

## **Bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh: Almost a Fait Accompli?**

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The fears being created and played upon by the politicians in the Seemandhra movement about the bifurcation of the state of Andhra Pradesh are overblown and unrealistic.

Andhra Pradesh (AP), the first state formed on the linguistic basis in India, is on the verge of bifurcation. The reasons and factors for this development might be many, but even after coexistence of 57 long years; the sense of same language has failed to keep the people of the state united. The only conclusion is that the “conditional formation” of a state based on language appears to be a failed experiment. I am not from Telangana; I hail from Vijayawada, located in the coastal Andhra region. Having spent almost 10 years as a student in Hyderabad, I would like to put forward some of my observations with regards to the issue of state bifurcation.

### **Rationale behind Division**

The rationale behind the agitation for Telangana is not merely “economic backwardness” or rather, as the proponents of a new state claim, “an imposed economic backwardness” and the culmination of grievances such as intentional neglect of the region in water sharing, funds allocation, employment opportunities (seen in the slogans *Neellu, Nidhulu, Niyamakalu*) or even cultural discrimination. These claims may or may not pass the test of rationality. But once a section of people start exhibiting their serious apprehensions and inconvenience to live with their counterparts in other regions and if their grievances are sustained for decades together - any attempt at an abstract unity can only further worsen the situation and damage efforts at overall development and harmony

I wonder if there would have been any agitation for Telangana if at all the “compromising formulae” (that was framed in the past between two regions) had been respected in letter and spirit. There is no guarantee that if Telangana becomes a separate state it would surely thrive towards an inclusive development free from exploitation and discrimination. If the new state fails to address the economic inequalities in the region and ensure substantive distribution of resources, the state’s rulers will have absolutely no one to blame except themselves.

## **Rationale behind Unity**

Unity can be wished or envisaged, I am afraid, it may not be imposed or demanded. The argument against bifurcation is only valid to the extent that it has the possibility of it costing the other regions negatively as they share many common natural resources and physical and nature infrastructure with the Telangana region. But then, the conclusion from that argument is that other regions have every right to fight for their due share following bifurcation as per established legal conventions.

It is widely alleged that the movement for “united Andhra” is predominantly instigated by political leaders and crony capitalists who have only vested interests in and around Hyderabad. That argument that “if you do not stand for “united Andhra” you do not love Andhra”, as the proponents of a united Andhra aver, is very much irrational and lopsided.

The sections that seem threatened by bifurcation and most concerned about the status of Hyderabad post this - are those that provide private sector services in the capital. A private entrepreneur is always led by the profit motive and is not driven much by regional affiliations. Most executives (owners and directors) of corporates operating in Hyderabad are either from the Andhra region or are from other states/ countries. The number of such executives belonging to the Telangana region is negligible in number.

But the logic that bifurcation should cause them to have apprehensions is faulty. The executives from the Andhra region who work in the information technology sector have worked in various parts of the world without any apprehensions, hindrances or inhibitions. Why should they feel any apprehensions in a Hyderabad based in a prospective separate state of Telangana? Shouldn't they focus more on expanding employment opportunities beyond Hyderabad in other places of the Andhra region as well? I argue that the focus of the corporates should be to petition government in the Andhra region to expand and upgrade infrastructure, government institutions, so as to ease their operations and to provide further employment opportunities in that region.

The other logic that we hear from opponents of bifurcation is based on the fact that Hyderabad as the capital of united Andhra Pradesh has generated a large share of state revenues (more than 50% as per reports). But can a mechanism not be evolved so that there is a restricted period following bifurcation, where there is sharing of revenues between the new states? Or even that the Andhra region could be compensated with a financial package from the government of India in order to develop other regions through capital and infrastructure?

The third bone of contention is that of sharing of river water following bifurcation. This should not be so, as there are many states in India which shares river water with its neighbouring states; the country itself has water treaties with neighbouring countries. Water sharing can be done appropriately using established national and international conventions between the new states formed out of bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh as well.

Beyond the aforementioned issues of capital, revenue and river water sharing, many fabricated issues have been raised by opponents of bifurcation. These include the “safety” of people from the Andhra region in Telangana. As someone who has lived in Hyderabad for a significant number of years - including the peak years of agitation for a separate state - I can hardly recall any major violent or unpleasant incident that was aimed at hurting the people from the Andhra region, except for a few stray incidents during December 2010. The opponents of bifurcation should be reminded that a new state of Telangana must and will function under the aegis of the Indian Constitution and therefore the irrational fears of insecurity in Hyderabad should be rejected.

Those who champion the cause of united Andhra basing their claims on Hyderabad must realise that the longer such stakes are claimed on the basis of “injustice” for the Andhra region, the lesser are the prospects of recompensation in employment and infrastructure in the Andhra region.

## **Role of Political Leaders and the Media**

Merely days after the announcement of the bifurcation decision by the Congress Working Committee on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2013, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Kiran Kumar Reddy openly expressed his discontent against the decision and made a few comments favouring “United Andhra”, including issues related to water sharing, electricity generation, status of employees in Hyderabad among others. These hypothetical statements - clearly based on prejudice - have generated a sense of insecurity among the people of the Andhra region. A few days later, he even went to the extent of saying that there would be “water wars” between Telangana and extant state if the state is bifurcated.

The chief minister’s statements mirrored the comments made by the party president of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti over the status of government employees in Hyderabad - both of them, equally untimely and illogical. These precipitated the present “Seemandhra movement” that rages to this day. If the chief minister was genuinely concerned about forthcoming complications in the event of bifurcation, he should have started an awareness campaign in Telangana the moment he assumed office. But now, he has thrown caution to the wind clearly to score some petty political points over his rivals.

Political leaders in the Andhra Region - as part of the Seemandhra movement - cutting across all political parties, despite very well knowing that bifurcation seems inevitable, have been instigating students, farmers and employees. They have completely failed in educating them about the probability of high number of employment opportunities that could be generated while constructing a new capital and other infrastructural facilities in the Andhra region. Instead their propaganda has been given too much play by the majority of the Telugu media (whose proprietors hail mostly from the Andhra region) and have succeeded in misleading the people of the region.

The telecast of some news channels - with proprietors hailing from the Telangana region - have been prevented across the Andhra region. This only exposes the hollow nature and vested interests involved in the Seemandhra movement.

## **Hyderabad's lopsidedness**

In the past 50 to 60 years the city of Hyderabad has grown in leaps and bounds as opposed to other areas in both the regions in Telangana and the Andhra region. Information technology companies, public sector units, state and central educational institutes, manufacturing industries, the entertainment industry, major national and international research institutes in the sciences and social sciences, national parks, multi-speciality hospitals, real estate, airports, multinational corporations, cultural centres, NGOs, even prime tourist destinations have been overwhelmingly concentrated in one place in Hyderabad, almost to the neglect of other places in the state. Within a short period of time between 1990 and 2005, Hyderabad emerged as the power house hub for economic, political, social, cultural and entrepreneurial activities, drawing people from all over the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The state governments over the years have completely neglected/ignored to scatter the process of urbanisation and failed to develop other potential urban agglomerations across the state. This has led to the emergence of heavy negative externalities in Hyderabad as the absorbing capacity has reached a maximum limit. As the population started flocking in at rapid rates, it started to exert high level pressure on resources and provision of basic amenities. The governments have been grappling with the issues like infrastructure, health and hygiene, law and order, medical services, transport, social justice, housing, pollution, communal harmony, drinking water, etc.

There is an urgent need to redefine development in Hyderabad beyond urban development - there is a need to increase purchasing power of the people so as to meet their basic necessities and lead a dignified life free from deprivation, insecurity - through inclusive development. The evolution of Hyderabad can only be termed as a mis-directed mode of development and an outcome of "centralised planning" that has been to the detriment of other regions of the state. The reason for this state of affairs has much to do with a lack of political vision and to do with narrow interests that are driven purely by capitalism.

Politicians from both the regions must apologise to their respective constituencies for landing the state in a critical juncture where in both the regions are desperately claiming that "they cannot survive without Hyderabad". At present, there seems to be no other way but to cooperate for the peaceful bifurcation of the state.

## **Way Ahead**

Once the state is going to be bifurcated, there are bound to be issues as people have lived together for 57 long years. But every issue and every concern from both the sides can be

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settled amicably in accordance with the legal and constitutional set up. Article III of the Indian Constitution facilitates the procedure for the creation of any new state within its jurisdiction.

We cannot deny the fact that agitation for “united Andhra” has also, to some extent, been able to garner the support of government employees and students. But the apprehensions, fears, inconveniences and tensions of these sections have been due to fabricated reasons put forth by the political parties in the state for their capitalistic and political aspirations. These fears are overblown, as even after bifurcation I would see no reason why both the regions cannot manage to grow socio-economically as each of them is bestowed with abundant natural and human resources.

Considering the large stretches of fertile agricultural land that is available, abundant natural gas reserves, sea coast extending for 972 kilometres, minerals, human resources, the people from the Andhra region should welcome this bifurcation as a blessing in disguise and strive to transform the agro based economy gradually into an industrial economy. This project might take time but slowly and surely it would only enable them to achieve more inclusive growth achieving social justice and eliminating income inequalities in a new state with a new capital.