

## Case for Smaller States

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The demand for the separate state of Telengana has grabbed the headlines. There are similar demands for Gurkhaland, Bodoland, Vidharbha and Harith Pradesh, and recommendations for Bundelkhand and Poorvanchal. Fears have been expressed that if Telengana is formed there will be pressures for other smaller states and the process will get out of hand. Some people tend to argue that splitting the larger states will weaken the country though there is no logical explanation why the country's unity should be affected by the larger states being split up. Another argument is that larger the number of states, it will increase the administrative costs. A new argument, reported to have been advanced by some security agencies, is that smaller states will not be able to handle the Naxalite insurgency.

India has 28 states and 7 Union Territories. They have populations varying from 166 million in Uttar Pradesh to 540,000 in Sikkim. UP has more population than Bangladesh, the seventh most populous nation in the world. Similarly, Maharashtra is more populous than Philippines, the eleventh nation of the world. Bihar with 82 millions outranks Germany and West Bengal surpasses Ethiopia with fifteenth largest population in the world. Can it be said that states with such enormous populations are being administered and developed optimally with the administrative machinery and the political governance structure we have at present? UP and Bihar are listed as *bimaru* (sick) states, along with Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In Maharashtra, the Vidharbha people have been agitating for a separate state for long. In West Bengal, the Gurkha people are complaining of neglect. It is a well known fact that all states are not developing at the same pace. It is also accepted that one of the reasons underlying the Leftist Naxalite violence is inadequacy of governance and misgovernance. It is time that the issue of democratic governance and development is revisited with reference to the population and area of states.

States Reorganisation of the fifties had its origin in the freedom struggle and the recognition that democratic governance with universal adult franchise necessitated that the administration of a state should be conducted in the language of the population and therefore states should be reorganized on the basis of states becoming unilingual and having a linguistic identity. This decision goes back to the days when the Provincial Congress committees were organized on linguistic basis. The states reorganization in retrospect may be seen as a farseeing and wise step. The linguistic identity ceased to be a divisive issue as it became in Pakistan or Soviet Union. It empowered hither-to disadvantaged people. One wonders whether a Kamaraj, M.G.Ramachandran and Karunanidhi could have become Chief Ministers and the empowerment of the

disadvantaged sections could have taken place as rapidly as has happened in India without the linguistic reorganization.

The rationale for linguistic organization is that overwhelming majority of the people of a state should speak a common language and attain literacy in it at the earliest possible date. As evident from the existence of a multiple number of Hindi-speaking states, all people speaking one language need not be within the boundaries of a single state. The point, exemplified by the Telengana demand, is that there can be two Telugu speaking states as there are nine Hindi speaking states. There can be two Marathi speaking states if Vidharbha emerges. It can be argued that having more than one state speaking the same language may attenuate the kind of linguistic chauvinism one sees in Maharashtra.

The imperative need for states reorganization arises out of slow pace of spread of literacy in the *bimaru* states and faster pace of development needed for poverty alleviation and more effective governance called for the above purposes. Today many of the states are too big in area and population to be effectively governed and developed. Representative democracy loses its meaning when a constituency is too big and too populous for a legislator to be in effective touch with his constituents. A state legislator represents today between a quarters million to a third of a million people in the state legislature. That cannot be termed effective representative government. Such dilution in representation is partly responsible for the muscle and money politics afflicting the country. There is a good case to increase the representatives double or triple the present number. At the same time state legislatures with triple the present strengths will be unwieldy. The more rational solution is smaller states and more effective representation. For democracy to be healthy the number of people holding elected offices should be a much bigger number in India. There should be a reasonable proportionality between elected representatives in local bodies in cities and district Panchayat bodies and members of legislatures.

Poverty alleviation is dependent on development and job creation which in turn depend on education and infrastructural development. When the states are too big in population and area, supervision is lax and the development funds are siphoned off. The same per capita amounts were made available for primary education for all states from the beginning of the first Five Year Plan. The large *bimaru* states have not been able to utilize the amounts effectively and the results are obvious on the ground. The large states- Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra- are afflicted by Naxalism, mostly because of inadequacies in governance. Smaller states will lend themselves to more efficient policing and governance. Infrastructure development will speed up if there are more states and more state capitals, which can serve as hubs of such development.

If the states are cut down in size and the number increased, it will serve to strengthen the union government and the equation between the centre and the states will tilt very much further in favour of the centre. In those circumstances, further devolution of powers to the states could be considered. That will be a necessity as development accelerates and India

gets further industrialized. These are issues which our constitution makers could not have addressed since they could not have anticipated the population increase of this magnitude, nor such persistence of poverty over such a long period of time with problems arising out of misgovernance and mass politics based on adult franchise when effective representative government is not possible. The first states reorganization followed the fast unto death of Potti Sriramulu for Andhra Pradesh. Some of the subsequent reorganizations were the results of such political pressure, as happened in the case of Punjab, Nagaland and Mizoram. There were also reorganizations which were the results of forethought such as the seven sisters in the North east, Uttaranchal, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand. It is now time to look at the issue from the comprehensive point of view for further advancement in economic development, political democracy and administrative competence needed to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Otherwise there are risks of uneven development of different areas of the country resulting in regional tensions and consequent adverse impact on its unity and integrity.

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