Remapping India since Independence: Critical reflections

Rajvinder Singh

Abstract

Political history of state formation in India after independence can be divided into four distinctive periods. In all four phases, different situations and factors have played a decisive role. The paper 'Remapping India since Independence' is an attempt to explore the connection and difference between these four phases. It would also try to explore the basic reasons which are responsible for the formation of a new state. With the new developments taking place in the Indian politics after independence about the demands of the creation of new states, the time may come for the formation of the Second State Reorganisation Commission to consider redrawing the map of India.

1. Introduction

The story of the tragic partition of the subcontinent is well-known but there is another remarkable story of the creation of the Indian Union which is not known to most of the people. Indian national movement leaders forged a national union out of hundreds of separate states which comprised the British Raj to find an entirely new nation on 15th of August 1947. After Independence, internal map of Indian Union is redrawn a number of times. The political history of remapping of India since independence is divided into four distinct phases: first phase of integration of princely states and reorganisation (1947-50); second phase of reorganisation on the basis of language (1950-1966); third phase of reorganisation of North-East (1960-90); and fourth phase of contemporary reorganisation of Hindu-Hindi heartland States and Telangana (1990-2014).

2. The First Phase: Integration of Princely States and Reorganisation

The Independence of India was a glorious achievement for the Indian people and its political leadership. It was the end of the British Empire almost after two centuries. But it did not signify the end of the struggle for India. As Alfred Cobben said, "it raised more problems than it solved" (Cobben, 1980). First and the foremost problem which India faced were of the unity and integration of the country which was the result of the crisis that India faced at the time of its Independence.

The British entered India after the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. They conquered these areas one by one and built a huge colonial empire across the subcontinent. The British Empire was built on the basis of administration,

unlike the hereditary monarchy of Mughal Empire. "British established, in territories under their direct control, a regular and uniform system of administration composed of a hierarchy of authorities, one subordinate to another, with powers and functions clearly demarcated. The pattern commenced at the base with the districts and converged at the apex with provincial Governors and the Governor-General, who were in their turn subordinate to the authorities in England" (Menon, 1961). But British Empire was not a united and integrated entity. Within the British Empire, there were three distinct categories- British India, princely state (native state or Indian states) and Tribal India (distinguished as Excluded Area and partially Excluded Areas). British Empire was the area directly administered by the British; Princely India had treaty relations (Paramountcy power) with the British and certain tribal areas of north eastern and central India were ruled by the Viceroy of India directly. The princely states in the subcontinent numbered around 600. Many of them were bigger than some European nation (Copland, 1999). A number of states like Bhopal, Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Gwalior, Indore, Baroda, Travancore, Mysore, etc. were quite large and economically as well as militarily viable.

After the Second World War, Labour Party Government came into power in Britain. Under the Cabinet Mission plan 1946, new government announced the transfer of power to Indian people and the paramountcy which they exercised over the princely states would automatically lapse. On 20th February 1947, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that, "As was explicitly stated by the cabinet mission, His Majesty's Government do not intend to hand over their power and obligations under paramountcy to any government of British India" (Sajal, 2007). On June 3rd British Government declared that the transfer of power was to take place on 15th August, and paramountcy was to lapse on that day. Consequently, rulers of several states claimed that they would be independent from 15th of August. Once the paramountcy lapsed, some of these states refused to join either India or Pakistan and declared their intention to remain independent, and some Excluded Areas too wanted to remain outside both the countries. On 11 June 1947, Travancore had decided to become an independent state, and next day, Hyderabad too made the same announcement. The rulers of Jammu and Kashmir, Junagadh and many other viable states were also thinking on similar lines.

Integration of the princely states is a fascinating chapter in the history of India. For the integration of these states into Indian Dominion, Indian Constitutional Assembly created a new ministry under the leadership of Sardar Vallahbhai Patel on June 1947. Its primary task was to bring the states into some form of organic relationship with the centre in order to prevent the balkanization of the country. For this purpose Sardar Patel and V. P. Menon produced two key documents: 'Instrument of accession' on three subjects (defence, external affairs, and communication), and a 'Standstill Agreement'

which kept alive the existing relations between the states and the Government of India. The territorial integration of princely states took three forms - merging with the adjacent provinces; grouping of certain States into separate units; and transformation of certain States into centrally administered areas (Sajal, 2007).

By August 15, 1947, all the princely states had acceded to India by signing the Instrument of Accession, except Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Jammu & Kashmir. These three states after 1947 were also acceded into India by different methods: Junagadh by plebiscite, Hyderabad by police action and Jammu & Kashmir by instrument of accession (With Special article 370). The accession of Indian states went side by side with their physical integration and reorganisation, 310 states were organised into six unions, while 215 were merged with their neighbouring provinces. Another 5 states were converted into Chief Commissioners' Provinces, but Hyderabad and Mysore were left untouched initially. Thus, as a result of integration, in the place of 554 states, 14 administrative units had emerged (Menon, 1961). In all these units, responsible Governments were set up, and the former rulers were given the title of 'Raj Pramukhs'. They were allowed to retain their personal privileges, and tax free privy purses were granted to them. The policy of integration served a great purpose. On the completion of this process, India emerged as an integrated entity both geographically and politically. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said:

"The historian who looks back will no doubt consider the integration of the states into India as one of the dominant phases of the India's History. (Menon, 1961)" It united the whole country into one political framework, and removed many administrative drawbacks and financial disparities.

3. Second Phase: Reorganisation on the Basis of language

India is considered to be the most diverse and complex society in the world linguistically and it is also one of the prominent factors that lead to the demands of separate states. "This linguistic diversity was speculated to lead to the break-up of the country in the initial years immediately after independence" (Harrison, 1960). All around the country various states started demanding the reorganisation on the basis of language (one language, one state) particularly in the southern regions. But the national leaders started expressing the fear that separation of provinces on such a basis would foster the growth of sub-nationalism in the reorganised states and could lead to further divisions whereas even the one (Pakistan partition) that had taken place earlier had been very painful and cruel.

The Congress party had historically been the initiator and most vigorous exponent of a linguistic solution to the problem of division of the Indian states. During British rule, the Congress party had advocated the re-division of the Indian states on a linguistic basis as a part of its platform. In

1903, Sir Herbert Risely, the Home Secretary in the Government of India, first raised the issue of reorganisation of Bengal province. "The Montague-Chelmsford Report (1918) considered the linguistic reorganisation of the provinces impractical even through reforms favoured smaller states. The Simon Report (1928) recommended the formation of provinces on linguistic basis. The reorganisation of Orissa (1936) and Sindh on linguistic principle was the only example of the British acceptance of this principle." (A Sarangi; S Pai, 2011). As early as in 1905, the Congress Party had supported the principle of linguistic states but it opposed the division of the Bengal Province. Thus, Congress Party's linguistic policy between 1905 and 1920 was ambiguous. It gained a concrete shape only in 1920 at the Nagpur session when the Congress accepted it for the first time in principle. And in 1921 the Congress went ahead in establishing 20 Provincial Congress committee's based on language. Officially, the Congress Party endorsed the linguistic principle in 1928 with its acceptance of the Nehru Report which advocated that the present distribution of Indian provinces had no rational basis and believed that its distribution was merely accidental. The Nehru Report endorsed that "the redistribution of provinces should take place on linguistic basis on the demand of the majority of the population of the area concerned" (Stephen, Lina, & Yadav, 2010). Congress reiterated its faith in this policy at Calcutta session in 1937 and in its election manifesto of 1945-46.

On 17th June 1948, the Government of India appointed the Linguistic Provinces Commission under the chairmanship of S.K. Dhar[1] to study the feasibility of organizing states on linguistic basis. In its 10th December 1948 report, the Commission recommended that division on linguistic basis would not be in the larger interest of the nation. It says:

"In the any rational and scientific planning that may be take place in regard to the provinces of India in the future, homogeneity of language alone cannot be the decisive or even an important factor. Administration convenience, history, geography, economy, culture and many other matters will also have to be given due weight" (Report of the Linguistic Commission,1948).

The report submitted by Dhar commission led to much resentment among people. As a result, in the Jaipur session of 1948, Congress appointed a three member JVP[2] Committee to consider the recommendations of Dhar Commission. This committee also rejected the linguistic factor of reorganisation of the states. Rather it recommended the reorganisation of states on the basis of security, unity and economic prosperity of the nation. It observed:

"We feel that conditions that have emerged in India since the achievement of independence are such as to make us view the problem of linguistic provinces in a new light. The first consideration must be the security;

unity and economic prosperity of India and every separative and disruptive tendency should be rigorously discouraged" (JVP Committee Report, 1949).

After the reports of Dhar commission and JVP committee, constitutional assembly agreed with the ideas proposed in these reports and on 26th January 1950 made a federal constitution within centralised federal system and divided the 28 states into four categories- A, B, C, and D on rational basis or balanced approach.

By the early 1950s, it was apparent that regional and non-congress political parties, state politicians, regional elites, and in some cases ordinary people did not agree with this classification. People all over India especially in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamilnadu and Kerala demanded reorganisation on the basis of language. The demand for Andhra, creation of a Telugu-majority state in the part of Madras state had become stronger in 1952. A Gandhian leader Potti Shreemalu was demanding formation of Andhra. He died on 16th December 1952 after undertaking a fast unto death and as a result, the Telugu majority 'Andhra state' was formed by Nehru in 1953.

The problem of reorganising the states of the Union of India assumed a new perspective with this announcement by Prime Minister Nehru. Consequently, his Government decided to appoint a three-members[3] State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) under the Chairmanship of Syad Fazl Ali to "investigate the conditions of the problem, the historical background, the existing situation and the bearing of all important and relevant factors thereon" (Windmiller, 1954). After three years, on 30 September 1955 the Commission submitted its report to Government of India. It recommended the establishment of 16 states and 3 union territories without any distinction and rejected the previous division on basis of four categories. After much debate, Parliament called for a reorganisation of India based on the criteria laid down by the SRC. The State Reorganisation Act 1956 implemented some of the recommendations of SRC and re-drew Indian map into 14 states and 6 union territories.

Indian Government hoped that these changes would satisfy the demand for territorial reorganisation, but the struggles continued in and across a number of states. Once the principle of linguistic states had been accepted, the demands for reorganisation on the basis on linguistic and ethnicity increased in Punjab and Bombay. In 1960, the bilingual Province of Bombay was divided into the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat after violent language riots. The demands for a separate Punjab State were also denied by the Central Government because they considered it as a religiously (Sikh) motivated demand. In 1966 'greater Punjab' was split between Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. It was accepted only when the Sikh leadership abandoned religious rhetoric and implied its demands in ethno-linguistic arguments (Chada, 2002).

4. Third Phase: Reorganisation of North-East (1960-90)

The third phase focussed on the division of the Assam state in Northeast India. The Northeast was the least integrated region in the territorial and administrative sphere of British Empire. The North-East is a patchwork of tribal and mixed linguistic communities. In the Indian Constitution, Six Schedule[4] added for the protection of hills district, which made all the hill district of Assam autonomous with their respective district councils. Although several new States had been created in India on the basis of language after independence but in Assam there were no such demands.

But the tribal leaders demanded the formation of a hill state, cut off from plains area under one administrative unit. Another proposal was raised for the formation of Purbanchal state, composite of Cachar, Tripura, Manipur, the Lushai Hills, the Naga Hills and the NEFA. Naga National Council (NNC) also wanted an independent Naga homeland for the Naga people outside Assam and India. Under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo, NNC launched a violent struggle against the government. "Taking all these entire factors into consideration, State Reorganisation Commission had come to conclusion that formation of hill state in this region was never feasible nor in the interest of the tribal peoples themselves. The hill district therefore should continue to be part of Assam and no major change should be made in their present constitution pattern" (Chauble, 1973). Ethnic and linguistic group in various areas, especially in the hill area and Naga leaders expressed their dissatisfaction with the recommendations of the SRC.

In 1960, Assam Government made Assamese the sole official language of the state. The tribal leaders expressed anxiety over the predominance of Assamese language in the region. Tribal of the hills and linguistic minorities had strongly protested against the imposition of Assamese language. Some had even said that, "as long as tribals remained with Assam their destiny lay in the hands of the Assamese" (Barpurji, 1998). In 1960, various party of hills area merged into the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) and again demanded a separate state within the Indian union. APHLC consistently protested against the state government's language policy of 'Assamisation' of hill people. In the end, Government of India acted in the favour of the APHLC and five states and two Union territories were carved out of Assam, under the act of North-East Reorganisation Act 1972. This state attainted full statehood: Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura (1972), Mizoram (1986) and Arunachal Pradesh (1987).

5. Fourth Phase: Contemporary Reorganisation of Hindi Heartland States and Telangana (1990-2014)

In 2000, Once again the internal map of India was redrawn to create three new states – Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand. These new states

were proposed on the grounds of administrative efficiency rather than on the language principle. These were the first states which were created on non-linguistic basis. Let us consider the following reasons that played important role in redrawing these states: - The trends that had become visible in the 1980s like the decline of Congress, the rise of Hindu nationalist forces, the emergence of coalition governments, the regionalisation of politics, and changes in political economy were important reasons for the creation of these states.

The idea of smaller states has found support among political elites across parties over time due to the change taking place, particularly with the emergence of the other backward caste communities and the presence of their strong leaders within the Congress and the BJP. The most important structural change arose from what Christophe Jaffrelot has called the *'silent revolution'* that swept north Indian politics in this period as a result of the rise to political power of lower castes (Tillin, 2011). Regional parties across India became important players within federal coalition government. Maya Chadda (2002) explains the formation of three new states in 2000 as one of the reasons for closer integration of ethnic and caste based regional parties in the central government. After 1989, the formation of coalition government in the centre had made the roles of regional parties even more significant in the national politics. Emma Mawdsley (2002) suggests that in the new era of unstable coalition government at the centre, a few seats either way could help to determine who governs in the state, and even at centre.

All these states witnessed the emergence of distinctive types of social movements in the early 1970s. Mary Katzenstein, Smitu Kothari and Uday Mehta (2001) had argued that identity-based movements (around caste, regional, or religious identity) emerged successfully within electoral politics. Rajni Kothari (1985) observed the emergence of new movements or 'non-party political formations' in the 1970s was linked to a shift towards a more participatory vision of decentralized democracy and development in which grass root issues became the subject of political activism.

Regional inequality has markedly increased since the early 1990s. Globalization and liberalization have led to the establishment of a global-national market economy which has opened up the floodgates for private capital which leading to regional inequalities among states and contributing to the rising demands for smaller states. The new political economy created 'region within the region.' The Marxist intellectual A.K. Roy calls it an 'internal colonialism.' He says:

"In India, the under- developed area is exploited by the developed areas as colonies, as are the underdeveloped by the developed people...the natives of the internal colonies are not only the victims of underdevelopment...but of development as well in central India, as this development does not mean the development of the people there but their displacement and replacement by the

colonies of developed people, the clever people, the political connected people coming from the developed areas" (Sinha, 1973).

The emergence of the Hindu national forces in the Indian politics is the next factor behind the demands for separate states. In the general election of 1989, BJP consolidated a position of a national political party. The implementations of Mandal Commission's recommendations for affirmative action for OBC, and the destructions of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and continuing campaign to build a Ram Mandir on its site, consolidated its base in the middle and upper class Hindu voters. In early 1990s, BJP became a stronger proponent of states' right in India's federal system and emphasised the need for the decentralisation of power.

In 2000, BJP government that had come to power with the support of regional parties and created three new states on the basis of administrative efficiency. L. K. Advani, then the home minster, explained that the states were being created on the grounds of 'administrative and economic viability' as well as for the 'overwhelming aspirations of the people of the region' (Speech to Lok sabha, 2000).

Telangana, the 29th state of the Indian Union came into being on 2 June, 2014 after a long drawn-out struggle of more than six and half decades. K. Srinivasulu says that three trends in the discursive articulation on Telangana can be identified: first, political marginalisation of the leadership, second, Economic and educational backwardness of the region or uneven development of the region (logic of internal colonialism) and third, Constructing the identity of Telangana as an 'imagined community' in opposition to the Andhra identity (Srinivasulu, 2011). Much like the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand formed in 2000, Telangana too has moved away from language affinity as the sole basis of state formation to a more complex network of socio-economic, political-ideological and regional bases of identities, favouring the creation of states in contemporary times (The Hindu, 2015)

6. Conclusion

In these four phases, different situations and factors have played a decisive role in the state formation. In the first phase 'integration or unity of nation', in second phase 'language', in third phase 'geographical-cultural-ethnic identity' and in the fourth phase 'new economic development and new trends in Indian electoral politics' have played important role. In the present time, there are number of sub-states advocates of state rights within Indian union. They have openly challenged the authority of the central government. Present political development after the formation of Telangana and the strong demands for Vidharbha, Bodoland, Coorg, Harit Pradesh, Bundelkhand and many more, where economic demands are triumphed over linguistic homogeneity, have changed the nature of the demands of state formation. There have been a

number of arguments in the favour of the formation of new states. Among them are geographical proximity, common historical traditions and experience, similar usages and customs, economic backwardness, administrative efficiency and democratic decentralization. These developments in the direction of creating new states suggest that the time may come to take a decision on the formation of the Second State Reorganisation Commission to consider redrawing the map of India for addressing the demand for smaller states. The demand for new states has once again emerged as a major issue in Indian politics.

Notes

[1] S K Dhar commission had been authorised by Constitutional Assembly and it investigated the problem of linguistic states only in southern India.

[2] its members, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallahbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya

[3] Its members were Justice Syad Fazl Ali, H.N. Kunzru and K.M. Panikkar

[4] [Articles 244(2) and 275(1)] Provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and the areas under the Gorkha Hill Council, Darjeeling in the State of West Bengal

References:

A Sarangi & S Pai. (2011). *Interogating Reorganisation of States.* New Delhi: Rutledge Press.

Advani, L. K. (2000). Speech to Lok Sabha .

Barpurji, H. K. (1998). *North-East India: Problems,policies and prospects Since Independence.* Delhi: Spectrum Publications.

Chada, M. (2002). Integreation Through Internal Reorganization: containing Ethnic Conflict In India. *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics , 2* (1), 44-61.

Chauble, S. K. (1973). *Hill politics in North East India.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

Cobben, A. (1980). *Nation State and National Self-Dermination.* London: Penguin.

Commission, I. L. (1948). *Report of the Linguistic Commission,1948.* 7 Aug 2008.

Copland, I. (1999). *The Princes of the India in the End Game of the Empire.* New Delhi: OUP.

Harrison, S. (1960). *India: The Most Dangerous Decades.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Katzenstein, M., Kothari, S., & Mehta, U. (2001). *Social movements politics in India: institutions, interests and identity* (Vol. Success of Indian Democracy). (A. Kohali, Ed.) New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kothari, R. (1985). The Non-Party Process. *Praxis International* (3), 341.

Mawdsley, E. (2002). Redrawing the Body Politic: Federlism,Regionalism and the creation of new States in India. *Journal of Commonwealth and Compartive politics* , 17.

Menon, V. P. (1961). *The Story of Integration of the Indian State.* Bombay: Orient Longmans Ltd.

Sajal, N. (2007). *Making of the Indian Union: Merger of Princely States and Excluded Areas.* New Delhi: Akanksha Publishing.

Sharma, P. K. (1967, October-December). INTEGRATION OF PRINCELY STATES AND THE REORGANIZATION OF STATES IN INDIA. *The Indian Journal of Political Science* , 236-241.

Singh, R. (2002). R*emapping india.* chandigarh.

Sinha, S. (1973). *The Internal colony: A study in Regional Exploitation.* New Delhi: Sindhu Publications.

Speech to Lok sabha (July 25, 2000).

Srinivasulu, K. (2011). Discourses On Telenagana and Critique of the Linguistic Nationity Principle. In A. Sarangi, & S. Pai, *Interogating Reorganisation of States* (pp. 164-189). New Delhi: Routledge.

Stephen, A., Lina, J. J., & Yadav, Y. (2010). *Crafting State- Nation.* Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

The Hindu (June 1, 2015).

Tillin, L. (2011). *Remapping India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

White Paper On Indian States.

Windmiller, M. (1954, December). Linguistic Regionaliam In India. *Pacific Affairs*, 219-318.