

The battle for Telangana: A historical perspective

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It is important for every sort of development and governance in Telangana that the people identify completely with their governing structures. This identification confers legitimacy on a government -- not just elections and number of votes. That identification has been missing in Telangana for 700 years, says Dr Gautam Pingle in the first of a two-part series on the new state.

Much has been said on the recent past and current events in Telangana. Many are aware of the details though there is some real and imagined controversy over the details. There is enough evidence for an interested person to make an informed decision.

The present can be explained without considering the past history of Telangana -- as for any other region. An understanding of the past, the associated folk memories among the people and the convictions, prejudices and preferences that have come to take hold among the people is necessary to grasp the present reality.

The resolution of present crisis will be ultimately decided by the people of Telangana in the general election of 2014 -- any solution before that time will be only an interim one -- when the people ratify or reject it.

As for the future, no one is competent to pronounce on it and as much depends on the way in which governance and equitable development of the region and all its constituent districts progress. Even in a separate Telangana state -- especially so -- these issues are of as much importance as they have been in the united Andhra Pradesh. Having deprived, despaired and denied of development and voice till now, the Telangana state will be obligated to ensure that all its constituent parts develop in a way to ensure equity and fairness for all. Much depends on what lessons the political leaders of Telangana have learnt or forgotten.

The sad history of the Telangana which constituted the Kakatiya Kingdom (1083- 1324) ended by its conquest by the Delhi Sultanate. This saw the end of its political autonomy. It then became a province of the Bahamani Sultanate from 1347 till 1518. When that Sultanate unraveled, the Telangana region became the core of the Golconda Sultanate (1518-1687).

With the collapse of Golconda in the face of the invasion of Aurangzeb at the end of the 17th century, the region became a Mughal province and, with the dissolution of the Mughal Empire, formed the Nizamate of Hyderabad state.

The Nizamate continued from 1720 till 1950 maintaining various statuses -- first formally as subsidiary to the Moghul Emperor (actually to the Maratha Empire), later allied with the French, and then with the English East India Company. Eventually the Nizam acknowledged as his overlord the British sovereign. When the paramountcy of the British sovereign lapsed with the Indian Independence Act of 1947, all the Indian princely states resumed their independence.

From August 15, 1947 till September 1 1948, Hyderabad state was an independent state belonging to the Nizam. When his independence ended with Indian Army's takeover in September 1948, Hyderabad state continued till 1950 with a military government and then on a civil administrator directed by New Delhi.

The Nizam's *de jure* role, however, lasted till November 19, 1949 when the Nizam accepted the Constitution of India as the Constitution of Hyderabad state. From January 26, 1950, he was *Rajpramukh* of Hyderabad state, which was given the status of a Part B state in the Union and Republic of India. The Nizam officiated as *Rajpramukh* through the first general election of 1952 and, finally gave up his nominal role in 1956, when Hyderabad state was dismembered and the Telangana region was annexed to Andhra state.

The recent past really begins around the period before Independence and proceeds thereafter.

But it is important to remember that since the collapse of the Kakatiya Kingdom of Telangana nearly 700 years ago, the region has been ruled by non-native conquerors except for four years between 1952 and 1956. In those four years Telangana was dominant part of Hyderabad state and the people enjoyed democratic governance through adult franchise. Telangana's fate in the state of Andhra Pradesh from 1956 till date is well documented and argued point by point.

But the main issue is simply this: that it was clearly evident in 1956 that the Telangana region was underdeveloped, politically, socially and economically and in terms of education and many other development indicators. Its only advantage was the enormous surpluses of government revenue over expenditure that it produced year after year due to the high taxation of the period of Nizam's rule.

It was therefore beholden on the political and economic elite of the Andhra region -- highly educated and developed, politically conscious and socially advanced, to ensure that the Telangana region developed fast and came up to the level of the rest of the state.

This did not happen for 57 years despite the warning of an agitation for separate Telangana state since 1969 and despite the presence of electoral democracy and two party rule by the dominant region's elite. The patience of the Telangana people has been exhausted and with growing awareness they have concluded that their development cannot be assured in the united state and this resolute and patient people are determined to regain the political autonomy that the region had lost in 1324.

They are no longer willing to be subjects but want to be full citizens of the republic, for which statehood is essential. It has been a long time coming, the sacrifices many, the humiliation has been endless and there is much to regain.

On December 10, 2009 the culmination was achieved by the announcement in both Houses of Parliament of the decision to form a separate Telangana state. Since then various vested interests, unconcerned with the interests of the people of Telangana, have conspired to delay and attempt to side track and vitiate that historic decision.

Sadly it is now more than three and half years. During this period nearly 1,000 young men committed ritual suicide to protest the delay -- with no response. Now the decision of the Congress Working Committee seems to have settled the issue. Knowing the Congress 'high command', one needs to wait for the passage of the bill in Parliament -- too many false starts have been the style of the Congress

Today the strength of region does not belong to conquering dynasties or charismatic political leaders or opportunist electoral politics but to the great mass of the Telangana people who have stayed constant with the idea of a self-governing Telangana state within the republic.

It is important for every sort of development and governance that the people identify completely with their governing structures. This identification confers legitimacy on a government -- not just elections and number of votes. That identification has been missing in Telangana for 700 years and will be conferred only when the Telangana state is created with Hyderabad city as its capital.

Watch out for part 2: A new governance model for Telangana

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