

The Birth of Telangana -A Seven Hundred Year Event

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The rest of the country is puzzled by Telangana. Where is it? Where did it come from? How did it happen? Where is it going? What does it mean for India?

Telangana is the center of the Deccan Plateau which divides North and South India. It is bounded in the north by the Godavari river and in the South by the Krishna. If these rivers had been harnessed well Telangana would have been a real Doab instead of being a dry land.

It was ruled by the local Kakatiya Rajas till it was conquered by the Delhi Sultan in 1323. From then on it was ruled by Muslim dynasties the Brahmani and Golconda Sultans and a brief spell by Aurangzeb. Since 1724 it was ruled by the Nizams of Hyderabad till 1950. So for 627 years the Hindu population of Telangana worked out a way of living with Muslim rule in relative peace despite the tension that comes from people of one religion ruling those of another.

Telangana was merged with Andhra State in 1956 on the basis of linguistic and religious unity. It was thought that in Andhra Pradesh things would be more democratic, fair and equal. Telangana was underdeveloped and heavily taxed under the Nizams and Andhra prosperous, educated and highly developed under British rule. Andhra had no cities while capital of Telangana, Hyderabad city, was the fifth largest in India. In and around Hyderabad city flourished Deccani culture and tehzib which sought to rival Lucknow. With the fall of the Nizam, the exodus of educated, talented and dispossessed Muslims of the former ruling class took place to Pakistan, UK and USA. Hyderabad began to lose its Nawabi ways. The incoming Andhra ruling elite dominated the Telugu capital city while the Telangana elite and people were reduced to second class importance. Under the Nizams, the Telangana people and elite had got used to this but now this was happening to them in a State which was supposed to represent Telugu unity and equality.

The protests against unfairness and discrimination resulted in a big explosion in 1969 with a peaceful agitation for Telangana Statehood which was put down by force. Nearly 300 students were shot dead by police. Congress politics changed and P V Narasimha Rao was made Chief Minister in 1971. This was the first time a Telangana politician ascended the CM's gaddi. This was disliked by the Andhras and they started a violent agitation for a separate Andhra State in 1973. Congress politics changed again and P V Narasimha Rao was sent off to Delhi. Telangana was denied the protection of laws and rules which were gained in earlier agitation. Many disgruntled Telangana emigrated to US and UK while others took to Naxalism. Telangana simmered with resentment till 1983, when N T Rama Rao, the Andhra film actor, gave the slogan of establishing Telugu self respect. Telangana voted massively for his Telugu Desam Party throwing the Congress Party out of power for the first time and hoping for justice and equity.

This did not happen and after 21 years of alternating Congress and Telugu Desam governments that did nothing for Telangana, a new movement was started in 2004 led by the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS). After 631 youths committed suicide for the Telangana cause, statehood was promised in 2009 but came only in 2014. The TRS swept the Assembly and Parliamentary elections of 2014 which it contested independently.

TRS will today form the first Telangana Government in 700 years for its 4 crore people. It promises to reverse the unfairness and inequity to its youth, farmers and government employees. Its plans and ambitions to develop Telangana are many.

Many Andhras have settled in Hyderabad and Telangana and are afraid of living and working under a Telangana Government as they have grabbed government employment and education opportunities reserved for locals. Andhra crony capitalists have illegally acquired government, temple and darga lands in and around Hyderabad. The Krishna and Godavari waters have been diverted from Telangana (which has the largest area in their river basins) to Andhra. All Telangana has got is Hyderabad city a city which needs water, power, drainage, roads and law and order. Hyderabad will be a great engine of growth for the new State, which is the 13th biggest in the country.

In the past, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal have broken away and have become States. Vidharbha, Marathwada, Bundelkhand, Purvanchal, Awadh, Paschim Pradesh and Bodloli and statehood demands are lying on the table. Hyderabad-Karnatak, Saurashtra-Kutch, Jammu, Ladakh are likely to join the list. All feel statehood will help solve their problems. There are many more deprived regions that think statehood is the way forward to development and self respect. India might soon have 50 States. This is no bad thing and will strengthen the Republic.

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