strategies of Class Formation in Coastal Andhra Pradesh", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 31 No. 2, July 1997, pp. 169-193.
7. Sanjaya Baru, 'The Local and the Global in Hyderabad Development', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42 No. 43, October 27 - November 02, 2007, pp. 31-36.
8. G. Krishna Reddy, 'New Populism and Liberalization: Regime Shift under Chandra Babu Naidu in AP', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 9, March 2-8, 2002, pp. 871-883
9. K. Srinivasulu, 'Y S Rajashekhar Reddy: A Political Appraisal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV, No. 38, September 19, 2009, pp. 8-10
10. For understanding the logic of Telengana activists, see M. Kodanda Ram, 'Movement for Telengana State: A Struggle for Autonomy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 13-19, 2007, pp 90-93; V. Anil Kumar, 'Why Telengana? Why Now?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 3, 2007, pp. 91-94; Telengana Development Forum, *Deprivation to Telengana: Case for Separate Statehood*, Memorandum submitted to Justice Sri Krishna Committee, Hyderabad, April 2010.
11. How the terrain and technical problems come in the way of building big dams in Telengana region has not been addressed in many of the writings on the subject, barring a few exceptions. See B. Srujana, 'Demand For Telengana - Channelling Discontent Into Wrong Areas', *India Current Affairs*, posted on January 11, 2011, <http://indiacurrentaffairs.org/demand-for-telengana-%E2%80%93-channelling-discontent-into-wrong-areas-b-srujana/> (Accessed on June 21, 2011)
12. For details of Srikrishna Committee recommendations see, Government of India, *Committee for Consultations on the Situation in Andhra Pradesh: A Report*, December 2010.
13. C.H. Hanumantha Rao, 'Sri Krishna Committee Report on Telengana: Recommendations at Variance with Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 29, 2011, pp. 33-36; K Srinivasulu, M Channa Basavaiah, D Ravinder, 'Srikrishna Committee: Thorough but Unviable', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI no 10, March 5, 2011, pp. 16-18.
14. S. Swaminathan, Aklesaria Aiyar, 'More Satyams in a New Telengana?', *The Economic Times*, March 10, 2010.
15. Anant Maringanti, 'Telengana: Righting the Historical Wrongs or Getting the Future Right', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 4, January 23 - January 29, 2010, pp. 33-38

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