

The divide that won't be bridged

By **Gautam Pingle**

Indian Express

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/the-divide-that-wont-be-bridged/849386/0>

Posted: Wed Sep 21 2011, 03:22 hrs

[Anna: Parallel govt dangerous](#)[Fight against terror and Pak Kasab's birthday](#) [How safe is knee replacement?](#)

The Telugu people's agitation for a separate state and their leader's death by hunger strike led in 1953 to the creation of Andhra state, made up of the two Telugu regions of Madras province: Coastal Andhra, and Rayalaseema. The third Telugu region — Telangana — had been part of the Nizam's state of Hyderabad since 1724.

The States Reorganisation Commission recommended, in 1955, that Telangana, in excellent financial health, be a separate state. It had been incorporated into the Indian Union in September 1948 after the Indian Army ended the Nizam's rule. Democratic elements in the region were not strong enough to assert themselves and the will of the people was not apparent.

The Andhra state was in financial distress and quarrels began over the implementation of the Sri Bagh pact between its two regions. Merger with Telangana was essential for its financial survival, and to provide diversion from its conflicts. The immature Telangana leadership was browbeaten into a merger in 1956 based on conditions to protect Telangana's interests, as stated in a "gentleman's agreement".

The result of the merger was to: first, consolidate the Congress' hold, and reduce that of the Communist Party, over the new Andhra Pradesh; second, unite coastal Andhra's and Rayalaseema's interests; third, reinforce the dominant (in Rayalaseema and Telangana) Reddy community's political control; and fourth, to initiate projects in Andhra based on Telangana's surpluses.

By 1969, the diversion of Telangana revenues and mal-allocation of government jobs provoked Telangana students into agitating for a separate state. and hundreds of students died in police firing. In the 1971 General Election, the Telangana Praja Samithi Party (TPS) secured 11 of the 14 Telangana parliamentary seats.

The appointment of a chief minister from Telangana (P.V. Narasimha Rao) and the merger of the TPS with the Congress was intended to solve this crisis. But coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema politicians started the "Jai Andhra" movement in 1973 and demanded the protection of Andhra state; the "Jai Andhra" crisis was sorted out with more guarantees to Telangana — including a constitutional amendment and a presidential order — which were not implemented fairly.

Since 1969, many young people in Telangana joined the Naxalite movement to protest the region's continued underdevelopment. This was exploited by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) — backed

predominantly by the Kamma caste in the Coastal Andhra — to win support in Telangana, and defeat the Reddy-dominated Congress in 1983. The Congress later also sought support of Naxalites in Telangana. Ultimately, a bi-partisan approach of TDP and Congress ensured the elimination of the Naxalite insurgency by 2005. Meanwhile, Telangana development had suffered for three decades.

The Telangana issue resurfaced with the formation of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001. Before the 2004 general election, Congress — allied with TRS — promised Telangana statehood, which the incumbent TDP government opposed. Congress won by massive majorities. Despite the agreement of national parties in 2005 to statehood, the Congress did not fulfill its electoral promise, and the TRS broke away as a result.

Before the 2009 general election, Congress once again reiterated its commitment to statehood. TDP did the same, and allied with TRS. While the Congress lost electoral support, it managed to retain power. After the death of its chief minister, Y.S.R. Reddy, in late 2009, the issue snowballed as nearly 600 Telangana youths committed ritual suicide for the cause, and the TRS leader, K. Chandrasekhara Rao, started a fast-unto-death. In December 2009, an all-party meeting and the Congress legislative party both recommended statehood. Based on these developments, the government of India announced its decision to create the state to both Houses of Parliament.

At this stage, vested interests from Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema that had illegally and irregularly acquired government land in and around Hyderabad city, organised opposition in New Delhi against Telangana statehood. The government of India was “persuaded” to delay the matter and set up the Srikrishna committee (SKC) to “examine” the issue in 2010. This postponed the implementation of the decision for a year, but the unsatisfactory nature of the report caused resumption of the agitation in 2011.

The polity and society in the state is split. The speaker of the assembly rejected a series of mass resignations of MLAs — from all three regions and all parties — thereby avoiding a legislative crisis. Further resignations are pending; many more anticipated. The resignations of 10 out of the 14 Congress MPs from Telangana are pending too.

The existence of the UPA government, with its “non-majority” of 261 seats in the Lok Sabha, is threatened. The existing caste divide in the state — Reddy and Kamma — now re-emerged on regional lines: Kamma dominance in coastal Andhra, a Reddy hold on Rayalaseema, and OBC strength in Telangana. The Rayalaseema demand for a separate state indicates, further that a trifurcation of the state — rather than just bifurcation — is inevitable.

The simple solution in such a case is for reluctant partners to live “separately in peace” than “together in conflict”, especially as all three regions are viable and will do much better on their own. The Telugu people were first united in the Kakatiya kingdom (1083-1323).

What is now clear is that the Telugu people's next experience together has not been anywhere as successful or long-lasting. It is apparent that the Telugu regional threesome was and is an unworkable marriage, in need of a divorce.

The writer is at the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad.

--

DR GAUTAM PINGLE
DIRECTOR
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF COLLEGE OF INDIA
BELLA VISTA
RAJ BHAVAN ROAD
HYDERABAD 500082
TEL:+91-40-66533 3000, 3084/3081
+91-40-2331 0907 (D)
FAX:+91-40-66534356/ 2331 3882
E-MAIL: gpingle@asci.org.in
gautam.pingle@gmail.com