

4/2015

2015

ISSN NO. 0019-5510

IJPS
INDIAN
POLITICAL
SCIENCE ASSOCIATION
वन्दे माते जगदी शक्ति

The Indian Journal of Political Science

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INDIAN
POLITICAL
SCIENCE
ASSOCIATION
75 Years
1939-2014
वन्दे माते जगदी शक्ति

Volume LXXVI, No. 3

SPECIAL ISSUE

July - September, 2015

Editor

C.P. Barthwal



विद्या नाम नरस्य रूपमधिकं प्रच्छन्नगुप्तं धनं
विद्याभोगकरी यशःसुखकरी विद्या गुरुणां गुरुः।
विद्या बन्धुजनो विदेश गमने विद्या परम दैवतम्
विद्या राजसु पूज्यते नहि धनं विद्यविहीनः पशुः॥



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STATEHOOD FOR VIDARBHA: FACT & POLITICS

The creation of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Telangana has served as a reminder that the demand for a separate state of Vidarbha was raised as long as back as October 1, 1938, when the Central Provinces Legislature passed an unanimous resolution to create a separate state of Mahavidarbha, predating even the demand for a 'Samyukta' Maharashtra. The State Reorganization Committee (SRC) endorsed this subsequently recommending that the Marathi speaking districts of Madhya Pradesh, which form a compact unit, be constituted into a separate state. Among other reasons put forward by the SRC for an independent Mahavidarbha, two in particular are noteworthy. One, the financial position of the unit was demanded satisfactory and two, the SRC found a deep-rooted regional consciousness. The commission's recommendation for a separate state of Vidarbha was not accepted in 1956 and the bilingual state of Bombay comprising of the Marathi-speaking areas of the then Bombay, Madhya Pradesh and Hyderabad states; and the Gujarati speaking areas of the then Bombay, Saurashtra and Kutch came into being. This paper seeks to examine the rationale behind the demand of statehood for Vidarbha.

History of Demand for Creation of Vidarbha state: The roots of the 'regional identity' of Vidarbha can be traced to the manner in which the British constituted the territory. The Central Provinces came into being in 1861 and with the inclusion of Berar in it in 1903 the province became known as the Central Provinces and Berar with Nagpur as its Capital. As elaborated, in the pre-Independence period this province covered four geographical areas- Nagpur, Berar, Jabalpur, Chhattisgarh, etc, and was known as the Central

Provinces and Berar. A flourishing Gond Kingdom emerged here in the end of the 16th century with Deogarh as its capital and continued 1739. Bhakta Bulund the third or fourth ruler established the modern city of Nagpur on the site of a hamlet known as Rajapur Barsa. The social process spread over the last two centuries where ruler ship, religion, caste and ethnicity coalesced evolving into a society

with a modern idiom and a fascinating history. Bhakta Bulund, who paid a visit the imperial court of Aurangzeb, offered his services and abandoning the rites Bhimsen turned to Islam. Impressed by the royal court the set about developing territory by liberally granting land grants to 'Hindu cultivators and artificers' as the Nagpur District Gazetteer (1999) notes. In 1739 Raghujee Bhosala of Berar started intervening in the affairs of Nagpur constituting himself as a protector to the weak Gond King Burhan Shah. This connection continued till 1853, when the last Bhosala descendent Raghujee III died without a child. The Marquis of Dalhousie, then governor - general declared that the state of Nagpur has passed to the paramount power and the commissioner of the Nagpur province till 1861 administered it as a British Province.

The Nizam of Hyderabad to clear outstanding debts leased out the territories of Berar (Akola, Amravati, Buldhana and Yeotmal) to the British who in 1903 attached it to the central provinces for administrative purpose leading to the creation of the ' Central Provinces Berar' with the city of Nagpur as its capital. The chief commissioner's province got the status of the regular province with a legislative council and the appointment of governors the head in 1914

Conflicts arose between the Hindi and Marathi-Speaking communities, the former using the backward classes to fight the Brahmin middle class Marathi leadership who believed that the deficit ridden Hindi areas got surplus revenue from the eight Marathi-speaking districts. The Brahmin leadership had to give way in the congress Party, the only political formation with a structure and programme in the region. The roots of the regional identity emerged in the ebb and flow of regional politics; the conflict between the two linguistic communities; the decline and rise of the respective community leadership laying down the ground for the subsequent demand for Mahavidarbha.

There is reason to believe that there was nothing innocent in the political map drawn, 'with the



colonial citizens living within a particular province organized into counter-poised if not actually hostile constituencies'. Such a 'striking economy of resources by way of soldiers and civil servants' had not escaped Lenin's notice till M N Roy explained the deviousness of the British policy, in their famous conversation of 1922.

The congruence of a latent regional feeling and economic grievance contributed to the demand for a separate state. The demand for a separate Maharashtra earlier was based on linguistic differences, and element now missing in the present dispute. The economic grievance is genuine, but is valid not only for Vidarbha but also for the entire country barring a few enclaves. To couch this grievance in distinct regional histories poses problems for the future.

Post- Independence Scenario: The government of India appointed the first State Reorganisation Committee (SRC) under Chairmanship of Fazal Ali on 29 December 1953. Vidarbhaite leaders at that time, like M.S.Aney and Brijlal Biyani, submitted a memorandum to SRC for a separate Vidarbha State. The Fazal Ali SRC, after considering these memoranda and all other related aspects, favoured a separate Vidarbha State with Nagpur as capital in the year 1956.

But even after the recommendation SRC headed by Fazal Ali, under the influence of western Maharashtra congress leaders, Vidarbha was made part of the new state of Maharashtra in 1960 by the central government, favoring the "One language - One State" principle and Nagpur city lost the capital status. Nagpur thus became the only city in independent India, which lost "state capital status after historically being a capital of the biggest state of India (by area) for more than 100 year.

In 1960, when the bill for recognition of Bombay state into Maharashtra and Gujarat came up for consideration in the Bombay Legislative Assembly, Y.B.Chavan assured Bombay city, Vidarbha and Marathwada about meeting their development needs. The statement of policy placed on the table of the house reiterated about setting up of development Boards of Vidarbha and Marathwada and promised to place a report about fund allocation and the board's functioning each year before the State Legislative Assembly. A similar declaration was made through an official publication called 'Guiding Principles of

Maharashtra' (1960). These declarations the 'State Reorganisation Agreement and article 371(2)' constitute the historical basis for the three constituent units to come together to 'form the new state of Maharashtra (GOM 1985:6).

The third plan (1961- 66) of the state, which in fact was the first plan of the new state, made a beginnings by identifying indicators of disparities for Vidarbha and Marathwada vis-s-vis the rest of Maharashtra. Based on assessment of backlog in the first two plans (Rs 23 crore) the Third Plan provide additional allocation of Rs 7.7 crore and Rs 7.1 crore for Vidarbha and Marathwada respectively. Irrigation, roads and primary education were the sectors in which both regions lagged behind. In addition Marathwada lagged behind in power development. The Fourth Plan (1969-74) declared that the backlog of Marathwada had been cleared and Rs 6.6 crore were provided to clear the Vidarbha backlog (GOM 1985:7)

The provisions of Article 371(2) of the Constitution came to be invoked a decade later. The 'state of Maharashtra (Special Responsibility of Governor for Vidarbha, Marathwada and the rest of Maharashtra) Order, 1994 issued by the President of India under Article 371 of the Constitution made an order called the Development Boards for Vidarbha, Marathwada and the rest of Maharashtra Order, 1994. These orders were issued on April 30, 1994. Based on these governor of Maharashtra constituted the three development boards namely the Vidarbha Development Board, the Marathwada Development Board and the Development board for the Rest of Maharashtra, that commenced functioning from July 1994. The board apart from ascertaining levels of development, assessing the impact of projects of the region, was supposed to submit an annual report to the governor of Maharashtra.

Why Separate state for Vidarbha: The Vidarbha region is nationally distinguished and geographically very distance from the state capital, Mumbai. Vidarbha is also historically different, culturally distinct, politically distracted, economically distressed and sentimentally quite different from Western Maharashtra but was always dominated by it.

The Vidarbha region under new Maharashtra state continued to suffer in development. This gave impetus to the demand of more equitable development of all regions of Maharashtra. The area supplies raw

material in the form of electricity, minerals and rice cotton to the more-developed western Maharashtra. People of the Vidarbha area finds themselves 600-1000 kilometers away from the state capital, Mumbai and have a feeling of this region being a colony of western Maharashtra. After merger with the new state of Maharashtra, the demand of separate statehood was raised time and again, with an economics view, quoting the increasing developmental backlog.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had also favored a "One-One language" principal for reorganisation of state. Accordingly, he submitted his views about forming at least 2 separate states of Marathi-speaking people, instead of a single large state of Maharashtra. As per his opinion, one state should have one language but at the same time, there can be two or more separate states of one language, depending upon the need for efficient administration, geographic and historical need and sentiments of local people. He had clearly favored "Vidarbha state" with Nagpur as capital saying, "single government cannot administrate such a huge state as united Maharashtra." (Ambedkar 1979)

Not only from the point of view of administration, but also from the point of view of development, Statehood for Vidarbha is desirable. Democracy functions more effectively in small area. E.F. Schumacher in his famous book "small is Beautiful" insisted that gone are the days of "Gigantism" (Schumacher, 1981) it is gigantism of all types political, economic, administrative, etc. that is giving into smallness. Besides limiting the area, Ambedkar limits the size of the population of state to be not

more than two crore. (Ambedkar). Vidarbha has total population of 2 crore and 30 lakhs according to the 2011 census of the government of India.

With exception of Shiv Shena, all political parties and their representatives from Parliament to Panchayat Samities have supported the demand for separate state of Vidarbha. Independent plebiscites organized by social organization recently in the four cities of Vidarbha- Nagpur, Amravati, Chandrapur and Yavatmal have show that 85 percent to 97 percent of voters favored formation of a separate state of Vidarbha.

The logic of creation of Vidarbha state be lead to more efficiency and better governance. For all round development of Vidarbha region the Center should have create a separate Vidarbha state. Now separate Vidarbha state is a need of the hour.

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