

What Kuldip Nayar should know

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Mr Kuldip Nayar tries to compare Telangana with the Punjab issue of 1960 on which he seems to have strong views. Conclusions drawn from one set of circumstances in one region cannot be applied to a completely different set in another region.

Punjab, as it is now, may be a small State but Telangana, with its 40 million people, is by no means one. His comparison of Telangana, therefore, with the division of Punjab is far-fetched and not worthy of him.

That said, he is of the opinion that the Sri Krishna Committee (SKC) and its report should have come before the decision to give Telangana statehood, implying that would have made a difference.

The whole point of the SKC was to try and negate the decision on statehood or to mollify the opponents who had assented when the all-party meeting and the Congress Legislature Party agreed to it on December 6, 2009.

Everyone, including him, seems to have lost sight of these essential facts which led the Core Group of Ministers and Union Cabinet agreeing to Telangana Statehood on December 9, 2009. Many falsely think the decision came from Chidambaram who announced it at 11 pm on Sonia Gandhi's birthday that day.

Next day, both Houses of Parliament were informed, and they welcomed the decision. The agitation by vested interests, after the decision, resulted in the appointment of the Sri Krishna Committee (SKC). Its report is 505 pages long and consists of 146,071 words.

One can't expect Mr. Nayar to have read the whole report, much less made sense of it, but what it said is enough to make a solid case for separation. He seems to have been badly briefed, instead.

The following extracts from SKC 's report will help:

1. "Overall, in spite of 50-plus years of policy protected planning and execution, one finds regional variations in the economic development of AP" (p.118).
2. The SKC noted that the Planning Commission had notified as backward nine of the ten Telangana districts, with the exception of Hyderabad, and resources have been allocated under its Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF). These districts contain, as the SKC says, 87% of the population of Telangana (p.81)
3. Considering the allegation that "Telangana has lower per capita income, lower access to employment, lower business opportunities and low access to education and so on", SKC says, "At the outset, some or all such allegations appear true when absolute amounts, numbers and percentages are reviewed" (p.117).

4. (In Telangana the) “net irrigation by canals has increased only slightly from about 1 lakh hectare to around 2.5 lakh hectares. Tank irrigation has reduced from 4 lakh hectares in 1955-56 to around 2 lakh hectares at present.” (p.189). Over this period, the growth in irrigation came entirely due to farmers investing their own money in 11 lakhs hectares of expensive well-irrigation.
5. “The implementation of G.O. 610 during 1985 to 2005 was, at best, tardy, which remains a grievance of Telangana employees. This issue continues to be highly contentious even today (p.48).” Girgliani Report on GO. 610 estimated 140,000 Telangana jobs diverted to Seemandhra persons.
6. “However, the data received from the State Government shows (Appendix 3.16) that the combined amount released to government and aided colleges together is Rs. 93 crores in Telangana while it is 224 crores in coastal Andhra (with college-going population similar to that in Telangana) and 91 crores in Rayalaseema (with population share being less than half that in Telangana)” (p.153). Most of the colleges in Telangana are private ones where students pay high fees.
7. “The real income of the agricultural wage labourers has declined considerably in Telangana whereas it has increased considerably in coastal Andhra region. Similarly, the SCs, STs and minorities in Telangana region have suffered a decline in income during the past about decade or more, whereas these communities have gained substantially in Coastal Andhra (p.119)”. This shows the weakest segments too suffered from regional neglect.
8. “Although as a sub-regional movement, the Telangana movement does not pose a threat to national unity” (p.344). This was unlike what was perceived then of the Punjabi Suba movement which nearly came true later in the Khalistan movement.
9. “The Telangana movement can be interpreted as a desire for greater democracy and empowerment within a political unit. As stated earlier, sub-regionalism is a movement, which is not necessarily primordial but is essentially modern – in the direction of a balanced and equitable modernization. Our analysis shows that cutting across caste, religion, gender and other divisions, the Telangana movement brings a focus on the development of the region as a whole, a focus on rights and access to regional resources and, further, it pitches for a rights-based development perspective whereby groups and communities put forth their agendas within a larger vision of equitable development” (p.415).
10. “However, given the long-standing history of the demand for a separate State, the deep penetration of the sense of grievance and the widespread emotion around the issue, unless genuine steps are taken to address both real and perceived disparities, the demand is unlikely to go away permanently even if it is subdued temporarily” (p.417).
11. “Thus, from the point of view of sheer size of economy, Telangana as a new State can sustain itself both with and without Hyderabad. The other combination of regions – coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema together can also sustain themselves as a State; in fact, they can also sustain themselves separately” (p.121).
12. “In view of the complex background of the situation and the rather serious and sensitive emotional aspects involved, the Committee is of the unanimous view that it would not be practical to simply maintain the status quo in respect of the situation” (p.442).
13. “Given the above first hand observations of the Committee during its tours of the regions, the Committee feels that the issue of sentiment has to be considered only as one among several factors to be evaluated. While not discounting people’s wishes or sentiments, the overall implications of bifurcation (or trifurcation as the case may be) have to be carefully delineated to arrive at a responsible recommendation”(p.352-353).
14. “The Committee is of the view that given the long history of the demand for a separate Telangana, the highly charged emotions at present and the likelihood of the agitation continuing in case the demand is not met (unless handled deftly, tactfully and firmly as discussed under option six), consideration has to be

given to this option. The grievances of the people of Telangana, such as non-implementation of some of the key decisions included in the Gentleman's Agreement (1956), certain amount of neglect in implementation of water and irrigation schemes, inadequate provision for education infrastructure (excluding Hyderabad), and the undue delay in the implementation of the Presidential order on public employment, etc., have contributed to the felt psyche of discrimination and domination, with the issue attaining an emotional pitch. The continuing demand, therefore, for a separate Telangana, the Committee felt, has some merit and is not entirely unjustified" (p.453).

15. "Therefore, after taking into account all the pros and cons, the Committee did not think it to be the most preferred, but the second best, option. Separation is recommended only in case it is unavoidable and if this decision can be reached amicably amongst all the three regions" (p.453). This was a complete volte face from the SKC's own data and conclusions cited above. Leaving aside the infamous secret Chapter 8 of the SKC which revealed its nefarious agenda, what would Mr. Nayar say to all this?

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