



Demands for New Small States : A Challenge to Indian Federalism

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Abstract

The increasing demand for new states raises a number of questions with regard to the well-being of India's federal democratic polity. There are four measures that must be considered while devising any framework to address the issue of federal reorganization. These are: the constitution of a permanent State Reorganization Commission, amendment of the Constitution to ensure that the demand for a new state emanates from the state legislature and not at the centre, examination of economic and social viability rather than political considerations and clear-cut safeguards to encourage democratic concerns like development and governance rather than religion, caste and language as valid grounds for a new state.

Introduction

India may have at least 50 states in future if demands for new states are to be conceded as the home ministry has received representations for creation of more than 20 states. Present in India has 28 states and seven Union Territories. Telangana will be the 29th state of the country. The demands for separate states have come from across the country -- for Kukiland in Manipur to Kongu Nadu in Tamil Nadu, for Kamatapur in North Bengal to Tulu Nadu in Karnataka. However, except Uttar Pradesh, which during the Mayawati-led BSP government proposed to create four states dividing the country's most populous state, no state government had given any recommendation for carving out a new state. But the demands continue to pour in. "The demands for creation of separate states were received by the home ministry through representations

from various organizations or individuals over the years," a home ministry official said. The demands for separate states are: In Uttar Pradesh, there have been demands for Awadh Pradesh, Poorvanchal, Bundelkhand and Pachimanchal or Harit Pradesh. There is also demand for creation of a Braj Pradesh, consisting of Agra division and Aligarh division of Uttar Pradesh and districts of Bharatpur and Gwalior from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. A demand for creation of Bhojpur comprising areas of eastern UP, Bihar and Chhattisgarh has also been received by the home ministry. There has been an old demand for creation of a separate Vidarbha by curving out the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. The most vocal demands for separate states came from Gorkhaland, by curving out Darjeeling and its adjoining areas in West Bengal. Demands for Bodoland, comprising Bodo dominated areas in Western Assam, and a separate state of



Karbi Anglong, comprising the Karbi tribals living areas under Karbi Anglong autonomous district in Assam, have also been pending with the Centre So far.

Regionalisation of polity

Let us refer to three factors responsible for brining local/ regional demands into sharp focus.

First, the change mode of electoral representation has led to assertiveness of the hitherto politically dormant region. The political articulation and mobilization along caste /ethnic/ language-based social cleavages undertaken by these newly emergent state/region level parties remain territorially contained and reely cross the regional lines.

Second growing regional inequalities in terms of income and consumption in the post reforms period have a accentuated the perception of neglect and discrimination. Coastal Region/ developed regions have invariably benefited more from the flow of private investment as compared to the regions at peripheral location.

Third We have what may be called ironically the “secession of the rich” even the rich regions within constituent state.

Objectives

- 1) To study of the Indian Federal system
- 2) To discuss the challenges of Indian Federal system
- 3) Why reasons the demand of regional political parties leadership to create new small states.

4) To discuss the got of achievement of development to create the new small states.

5) To discuss the need of permanent state re-organization commission.

Regionalism

Regionalism means love for a particular region or state in preference to the country as a whole, and in certain cases, in preference to the state of which region is a part. A region is a defined territorial unit including particular language or languages, castes, ethnic groups or tribes, particular social setting and cultural pattern etc. What precise factors must exist before a tract of territory could be called a region cannot be firmly predicted. In fact several factors such as geography, topography, language, religion, customs, stages of political and economic development, common history etc.. should come together – tide by a sentiment of togetherness – than a region can be formed. However, as Sanjib Baruah points out, a region cannot be objectively defined. As like nations, regions are not self-evident and pre-political realities on ground. It is a contested, fluid identity constructed through political mobilizations. Regions are relatively flexible, socially constructed and politically mediated identities. Which one of the above mentioned factor will become important for the construction of a region varies from time to time and context. The example of flexible, changing identities of region can be seen in the case of Andhra Pradesh, which was initially demanding a separate statehood on the



basis of the demand for separate statehood for Telangana. Another example of regional identity is the Bodo challenge to the earlier constructed Assamese identity.

Causes of regionalism in India

- 1) Problem of economic and social development / economic factors
- 2) Increasing awareness of the people in then backward areas
- 3) Political factors
 - A) Rise of Regional Elites
 - B) Personal Motives
 - C) Rise of regional Parties
- 4) Identity based regionalism / Cultural factors

There are three issues—one financial and the other two political—that need to be addressed carefully while forming new states.

First and foremost is the question of administrative and financial viability of the politicians the new states. Usually, when demands for statehood are made, there are equally strong claims about the viability of these states. In the case of Jharkhand, for example, it was claimed that abundance of mineral resources was enough to make the state prosperous. A decade later, the reality is different. Similar claims are being made in the case of Telangana. This welter of claims and doubts needs to be disentangled carefully. Otherwise, states are sure to fall back on an old demand: special status. Even mineral-rich states

are not immune, Orissa is a good example. The denial of a special status demand is not the end of special and extraordinary fiscal transfers from the Union government to the states. Very often, new states continue to get special grants and outright transfers for extended periods. A proliferation of such demands will be an unhealthy trend. Even as the demand for Telangana was agreed to, immediately there were cries for new states such as Vidarbha and Gorkhaland. If, hypothetically, the latter two are conceded they will certainly require financial help from the Centre for a long time. This has other repercussions. Transfers of resources from the Union government to the states are governed by the recommendations of the Finance Commission (FC), a constitutional body. What will happen to FC recommendations when more and more states demand resources over and above what this body recommends? It will, for starters, dilute FC's recommendations and move away from rule-based fiscal transfers to a more ad-hoc system where political concerns will dictate such transfers. This will be a dangerous trend with unforeseen consequences.

Second, in the din of these demands the dangers of emergent federal imbalances have been lost sight of. In India, political representation of states in Parliament is not based on any theory of "equality of states" as, for example, in the US. The population of each state determines the number of members it sends to the Lok Sabha. Similarly, there is no notion of equality in the Rajya Sabha. Creation of smaller states automatically gives



greater political power to large states. For example, the division of Andhra Pradesh—which had 42 members in the Lok Sabha—will undo this large majority. This also means one less state with 40 MPs or more. This means more political power to states such as Uttar Pradesh that have one less big state to contend with. To be sure, India is not a Union of warring or fractious states. But creating small states without ensuring equity in representation can have unforeseen political consequences. It will certainly upset the inter-state political equilibrium in the country.

Finally, there are strategic and national security issues in creating new states with ethnic majorities especially in border regions. The demand for Gorkhland is one such example. Take a look at the map of the country and you will see the demand is being made in a region that provides a vital link to the North-Eastern states. This is a politically sensitive issue: the needs of ethno-linguistic minorities need to be balanced with broader concerns about national security.

The question of new states in India needs to be deliberated with care and sensitivity. It also requires a hard-nosed look at financial, administrative and national security concerns

SHIFT IN INDIA'S FEDERAL IDEOLOGY

Three developments mark the shift in India's federal ideology. First, regional identity, culture, and geographical differences now appear to be better recognized as valid bases for

administrative division and political representation as democracy deepens and widens. Second, smaller states are being proposed on the grounds of good governance and development rather than merely on the linguistic or cultural principle was the case of the first two phases of reorganization. Third, recently even dialect communities have been asking for their own 'territorial homeland' while underlining the cultural and literary distinctiveness and richness of the dialect (Bundelkhand).

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF SMALLER STATES

Does India need smaller states? Let us consider the following three arguments in favour. First, the argument that 'small is beautiful' does find resonance in the developmental experiences of the newly created smaller states. Factual analysis shows the development and efficiency argument does work in favour of the new states when compared with the parent states. During the tenth five-year plan period, Chhattisgarh averaged 9.2 percent growth annually compared with 4.3 percent by Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand averaged 11.1 per cent annually compared with 4.7 percent by Bihar, and Uttarakhand achieved 8.8 per cent growth annually compared with 4.6 percent by Uttar Pradesh. Arguably, getting 'a territory of their own' unleashes the untapped/suppressed growth potentials of the hitherto peripheral regions. Second, comparatively smaller but compact geographical entities tend to ensure that there is better democratic governance, as there is greater awareness among the policy makers about the local needs.



Smaller spatial units having linguistic compatibility and cultural homogeneity also allow for better management, implementation and allocation of public resources in provisioning basic social and economic infrastructure services. A relatively homogeneous smaller state allows for easy communicability, enabling marginal social groups to articulate and raise their voices.

Third, smaller states provide gains for the electorates in terms of better representation of their preferences in the composition of the government. In a patronage-based democracy like in India, the amount of the transfer of state resources/largesse a constituency/region gets depends crucially on whether the local representative belongs to the ruling party. Understanding this electoral logic of patronage distribution, the electorates of a smaller region have a propensity to elect representatives with preferences more closely aligned to those of the bigger region within the state. Such a motive, however, would no longer operate once the region constitutes a separate state.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST SMALLER STATES

One also needs to address and negate some of the oft-repeated apprehensions raised against creating smaller states. First, reminiscent of 'partition anxiety', many fear the rise of regional and linguistic fanaticism as threats to national unity and integrity. A global surge in ethno-nationalist conflicts serves to rekindle these fears. No region has ever experienced secessionist

movement after being recognized as a separate state except for a brief time in Punjab.

Second, many believe that bigger states ensure cohesion and stability; however, there are myriad forms of political violence going on unabated in the big states (eg. Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal). In these cases, violent movements are expressions of a demand for recognition, justice and autonomy; relatively homogeneous smaller states would always be better poised to provide a wider range of policies in response to local conditions.

Third, smaller states (like mineral rich Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand) are often viewed as being much more vulnerable to the pressures of the corporations and multi-nationals due to their small scale economies and the greed of the newly emergent regional elite. Now, if this is so then what explains the presence of coal mafias and land sharks in the bigger states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka? Corruption or political wheeling-dealing in high places is not confined to the smaller states as any discernable observer of Indian states would be able to tell.

Fourth, political expediency and opportunism rather than the objective evaluation of democratic and developmental potential are said to be involved in the making of new states. Even if this was present in some instances, it is not the norm. Certain principles have always been adhered to without exception with the establishment of states in the past. The demand for a



new state: a) is not to be communal or secessionist in nature; b) should have popular support and enjoy a broad consensus; c) should be agreed upon by the parent state, d) aims at the creation of socially and economically viable state.

Towards a Policy Framework

The following four measures may be considered while looking at an appropriate policy framework to address the present impasse. First, a permanent entity called the Second State Reorganization Commission may be constituted as a constitutional body with quasi-judicial power. The commission may be asked to ascertain a set of objective and coherent criteria to consider the demand for a new state.

The Second Centre-State Relations Commission or Inter-State Council may also be involved. Second, popular

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support can be ascertained by amending the Constitution so that any legislative measure to alter/diminish/increase the territory or creation of a new state should emanate from the state legislature and not at the centre. The minimum would be that the view of the parent state legislature be necessarily ascertained.

Conclusion

Federalism as an idea and a process enriches democracy in a multinational/cultural country like India, as it tends to promote democratic values and temperament by recognizing, accommodating and protecting diverse regional identities and rights. The creation of smaller states would contribute to the federal agenda of enhancing democratic development based on decentralized governance and greater autonomy for units.
8 MPSC, Unik Academic, Tukaram Jadhav