

## Balkan Woes and Vote-Banks

Mrittunjoy Guha Majumdar\*

St. Stephen's College, Delhi, India

### Abstract

Ethnic chauvinism is detrimental for national interests. Historically, no political entity has been static and unchanging in the past. Whereas under Harshavardhan and Prithviraj Chauhan, Tabarhind (Bhatinda) and Ajmer may have been part of a single kingdom, today one cannot picture Ashok Gehlot and Prakash Singh Badal having tea over joint administrative ventures quite so easily today. Change is the only constant in geo-politics, so much so that Chinese claims over Tibet and demands for Tibetan independence are often based on facts and figures that span less than a century! It may be hard to believe that in the nineteenth century, Afghanistan and Myanmar were as much a part of India as Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh today are. So, in this regard one needs to be cautious about how one segregates people. Our country has had to bear the brunt of partition once and like various writers have illustrated, such times may draw contrasting reactions: on one hand, as Amitav Ghosh highlighted in *The Shadow Lines*, these boundaries are often not inked in the people's psychology even after maps have been sullied by a new fissure cutting across fields and settlements, on the other hand these acts may entail long-lasting and even traumatic experiences for more than a generation. Agreements signed and bills passed by a select few define how the people are governed and histories written.

**Keywords:** Balkanization; State reorganization commission; Telangana

The world may remember the Ottomans for their glorious reign and the thriving cultural as well as economic state of their kingdom, but the one aspect related to the Ottomans that contemporary society has set as a precedent for recent geo-political developments is the Balkanization of former Ottoman territories [1]. In the nineteenth century, the erstwhile lands of the Ottomans in the Balkan Peninsula were divided and sub-divided until what is now known as the Yugosphere was broken up to give the world miniscule sovereign nations. Some of the countries formed were as small as Tripura and Nagaland while others, such as Serbia and Croatia, were significantly larger. However, one persistent issue relating to these states has been the instability and beggar thy neighbour economic policies, which aim at economic progress at the expense of the economic stability of one's neighbouring countries, besides a violent environment that still irks the denizens of these countries.

Similar tidings, albeit not having reached such an advanced and volatile stage, have emerged in India. Recently, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has agreed to the creation of the 29<sup>th</sup> State of India – Telangana. And a momentous decision it has been, as can be gauged by the reactions it has drawn from the people all over the country. Where on one hand the pink streamers of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) dotted roads and public places in Hyderabad, dejected legislators of the Seemandhra region devised ways to potently voice their displeasure. Though to quite a few of us, it may seem to be just another geo-political manoeuvre of the ruling classes, one may need to analyze the issue a little further to truly assess the importance of such moves and the possible consequences that may arise thereafter.

Historically, in the pre-independence era, there had been 562 princely states that covered the length and breadth of India subcontinent. Most of them were petite kingdoms though others had their own residencies under the British regime. Nizam Asaf Jah VII, the ruler of Hyderabad, had initially put forth the view of remaining independent. But given the location of the state, the Indian leaders summarily rejected the demand and beseeched Sardar Patel to get Hyderabad for India. Yet, even after the integration of the kingdom with India, after the military annexation codenamed Operation Polo, a particular section of the erstwhile state remained backward and underdeveloped, relative to other parts of the state of Andhra Pradesh. What came

forth after a period that involved popular movements like the Vetti Chakiri Movement was hardly an ideal state. The State Reorganization Commission (SRC) Report of 1955 [2] clearly highlights apprehensions about merging Telangana with a greater Andhra. There was an unease arising out of various factors: Developments plans like the Nandikonda project, which people of Telangana felt would not benefit Telangana as much as the other regions of Andhra; the fact that people of Telangana were educationally backward relative to others in Greater Andhra at the time of the SRC report; most importantly, the SRC Report categorically mentioned (Para 379, SRC Report 1955) that Telangana could be a unit all by itself, given its revenue of around 17 crores at that time and hence, could survive independently! Post-independence, issues like inappropriate representation in politics and legislature, lack of jobs for people from Telangana arose. With the State Secretariat employing less than 15% people from Telangana, GO (Government Order) 610, issued in 1985, which gave the legislature a means repatriate non-locals who were recruited in Telangana, besides immolation of a number of youth, became a political tool for those seeking a separate Telangana. All said and done, Telangana finally seems to be on the verge of statehood.

However, this raises an important question: Does our country need more states? How does one delineate political constructs in the form of states? Linguistic demarcations may be an answer. Since 1955, we had states largely defined on linguistic lines until, in 2000, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government created the triplet: Uttaranchal, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand, thereby recognizing that not only language defines the identity of an individual and communities. Given the population of the nation, India has a lot fewer states than many other countries. This raises the administration angle: whether smaller political units can have more able administration or whether larger states can remain as

\*Corresponding author: Mrittunjoy Guha Majumdar, St. Stephen's College, Delhi, India, Tel: 9654597686, E-mail: [mgm913@gmail.com](mailto:mgm913@gmail.com)

Received March 21, 2014; Accepted October 28, 2014; Published November 06, 2014

Citation: Majumdar MG (2014) Balkan Woes and Vote-Banks. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 2: 132. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000132

Copyright: © 2014 Majumdar MG. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

a cohesive unit. Our past experiences with smaller states give no clear answer. While all the three states formed in 2000 have had a fairly unstable political system, there has been an evident rise in employment, healthcare and civil amenities in these states. One interesting aspect of this debate is that the creation of new states leads to establishment of local bureaucratic and civil bodies, which in turn leads to a growth in public sector employment, though the downside often is the elongated period of time and efforts involved in setting up new legislatures, courts and offices. No wonder Congress took the easy way out on the Hyderabad issue by proclaiming that Hyderabad would remain as the joint capital for the next 10 years.

Another pertinent question that arises is that who assesses the right of a certain community to claim a state and thereafter pass a judgment on the legitimacy of the claim? Can the national government take a call on such a momentous political decision in an appropriate manner? Going by the constitution, one would say that one obviously can. But then the question arises that when qualified bodies such as SRC gives directives for formation of states like Vidarbha and the political system declines, what goes into making that decision? Is it taken after considering the various issues involved or is just for vote-bank politics? For one, Congress' decision on Telangana, a year before the General Elections raises certain questions, especially with the upsurge of support for the YSR Congress and the dipping fortunes of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. Now with the creation of Telangana, Congress, according to poll-pundits, will at least have double-figure number of seats. So is this just politics being played out at the expense of the people's interest? Though one may find that the Telangana issue does have a certain historicity attached, would it not have been more prudent to try and empower people from the region in the existing state rather than make a state that would now more often than not depend of Central support on a variety of issues. As for historicity, people demanding the creation of Vidarbha, Gorkhaland, Bodoland,

Bundelkhand and Maru Pradesh also have been active and vocal about their demands for a fairly long period of time. So is it a decibel slug-fest that defines the process or should the central government just throw up their hands and agree to the formation of 50 odd states and change the country's name to the catchy United States of India (USI)?! Interestingly, often the demands for states by apparently different communities and for distinct reasons have overlapping geographies. This just goes on to show that communities of states being divided may share certain common interests that they may not be voicing. Or there have to be communities that may feel alienated in a certain state, which for the "greater good", maintain status quo. Or else, we just may relapse to the political mosaic that existed just before independence: 500+ states (a far-fetched thought but who knows...)!

Such decisions change a nation's collective consciousness forever. It's time for the politicians to introspect and realize this simple truth rather than play to the galleries, as has been done in selected cases.

Balkans identifies the piercing clarity the historical roots of current conflicts and also gives a common reassessment of the region's history, from the world wars and the Cold War to the collapse of communism. The Balkans has been a crossroads, a zone of endless military, cultural, and economic mixing and clashing between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Acclaimed short history, Mark Mazower sheds light on what is called the tinderbox of Europe. Focusing on events from the emergence of the nation-state onward.

#### References

1. Hoffmann C (2008) The Balkanization of Ottoman Rule Premodern Origins of the Modern International System in Southeastern Europe. *Cooperation and Conflict* 43: 373-396.
2. Government of India's (1955) Report of the States Reorganization Commission.