

Regional Identities and its Implications on the Notion of National Identity: *Some Observations on the Linguistic Reorganisation of States*

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We live in times when the political discourse is increasingly falling into a pit where any discussion on the nation or the national or nationalism is being reduced to a sectarian wrangling rather than an informed debate. Any assertion of the regional identity, whether it is based on language, food habits or literature or any other identity (including ethnic, religion and caste) is increasingly being seen as inimical to nationalism and even anti-national at times. In the same way, any concern for the national is either ridiculed or even condemned as *imperialist*, particularly by sections in the academia that are out to interrogate nationalism the *deconstructionist* way. The tragedy is that both sides in this debate clearly lack praxis for action, notwithstanding their strident claims to have one. This paper is an attempt to consider these from a historian's perspective and not in the realm of justifying one or another of the sides. The purpose, in other words, is not to contribute to the corpus of polemical writings on the agitations and the responses to them. This is not to deride the polemics in any way; history, after all, will be meaningless shorn of polemics. It is, hence, appropriate, to begin this exercise by setting out with a statement on what I mean by a historical perspective on the subject and why it is not an exercise in polemics.

I

In the George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures at the University of Cambridge¹, E.H.Carr, contested the proposition that the historian's task was to collate facts and as long as their veracity was not doubted, it constituted history. For Carr, mustering the facts in an accurate manner was indeed a necessary condition of the historian's work and not his essential function. Carr held that such tasks as to ascertain the age of a particular piece of pottery or to decipher an inscription or to establish the precise date of an event by way of an elaborate astronomical calculation were all tasks best left to experts in those disciplines. Facts, thus, are available on a platter and are common for all the historians who live in a particular time. The historian, according to Carr, ends up choosing a certain set of facts to arrive at a certain conclusion. In the same breadth, Carr also contested the widely held dictum that facts speak for themselves. "It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: It is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context..."

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It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Ceaser's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other peoples before or since interests nobody at all... But it will probably be ignored by historians".²

This long invocation of E.H.Carr's idea of history is appropriate to defend the idea of re-visiting the history of the linguistic reorganisation of States through the written evidence that have been available to historians all these while rather than resorting to any oral tradition on the subject. In doing so, I intend dispelling the sense of *déjà vu* that is most likely to be felt in the context of the increasingly strident demand for smaller states, across the country, in recent times. From the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of the States that marked the discourse at the time of independence and the culmination of that struggle in Potti Sriramulu's martyrdom, the setting up of the States Reorganisation Commission and eventually the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, we are now witnessing movements that seek division of the linguistic states into smaller states. This paper will try to dispel the belief that the demand for smaller states is a repudiation of the idea of linguistic organisation of states and in that sense a confirmation of the fears that were expressed against it even in the times when it bloomed.

It will be argued here that the demand for smaller States that is raging out there is neither a repudiation of the principle of linguistic States nor is it a logical sequel to it. It is essentially the fallout of some serious failure on the part of the political establishment in independent India in the domain of governance at one level (particularly in such instances as Uttarakhand, Bodoland, Gorkhaland and others of such kind) and the fragmentation of the political set-up wherein the days of a single party managing to play the balancing act between distinct social groups are over and the party system is fragmented on the basis of social groups (as in the case of Telengana, Bundelkhand, Harit Pradesh, Vidharbha to state a few examples). This, in turn, is the cause for the increasingly strident demands for smaller States. In that sense, it is far too different from the idea of linguistic States.

Having said this, the scope of this paper will be restricted to recalling some of the facts that went into the making of the linguistic states in our short history.

In this regard, it is proper to begin by stating that the idea of linguistic reorganisation of States was raised, argued and held in abeyance by the Constituent Assembly in 1947-49; was glossed over for a while after the Constitution came into force; and revived soon after to be conceded in principle and implemented in stages beginning with the formation of a composite Andhra Pradesh in 1956 and culminating in the trifurcation of Punjab to constitute a Punjabi speaking State by excluding Haryana and Himachal Pradesh from the existing State of Punjab in 1966. And by that, the idea of linguistic reorganisation of states that was internalised by the nationalist leadership since 1921 and identified as integral to the making of independent India in the Nehru Committee Report in 1928 was given concrete shape.

II

In a sense, the idea of linguistic states was recognised by the nationalist leadership in what could be termed as the earliest instance when the Indian National Congress tried to present the shape of things that would be in independent India.³

Section 86 of the Nehru Report, for instance, was explicit on this count. It read as follows:

“The redistribution of provinces should take place on a linguistic basis on the demand of the majority of the population of the area concerned, subject to financial and administrative considerations.”⁴

In many ways, the approach to the national, in the vision of the generation that led the struggle for freedom since the beginning of the Gandhian era, was based on an understanding that it had to necessarily internalise the existence and the importance of the linguistic identity of the people across the sub-continent. Indian nationalism, in other words, was looked at as a concept or a notion that was clearly mediated through the identity of the language that the people spoke. It will be appropriate, at this stage, to note that the Indian National Congress, at its Nagpur session (1920) recorded its appreciation of the idea that the national identity will have to be necessarily mediated through the linguistic identity and resolved to set up the Provincial Congress Committees on a linguistic basis. The demand for such reorganization of the Congress provincial committees on linguistic basis was first mooted by way of a demand for a separate Andhra Congress Province in the Congress sessions in 1915 and 1916 and finally accepted, in principle, at the Congress session in Calcutta in 1917. There was vehement opposition to this idea from Annie Besant (who was also the President at that time), as well as from the Tamil speaking delegates from Madras and even Gandhi felt that such a move could wait. It was Tilak who pushed forward the idea. A sub-committee was appointed in December 1917, to revise and settle the representation for the Telugu speaking people in the AICC (as distinct from the existing scheme where they were to be a part of the delegates from the Madras province). A Sindh Provincial Congress Committee came into being in 1918 itself.⁵

It is, however, important to note here that the Indian National Congress' scheme of organisation of its provincial committees on linguistic basis did not include the regions constituted by the Indian States even where they were contiguous, in terms of the language spoken by the people in those parts that were part of the British Indian provinces. Thus, the Telengana region was not thought of in the Andhra Provincial Committee, the Travancore-Cochin region was not thought of in the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee and so on and so forth. While this incongruity can be explained by the fact that the Indian National Congress had not, at that time, internalised the demand for independence in the Indian States into its core or its creed, the leadership did not consider this as an imperative even at the Haripura session in 1938. Even while the session sanctioned the joining of the peoples' movement in the Indian States with the larger struggle in British India and recognised the reality that the rulers of the States were mere appendages of the colonial regime (if not as “natural” allies of the British) and thus setting out on a radical course of including those into the linguistically organised Provincial Congress Committees in the contiguous regions, the Haripura session

conceded only a part of that. The session resolved that the movement in the Indian States shall be under the direct command of the Congress Working Committee.⁶

The process of internalising the aspirations for freedom in the Indian States, however, could not be stalled given the fact that the logic of colonial domination that guided the birth and the growth of the freedom struggle were equally true in the Indian States as it was in British India. This led to the natural melting down of the distinctions between the people in the Indian States and those in British India in the regions contiguous to those and thus caused a unity in due course. This unity was at all levels; the leadership of the Provincial Congress Committees and those in the States Peoples Movements everywhere were in constant interaction notwithstanding the line adopted at the Haripura session. This process, in fact, was behind the movement for independence and the demand for integration of those region such as Hyderabad, Travancore, Kashmir and elsewhere into the Indian Union. The Telengana struggle as well as the Punnapravayalar movement therefore laid the foundations for the linguistic states of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

The importance of the Nagpur session in 1920, however, is in the fact that it was here that the Indian National Congress resolved to set up Provincial Congress Committees on exclusively linguistic basis and this, in turn, leading to the re-distribution of Congress Provinces across India into 21. Apart from Andhra⁷ and Sindh that were already there, the Nagpur session resolution led to the constitution of the Kerala Pradesh Provincial Committee⁸ and the Karnataka Pradesh Provincial Committee.⁹ It may be stated here that the Indian National Congress constitution, as amended in 1908, had provided for a separate Provincial Congress Committee for Bihar even though the region was still a part of the Bengal Presidency.¹⁰ This decision of 1908, however, was not based on an informed debate involving the linguistic identities as it was in the Nagpur session.

III

The important point here is that the construction of the national identity during the course of the freedom struggle was one where the linguistic identity was seen as one that mediated the making of the national identity rather than treating it as a threat to the national. And in that sense, the Indian National Movement, treated the linguistic identity as integral to its course and even accorded to it a pivotal role in the making of the national identity. It may be stressed here that the acceptance of the demand or the idea of Provincial Congress Committees on linguistic lines (as against the administrative division of provinces done by the British) was accepted by the Congress session at Nagpur, held within months after the Special Session at Calcutta (September 1920) where the non-cooperation resolution was adopted. It clearly signifies that the decision at Nagpur was indeed an imperative for the Congress in the given context where the platform was transforming into mass movement for independence. And this clearly was also the basis for the Nehru Committee Report firming up the idea as a Constitutional principle.

The linguistic reorganisation of the Provincial Congress Committees was also an explicit statement, on behalf of the national movement that Indian Nationalism, even while it sought to steer clear of religion as a basis of division; in other words, the Indian

National Congress was committed as much to ensure that the nation did not consider linguistic identity as inimical to the making of the nation; nor its existence. The leaders of the national movement, in fact, did seem to internalise the importance of acknowledging India as much a *civilizational* state as distinct from the nations across Europe and elsewhere. And in such a scheme, it was imperative for the organisation of the struggle for freedom to acknowledge and internalise linguistic identities as an inevitable category in the nation making agenda. It is then legitimate to argue that the nationalist leadership did recognise linguistic identities as integral to the making of the Indian Nation and was committed against any attempt to annihilate linguistic identity.

One does find this approach to the past or tradition or the lineage (in whatever words the *civilizational* dimension of the Indian state is described) in Jawaharlal Nehru's writings particularly after 1937¹¹. In one such instance, Nehru writes:

"It was not her wide spaces that eluded me, or even her diversity, but some depth of soul which I could not fathom, though I had occasional and tantalizing glimpses of it. *She was like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.* All of these existed in our conscious or sub-conscious selves, though we may not have been aware of them, and they had gone to build up the complex and mysterious personality of India... The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me: it was an emotional experience which overpowered me."¹² (emphasis added by author)

Lest he be seen as one caught in a time warp and nostalgia, Nehru hastens to clarify his own position in the same essay. He adds:

"It was absurd, of course, to think of India or any country as a kind of anthropomorphic entity. I did not do so. I was fully aware of the diversities and divisions of Indian life, of classes, castes religions, races, different degrees of cultural development. Yet I think that a country with a long cultural background and a common outlook on life develops a spirit that is peculiar to it and that is impressed on all its children, however much they may differ among themselves".¹³

It may be stressed at this stage that the influence that Jawaharlal Nehru came to exert on the making of the various policies for independent India was indeed at par with that of Mahatma Gandhi in the realm of making the strategy for India's struggle for independence. It may also be stressed that both these leaders had internalised the aspects of India's past and its civilizational lineage in their way of thinking. And in this sense, both Gandhi and Nehru could see the need for building a national identity that was essentially mediated by the linguistic identity of the different people speaking different languages. In other words, both Gandhi and Nehru thought alike on the need to preserve the diverse traditions that were mediated and represented through the different languages and clearly opposed to any such thinking that perceived such diversity as a threat to national unity. And this came to be expressed, in categorical terms, in the manifesto of the Indian National Congress for the elections to the Central and Provincial Legislative

Assemblies in 1945. Emphasising the Congress' commitment to equality in all sense of the term – of individuals, the communities and religious groups and “for full opportunities for the people as a whole to grow and develop according to their wishes and genius”, the manifesto made a clear reference to the reorganisation of the provinces in the following terms:

“... it (the Congress) has also stood for the freedom of each group and territorial area within the nation to develop its own life and culture within the larger framework, and it has stated that for this purpose such territorial areas or provinces should be constituted as far as possible, on a linguistic and cultural basis...”¹⁴

IV

The overwhelming majority secured by the Indian National Congress in the various provinces led to the Congress dominating the Constituent Assembly too.¹⁵ In other words, the Constituent Assembly turned out to be the terrain for the struggle demanding the linguistic reorganisation of the Provinces.

That the demand came to be articulated most ardently by the Congress leaders from Andhra was not coincidental. On August 31, 1946, only a month after the elections to the Constituent Assembly, Pattabhi Sitaramayya gave expression to the demand for an Andhra Province in an article to the Hindustan Times: “The whole problem” he wrote, “must be taken up as the first and foremost problem to be solved by the Constituent Assembly”.¹⁶ The first meeting of the assembly was still a few months away and it was usual practice for the senior leaders then to use the columns of the newspaper to vent their ideas and demands. Sitaramayya, at that time, was a member of the Congress Working Committee. And he also presided over a conference on December 8, 1946 that passed a resolution demanding that the Constituent Assembly accept the principle for linguistic reorganisation of States.¹⁷ It may be noted here that this happened a day before the Constituent Assembly met for the first time on December 9, 1946. The campaign persisted, in like manner, within the Constituent Assembly until Jawaharlal Nehru, on November 27, 1947, accepted the principle underlying the demand for linguistic provinces, in the Constituent Assembly (Legislative)¹⁸ and the Government of India stated that Andhra could be mentioned as a separate unit in the new Constitution as was done in case of the Sind and Orissa under the Government of India Act, 1935. The Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, however, found such a mention of Andhra was not possible until the geographical schedule of the province was outlined. Hence, on June 17, 1948, Chairman Rajendra Prasad set up a 3-member commission, called *The Linguistic Provinces Commission* with a specific brief to examine and report on the formation of new provinces of Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra.¹⁹

It is necessary to stress here that the important leaders of the Indian National Congress, including Nehru, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad, had shown signs of retreat from the unbridled enthusiasm they had, even in the immediate past, for the linguistic reorganisation of the provinces. The experience of partition and the manner in which the demand for Pakistan caught the imagination of a large section of the Muslim community

(within a short period of five years since 1940) had an impact on their approach to all talk of denominational politics. Apart from that, there was also the question of the practical dimensions of a realignment of the provincial boundaries in terms of the time and the efforts it involved. A distinct indication of this came in the proposals of the Sapru Committee as early as in December 1945²⁰ and at least a year before the Constituent Assembly held its first session. The proposals, among other aspects, reiterated that "historical accident and administrative exigencies have contributed to, by no means, an ideal division of the country into provinces" but stressed that the linguistic reorganisation of provinces was taken up by the Government in independent India and rather than be done at the time of making the constitution. The committee recommendations were as follows:

"While it is not desirable that the new constitution should be delayed by the realignment of provincial boundaries on linguistic or cultural considerations, the constitution act shall indicate the machinery and prescribe the procedure for such realignment of old provinces and for the creation of new provinces after it has come into force and, on such realignment or creation of provinces, all consequential amendments may be made in the constitution".²¹

The report of the *Linguistic Provinces Commission* was clearly an elaboration of what the Sapru Committee expressed and served the purpose of the political leadership of the Constituent Assembly.²² It may be noted, in this regard, that the Constituent Assembly as well as the S.K. Dar Commission at this point of time, were face to face with a reality where there was an element of uncertainty over the status of the Indian States *vis a vis* the Constitution. This was indeed of critical importance, given the fact that many such Indian States and parts of the Provinces were contiguous in terms of the language spoken by the people. As for instance, Hyderabad with the idea of an Andhra State; Mysore with the idea of Karnataka; Travancore and Cochin in the case of Kerala; and Vidharba in the case of Maharashtra; these were concrete issues that could not have been glossed over by the Commission.

Submitted on December 10, 1948, the S.K.Dar Commission Report, clearly satisfied the political leadership of independent India and left those campaigning for the linguistic re-organisation of the provinces without any reason to celebrate. Running into some 150 paragraphs, spread over five chapters, the report dealt with the political dimensions of the idea of linguistic states and also the financial, economic and administrative aspects involved in the exercise. With the help of experts whose services it drafted, the Dar Commission listed out a litany of reasons against the idea of linguistic reorganisation in the political sense as well as hard facts to establish that such reorganisation in the given context was also economically and financial un-viable. Among the most substantial reasons that the commission mustered was that the re-organisation on linguistic basis involved decisions pertaining to the nature of the relationship between the Indian States with the Union and held that there was no point working on the subject until this issue was settled. Its report dealt with each of the four proposed States – Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra – in this context.

The more significant aspect of the Dar Commission's report, from the concerns of this paper was on the principle of linguistic states. Even while it reiterated the Indian National Congress' position held for 30 years that the provinces as they existed at that time were administrative units of British imperialism and that they came into existence in a way that was not meant to work as democratic institutions, the Dar Commission went on to stress upon the need to hold on to them. It said:

"But they have taken root and are now vital living organisms and have served the useful purpose of bringing together people who otherwise might have remained separated. And though they may be somewhat disadvantageous in working modern democracy, ***they are not bad instruments for submerging a sub-national consciousness and moulding a nation***"²³ (emphasis added).

After ruling out any basis for the creation of the four new states, into which the commission was to look deep, the Dar Commission also lent its advice to the future government of independent India. It was a repudiation of all that the Congress stood for during the three decades since its passed a resolution on the subject at Nagpur in 1920. The Dar Commission Report presented to the Constituent Assembly said:

"In any rational and scientific planning that may take place in regard to the provinces of India in the future, homogeneity of language alone cannot be decisive or even an important factor. Administrative convenience, history, geography, economy, culture, and many other matters will also have to be given due weight. It may be that the provinces thus formed will also show homogeneity of language and, in a way, might resemble linguistic provinces. But, in forming the provinces, the emphasis should be primarily on administrative convenience, and homogeneity of language will enter into consideration only as a matter of administrative convenience and not by its own independent force".²⁴

The Commission report read like a thesis against the idea of linguistic reorganisation of the provinces and spoke against any such effort in the immediate context. And if its arguments were to be taken seriously, it was the Commission's case that linguistic identities were mere sentiments and was even inimical to the stability and integration of the nation. It is appropriate to put this in the words of the Commission itself.

"In order to secure the stability and integration, India should have a strong centre and national language. Indian nationalism is deeply wedded to its regional languages; Indian patriotism is aggressively attached to its provincial frontiers. If India is to survive, Indian nationalism and patriotism will have to sacrifice some of its cherished sentiments in the larger interests of the country...

The only good that we can see in a linguistic province is the possible advantage it has in working the Legislature in the regional language. But this is more than counter-balanced by the obstruction the linguistic

provinces will inevitably cause to the spread of national language or national feeling in this country..."²⁵

Notwithstanding all these, the Indian National Congress organisation, consisting of a large number of persons who were committed to the idea of Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra, persisted with the demand and it came to be voiced at the Jaipur session, held only a few days after the S.K.Dar Commission had submitted its report to the Constituent Assembly on December 10, 1948. It was only obvious that the delegates were keen on a political response to the issue rather than one by a commission consisting of a retired high court judge, a former bureaucrat and an *unknown* member of the Constituent Assembly. The issue gained centre-stage with Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who had been in the forefront of this demand in the couple of years before 1948, was elected the Congress President at the Jaipur session. A committee consisting of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Jawaharlal Nehru was constituted by the Indian National Congress by way of a resolution at the Jaipur session to report on the subject.

The specific brief before the Committee was to consider the question of linguistic provinces and "to review the position and to examine the question in the light of the decisions taken by the Congress in the past and the requirements of the existing situation, (i) in view of the report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission, appointed by the President of the Constituent Assembly, and (ii) the new problems that have arisen out of the achievement of independence".²⁶

The report of this committee, came to be known subsequently as the JVP committee (Jawaharlal-Vallabhai-Pattabhi), submitted on April 1, 1949 was an endorsement of all that the S.K. Dar Commission recommended in December 1948. Conceding that the Congress had "given the seal of its approval to the general principle of linguistic provinces," the JVP Committee went on to add that "it was not faced with the practical application of this principle and hence it had not considered all the implications and consequences that arose from this practical application".²⁷ The report did place on record that the Congress supported the demand for linguistic states because it found the provinces as they were created by the British were done on an "artificial manner" and that due to a desire to have homogenous cultural units as far as possible. It then said:

"It is clear that in giving effect to this principle a great many difficulties of a far-reaching character have to be faced. Whatever the origin of these provinces, and however artificial they may have been, a century or so of political, administrative and to some extent economic unity in each of the existing provincial areas had produced a certain stability and a certain tradition, and any change in this would naturally have an upsetting effect. It would have far-reaching consequence, political, economic, financial and administrative. These reasons, of course, were not necessarily enough for us to go back on, what had long been considered, a basic principle of the Congress. But these reasons could not be ignored, just as the course of recent history, with all that had resulted from it, could not be ignored. In consideration of this problem, all these factors had to be kept in mind and balanced with each other".²⁸

Interestingly the JVP committee also went on to describe the demand for linguistic states, in the given context, as "narrow provincialism" and that it could become a "menace" to the development of the country. Assuming to itself the responsibility of viewing the problem of linguistic provinces in the context of the times, the report said:

"That context demands, above everything, the consolidation of India and her freedom, the progressive solution of her economic problems in terms of the masses of her people, the promotion of unity in India and of close co-operation among the various provinces and states in most spheres of activity. It demands further, stern discouragement of communalism, provincialism, and all other separatist and disruptive tendencies".²⁹

And without mincing words, the JVP Committee went into the specifics of its concerns by referring to the partition of India. "This partition" the report said, "has led us to become wary of anything that tends to separate and divide". The three leading lights of the Congress who constituted the committee, however, placed on record that the communal problem and the idea of linguistic reorganisation of provinces were not the same. The report did make this qualification in so many words.

"It is true there can be no real comparison between this partition and the linguistic regrouping of India. But it is also true that in the existing fluid state of India, even small things in themselves may lead to evil consequences and let loose forces which do injury to the unity of India".³⁰

The JVP committee also felt that "while language is a binding force, it is also a separating one" but then stressed that it was possible that "when conditions are more static and the state of peoples' minds calmer, the adjustment of these boundaries or the creation of new provinces can be undertaken with relative ease and with advantage to all concerned".³¹

Despite its endorsement of the recommendations of the S.K.Dar Commission, the JVP committee, being one consisting of political leaders who had led the movement for freedom, had reasons to perceive the issue differently. And this was clearly reflected in its report too. Hence, the report said: "Nevertheless, if there is a strong and widespread feeling in an area for a linguistic province, a democratic government must ultimately submit to it, unless there is grave danger to the State and unless this feeling comes into conflict with a rival feeling. If there is general consent and willingness, the of course the difficulties are much less".³¹ It may be noted here that among the three members of the committee, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who was also the Congress president at that time, was a strong votary for the formation of the Andhra State on linguistic lines; he had, in fact, remained the central figure of the campaign until most recently. It is not possible to state as to whether his presence in the committee had led to this observation but then such an inference will not be out of order.

The JVP committee's conclusion that it was not the right time then to embark upon the idea of linguistic reorganisation of States and that any such efforts will retard the process of consolidation of the gains and also dislocate the administrative, economic and financial structure was accepted by the Congress Working Committee soon after the

report was submitted and the political leadership of the Constituent Assembly as well. In other words, the consensus was that the linguistic reorganisation of States be postponed and this clearly was reflected in Article 3 of the Constitution.³² It is to be noted that the makers of the Constitution did not qualify the possible reorganisation of the States as only on linguistic basis and left it open as long as there was agreement to that from the different States concerned with such reorganisation.³³

V

It is now possible to argue that the campaign for the linguistic reorganisation of the States was not merely an abstract idea; and that it was certainly a popular movement even while the Constitution was being drafted. It is also possible to state then that those in the fore-front of the movement, being part of the national movement in every sense of the term and were also an integral part of the Indian National Congress, were as much a part of the consensus that had emerged at that point of time: To postpone the task to a later date. And thus the campaign seemed to have been suspended for a while; but not for long. It is also significant that the resurgence took place with the demand for a separate Andhra State. Andhra, after all, was the first instance of the reorganisation of the Provincial Congress Committees on linguistic basis.

Potti Sriramulu's fast beginning October 19, 1952 and his martyrdom thereafter during the night of December 15, 1952, are events that are now an integral part of any discussion on the subject and suffice it to note here that this happened within months after the end of the first general elections and Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in Prime Minister in February 1952. And the pace at which the Union Government moved the Bill to form the Andhra State³⁴ reflected the intensity of the movement for the linguistic reorganisation of the States and also the empathy to the idea of linguistic reorganisation of states among those who led the Union Government, including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

The SRC, however, seemed to remain caught in a time warp and its report, submitted in October 1955, virtually endorsed many things that were stated by the S.K.Dar Commission and all the arguments that the JVP committee had against the linguistic reorganisation in its own time. The three members of the SRC, despite their standing in their own right, decided to lean heavily on the stated position of the Congress party on the subject.³⁵ And for this, the Commission studied the resolutions on the subject at the Hyderabad session of the Congress in January 1953, the Congress Working Committee subsequently in May 1953 and the Congress session at Kalyani in January 1954. The Commission defined the Congress position, in all those instances, in the following words:

“In considering the reorganization of States, all relevant factors should be borne in mind, such as the unity of India, national security and defence, cultural and linguistic affinities, administrative convenience, financial considerations, and economic progress, both of the States and the nation as a whole”.³⁶

The elaborate and somewhat pedantic observations of the Commission on aspects of language and culture revealed that its members perceived diversity as a potential threat to the national unity and also found that the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of the States, as such, could threaten the nation. As for instance, it argued that it was "neither possible nor desirable to reorganise States on the basis of the single test of either language or culture", and stressed that "a balanced approach to the whole problem is necessary in the interests of our national unity".³⁷ And in order not to leave anyone in doubt as to what would constitute the "balance", the SRC sought to stress linguistic homogeneity "as an important factor conducive to administrative convenience and efficiency but not to consider it as an exclusive and binding principle...". The balance, according to the Commission, was "to ensure that communicational, educational and cultural needs of different language groups, whether resident in predominantly unilingual or composite administrative units are adequately met". The Commission also made a categorical assertion that "where satisfactory conditions exist, and the balance of economic, political and administrative considerations favour composite States, to continue them with the necessary safeguards to ensure that all sections enjoy equal rights and opportunities..."³⁸

The SRC then ventured into the realm of the political with such assertions as the imperative to "repudiate the *home land* concept, which negates one of the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution, namely equal opportunities and equal rights for all citizens throughout the length and breadth of the Union". In the same way, the Commission's report stressed the need to "reject the theory of *one language one state*" which according to it was neither justified nor practicable.

And in the end, the States Reorganisation Commission recommended reorganisation of the Indian States in a manner that was neither based on linguistic identities nor on the basis of the status quo; the boundaries, as they were, in the view of the commission, were due to historical accidents and administrative convenience and the Commission's opinion was that it shall not prevail. If the Commission's recommendation was to be implemented, India would have been made of 16 States (in place of the 27 States that were there at that time). The Commission recommended the following States to constitute the Indian Union: Madras, Kerala, Karnataka, Hyderabad, Andhra, Bombay, Vidharbha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Orissa and Jammu & Kashmir.³⁹ In other words, the Commission's recommendations were a compromise between administrative convenience and linguistic concerns.

It is important to note here that the Commission's scheme envisaged Hyderabad to remain a separate State (despite the linguistic, geographical and administrative contiguity of the region with Andhra)⁴⁰ even while seeking the merger of Travancore-Cochin with the Malabar region of the Madras State to form Kerala; and Mysore with some other regions of Madras into Karnataka. The SRC, however, opposed the bifurcation of the Bombay State into Maharashtra and Gujarat but recommended a separate Vidharbha exclusive of the Bombay State. It also rejected the idea of a Punjabi *subha*.

VI

The Nehru regime, however, was guided by the principle of linguistic reorganization of the States to which the Indian National Congress had committed itself since 1920 and this was established, to some extent, in the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. The principle of linguistic states was put into effect in at least a limited sense; Andhra Pradesh, including the Hyderabad State came into existence by that in the same way as Kerala, including the Travancore-Cochin State and the Malabar district of Madras came into existence; and Karnataka came into being including the Mysore State and also parts of Bombay and Madras States. In all these cases, the core principle was linguistic identity. The Nehru regime, however, denied acceding to a similar demand in the case of the Gujarati speaking people for a separate State in that instance. However, this too was conceded in May 1960. And even after all these, the demand for a Punjabi *subha* continued to be described by the establishment as separatist until 1966; in that year, Punjab was trifurcated and two new States – Haryana and Himachal Pradesh – came into existence.⁴¹ The trifurcation of Punjab, however, brought to an end the process that was initiated by the Indian National Congress, in 1920, to put language as the basis for the reorganization of the provinces.

In conclusion, it may be said that the fears that were expressed by the S.K.Dar Commission, the JVP committee and the States Reorganisation Commission turned out to be misplaced. Indian unity, or the notion of the national, came to be threatened only when this principle was run down and the demand for linguistic reorganization of the States was condemned as being inimical to the national. The struggle for Andhra, the agitations in Bombay, Gujarat and elsewhere between 1956 and 1960 and the campaign that the Akali Dal spearheaded for a Punjabi speaking State until 1966 were all evidence to this. In other words, the struggles ceased that very moment when the demand was accepted. In a sense, reorganization of states on linguistic lines strengthened the national and the nation rather than unravel it in any way.

References:

- 1 The Lectures delivered between January and March, 1961 and compiled into a book titled *What is History* will perhaps be a means to liberate history teaching in our schools and colleges. The prevailing method of teaching history in our schools successfully reduces the discipline into a compendium of facts about wars fought, territory annexed and structures that the Kings and the Emperors built. Apart from turning away the young minds from the discipline, it also helps construct a mindset in the present that would celebrate similar acts by the rulers in our own times.
- 2 E.H.Carr, *What is History*, Penguin Books, 1964, page 11.
- 3 In pursuance of a resolution passed at the Madras session of the Indian National Congress (1927), the Congress Working Committee convened an All Parties Conference in February 1928 at Delhi and subsequently at Bombay in May 1928. The Bombay meet of the All Parties Conference set up a committee, under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru, with a brief to “determine the principles of the Constitution for India”. The report of this committee, that came to be called the *Nehru Report*, submitted in August 1928, was indeed acclaimed by constitutional experts as “not only an answer to the challenge that Indian Nationalism was

unconstructive” but the “frankest attempt yet made by Indians to face squarely the difficulties of communalism”.

- 4 For a complete text of the Nehru Report, see B.Shiva Rao (ed), *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents*, Universal, 1967. Volume I pp 59-75.
- 5 Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Padma Publications, 1946. Volume I, pp 56-57.
- 6 *Ibid.* Volume II, page 80.
- 7 The Andhra Provincial Committee did not include the Telengana region and was restricted to the coastal districts and the Rayalaseema region that were part of the Madras Province then.
- 8 The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee was restricted to the Malabar district region of the Madras Province and excluded the Travancore and the Cochin States.
- 9 The Provincial Committee did not have any representation from the Mysore State and was made of representatives from the Kannada speaking region of the Madras Province.
- 10 Sitaramayya, *op. cit.* Vol. I, page 55.
- 11 There is indeed a sea change in Nehru's approach to the past in the post 1937 period from that of his views as stated in his Autobiography (completed in 1935 and first published in 1936). Nehru himself states that his understanding of India was based, until the time he completed his autobiography, on some fleeting visits to places in the United Provinces; and that it began to change during his extensive tours across the country and to the hinterlands, beginning with the campaign tours in 1937 and in the couple of years since then; Nehru's expressions on a variety of subjects changed after these and are found in *The Discovery of India* (completed in September 1944 and first published in 1946).
- 12 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 1981. p 59. The essay, titled The Search for India, from where these parts are cited, is among the many where Nehru delves into the past and its importance to the present and the future of India.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Congress Election Manifesto, October 26, 1945. See Appendix V to B.Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *Why Vote Congress*, Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1945. Page 77. Also see Sitaramayya, *op. cit.* Volume II, page i.
- 15 It may be noted here that the Constituent Assembly was constituted by members elected by the representatives of the various Provincial Legislative Assemblies that were in existence since early 1946. The indirect election of the Constituent Assembly was found to be the next best alternative to one elected directly by universal adult suffrage (only 28.5 % of the adult population were voters in the elections given the restrictions based on property ownership and other considerations that guided the poll process then. But this proposal was accepted by the leaders of the movement at that time in order to save time and hasten the process of drafting independent India's constitution) and it consisted, to begin with, of 296 members including the Congress, the Muslim League, Landlords, Communists and such others. The Muslim League, however, decided against joining the assembly. Similarly, the Indian States went unrepresented in the assembly at the time of its constitution. 93 members joined the assembly subsequently (in stages) and the process was completed as late as in October 1949, i.e. until a month before the Constitution was adopted by the assembly. It may be added that Hyderabad had not sent its representatives even at that time. The representatives from the States were

either elected (where the Indian States merged with an existing province) or by nomination (by the Rulers where they existed as independent provinces after merger into the Indian Union). All this notwithstanding, the Indian States ceased to exist at the time of adoption of the Constitution even if they were classified as Part B States, was one of the same kind as that of the other provinces.

- 16 Cited in Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, OUP, Delhi, 1966, page 241.
- 17 Austin cites at least 4 resolutions in the first session of the Constituent Assembly in support of the demand and incidentally all those were from members from States that witnessed movements for linguistic reorganization in the decade and half after independence.
- 18 After August 15, 1947, the Constituent Assembly also worked as the Union Parliament and this arrangement continued until the constitution of the First Lok Sabha after the general elections of 1951-52. Nehru made this announcement in his capacity as the Prime Minister.
- 19 S.K.Dar, a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court was its chairman; Pannalal, a former civil servant and Jagat Narain Lal, a member of the Constituent Assembly were appointed members of the Commission.
- 20 It may be noted that the Sapru Committee was perhaps the earliest response to the failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks of September 1944. Though not a direct initiative of the Indian National Congress, it is important to note that all the 30 members of the Committee, including its chairman, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and such others as S.Radhakrishnan, N.Gopalswami Ayyangar, Sachidananda Sinha and M.R.Jayakar, were members of the Constituent Assembly and also emerge as the most articulate sections in the assembly. Hence, their views on the various issues including that of the linguistic reorganization of the states assume importance.
- 21 Constitutional Proposals of the Sapru Committee, 1945. Cited in B.Shiva Rao (ed) *op. cit.* Volume I, pp 155-56
- 22 Granville Austin notes that Rajendra Prasad, in his capacity as chairman of the Constituent Assembly had sought a commission consisting of representatives of the various Provincial Governments and that the proposal was dropped on the intervention from Nehru and Sardar Patel. Austin avers that the composition of the three-member Commission formed subsequently had determined the sense of the report too. Austin's description of Jagat Narain Lal, the lone representative of the Constituent Assembly in the Commission, as a "listless member from Bihar" says it all. Austin's conclusion makes sense when seen in the context of the events that followed in this regard.
- 23 Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission, December 10, 1948. A full text of the report is reproduced in B.Shiva Rao (ed), *op. cit.*, Volume 4, pp 439-509.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *Report of the Linguistic Provinces Committee appointed by the Jaipur Congress*, Indian National Congress, New Delhi, 1948. page 1.
- 27 *Ibid.* page 2.
- 28 *Ibid.* pp 2-3.
- 29 *Ibid.* pp 4-5.
- 30 *Ibid.* page 6.

- 31 *Ibid.* page 8.
- 32 *Ibid.* page 9.
- 33 Article 3, as adopted on November 26, 1949 read as follows: Parliament may by law- (a) form a new State by separation of territory from any State or by uniting two or more States or parts of States by uniting any territory to a part of any State; (b) increase the area of any State; (c) diminish the area of any State; (d) alter the boundaries of any State;
- 34 The constitutional position in this regard is that a Bill to create a new State either by partitioning an existing State or merging two or more States can be introduced in Parliament only after the President of the Republic makes a reference and the reference is made to the State concerned. It is not necessary that the concerned States have to concur. A mere reference, however, is necessary and sufficient for a Bill to be introduced in Parliament.
- 35 The Bill to form a new State by taking away the Telugu speaking regions from the then Madras State was moved in the Lok Sabha on August 10, 1953. This was the first ever instance of the formation of a State that approximated as much as possible to a linguistic province.
- 36 The Commission consisting of Justice Fazl Ali, K.M.Pannikar and H.N.Kunzru was set up in August 1953 and this was as much a response by the Union Government (as was the Bill to form the Andhra State) to the fast and the martyrdom of Potti Sriramulu.
- 37 *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission, 1955*, Government of India, New Delhi. Page 17.
- 38 *Ibid.* page 45.
- 39 *Ibid.* page 46.
- 40 *Ibid.* page 203. It is important to note here that the Commission's scheme envisaged Hyderabad to remain a separate State (despite the linguistic, geographical and administrative contiguity of the region with Andhra) even while seeking the merger of Travancore-Cochin with the Malabar region of the Madras State to form Kerala; and Mysore with some other regions of Madras into Karnataka. It was also against bifurcation of the Bombay State into Maharashtra and Gujarat but recommended a separate Vidharbha exclusive of the Bombay State. It also rejected the idea of a Punjabi Subha.
- 41 It may be noted here that Hyderabad then was that part which was under the Nizam's rule prior to integration and is not the same as the Telengana State as demanded now. The demand seemed closer to realization at the time of writing this paper.
- 42 There is indeed a consensus among contemporary political thinkers that the long delay in recognizing the linguistic basis in the Punjab was indeed a strong basis for the rise of communal politics in the State and the build-up, in the late Seventies, into a separatist slogan there.