

Raising MLA Seats to 153 Will Spell Doom for Telangana State

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The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill 2013 fixes the Parliamentary constituencies for the successor states and Assembly constituencies for residuary Andhra Pradesh. Where the Telangana Assembly is concerned, there is unequal treatment. While Section 16 sets the total figure for Telangana Assembly constituencies at 119, Sections 17 and 18 of the Bill provide only for a "Provisional Telangana Legislative Assembly" consisting of the current 119 MLAs. It omits the list of the Assembly constituencies in the Second Schedule (Table A), to be filled later by the Election Commission. The Election Commission (advised by five local MLAs!!) will then restructure all Telangana Assembly constituencies before the election of a permanent Telangana Legislative Assembly.

This is a devious scheme of Shashidhar Reddy, who has organised a Telangana Congress group to increase the number of Assembly seats to 153; two more in each Parliamentary constituency. For the last 10 years, Congressmen in the state have enjoyed power without responsibility for Telangana. Now, using Sonia Gandhi's firm and unshakable support for Telangana statehood, so me unemployed hopefuls and "late Latifs" want to jump on the Telangana bandwagon and get elected. Without Sonia and Telangana they would have lost their deposits if they dared to try. The population per constituency indicates the representative nature of the MLAs. As per the 2009 electorate, the 119 Telangana MLAs will represent an average of 2.08 lakh voters each; the smallest is Bellampally (SC) at 1.39 lakh and the largest are Kukatpally and Seringampally, both at 3.8 lakh. With the increase to 153 MLA seats, the average Assembly electorate in Telangana will be 1.62 lakh. While all Assembly constituencies will be in the same Parliamentary constituencies as before, a restructuring of Assembly constituencies will result in changes in their mandals or wards.

All Parliamentary constituencies will remain intact; only the new Assembly segments will be reduced. Thus, the smallest Parliamentary seat, Adilabad (ST) with 11.31 lakh voters, will now have nine Assembly segments with an average of 1.25 lakh voter each. The largest parliamentarily constituency, Malkajgiri with 2.34 lakh voters, will have nine Assembly segments averaging 2.60 lakh voters.

The last delimitation commenced on January 22, 2007, and the final order was issued by the Election Commission on November 26, 2008. The proposed increase to 153 Assembly constituencies would require an equally complicated, complete and detailed exercise with public consultation. If the order is challenged in the courts, then the process will drag on further.

Meanwhile, the term of the Provisional Telangana Assembly will end and President's Rule will be imposed on the new state. Politically, this means the Telangana State electorate will vote for Parliament before it votes for the Assembly. The whole Telangana effect in favor of the Congress will be diluted by passage of time. If the Lok Sabha election brings Modi and BJP to power, the Telangana electorate will be influenced by the national trend. All this will damage the prospects of the Congress winning handsomely in the Assembly elections. If TRS joins the Congress, it will also suffer. AIMIM cannot support this venture either.

The only beneficiary in Telangana will be the TDP, which by then would have concluded an alliance with BJP in Seemandhra and emerged strong enough to extend that alliance to the Telangana Assembly election. As many as 10 to 20 new seats will be won by TDP with support from 'settlers' opposed to Telangana statehood and all it stands for. Instead of being wiped out in Telangana for its negative role on statehood, it will remerge as a force. So, the greed of Congress hopefuls trying to get more unoccupied and uncontested seats will be evenly matched by the fear of those sitting Congress MLAs who will lose their seats due to the delayed election. It will be also matched by the fear of TRS and MIM in seeing their base eroded by the TDP/BJP alliance backed by a Centre ruled by Modi and BJP. How are the Congress and TRS to confront the electorate with this scheme and hope to win votes? What will be the attitude of TJAC towards all this?

The Telangana movement has struggled for a decade with hardly any Congress elected official fighting for it despite repeated election promises. Meanwhile, more than 630 youths have committed suicide for Telangana statehood. It would be an insult and crime towards those martyrs if the first result of statehood is to increase the number of elected officials. Increasing the number of MLAs is going to cause further deterioration of governance in the countryside, rather than improve it. The smaller the electorate in any constituency, the more important will be the smaller vote banks. The contestants will have to be aligned to the vote banks and the winner will then not be well disposed to the vote bank that voted against him. All this will come in the way of inclusion of the entire electorate in the governance process and creates ill will from their inevitable exclusion. Telangana people, in their fight for statehood, have not been divided by religion, caste or class. This scheme raises the likelihood of dividing Telangana polity. This is not a recipe for progress; it is a prognosis of disaster. No friend, let alone a supporter of Telangana, will wish this situation on the new state. The only hope is that good sense will finally prevail and the Union Cabinet, or Parliament, will replace "Provisional Telangana Assembly" with a permanent one with 119 MLAs. Failing this, all hell will break loose.

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