

Intra-State Border Change:

Dynamics of the Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation in Tribal Areas of Telangana

*A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad
in partial fulfilment of the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
POLITICAL SCIENCE

by
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January 2022

DECLARATION

I, **Jadhav Prathap Singh**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**Intra-State Border Change: Dynamics of the Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation in Tribal Areas of Telangana**' submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Kham Khan Suan Hausing**, is a bona-fide research work, which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

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This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other university or institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

A) The research scholar has published the following peer-reviewed research articles:

- 1) “Tribal Rights and Paradox of Democratic Governance in India”, *NIU International Journal of Human Rights*, 8(13) 2021, pp-55-60, ISSN, 2394-0298
- 2) “Governing the Scheduled Areas: Appraising ‘Decentralization’ and ‘Self-Rule’ in Adilabad District of Telangana”, in E. Venkatesu (ed.) (2016): *Local Governance in India: Experiences after the Constitutional Amendments*, (Delhi: Kalpaz Publication), pp.169-184. ISBN: 978-93-5128-202-0
- 3) “Neo-liberalism and Re-Articulation of Identities and their Politics in India”, *Journal of Social Discourse*, 3(1) 2016, pp-152-165, ISSN-2348-6376.
- 4) “Impact of Reservation on Empowerment of Tribal Women Representatives in

PRIs in Telangana”, *Ajanta*, 7 (1), 2018, pp.94-102, ISSN 2277-5730.

5) “Does Decentralization Empower Tribal Women Representatives? Study in Telangana”, in Somashekhar and Dayananda Mane (eds.) (2018): *Empowering Rural India through Decentralization*, (Mysuru: Gayathri Enterprises), pp.378-389, ISBN978-93-87584-30-3

B) The research scholar has presented his research papers in the following international/national conferences/seminars:

1) “District as an Arena of Governance and Politics: Traction for New Districts in India”, in three days National Conference, *Exploring Grassroots Governance in India*, organised by TISS Mumbai, from 18 to 20 December 2021.

2) “Politics of Difference via Sub-Regionalism in India: A Case Study of Telangana”, in an international Conference on ‘The Politics of Difference: (Re)Locating Subalternity/Marginality’ organised by the Department of History, Assam Central University, Diphu Campus, Assam on 22-23 September 2017.

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4) “Trajectories of Politics of Nomenclatures: Indigenous, Adivasi and Tribe”, in a national seminar titled "Historical and Cultural Aspects of Indian Tribes", organised jointly by Department of Hindi and Center for Dalit and Adivasi Studies, University of Hyderabad on 09 August 2019.

5) “Reclaiming of Tribal Identities: Reservation Conflict in Telangana”, in a national conference on ‘Tribal Identity and Tribal Integration: Issues of Nation Building’, held on 31 July and 01 August, 2018 at the Department of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad.

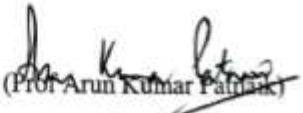
6) “Impact of Reservation on Empowerment of Tribal Women Representatives in PRIs in Telangana”, in the national conference titled ‘Empowerment of Women through Political Participation, Mobilization, and Organization’, organized by Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka held on 29-30 November 2018.

7) “Conflict between Tribal Communities and Forest Department in the Scheduled Area: A Case Study of Recently Declared Kawal Tiger Reserve in Adilabad District”, in a national seminar on ‘Democracy, Development and Tribes in India: Reality & Rhetoric’ organized by the Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad, on 12-13 August 2013.

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RS703	Environment and Development	4	A

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List of Abbreviations

ABMP	: Akhil Bharatiya Maharaja Party
ADC	: Autonomous District Council
ADP	: Aspirational District Programme
AJSU	: All Jharkhand Students Union
AHPS	: Adivasi Hukkula Porata Samithi
AGSP	: Adivasi Gondwana Sangshema Parishad
AGSO	: Adivasi Gondwana Student Organisation
AMS	: Adivasi Mahila Sangam
ANS	: Adivasi Nirodyogula Sangam
APPS	: Adivasi Pradhan Purohit Sangh
AP	: Andhra Pradesh
APCLC	: Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberty Commission
ASP	: Adivasi Sangashema Parishad
BC	: Backward Classes
BJP	: Bharatiya Janata Party
BKD	: Bhadradri-Kothagudem District
BRGF	: Backward Region Grant Fund
CPI	: Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	: Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	: Communist Party of India (Marxist and Leninist)
CPI (ML)(J)	: Communist Party of India (Marxist and Leninist) (Janashakti)
CM	: Chief Minister
CCDP	: Conservation cum Development Plan
DRDA	: District Rural Development Agencies
DTDO	: District Tribal Development Officer
DPC	: District Planning Committee
FD	: Forest Department
FRA	: Forest Rights Act (2006)
JMM	: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
GCC	: Girijan Co-operative Corporation
GO	: Government Order

GoT	: Government of Telangana
GRCS	: Girijana Raytu Coolie Sangam
GSP	: Girijana Sangshema Parishad
GSS	: Gondwana Sangarshana Samiti
HYA	: Haimendorf Youth Association
ILO	: International Labour Organisation
IAS	: Indian Administrative Services
INC	: Indian National Congress
ITDA	: Integrated Tribal Development Agency
KB	: Komaram Bheem
KS	: Kolam Sangam
KTR	: Kawal Tiger Reserve
KCR	: Kalvakuntla Chandrasekher Rao
LHPS	: Lambada Hakkula Porata Samithi
LST	: Local Scheduled Tribes
LTR	: Land Transfer Regulation Act
MADA	: Modified Area Development Agency
MRSS	: Manya Seema Rashtra Sadhana Samithi
MC	: Multiculturalism
MGNREGA	: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MIF	: Manukota Intellectuals Forum
MLA	: Member of Legislative Assembly
MLC	: Member of Legislative Council
MP	: Member of Parliament
MPP	: Mandal Praja Parishad
MPDO	: Mandal Parishad Development Officer
MPTC	: Mandal Parishad Territorial Council
MPTDP	: Multi-Purpose Tribal Development Projects
MRO	: Mandal Revenue Officer
MRP	: Multicultural Recognition Policies
MZS-JAC	: Mulugu Zilla Sadhana Joint Action Committee
NB	: Nangara Bheri
NITI	: National Institute for Transforming India

NS	: Naikpod Sangam
NGOs	: Non-Governmental Organisations
OBCs	: Other Backward Classes
NTR	: Nandamuri Taraka Ramarao
PESA	: Panchayat Extension to the Scheduled Areas
PO	: Project Officer
PVTGs	: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups
PWG	: People's War Group
RGSU	: Raj Gond Student's Union
RSU	: Radical Student's Union
SA	: Scheduled Area
SC	: Scheduled Caste
SMPT	: Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks
SS	: Sevalal Sena
SDC	: Special Deputy Collector
ST	: Scheduled Tribes
SRC	: States Reorganisation Commission
TAC	: Tribal Advisory Council
TADC	: Tribal's Autonomous District Council
TD	: Tuddum Debba
TDP	: Telugu Desam Party
TDFA	: Telangana District Formation Act
TS	: Telangana State
TR	: Tiger Reserve
TRS	: Telangana Rastra Samithi
TRICOR	: Telangana Scheduled Tribal Cooperative Finance Corporation Limited
TSP	: Tribal Sub-Plan
TZ	: Tiger Zone
UNDRIP	: United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People
YSRCP	: Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party
ZPP	: Zilla Praja Parishad
ZPTC	: Zilla Parishad Territorial Council

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Delineating territorial borders for political units such as nation-states, provincial states and districts are indispensable for governing modern societies¹. The border serves two purposes, firstly as an idea that indicates the demarcations that identify people's spatial and social identity, and secondly, it functions as an institution through which power and authority are crystalised. The boundaries of governance based on territorially binding and differentiated power, entails the construction of political communities. But drawing of states, inter-states (provincial), and intra-states (district) borders for territorializing political and governance units have always been politically contentious in deeply divided societies² as it involves changing demography, and accommodation or assimilation of social groups within units.

Interestingly, differences in the interests of social groups have important bearings on the borders and size of political and administrative units. In these complex contexts, redrawing borders entails not only re-bordering and de-bordering of space but also of belonging, socio-political orders and othering (Davis, 2019; Popescu, 2012; Rajaram and Nevzat, 2006:367; Samaddar, 2016; Sendhardt, 2013:21). Not surprisingly, border changes have social, political, and material underpinnings in diverse society. Against this backdrop, 'size and territorial structure of a polity, have been a significant matter of theoretical debate since the early stages of political theory' (Pierskalla, 2016: 249). Similarly, the demand for territorial redistribution of administrative and political boundaries is a recurrent theme in Indian politics. With this backdrop, this study attempts to theorise the demands and formations of new districts in the tribal areas³ of Telangana.

Federal/decentralised units have been used to recognise and accommodate territorially concentrated groups in various countries (see Basta et al., 2015; Choudhry 2008;

¹The borders gained more significance with the emergence of the idea of nation-state, particularly after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

²The study draws the idea of 'deeply divided societies' from O'Leary et al., (2001) and Choudhry (2008).

³Terms such as 'tribals', 'Scheduled Tribes' (STs), 'Adivasis', and 'indigenous people' have been used interchangeably in this study, to refer to communities that are classified as STs by the Government of India under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. In this study, the term 'tribal areas' refer to tribal predominant areas or Scheduled areas.

Stepan et al., 2011; Swenden, 2006). Horowitz (1985: 598) contends that ‘the federal territorial units and regional autonomy are most common territorial techniques in accommodating diversity, and mostly seen as a panacea for deeply divided societies in distributing power and resources’. Thus, the ethnic competition or conflict would be quarantined within the sub-state units (ibid). Yet, a democratising society faces significant controversy over whether and how the communities should be recognised and accommodated with territorial units (Gutmann, 1994:3). Reflecting on this complex process, Tillin (2013:1) viewed that “the diverse viewpoints on internal administrative and political borders within the federal structure present opposing images of political groups, economic networks, social life, and sacred places”. All layers of political units in the federal structure become the object of political competition among various groups and actors (Horowitz, 1985: 598; Bardhan, 2005).

The Indian constitution devised the federal/decentralised power structure and provides recognition and self-governance to territorially concentrated communities. The borders of provinces or local governments tend to reflect particular ethno-territorial identity (Adeny, 2017). For instance, the reorganisation of provincial states based on languages and ethnic criteria, and the provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules were designated for predominant tribal areas. Put differently, Indian federal/decentralised units operate through a combination of shared-rule and self-rule⁴. This means all level of governments within a federal system share in the task of governing but each has their own sphere of autonomy.

India’s federal/decentralisation experiment with creating new states and sub-states (district) units is a work in progress. Towards this end, the district is a vital unit of India’s federal polity wherein the sovereign authority is shared and self-rule is exercised. The district as a unit plays a substantial role in entrenching decentralised governance. The Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment legally devolves substantial power to district/local bodies. This amendment envisions meaningful changes in the political and governance realms at the local level, and reconfigures its relationship with the upper layers of governance, namely the center and the state.

⁴Rudolph and Rudolph (2010) theorised federalism as a mechanism of sharing and negotiating divided sovereignty in the context of state creation. As a result, sovereignty is viewed as scattered, shared, and frequently challenged.

District borders represent the internal map of the states and specify the operational boundaries of governing units. Along with other units such as nation and provincial-states, the spatial imaginations of the government and belonging of the subject citizens occur at the district level as well. The district borders, thus, define the identity of the people living in those areas and shape the imagination of the policy makers and administrators. As districts assume greater saliency in the domains of governance and politics, interests of social groups and political parties play a vital role in redrawing of district borders and selecting towns for headquarters. The drawing of district borders (intra-state borders) entails delineating the jurisdiction of a new unit, change in demography, crystallization of power at the lower political and administrative units. The creation of a new district has the potential to dramatically alter the political, social, and economic landscape of provincial states, reinforcing its image as the ‘laboratory of democracy’ (Kohli, 1987).

The normative base for the government to introduce decentralisation measures such as proliferation of administrative and political units involves the imperative to recognize the distinctive demand of autonomy and accommodation of territorially concentrated communities (Mukherjee, 2014; Grossman and Lives, 2014). According to Mathur (2008: 75), ‘decentralisation means dispersing power to the local self-governing communities’. Decentralisation, thus, produces the pluralistic structure of governance wherein the local communities emerge as key players in the face of homogenising forces such as liberalisation, globalisation, modernisation, and cultural assimilation (Kothari, 1996: 34-41). In this sense, decentralisation entails power-sharing with nested political communities. Creating a new district tends to make the unit smaller and culturally homogenous, strengthen individuals’ ability to act collectively and improves goods and services they receive from the governments. As Grossman and Lives (2014: 196) put, ‘the homogeneity in new administrative and political units can also stimulate local ethnic politics, as ethnic boundaries are reified and give people a better sense of control over their lives’. In the formations of new districts, territorially concentrated discrete communities tend to be considered for recognition and accommodation through overlapping borders. The re-drawing of district borders as a part of the decentralisation project impacts the redistribution of spatial and symbolic recognition in ways which reconfigure power within units.

Though extant studies have focused on the politics of drawing borders and accommodation of communities' demands at the national (Diener and Joshua, 2010; O'leary et al., 2001; Singh, 2001) and inter-states (provincial) levels (Bhattacharyya et al., 2017; Corbridge, 2002; Hausing, 2018; Kumar, 2011; Mawdsley, 2002; Prakash, 2001; Sarangi and Pai, 2011; Suri 2016; Tillin, 2013), scant attention has been paid to politics involved in drawing intra-state borders (districts). Few studies conducted on the formation of districts (local units) in other countries, for instance, like Indonesia (Kimura, 2013; Pierskalla, 2016), Uganda (Grossman and Levis, 2014; Green, 2008; Hassan, 2016) and Nigeria (Kraxberger, 2004) offered explanations of ethnic consolidation and political incentives. However, district formations and ethnic accommodation have not been studied in India. There is a compelling need to understand how politics involves in re-drawing district borders in deeply divided societies like India.

1.2. Research Puzzle

Drawing borders for territorialising new district units on the ground of decentralisation is seen as a political act. In this context, the delineation of borders connotes the political significance on both demands (people) and supply (government) sides. Given such significant implications and the proliferation of new districts in India from 1947 to 2019 (see figure 1.2), new districts and their borders attract scholarly attention. Creation of a district is a state (provincial) subject. The states have not employed uniform criteria for forming new districts. Thus, different states have different size and demographic composition of the districts⁵. People have been demanding new districts for their areas. The Telangana government has undertaken reorganisation of new districts in 2016 and 2019. In doing so, it considered some selected demands and ignored other demands. The formation of new districts underscores rigidities and resilience involved in it. The politically complex process involved in this offers a puzzle to understand where, when and why new districts have been created in deeply divided setting. In other words, what factors play role in redrawing borders and selecting towns for headquarters in areas where tribal communities are politically salient? How does the creation of new institutions recast the communities' politics?

⁵ The size of the districts varies from state to state, for instance, Kutch district in Gujarat with 0.45 lakh s.q.km. area, is the largest district in India. In contrast, Mahé in Puducherry with 0.8 lakh s.q.km is the smallest district.

Against this backdrop, the study is analytically centered on demands for districts and the creation of districts in tribal predominant areas of Telangana. It primarily focuses on two processes: first, the tribal communities' grounding of the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation to demand new district borders and towns as headquarters in Telangana. Second, the role of factors such as political contexts, state and district levels leaders' incentives, government and social groups' interest in influencing drawing of new district borders, and selection of towns for headquarters. It also focuses on how these factors not only impact upon the accommodation of tribals' demands but also implications on the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

It is important to underscore here that the demand and supply sides of drawing of borders operate within the larger moral and political frames in the following ways. The state government territorialises new district units on normative and empirical considerations such as decentralisation, taking administration closer to people, increasing people's participation, development, service delivery, effective implementation of welfare schemes and redistribution, and recognising culture and territorial identities of the people (Samudranil, 2015; Singh, 2016c). The Telangana government has mentioned specific criteria to create new districts such as cultural compactness, the population in the region, geographic size, and distance of the headquarters to the different areas in the district (Government of Telangana (GoT), 2016a). Political elites⁶ within the government celebrated and justify their act of creating borders for the common good on the contention that it serves the public, especially the weaker sections and less developed areas, and reduce the sectional/regional disparity.

Strikingly, tribal communities employ their own moral and political justifications centered on the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation in shaping the district borders. Demand for districts in the tribal areas is invariably linked to identities that provide a fulcrum for governance (Singh, 2016d; The Hans India, 2016). However, the state's criteria such as cultural compactness of the areas and people's demand for drawing new district borders as a basis of accommodation by the government, and the moral and political claims of tribal communities do not always converge. Despite the normative grounds of creating new

⁶ Political elites refer to those who hold influential positions in government and political parties at the district and the state levels.

district borders, redrawing borders is not as politically uncontentious as one would imagine. Indeed, many socio-political factors are involved in demanding intra-state border change. The districts are the actual sites of power and establishing networks in the execution of federal polity and government-driven decentralisation. It is therefore essential to understand the consonance and inconsonance of government's drawing of district borders with the tribal communities' demand for new districts and selection of towns as headquarters. To what extent is the drawing of district borders a response to territorially/ethnically grounded differences? How much is this phenomenon 'bottom-up'? Conversely, to what extent do the new district borders involve the actions of political elites and entail a 'top-down' decision-making process. This question goes beyond the conventional understanding that sees creation of new districts as a mere act of forming units as part of decentralised reforms and the outcome of the whimsical actions of a leader(s). Therefore, this study attempts to understand the politics behind the demand for new districts and district border change in the tribal predominant areas of Telangana state. The following section focuses on the immediate political contexts of the creation of new districts in Telangana.

1.3. The Drawing of New District Borders: Political Contexts

The territorial imagination of the tribal communities often overlaps and cuts across with the political border drawn by the government and political elites. The creation of new districts configures and reconfigures tribal politics in the tribal areas of Telangana. The tribes constitute 9.8% of the state's population and live in Scheduled and non-Scheduled areas (GoT, 2016c: 5). The tribals are spread all over Telangana, but most of them live in and around forest areas of the erstwhile districts of Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal⁷. The tribal areas in these districts are designated as Scheduled Areas. The Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) located at Bhadrachalam, Utnoor, Eturunagaram in the erstwhile districts-Khammam, Adilabad and Warangal, respectively, implement various developmental schemes and protect the tribal interests (Reddy and Anil, 2010: 11). The demand for new districts emerged in tribal areas of the erstwhile Khammam, Adilabad, and Warangal districts before the government created various districts. In the district

⁷ In erstwhile Adilabad, Khammam and Warangal districts, STs constitute 18%, 25% and 15% of the total district population respectively (GoT, 2016c).

reorganisation process, these districts have witnessed intense political mobilisation for new districts. The majority of tribals and their organisations have vehemently protested for recognising their areas by creating separate districts around contiguous tribal concentrated mandals/ITDA mandals or areas adjacent to ST reserved Assembly constituencies. The ITDA headquarter towns such as Utnoor in the composite Adilabad district, Bhadrachalam in the erstwhile Khammam district, and Eturunagaram (later Mulugu) and Mahabubabad⁸ in former Warangal were demanded as district headquarters (Mahender, 2016; The Hindu 2016; The Hans India, 2016). The tribals deploy constitutionally recognized Scheduled and ITDA areas, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness from the mainstream people, and their historical association with areas in constructing the borders of demanded districts. The tribals' demands for the districts have ethnic undercurrent.

Initially, the demand emerged in the Bhadrachalam area in Khammam district. Later on similar demands emerged in Utnoor, Eturunagaram and Mahabubabad around the issue of identity. The tribal civil society organisations such as Adivasi Sangshema Parishad (ASP), Tudum-Debba (also known as Adivasi HakkulaPorata Samithi (AHPS)), Naikpod Seva Sangam (NSS), Lambada HakkulaPorata Samithi (LHPS), Sevalal Sena (SS), Nagara Bheri (NB), Girijana Sangam (GS), Adivasi Nirudyoga Sangam (ANS), Adivasi Gondwana Student Organisation (AGSO), Kolam Sangam (KS) and other organisations led protests, rallies and *dharnas* at Bhadrachalam, Utnoor, Eturunagaram and Mahabubabad towns (see Deccan Chronicle, 2014); Mahender, 2016; The Hindu, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; The Hindu, 2016a; 2016b; Sridhar, 2016).

The demands for Bhadrachalam, Eturunagaram, and Utnoor towns-based districts had a long history. The tribal organisations' demands and protests had metamorphosed into a widespread movement, particularly from 2014 (Deccan Chronicle, 2014). The government floated the idea of dividing the districts based on the cultural and decentralisation aspects in 2015. The policy rationale emboldened the tribal civil society leaders to intensify their demand to claim new districts. In this process, the tribals have invoked cultural, economic, and political marginalisation to demand new districts. Further, the tribals' projection of

⁸ Except four mandals and Tribal Sub-plan areas, rest of the mandals of Mahabubabad do not come under Scheduled Areas.

cultural, language, spatial and historical differences became the normative base for claiming moral and political legitimacy for recognition, autonomy/self-governance, and control over the resources. In this socio-political context, tribal politics of indigeneity based on their ethno-territorial identity has also assumed greater salience (Karlsson and Subba, 2006; Steur, 2011; 2009; Xaxa, 1999, Rycroft and Dasgupta, 2011). The tribals considered that changes in district borders would impact their cultural and symbolic recognition, resources control, and representation. The struggle for separate districts stems from the tribals politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation (Singh, 2016a 2016d; Mahesh, 2015; The Hindu, 2015a; 2016a). Drawing from extant literature, this study defines and locates the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation that are used as explanatory categories/variable to understand the tribal's demand for separate districts.

Although tribal groups have distinctive social customs, cultures, and languages, their shared identity stems from a common civic identity i.e., STs, similar geographical and socio-cultural locations, developmental-governance issues, and political articulations, which are different from those of the people from plain area. Indeed, the tribal communities are united in demanding districts based on their shared experiences and political aspirations. Despite the socio-cultural and political differences, there is a 'strategic essentialism'⁹, to use Gayatri Spivak's phrase (cited in Zhaoguo, 2011), which implies forging of alliance for common interests among the communities to further their common political agenda.

The tribals perceive that their areas are politically, economically, and ethnically marginalized. Cultural differences, backwardness, and underrepresentation play a crucial role in claiming ethno-territorial group differentiated rights and identity. All these claims are employed vis-a-vis the 'significant others' (Taylor, 1994), namely the non-tribals¹⁰ and the state. In this competing social and political scenario, the different groups engineer their politics to align the district border and headquarter with their socio-political interests. Bookman (2013: 207) contends that 'regardless of the state's political character, the sub-state borders corresponding with the ethnic areas/boundaries, is critical in the demographic struggle

⁹ Strategic essentialism refers to mobilisation strategy wherein the different groups and communities join together to fulfil their common interests.

¹⁰ In this study the term 'non-tribals' refers to those people other than the STs.

for power’. In such a socio-political complexity, the state elites have to cater to different competing interests by drawing borders.

1.4. Formation of New Districts

Formation of new districts was part of political project of the Telanga Rashtra Samithi (hereafter TRS) party. The TRS-led government embarked on the project of creation of new districts from 2015 to fulfill its promise for the creation of more districts (The Hindu, 2016c). The government’s project triggered more demands and led to intense lobbying and agitations in Telangana (Nag, 2016b; Mahesh, 2016). Initially, the TRS proposed to create fourteen new districts but finally created twenty-one new districts in 2016 out of the existing ten districts, through the Andhra Pradesh District Reorganisation Act 1974 (The Hindu, 2016c).

Table:1.1. Formation of New Districts and Demand for Tribal Districts

Old Districts	New Districts Formed in 2016	New District Formed in 2019	Tribals’ District Demand
Adilabad	Asifabad-KomuramBheem		Utnoor
	Adilabad		
	Nirmal		
	Mancherial		
Khammam	BhadradriKothagudem		Bhadrachalam
	Khammam		
Warangal	Jayashankar-Bhupalapalli	Mulugu	Eturunagaram/Mulugu
	Mahabubabad		Mahabubabad
	Warangal(Urban)		
	Warangal(Rural)		
	Jangaon		

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on field data

In 2016, the government divided the former Adilabad district into four districts, namely Asifabad, Mancherial, Adilabad, and Nirmal. This failed to consider the demand for tribal district with Utnoor town as headquarter. The tribal areas have been dissected into four districts, though a greater number of the predominantly tribals mandals come under the Adilabad and Asifabad districts. Similarly, the government bi-furcated the erstwhile Khammam district into Khammam and Bhadradri-Khothagudem districts. The majority of tribal predominant mandals come under the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district. Still seven

predominant tribal mandals, contiguous to tribal mandals in the Kothagudem district (three remained with new Khammam district; two each merged in newly created Mahabubabad and Bhupallapally districts) have not been included in the district despite the people's vehement demand. The government selected the Kothagudem, a town located in the plain areas, as headquarter, but not the tribal demanded Bhadrachalam town.

Interestingly, the government divided the composite Warangal district into five new districts, viz., Warangal (Urban), Warangal (Rural), Mahabubabad, Bhupalpalli, and Jangaon in 2016. In this division, it created the Mahabubabad district where the Lambada tribes are predominant. However, the demand of the Koya, a tribal group, for the creation of a new district in the Koyas predominant areas with Eturunagaram town as their district headquarters was not considered. As a result, the demand and mobilisation for a separate district for the Koyas' predominant areas continued. Despite the creation of twenty-one new districts out of the existing ten districts, the government continues to be subject to criticism and discontent for not considering the demands of the tribal for the districts.

Figure 1.1: Old and New Districts Borders in Telangana State



Source: <https://www.telangana.gov.in/about/districts>

One of the principal reasons for the loss of TRS in tribal predominant constituencies in the last (2018) elections is their dissatisfaction with the new district borders and selection of

headquarters¹¹. To fulfill its election promise and due to increasing pressure from the people, the TRS government created two more districts in February 2019, in its second term (see Figure 1.1 map of 33 districts) (The Hindu, 2016d). Against this backdrop, it is essential to understand how and why tribal communities have demanded new districts. Where, when, and how territorially concentrated tribal communities' demand for the new districts were recognized and accommodated? How has districts' border change catered to the tribal communities' politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

1.5. Locating Arguments of the Study

Understanding the nature of engagement between the state and the tribal communities is key to understand tribal identity politics and autonomy/accommodation politics. Previous studies conducted by the colonial bureaucrats and ethnographers such as Dalton (1892) and Risley (1903), Elwin (1943; 1988), Haimendorf (1945; 1982) Grigson (1944; 1991; 1993), have documented socio-cultural aspects of the tribal communities wherein they were recognised as a distinct society. In other words, tribals are considered different from the mainstream caste-Hindus. Colonial scholars and bureaucrats considered that tribal's animistic beliefs and practices shape their animistic religion. To civilise the tribals and protect them from marauding caste-Hindus outsiders, they suggested devising socio-spatial strategies of governance such as Regulated and Non-Regulated Areas, later known as Scheduled Areas. These governing strategies were developed based on a social theory wherein tribals were described as noble savage or primitive noble who need special attention.

Conversely, Indian anthropologists such as Ghurye (1963) and Bose (1941; 1975) and national movement leaders have contended that tribals are backward Hindus and need to be absorbed into the mainstream caste society. The supporters of this standpoint attributed the tribals' backwardness to colonial rule, and argued for integrating or assimilating them into mainstream society in order to uplift them from their backwardness. Similarly, reflecting critically on Adivasi and indigenous identity, Prasad (2003; 2004) and Sundar (2007) employing Marxists perspective, have argued that in-precolonial period, tribals were not isolated from mainstream society and its economy. They questioned the colonial construction

¹¹ TRS won only five out of twelve assembly seats in the state (see Appendix I for results).

of Adivasis as primitive and culturally different from mainstream people. They argued that the tribals need to be modernised to uplift from backwardness and integrate into the larger class struggle. Both have criticized Elwin and other scholars for romanticising Adivasi identity, which results in the stigmatization of the tribals. The above-mentioned scholars respectively employed the nationalist and Marxists perspective to argue that recognition of distinctiveness of the tribals would result in fissure in larger national unity and class struggle. Both colonial and nationalist scholars have attributed paternalistic role of the state in protecting the tribals' interests and in governing them. Interestingly, Chandra (2013a, 2013b) engaging liberal perspective, has implicated the colonial and post-colonial governments in the ideological production of tribals as primitive through protective/segregated policies. He contended that state's treating of the tribals as primitive groups and protection policies characterize them as primitive, a stigma, which suppresses the individual progress. Thus, the tribal protection policies are contrary to liberal intellectual tradition that espouses individual autonomy and rights. However, colonial anthropologists, nationalists, Marxist and liberals failed to acknowledge tribal agency and their political consciousness in the collective sense.

Reflecting on tribal political consciousness and assertions, Singh (1982; 1983) documented 'tribal movement in India' in two volumes. The first volume focuses on northeastern India and the second on peninsular India. He has broadly classified the tribal movements into four categories. First, movements for political autonomy (e.g., Jharkhand movement); second, agrarian and forest-based movements (e.g., Santhal Movement); third, sanskritisation processes (e.g., Bhagat movement in Jharkhand); and fourth, cultural movements based on script and language (e.g., Bhils movement in central India). The methods adopted by these movements ranged from constitutional agitations to armed insurgency. In this line, the subaltern studies scholar Ranajit Guha (1983), by documenting the peasant and tribal revolts, has considered that the tribals/peasant politics constitutes an autonomous domain with independent political consciousness, unlike the orthodox nationalist/marxists or colonial scholars who described the tribals/peasant rebellion as pre-political, sporadic, and unorganized. Adding to this, Bates and Shah (2014), while differentiating the representation of tribal struggle from peasant and Dalits struggle, argued that the state-making process produced different trajectories of Adivasi resistance.

Later on, several scholars have carried case studies on tribals. For instance, a case study by Hardiman's (1987) focuses on the Devi movement of south Gujarat wherein the tribals' spiritual and cultural elements were invoked to resist exploitation by the Parsi businessmen. In a similar line, Baviskar (2003) highlights the tribals' cultural assertion to make claims over the natural resources. By the same token, Weiner (1978) contended that industrialization and urbanisation of Chota Nagpur and Assam tribal regions caused influx of outsiders in the tribal region, which resulted in tribal land alienation and taking away of employment opportunities by migrant people. Consequently, the indigenous groups started nativists, that is, 'sons of the soil' movements to claim over resources and opportunities. Nilsen's (2017) study, employing the state-society perspective, documented the Bhil tribal's mobilisation and tribal struggle in seeking their rights in the governance process. Likewise, Bose (2013) contends that though tribals have political citizenship, they continue to battle for civil and social citizenship, which is realised through the right to their lands and other resources. The state delegitimised their existence inside their inhabitations by imposing governmentality. As a result, Adivasis are never granted full citizenship (Bose et al., 2012).

Other studies employ the political ecology perspective to defend tribals rights over the forest and natural resources while questioning the colonial and post-colonial states' forest and wildlife protection policies (Gadgil and Guha, 1993; Rangarajan, 1995; Saberwal, Rangarajan, and Kothari, 2001). In the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of global indigenous solidarity movements, scholars have focused on indigeneity and Adivasi identity, and subjectivity among the Adivasis (Karlsson and Subba, 2006; Steur, 2011; 2009; Xaxa, 1999, Rycroft and Dasgupta, 2011). In similar lines, Bhukya (2017; 2010) has argued that historically tribals have been pushed to peripheries and subjugated by mainstream society and state with its 'colonial rationality'. But, the tribals have been employing their indigenous identity in their revolts and political autonomy movements to resist the state and mainstream society's dominance in their areas. Further, Xaxa (2005; 2008) viewed that the tribal identity, language, and autonomy play significant role in generating historical identity and their political articulations. In a similar fashion, Prakash (2002) observed that the Jharkhand state movement is a byproduct of the autonomy, customs, and culture of the tribal communities. Though movements emerged in response to demographic change and the increasing influence of non-tribals and state policies, in more recent years, this has shifted towards to a

preoccupation on being indigenous and constructing the tribal nationalities. Further, in this ideological line of tribal politics, Bodhi and Bipin (2019) have challenged the dominant western-European/colonial and upper/dominant caste epistemologies while highlighting the significance of organic tribal/Adivasi epistemologies in academic as well as public discourses in producing authentic tribal identity and politics.

The above studies have significantly contributed to tribal studies and help in understanding tribal politics and construction of ethno-territorial identities. However, it can be inferred that existing scholarship approached tribal politics from a binary point of view: either from the vantage point of the state (paternalistic)/ non-tribals or tribes (communities). These studies have not focused much on the dynamics of political arrangements wherein representative institutional dynamics and actors such as parties and leaders play a critical role in shaping and recasting tribal politics. Thus, the tribal demands for districts, strategic interests of tribal elites, and subsequent reconfiguration of tribal politics are scantily explored.

1.5.1. The Politics of Compromise to form Sub-State Units: Beyond the Binary

The drawing of district borders and accommodation of the demands of tribal communities cannot be explained autonomous of socio-political reality and political competition at the district and state level. The elites have emerged within the tribal communities due to the reservation policy, modernisation and democratisation processes (Corbridge, 2000: 64; 1988; Shah, 2010; Weiner, 1978). The democratisation process introduced the representative aspects wherein individuals from communities act as representatives or elite faces of the community, who play a significant role in channeling the communities' demands/aspirations and maneuvering the politics. Indeed, the public representatives' voices matter more in the electoral democracy than the tribal traditional or civil society leaders, as they have party connection and patronage relationship with the ruling class at the state level.

As Horowitz (1985: 294-296) notes, two types of parties accommodate ethnic interests: first, the broad-based party, which accommodates the interests of different segments while making a compromise. Second, ethnic parties are solely based on ascriptive identities, and are exclusive i.e., membership is restricted only to the ethnic group. The tribals were not given separate electoral constituencies. Like in most states, tribals do not have a political

party of their own to represent the community interests in joint electorate in Telangana, and they have mainly been depending on the state or national parties led by the non-tribals. The mainstream parties, mainly occupied with mainstream political issues, pay marginal attention or act contrary to the tribal interests for political reasons. The tribal representatives are associated with different parties. In these contexts, party's cooption of tribal collective aspirations/demand depends on the socio-political contexts and political contingencies. This is how social protest and institutional politics are interconnected in the tribal areas. It is interesting to understand how ST public representatives act in situations where they may find themselves caught up in between opposing loyalties, such as loyalty to the party and ideological/ethical conviction to their community. Political competition plays a critical role in the drawing of new district borders. From the supply side, drawing new districts borders and selection of towns for districts headquarters were influenced by political exigencies and incentives. In turns, these political exigencies and incentives were also interwoven with the catering of different social interests and government's resource needs.

This study argues that the tribal communities' demands for districts are embedded in the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation. But, the four imperatives, viz; political, socio-cultural, economic, and administrative, influence the creation of new districts and selection of towns for headquarters. These imperatives are not exclusive but are mutually constitutive factors. Thus, the accommodation/assimilation of tribals' demands for new districts in tribal areas varies from district to district, as it depends on the socio-political contexts in the areas. These influence not only their moral and political claims, but also subsequent interpretations of the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

Though the demand for new districts is a collective political activity, the decision or outcomes are decided by the acquiescence or co-option of tribal leaders and demands. Within this framework, borders are set, and the ruling party and its leaders define the terms of tribal accommodations. This study argues that there is a fusion of the community identity and political interests in the accommodation process. This marriage occurs based on the political expediency of the ruling party and district-level leaders for political incentives and individual communities' interests. Thus, there are changes in political strategies as per their interests,

without distancing from the political and ideological loyalties. Politicians act in mutually inclusive and exclusive zones. This study reports that the socio-political complexity and economic concerns involved in drawing district borders drive drawing of borders and reconfiguring the tribal politics. But then the primary question is why the new district has such traction among the people in general and parties? The following section discusses the significance of the district in the realms of governance and politics.

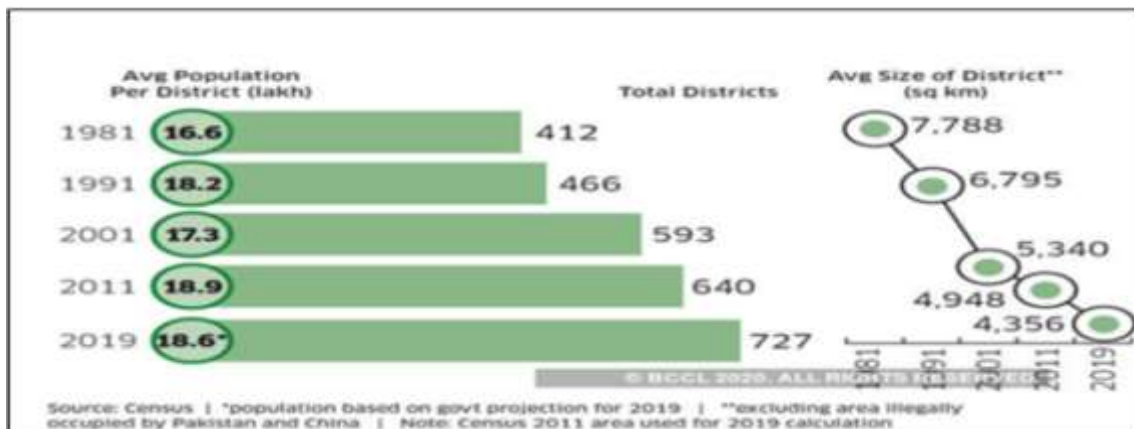
1.6. The District as an Arena of Governance and Politics: An Historical Institutional Account

Lustick (2011) and Lustick et al, (2004) used the historical institutional approach to understand state/national borders as institutions that involve in distribution of values, resources and power. Similarly, Tillin's (2013) study on inter-state borders in India, have been examined from the same approach to understand the constellations of power that reinforce provincial-state borders. Drawing from these studies, the present study employs the historical institutional approach. The following section examines how district(s) as a vital institution in federal/decentralised structure and what factors bring significance to the district and its borders in India with particular reference to Telangana state.

District formation is a complex process wherein socio-political actors negotiate and bargain within the extant institutional arrangement. The reorganisation of internal boundaries is not a new phenomenon and had its pre-colonial and colonial states antecedents. States are engaged in some form of decentralisation for two reasons: First, to have information about different regions for policy formulation and implementation. Second, the creation of provincial states and districts is primarily based on economic interests and administrative expediency rather than accommodating the peoples' demands (Sarangi and Pai, 2011: 3). As Kothari (2012: 128) states: "due to its continuity from pre-colonial rule to governance the post-independence period, the district has become a level at which the administration, political and social communications have consolidated". Indeed, there has been a consistent rise in the number of districts and internal border change of states in the post-independence period. There were only 412 districts in India in 1980. However, the number of districts has increased to 727 by 2019(see Figure 1.2). It has to be noted that there are no uniform criteria

employed for the carving of districts. The geographical size and the population in each district are different within and across the states. States have the authority to redraw district borders and selection of headquarters; they do not require prior permission from the central government. So, there is no fixed rationale for all states to decide district border and headquarter. Thus, the creation of new districts and changing of borders all seem to have been driven by socio-political considerations.

Figure:1.2. Increase in Number of Districts in India from 1981 to 2019



Source: *Economic Times* (2019) (<https://bit.ly/3tyF06c>)

Initially, but not always, proposals for creation of districts are received from the local/state-level representatives, and the public. Then the district administration headed by the District Collector forward the proposal after a supposedly thorough consultation and meeting with the representatives and the public to the state government. It is generally perceived that logistic and socio-political considerations such as the distance from headquarters, population per unit, and vetting of financial cost to reduce unnecessary expenditure in connection with the planning, administration, and political-cultural unity of areas-specific territorial and historical communities demand are supposed to be deciding factors in the formation of new districts. The proponents of decentralisation view that large districts are likely to be administratively leviathans. In the larger districts, politicians and officials face difficulty in accommodating diverse interests under the guise of the distance from the administrative headquarters. Given the phenomenal rise of new districts in India, we need to understand the growing significance of the districts in the arenas of governance and politics. The following

section focuses on the various historical contexts of creating smaller administrative units on the ground of decentralisation.

Given the importance of districts in politics and governance, state governments and parties try to establish their control over districts. Telangana, has a history of creating new districts for various reasons. For the first time, the government created the Khammam district with six blocks of Warangal district, namely, Burgampadu, Paloncha, Khammam Yellandu, Kothagudem, and Madhira; Khammam town was made the district headquarter in 1953. Further, by issuing the Government Order (GO) 553 in 1959, the tribal predominant Bhadrachalam revenue division consisting of Nuguru Venkatapuram and Bhadrachalam blocks of East Godavari district and Aswaraopeta taluk of West Godavari District were merged into Khammam district. This merger took place because of pressure from the people on the ground of distance from district headquarter, transport connectivity, and geographical contiguity.

Further, the Andhra Pradesh District Re-organisation Act was introduced in 1974, though the government did not immediately create any new district. Subsequently, under this Act, the then Chief Minister (CM) Chenna Reddy created Rangareddy district, which was carved out of Hyderabad and Medak districts in 1978. Chenna Reddy represented the Chevella assembly constituency, and the Chevella town was selected as headquarters of the district to consolidate his position in the constituency (Laxman, 2019: 6). The creation of the Rangareddy district was legitimatised on the ground that after the Six Point Formula agreement between the leaders from the Telangana region and central government in 1973, the central government brought the Constitution(Thirty-second Amendment) Act, 1973 and inserted Article 371D. With this amendment, employment and education opportunities were reserved at the district level based on locality to reduce regional imbalance. Chenna Reddy defended his decision by saying that the people from Rangareddy areas are losing their economic and employment benefits by being part of a large and cosmopolitan district, and that they run the risk of losing Telangana identity (ibid). Interestingly, the district was named after his father-in-law Venkata Rangareddy. In this way, the creation of Rangareddy district served to simultaneously create his family clout and consolidate his political base in the new district.

Apart from creating districts, the local self-government bodies underwent significant structural changes such as more power to representative bodies in 1981 and 1987. These changes were not free of political incentives. The direct participation of the parties in the electoral process at the district level has brought a new dimension to local politics (Sudarshanam, and Rao, 1990). Popular leaders like Nandamuri Taraka Ramarao (NTR), who enjoyed widespread support base on his charisma, tried to control the local self-government institution to establish his support base at the district where the majority of the populations are concentrated (Kohli, 1988). Whether it is NTR's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) or the Congress, once they come to power they have tried to control the Zilla Praja Parishad (ZPP) by hook or crook to dislodge the opposition party from the local government¹². Rao and Sundar (1990:553) noted that the Panchayati Raj institutions have been considered influential and vital in maintaining and strengthening the rural base of the party in power. Kohli (1988:15), who studied politics in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, has observed that after the emergence of NTR's TDP, there was competition and political conflict between the Congress party that enjoyed traditional base in the district, and the TDP as a ruling party in the state to establish their control over the district. He further noted that 'while Congress dominated the district government, decisions on local bureaucrats' careers were decided by TDP government as the TDP strives to consolidate its dominance in Guntur district' (ibid).

Parties and leaders tried to use the formation of districts and the avenue of representation they offer to accommodate different castes and communities (Rao and Sundar, 1990). As reflected in the case of Andhra Pradesh, NTR in June 1986, in a bid to gain votes and strengthen the TDP's base among the Backward classes, increased the percentage of reservation in local government for the backward classes from 25% to 44%- on the basis of their population (ibid: 556). Due to the constitutionalisation of local government through the enactment of the 73rd amendment to the Constitution, the significance of the district

¹² Following the recommendations of Ashok Mehta committee, NTR restructured local governments by creating mandals with smaller geographical areas while dismantling larger traditional *tulukor* Block system in 1986. Scholars considered that NTR created Mandal system and abolished the traditional village *Patel* system in order to dismantle the Congress network-support system within the district and establish new support base for TDP (Sudarshanam and Rao, 1990; Haragopal, 1990). Similar steps were also followed in other states like Karnataka, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir which were ruled by non-Congress governments but these changes were not uniform and the system of local governance institutions were created according to political needs of the respective states (see Kistaiah ed., 1990).

government has increased within the federal structure (Maheshwari, 2013: 387). This changed the fundamental nature of the governance and politics at the district. Thus, districts have emerged as a vital arena of politics and governance in India. In Telangana, the creation of 21 new districts in 2016 and two more in 2019, were also important for many reasons such as political, economic, and governance. After discussing the historical and political contexts of the creation of districts by the previous governments, we can infer that political, economic, governance, and social factors influence the government's interest and popular demands for the districts. The following section focuses on these four factors.

1.6.1. Political Factors

During British rule, the district administration was more occupied with administrative roles like revenue collection and maintaining law and order. In the post-independence period, districts have got crystalized as political and governance institutions. Districts have gained their own identity in the federal structure (Kothari, 2012: 127). With the increase of developmental and welfare activities by the state and the non-state actors such as civil society organisations, districts have become what Rajni Kothari (2012) calls 'the actual machinery for carrying out the government's decisions and planned programs'. With the Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment, the local government got constitutional status and became a vital third level of government in the federal setup. With this amendment, conducting regular elections was made mandatory, for which the State Election Commission was institutionalised. This constitutionally guaranteed decentralisation gave impetus to the districts, whose role was traditionally overshadowed by the state and the central governments.

The creation of Zilla Praja Parishad (ZPP) (in Telangana) has brought significant change in the nature of politics and governance at the district and state levels. The ZPP, as a representative institution, has created a power center at the district level¹³. Though the Centre and States depend on the district for exercising their power and shared sovereignty, the ZPP

¹³ All members of Zilla Parishad Territorial Council (ZPTCs) of the district, directly elected based on the parties' symbols, constitute the ZPP. The ZPTC jurisdiction is coterminous with mandal borders, and each mandal will have to elect one ZPTC member (GoT 2018:142). The ZPTC members elect Zilla Praja Parishad Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Within a district, the position of members of ZPP and ZPP Chairman are determined by a system of reservations for SC, ST, OBC and Women. The ZPP Chairman acts as a political and legislative head of the district government, and has been accorded protocol status on par with a Minister of State (Mohan, 1996: 54).

has an exclusive authority (GoT 2018: 143-147). Thus, the ZPP represents the entire district, and at the district level, Zilla Parishad resembles state government¹⁴. The ZPP is constitutionally mandated to exercise power over and execute developmental and welfare planning in all crucial sectors such as agriculture, health, public services, land serves, development, local planning, etc. (ibid:142).

The emergence of the elected head of the district has provided additional political space for the consolidation of local power by parties and leaders (Kohli, 1988). Thus, the system has generated new leadership and new politics at the district level. Consistent with the popular support and grounded connection with people, the district-level elected bodies (ZPPs) are politically important, and responsible to the people; hence they perform a vital role in providing services, implementing schemes, and establishing direct networks with the people and the communities. The actual work (development and policy) of the government and political parties' interests are carried out at the district level as people come into direct contact with the administration at the district than at the provincial state or central levels. The local networks, organisational strength, and people's support are essential for strengthening the party and the leaders' position. This could be easier if the leader and the party have control over the district affairs. Thus, there is tough competition among parties for winning majority of seats in ZPP to form the government at the district level and to get elected to the posts of Chairman and Vice-Chairman. The majority of the voters tend to judge the government's performance by considering how the programmes/policies are executed in the district. The ruling party in order to be connected with people should have its strength and support base at the district because it is here that voter proximity, visibility, and administrative viability are crystalized to the maximum. The district government helps distribute and carry government functions and helps keep a good image of the government and goodwill among the people by establishing a direct connection. Elections at the district level enable the party in power to gauge public opinion.

The ZPP has the power to levy some taxes, receives funds from state and the center, and executes developmental programs and funds of the state and central governments. The

¹⁴ Though there are three levels in the panchayat raj, the Gram panchayat at the lower level and Mandal Parishad at middle or Mandal level, have to work under the authority and supervision of the Zilla Parishad (GoT, 2018)

ZPP has wide and tangible financial and other powers independent of the District Collectors (ibid). With this, districts have emerged as a formidable center of power, sometimes engendering conflicts between district officials and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) or ministers at the states level to control the district and ZPP members. Conflicts are likely to be endemic if they belong to different political parties (Mohan, 1996: 54). If ZPTC and the state government are from the same party, the ZPTC will have leverage in receiving more developmental works and funds from the state government and individual Ministers, which will allow ruling party to build client-patron relationship with voters. Apart from ZPP, there are other bodies and boards such as Agriculture Cooperative Societies, Market Committees, Agriculture and Credit Cooperation and Scheduled Castes (SC) and ST Corporations, Library Chairman, Forest Protection Committees, etc. The ruling parties use these bodies to accommodate the leaders at the district level.

The emergence of regional political parties from the 1980s, particularly after the economic liberalization era, has brought rapid transformation from single-party domination to coalition governments. This had reconfigured the federal system. State-based parties begin to play an increasingly influential role in the forming the coalition governments. In turn, the regional parties have started consolidation of their support base at the district level to maintain their political success in the state (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2010: 65). Particularly after the 73rd constitutional amendment, the district level government has received traction and increased competition among the political parties for sharing power with the local governments. An elaborate network of patronage has developed as a consequence which extends into the villages, which are controlled and directed from districts than the states. New types of jobs, welfare benefits, developmental work, financial institutions and scarce resources, position and authority, the proliferation of educational institutions and civil society organisations with resources, and, influence and corruption—all of these have given meaning to the government mechanism at the district level (Kothari, 2012).

A new feature in the distribution of power in India is the growing importance of democratic elements in the political system, namely increasing the significance of voters in the constituencies and the local elites as Kothari puts it: ‘The district-level leaders also control a good part of the election machinery of the parties, this is due to the dependence of the state

and central leaders on them and partly with the increasing importance of rural patronage and influence in the election outcome, the political recruits for state level, also coming from the district'(ibid:118-119). Referring to district-level leaders, Kothari (2012:126) notes that 'the new organisational men found at the district capital are more closely aligned with conventional social orders, revealing a new form of Indian politics. They are realistic men, unconcerned with modernist idioms but modernisers in their own right, who are aware of the intricacies of local society'. The district helps establish a link with local political leaders and people and establishes patronage to leverage the party's position in the district. For the political parties, leaders, and social groups, the district becomes the true ground and foundational layer to maintain their dominance and status quo.

With the increased significance of ZPPs, even the nature and style of bureaucrats have changed as they are also accountable to the local bodies. Before, 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the district Collector was a key pivot to execute governance; hence, the collector was considered as the linchpin of the district. The bureaucracy is expected to be politically neutral in rendering services in decision making and implementation. With the 73rd amendment, the role of the Collector has significantly got diminished and s/he is expected to pay abeyance to the political ideas and interest of the ruling government (Rao, 1996: 73; Radhakrishnan, 1996). They have to work with the local district level representatives, MLAs, Member of Parliaments (MP)s, and party leaders. In any conflict of views (on the matter of policy and governance) between the bureaucracies and the elected representative, the latter prevails. Politicians influence decision-making because they claim that they are 'representatives' of government. Thus, bureaucrats have to be subservient to the politicians and interests of the ruling party. The attempts for political control underline the growing interest in the district institutions.

Earlier studies on districts have documented the structure and function of the district administration from an administrative perspective (Shukla, 1976; Khera, 1979; Kothari, 2012). But studies from the 1980s have focused on the political significance of districts and highlighted parties competing to establish their control over the districts. For example, Kohli's (1988) field study in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh has documented the dynamics of allegiance between the parties and caste groups within Guntur district in the context of the

emergence of NTR-led TDP. Likewise, an edited volume by Kistaiah (1990) has noted that the administrative reforms introduced by the NTR's government in 1980s in the form of establishing Mandal system in Andhra Pradesh had political underpinning i.e., to consolidate TDP base in the Zilla Parishads and other local representative bodies by dismantling the established local networks of Congress party. Nag (2016a:18-19), reflecting on the creation of more districts by Kalvakuntala Chandrashekar Rao (KCR)'s government, was spot on when he said: 'KCR can provide work for the leaders at the district level with the creation of new districts. These leaders will attempt to exert control over the new and somewhat inexperienced collectors by instructing them on how to/whom to distribute the handouts'.

The political significance of forming new administrative units is underscored by studies conducted in other countries. For instance, studies on the politics of creation of administrative units proliferation in Indonesia (Kimura, 2013; Pierskalla, 2016), Uganda (Green, 2010) and Nigeria (Kraxberger, 2004) have considered that the central leadership creates district for the political incentives it offers. Grossman and Levis (2014) observed that that the creation of administrative units in Uganda is motivated by both central and local political incentives. The ruling parties' interests in controlling district might lead to re-centralization of the unit in the name of decentralisation. On a different note, Hassan (2016) contends that the leaders create districts only in those ethnic areas where they see electoral gains. Thus, the parties are interested in consolidating their base in districts.

1.6.2. Economic Factors

With the increase in the power and influence of ZPP, districts have emerged as a new channel for local people to stage their aspirations and influence in the resource allocation. Article 243(I) and 243(Y) of the Constitution added by the 73rd Amendment Act brought about paradigm shift in local government. Under this rubric, the State Financial Commission has the power to recommend the devolution of funds to local bodies over and above those devolved by the central government as mandated by the central Finance Commission. Apart from these financial devolutions, the local government also collects taxes¹⁵. The ZPP, being the highest

¹⁵ The local cess surcharge on stamp duty, seigniorage fees and lease amount of mines and minerals, sale proceeds of social forestry plantations, and entertainment tax, are some of the key sources of assigned/shared revenues to district level bodies.

elected body at the district level, is constitutionally mandated to exercise control over agriculture, health, public services, land surveys, development, local planning, and revenue etc. (GoT, 2018:142). “ZPP and District Planning Committee (DPC) determine contour of economic development in the district, and allocate resource and monitor implementation” (Mohan, 1996:55). The District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA), headed by the ZPP chairman, gets enormous funds from the central and state governments to eradicate poverty and carry developmental works. Apart from these, the central and state governments have to depend on the district to plan and implement various programs.

The district headquarters have become centers of developmental, administrative, and other governance institutions. The establishment of various government departments and resource agencies such as co-operative banks and offices such as the Collectorate bring interest in the district (Kothari, 2012: 128-129). Apart from the government officials and departments, the district attracts many non-governmental institutions and agencies to establish their centers in the district. Thus, creating a new district brings new infrastructure, markets, and development in the areas. The leaders will establish support and patronage base for their leadership through district bodies, which helps them connect with the local people and communities (ibid). Access to state funds, jobs, contracts, and decision-making draws politicians towards districts (Grossman and Levis 2014:196). The consultation over distributive and development grants, decision on co-operative credit and agricultural loans, allocation of scarce resources and selecting beneficiaries for government schemes, the decision on construction of schools, hospitals, libraries, dispensaries, roads and tube wells, negotiation on matching grants for specific projects, etc., have been areas of influence and pressure. Thus, the district/panchayati raj institutions have evolved into core mechanisms that accommodate political elites with access to and direct state resources and development funding (Srinivasulu, 2002: 9) Further, Kothari (2012:130) observed that “the delineation of the new agencies has not just resulted in the decentralisation of function and resources; it has also led to a remarkable concentration of social, economic and political power at local level leaders and groups”. Additionally, Karlo Basta (2015) in a different context, has argued that the ruling elites’ decision to draw sub-unit borders is influenced by a desire to control resource-rich areas. The government and the dominant social groups try to protect their material interests which are entwined with borders.

1.6.3. Governance Factors

The districts as decentralised units assume powers and functions devolved to them which often overlap with the state and the central government (Kothari, 2012:127). A district is where people contact the district administration to address their needs and welfare. It is the district that connects remotest villages, which are otherwise difficult to access. People directly engage with Zilla Parishad, district collectorate, and district planning body at the district than the state or central levels (Khera, 1960). Most government offices/centers are established in the district (ibid: 1). It is an administrative and political institution whereby the government and the parties function through their representatives who are pivotal in the district politics and administration. The decentralisation of power and resources brought significant importance in governing the district institutions (Rao, 1996). The role of the district became significant in implementing welfare schemes and development activities, especially with the emergence of the welfare state.

The district as an institution carries primarily four roles: first, planning and policy formulation at the district level. Article 343ZD of the Indian Constitution mandates that the District Planning Committees (DPC) prepares the draft District Development Plans (DPPs) (Pal, 2006:122). The DPCs must play a significant role in preparing plans at the district level upon which the state and the center will rely (NITI Aayog, 2018: 6). The ZPP examines, approves, coordinates, and consolidates plans prepared by the Mandal Praja Parishads (MPP) and Gram Panchayats (GoT, 2018: 184). Second is the administrative role, i.e., to ensure public safety and protection of citizens' rights, maintenance of law and order, and criminal and civil justice administration. Third, the implementation of welfare schemes. The government has introduced many developmental policies and programs in agriculture, co-operative industry, and other sectors. Special programs such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and others, introduced to develop the weaker sections of society. The district administration is responsible for implementing all of these welfare initiatives in order to meet the requirements of the people. It also ensures that those living in isolated villages have access to basic necessities. The district administration's critical function is to guarantee that citizens are involved in the design and implementation of development projects. Fourth, to exercise the above, the ZPP has to levy taxes or fees while

also playing a vital role in revenue administration. Additionally, the formation of new districts also depends on financial viability. It is generally perceived that the logistics such as distance, population per unit, and vetting of financial cost to reduce unnecessary expenditure connected with the planning and administration in these regions are important considerations in the formation of districts that the dictum ‘the per-capita availability of bureaucrats and policy implementers increases with smaller districts’ is also another critical factor on which new districts are formed (Pilla, 2016). Largely the government explanation in the formation of new districts includes increasing the administrative efficiency and effectiveness by bringing administration near to the people. Along with these three factors, we can add socio-cultural factors as well.

1.6.4. Socio-Cultural Factors

The idea of a small district invokes emotional and political appeal among the people in different regions. Scholars of decentralisation and federalism viewed that the small administrative units like the districts will provide effective, efficient, and economical governance to the people while simultaneously giving them a sense of belonging and direct exercise of their authority. Each unit in a federal/decentralised polity reflects different political aspirations and articulations of a given area. The political articulation varies from one district unit to another, contingent as they were on the district's socio-political structure or demography. Thus, the district border creates social and political development within the units. Establishing bonds of affinity among citizens provided the basis for social cohesion that helps in getting recognition and welfare goods. The new district gives a sense of identity and belongingness to demographically dominant social groups, whereas a sense of alienation and marginalization to those groups which feel alienated or marginalised from the borders. The new district border either disturbs the traditional ties of social cohesion or is likely to provoke new belonging and social coalitions.

Apart from the social groups, political parties and leaders also seek to shape the new district border according to their political interests and in ways to consolidate their positions by demographically leveraging certain groups. Creating district involves administrative change and a conscious creation of bounded people, who have elaborated and revised borders

to make sense of their social and political surroundings. This leads to creating a new body of people from the already existing collective. The ethnic or territorial-based mobilisation for the district gives social and political unity to territorially concentrated communities. The new districts are associated with the symbolic recognition of people of a particular area. With the 73rd Constitutional amendments, the Zilla Parishad emerged as one of the main power centers, which are composed of elected representatives of local bodies and which also provide access to the district institutions. The district as an institution plays vital role in accommodation and assimilation of groups. Not surprisingly, different groups mobilise people based on their ethnic identity for symbolic recognition. The influential and the demographically dominant groups within district, try to crystalize their social and political power. It is not just the larger entities such as parties and social groups but also the individuals who derive their entitlements from the district.

The above discussed four factors make the district a significant unit of governance and politics. Given a larger stake in the local government and district, the drawing of borders is bound to reflect the distribution of power, resources, and symbolic representation of various groups wherein an opportunity structure is created for political parties and certain social groups. Political interests influence in shaping and controlling the district. Thus, drawing new district borders get traction among communities and parties. The following section focuses on the research problem.

1.7. Research Problem

The drawing or redrawing of borders of nation-state, provincial states, and districts, have been a significant development in modern politics. Factors such as culture, language, ethnicity, economic backwardness, resources etc., have played important role in forming nationalities and shaping territorial borders of politics units. Some scholars saw the formations of a nation with a single culture and language, and the impossibility of forming a nation marked by multiple identities. However, the idea of associating the nation with a single culture and language was challenged because the assimilation/integration violate group rights and individuals' dignity, as they are shaped in social contexts and draw their dignity from the social-cultural belief and practices. Among other strategies, federalism/decentralisation is an

important and potential institutional strategy to accommodate diversity and quarantine ethnic conflict in deeply divided societies. Federalism leverages distribution of power, resources, and representation. However, the formations of federal units become sites of political competition among the groups. Demands and formation of political units result in construction of nationalities. In these contexts, it is important to understand the demands and formations of federal units both at the state and district levels in India. India's democratic experience through decentralised system is an ongoing process. Yet, drawing borders for governance and political units is seen as a political act influenced by socio-political interests.

Though previous studies have explained factors such as language, culture, ethnic identity, backwardness, administrative and 'political opportunity structure' in formation of states, no attention has been paid to understand district borders and the accommodation of diversity. This is surprising given the the increased number of districts in India. Therefore, it is vital to know not only how, when and where districts borders are created but also what factors shape territorialisation of district units. How demands for districts in the tribal areas entail distinctive forms of politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation? Though districts formations on the ground of decentralisation involve the politics of recognition, redistribution or access to resources, and power-sharing with the local communities, the process generates complexity and contestation in ethnically compact areas. Understanding the drawing of borders of new districts is pertinent in those areas where politics is based on community identity and territory. It is equally important to understand how tribal communities have been making their moral and political claims centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in the formation of new districts. How the politically salient tribal predominant areas have been accommodated while drawing new district borders in Telangana, and what factors determine drawing border and recasting tribal communities' politics will be the central analytical focus of this study.

1.8. Research Question

Located against this contextual background, the central research question of this study is: How re-drawing intra-state borders configure and reconfigure the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in the tribal areas of Telangana?

1.9. Objectives and Scope of the Study

In this backdrop, the study attempts to examine two main objectives: firstly, to historically understand tribal politics and governance that drives the formation of nationalities and traditional territorial boundaries, and how this in turn foreground the demand for new districts, and accommodation of demands for creation of new districts in the tribal areas of Telangana. In doing so, this study seeks to understand tribal politics/movements, and how subsequent responses of the state shape institutionalisation of territorial and ethnic identity, influences the emergence of demand for new districts.

Secondly, to study the tribal communities' moral and political claims centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation, and to examine how these interact with the interests, strategies and agendas of the district and state-level political elites in the context of tribals' demand for new districts. In doing so, this study unravels the immediate and ideological causes of the demand for districts and explicates the factors that shaped new district borders in tribal areas of Telangana. The implications/reconfiguration of the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation is also examined.

The scope of the study is the tribal areas of former Adilabad, Khammam and Warangal Districts in Telangana. These districts had more tribal population who were concentrated in particular territories. Though the study temporally is based on the historical trajectories of tribal politics, events that took place from 2014 to 2019 form the main basis of the study.

1.10. Methodology and Sources

The study is based on qualitative research. The research relies on an extensive fieldwork carried out in the newly created eight districts: Adilabad, Komarambheem-Asifabad, Manchirial and Nirmal (from the erstwhile Adilabad district), Bhadhradi-Kothagudem and Khammam (from the erstwhile Khammam). Out of the five districts created from the erstwhile Warangal, the researcher has selected only two districts- Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts because they have a substantial number of tribal populations and history of demands for separate districts.

Researcher has used the snow ball technique and has conducted 115 interviews with representatives of civil society organisations from tribal communities, leaders of various ST communities, public representatives such as Sarpanchs, Mandal Parishad Territorial Councils (MPTCs), MLAs, Panchayat Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Coordinators of four districts, Chairman of ITDA Advisory Committee, and Officials of three ITDAs, Officers in revenue and districts administration. In addition, three informal group discussions with tribals were also conducted. The field work was conducted in February 2018, and from April 2019 to June 2019. To represent almost all sections, the interviewees were selected from different tribal communities like: the Gonds, the Lambadas, the Koyas, the Naikpods, the Thotis, the Kolams, the Pradhans, and the Kondareddies and the non-tribals.

The interviews were primarily based on open-ended and semi-structured questionnaires, which allowed the interviewees to express their ideas and opinion freely on the research problem and reflective of the larger picture in understanding the real problem. Most of these interviews are audio recorded. The interviews focused on research themes such as history of demand for districts, political mobilisations, socio-cultural, political, and economic reasons for demands of tribal districts, consultation process and the role of leaders and bureaucrats. It also includes themes such as factors for creation of new districts, accommodation of tribals demands, community identity, politics and representation in new districts. It also includes themes such as factors for creation of new districts, accommodation of tribals demands, community identity, politics and representation in new districts. One of the limitations of the research technique is that majority of the respondents were local elites, and included few non-elite respondents. However, interviews and informal focus group discussion with non-elite respondents and in-depth interviews with elites could possibly be the best bet to harvest out the necessary research information and materials to support the analytical and explanatory framework. Therefore, some of the conclusions of the research may be considered approximate to the reality and representative of the larger picture.

The study complements the findings from the qualitative interviews with a critical content analysis of the Government Acts and Orders, Telangana government's Guidelines on Creation of Districts, government reports and documents, profile of three ITDAs (Bhadrachalam, Eturunagaram, and Uttnoor), and data from Tribal Welfare Department and

Forest Department. The secondary data includes books, journal articles, newspapers, and other sources.

This study employs the historical institutional approach to examine intra-state border change in tribal predominant areas of Telangana. Like the state and provincial state borders, the district borders are considered as institutions. Institutions are a vital tool to facilitate or hinder socio-political goals. District institutions are a mechanism for determining rights and resources to people and regulation over communities. Therefore, the district units set the rules of the game for political and economic competitions. The reorganisation of intra-state “boundaries shapes the resources that includes the social esteem or recognition, redistribution of and access of economic resources and political power” (Tillin, 2012: 22). The rationale for reading the situations at districts through the historical institutional approach is to examine how the pattern of power entails intra- state (districts) border change, and how the reorganisation of institutional boundaries configures and reconfigures tribal politics.

This study attempts to understand both the processes, namely the tribals’ demands for new districts and the role of socio-political and economic factors in the formation of new districts. To understand the tribal communities’ moral and political grounding of their demands for the new districts the study employed three explanatory variables, namely the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation. The formation of new districts was influenced by certain imperatives and consideration of ruling elites. This study employs the political, social and economic imperatives as additional explanatory variables to account where, when and how the new district borders were drawn and the politics behind the selection of towns as headquarters in the tribal areas of Telangana.

1.11. Significance of the Study

The government tends to defend the drawing of district borders on the normative ground of decentralisation. Nonetheless, it is imperative to study how the tribals’ demand for the new districts and changing district borders are affected by multiple border change and how this in turn impact upon tribal identity claims and the diverse interests involved. The study focuses on how districts formations have historically impacted on the tribals political and territorial consolidations. This would help revitalise the debates on drawing borders of

federal/decentralised units and tribal accommodation in India's federal polity. This study intends to contribute to deepen our understanding of drawing of borders/formation of the new political unit at the district level in federal /decentralised system, and contributes to the literature on 'tribal studies', and 'governing divided societies'.

1.13. Limitation of the Study

The study is confined to the tribal areas of Telangana, and has not compared the district formations in other states due to limited time and resources. The study could not ascertain views of Cabinet Sub-committee Report on feasibility of forming new districts (2015), and Keshav Rao Committee report (2016) on formation of four districts, due to non-accessibility.

1.14. Chapterisation

The study is organised into nine chapters. **The first chapter** contextualises the study, introduces the research problem, research question and provides an outline of the research. It then highlights the significance of districts in Indian politics and governance, and the traction that newly formed districts attracted from scholars and practitioners of politics.

The second chapter, drawing from extant literature, defines and contextualises drawing of borders of political units. It fleshes out the creation of political units at the national level and describes the multiple strategies of accommodation adopted in deeply divided societies. Among the strategies, it discusses how federalism/decentralisation has emerged as a normative as well as a political strategy to accommodate diversity in liberal democracies. This chapter discussed the role of various factors such as linguistic, ethnic, and political, etc. in drawing provincial/state borders, and contextualised the drawing of the border at the district-level in Indian federal system. It then defines the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in reference to tribal politics.

The third chapter focuses on the historical trajectory of tribal politics and governance and its role in constructing territorial borders in the tribal areas of India in general and Telangana in particular. This chapter highlights that territorial and ethnic identities of tribals have emerged out of tribal's struggle for identity and autonomy, and the successive governments' responses. It also highlights how ethnically formed and constitutionally

recognised identities become the basis for emergence of new district demands in tribal areas of Telangana.

The fourth chapter provides an outline on demographic details of communities and areas that were demanded as districts. The chapter also sketches the historical and political contexts in which demands for districts emerged in tribal areas of Telangana.

The fifth chapter discusses the construction of tribal communities' moral and political claims around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in the context of their demand for new districts. It discusses the background conditions that foreground the formation of tribal nationalities and their demand for tribal districts in areas where they are territorially concentrated. It highlights their socio-political experiences and expressions that are embedded in their ideological positioning to differentiate themselves from other social groups. These are constitutive of the ontology of tribal politics.

The sixth chapter focuses on the politics that undergirds the formation of four new districts in the erstwhile Adilabad district in 2016. It also attempts to understand the role of communities, individual actors such as public representatives and parties, their interpretations, and how the tribals have been responding to new borders and district headquarters. This chapter and subsequent chapters highlight the role of political, social, economic and administrative imperatives in territorialisation of district units in federal/decentralised structure.

The seventh chapter discusses in detail the redrawing of district borders in the erstwhile Khammam district. It examines how and why two districts were formed out of the former district, why few mandals were merged in the other district and people's responses to the new borders. This chapter discusses the role of four imperatives—political, social, economic and administrative in territorialisation of district borders and selection of towns as district headquarters. It highlights how the inter-state border change reconfigures the tribals' long-standing demand for intra-state borders. In addition, it highlights the difference over the nature of district that was demanded by various tribal organisations and the Left parties, and conflicting interests of the tribals and non-tribals in the selection of towns as district headquarters.

The eight chapter documents the creation of new districts, namely Mulugu and Mahabubabad from the erstwhile Warangal district. The government considered the demand of Mahabubabad district, but the Eturunagaram areas were merged into the newly created Jayashankar-Bhupalapally district in 2016. Due to continuous political mobilisation, Mulugu district was created in 2019. This chapter discusses why Mulugu demand was not considered in 2016 but was subsequently acquiesced and formed in 2019, and how Mahabubabad district was created in 2016 itself. It seeks to understand how Mulugu town emerged as a popular choice for district headquarters and why Eturunagaram town, which featured in tribals' long-standing demand for district was not selected. The chapter also fleshes out how the Koyas and Lambada's concentration in their traditional areas facilitate the accommodation of their communities demands for decentralised units while simultaneously catering to the dominant non-tribals' interests.

The last chapter, i.e., ninth chapter, concludes the study by summarising the key arguments and findings of the research in a comparative perspective.

Chapter 2

The Borders of Political Units:

The Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation

2.1. Introduction

With the advent of the concept of the modern nation-state and subsequent development of layered governance structure through political units, contemporary notion of borders, territory, identities of communities and self-governance have been subjects of debate and contested interpretations in deeply divided societies (Opello and Stephen, 1999; Teichova and Herbert, 2003; Laitin, 2007; Miller, 1995; Kymlicka, 1995). These notions and practices provide identification/recognition to some groups, while others have a sense of repudiation/assimilation within defined units. Hence, in modern politics, the political units such as nation-states, provincial states, and districts have been subjected to political competition among communities as these units function as containers of people. Communities seek recognition, redistribution/access to resources, and political power through new political units. Territorial disputes spawned by drawing and redrawing of borders have contributed significantly to modern political development (Diener and Joshua, 2010:5; Kolers, 2009:1; Samaddar, 2011:48).

Against this background, this chapter is divided into two major parts. The first part of this chapter discusses the role of various factors in drawing borders at the national and inter-state levels and various strategies of ethnic accommodation. Understanding the unit formations at national and provincial levels gives a reference point to explicate the district unit formation in the Indian federal system. The second part of the chapter defines the concepts of politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation, which the tribals foregrounded to demand for the formation of new districts. Before examining the political units formations at various levels, it is essential to understand the notion of border.

2.2. The Notion of Border

Border or boundary is a political and social marker that limits the jurisdiction of government or institutions that operate within the unit. 'Delineating territorial boundaries for any political

project of governance, be it nation-state, provincial state or local government, needs both borders and boundaries of governance' (Davis et al., 2019:163). Simultaneously, border relies explicitly or implicitly on political projects of belonging that endows criteria for who can belong and who do not fit within a demarcated political unit (ibid). In other words, border excludes access to outsiders while functioning as identity markers for insiders' loyalties in polity and the scope in which resources are provided. Thus, 'the borders define individual and collective entitlements, duties, social cohesion and solidarity' (ibid: 3).

The nation-state or state-nation building process¹⁶ and their attempts to reshape and resize the space for political and administrative power-sharing and to govern its subjects have involved drawing and redrawing borders at various levels, such as at the state/national (sovereign borders), the inter-state (provincial) and also at the intra-state (districts or local) levels. Borders aim at two projects, namely, the politics of governance and the politics of belonging. Nevertheless, there could be an inherent tension between the political projects of governance and belonging. The particularity of political projects of belonging often tends to undermine or leverage groups' identity, material benefits, and power of self-governance. Referring to this juxtaposition, Henri Lefebvre (cited in Davis et al., 2019:3) has argued that space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggle, and therefore a critical issue in politics. van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002) correlated the terms "bordering, ordering, and othering". The bordering process is described as a "social practice of spatial differentiation" (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002; Passi, 1998). It is essential to understand the borders and boundary-producing practices that generate socio-political differences (Paasi, 1998).

The state or any political unit is considered society's container which undergirds certain type(s) of identity, providing cohesive and recognisable polity and a means of coexistence. This marks off the state from other units or containers. But, the question is, what are the elements or cohesive forces that form the basis for the identity formation of these containers in the federal polity? How ethnic diversity is accommodated to provide recognition, resources, and power.

¹⁶ In 'nation-state' concept, the state is built on the socio-cultural aspects, so it is perceived as socio-cultural entity- wherein stress is laid on homogenous culture and political identity. In 'state-nation' the state promotes socio-cultural diversity as enduring values (Stephen et al., 2011:8).

In the federal system, authority is divided between the state — regional and local governments. In the Indian federal system, the borders of regional or local governments tend to reflect a particular ethno-territorial identity (Adeney, 2017). A change in federal/decentralized units' borders accompanies changes in socio-political realms. In this regard, Bookman (2013:62) contends that 'if the administrative boundaries of the state and sub-state regions are changed, the relative ethnic composition of both the state and sub-state regions is likely to change. It changes the historical socio-spatial boundaries connected with ethnic groups..., a group can be minority or majority, depending on where the boundary is drawn'. The communities or groups that are differentially situated might have different priorities within the units and seek recognition and accommodation through borders.

Nevertheless, the drawing of borders has time and again generated compliance and resistance among the subject communities who have been either included or excluded. The groups became subjects of a new power structure that has been constituted within or out of the new borders. Hence, border making of political and administrative units within the nation is a political act that reproduces resizing of the political map and underscores the socio-political reconfiguration. It is essential to understand factors that shape inter-state and intra-state borders and why people demand distinct political and governance units? The following section discusses the formation of nation/nationalism or national identities.

2.3. Bordering the Nation: A Brief Survey

The 'nation' is a collective identity of a group of people, built on people's strong emotive feelings. 'Individuals identify with their nation in the same manner that they identify with other collective identities such as religion, tribe, race, and ethnicity' (Dawisha, 2002:3). But, as Max Weber (2004:4) said, 'a nation' is 'a community that tends to produce a state of its own'. The nation is based on a particular claim about distinctiveness such as culture, language, religion, etc. It is rooted in the idea of investing cultural communities with political power. Ernest Gellner (1983) considers that the nation-building process is "to endow a culture with its own political roof". Further, it is significant to note that J.S. Mill (2001) stressed that 'the democracies/free institutions are nearly impossible to establish in countries populated by people of various nationalities'. Mill associated the nation with a single culture and a single

language for unity and democratic deliberation within the national unit. Similarly, Smith (1984:290) defines the nation with “the ethnic identity, definite territory or homeland, a single economy and citizen rights for all its members”. The ideas of cultural distinctiveness and self-governance form the idea of the nation.

However, Renan (2004:33) contended that race, language, geography, interests are not sufficient elements to the soul of nationalism. He defined nationalism based on the two principles. The first possess the common heritage of glory and grief. The second, people’s desire to continue a life in common existence; he, thus, calls the nation as a ‘daily plebiscite’. Ernest Gellner (1983:55-56) puts it succinctly: “nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men are a myth. Nationalism..., sometimes selectively takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored”. “But nationalism as a phenomenon unfolds inherently in a certain set of social conditions” (ibid: 125). He further noted that during the industrial age, ‘culture had a completely new economic function because industrial development required homogenous culture unlike agrarian societies’ (ibid). Similalry Anderson (1983:40-41) considers nation as ‘imagined political community, i. e. sovereign and limited, imagined because it is not based on face-to-face contact, yet in the mind of each live the image of their communion (ibid:15). The decline of the premodern societal link led to the creation of new ways of linking fraternity, power, and time. The modern communication and print media, homogenization of language, census, and museums have facilitated nationalist feeling of ‘ourness’.

Barth (1969) contends that the markers of difference e.g., religion, perceived cultural history, colour, or language, are not natural expressions in collective identity but are selected by actors and attach values for making their collective identity. The elites use identities as symbols to mobilize the group to defend its interests and compete with other groups (Brass, 1991:75).Further, with this understanding, the argument of ‘internal colonialism’ highlights that ‘the ethno-regional movements mostly take place in those territories that are economically independent, with ethnically distinctive people that are characterized by ‘hierarchical cultural divisions of labour’ (Levi and Hechter, 1985: 130).

It is explicitly clear that the roles of cultural and political identities to have self-determination, have been highlighted in drawing national borders and dividing the world into political units. The emphasis on the people rather than the ruling elites as the foundation for sovereignty and self-determination distinguishes modern nationalism (Anderson, 1983). The beginnings of modern nationalism can be traced back to the late eighteenth century in Europe¹⁷. The following section discusses ethnic or national identities' role in deeply divided societies and strategies of ruling elites to respond to ethnic demands.

2.4. Nationalities and Political Units in Deeply Divided Societies

The use of nation-building as a means of political consolidation began in Western Europe and extended to Eastern and Central Europe with the rise of nationalism in Asia and Africa with decolonization. When ethnic minorities in deeply divided societies challenge nation-building efforts, ethnic tension arises (Choudhry, 2008:30). For instance, minority groups oppose dominant groups' nation-building efforts, and involves in minority nation-building on their territory by invoking degree of self-rule before their integration into the large states (ibid). Therefore, the composite nationalism in the decolonised country like India is seen as an incomplete revolution due to the uneven development of nationalities and subsequent cultural and political assertions (Srinivasulu, 2011:168).

The communities have started asserting and claiming their rights based on their primordial/ ascribed identities. The rise of identity-based politics challenged the earlier notion of equating a nation with a culture and single language, and saw diversity as a problem (Bhattacharayya, 2015:213). In this regard, Kymlicka (1995:73) challenged "J.S. Mill's thought that the united public opinion is necessary for working of liberal institutions and it is impossible without a common language and national identity". Kymlicka considers that 'a country with more than one nation is referred to as a multinational state rather than a nation-state' (ibid:11). The existence of more than one nation inside a particular state, where nation refers to a historical group, occupying a certain region or homeland, with distinct language or

¹⁷ According to Anthony D. Smith (1984:300), four conditions lead to four dimensions of collective mobilisation for national borders. External threat become test of communal unity; economic expansion: where new markets eventually disrupt local connections and regionalism; cultural clash: competitiveness between cultures of differing technical levels forces communal responses; secularisation: challenge to a traditional faith stimulates the emergence of activists and educated group.

culture, is the source of cultural diversity. Kymlicka defends minority rights by pointing out that the minorities have their own societal culture, as their language and historical narratives are already embedded in a comprehensive set of social practices and institutions that connect all elements of social life. For their members, these practices and institutions define a spectrum of socially meaningful possibilities (ibid:79). Therefore, he further says that the 'access to a cultural system determines people's ability to make meaningful decisions' (ibid: 84).

Kymlicka's 'cultural liberalism'¹⁸ or multiculturalism challenged homogenisation by arguing that culture and community are the essential or basic needs of all individuals and individual dignity embedded in the collective identity¹⁹. The imposition of a single language and culture violates an individual's dignity and group's rights (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994). This strand contends that the political process in liberal democracies, which is supposed to be based on culturally neutral policies, visibly or clandestinely patronage a particular culture, and state policies/ideologies reflect the dominant or majority community culture. 'It is not possible for the state to remain neutral on the cultural question' (Choudhry, 2008:11). 'The viability of ethnic minority's social and cultural aspects may be jeopardized by the majority-dominated system's economic and political decisions, while the members of majority/dominant culture do not face such problems. In this process, the homogenous nation-building process would not lead to nation-building but nation-destroying (Connor, 1972). Similarly, Young (1990:183-91) viewed that 'in the political process, oppressed groups are at a disadvantage, and part of the remedy is to provide institutional mechanisms for recognition and representation of oppressed groups'. Therefore, defenders of community and cultural rights argued for recognition and accommodation of ethnic and territorial identities through territorial units or non-territorial power-sharing to the minority communities to rectify disadvantages and provide justice (Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995; Young, 1990).

¹⁸ Cultural liberals think that society should not enforce any particular code of conduct, and they consider themselves as supporting nonconformists' moral rights to express themselves as long as they do not damage others.

¹⁹ The extant literature focuses on identity politics, especially political and social theorists displayed their keen interest to understand and manage the identity -based politics in a democratic political system (see Taylor, 1994, Kymlicka, 2007;1995; Gutmann, 2003; Appiah, 2005; Kukathas, 1992; Honneth, 1995;2003, Young, 1990; Fraser, 1998;2003; 2009; Tully, 1995; Phillips, 1993; Mahajan, 2002;2011; Bhargava, 1999; Parekh, 1999; Okin, 1998; Xaxa, 1999; Sandel, 1984; Walzer, 1983).

2.4.1. Accommodation Strategies

Federalism/decentralisation as a constitutional device emerged as a principal strategy to accommodate the claims of territorially concentrated national minorities, and quarantine socio-political conflicts (Horowitz, 1985:598; Kymlicka, 1995:28). Federalism 'is a territorial version of segmental autonomy'²⁰, (Choudhary, 2008:28). Kymlicka (1995:29) notes that 'only if a national minority gains a majority in federal units, then the federalism work as a means for self-governance'.

Furthermore, Kymlicka (1995:27) considers different kinds of societal cultures and suggested different rights for three different minority groups: these are polyethnic (immigrants), national minorities (historical and cultural communities), and ethnic (indigenous). He favours political and economic rights to these minority groups as protection from majority communities' political and economic dominance. First, self-governing rights, a delegation of some power to national minorities often through federalism through which borders are drawn to accommodate national minorities. 'These rights are in place to ensure that a national minority is not outbid by the majority on issues that are particularly important to their cultures, such as language, education, resource development, and other socio-cultural issues' (ibid:37). Second, polyethnic rights (some financial or legal protection to religious or ethnic groups) should be provided (ibid:31). 'Polyethnic rights protect certain religious and cultural practises that the market may not sufficiently support (for example, supporting immigrant language programmes) or that are disadvantaged by current laws (e.g., dress code that conflict with the religious belief)' (ibid:38). Third, indigenous communities having self-governing rights. These 'special representation rights' provide seats in institutions for ethnic/indigenous/national groups (ibid: 6-7). These rights ensure that an ethnic minority will not be disregarded on decisions that are made on nationwide bases (ibid: 38). All three group differentiated rights are often described as collective rights (ibid: 32)²¹. Kymlicka (1995)

²⁰ However, Hausing (2021) argues that the adoption of these institutional strategies in Indian federalism depend on 'the nature and history of ethnic conflict, the timing and mode of negotiations.' These, he argues, determine distinctive types of autonomies, namely, homeland state autonomy, decentralised autonomy and devolutionary autonomy (ibid).

²¹ Similarly, Bhikhu Parekh (2000) broadly classified three forms of diversity which exist within the modern societies, viz., first, 'sub-cultural diversity' in which members broadly share their societies' dominant meaning and values but they seek to have their own distinct life styles. Second, 'perspective

considered that differentiated group rights promote the rights of individuals as they exercise their choice or autonomy to take decisions in particular social contexts.

Apart from Kymlicka's minority rights theory, many institutional strategies have been suggested to manage or accommodate diversity. In this regard, Ian Lustick (2001) used his theory of state expansion and contraction, and taxonomy of modes of regulating national and ethnic conflicts. He considers two strategies: In 'a regime threshold' the state considers the territory as a colony so it is likely to give it up, whereas in an 'ideological hegemony threshold', the territory becomes an essential part of the core or state, so the state establishes tight control over it. Similarly, O'Leary (2001) considered that the state builders or state-managers employ two strategies of 'right-sizing' and 'right-peopling' for shaping the borders and ethnic accommodation or exclusion. Right-sizing/right-shaping refers to central political elites shaping the external and internal borders of states. Second, right-peopling implies drawing borders in ways which makes the state coterminous with a people. He has listed five ways in which elites externally try to 'right-size' their state: 1) up-size- through take-overs; 2) stabilize' their borders; 3) 'down-size' through reducing their territories; 4) ally-while retaining their former spatial configuration within federalizing or confederalising unions; and lastly, 5) merge- through assimilation or integrationist unification or reunification.

Further, Mc Garry et al., (2008:41) consider that the democratic state adopts two broad sets of policies to accommodate territorially concentrated communities. The first is integrationist, which advocates for a shared public identity that is coterminous with the state's territory. 'Integrationists principally want all citizens equality before the law and inside public institutions'. Integrationists are against the public institutional recognition of group identities, but they accept cultural rights in private realms. 'Integrationists cast off the the notion that ethnic distinctions must inevitably lead to political divisions' (Choudhry, 2008:28). This emphasizes unity over diversity in plural states, and is inimical to the institutionalization of difference, including its territorial form. 'Integration is seen as crucial to progressive politics, political stability, public unity, and the abolition of group-based chauvinism' (Mc Garry et al.,

diversity' wherein the members are highly critical of central principles or core values of dominant social system and they would demand to reconstitute it, for instance feminists. Third one is 'communal diversity' which reflects existence of self-conscious or territorially concentrated communities which are entertained and governed by their own belief and values. Though these divisions are not sacrosanct or may exist more forms of diversity, but the purpose is to get sense of how forms of diversity are constituted.

2008: 41). But integration policies lead to assimilation and domination of one group over others.

Conversely, accommodation advocates equality with institutional respect for group or ethnic distinctions, and it supports dual or multiple public identities. Accommodation stresses on the stable management of deep diversity (ibid). Integration, according to accommodationists, is unfair and certain to fail, because it usually entails a political choice in favour of one and, in most cases, the greater community. Thus, the integrationist's rhetoric frequently hides dominant interests beneath its veneer of neutrality or impartiality, and privatizing culture is inherently biased against weaker cultures. "The single national identity or official language favours the dominant community's identity. The same holds for integrationist state structure, executive design, and public sector composition. Unitary states and national federations will favour dominant communities will" (Mc Garry et al., 2008:79). It advocates the autonomy and integrity of substate political communities through various institutional approaches, perhaps the most important of which is federalism/decentralisation. The significant forms of accommodation are now known as centripetalism, multiculturalism, consociationalism, and territorial pluralism (ibid). Further, Mc Garry et al.,(2008:88) note that the government will pursue integration or accommodation towards a particular community depending on its mobilisation capacity.

Likewise, O'Leary et al., (2001) have mentioned eight strategies to maintain differences or eliminate them. 'The eliminating strategies are genocide, ethnic expulsion, territorial elimination, such as permitting secession, active decolonisation or partition, and political homogenisation, in the form of integration— eliminating cultural from the political domain by treating all as civic equals— or assimilation (encouraging acculturation and eventual fusion)'. Whereas 'the other four grand strategies for managing differences are control, arbitration, territorial management through autonomy— home rule or devolution— or federal; and consociation (grand coalition government, proportionality, community autonomy and veto for minorities)' (O'Leary et al., 2001:28-29; Lijphart, 1996). These strategies have an immediate implication of state borders — internal borders in the case of elimination strategies, such as autonomy or federation and external borders in the case of elimination strategies such as permitting secession, active decolonisation, or partition (ibid:29).

Reflecting on institutional accommodation and sustenance of demands, Kohli (1997: 329) notes that ‘the degrees of institutionalisation and leadership strategies shapes the outcome of self-determination movements in India and other developing countries. Accommodation in well-institutionalised democracy leads to an ‘inverse U curve’ of ethnic politics, e.g., ethnic movement in Tamil Nadu in India in the 1950s and the 1960s. In contrast, non-accommodation in well-institutionalised democracy leads to demands and a repression cycle of movements e.g., Sikhs movement for Khalistan in India’s Punjab in 1980s. Accommodations in the case of weakly institutionalized democracies lead to a nonviolent disintegration of the state e. g. Czechoslovakia in the 1990s, whereas non-accommodation in weakly institutionalised countries led to turbulence or collapse e.g., the first and second Republics in Nigeria’.

Looking at how the government takes decisions on accommodation, Karlo Basta (2015:154) has argued that “the ability to accommodate demands for territorial autonomy varies from state to state. In explaining this variation, state elites face challenges in accommodation i.e., addressing the nationalist demands of constituent groups while simultaneously engaging in the business of day-to-day governance”. “Accommodation of nationalist demands (accommodation imperative) can, but need not, impinge on the government’s ability to govern (the governance imperative)– that is, to provide public goods in a timely and effective manner. In turn, governments’ effectiveness in the provision of public goods influences elites’ ability to maintain their hold on power” (ibid). Thus, “if territorial autonomy impinges on the ability of a state’s central authorities to implement key macroeconomic policies across the state’s territory, then accommodation will be limited, on the other hand, the central authorities do not expect that autonomy will affect their ability to implement economic policies, then they will be more accommodating of minority aspirations” (ibid:149). He views that ‘the governance imperative tends to take precedence over the accommodation imperative’ (ibid:162).

These studies are points of references and departure to understand the institutional strategies to accommodate the tribal differences with the formation of new districts in the Indian federal/decentralised system. After discussing the formation of the nation, and institutional strategies to manage/ recognise and accommodate diversity in divided societies,

the following section focuses on the formation of nationalities and federal units (inter-state borders) in India.

2.5. Formations of Inter-States Borders in India

As discussed, broadly, nationalism is associated with people connected with culture, language, and religion to claim self-governing rights in a given territory. It is envisaged that the boundaries of nationalities should be the boundaries of state. Nonetheless, submerged nations often exist within sovereign states, regardless of identifying their political identity (Kumar, 2002:17). Regarding nation-building, Paul Brass (1974:9) outlined two forms of nation-building in diverse social contexts: first is typified by the modern nation-state wherein the loyalties for the state and culture are merged, e.g., European countries. The second form of nation-building obtains in a multiethnic country where the multinational ties exist within a larger territory and a single political structure based on patriotism derived from common struggles, shared interests, ideology, etc. India falls under the second category. Nationalism begets sub-nationalism which often vied with the nation in the post-independence period (Bhattacharyya, 2005).

Democratic values of self-governance necessitate communities to have control over their own affairs. Multiethnic states have ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural divisions that are politically salient (Choudhry, 2008: 5; Swenden, 2012:614). Given its diversity, India adopted territorial strategies such as federalism/decentralization to accommodate demands of different ethnic group to protect the unity and stability in the system. India began its democratic experiment with greater diversity than any other democracy in the world (Stepan et al., 2011:45). Jalal (cited in Mawdsley, 2002:3) argues that ‘given the country’s wide size and diversity, as well as its history of colonisation, federalism was more of a necessity than a choice’. Rudolph and Rudolph (2010) consider federal power-sharing as the state formation process, which entails negotiated and shared sovereignty.

In this context, federalism is wider sense defined as ‘a political equilibrium that arises from a suitable balance of shared rule and self-rule’ (Bhattacharyya, 2005:3). Tillin (2011) considers that India’s federal constitution is well-equipped with administrative systems that provide territorially concentrated ethnic groups with apparent recognition and degree of

self-governance. Additionally, Mawdsley (2002:3) contends that federalism provides for both unity and diversity in theory, but it encompasses a broad spectrum of ideologies and arrangements in practice. Further, scholars have characterised India as practicing asymmetric federalism²² that provides ‘self-rule to distinct sub-state groups by generating an asymmetry in the degree of self-rule assigned to different communities within the framework of shared rule’ (Tillin, 2020; Hausing, 2014:88-89; Baruah and Rouleau, 2011: 6).

With these contextual practices in accommodating diversity and identity issues, scholars attribute the success to Indian federalism/decentralization in its own right (Battacharyya, 2005; Tillin, 2019; Mawdsley, 2002; Hausing, 2021; Adeney, 2007; 2017; Kumar, 2002). Thus, India is practicing ‘substantive democracy’ (Bhattacharyya, 2015:215) and ‘ethno-federal system’ (Adeney, 2017). Yet, identity, ethnicity, language, cultural and economic factors continue to be sources of socio-political conflicts and become a central subject for demanding state and sub-state units within the federal process.

2.5.1. Early Phase of Formation of States: Recognition of Ethno-Linguistic Identity

India’s independence in 1947 has transformed a civilization into a modern nation-state (Kumar, 2002). India is a constellation of sub-nationalities constituted by ‘regional communities as the crucial source of their identity formation’ (Kumar, 2002:31; Sarangi and Pai 2011). Notwithstanding apprehensions of identity-based politics in the early period of independence, the regional, cultural, language, and ethnic issues have played a key role in the political process and institutional development from the inception of the post-colonial state (ibid). Diversity was accommodated through federal units to maintain order and unity (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018:152). Unlike other classical federal countries such as America, Switzerland and Canada, India’s experiment with creating new states and sub-state within decentralization is ongoing. Consequently, the initial federal design have been recasted in the post-independence period, keeping in view diversity and political and economic needs (Sarangi and Pai, 2011:2; Hausing, 2018). It is important to understand how a socio-cultural

²² Concerning the asymmetrical federal process in India, Hausing (2014) highlights that asymmetric federalism entails differential *de jure* or constitutional powers and status to some units of the federation, for instance the Fifth and Sixth Schedule which envisions self-rule for tribals in scheduled areas (ibid). Whereas *de facto* asymmetric federalism stems from variation in size, geography, history, wealth, and culture of states and which is commonly evident across all federations (ibid:87).

community becomes the political community and the factors that influence in constitution of federal and political units.

In the post-independence period, the successive governments have carved boundaries to divide territories and accommodate ethnic groups within the administrative and political units (Mohapatra, 2012:313). The provinces under British colonial rule hardly had natural or cultural boundaries (Suri, 2016:4). British India's administrative structure, which India had inherited, resulted from military, economic, political, or administrative exigencies rather than rational policy or need/desire of the people (Sarangi and Pai, 2011:3). In 1903, Herbert H. Risely, then Home Secretary of the colonial government, while recommending the partition of Bengal, viewed that 'there is a significant link between linguistic provinces and administrative efficiency, hence reorganising India's states along ethnolinguistic lines to increase legitimacy, efficiency, and stability, is critical' (Hausing, 2018: 451). In this context, language emerged as the important fulcrum around which demands for demarcation of regions along linguistic lines arouse (Sarangi and Pai, 2011:5).

Further, in 1920, Indian National Congress (INC) had supported the reorganisation of provinces on a linguistic basis and invoked the linguistic identities in building organisations to deepen nationalism among different nationalities. However, it reneged its position following the rise of communalism and partition (Hausing, 2018; Singh, 2008). But, due to diversity, one subject that has remained controversial is drawing administrative and political borders in the post-independence period. Principally, linguistic, ethnic, and tribal groups based on sub-regional identity started demanding the states and sub-state units. Article 3 of the Indian constitution provides the Union government the unilateral power to redraw the political map of India. Indian federalism has continued to reorganised its territory in different phases and at different times (1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 2000, and 2014) based on various criteria.

The demands and movements for new states multiplied following the commencement of the Constitution in 1950. There were debates on how many states India should have and the criteria for drawing inter-state borders. During the last phase of colonial rule, religious identities played a dominant role in political conflicts. But, religion as a

criterion for territorial claims to draw interstate borders was not entertained in the aftermath of partition (Tillin, 2013:27). At the time of independence, states were formed based on political and historical reasons rather than linguistic or cultural distinctions, but this was only a marriage of convenience. In the post-independent period, several factors such as language, religion, ethnicity/tribes, historical legacy, political autonomy, and economy, underpin state demands in India (Pai, 2007: 195; Suri 2016). These factors provide identity to significant groups of people in a region who can constitute a separate state (Suri, 2016). However, central elites were reluctant to carve inter-state borders based on linguistic or any other such identities immediately after India's independence.

Contrary to central elites' perception, people started agitating to reorganize states on linguistic and cultural bases. After facing constant pressure and demand to redraw internal borders, the Constituent Assembly formed the Linguistic Provinces Commission (led by S.K. Dhar) in 1948. The Commission opposed the drawing of internal borders on the ground of linguistic identity and instead suggests that borders should be drawn based on the administrative criteria. It favoured that the center should have overriding power concerning state's territorial boundary. In the background of partition and communal conflict, the Commission's report came with underlying concerns of national anxieties of 'unity and order' (Singh, 2008). Similarly, the JVP Committee, (Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabh Bhai Patel, and Pattabhi Sitaramayya), was constituted in December 1948 to investigate linguistic-based state demands further. In its report in 1949, the JVP Committee echoed the apprehensions and anxieties expressed by the Dhar commission and dismissed the concept of reorganizing states on linguistic lines. However, it noted that the issue could be revisited in light of popular demands. Similarly, 'the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) (chaired by Fazal Ali) (1953–55) emphasized on a balanced approach based on language, economic viability, and administrative convenience. Language, it suggested, as a factor of reorganisation should not undermine rather strengthen the unity, integrity and security of India' (Bhtattacharyya, 2021:53; Hausing, 2018:452).

In 1953 Andhra, the first linguistic state was formed for Telugu speaking areas from the state of Madras, after massive protest erupted following the death of Potti Sriramulu, who was on a hunger strike demanding a separate state for Telugu-speaking people. The massive

protest led to the formation of the SRC. In 1955, the SRC recommended a balanced approach that would be sensitive to linguistic demands while considering economic and administrative viability (Bhattacharyya, et al 2017). It proposed that the country would be divided into 16 states and three centrally controlled regions. Although the government did not comply with all of the recommendations, it divided the country into 14 states and six Union Territories with passing the States Reorganisation Act in November 1956²³.

Though the formation of states in 1956 was based on the linguistic criteria, Gujarati speaking people's demand for a separate state was not considered. Following unrest in 1960, the state of Bombay was divided into Gujarat and Maharashtra. In 1963, Nagaland was formed for the Naga people, bringing the total number of states to 16. The Sikhs' demand for the Punjabi Suba in the 1960s resulted in the concomitant demand for separate Haryana and Himachal Pradesh states (Pai, 2007:195). The Parliament passed Punjab Reorganisation Act in April 1966, after the Shah Commission report. The Punjabi-speaking areas were given to Haryana, while the hilly areas were given to Himachal Pradesh the then Union Territory. Chandigarh, the joint capital for Punjab and Haryana, was designated as a Union Territory. All these cases indicate that language has emerged as a dominant criterion for demanding and creation of new states in India, which in turn leverages linguistic federalism in India (Bhattacharyya, 2018:153)

Under the wings of linguistic federalism language become the symbol of national groups (Brass, 1974). During the early phase, language played the catalyst role to transform the cultural frontier of states into the political frontier. Identifying the state(s) with cultural and linguistic identity is considered conducive to the democracy and governance (Suri, 2016:3). The underlying principle in various regional accommodations of these identities has remained internal self-determination, a predominant principle in all regionalism and sub-regionalism (Bhattacharyya, 2005:24). Reflecting on the creation of linguistic states, Kumar (2002:27) viewed that 'it was a big effort that aimed at two opposing goals simultaneously. First, it sought to democratise regional polities. Second, at the same time, linguistic reorganisation benefited in this process bolstered not only regional constituencies but also

²³ The states were Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The six union territories were Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Laccadive, Manipur and Tripura.

reinforced the center'. This phase ended with the reorganisation of the Punjab state based on two languages, Punjabi and Hindi, in November 1966.

2.5.2. Second Phase of State Formations: Accommodation of Ethnic nationalities

In the 1960s and 1970s, the territorial reorganisation of states extended to north-eastern India, wherein tribals' aspirations for statehood and autonomy remained a major strain in federal relations (Pai, 2007:195; Hausing, 2021). The institutional response of the Union government was the enactment of the Northeastern States Reorganisation Act, 1971, which upgraded the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura, and the sub-state of Meghalaya to full statehood, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to Union Territories. The last two became states in 1986. Similarly, Sikkim was created in 1975. The geo-strategic location of these areas ensured that tribal states were formed by deviating from the language principle and from overriding consideration of financial viabilities (Bhattacharyya, 2005:13).

Interestingly, Goa became the 25th state of the Indian Union in May 1987 based on the Konkani language which marked a continuation of the initial phase of the territorial reorganisation of states based on language. But in the second phase (1970s and 1980s) the states in the northeast were formed based on tribal/ethnic identity and not language (Adeney, 2017; Sarangi and Pai 2011). In some cases, ethnicity appears to be an informally viable basis for political-administrative reorganisation (Mawdsley 2002:6).

2.5.3. Third Phase: Transcending the Ethno-Linguistic Identities, and the Role of Political Opportunity Structure

Many regions and tribal communities have been left behind in state formations based on linguistic identities. Their status has remained uncertain despite the growing migration of outsiders into their region. In the formation of linguistic states, the aspirations, and pressures of the dominant castes played a key role, as they saw opportunity to match new state borders with their linguistic area (Hohler, 2013:31). States' reorganisation based on the linguistic criteria has fostered majoritarianism's political principle in the government and administration. This often undermined the constitutional recognition and rights provided to the minority communities (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018).

Movements based on tribal or ethnic identities acquired salience in several states in the 1980s²⁴. These include, among others, Bodoland agitation in Assam, the Chhota Nagpur region in Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, and Darjeeling hill district of West Bengal. These regions are rich in natural resources like minerals, forests, and rivers, yet they remain backward compared to other areas within the larger states. Political mobilisations in these areas were driven by a pervasive sense of economic and cultural deprivations. Scholars have referred to this process as internal colonialism (Corbridge, 1999; 2002; Prakash, 2002;2012; Srinivasulu, 2011; Tillin, 2013; Weiner, 1978). Additionally, the rise of new social movements based on protection of forest and natural resources such as the Chipko movement in 1970s, Narmada BachaoAndolan in the 1980s, indigenous movement in central India from the 1980s, have foregrounded the legitimacy of tribal and hill state movements in Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh (Mawdsley, 2002; Prakash, 2002; Tillin, 2013). The government has come up with ideas of Regional Development Councils to appease the people of these regions. However, these measures could not fulfill the regional aspirations of the people.

The movements for Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand were long drawn but became vigorous in the 1990s (Tillin, 2011; Prakash, 2002; Mawdsley, 2002). Invoking administrative efficiency and sub-regional aspiration rather than the language principle, the then BJP led NDA government redrew India's internal map to create the three states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand out of as the 'Hindi-heartland' states in 2000 (Mawdsley, 2002:2-3). In these cases, a complex combination of tribal ethnicity, language, regional deprivation, ecology, economic backwardness, and discriminatory treatment by the respective parent states' political elites provided the basis of intense regionalism and its resolution in statehood (Bhattacharya, 2015; Singh, 2008). For instance, Uttarakhand is less ethnically distinct from Uttar Pradesh than its economic differences. Jharkhand and

²⁴Tillin (2013:53) mentioned two schools of thoughts on the formation of tribal identity. First, "the school of internal colonialism believes that ethno-regional assertions are likely to result in economic dependent territories with ethnically distinctive populations that are characterized by hierarchical culture division of labour". Second "an instrumental approach to the mobilisation of regional identities argues that the movements likely to result from the perception of regional neglect or internal colonialism depended on the extent to which elites could fuse cultural or ethnic identities with a sense of a backward developmental profile to create a distinctive political identity"(ibid:53).

Chhattisgarh share a tribal population that is disproportionately larger than that of their parent states. Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh underscored the imperative to recognize tribal identity while simultaneously undertaking development activities in the region to improve the condition of tribal population of this resource-rich but poverty-stricken part of the country (Prakash, 2007). However, massive migration of people from the Bihar plains and other parts of India has reduced the tribal majorities in the newly formed states to minorities over time (Singh, 2008). Though initially, the Jharkhand demand was made to protect tribal culture, heritage, regional identity and development, the nature and character of this demand has undergone significant changes over the years due to demographic composition and political reasons (Prakash, 2002; 2012).

Interestingly, the state of Chhattisgarh, with a significant tribal population, was created as a separate state on the ground of administrative convenience and tribal identity by the NDA government though it had no history of popular mobilisation for the state (Tillin, 2013). Mawdsley (2002) contended that the BJP saw a political opportunity to form three new states to consolidate its political position and counter the rising lower caste-based parties to come to power in these states. Furthermore, Tillin (2013: 10-21) has described four causal factors and rationale for setting the inter-state borders in 2000: sociological (regional ethnic movements), federal-electoral politics (political opportunity structure created by coalition politics), political economy (rent-seeking interests of political, industrial and local elites), and administrative (improve administrative efficiency).

Similar demands for smaller states came from sub-regions of Andhra Pradesh (Telangana), Maharashtra (Vidharbha and Marathwada), Jammu and Kashmir (Jammu and Ladhak), Gujarat (Saurashtra and Kutch), Madhya Pradesh (Vindya Pradesh) etc., though these larger states were formed based on linguistic identity (Kumar, 2011; Chauhan, 2012: 253; Sarangi and Pai 2011). Mawdsely's (1999:110) study on the Uttarakhand movement highlighted that "although concerns of language, ethnicity, and religion play parts in regional demands, so do the issues of development and democracy administrative and political accountability, efficiency and greater control over politics and resources". These demands are not only based on ethno-national issues but also on economic backwardness, low political representation, and cultural discrimination.

The separate state movement for the Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh was a long-drawn movement. Despite speaking the same language, the Telangana movement came against the cultural, economic, and political disparities and diversion of resources — land, water, and jobs — in favour of coastal Andhra Pradesh (Bhattacharya et al., 2017; Haragopal, 2010; Hausing, 2018; Hohler, 2013:32; Ram, 2007; Srinivasulu, 2011; Jadhav, 2010; Srikanth, 2013; Suri, 2016). After a long struggle, Telangana was formed in June 2014, when the ‘political opportunity structure’ was ripe for the political parties, movement, and other actors in the multi-level interactive process (Hausing, 2018). Ironically, Andhra Pradesh, the first state to be formed based on linguistic identity in India was divided after six decades. The majority of Indian states were reorganised based on the linguistic nationalities, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the demand for Telangana and Bodoland and other such sub-region demands within the linguistic states have highlighted the limitation of language in holding people together within political units. The reason being the minority communities within the larger linguistic states, perceived weak power-sharing, historical injustice, cultural discrimination and economic deprivations and embarked on their own political projects (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018; Hohler, 2013; Srinivasulu, 2010; Hausing, 2018). The struggle and the formation of Telangana challenged the principle of linguistic nationality and provide an alternative framework for reorganizing states and recognition of regional identity and autonomy (Hausing, 2018; Srinivasulu, 2011).

Thus, the demand for states in 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and then 2000 to 2014 reflected regionalism and sub-regionalisms (region within the region), which are rooted in India’s many-fold diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, communities, and religions, which are fueled by a sense of regional deprivation (Bhattacharyya, 2005; Kumar, 2011; Singh, 2008; Hausing, 2018: 453; Prakash, 2002; Samaddar, 2011; Sarangi and Pai, 2011; Srinivasulu, 2011). It is to be noted that due to coalition politics, market economy, caste mobilisations etc., the ‘political opportunity structure’/political incentives within multi-level interactive process was driven by political parties, movements, leaders, and organisations (Hausing, 2018:453; Mawdsley, 2002; Tillin, 2013). Therefore, it must be noted that each region’s demand is unique, and different actors’ interests operate in demanding and carving

the new state borders²⁵. In this way, the politics of reorganisation in India was informed by political opportunism, coalition compulsions, and unprincipled bargaining among the stakeholders, which resulted in the 'politics of compromise' in state formations (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018:153; Hausing, 2018; Tillin, 2011).

While analyzing the Telangana movement and state formation, Suri (2016) summarises the following factors that contributed to the emergence of regional demands and the formation of states in India. First, the historical past is invoked to form regional identities in different political contexts. This includes memories of unity under governments in medieval and modern India and feelings of dominance and subjugation, pride, and shame inherited from the past. Second, demand for recognition of regional identities with autonomy or separate states is fueled by cultural differences, perceptions of domination of one region over another within a state (internal colonialism), and competition for employment and educational opportunities. The third factor is the imbalance in economic development between the regions. Fourth, administrative convenience as a criterion was foregrounded with the rise of population and increased participation. Fifth, the strategies of the national leadership to create new states to resolve the problem in the formation of the center-state relation generate new aspirations and emotions for the states. The parties, particularly national parties, saw their interest in reorganizing the states. Sixth, opposition parties and leaders, who are dissatisfied with power-sharing, would find an opportunity to support regional demands. Seventh, regional elites see political and economic opportunities in their states.

Therefore, we can infer that the initial phase of the formations of new states was principally based on ethno-linguistic identity; the second phase was on the ethnic-tribal identity. In the third phase, it was the political opportunity structures that played a crucial role. This study employs the above studies' arguments as the reference point and departure to understand the tribal demands and formation of districts in Telangana.

Several scholars have viewed that federalization/decentralization shows remarkable resilience, flexibility, vitality, and strength in accommodating diversity (Adeney, 2007; Bhattacharyya, 2001; Hausing, 2021). The majority of Indian states, sub-states, regional

²⁵However, Bhattacharyya (2021) critically viewed that the reorganisation of states in India was considered on the ground of recognition of cultural question and not on the redistribution question.

councils, and tribal councils at the district level are based on recognising and accommodating distinctive ethno-linguistic and tribal identities (Adeney, 2017:131; Hausing, 2021). Therefore, the trajectory of federal/decentralized accommodation reflects the gradual erection of decentralized structure and the creation of more territorial units for accommodating diversity.

In modern democracies, citizens cannot get rid of their socio-cultural and territorial attachments for modern politics, rather, they facilitate getting their entitlement and fulfilling individual dignity. There have been demands from territorially concentrated communities to decentralise power and access to resources through the formation of new states and districts. The formation of political units in a multi-ethnic federation like India revolves around recognising territorially concentrated groups and redefining their identities (Hausing, 2018:450). The political/administrative division reinforces the ethnic consciousness and formation of nationalities, particularly among territorially concentrated communities. Therefore, in deeply divided societies like India, all levels of political and governance units in the federal structure become the object of political competition (Horowitz, 1985:598). In these scenarios, political conflicts for political units are grounded in cultural, tribal identity, language and regional differences, developmental and resource claims. The formation of new political and administrative units influences the communities to make moral and political claims for revaluing identities and changing the dominant pattern of representation and access to resources. The accommodation of identities will provide the matrix to strike a balance between the justice and equality claims of communities. But the process and recognition of identity to provide power has always been a conflict-ridden and politically driven process. Drawing territorial borders that largely coincide with ethnic boundaries remain politically and socially complex. While the inter-state border change/state formations have received greater attention from scholars, the formation of new district borders has received no attention.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to understand how the tribal communities have been making moral and political claims centered on the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation for grounding their demands for new districts. How India's experiment with creating new states and sub-states within federalism accommodates the tribal demands of new districts therefore demands systematic study. Understanding the tribals' moral and

political claims provides an epistemological orientation to communities' politics. The following section aims to understand these.

2.6. The Politics of Recognition

German historians and philosophers from Johann Gottfried Herder to Leopold von Ranke used the idea of culture and recognition of cultural difference to question France and England's dominant and superior attitude of enlightenment and dominant culture²⁶ (Mahajan, 2002:56). They contended that communities in history are constituted by discrete and various cultures, each of which has its own values, moral norms, economic and political structures, and 'its own whole'. This, they averred, needs to be recognised in its own right (ibid). In this context, Hegel (cited in Fukuyama, 1992:155) viewed that the recognition drives man to rescue his life in the struggle or war for prestige but not for material concerns.

Charles Taylor (1994) conceptually developed the politics of recognition. He argued that identities are formed by recognition, and the absence or misrecognition of a person or group by others results in inflicting harm and suffering to them, denying them their existential identity. Taylor considers that 'recognition is a vital human need' (ibid: 26). According to him, two historical changes have made recognition inevitable in modern times. First, the collapse of social hierarchies based on honour (preferential rather than equal) is intrinsically linked to inequality. The notion of honour was replaced by the modern notion of dignity embedded in universalism and equality. This dignity is essential for democracy. Thus, democracy witnesses different demands of equal recognition like cultural and gender recognition (ibid: 27). Second, individual identity has been reconfigured in eighteenth century as with the idea of 'my', which he sees as the authenticity that is my own way of being. Individualism developed based on the notion that 'human being is endowed with a moral sense' (ibid). The identity of individuals emerged along with the idea of authenticity. With a capacity of moral sense, now individuals can judge what is right and wrong, which was missing in prior individuals who depended on the common good, which he referred as a moral accent. The idea of authenticity replaced the moral accent. According to Taylor, this process

²⁶ To understand the context of rise of debate on cultural question I have surveyed related literature from Taylor (1994) and Mahajan (2000).

of individual dignity was influenced by Rousseau, Herder, and Hegel whose discourse gave importance to dignity which is derived from personal self-worth (ibid).

Significantly, Taylor (1994:32) considers that human character is in dialogical relationship with the ‘significant others’. Thus, he says our identities are defined in dialogue or struggle with others and not defined in isolation (ibid: 33-34). The discourse of recognition operates at two levels, namely, the intimate sphere and the public sphere. He says that the transformation of honour to dignity influences politics in ways which foreground universal equalisation of rights and entitlements (ibid: 37). This process of equalisation affected not only the political sphere but also the socio-economic spheres.

In contrast, the second change that modern notion of identity brings about is the rise of the politics of difference that stressed the significance of differences of individuals and groups (ibid: 38). The politics of difference grows from universal dignity politics, as human beings are conditioned in their socio-economic spheres. Thus, the socio-economic redefinition justifies social programmes. The politics of difference makes a distinction based on differential treatment, and if not differentiated, they are further discriminated (ibid: 39). This can be done for two purposes. One is to cherish distinctiveness forever and the other is “the supposed neutral set of cultural blinded principles of equal dignity is a reflection of one hegemonic culture” (ibid: 43). Taylor critiques the Kantian view of not having collective good for individual autonomy on the ground that the substantive end (drawn from Dworkin) differs from culture to culture. Taylor (1994:59) notes ‘a society with strong collective goals can be liberal provided it can also allow diversity, particularly when dealing with those who do not share its common goals; and provide effective safeguards for fundamental rights’.

Agreeing with Taylor that recognition is vital to the human being, Honneth (2003:111) views that the ‘traditional problem of capitalist society is no longer considered to be central to current moral disquiet’. He suggests that contemporary movements need to be understood from the conceptual framework of recognition (ibid: 112). He argues for moral ‘monoism’ wherein recognition solves the material and non-material concerns of identity. Therefore, recognition is a fundamental and overarching moral category, while distribution is derivative within it. According to Honneth, there are three spheres of recognition, viz.; love,

law, and solidarity. The term 'love' denotes our physical requirements and emotional relationship with others and builds our primary relationships (such as close friends, family, and loved ones). It delivers essential self-confidence, which can be devastated by physical abuse. The second sphere is rights (law) that denotes to the growth of moral responsibility, established through our moral relations with others. 'Its a mutual method of recognition in which a person learns to perceive himself through the eyes of his or her interaction partner as a bearer of equal rights' (ibid: 194). The denial of rights through social and legal exclusion could jeopardise one's sense of self as a fully engaged, equal, and valued member of society. The third sphere is 'solidarity,' which is concerned with the recognition of our characteristics and skills/abilities. 'It is critical to boost our self-esteem and become more "individualised," because our own characteristics and abilities are what distinguish us' (Honneth, 1995: 122). As a result, 'unlike love and rights, which communicate universal human characteristics, esteem necessitates a social medium that must express the distinctive differences between human subjects in a universal, and more precisely, intersubjectively obligatory manner' (ibid). All three spheres of recognition are critical to developing a positive attitude towards oneself. Rejections of these recognitions make people struggle for their rights.

Unlike Taylor and Honneth who viewed recognition from self-realization point of view, Nancy Fraser (2003; 2009) considers recognition as an issue of justice. She disagrees with Honneth's argument and proposes the 'perspective dualism' analysis wherein recognition, redistribution, and added representation categories are co-fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice. 'The disassociation between politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation causes the widespread decoupling of the cultural politics of difference from the social politics of equality and denial of political agency' (ibid, 2003:12). She considers that the difference between the claims of recognition and redistribution is a false antithesis; justice requires a synthesis of all these claims (which is referred to as 'substantive dualism') (ibid, 2003:12-15; 2009). Fraser substantiates her argument by examining the case of gender, where she highlights that females are deprived of their worth in both labor and through cultural practices. She argues that it is unjust if someone or groups are deprived of the status of full participation or partner in social interaction due to the institutionalised pattern of cultural values that prevent their participation. In this context, Fraser brings into fore the notion of 'participation parity', which provides space for equal

participation with fair terms of interaction under the condition of value pluralism (Fraser, 1998:3). Fraser further argues that everyone has an equal right to pursue social esteem under fair terms of the condition of equal opportunity. Thus, unlike other thinkers, she connected social esteem with fair terms of conditions where everyone avail equal opportunity. According to her normative conception of parity participation, justice necessitates social measures that provide ambience to all members of society to intermingle as peers. To achieve participation parity two settings must be fulfilled: First, the distribution of material resources must ensure participant's independence and 'voice'. Second, cultural institutions must express equal respect for all and ensure equal opportunities for earning social esteem. Recognition, redistribution, and representation are essential, and neither one is sufficient to achieve the 'participation parity'/justice (ibid: 5).

Bringing new dimension by highlighting the foundational aspects of the politics of recognition, James Tully (1995:1) notes that "the question is not whether one should support or oppose cultural diversity; rather it is the antecedent question of the critical attitude or spirit in which justice can be rendered to the demands for cultural recognition". He argues that injustice is meted out when the constitution fails to recognise cultural communities. Such recognition is vital to determine voices in the discussions and negotiations that constitute the societies' crucial public institutions. Tully (1995) refers to six demands of cultural recognition politics, namely: first, demand for statehood and ethnic autonomy within the state; second, multi-national organisations challenge to the nation state; third, demand from minorities and linguistic communities for their political and legal protections; fourth, demand from immigrants for their social safeguards; fifth, feminists demand for changing socio-political structure to have their representation; and sixth is about aboriginal communities demand to be reconditioned as first nations for self-government, settlement of the land, respect for treaty obligations, and compensation for past injustices. The aboriginals' struggle for constitutional recognition may conflict with other cultural recognitions in many different ways (ibid: 2-3). According to Tully, there is a clash of cultures between mentioned groups, and they all try logging for the institutions (ibid: 4). All these demands have three common concerns: first, all cultures demand self-rule. Second, they see that current institutional arrangements reflect dominant power, which is unjust and against the principle of self-rule. Third, they assume that culture is an irreducible and a constitutive aspect of politics (ibid: 4-6).

A just constitution, constructed by the deliberation and negotiations among equals, ensures that each person is given their own dues (politics of cultural recognition). The modern constitution-making process neglected intercultural dialogue. Thus, the politics of cultural recognition are emerging (ibid: 28-29). Tully does accept that indigenous communities or minority cultures have been provided constitutional recognition in many countries. But, he argues that the language of their accommodation does not reflect the 'political traditions of interpretation' of these cultures in their own rights. These traditions were unheeded by modern constitutionalism (liberalism, nationalism, and communitarianism) (ibid: 35-37). Tully further says that in modern constitutionalism, different communities have not been accommodated in order to suppress diversity and to defend uniformity. He contends that the constitutional making process should be evaluative, not telos (purpose/goal). The evolutionary constitutional process must reflect all participants as equal interlocutors who deliberate in terms of equal recognition. This process can frame a just society (ibid).

Further, scholars viewed that individuals' identity is closely bound by culture, and cultural identity is crucial for 'personal agency and development' (Kymlicka, 1989:176; Mahajan 2002:45). Though individuals may not like to associate with a particular identity, they cannot escape all forms of discrimination or disadvantages vested in their groups (Phillips, 2007: 15; Kymlicka, 1989). Similarly, Walzer (1983:314) views that the diverse cultural orientations express diverse views in society and polity because the historical and social experiences shape them. So, the distribution of social and political good must be in terms of their distinguished identity. Therefore, minority communities' rights cannot be subsumed under undifferentiated citizenship as some groups are unfairly disadvantaged in the cultural marketplace. Political recognition, and support from state rectifies these disadvantages (Kymlicka, 1995:109; 1989). 'The majority's economic and political policies may jeopardise the viability of their societal cultures' (ibid, 1995:109). 'They could be outbid or outvoted on resources and policies that are vital to their socio-culture's existence' (ibid). Therefore, people with a protective culture will protect their material and political-economic interests (Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000:8-9). Carens (2000) suggests that equality and freedom require us to respect claims about culture and identity within the contexts unfold.

Additionally, Bhargava (1999:12) enlists three dialogical or structural contexts within which demand for political recognition is made. These are: first, ‘particularized hierarchy’ in which a relationship exists between two communities: dominant and subordinate. Here the difference is maintained but within the relation of subordination. The purpose of difference in this context is sustained by treating communities unequally. Second, ‘universalistic equality’ denies cultural rights and what matters is membership in the abstract political community. Third, ‘particularized equality’ wherein people are differentiated, but there is equal relation among different cultural communities (ibid). In these contexts, to prevent the domination of other cultures, ‘the community tends to assert for separate and special community rights, particularly of self-governance, activates the reinvention of community history, traditions and identity in a way that underlines distinctiveness from others’ (Mahajan, 2011:17).

The recognition of identities of the territorially concentrated groups is central in demand for forming a political unit. ‘The government’s decision on internal boundaries unavoidably involves recognition, accommodating, and supporting particular ethnic groups’ and grants these groups significant institutional resources (Adeney, 2017:130; Kymlicka, 1995:115; Bhattacharyya, 2021:51). Hausing (2018:450) considers that ‘in a multicultural setting where territorially concentrated groups lack the numbers, power, or resources to affect change in the ways norms, rules, and procedures of intersubjective recognition are deliberated, formulated, and implemented, the consequences of non-recognition or misrecognition can be oppressive’. Drawing from the above theoretical work, one could infer that the politics of recognition is an important concern for communities’ territorial recognition through political units.

The tribals’ projection of cultural, language, spatial, and historical differences became the normative base for claiming moral and political legitimacy for recognition, autonomy/self-governance, and control over the resources. The entry of the modern state (both colonial and post-colonial) into the tribal areas has changed the socio-political nature, i.e., community’s identity becomes the fulcrum of governance and politics. Additionally, the modern political and administrative borders have been factors in developing tribal identity consciousness (Prakash, 2002; Singh, 1982; Xaxa and Puia, 2020). Initially, the educated

section of tribes, quick to learn from the nationalist leaders, employed their history, glorified the past tribal struggles, and utilized the tribal unique heritage to produce images of the autonomous form of tribal nationalities that asserted ethno-territorial recognition from the colonial and the post-colonial state (Prakash, 1999: 466). But their nationhood is yet to materialize in the form of distinct political-administrative units or arrangements baring the northeast' (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 89). Additionally, after the rise of global indigenous solidarity movements from the late 1980s and 90s, the tribal activists were quick to appropriate or make an alliance to strengthen their moral and political claims (Rycroft and Sangeeta, 2011: 8). The tribals demand for identity recognition and autonomy entail inter-state borders change from 1950s to 2014 i.e., until the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. The demand for states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Gondwana, Manyaseema, and Bhilwada are exemplars (Prakash, 2002; Singh, 1982; Sundar, 2007; Xaxa, 2008). This demand also extended to the sub-regional or ethnic concentrated areas while creating new districts. The argument emanates from the logic that the territorial border of the district unit should follow the ethnic boundaries and ethnically connected towns as district headquarters.

The territorial and ethnic identity, language and socio-cultural practices have been salient in shaping political and governance in Scheduled/tribal areas. Identity and self-governance have always been on the tribal political agenda. The communities' primordial and ascribed identities have always been major elements in the tribal politics of recognition and claims for dignity. Thus, the politics of recognition is all about the revaluation of identities that have lacked the desired status. The political situation depends on the culture and social setting, which cannot be negated in identity formation and subsequent moral and political assertions. Thus, the tribal cultural campaign seeks to further their own cultural and political agenda within their regions. In this study, the politics of recognition is defined with certain constituting aspects such as socio-culture assertions, territorial and ecological claims, language, constitutional recognition/self-governance, community's history, association with symbolic struggle and sites, etc.

2.7. The Politics of Redistribution

The redistributive aspects have played an important role in influencing modern political development. The dominant mono-cultural governance model within liberal democracy has been based on the individual-centric understanding, and all citizens are treated as equals. In this model, identities are considered inappropriate in influencing the distribution of/control over resources. This line of thinking considers cultural differences as a site of exclusion of citizens from common rights, thus, supporting equal rights for all citizens without considering groups' cultural contexts. Similarly, the Marxist perspective stressed that all concerns of human beings in modern-capitalist society revolve around economic issues. Thus, all political struggles are economic struggles, and the cultural question remains secondary that is seen as the super-structure/epiphenomenal to the 'core' i. e., economy. This perspective views incompatibility or antithesis between material and recognition claims or has given more priority to redistributive aspects over recognition in the social and political discourse.

But the 'multiculturalists and the defenders of cultural rights-based politics argue that this idea has not effectively materialized the goal of equality' (Mahajan, 2002:87). In most societies, some groups are privileged while others are oppressed and systematically exploited due to their social difference and economic backwardness (Young, 1990). The culture-based differentiated framework provides certain rights and assurance for their material dignity (Kymlicka, 1995). Therefore, the adherents of groups' rights link identities assertions with the claims over the state and natural resources. Thus, the culture-based differentiated framework provides certain rights and assurance for the material dignity of neglected or backward groups.

The differentiated material equality was first developed by Taylor (1994:39) who argued that different socio-economic conditions define the deferential preference in material allocation. Thus, social location plays a vital role in redistribution. Later on, Honneth (2003:118-120) viewed that distributional injustice is embedded in the institutional expression of social disrespect. Further, Tully (1995) points out that the different constituencies should play a role in framing and setting constitutional agendas that take care of redistributive aspects. Fraser's (2003) intervention makes a remarkable contribution to this debate. She

argues that redistribution and recognition are dimensions of justice, these two cannot be traded off. It was Fraser who highlighted the autonomous significance of redistribution within the politics of recognition (difference).

Banting and Kymlicka (2006) examined the trade-off between recognition and redistribution. Banting and Kymlicka have defended Multicultural Recognition Policies (MRPs) and discarded three main criticisms leveled against MRPs in the following ways (ibid).

Table.2.1: Criticisms and Defences on Multicultural Recognition Policies

Major Criticism on MRPs	Banting and Kymlicka's Defenses of MRPs
The 'crowding out effect', i. e. MRPs weaken the pro-redistribution politics by diverting attention from redistribution to recognition	The MRPs have not abandoned the problem of economic inequality, in fact, the MRPs have redeveloped welfare politics by developing agency within neglected communities, and the issues of economic inequality are left out in general with a sense of hopelessness
The 'corroding effect', i. e. the MRPs are eroding trust and solidarity among the common citizens	The MRPs resulted from pre-existing lack of solidarity/trust as the dominant culture never trusted diverse communities
The 'misdiagnosis effort' point out two problems with MRPs- the rhetoric of MRPs club all ethnic communities together as equal victims of misrecognition rather than focusing on individual cases such as race, and the other critique is that the ethnic and racial difference have replaced attention to the class which does not produce pan class issue	The MRPs of justice in one sphere would also impact other spheres. Therefore, they view that economic concern is always embedded in MRPs

Source: Prepared by researcher drawing from Banting and Kymlicka (2006:3-20)

Banting and Kymlicka argue that the effect of the trade-off between MRPs and redistribution needs to be contextualised and cannot be generalized (ibid: 44). Hence, identities play a key role in forming material interests (Kymlicka, 1995).

The redistribution entails allocating resources among various groups, organisations, and institutions. The claims of redistribution involve in substantive political-economic

restructuring, i.e.,— redistribution and control over the resources and institutions such as states or districts. In diverse society like India, communities compete for scarce state and natural resources through political units. Predominantly, conflicts over resources are linked to the nature of the Indian society that is seen as the complete grid of inequality, exploitation, and discrimination. Different communities' experiences vary in their magnitude of exploitations, marginalization, poverty levels, and different stages of development (Bardhan, 2005: 185; Malik, 2020:46).

The tribal areas in India are still way behind the mainstream development process (Bakshi et al., 2015:49). Crippled by Maoist insurgencies, they have devolved into backward enclaves (ibid). The predominant tribal sub-districts within the larger districts in India suggest a continuum packet of underdeveloped area (ibid). In many states, most advanced sub-districts are predominately non-tribals, which are flanked by most underdeveloped tribal sub-districts. This developmental disparity, in spatial terms, manifests in dividing mainstream areas as core and tribal areas as peripheries (ibid: 50). Furthermore, this condition is primarily blamed for the continued influence of the Maoist movement in the tribal areas (Dandekar and Choudhury, 2010; Guha, 2007; Nilsen, 2018; 2012; Roy, 2010). State control over the tribal areas through various means such as demarcating these areas as forest and wildlife areas has led to growing disempowerment of the tribes especially pertaining to access to natural resources that the tribals had enjoyed for centuries (Singh J., 2016:175; Xaxa, 2008:69).

Though tribal areas are rich in forest and mineral resources and have been subject to the extraction of resources, little benefits flow to the tribal area (Shah et al., 1998; Bakshi, et al., 2015:50). In the name of development, all the essential resources such as land, water, and forests have been nationalised and tribals have borne the brunt of displacement and dispossession resulting in internal colonialism (Nathan and Xaxa, 2012; Xaxa, 2008; Baviskar, 1995; Nilsen, 2010; Ramdas, 2009; Tillin, 2013). Despite constituting only 8.6% of India's population, STs account for 40% of those displaced since independence due to the construction of dams, mining activities, and establishment of industries, wildlife parks, and sanctuaries (CPR's Report, 2020). As a result, this group has suffered a disproportionate share of the burden of economic development.

The various Commissions and Committees appointed by the government have pointed the state's failure to improve the material conditions of the tribal communities (Mungekar Committee, 2009; Xaxa Committee, 2013). The STs are plagued by poverty and landlessness. Nearly 47% of STs live under poverty in rural areas, compared to 33.8% for the national average. Even though they are the only communities with constitutional safeguards of land rights, 9.4% of STs are landless, compared to 7.4% for the national average" (CPR's Report, 2020). The central and state governments' protective legislations to end tribal exploitation and land alienation have not worked effectively. There is a sense of injustice that tribal areas have been neglected in development, but the resources are being exploited to develop other regions or sections at the cost of tribal lives (Guha, 2007; Nathan and Xaxa, 2012; Weiner, 1978). As a result, increasing regional disparities with the acute poverty and deprivation in the tribal areas have always been a major concern of tribal politics. The educated tribals started claiming better economic prospects and demanded separate political units (Prakash, 1999).

Additionally, the welfare politics or state-led redistribution (largesse from the state) influences the pattern of cultural and assertive aspects of the communities. Though the state wants to develop the tribals on the line of industrialization and assimilation, tribal assertions have been growing to control the resource (Xaxa, 2008). The areas are recognized as backward areas to allocate special grants such as Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF)/Aspirational District Programme (ADP) and funds under Article 270 and the tribal Sub-plan. There was a dominant view among the policymakers that all elements of tribal identity would vanish as they get assimilated, with the economic strategies mentioned above and the modernisation process. Contrary to this belief, the consolidation and assertion of the tribal communities for their identity recognition, autonomy, and control over the resources through institutional means have challenged assimilationists' view, which saw modernity as a panacea. Thus, we can observe the unfolding of the process of 'modernity of tradition', to use Rudolph and Rudolph's (1967) phrase, which adapt modernity to suit the traditions and culture of the tribal communities. The trajectory of the engagements between the state and the tribals has generated a political process wherein they were made as subject citizens. Increased ethnicization of Adivasi identity leveraged them to bargain with the state and control resources in their areas even as backwardness becomes the basis for claiming group-

differentiated rights (Jayal, 2013: 266). Therefore, for the tribal communities, redistribution/access to resources are the source of material dignity. In this context, it is essential to understand the role of redistributive politics in tribal demands for the districts.

2.8. Representation

The sources of tribal marginalisation are not limited to cultural and economic aspects but are also seen in the political domain. Politics is a collective affair wherein all interests and concerns need to be reflected. The rise of group politics has changed the conventional notion of representation i.e., common citizenship. Communities and groups demanding representation in the political arena have identified another important site of injustice in the forms of underrepresentation, denial of participation, and misrepresentation. Thus, representation is one of the essential dimensions of justice, along with recognition and redistribution. Philosophers such as Taylor (1994), Kymlicka (1989), Young (1990), and others have changed the earlier notion of common citizenship by stressing the importance of group representation. Likewise, Tully (2005) argued for communities' representation in constituting constitutional institutions. Further, Fraser (2003; 2009) argued that representation is one of the important dimensions of justice. According to Fraser (1998:6), denial of participation causes injustice to the communities, and 'people's struggle for recognition and collective agency depends on securing 'participation parity'.

While theorizing the concept of representation, Pitkin (1967) has distinguished four types of representations: formalistic, substantive, descriptive, and symbolic. Among the four, the substantive and descriptive representations have emerged as the two major conceptual categories in examining representation. The substantive form of representation is concerned with the representative's performance based on the universal principle of representing everyone; a member belonging to one group can represent other groups. The descriptive form is involved with the representative's identification. It has been stated that descriptive modes of representation are required in a diverse society, what Phillips (1995) calls the 'politics of presence'. Similarly, Young (1990:184) has also opined that different social groups have specific expectations and viewpoints, influencing contrasting policy and political reasoning. In this context, Jayal (2006:6) notes that 'the universally established rights of political

citizenship are insufficient to ensure representation of communities defined based on ascriptive identities'. As a result, effective representation of disadvantaged groups through special provisions within institutions is necessary.

Mansbridge (1999) has mentioned the essential contexts for descriptive representation: first, there is mistrust between the marginalised and dominant groups; second, marginalised group's under-representation. Third, communities' past discrimination and subjugation. Fourth, the existence of a condition in which marginalized groups's ability to rule is openly questioned. The essence of the argument is that no one should be denied their basic rights of political participation because of their identity, and differences should be respected.

The above studies underscore the significance of providing representation to disadvantaged groups like tribes. The culturally differentiated spaces that are politically acknowledged or recognized have different political spheres. This process makes them exercise their agency and define the public sphere according to their own understanding and experiences. The politics of representation is important in two respects, first, it challenges dominance or oppression; second, it underscores that differences must be recognised to provide representation. Mahajan (2011:8-9) considers that the "absence or marginalization of the community from the areas of public life and underrepresentation merits serious consideration". Given that Indian society is a community of communities, ethnic/territorial identity-based representation gains saliency. Here ethnic difference is often channeled to a demand for autonomy/self-governance and symbolic representation.

The groups' politics stress that the communities need to be represented in the deliberative and other institutions to protect their interest and distinctiveness in order to avoid the domination of advanced communities over marginalised communities such as tribals. The territorialization of political units play a vital role in providing representation in public bodies, namely, symbolic and political representations, employment, and self-governance.

The desire for autonomy and self-governance²⁷ in the tribal areas has been the leitmotif of tribal politics. The decentralization debate in the tribal area is fundamentally about self-governance through formation of ethnic areas. The Indian Constitution recognises the self-governing rights of tribal communities through the Vth and VIth Schedules of the constitution. These special rights are listed to minimise the homogenisation of tribal communities within the mainstream. The belief is that identities of territorially concentrated communities play an essential role in representing their collective entities. However, there is overarching dominance of the central and the state governments in the tribal areas because they are located within the state's boundaries. The self-governing institutions lack the effectiveness to protect tribal interests (Singh J., 2016). Added to this problem, 'tribal interests cannot be easily articulated in the legislative domain since the ST reserved seats are so remote or dispersed across the country' (Guha, 2007). The tribals are underrepresented in political parties and institutional positions (ibid). Therefore, the tribal communities' demand for the federal/decentralised units also emerges from the concerns of increasing their representation and exercising their collective agency.

Representation in tribal politics can be understood in two ways. First, it means the role of the community's elite in political power-sharing and access to public offices. Second, increased participation of communities through demographic strength and symbolic representation by including their historical struggle and symbolic sites in new districts and overlapping districts borders with the constitutionally recognised Scheduled Areas.

In this competitive context, new political units will assist the communities in increasing their political and symbolic representation by increasing the proportion of their population within new units. The spatial distribution of people has a significant influence over the politics of ethnic-territoriality (Basta et al., 2015: 5). Many of the democratic society's representative systems reflect the institutional presence of the dominant interests and identity. The demographic configuration would also assist the tribal communities in countering the outsiders/non-tribals' dominance and leveraging their positions within the administrative and political units. The geographical separation, distinct ethnic and culture, and legal pluralism

²⁷ Mary Ellen Turpel notes that 'self-determination is defined as the right of every culturally and historically diverse people to select their political position through democratic means' (in Tennant, 1994:43).

that operates in the territory qualify them to claim decentralization by instituting borders and being at the helm. Thus, the district provides the tribals a modest local autonomy and creates the *sine qua non* condition for their participation.

Given this trajectory and concerns of the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation, this study employs the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation as theoretical/analytical variables to understand the tribals' moral and political claims that undergird their demand for new districts.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter began by defining and contextualizing borders of political units. The creation of political units at the national level and described the multiple strategies of accommodation, particularly to highlight significance of federal/decentralisation in deeply divided societies. In addition, the chapter has discussed the drawing of the border at the provincial state level and the role of various factors such as linguistic, ethnic, and political, etc., in institutionalisation of boundaries of federal units. Understanding of redrawing of inter-state boundaries make reference and departure point to understand and contextualise the drawing of the border at the district level. The subsequent sections have discussed the concepts of the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

Redrawing the internal boundaries or inter-state and intra-state boundaries in deeply divided societies provide recognition, redistribution, and representation to the territorially concentrated groups or may undermine their demographic strength. Institutional building process through political units plays a vital role in accommodation or assimilation. It is essential to understand how the tribal communities have employed their moral and political claims centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in demanding the new districts. The subsequent chapters of this study examine the accommodation of tribal demands, and its implications on the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in the new districts.

Chapter 3

Historical Trajectories of Politics and Governance: Territorial and Ethnic Identity Formation in Tribal Areas

3.1. Introduction

“Jaal Jangal, Jamin Hamara Haih (water, forest and land belongs to us)” – Komuram Bheem (cited in Sahu and Rajaiah, 2010:84)

“Sir, if there is any group of Indian people that has been shabbily treated, it is my people. They have been disgracefully treated, neglected for the last 6,000 years. The whole history of my people is one of continuous exploitation and dispossession by the non-aboriginals of India punctuated by rebellions and disorder, and yet I take Jawahar Lal Nehru at his word. I take you all at your word that now we are going to start a new chapter of independent India where there is equality of opportunity, and no one would be neglected”- Jaipal Singh Munda (cited in Guha, 2007a: 318)

Komuram Bheem’s slogan emerged in the tribal revolt against the Nizam’s government in 1941, asserting that water, forest, and land belong to them. This assertion underscores radical demarcation of boundaries of tribal areas and establishing their identity. Similarly, while welcoming the Objective Resolution in the Constituent Assembly debate in December 1946, Jaipal Singh Munda, an Adivasi leader, had sought to assert the tribal difference by reinforcing the historical, socio-political boundaries between the tribals and mainstream society. While mindful of the unravelling civic and political engagements in independent India, he underscores that such engagements need to foreground ‘equality of opportunity’ by taking into account tribal difference. Both these Adivasi leaders have categorically stressed the political and social differences of the tribal communities and their areas.

In the Constituent Assembly debates, Jaipal Singh’s intervention specifies the ideological and normative terms of engagement between the state and the tribals in independent India. Indeed, this engagement and the discourse that it entails, has been a major source for tribal political consolidation and frame for the state’s institutional and developmental strategies. This chapter focuses on the historical trajectory of political and institutional development in the tribal areas of India²⁸ while specifically focusing on the tribal areas of Telangana. It intends to contribute to understanding the ethnicisation of the identity in

²⁸ The study focuses on peninsular Indian tribes and excludes the northeastern tribal areas given the latter’s different/unique geo-political situations and historical background.

the tribal areas, the drawing of formal and informal socio-political borders from ethno-territorial vantage points.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on political system and tribal society of the pre-colonial period. The second and third sections describe the governance and politics in colonial and post-colonial periods.

3.2. Pre-Colonial Political Formation in Tribal Areas

Adivasis mostly live in and around the forest, popularly known as Agency or jungle areas, historically perceived as ‘peripheries’ of the mainland (Bhukya, 2017; Sen, 2018). These areas are often regarded as backward regions in terms of development (Bakshi, et al., 2015; Shah et al., 1998). Tribal communities have their respective chiefs and clan councils (panchayat) or socio-political organisations to manage their social, religious, economic, and political affairs (Sundar, 2007:39). The economy of the tribals had been depended on land, forest products, and grazing cattle. Forest and land have been vital for the tribals’ ways of life (Sen, 2018). The distinctive ecological, economic, and territorial features have been employed as identity makers in the tribal political and developmental discourse (ibid).

The contiguous tribal areas in central India, including Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Gujarat and Rajasthan, appear geographically, historically, and politically different from other plain areas. The pre-colonial and colonial regimes which sought to rule the tribal areas divided these areas by drawing internal boundaries for securing resources, and in other cases for political, and administrative reasons. This gradually transformed socially closed and culturally knitted communities into a fluid landscape of informal exchange and social relationships which overtime become institutionally regulated areas. Against this backdrop, the following sections shed light on the tribal communities’ engagements with larger states from the pre-colonial period.

In the pre-colonial period, though there had been cultural and political differences between the tribal areas and the plain areas there was a functional relationship between the tribes and the mainland people (Xaxa, 2008). Scholars, who defended the pre-colonial

differences between the tribes and the caste-Hindus, argue that the mainstream society produced this cultural difference by portraying the tribes in a pejorative sense such as *mlechhas* (as barbarians, primitive), *dasu*, *jangli* and so on (Sen, 2018; Skaria, 1998)²⁹. The tribals who had their own local political and social systems reconfigured their premodern identities such as *jungli*, wildness, and tribe in a more positive sense to their benefits in negotiating with the modern expansionist state or larger political entities (Bhukya, 2017: 5; Sen, 2018; Skaria, 1997; Xaxa, 2008). In the process, the plain and forest divide became more apparent. In other words, they became the marginalised and politically excluded ‘others’ in the modern world (Gupta, 2019:108). Binary categories such as civilized-uncivilized, modern-backward, and governed-ungoverned are invoked, which overtime constitute the ideological underpinnings of social boundaries. These foreground tribal imaginary boundaries, which become very helpful for the construction of social and spatial identity of the tribal communities.

In the case of tribal areas of central India and the Deccan (the territory under Nizam’s rule), the tribal communities acted autonomously under larger political entities or empires. From the mid 13 century, four Gond dynasties ruled in Chanda, Kherla, Deogarh, and Garha (it covered tribal areas of central India and areas of the north-eastern part of Deccan region, that is, Telangana). The tribal dynasties sometimes ruled as independent rulers and as subordinate rajas or under the suzerainty of empires by paying tributes or taxes (Bhukya, 2017; Haimendorf, 1979; Munshi, 2012; Prasad, 2003; Sundar, 2007). Bhukya (2017: 36) documents that ‘from the early medieval period, the local Gond chiefs had control over their people and resources, and whenever imperial powers like the Kakatiyas, Vijayanagara rulers, Bahmani sultans, Nizams of Hyderabad and Marathas weakened, they maintained their sovereignty in their respective territories’. Drawing from James Scott’s concept of hill people evading state, Bhukya (2017:3) viewed that ‘the freedom-loving tribals’ whose socio-political order was based on community norms tried to evade the states in order to have self-rule and self-governance’. He further contends that ‘the divide between the

²⁹ Conversely, scholars like Beteille (1986), Prasad (2003), and Sundar (2007) have opined that there are no major political differences between the mainland and tribes in the forest areas, they coexisted before colonial rule. Beteille (1986:309), drawing from Kosambi’s historical study, showed a proclivity for the cohabitation of caste-Hindus and tribes. However, he noted that ‘the Hindu Kings and, to a considerable part, Muslim successors did not strive to evict tribes, but permitted or even encouraged them to remain on the periphery’.

mainland and tribal areas is a byproduct of the historical encounter between the dominant and the subordinate groups of the mainland' (ibid:1). Given their geographical location, 'the tribal areas were generally considered impassable forest terrain'. This perception ensured the form of administration that was both *laissez-faire* (minimal government interference) and, when necessary, highly repressive and whose main purpose was the extraction of revenue in the form of tribute payments and resources such as timber (Sundar, 2007; Bates and Shah, 2014). Later on, state expansion was achieved through expansion of land grants to non-tribals and the taxation system. In this process, the clearing of forests for agriculture was crucial for enhancing revenue of the state.

In Deccan India, which covers the tribal areas of Telangana, the Kakatiya rulers momentarily undertook the development of the tank-irrigation system to expand agriculture in 14th century. The tank irrigation policy was followed by the Vijaynagara kings and the Qutb Shahis, which encouraged many social groups to practice agriculture and settle permanently in the forest and tribal areas. However, this process was not free from tensions. The tribals often resisted empire-building, for instance, the fight against the Kakatiya rulers by Sammakka and Sarakka from the Koya tribes (Bhukya, 2017:10). The tension between the social groups in the forest areas further deepened with the growing population. There was increasing pressure on land, forest areas, and resources like timber, minerals, forest reserves, and so on (Reddy and Anil, 2010). This was the scenario unfolding in the tribal areas in the pre-colonial period.

3.3. Governing Tribal Areas in Colonial Period

The imperial powers exercised nominal sovereignty in the pre-colonial period particularly over forest and hill areas, while local communities had sovereign power over their territories, resources, and people (Bhukya, 2010; Xaxa, 2008). Initially, the colonial rulers believed that the forests and hills were only the domain of wild and unruly people. Not only would administering these tracts be difficult, but it would also be uneconomical for the government, as the places were unsuitable for business and governance (Bhukya, 2017:51; Chandra, 2013a). Thus, these areas were allowed to be governed by the traditional tribal system or through local rajas subject to pay tributes to the colonial state (Bhukya, 2017: 51). Gradually,

for the sake of extracting resources, the tribal areas were brought under the control of colonial rule by taming their rajas by imposing a new forest and governance system (Bhukya, 2017: 50; Guha, 1983:130-49; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999:13). Thus, the colonial state-making process subordinated the traditional tribal political orders. All these acts resulted in the breakdown of tribals' traditional authority, and the colonial government adopted a paternalistic approach towards the tribals (Guha, 1983). This resulted in a new consciousness, particularly among the educated rajas who started questioning the colonial domination (Bhukya, 2017: 51).

Concerning the tribal areas of Telangana,³⁰ Mir Qamar-ud-Din Siddiqi (Asaf Jah I), also known as the Nizam, the provincial Governor of the Telangana region, declared the region as an independent state³¹ (Reddy and Anil, 2010: 20). This coincided with the decline of the Mughal Empire in the early 18th century. With the consolidation of colonial rule in India, the Telangana region of Hyderabad state was under the British paramount power, as a 'princely state'. Under this indirect rule, colonial political rationality was imposed to regularise and control people (Bhukya, 2017). 'The British introduced legislation in favour of private rights over property, forest Acts, courts of law, revenue, and forest and excise apparatus from the district level to the smallest village'(Reddy and Anil, 2010: 24). 'Individual rights to resources were formed as a result of this process, which demolished collective frameworks' (ibid). Influenced and guided by the colonial rulers, the Nizams controlled the tribals and the forest areas as the forest resources were brought under the Nizam's Revenue Department (ibid: 20).

Against this backdrop, the tribals revolted in the Rampa area (near Bhadrachalam area) in 1802-03 against the Britishers, the latter inhumanely suppressed the former by projecting the rebellion as anti-social (ibid). With the loss of power and their marginalisation, the tribal communities carried their raids on Britishers and the Nizams of Hyderabad (Bhukya, 2017:52). Likewise, thousands of Gonds and Rohillas, under the leadership of Ramji from the Gond tribe, created turmoil in the Adilabad district of Hyderabad state throughout the 1860s (Rajagopal, 1976: 24). With the British government's help, the Nizam's

³⁰ Before and after the arrival of the colonial rule, major parts of the tribal areas of Central and Deccan areas were under the Nizam and some parts under the Marathas and Madras Presidency.

³¹ The region composed of the erstwhile districts of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Medak, Khammam, Nalgonda, Nizamabad, Mahbubnagar, and Warangal.

government had suppressed the revolt at Nirmal in Telangana in 1860 (ibid: 33-34). Similarly, in 1867, the neighboring Bastar state also witnessed a major revolt against the British interventions, corrupt practices to protect the tribals' traditional system (Sundar, 2007).

The tribal rebellions had targeted the colonialists and the money lenders and feudal lords who acted as the social support base for the colonialists. The colonial attempts to impose taxes, seize land, invalidate the tribal legal and social system, control resources, and extend patronage to the feudal and money lenders were the significant factors that led to the tribal revolts (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019:10; Bhukya, 2017:52). Further, Reddy and Anil (2010:22) contended that the tribal movements were not merely against money-lenders or migrants to tribal areas as often portrayed by European scholars, they were also against alien rule. Thus, whenever the tribals were faced outsider's rule, they expressed themselves in ways to assert their autonomy to maintain their traditional system³².

After suppressing the tribal revolts, the British government recognised limited rights of the Gond rulers in the 1860s (Bhukya, 2017). At the same time, the colonial administration gave allowances to Bastar and Chanda rulers. Despite the loss of communal sovereignty, raja Mokhasis (Gond chiefs), who served as traditional village heads and revenue collectors, continued to wield their customary power under the Nizam's reign (ibid:11). The above policy was pursued to serve two purposes: firstly, to appease the tribal rajas, and secondly, to gradually integrate tribals into wider caste-Hindu society by imposing a new land revenue system, i.e., granting *Zamindari* (land given to the landlord) rights to the local rajas and encouraging caste-Hindus to settle in the forest and tribal areas (ibid). However, these measures further caused discontent among tribal communities as their land was alienated and exploited by outside forces.

³² During this period, there were prominent revolts and rebellion in other parts of tribal India against the British rule and outsiders, namely: the revolt of Pahariya Sirdars (1778), Tamar revolt (1789, 1794–1795), tribal revolt (1807–1808) and agrarian tribal revolts (1811, 1817, 1820), Bhumij revolt (1832–1833), the Santhal rebellion (1855–1857), the Kherwar/Sardari movement (1858–1895) (Raghavaiah, 1979). The Kol insurrection of 1833 was caused by encroachment on tribal land. The Tamar rebellions occurred seven times between 1789 and 1832, mostly as a result of the illegal confiscation of the Hos, Mundas, and Oraons' land rights. The Santhal revolt (1855) was primarily a reaction to landlords, local moneylenders, and other oppressors (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019:12), and in 1868 the Naikdas; and in 1873 the Koli revolts (Verghesh, 2016: 24).

To deal with the insurgent Adivasi groups, the colonial government brought the Scheduled District Act XIV, 1874, and Adivasi populated areas were placed under the Scheduled District³³; tribals living in these districts were designated as Scheduled Tribes and excluded from the general administration³⁴ (Bhukya, 2017:120). The Governor-General directly ruled the tribal areas through district officers. The tribals were subjected to special laws and administrative procedures secured either by the enactment for the individual tracts or notifications under all India status (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019:16; Rao, 2014.). Thus, the tribal areas were referred as Agency areas which in some ways officially delineated their political boundaries for the first time.

Tribal difference was further consolidated through administrative and political identification of the areas. The colonial government started differentiating the tribals from the mainstream society: the caste-Hindus as plain people whereas the tribal communities as egalitarian, indistinguishable clans living in hills and forests (Bhukya, 2017; Chandra, 2013a; Damodaran, 2006a; Guha, 1983; Sivaramakrishnan, 1993; Skaria, 1999, 2000; van Schendel, 2011). Gradually the Colonial government's strategies of census operation reinforced the differences and social boundaries by officially validating the classifications as tribe and castes. The colonial rulers believed that the tribals were marginalised and pushed to the periphery by the plain caste-Hindu people. Thus, the colonial rulers wanted to protect the tribals and civilize them (Chandra 2013a; Elwin 1943; Haimendorf, 1982). Therefore, treating the tribals differently is reflected in the administrative innovations and institutional strategies. This process provides a further fillip to the process of formations of tribal nationalities.

‘The Colonial government symbolically defended the Scheduled District Act 1874 for protecting the tribals, particularly from the land-hungry non-tribal migrants from the plain

³³ “In 1833 Chhotanagpur was declared as non-regulated area after the great Kol uprising” (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019).

³⁴ The Rajmahal hills tracts were removed from the authority of ordinary court orders in 1782. This rule was made into law by Regulation I of 1796. The tract was administered by the Collector without any of the regular laws of the British government being applicable. The Collector could set his own rules for conduct affairs. This regulation was subsequently replaced by regulation I of 1827. With the introduction of the famous Wilkinson Rules under Regulation 13 of 1833, significant change was brought into the administration of the tribal areas”. The governance was brought under the Agent to the Governor-General, “after which the tribal areas were called as Agency areas. The Agent was made responsible for the civil and judicial administration” (Bhukya, 2017: 120).

and the problem of indebtedness' (Bhukya, 2017:120). But, scholars were of the view that the tribal areas were declared as separate areas in order to suppress people who have been rebelling against the government, so the governance was carried in an autocratic way by the Governor to fulfill material and political interests (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019:16). This new governance model had deprived the tribal pre-colonial autonomy and disturbed the traditional economic system (Bhukya, 2017; Reddy and Anil, 2010:20). As Anderson (1983:43) contended that 'to control the people and territories of a colony effectively, these authoritarian bureaucracies had to find the expected "tribes," locate them precisely on a map, count them in census, and ethnically categorize'. Further, he considered that 'by doing so, the colonial authority gave specific spatial expression to the territories of people who may not have had any collective identity or political unity in the past, and explicitly establishing the borders of chiefdoms and kingdoms, which were used to define administrative subdivisions (ibid).

Simultaneously, with the centralisation of administration, agriculture and forest protection were made to cater to the needs of the colonial market (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019: 8-9). In this process, 'The tribals were exposed to the commercial interests of the plains as a result of British colonial practises. Through clandestine deals, exploitative activities, land grabs, and other means, outsiders like as traders, moneylenders, and settlers gained significant swaths of tribal territory'(Verghesh, 2016:23; Bhukya, 2017). Not surprisingly, the Nizam of Hyderabad had followed colonial policies, which were the cause of the alienation of lands and restriction of the tribals exercising their rights in the forest (Reddy and Anil, 2010:20). The colonial government brought, in the name of 'public interest', the Land Acquisition Act 1894 to acquire a large tract of land for railway lines and shipbuilding to extract and transport the resources (Sundar, 2007:129).

The colonial and provincial states have arrogated themselves to have the right to regulate and control the ecological and social landscape of the country (Bhukya, 2017; Sundar, 2007; Rangarajan, 1995). For the first time in Indian history, a government claimed direct property rights over forests during colonial control (Guha, 1983; Verghesh, 2016:26). The Forest Act of 1878 (amended in 1927) legitimatised and consolidated state power over the forest and monopoly over resources (Bates and Shah, 2014: 8). This Act was implemented through a well-established bureaucratic system of the Indian Forest Service (Guha, 2002).

Under this policy, the forests were governed, measured, exploited for commercial purpose (Rangarajan, 1995: 1–9). This Act also established a provision for the creation of ‘Protected Forest’, which excludes the local people (Gadgil and Guha, 1993: 120). Only a few were allowed to stay in the forest to provide labour for the newly created forest department. Shifting cultivation, foraging, grazing, and hunting were banned in protected forest as a consequence. This disturbed the livelihood of those in and around the forest, who freely used this for centuries (Bates and Shah, 2015; Verghesh, 2016). The tribals were deprived of their rights and became a victim of these new laws. The majority of the tribals could not understand these laws and could not be expected to change their lives overnight to match the new regulations (Sundar, 2007:114). Thus, the tribals were categorized as ‘offenders and criminals’ in their territory for not following these laws. With regard to the violation of forest acts, Elwin (cited in Sundar, 2007:114) quoted the opinion of a forest official, “our laws are of such kind that every villagers breaks one forest law every day in his life”. The colonial rule was extended from British India to direct control of feudatory states. Similar laws, logic, and assumptions were applied in these feudatory areas (ibid).

In order to establish complete control over the areas and people’s mobility, the British brought a legislation called the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 (amended in 1911). This Act aimed to control the forest-dwelling and cattle-rearing tribal communities such as the Lambadas, Bhils, Yerukalas, and others who do not practice sedentary cultivation. The Britishers referred these tribals as ‘habitual criminals’, and notified them as ‘Criminal Tribes’ (Bates and Shah, 2014:8-9; Bhukya, 2010; Radhakrishna, 2001; Rath, 2006:31; Sundar, 2007). Additionally, the colonial government had imposed restrictions on shifting cultivation, forest-dwelling, and cattle-rearing communities to establish complete control over the territory and the tribals (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Radhakrishna, 2001). The tribal customary rights were curtailed and labeled as ‘encroachers’. “The criminalisation of the tribals through legal means not only effectively disposed the original inhabitants but also ostracized and stigmatized them” (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019:16; Verghesh, 2016). Thus, demarcation of areas for the administration of tribes while restricting their rights seems that the colonial rulers used the carrot and stick policy.

The impact of forest laws was tragic for the self-governing communities for whom forests were not only a source of livelihood and sustenance but also a way of life. It is not surprising, therefore, that the tribal communities, who considered that the colonial rule amounted to intrusion, restriction of their centuries old freedom and loss of autonomy, have repeatedly revolted against the British and local exploiters (Xaxa and Puia, 2020:90). Thereby, the tribal fights were described as the early national struggle for self-rule in India (ibid).

On similar lines, in the year 1893, Hyderabad State brought vast tracts of forest land under Protected Forests and placed them under the direct control of the Forest Department. The administrative powers of revenue officials of the district were removed as a result. Further, the Forest Act 1900 strengthened government control (Reddy and Anil, 2010: 20-21). On the one hand, the new forest surveys were conducted to demarcate the reserve forest. On the other hand, the non-tribals were encouraged to settle in the tribal areas to transform them into the state territory and collect revenue taxes from people (Bhukya, 2017:76). It is interesting to note the case of district reorganisation and changing of headquarter from Asifabad to Adilabad, which increased the non-tribal population in the Adilabad district due to the change of border and demography. Similarly, the tribal-dominated neighboring Chanda district was also reorganised. Thus, the reorganisation of Chanda and Adilabad district drastically decreased in the percentage of tribals in early 1900s (ibid: 166).

The colonial and the provincial state's policies of controlling the forest and land, and encouraging outsiders, resulted in the Gonds, the Kolams, and the Koyas gradually losing their traditional power and rights. The forest-dwelling Lambadas were further marginalised as their survival means, i.e., cattle rearing was severely affected by the colonial policies of restriction in the forest and state control of grazing land (Bhukya, 2010)³⁵. Thus, the colonial policies resulted in churning in the forest areas. The Lambadas, under the leadership of Sevalal, asserted their rights over forest and grazing of cattle (Bhukya, 2010: 208-218). Likewise, the Koyas, under the leadership of Alluri Sitarama Raju led their revolt against the British rule in Manyam in AP in the 1920s (Murali, 2014). The forest contract, commercial

³⁵ During the devastating famines in Hyderabad state in 1876-78, 1899–1900, and 1918–19, the Lambadas' who were the cattle rearing community were worst affected due to the callous and authoritative attitude of the forest department (ibid).

exploitation of minor forest produce, and banning of shifting cultivation, grazing, and foraging (particularly harmful in a time of drought) were vital factors behind the 1910 ‘Bhumkal’ rebellion of the Gonds of Bastar state (Sundar, 2007). All these movements and their leaders became legends for future generations as they inspired future socio-religious and political movements of tribes. Thus, these movements and their leadership contributed to socio-political consciousness among the tribals. ‘Due to the colonial forest and land policies, exploitation by the outsiders, and criminalisation of tribes the revolts among the tribals became a routine occurrence during the colonial period’³⁶(Verghesh, 2016: 24; Bate and Shah, 2014:4).

The colonial government reacted to these rebellions, brought specific protective laws while camouflaging their interests, and blamed non-tribal outsiders for tribal exploitation³⁷. The transfer of land to the outsiders was restrained. However, most of these laws were widely disregarded in practice as unscrupulous merchants and moneylenders found ways to circumvent them. In order to pacify the toiling tribes, the colonial rulers brought ‘the policy of protectionism’ from the late decades of the nineteenth century (Bhukya, 2017; Sundar, 2007). As part of the process, the colonial rulers started creating administrative categories and boundaries for tribal areas in the early decades of the 1900s. The encircled tracts were called Excluded or Partially Excluded Areas or Agency areas. These were separated from general administration under the Government of India Act of 1935 (GoI Act 1935) (Prakash, 1999: 467). The main difference between these areas and the plain areas was that the legislation passed by the central and provincial legislative assemblies would not be applied to the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas unless the Governor gives his assent to these laws. In

³⁶ These include, among others, the Munda revolt led by Birsa Munda (1895-1901), tribal movement in Midnapur (1918-19) and Santal movement in Malda in West Bengal (1924-32), Tribal and National movement in Orissa (1921-1942) and Tribal movement in Assam (1873) (Sethy, 2016: 79), and Bhumkal revolt in Bastar in 1910 (Sundar, 2007).

³⁷ Particularly after “the Birsa Munda revolt in 1890s, the government passed the Tenancy Act of 1903, which recognized the *Mundari Khuntkatti* system (where descendants of original settlers held community ownership over certain land in Munda areas). The colonial government also passed the Chottanagpur Tenancy Act in 1908 to prohibit land transfers to the outsiders in Jharkhand areas. Similar protective measure was introduced elsewhere. In the central provinces, the Land Alienation Act of 1916 restricted the transfer of the land to the non-tribals by sales, exchange, gifts or will, although this legislation permitted leasing for up to twenty years, rendering the measure somewhat ineffective” (Bates and Shah 2014: 9). “The Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfer Act 1917 (Act of 1917) was enacted with the goal of lowering interest rates and regulating land transfers in the Agency Tracts of Ganjam, Vizagapatnam, and Godavari Districts. The Act was then extended to the taluk of Bhadrachalam in the East Godavari District by a subsequent notification” (Rao, 2014).

the interest of the tribals and for better administration, the Governor was empowered to make special regulations. With this Act, the tribals were designated as Scheduled Tribes³⁸. The creation of the Excluded Areas or Scheduled Tribes was part of the colonial state's policy of protectionism. This policy claimed to provide self-governance/autonomy to the tribals (Baruah and Nicolas, 2011: 8; Bhukya, 2017).

The colonial rulers most considerably encouraged new colonial administrators cum ethnographers/anthropologists to study and document tribals' lives. With the influence of these ethnographers and administrators, the tribes came to be constituted as people who practiced animism and resided in particular territories (Xaxa, 2008). Thus, colonial anthropologists played a crucial role in further differentiating the tribals from the caste-Hindus of plain areas (see Bhukya, 2017; Guha 1983; Prasad, 2003; and Sundar, 2007). Anthropologists like Elwin, Haimendorf, Grigson, and others have played a crucial role in introducing the isolation policy (Bhukya, 2017:118). The colonial rulers and anthropologists celebrated the tribal culture (Bhukya, 2017; Skaria, 1997). With the help of colonial anthropologists, the colonial government has started intervening in the administration such as schools, roads, etc. (Sundar, 2007; Bhakya, 2007). Interestingly, the colonial state did not intervene in the spiritual and cultural domain of the tribal communities, but control on economic life was imposed (Prakash, 1999). Bates and Shah (2014) have argued that the colonial state making in tribal areas produced different subject making from the caste-Hindus.

However, GoI Act 1935 has not provided rights to the tribals to manage their own affairs because the colonial rulers were doubtful of the ability of the tribals to manage their own affairs. As a result, the tribal areas continued to be governed by the Agent (Officer) of the governor, and self-rule was limited (Bhukya, 2017:121). This process reflects 'the colonial government's twin policy of selective recognition and appropriation of their customary rights' (Kotes, 2019). The tribal elites perceived the colonial policies of difference as an imposition of state power, denying self-governance, and the negative projection of tribals as backward and uncivilized, which would stigmatize them (Xaxa and Puia, 2020). Therefore, to assert their own identity, the tribals had formed an association such as Adivasi Mahasabha and Gond

³⁸ The colonial government started institutions like the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) in 1945 to study and protect the interests of the tribal communities.

Mahasabha, which opposed the classification of Adivasis as Hindus at a time when the national movement leaders demanded their inclusion into larger Hindu identity in the 1940s (Bhukya, 2017).

3.3.1. Encountering the National Movement

From the 1920s India's national movement for free was expanding its base and spreading its mobilisation in the tribal areas. During this period, the tribal areas have witnessed movements against land and forest policies, restriction on *poddu* (shifting) cultivation, malpractices in the administration, etc. For instance, the Koyas in Manyam areas were fighting against the British, under the leadership of Alluri Sitaramraju in 1922 (Murali, 2014:162). Apart from immediate partial economic demands, the general political slogan was an autonomous Koya area and local self-government (Sundarayya, 1972: 177-178). The tribals and peasants in Jungle Mahals and neighboring tracts in Bankura and Singhbhum in Jharkhand also fought against landlordism. Likewise, Birsa Munda, who became a legend with his struggle against the colonial rulers and *Dikus* (outsiders), contributed to the tribals' growing political and social consciousness. The Birsaites and Thana Bhagats movement of south Bihar also played an essential role in tribal mobilisation (Dasgupta, 2014). Additionally, other tribal religious movements such as the Devi movement of south Gujarat asserted self-governance (Hardiman, 1987). The messianic or millenarian movements took place against the distressing conditions and exploitations of the tribals. The Congress Party and Mahatma Gandhi made several attempts to involve the tribals in the national movement and also incorporate tribal movements within its folds (Xaxa and Puia, 2020). In order to achieve this goal, the Congress party influenced the local leadership of the tribals and tried to project the tribal's struggles within the national self-determination' struggle.

Nevertheless, the Congress party and national leaders criticized colonial government policies of exclusion and protectionism as another attempt to divide people of India into different groups in the Faizapur conference (Bhukya, 2017:120-121). On the same ground, all provincial legislative assemblies denounced tribal exclusion policy in 1936. As Adivasi politics emerged as a significant force, particularly after the formation of Adivasi Mahasabha, the Congress party started expressing its insecurities (Bates and Shah, 2014:12). The leaders

of national movement have seen tribal movements as a fight for the forest and land but not as a movement for autonomy or self-governance and made all efforts to incorporate tribal anti-colonial struggle in the national movement and the mainstream society. To work in this direction, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers such as Thakkar Bapa and Elwin worked with the tribal communities (Bandhu and Jacob, 2019: 26). During the civil-disobedience movement of 1930-33, the members and activists of the Congress party joined Adivasis in central India, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh for forest *Satyagrahas*, which engaged in disobeying the government forest regulations and demanded the restoration of tribals customary rights (Hardiman, 2003: 146-147).

3.3.2. Adivasi Autonomy Movements

By the early twentieth century, the distinction between tribes and castes was clearly demarcated in the colonial imagination and legislation. The dangerous savage was increasingly replaced by the 'protected savage' in colonial state and missionary narratives. Under the impact of colonial education and modernity, small but significant western-educated Adivasi elite began to organise for tribal identity and autonomy in Chota Nagpur, Bengal and other areas from the 1930s (Bates and Shah, 2014:10). Indeed, the term Adivasi (original inhabitant) was used and popularized in relation to the original inhabitant and territoriality. The concept of the Adivasi as a collective identity for people with a long history of exploitation and displacement took shape in the following years and undergirded the various tribal autonomy movements in India (Prakash, 2002).

In 1915, Adivasi Unathi Samaj (Adivasi Development Committee) organisation was formed in the Chota Nagpur region. The Adivasi Mahasabha as a political organisation emerged in the late 1930s, from which the Jharkhand party descended in the 1940s³⁹. The formation of Adivasi Mahasabha was a watershed movement in tribal politics as it built a political-social category and popularized the term Adivasi across the tribal areas of India (Bates and Shah 2014:10). The role of Adivasi Sabha was significant in driving the demand for Jharkhand state which was premised on tribal culture and heritage, one of the most

³⁹ Leaders like Rai Saheb Bandiram Uraon, Theodore Surin, and Paul Dayal played active roles in forming the Mahasabha. Jaipal Singh Munda emerged as a significant leader of the movement (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 91).

longstanding autonomy movement in India that started in the early 1930s and lasted till 2000 (Prakash, 1999). In Gujarat, there was a stir for autonomy among the tribals living in the southern part of the state, but it never acquired a mass character. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, there was a demand for a separate Gondwana state by the Gonds during the late 1940s and 50s (ibid). The Gond Mahasabha started as a cultural movement, soon turned into a political movement demanding a separate Gond Raj (Gond self-rule) in post-colonial India (Bhukya, 2017:64). In a similar line, lately, demand for the Manyaseema as a separate state with the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana also emerged. Indeed, these autonomy movements have operated as a unifying force among the otherwise heterogeneous tribal communities. However, these demands could not be translated into organized movements like the Jharkhand demand due to lack of leadership and proper organisational structure.

In the case of the areas under the Nizam's rule, the forest policy of 1890 and subsequent Forest Act of 1900 established complete control of the forest department over the forest areas. During this period most tribals cultivated land under a tenure system known as *siwa-i-jamabandi*, without conferring ownership to the tribals. The power structure, i.e., *Sarkar*, *Sahukar* and *Zamindar*, to use Ranajit Guha's (1983) words, only resulted in tribal exploitation. The majority of the Gonds, the Koyas, the Naikpods, and the Pradhans practiced settled agriculture, while the Kolams and the Kondareddies practiced shifting cultivation in the forest areas. The Lambadas gradually started settling as agriculturists while continuing their cattle rearing occupation. The common thing among the communities was that they used to move within their territory. But reserving the forest and its demarcation did not consider tribal dependency on the forest. In one stroke, many tribals were rendered displaced and without entitlements. Large eviction took place in the name of forest conservation in the 1920s, and mapping operations continued till the 1940s, which denied their customary rights. Apart from the process of eviction due to forest conservation, the moneylenders continued to exploit and alienate the tribals' land, despite the existence of the Moneylenders Act of 1934 (Bhukya, 2017:104; Haimendorf, 1945). This process generated conflict between tribal communities and the state (Reddy and Anil, 2010:21).

3.3.3. Komaram Bheem led Revolt for Autonomy in Telangana

The Nizams of Hyderabad state modeled the governance on the line of colonial rule. Bhukya (2017: 133-134) viewed that it has produced two-level systems engaged in exploiting tribal communities. 'The central level government was reformist and based on colonial logic, whereas the local level administration only used new forms of governance and legislation when it benefited them, and behaved coercively and unlawfully when it did not'.

In this backdrop, when the Gonds tried to settle in the forest reserve areas in Bhabejri in the Asifabad district, where the Kolams were already residing, tension emerged between the forest department and the tribals. The officials of Nizam's government, who initially extracted money from the tribals, harassed them to evict them from the forest land. Subsequently, in 1940, the tribals declared an armed rebellion under the leadership of Komaram Bheem and Kumram Sooru, who were from the Gond and the Kolam communities, respectively. They gave the slogan of *Jal, Jungal, Zamin hamara hain*, during this movement. Bheemu and Sooru unitedly led their communities to fight against the Nizams and the Colonial army, who came to suppress the uprising. This incident reflected the failure of the state to check the malpractice, dispossession of the tribals, and recognition of their territorial rights.

Scholars have provided different interpretations on this tribal rebellion. Haimendorf (1945:65) argued that 'the revolt resulted due to the corrupt forest officials and due to the rising demand among the tribals for the land and forest and to get rid of burden on tribals imposed by the state'. He sought to understand tribal problems from the administrative point of view but not from the vantage of a political view-point. However, Bhukya (2017:131) and Sahu and Rajaiah (2010) consider that the tribal struggle was for autonomy and to re-establish their raj.

After the rebellion, in early 1940, based on Haimendorf's⁴⁰ suggestions, the Nizam government issued the Tribal Areas Regulation 1356 *Fasli* (1946 A.D), to separate tribal areas from the general administration. These areas were placed under a Special Officer from 1946, to take necessary measures to protect the tribal interest and restrict the rights of the non-tribals

⁴⁰ He was appointed as the Aboriginal and Backward Tribes Advisor to the Nizam's government.

in the tribal areas. Additionally, another regulation called Tribal Areas Regulation 1359 *Fasli* (1949 A.D) further empowered the government to protect the tribal land (Rao, 2014). With Haimendorf's interventions, an agency called Social Service was also established within the Revenue department to look after the developmental activities of the tribals⁴¹.

Though the Nizam had taken few welfare measures for the Gonds and the Kolams in the former Adilabad district, the Lambadas and the Koyas in Warangal, Khammam and Nalgonda districts were neglected. In these contexts, with the help of the Communist armed rebellion, the oppressed Lambadas of these districts under the leadership of Thanu Nayak, Lachha Nayak, Mangili Bai, and other leaders of the community, fought against landlordism, and for land rights and identity from 1946 to 1951 (Sundarayya, 1972: 60). However, the rebellion was suppressed by killing Thanu Nayak and other Lambadas (ibid: 239). A similar fate was met by the Koya leaders like Soyam Gangulu and Kunja Muthyalu who fought against the feudal lords in the former Khammam district (ibid: 260-261).

It is imperative to highlight the impact of colonialism on tribal governance and politics. As Sundar (2007: 4-11) noted, colonialism brought watershed changes in tribal societies, economy, and politics in three significant ways. First, the alien structure of government and administration was imposed on tribal communities, which did not come from the changing exigencies of local tribes. Second, the colonial rule did not integrate tribal regions into the wider system, but the nature of integration changed during the colonial rule. The tribals got unequal integration into the more extensive market economy. Third, the colonial rulers exercised their power by creating the socio-political and epistemological categories through laws, censuses, gazettes, surveys, records, etc. Though the British colonial and provincial governments projected that they were protecting tribals' cultural rights, material, and societal interests, the colonial government integrated tribal communities into mainstream economic and political systems. Interestingly, the colonial and provincial

⁴¹ As a development and entitlement measure, 'a total of 130,000 acres of land was distributed to the tribals in the district between 1944 and 1948 on *laonipatta* (land title certificate) under the direction of Moazam Hussa in the then Special Officer for tribals' (Bhukya, 2017:151), and the Public Health Department started providing healthcare to the Gonds and the Kolams. Apart from these activities, on the advice of Haimendorf, in order to reach out a greater number of tribes, the government started officially conducting public *darbarat KeslapurJatara* (fair) from 1944, to address the grievances of the tribals (ibid :152).

governments brought the tribal areas under different territorial set up of administration. Thus, the institutionalization of their areas and administration set up gave a sense of political identity and consolidation among the tribal communities. The modern state and market played a vital role in politicised ethnicity of the premodern agrarian communities.

However, the colonial government's recognition and separation of the tribal areas generated debate. Three broad positions can be classified on the tribal question, namely: isolation or protection, assimilation, and integration. The following section discusses these three approaches.

3.4. 1. Isolationist Approach

This approach emerged in particular historical and political contexts. The perennial tribal rebellions against the colonial rule have led the colonial government to study the tribals. The colonial government considered tribals different from the plain people who are typified by the caste system (Gupta, 2019:110). Anthropologists and anthropologically minded administrators such as Verrier Elwin, Haimendorf, Grigson, and others supported the 'tribal difference' thesis and advocated isolation and developmental policies.

Varrier Elwin, a Christian missionary turned anthropologist and Gandhian, lived with the Gonds in central India for several years, and he even married a tribal woman. Elwin became an influential advocate of policies intended to isolate Adivasis from the onslaught of modernity and mainstream society. In 1940, in a letter to a social worker A.V. Thakkar Bapa, Elwin (cited in Sundar, 2007:181) described the protectionist and interventionist positions in the following ways.

“the protectionists regard the aboriginal with love and reverence. He does not see him as a being on a lower level... The protectionist does not want to keep the aboriginals ‘as they are’ forever, least of all as specimens in an Anthropological Zoo. He is keen on progress, but his problem is how to adjust the progress so that the Indian aboriginals do not suffer the disasters witnessed in Interventionists on the other hand, is all for uplift’ He has cut and dried ideas about what is suitable for people and he applies these indiscriminately... The interventionist has very rarely lived among the aboriginals so as to understand what they really think, though he has often visited them in order to do them good., wherever the interventionists policy has been followed, there has been decay and degradation”

Elwin viewed Adivasis as creatures of nature whose worldviews were entirely at odds with civilized people (Elwin, 2007). Due to contact and influence of non-tribals, the tribals were acculturated or were losing their culture, what he called as 'loss of nerve' (ibid). To solve tribal problems and protect their interests, Elwin suggested creating a national park for them, though he later recanted on his position (Guha, 1996:78). Echoing the views of Elwin, Haimendorf (1982) had argued that Adivasis society should be isolated, and any intervention in their socio-political life would cause devastation of their simple and naturalistic life. He further viewed that outsiders have done much damage, including the state bureaucrats. Therefore, he suggested that governance structure should be erected only to protect the tribal interests and identity. During the 1940s, Haimendorf recommended setting up various schemes for tribals, aimed to preserve and safeguard their culture and languages (ibid). He encouraged educating the tribals to develop the skill of governing themselves more sophisticatedly (Bhukya, 2017).

Thus, the colonial anthropologists argued that the tribals are culturally and ethnically different. The tribals were distinguished by their clan-based systems of kinship, animistic religious belief, and in terms of their habitats in the forest. Hence, the tribal communities need to be isolated and protected from the corrosive influence of the mainstream people- from non-tribals (*dikus*) such as money lenders, traders, and landlords (Sundar, 2007:160). The isolationist idea played a crucial role in creating a separate class of areas for tribal people with a different legal framework such as Scheduled District Act of 1874, Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas which later came to be known as Scheduled Areas (ibid:164). But they believed in the inability of tribals to handle representative institutions. Grigson and Elwin opposed the creation of elected government among the tribals (ibid: 163). The colonial government started ruling them through bureaucratic agents. The Isolationists advocated the need for development programmes to counter tribal insurgency. Thus, their understanding of the tribal question was poverty-related but not a political one. This reconfigured the notion of tribals as backward and primitive, unlike the pre-colonial empire which used to treat them as an autonomous political zone and self-governing communities. This converted tribal political zones into cultural and sociological zones- zone of backward, poor, archaic, primitive, and marginalised people (Bhukya, 2017:13). Bhukya (ibid) contends that the division created by the colonial rulers is dubious and the historically embedded differences went beyond the

colonial divide'. The treatment of tribals as noble savages aided a paternalistic desire to protect them from others and themselves, and to control them (Bates and Shah, 2014: 3; Cederlof, 2014). This strategy is seen to perpetuate Adivasis perpetual dependency. Elwin and others influenced Nehru's government to continue the colonial policies of territorial and ethnic distinctiveness while exercising control in the economic realm.

3.4.2. Assimilationist Approach

Conversely, some Indian anthropologists/sociologists like G.S. Ghurye, N.K. Bose, M. N. Srinivas, and others opposed tribal isolation and urged for their assimilation into the mainstream society. They criticized the ecological romanticisation of tribes and protectionist policies of colonial administrators and anthropologists. G.S. Ghurye, a most influential proponent of the assimilationist approach, argued that the tribals are backward Hindus. Their problems were not different from those of backward castes, the poor, ignorant, and exploited people in general (Ghurye, 1963). According to him, the tribals faced problems because of land and forest regulations introduced by the colonial government, ignorance of the tribals, and chicanery of the moneylenders (Ghurey 1963:207).

Ghurey contended that the tribals were Hindus because they were born on Indian soil, worshiped Hindu gods, and spoke the same regional language as the caste-Hindus. Thus, he strongly opposed the enumeration of tribals in the census under a separate category of 'animists' (Ghurye, 1963:7-12). He considered that attempt to differentiate the tribals from the Hindus masquerades the colonial interests of divide and rule. He saw Elwin as worse than an 'isolationists or preservationists' and was a 'no-changer' and revivalist (ibid: 89). Ghurye proposed that the tribals' relationship with other backward castes/classes be strengthened through integration. In his view, integrating them into mainstream society would lift them from poverty (ibid: 126). This envisioned Adivasis as peasant castes integration into big societies by widespread adaptation of established agriculture and respective dominant nationalities' linguistic and cultural norms (Badhu and Jacob, 2019: 33).

In this line, A.V. Thakkar Bapa, a Gandhian social worker, supported assimilation by arguing that aboriginals should share rights and responsibilities on an equal footing with the country's civilized communities (Gupta, 2019:119). Isolation, he said, would strike at the

heart of national solidarity (ibid). Similarly, as mentioned earlier, the national leaders saw the policy of protecting tribes from other Indians as a policy of divide and rule and favored assimilation to uplift the tribes from backwardness. Thus, they criticized special protections and demarcation of territories as Scheduled Areas. The assimilation approach seems to be eliminating the difference of identity of the tribals and creating new subjugated subjects within the graded order of the mainstream society.

3.4.3. Integrationist Approach

In the late 1940s and 1950s, a third and middle position was articulated, which is called as the integration approach. The chief proponent of the Integrationist approach was Jawaharlal Nehru, who critiqued both the assimilationists and the isolationists approaches by saying that the former approach completely absorbs the tribal communities whereas the later approach isolates them (Gupta, 2019:117). Nehru believed that ‘the tribals should be allowed to develop along the line of their own genius’ within the national integration framework. Interestingly, even the assimilationists and isolationists claimed their position moves toward integration, which was seen as having moral ground (Sundar, 2007:18). According to K.S. Singh (1982), ‘integration and assimilation are not always the same things. Integration refers to the give-and-take principle among the communities, a dynamic process, whereas assimilation is a one-way process. Thus, integration must be separated from assimilation that entails the entire loss of cultural identity for marginalized communities’. With the moral high ground, the integrationists found fault in both—the protectionists’ efforts as isolating the tribe and keeping them in ignorance and the assimilationists’ effort to disregard the tribal culture and society. This policy position entails safeguarding their unique way of life and protecting them from social injustice, exploitation, and discrimination, as well as bringing them up to pace with the rest of the nation and integrating them into national life. The central measure of this approach i.e., the balance of the dichotomy--known as the “development-difference dichotomy”, which safeguards the tribals’ traditional rights without jeopardizing sovereign power--continued into the post-independence nation-state creation. However, this policy leads to assimilation over a period of time. Therefore, as McGarry et al. (2008) pointed out, integration is not significantly different from assimilation policies. All three approaches seem to ignore the agency of the tribals to decide their own governance and politics.

3.5. Constitutional Schema for Tribal Recognition and Accommodation

To address the tribal question, the Constituent Assembly assigned the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities, which in turn formed three Sub-Committees in 1947. The first committee, headed by Gopinath Bardoloi, was constituted to study the tribal and excluded areas in Assam under the chairmanship of A.V Thakkar Bapa. The second committee was assigned to examine the Excluded and Partially Excluded areas ‘other than Assam’. The third committee was to study the ‘tribal areas’ in the North Western Frontier Provinces. The proposals of the first two committees were adopted in the draft constitution in February 1948. These committees had recommended giving substantive power to the Tribal Advisory Council (TAC), but in the final version of the constitution, the role of TAC was reduced to mere consultation for two reasons– first, with the view that the backward tribes would not be able to handle the complicated legislation or administration. Second, several members of the Constituent Assembly and provincial legislatures raised their sustained objections, as they felt their powers are being circumscribed (Sundar, 2007: 184). However, on the questions of tribal autonomy, members were divided and presented contrary views.

Brajeshwar Prasad (Bihar: General): *“I may be confronted with the question, what will you say to the tribals if they come and tell you that they want political autonomy...? I will never concede this demand. I believe in the principle of the greatest good of the greatest number. I will not jeopardize the interest of India at the altar of the tribals ”* (cited in Sundar, 2007:187).

The above views reflect the assimilation and denial of any special recognition to the tribals. Nehru, an important figure in building discourse and development in the post-independence period, took a sophisticatedly sensible way by saying that ‘because of no fault of their own, the tribals were backward. Thereby, the Indian government’s objective would be to protect the tribals from their rapacious neighbours, and provide opportunities to develop the tribals’ (Singh, 1989: 89). Other members such as Gopinath Bardoloi, J.J.M Nichols Roy, B.R. Ambedkar, and Jaipal Singh pitched for tribal recognition and autonomy. To counter the prejudicial attitude of caste-Hindus, J.J. M. Nichols Roy pointed out that ‘rather than excepting the hill tribes of Assam to rise to the standards of caste Hindus of plain areas, there were many respects in which the caste-Hindus should emulate the tribals as being more civilized, for instance the kind of equality prevailed among them (cited in Sundar, 2007:186).

Similarly, Jaipal Singh condemned the paternalistic attitude of the members by articulating his view as below.

“Your mission of amelioration of the lot of the Adivasis is of the kind that the Britishers professed to have, coming to India over all this distance of six thousand miles, I would ask you mercifully to leave us alone, and quit the Adivasi regions, I would remind such people of the adage ‘physician, heal thyself’ (cited in Sundar, 2007:187).

Jaipal Singh and other tribals leaders eloquently placed the difference between Adivasis and the plain people, and sought recognition and greater autonomy. The tribal representatives and organisations did not see the tribal backwardness as intrinsic to the tribal identity but something that stemmed from exploitation by outsiders for centuries. Thus, they sought special recognition and protection by invoking tribal cultural difference, languages, and history (Prakash, 1999: 483). In the vibrant historical background of the tribal assertion and diversity, the Constitutional Assembly of Independent India sought to strike a balance between the values of self-rule and national unity (Baruah and Nicolas, 2011: 8). The post-colonial governance model was aptly described by Rajini Kothari (2012: 108) thus: ‘the resulting institutional framework was largely modernist in nature, but it differed significantly from the Western model in terms of facilitating national integration and social assimilation’. As reflected in the Constitution, the post-colonial administration did not break away from the colonial categories or governance strategies. Thus, the protectionists’ colonial discourse continued without significant modifications (Prakash, 1999: 473).

Against this background, the protection policies have entailed forming borders and territoriality in the tribal areas to protect the interest and identity of the tribal communities. Article 244 of the Constitution provides special territorial arrangements for the tribal areas, referred to as the Fifth and Sixth Scheduled Areas⁴². The Governors of the States are given discretionary powers regarding the administration of these areas. The TACs were formed to guide the policies related to the tribal areas in the Fifth Scheduled states.

⁴² As per this Article, the President of India is empowered to declare any predominant tribal areas as Scheduled Areas. “Article 244 (1) enumerates the Fifth Schedule laws that apply to the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in all states save Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.” (Rao, 2014:1-2)

The function of Scheduled Areas is to protect tribal autonomy, culture, and provide good governance in the Scheduled Areas⁴³. Through the Fifth Scheduled Areas, a separate governance structure has been created in tribal areas in post-independent government. Therefore, B.D. Sharma called the Fifth Scheduled as ‘a constitution within a constitution’ (Government of India n.d.2). This constitutional recognition established a distinction between tribes as a social and cultural entity and tribes as a political and administrative category (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 87).

Two underpinning features of the Scheduled Areas are recognising communities’ territorial identity and separating the governance from the general administration of the state or central governments. However, a greater degree of self-governance and autonomy has been ensured to the Sixth Scheduled Areas than the Fifth Scheduled Areas. Though the Constituent Assembly recognized the socio-political identity of the tribal areas, it has set a goal for the industrialization-integration model of development in the economic realms (ibid). The discourse and policies veered towards assimilation and integration by echoing the colonial state’s idea of a paternalist state of encouraging and guiding the tribal welfare from above. However, constitutional recognition plays a vital role in forming borders of the tribal areas. Consequently, the tribal groups internalized the modality of colonial and post-colonial recognition and autonomy.

3.6. Development and Difference in Post-Independence Period

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister, put forth five principles popularly known as the ‘*Panchsheel* doctrine’ of tribal development and governance in a forward message in Elwin’s book titled ‘A Philosophy of NEFA’ in 1959. The five principles are as follows. First, the tribals should develop along the line of their own genius and should not be imposed from outside. Second, their rights to land and forest should be respected. Third, administration and governance should be carried by themselves, and staff from outside should be avoided in the tribal territory. Fourth, the administration should be in tandem with the tribals’ social and cultural institutions. Fifth, results should not be judged based on statistics or expenditure but by the quality of human character that is evolved. These principles influenced the protective

⁴³ The autonomy of the tribal areas is also confirmed by the Courts in case of *Samatha vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* (1997) 8 SCC 191.

policies of culture, land, forest, and tradition, whereas the promotional policy consists of development and welfare schemes to uplift the tribals (Singh, 1989). Nehru was of the view that the tribal peoples should be able to benefit from modern medicine, education, agriculture, and economic prosperity, but not at the cost of the value of their life (ibid). Interestingly, Nehru's integrationist policies were formed against the backdrop of the rise of anti-feudal uprisings in Telangana and Tebhaga in West Bengal as well as later radical communist organisations sheltering in tribal areas. As a result, Nehru and the subsequent governments have symbolically turned to populist welfare measures to curb communist support base in the tribal areas. Thus, the colonial and post-colonial regimes have institutionalised territorial and non-territorial accommodations.

On the developmental front, in the First and the Second Five Year Plans, separate Tribal Development Blocks were created wherein development programmes like the Multi-Purpose Tribal Development Projects (MPTDP), and Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks (SMPT) in 1954 and 1956 respectively were initiated (Rath, 2006:31). The first four Five Years Plan period was characterized by development programmes launched under the Community Development Plan and National Extension Policy, which combined tribal development and multi-sided activities and placed the Tribal Welfare Department in a subservient position to other departments. To evaluate the function and effectiveness of these programs in tribal areas, the government constituted various committees such as the Elwin Committee in 1959, the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, known as Dhebar Commission in 1961, and the Shilu Ao Committee in 1969 (ibid). The committees have found that all the government programmes have failed to impact the economic life of the tribals considerably. Indebtedness, land alienation, educational backwardness, and a lack of adequate communication were serious roadblocks to their advancement. Similarly, the U.N. Dhebar commission further stated that the development projects under the Five-Year Plans resulted in a significant displacement of STs. It said that the British laws were still being used to regulate the forest and restrict tribal rights (ibid). It is significant to note Verrier Elwin committee's (cited in Guha, 2007) observation that 'the authorities in charge of these programmes 'lacked any deep knowledge of their people and had very little understanding of general policies for the tribal development'. Added to this, 'the authorities had a tendency to see themselves as superior, as heavenly-born missionaries of a higher civilization. They rule

the people..., any failure is generally attributed to the tribal officials, who blame everything on the people's laziness, improvidence, suspiciousness, and superstitions' (ibid). Then further it pointed out that civilized (mainstream) people drove the tribes into the hills, robbed them of their arts by selling cheap and tawdry market products, and took away their sustenance by prohibiting them from hunting and establishing new taboos that deny them of required protein through meat and fish. Outsiders forbid them from drinking homemade rice beer and look down on them, eroding their self-esteem and robbing them of their freedom by imposing laws that are beyond their comprehension' (ibid).

Thus, Nehru's policy of integration seems to have become a reality, willy-nilly. Nehru inferred that though India achieved its political integration, psychological integration remains elusive (Singh, 1989:133). Scholars like Bates and Shah (2014), Bhukya (2017), Guha (2007), Sen (2018), Sundar (2007), and Verghesh (2016) have argued that continuing the colonial policies are the cause of unrest in the tribal areas. Similarly, Kotesch (2019) has aptly noted that the post-colonial state with its integrationist or *panchaseel* policies entailed limited customary rights to the tribals while substantially exercising its sovereign power to enact laws and administrative power to take away autonomy. He further points ways of their marginalization: 'first, by allowing the non-tribals to establish the industries in the tribal areas to exploit natural resources and cheap man power. Second, occupy and enclose the forest land on the ground of forest and animal conservation. Third, allowing indiscriminate mining and construction of big and multi-purpose dams, etc., without the participation or inclusion of the tribals in the large-scale economic processes' (ibid). Therefore, it is argued that the Fifth Scheduled model and other provisions of protection of tribal interests failed in protecting their interest because a substantial level of territorial autonomy and self-governance were not provided to the communities.

Based on the collective name, the common myth of descent, shared history, distinctive shared culture, an association with specific territory, and a sense of solidarity, there has increasingly been socio-political consolidation among the tribal communities (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 88). With these characters, it is considered that the tribal autonomy movement has been an expression of their national identity (ibid: 89). With these national identities, the quest for self-rule continued to be the focal point of tribal struggles in post-independent India

(ibid:95). Such assertions have a strong co-relation to the idea of being indigenous to the land they inhabit. The educated and elite sections within the tribals, who are products of welfare schemes and education, started playing a proactive role in articulating tribal autonomy demand and politics. The exploited and deprived sections found their voice in the educated sections as their articulation have been based on nationality. Their nationality was further strengthened with the state recognizing them under various political and administrative categories. The tribal category emerged as an overarching identity despite the socio-cultural difference between heterogeneous communities.

3.7. Identity and Autonomy Struggles

The contiguous tribal areas in central India were divided into Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orisha, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan states in the 1950s and 1960s. Since independence, the tribals have been demanding for the formation of states such as Jharkhand, Chattishgarh, Gondwana, Manyaseema, Bhilwada etc., and also extending their demand for creation of new districts at the sub-regional level for autonomy and self-governance (Sundar, 2007:12). These state demands emerged to protect the tribal identity, culture, heritage and resources (Prakash, 1999; Xaxa 2008).

It is noteworthy that in the domain of electoral politics, the Jharkhand party was formed in the 1940s, with a primary agenda of creating a state for tribals. In this context, parties such as the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Muslim League extended their support to the demand. In this regard, the CPI stated that the “autonomous region for the tribals, wherever they live in compact areas, need to be created” (cited in Bandhu and Jacob, 2019: 29). But the demand was consistently dismissed by the Congress party and its leaders who viewed that the tribal territory, which is rich in mineral and other forest resources, cannot be cut off from the mainstream society and national development (ibid).

The Jharkhand Party had performed well by winning 32 seats in the 1952 assembly elections and emerged as a principal opposition party in Bihar (Guha, 2007). The spectacular support to the party was attributed to the party’s demand and articulation of a separate state for the tribals. The massive participation of the tribals, when the State’s Reorganisation Committee visited Ranchi reflected the popular sentiment (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 91).

Contrary to people's demand, the committee suggested that the demand was unsound and overruled. This demoralised the leadership and weakened the decreasing enthusiasm of the masses, though the demand continued to reverberate in the public domain (ibid). The Jharkhand party's influence was also dented by a series of splits, while the tribal areas witnessed the increasing presence of the Left-wing parties. However, other tribal organisations emerged and began to aggressively articulate Jharkhand's separate state demand. In this phase, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) led by a charismatic Santhal leader Sibbu Soren, and the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) emerged as prominent organisations. After regaining the political importance of the demand for a separate Jharkhand state, eventually, the demand was partly acknowledged in the sense that the area was given an Autonomous Regional Council with some legislative and executive powers in December 1994 (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 91). Despite the Regional Council, the demand for Jharkhand was aggressively articulated and became an important electoral issue, which the national parties could not brush off. Given the electoral constraints and influence of coalition politics, the national parties, notably the BJP, played a leading role in creating Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh states (Mawdsley, 2002; Tillin, 2013). But, due to non-tribals' support in the later phase of the Jharkhand state movement, the formation of Jharkhand state was limited to the tribal predominant districts of Bihar and did not include adjoining areas of other states. This was contrary to the original demand of the Adivasi Mahasabha and Jharkhand party leaders i.e., tribal state with the tribal areas of central India (Guha, 2007; Xaxa, 2008).

Similarly, The Gonds and other tribal communities demanded a separate state consisting of tribal areas of Chhattisgarh and contiguous districts of the Rewa and Vidarbha regions, generally known as Dandakaranya (Bhukya, 2017:143). Though echo of the demand was present even before independence, it was sharply articulated in the post-independence period. Several tribal organisations demanding for a separate state submitted a memorandum to the SRC in May 1953. However, this demand remained merely at the level of articulation. It failed to translate itself into a sustained and organised movement (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 91). It is noteworthy that Pravir Chandra Dev, Gond raja of Bastar, who was demanding restoration of tribal political system and autonomy and formation of Chhattisgarh state (Guha, 2007), also formed parties initially, Adivasi Seva Dal and later formed Akhil Bharatiya Maharaja Party (ABMP). In the 1961-62 election within the Bastar region, his party

candidates won with a larger majority. The Madhya Pradesh government stifled the Pravir Chandra Dev-led movement by killing him and his supporters.

The demand also emerged for an autonomous state for tribal areas of south Gujarat, which was raised for the first time by a tribal MLA in the State Legislative Assembly in 1969. A conference was conducted to press the demand, but later the demand did not get considerable momentum (Xaxa and Puia, 2020: 91). Similarly, tribals from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana state have demanded the autonomous tribal state called Manyaseema, which comprises contiguous tribal areas from Srikakulam East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh, and former Khammam, Warangal, Karimnagar and Adilabad district of Telangana. Even the Srikrishna Committee, which was appointed in 2010 to study the Telangana demand, in its report, suggested the creation of a separate Manyaseema state for the tribal areas. Tribal movements have also taken place in other states since 1970s. The Bhoomi Sena and the Kashtakari Sanghatan aorganisations have led the tribal fight in Maharashtra for land and forest rights. There have been several movements against development-induced displacement. As in the 1970s, there were protests against the Koel-Karo projects in Bihar and the infamous Narmada Bachao Andolan in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. Adivasis of Odisha have been fighting against the state government, which is trying to displace them and take away their land (Guha, 2007). Thus, these tribal rights and autonomy movements and their demands reflect Adivasis's expression of discontent against the policies and programmes of the state, outsiders and assertion of territorial identity (Bates and Shah, 2014; Guha, 2007; Raghavaiah, 1979). Additionally, from the 1960s, the Naxals or armed Maoist revolutionaries made inroads into the tribal areas and started becoming a channel for tribal disaffection while encouraging the tribal organisations (Guha, 2007).

3.8. Governance and Politics in Tribal areas of Telangana

With the growing trouble in tribal areas of Srikakulam district, where tribals were fighting against feudal lords and the outsiders with the help of Naxalites in the 1950s, the erstwhile AP government enacted a protective law, A.P. Scheduled Area Land Transfer Regulations 1 of 59 Act (LTR 1of 1959 Act), repealing the earlier Agency Tracts Land Transfer Act 1917, in

1959. This Act prohibited the transfer of tribal land and properties to the non-tribals and the power to restore tribal land illegally acquired by the non-tribals (Reddy, 2006:1430). Initially, this Act was applied to the Scheduled Areas of East Godavari, West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, and Srikakulam districts (Rao 2014:3). The Tribal Areas Regulation 1359 *Fasali* (1949 A.D) was replaced with LTR 1 of 1959 in Telangana in 1963, which applied to the tribal areas in the districts of Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad, and Mahbubnagar (ibid).

The development of transport and communication facilities and industries facilitated the non-tribals, especially the dominant castes such as the Velammas, Reddys, Kammas, Marwaris, Komatis, Muslims and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) communities peasant and businessmen, to grab huge tracts of land in the tribal and forest areas (Bhukya, 2017:164-65). The period from 1960s to the late 1970s witnessed maximum influx from the plains (Haimendorf, 1985). ‘Although the LTR Acts had been operating, the non-tribals find ways and means to circumvent the provisions of LTR 1 of 1959 through *benami* or other clandestine transactions with tribals’(Rao, 2014:3). Adding to this, the government did not take necessary steps for its enforcement during the next 10 years. The Court underlined that there were no working rules to effectuate this (ibid). The Tribal Areas Regulation of *Fasli* 1356, which was set for different ecological and social settings, offered effective protection to the tribals against land alienation. However, this status was repealed and replaced by an ineffective rule and law of 1959, which took away the powers of Social Security Officers in Telangana and gave them to the revenue department, which is primarily controlled by the non-tribals (Reddy, 2006; Rao, 2014). The state’s policy on the reservation of forest areas also affected the tribal’s forest dependency and land.

With the growing discontent, the Naxalite influence was growing in the tribal areas during this period. To counter this, the government amended and enacted the Land Transfer Regulation Act of 1970 (LTR 1 of 70 Act) to protect the land rights of the tribals and control the outsiders. The LTR 1 of 70 Act provided that the non-tribals who validly acquired the titles were not be disturbed and that they could not sell their land but could transfer only to the tribals or the government. Further, the Act also stated that land possessed by a non-tribal in the Scheduled Area would be deemed to have been acquired from the tribals (Reddy, 2006:1430). Similarly, Indira Gandhi’s government (during the Fifth Five Year Plan 1974-

1979) introduced the 'Tribal Sub-Plan'. According to this plan the central government would earmark 8.6% (the proportion of tribal population in the country) of the total annual budget spending on tribal development (GoI n.d.:48). The central government created the ITDA as a special institution to serve and protect the tribal interests in their areas (Rath, 2006: 32). On the one hand, the government brought these institutions and regulations, but on the other hand, it used its executive power to issue Government Order (G.O), diluting the provisions of the LTR 1 of 70 (ibid:1431). For instance, "in 1972, the Andhra Pradesh government issued an order declaring all forest land occupation after 1964 to be illegal. This was true for both tribals and non-tribals. Land held by non-Adivasis in the Agency Areas prior to 1964 became lawfully possessed land as a result of this ruling" (Bhukya, 2017:166-167). In another instance, Chenna Reddy's government issued a G.O. No. 129 on 13th August 1979, to exempt application of LTR 1 of 70 on those non-tribals who occupying up to five acres of irrigated land and 10 acres of dry land. Thus, an executive order has effectively checkmated the laws (Menon, 1984). These new G.Os were against the interests of the tribals.

The gradual increase in the number of non-tribals in the tribal areas has been documented by several studies. For instance, when Haimendorf revisited the tribal areas of Adilabad in 1976, he found that a significant number of outsiders had entered the tribal areas and there was increase in land alienation of the local tribes (Haimendorf, 1989:58). In this period, Micheal Yorke (1982), who carried his research in Adilabad agency areas in Tirayani village in 1976-78, gives a detailed account of the Velamas and the Reddies occupying the land and pushing the tribals into deep forest. Similarly, Kodanda Ram (2007), in his study of Jainoor village in Adilabad district, found the increased settlement of non-tribals, which transformed the village into a market town. This immigration took place with the clandestine help of state governments. He argued that the peasants from the Andhra region occupied the most fertile land in the Godavari belt and ousted the tribals from their land (Ram, 2007:15). J.M. Girglani (2015), a former Indian Administrative Services (IAS) officer, who submitted a report on the tribal land issues in Andhra Pradesh to the state government in 2005, has given details account of tribal land alienation in tribal/Agency areas of Eturunagaram in former Warangal district, Agency Areas of Bhadrachalam in erstwhile Khammam district and tribal areas of Uttoor ITDA in composite Adilabad district. His report noted that various land protection laws have failed to forestall tribal land alienation.

Apart from land alienation caused by the entry of the non-tribals, the government has brought many policies to control forests and protect wildlife. The Forest policy of 1952, the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972, and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 have taken away tribal rights by establishing strict control over the movement of tribals in the forest area and their survival depends on the mercy of forest department (Guha, 1983: 40). The Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 1982, in particular, criminalised tribals by declaring them unauthorised residents, and a huge number of tribals were evicted from their land and forced to leave the forest (Bhukya, 2020; Rao and Sankaran, 2003).

The emergence of CPI (ML)/Naxalites inspired militant peasant conflict in the post-independent period (Srinivasulu, 2002). From the 1970s to 2000, the Naxalites enlisted tribal support by highlighting the failure of development efforts to improve their lives and free them from harassment of the forest and other departments (Reddy and Anil 2010: 30; Verghesh, 2016). Chandra Pulla Reddy led CPI (ML) group mobilised tribes during the 1970s, but this organisation was suppressed during the emergency period. Later Radical Students Union of the People's War Group (PWG) led by Kondapally Seetharamaiah became active in the tribal areas. From 1977, PWG was involved in the formation of *Girijana Rythu Coolie Sangam* (GRCS) which was a civil platform for PWG. These organizations organised the tribals for their rights (Bhukya 2017:170; Srinivasulu 2002:28).

Against these socio-political contexts, the tribals attended a meeting at Indravelli in Adilabad district called by the GRCS in 1981. This meeting came in the backdrop of a growing number of outsiders in the tribal areas and the alienation of tribals from their land. Initially, permission was given to conduct the meeting, but later it was canceled and prohibitionary order under IPC 144 section was imposed. But the tribals tried to attend the meeting, which resulted in a scuffle between the police and the tribals, and resulted in police firing on tribals (Raghuram, 1981). On 20th April 1981, according to the government, thirteen insurgents were killed at Indravelli town. But Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberty Commission (APCLC) criticised the state for killing of innocent tribals. Reflecting on this incident, Balagopal (1988) considered that 'forest protection strategies and commercialization of forest which deprives tribals of their traditional rights over the forest-land and its product results in the unrests'. Further, Bhukya (2017) viewed 'it was Bheemu's spirit of self-rule that provided

it with ideological inspiration for their struggle'. This argument connects with the larger community's struggle for identity and autonomy. As a result of Indravelli killing, a major clash between the police and the Naxalites who were supported by the tribals, took place in 1985, which resulted in the death of seven policemen. Reacting to the growing discontent among the tribals, the then chief minister of A.P, N.T Rama Rao proposed 16 principles for protecting tribal rights and land. His government also offered many government jobs in tribal areas to those who had completed Class VII. Later on, the Congress government in the state introduced the Remote Area Development Programme to reduce the influence of the Naxalites in tribal areas. Nevertheless, these attempts by various governments failed to end tribal political activities (Reddy and Anil, 2010: 30).

After the Indravelli incident, educated tribals in Adilabad played a crucial role in forming organisations such as Raj Gonds Student's Union (RGSU) to protect their rights and interests and mobilise the tribals. With increased activities by the tribal organisation, the non-tribals who felt insecure tried to suppress the youth with the help of the police, accusing them of being Maoists. To avoid the tag of Maoists, they changed their organisation's name to the Gondwana Sangarshana Samiti (GSS) in 1984. They identified 2 lakh acres of grabbed land in the Adilabad district agency area and demanded that the government authorities settle these land issues (Bhukya, 2017:171). The GSS also campaigned against the forest laws. During the 1990s, GSS took up issues of self-rule in the tribal areas and started demanding new districts similar to the Sixth Scheduled model to protect and exercise their rights. GSS also started their traditional council at the village and district level identical to the Sixth Scheduled (ibid:172). The communities' autonomy in the past and Bheemu's struggle, and other historical struggles, shaped the political consciousness of the communities and demand for identity recognition (ibid). Certainly, the colonial and post-colonial policies of tribal protection and territorial recognition have been used for avowedly political purpose (Bates and Shah, 2014:11). With the support of CPI (ML) groups, community organisations such as *Tudum Debba* for the Gonds and Koyas, and *Nagara Bheri* for the Lambadas had started to assert their community identity and protect their interests. With the gradual decline of Naxalites, the short alliance weakened, and tribal groups asserted their politics without associating with Left groups. Luisa Steur (2014) observed a similar occurrence in her study on Kerala. She contends that the tribals who were associated with CPI (M) party started deserting the party

and began their own tribal organisation because in the neoliberal era social security was reduced and their culture was under attack. Similarly, Uday Chandra (2013) contended that ‘indigeneity’ functioned in Jharkhandi activist discourses as a marker of a distinctive post-materialist turn in bourgeois politics’. This took place in a context where indigenous politics was getting currency over class politics. A longitudinal overview of tribal political mobilisation demonstrates that the tribals are seeking for territorial recognition and consolidation, access to resources, and power.

3.9. Tribal Politics in the Era of Globalisation of Indigenous Politics

During the late 1980s and 1990s, recognition of indigenous people’s identity and rights at the international level is directly related to the rise of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and movements interested in the protection and survival of indigenous cultures (Shah and Bates 2014:15). In 1982, the UN system set up the ‘Working Group on Indigenous Populations’ (WGIP) to deal with this. In this context, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) brought the Indigenous and Tribal People’s Convention, 1989 (No 169) to deal with the rights of the indigenous people of different countries. The Indigenous and Tribal People’s Convention stated that the Indigenous are victims of historical injustice, including colonisation, expropriation of their lands, territories, and resources, oppression and discrimination, and a lack of control over their own lives (ibid). Tennant (1994:31) highlights that ‘by identifying indigenous people as agents of their own development and to provide autonomy, the Convention encourages states to respect their territories’. The year 1993 was declared as the first International Year of Indigenous People. In addition, in the same year the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna recommended the declaration of a Decade for Indigenous People (1995-2004). Contextualizing the global Indigenous movement, Morgon (2011: 63) notes that “while increased incursions of the global economy provided the better incentive for indigenous peoples to mobilise internationally, other globalising processes helped create the global indigenous movement and facilitate mobilisation”. The rise of the indigenous movement at the international level legitimised and gave moral and political strength to the tribal politics of territory and ethnic identity (Bates and Shah, 2014; Karlsson and Subba, 2006; Xaxa, 1999). Significantly, like the indigenous movement solidarity, the Adivasi/tribal identity operates to consolidate variegated communities in India.

‘The economic liberalization from the late 1980s and 90s in India, allowed the multi-national corporations and business houses to harvest the country’s mineral resources, most of which are located in the tribal areas’ (Bates and Shah, 2014:17). The central and state governments, run mainly by the non-tribals, have signed leases with mining companies, both Indian and foreign (ibid). The government displaced the tribals prior to liberalization, and they continued to be displaced in post-liberalization (Guha, 2007). In recent times, tribal politics has taken recourse towards being indigenous to defend their territorial and identity claims against the growing state and non-tribals influences. Interestingly, when liberalization was on a high, the tribals right to self-govern had been recognized to some extent. The simultaneous rise of neoliberalism and increasing welfare state activities have necessitated the critical role of the collective identities and their projection of moral and political claims.

3.10. PESA: Politics of Self-Governance

As part of the government’s effort to increase decentralization, the Panchayati Raj Act was enacted in 1993 through the Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment. However, this Act is not applicable to the tribal/Scheduled Areas. During this time, tribal organisations such as Bharat Jan Andolan led by Dr. B. D. Sharma, were demanding self-governance and territorial recognition in the form of the new district and tribal district councils under the Sixth Schedule particularly in Madhya Pradesh (MP) (in the areas of present-day Chhattisgarh) (Sundar, 2007:3). As far as the tribal areas of Telangana are concerned, community organisations like *Tudum Debba* gave a slogan of *Mava Nate Mava Raj* (our village, our rule) for Gonds, *Mavurlo Marajam* (our rule in our village) by the Koya’s, Nagara Bheri of Lambadas were mobilizing with the slogan, *Apan Gadem Aan Appan Tandem Apan Raj* (our own rule in our territory and village), a vernacular axiom popular among the communities for claiming self-governance. Given the intense demand, states like M.P constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. B.K. Roy Burman to look into the applicability of Sixth Schedule to the tribal areas (ibid). With demand from the people for self-governance, the Central government also appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of Dileep Singh Bhuria to examine the extension of the Seventy Third Amendment to the tribal areas. Based on some of the recommendations of the committee, the government enacted the PESA Act, No. 40 of 1996 (ibid: 258).

The source of this law lies in Article 244 and the Fifth Schedule of the constitution. Thus, the Panchayat Raj institutions were extended to the tribal areas with comparatively more self-governing power. It is important to highlight two essential sections of the PESA Act- 'section 4 (a) the state legislation on the panchayats shall align with the customary law, social and religious practices and traditional management practices of community resources'(GoI, 1996). Section 4 (d) states that 'every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources, and the customary mode of dispute resolution' (ibid). Thus, the PESA Act recognised the communities' political and cultural identity and empowered the tribal villages to undertake developmental works, manage resource, protect the forest, and pass a resolution against their exploitation and land alienation (ibid).

The tribals demand for the Sixth Scheduled model of governance or Bhuria committee recommendations terrified the non-tribals in the tribal areas (Sundar, 2007: 259). Thus, the non-tribals and mining companies challenged the constitutional validity of these legislations on the grounds of violation of fundamental rights like right to equality (Article 14), right to life and livelihood (Article 21), and right to carry any profession, business or trade (Article 19(1) (g)). The Courts rejected these challenges and stated that the laws regulating or prohibiting the transfer of land in tribal areas and Scheduled Areas, are protected by the Fifth Schedule as well as by Article 15(4), among others" (GoI n.d.:21-22)⁴⁴. To avoid judicial interventions, the government came up with the idea of amending the Fifth Schedule Act. This resulted in vehement resistance in majority of tribal areas. "According to the National Campaign Against the Fifth Schedule Amendment (NCAFSA), 10 million of the 80 million indigenous people have already been displaced by various programmes throughout the years. If the proposed revisions become law, it will open the floodgates for international corporations to exploit the forest and mineral riches, wreaking havoc on the tribal economy" (cited in Rath, 2006: 46-47). Thus, the PESA Act plays a significant role in territorial recognition and protecting their identity and interests.

⁴⁴The Supreme Court made a significant judicial intervention in the Samatha judgement of 1997, which supported the verdict of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on the restoration of tribal rights to land in Scheduled Areas. It states that industry cannot operate in Scheduled Areas unless a lease has been obtained for a state undertaking'. (Rath, 2006: 46-47)

3.11. Environmentalism of the Poor: Tribal Territorial Concerns

After liberalisation of the economy and entry of Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) into tribal areas, the tribals have started defending their land, forest, and territory. Issues of livelihoods, ecology, and sacred spaces are interconnected with people's dependency on the forest or ecology. Thus, the assertion of cultural identity is also part of the history of conflict over natural resources. These concerns and movements have been described as 'environmentalism of the poor' by Juan Martinez-Alier (2002) and Ramachandra Guha (2002). Defining environmentalism of the poor, Alier (2002: x) notes that 'the resistance is expressed in many idioms to use natural environments, cultural aspects and loss of livelihood'. For instance, tribal struggle in Odisha against mining of the hill's areas by the Vedanta Company, and resistance to the Polavaram multipurpose project by tribals of AP and Telangana states are seen as the environmentalism of the poor.

By introducing wildlife conservation policies such as the Biological Diversity Act 2002, the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2006, and other government orders, the governments have declared the tribals and forest areas as the wildlife zones and Tiger reserves for protecting the wildlife and tigers, respectively. Thus, the tribal communities have been resisting the demarcation of their territories as wildlife or tiger zones. Thus, all over tribal areas in India, the resentment of the communities against the constraints imposed by the government conservation programs and state control over natural resources induced conflicts⁴⁵ (Torri, 2011; Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Kabra, 2003; Padel and Das 2012: 67; Singh J., 2016). For example, the declaration of Kawal Tiger Reserve in the composite Adilabad district in 2012 led to stiff resistance from the tribal communities. It resulted in everyday conflict between the forest department and the tribals (Singh J., 2016). Ironically, the development paradigm that followed always sidelined environment, wildlife conservation, and tribal rights (Sekhsaria, 2007). The indigenous movements to defend tribal territory and resources have been gaining strength from local to global level. This, among others, resulted in the enactment of the Forest Right Act 2006.

⁴⁵ The unprecedented nationwide eviction drive was triggered by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's (MoEFCC) order issued on 3rd May 2002, which alleged that 'approximately 12.50 lakhs ha of forest land is under encroachment'. This resulted in evictions of about 3 lakhs forest-dwelling tribes from 152,400.110 ha between May 2002 and March 2004 (Bijoy, 2021:7). This Act not only denies rights to the tribals but violates their basic dignity to survive.

3.12. Forest Rights Act, 2006: An Acknowledgement of Historical Injustice

The historic legislation the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act, 2006 (hereafter FRA 2006) was enacted to recognise the rights of the tribals over land, natural resources, and forest by issuing the title deeds to tribals. Significantly, the Act recognises the historical injustice done to the tribals stating that ‘the forest rights on ancestral lands and their habitat were not adequately recognised in the consolidation of state forests during the colonial period as well as in independent India resulting in historical injustice to the forest dwelling STs who are integral to very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystem’ (GoI, 2006). The government’s acknowledgment of injustice done to the tribals underlies their territorial and cultural recognition. For meaningful participation of tribals and to protect their own interest, the FRA made it mandatory for the government to take ‘prior-informed consent’ from the tribals for any developmental projects in their areas. Based on this provision, the Dongria-Khond tribes of Niyamgiri hills opposed the government’s plan to to allow MNCs to mine their areas in 2013 on the fear that this would displace them. Subsequently, they approached the Supreme Court of India, which upheld the provisions of FRA and forest rights as inalienable rights, and asked the Odisha government to take the prior informed consent of the tribals (in GoI n.d.:11). Finally, the government conducted *gramsabha*, which passed a resolution opposing the government’s decision to allow mining operation in their areas. Thus, the FRA again establishes legitimacy and identity recognition of the tribals over their traditional areas.

3.13. Conclusion

The tribal struggles and the responses of colonial and post-colonial governments in the realms of governance and politics give a fillip to draw formal and informal boundaries in the tribal areas. Tribal territorial and ethnic identity, autonomy, and decentralisation of power seem to be the dominant aspects in the entire trajectory of tribal politics and their engagement with the state. Decentralisation of power and the creation of suitable institutions like creating new districts are works in progress. But the creation of new districts borders and their headquarter in the tribal areas and how the tribal territories are being accommodated remain understudied.

The subsequent chapters focus on the demand for districts in the tribal areas and the politics behind the accommodation of the tribals demand.

Chapter 4

Demographic Profile and the Emergence of Demands for Districts in Tribal Areas

4. 1. Introduction

Before studying the tribal moral and political claim-making process, centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation for new districts, it is essential to understand the profile of study areas and the contexts in which demand for ethnic territorial-based districts has been raised. Various actors and socio-political and economic contexts play a role in shaping the demand for territorial political units. Miroslav Hroch outlines three stages of ethnic consolidation and demands. First, the intellectuals begin to propagate the characteristics of their ethnic identity and demands. Second, political, economic, and social interests and demographic politics are deployed. In the third stage, it becomes a mass movement (cited in Bookman, 2013: 9). Keeping in view of the above, this chapter mainly focuses on ‘who’ sought to redraw borders, and ‘where’? And the question of ‘why’ districts were demanded and ‘how’ districts were created are discussed in subsequent chapters.

This chapter is divided into two sections and subsections. The first section outlines the demographic profile of the communities, areas, and demanded districts. The second section documents the historical and social contexts in which various actors played a role in the demands for districts in the tribal areas of Telangana. Documenting the demography is essential because it addresses how tribal communities were shaping territories within the erstwhile districts of Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal. It also helps us to understand the role of the actors and historical contexts in the trajectories of the demands for tribal districts. Understanding the profile of the territorially concentrated tribal groups and their attempts to construct boundaries for demanding new districts would help understand the extent of accommodation of the demands and politics over the formation of new districts’ borders discussed in the next chapter. The following section provides an overview of how this plays out at the state and community levels.

According to the 2011 census, the Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute 9.08 (34 lakh) percentage of the Telangana's population (Government of Telangana (GoT), 2017: 2). The Lambadas (Banjara) constitute the largest tribal community of Telangana, with a population of 20.44 lakhs spread across the state (ibid: 4). Before the onset of colonial rule, the Lambadas were a forest-dwelling and cattle-rearing community. They also seasonally supplied goods through the forest tracts and rugged terrain. With the establishment of colonial rule, governance was structured in ways to control forest land and tribal communities (Bhukya, 2010). Gradually, the Lambadas started settling in the forest and hill areas with a separate settlement called *Tandas*, usually away from the main village. This enabled them to tenaciously maintain their cultural and ethnic identity (ibid). Presently, they are spread across all districts of Telangana but are primarily concentrated in erstwhile districts of Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad, Nalgonda, Nizamabad and Medak. The Lambadas speak Goar language. Their main occupation is agriculture and cattle rearing. Their colorful native dress and intricate needlework are distinct. Their traditional and cultural festivals are a celebration of *Seetala* (forest God), *Teej*, and *Sevalal Jayanthi*. The Lambadas' culture and religious beliefs differ from the mainstream society, but they started worshiping mainstream gods and started celebrating major mainstream festivals in recent times.

The Koyas are numerically the second largest group with a population of 3.81 lakhs. They are spread across the erstwhile districts of Khammam (which includes the new district of Bhadradi Kothagudem and Khammam) and Warangal (Mulugu, Jayashanker-Bhupalpally and Mahabubabad new districts) (GoT, 2018-19). Their main occupation is agriculture and livestock rearing. Though the Koyas have their own language, majority of them have adopted the Telugu language. The Koyas were actively engaged in shifting cultivation called *Podu* but are currently engaged in settled agriculture due to forest policies and state control over the forest areas (Murali, 2014:142-143). The Samakka Saralamma Jatara (Medaram *Jatara*/fair) is their main festival. It is the largest tribal fair in Asia (Serish, 2018).

The Gonds constitute 2.97 lakh and primarily reside in the erstwhile Adilabad district (GoT, 2018-19). They speak the Gondi language. Their main occupation is agriculture. The Gonds ruled the Chanda-Balarshah towns in Maharashtra, Uttoor, and Asifabad towns in erstwhile Adilabad district in Telangana from 1350 to 1751 (Gangaiahi, 1984: 145). The

Gonds resided in the mainstream areas such as Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (particularly in the Berar region), but they were pushed into the forest/periphery by the Maratha rulers, the colonial and post-colonial state and society (Bhukya, 2017; Prasad, 1999). Their traditional festivals are Nagoba *Jatara*, *Dandari* festivals, and martyrs' anniversaries at Jodeghat and Indravelli.

Together these three ST communities, namely the Lambadas, Koyas, and Gonds constitute more than 80% of the ST population of Telangana. There are other minor tribal communities such as the Naikpods, Andhs (0.13 lakh), Pradhans (0.24 lakh), Thotis (0.04 lakh), and Kolams (0.44 lakh) who inhabit mainly Adilabad district. Other communities such as Chenchus (0.16 lakhs) and Kondareddies (0.02 lakh) are residing mostly in Warangal and Khammam districts, respectively. Erukalas (1.44 lakh) are dwelling in Hyderabad and Rangareddy Districts (GoT, 2018-19).

A large portion of Telangana's tribals areas constitute contiguous tracts in three erstwhile districts, namely Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal. The tribal areas of these districts are located along the Godavari river belt and extend from the northeast to the southeast part of the Telangana state. These districts have plenty of natural resources like forests, rivers, minerals, and other resources. The majority of the tribals live in poverty; most of them are illiterate and lack infrastructure facilities. The tribes are close-knit communities. Yet, the tribal groups vary significantly from each other in terms of language, culture, and living patterns. They mostly live in their separate hamlets called *Gudem* and *Tandas*. The communities are ethnically distributed differently in different districts. Based on the geo-ethnic characteristics of tribes, they are divided into four geographical regions in Telangana.

Table 4.1: Geographical Distribution of Tribal Communities in Telangana⁴⁶

Sl.no	Community-Regions	Geographical Areas
1	Gonds, Lambadas (Banjara), KolamsNaikpods, Pradhans	The hill ranges and plateaus of Adilabad district.
2	Koyas, Lambadas, Konda-Reddies	Tribal areas of Khammam, Warangal, parts of Karimnagar districts, areas along with the Godavari and its tributaries
3	Lambada, Chenchu	Tribal areas of Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda along the river Krishna and a small spill over population in Ranga Reddi district.
4	Lambadas/Banjaras, Yanadis, Yerukalas	Plain Areas in the rest of Telangana

Source: Prepared by the researcher drawing from B.D. Sharma (cited in Gangaiah 1984:107).

The central parts of the erstwhile Adilabad, half of the Khammam district, and the eastern, and the southeastern areas of the Warangal districts, had predominant tribal populations. All three former districts were symbolically associated with tribal identity as they were popularly known as tribal predominant districts in Telangana state, despite having a preponderant non-tribal population. ‘The tribals preponderance areas in these districts have been designated as Scheduled Areas administered by the ITDAs to protect the tribal identity and promote tribal development’ (GoT, 2018-19; Rao, Deshingkar, and Farrington, 2006). The Scheduled Areas in the state cover 30,031 Sq. km. which is 11% of the geographical area in the state and it includes all three aforementioned districts. ‘The ST population in ITDA districts is 52.96 % of the total ST population in the state and the remaining 47.04 % tribals inhabit the plain areas’ (GoT, 2017:3). Within these districts or under the ITDA, tribal areas are broadly classified into three areas: Fully Scheduled Mandals, Partially Scheduled Mandals, and Non-Scheduled Mandals⁴⁷. According to these classifications, ITDA and other government institutions work on tribal welfare, development, and protection of tribal interests. Utnoor town in Adilabad district, Bhadrachalam in Khammam district, and Eturunagaram in Warangal district, remain central, symbolically, and socially connected towns in these tribal areas. The ITDA

⁴⁶ Districts mentioned in the table represent erstwhile districts in Telangana.

⁴⁷ Fully- Scheduled mandals are those mandals which have more than 50% of ST population and come under ITDA areas, Partially Scheduled mandals are those tribal areas located in the same areas where mandals are located. They are covered under ITDA. Non-Scheduled mandals are largely located in plain areas where the tribals are less and are dominated by the mainstream people.

headquarters are located in Uttoor, Bhadrachalam and Eturunagaram towns. These towns have been the epicenters of their socio-political and administrative activities.

The majority of the tribals depend on agriculture and seasonally on forest products. Their agriculture is mostly rain-fed, and the productivity depends upon the monsoon. Low price of their products, heavy increase of the cost of agricultural inputs and inability to generate surplus income led to their immiseration. So, agriculture for tribals in the current scenario is prone to debt-ridden. Though blessed with plenty of water sources, as the river Godavari and its tributaries flow in these regions, the irrigation facilities in these places are meager. Tribals such as the Koyas, Gonds, and Lambadas are agriculturally settled communities. Whereas most of the Kolams, Chenchus, Thotis, and Konda Reddies who are classified as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribals Groups'(PVTGs) are still practicing shifting cultivation. This accounts for their deeper social and economic backwardness. They continue to face harassment from the Forest Department. Subsistence income of the PVTGS, depends on the forest products such as bamboo, honey, etc. Their chronic dependence on the vagaries of nature accentuates their vulnerable conditions as they have to borrow money in uncertain times, which puts most tribal communities in the debt trap, market exploitation, and subsequently alienation of their land. This process results in poverty, unemployment, socio-economic exploitation, discrimination, and political marginalization. The situation is further made miserable by the forest department's concerted efforts to increase its hold on the forest areas by harassing tribals who have been living in these areas for generations even before the Forest Department came into existence. The economic status of majority tribals is not on par with plains areas due to illiteracy, ignorance, exploitation, etc. After briefly discussing the state-level picture, and before moving to understand the demands for tribal districts, it is essential to understand the erstwhile district profile and tribals' composition and territorial concentration.

4.2. Profile of Tribal Areas and Communities in the Erstwhile Districts

4.2.1 Composite Adilabad District

The composite Adilabad district's headquarter was located in Adilabad town in the northern part of the district. According to the Adilabad district census manual (2011) the town was

named after Ali Adil Shah, a ruler of Bijapur Sultans/dynasty (District Census Handbook Adilabad, 2011). Before the erstwhile district acquired its uniform identity, it was not a homogenous entity for a long time, with different dynasties ruling at different times, including the Mauryas, Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Chalukyas of Badami, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas of Kalyani, Mughals, Bhosle Rajas of Nagpur, Asaf Jahi's, besides the Gond Rajas of Sirpur and Chanda (ibid:21). Initially, Adilabad was not a full-fledged district. It was formed as a taluk (administrative division) along with Rajura and Sirpur, in Sirpur-Tandur sub-district in 1872. In 1905, Adilabad was created as an independent district with Adilabad town as its headquarters (ibid:2). The Hyderabad government led by the Nizam merged two Taluks viz., Narsapur and Nirmal from Nizamabad (Indur) district, and two Taluks viz., Chennur and Lakshettipet from Karimnagar (Elgandla) into Adilabad district in 1905 (ibid), and there were no changes till 1956. Andhra Pradesh was formed when states' reorganisation was carried out based on the language criteria. When the district was again reorganized in 1956, Telugu-speaking areas were added to the district, and Marathi-speaking areas were merged with Maharashtra. The Marathi-speaking Taluks of Rajura and Kinwat and Islampur circle of Boath Taluk were transferred to Maharashtra. Whereas, new areas of Mudhole Taluk, i.e., Mudhole, Kubeer, and Bhainsa, except for Dharmabad from Nanded district of Maharashtra state, were added to Adilabad district (ibid). From 1956 until the districts' reorganisation in 2016, the district did not undergo major territorial and border changes, whose jurisdiction remained intact over the said territory.

The erstwhile Adilabad district was the second-largest district in terms of territory, only after Mahabubnagar district in Telangana. There were 52 mandals in the district. The forest area of the district is 6944.5 sq.kms. It forms nearly 43% of the total district areas and covers most of the tribal areas. The district had the second-largest concentration of tribals after Khammam district. The district has remained symbolically associated with tribal identity. It was popularly known as a tribal district in Telangana due to the historical presence of tribals in large numbers. Apart from the Gonds and the Lambadas, who are the principal tribal communities, there are other communities such as the Kolams, Naikpods, Pradhans, Andhs, and Thotis. As per the 2011 census, all these communities together constituted around 19% i.e., 4.9 lakhs out of 27 lakhs total the erstwhile district population (ibid). In numerical terms, the Gonds and Naikpods constitute 2.55 lakhs Lambadas 1.43 lakhs, Kolams 0.52

lakhs, Koyas 0.26 lakhs, Pardhans 0.16 lakhs, Andhs 0.9 lakhs, and the Thotis 0.8 lakhs. Among these tribes, the Kolams and Thotis are PVTGs.

The tribal areas of Adilabad district spread across Pengangariver in the north, Pedhaavagu streams, and Wardha river on the east and west of south Godavari. These areas are covered by dense forest. The tribal areas formed the central part of the district. Most of these areas are designated as Scheduled Areas and fall under ITDA jurisdiction. The ITDA is based in Utnoor, a centrally located town in the former Adilabad district. Initially, the ITDA came into existence on 1 August 1975, with headquarters at Adilabad, which shifted to Utnoor in September 1979. ITDA covers 45 mandals in the district, with 412 scheduled villages, 234 non-scheduled villages, and 12 cluster villages. The tribal sub-plan area consists of 646 villages covering 6,353 sq.km, or 38.13 percent of the District's total geographical area (ITDA Utnoor, 2019). ITDA areas have been distributed among the newly formed four districts i. e. Adilabad, Asifabad, Nirmal, and Manchirial. Politically, the Adilabad Lok Sabha constituency has been reserved for the STs since 2009, and with three contiguous ST reserved Assembly constituencies, namely Asifabad, Khanapur, and Boath. These constituencies cover the central belt of the former district and overlap with the tribal territory, which was demanded as a district. Utnoor town is centrally located in the tribal areas, having a historical connection with tribal identity, and ITDA administrative set up makes Utnoor as the natural epicenter for tribal political and social activities. The tribal communities have demanded Utnoor as a district covering almost all the tribal/Scheduled areas mandals or three contiguous ST reserved constituencies. The demanded area's circumference covered 20 mandals and a few areas of the Dandepalle Mandal (see Figure 4.1). The map below represents tribal demanded borders and headquarters. The demand came to existence as part of a larger tribal movement in the state demanding tribal districts for tribal areas, a demand which originated in Bhadrachalam of Khammam district.

Figure 4.1: Border Map of the Tribals Demanded District in the Erstwhile Adilabad District



Source: Created by the researcher using the map from District Census Handbook, Adilabad 2011

4.2.2. Erstwhile Khammam District

Khammam district is one of the northcentral districts of the Telangana state. “Chhattisgarh and Odisha States bounded the composite Khammam district on the North, South by Krishna district, East by East Godavari and West Godavari districts, and West by Nalgonda and Warangal districts” (District Census Handbook Khammam, 2011: 5). The Godavari basin covers 1,351 sq. km of areas, and the major region covers parts of Nugur, Bhadrachalam, Bhoorgampadu, and Manugoor areas (ibid). The present-day Khammam district was formerly part of the Kakatiya monarchy, which fell to the Bahmani kingdom after the latter's defeat. In the later period, it came under the control of the Qutub Shahi dynasty of Golconda. The Mughal Empire annexed the Qutub Shahi dynasty. From the early part of the eighteenth century to 1948, the Hyderabad state was ruled by the Asaf Jahi dynasty (popularly known as the Nizams) (ibid). The erstwhile Hyderabad Government formed composite Khammam district with the five erstwhile taluks viz., Khammam, Yellandu, Bhoorgampadu, Palwancha (Kothagudem), and Madhira of Warangal on 1 October 1953. Khammam district was created because Warangal district was deemed too large and unwieldy for administrative purposes. In 1959, Bhadrachalam taluk and Nugur sub-taluk of East Godavari district were added to the

Khammam district because the headquarters located at Kakinada was not easily accessible to the people (ibid).

In 1985, following the introduction of the Mandal system in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, the district was divided into 46 mandals and four revenue divisions, namely, Khammam, Kothagudem, Palwancha, and Bhadrachalam. Out of 46 mandals, 29 mandals⁴⁸ are fully included in the ST Sub-Plan area and 2 mandals have partially fallen under the ST Sub-Plan area (<https://bit.ly/3wFRSb8>). The district's total area was 16,029 sq.kms out of which the area under Tribal Sub-Plan is 12,175 sq.kms (76%) of the total area (<https://bit.ly/3i731wx>). The mandals are mostly inhabited by the Koyas, Lambadas, and Kondareddis (<https://bit.ly/3rxRPho>). The eastern part of Khammam district has a predominantly tribal population, and the ITDA is located in Bhadrachalam town. As per the 2011 census, the ST population accounts for 26.47% of the total population of district (ibid). Most tribal areas come under the Mahabubabad Lok Sabha Constituency (the town was in the erstwhile Warangal district). There are five Assembly Constituencies, namely, Wyr, Aswaraopeta, Pinapaka, Yellandu, and Bhadrachalam which are reserved for the STs. Based on these areas, the tribals demanded a new district and Bhadrachalam town as its headquarter (see figure 4.2).

The tribal communities demanded Bhadrachalam district encompasses the above-mentioned ST reserved Assembly constituencies or 24 scheduled mandals. Though the non-tribal population is more than the tribal population in Bhadrachalam town, it has always been central to tribal political activities. Initial demand for the Bhadrachalam district emerged when the tribal-dominated mandals were merged into Khammam in 1959. The tribals from the Bhadrachalam had demanded a new district for the first time. The educated and employed sections of the tribal communities developed and tried to popularise the demand for a tribal district where they are concentrated. The district demand had a spillover effect and inspired similar demands in other tribal areas, particularly Utnoor in Adilabad district and Eturunagaram in the Warangal district.

⁴⁸ Including 7 mandals which were merged into AP in 2014. Now there are 22 mandals under ITDA out of which 5 are in new Khammam district, 2 are in Mahabubabad and rest are in the Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district.

Figure 4.2: Tribals Demanded District in the Erstwhile Khammam District⁴⁹



Source: Created by the researcher using a map from District Census Handbook, Khammam 2011

4.2.3. Former Warangal District

The Warangal district was bounded by Karimnagar district and Chhattisgarh State in the north, Khammam in the east, Nalgonda in the south, and Medak district in the west. The geographical area of the district is 12, 846 sq.kms. ‘The Warangal district was once a component of the ancient Andhra ruler’s Kingdom, which ruled over the entire Deccan’ (District Census Handbook Warangal, 2011:11). ‘Then Yadava Kings of Tuluva of Andhras established their capital at Orukal, the original name of Warangal, in the eighth century. From the middle of the twelfth century, it formed central to the Kakatiyas of Warangal’ (ibid). Around the middle of the thirteenth century, Muslim rule was established in Deccan India. Mohammed Bin Tuglaq appointed Malik Maqbool as the Governor of Telangana, under whom Kapaya Nayaka ruled Warangal independently. “far Khan, one of the military officers who revolted against Mohammed Bin Tuglaq, crowned himself king of the Deccan under the title of Alauddin Shah Bahmani on 3 August 1347, and Malik Maqbool was dismissed from the Governorship” (ibid).

The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb conquered Golconda in 1687, and it remained part of the Mughal Empire until the southern provinces of the empire split away to become the

⁴⁹Boundaries of 7 mandals which were merged in AP, were drawn roughly by the researcher.

state of Hyderabad in 1724. From the mid-18th century till 1948 Warangal was under Nizam's dominion. During the rule of these dynasties, tribal areas used to have community rulers while acting as feudatory rulers to the larger entities. Hyderabad was annexed to India in 1948. It and became a part of the Telugu-speaking Andhra Pradesh state, which includes Warangal.

The tribal region in the former Warangal stretches along the Godavari (river bank) in a strip covering the Eturunagaram area in the east to the southeastern parts of the district. The area has a dense forest cover and is rich in mineral resources such as coal, sand, iron ore, laterite, dolomite, granite, and quartz (ibid: 19). The region is also rich in water resources as large rivers like Godavari, Akeru, and Maneru with their tributaries flow through other lakes such as Parkal, Lakkavaram, Chandpur, and Ramappa. It also has prominent streams like Salivagu, Moruvanchavagu, and Peddavagu.

The two dominant communities in these regions are the Koyas and Lambadas. The Koyas are mostly residing in and around the Eturunagaram areas (in Mulugu constituency), which is in the eastern side of the district, and the Lambadas though they are spread all over the district, predominantly concentrated in the Dornakal-Mahabubabad constituencies, which is located in the southeastern side of the district. There were 50 mandals in the erstwhile district, and the tribal population constitutes 15.11% (5.35 lakhs out of 35 lakh) of the total population of the district (ibid: 11-12). The tribal predominant mandals are Eturunagaram, Mangapet, Tadvai, Govindraopet, Mulugu, Kothaguda, Gudur, and Mahabubabad mandals. Bhupalpally, Venkatapur, Nallabelly, Narsampet, and Khanapurmandals are also other TSP mandals with less ST population. Nearly 68 villages that fall under 15 mandals with a majority tribal population are grouped as a cluster and included in the MADA (Modified Area Development Agency) area. The remaining area is neither included in TSP nor MADA comes under Distributed Tribal Groups. The Lambada-dominated mandals in Mahabubabad-Dornakal areas come under plains areas, and ITDA located at Eturunagaram governs tribal villages. There are 12 assembly constituencies, and two Parliamentary constituencies under the erstwhile Warangal district. Mahabubabad is a Parliamentary Constituency, and Mulugu, Dornakal, and Mahabubabad are Assembly constituencies reserved for STs. The Koyas constitute the predominant group in Mulugu constituency, and they have demanded

Eturunagaram/Mulugu town-based district. The Lambadas are the principal group in Dornkal and Mahabubabad constituencies. The Lambadas have demanded that Mahabubabad town-based district should be created with these two constituteincies. The Eturunagaram demand is much older, while Mahabubabad demand started gaining ground from 2002, particularly after the reemergence of the Telangana movement. Thus, it is clear that the ethnically concentrated communities logged to create districts for their areas.

Figure 4.3: Erstwhile Warangal District Mandals' Border Map



Source: Created by the researcher using a map from District Census Handbook Warangal 2011

In the tribal areas of the aforementioned three districts, forest cover, diverse tribal villages, small market towns, memorials, statues of tribals' leader, culture, and communities' distinct languages all stand out dramatically and symbolically in shaping the territorial identity in ways to differentiate from plain areas. The tribes are numerically more in these areas and differ widely in their habitat, level of development, modes of production, exposure to the wider world, traditional values, customs, beliefs, and different political articulations. The tribals are not a homogenous community, and they are socio-culturally different from each other. Yet, they have certain commonalities, shared experiences, and larger socio-political (legal) identities that foreground their shared and collective social identity, which juxtaposes them from the mainstream society. These create a sense of separate identities of the territory and the communities with different social organisations and cultural contexts.

Given these features, the geopolitics of the area is shaped by internal and external actors, which in turn, shape their claims and interests. Hence, politics in these tribal areas evolved based on social and political complexity and contexts. With the predominantly tribal population in areas of the erstwhile three districts, to some extent, their traditions, socio-cultural and political aspects occupied symbolic positions in the political, social, and administrative spheres. However, these larger districts have also been a site of issues and contentions for the tribal communities. Tribal communities' glaring differences and dynamism in the social and political spheres have generated different political articulations and demands. The communities try to reaffirm and establish their primacy in the areas by carving out a separate district for themselves. These demands were justified as most respondents of this study pointed out that earlier the government officials were sensitive to their concerns only for formality's sake that never got materialized in reality. Thus, the tribals were optimistic that the new districts would create economic and political opportunity structures for them.

The elite sections⁵⁰ from the tribal communities have played a crucial role in creating political awareness, consciousness, and articulate their demands. Since the independence period, the tribal communities' territorial and ethnic identities have been deployed to negotiate with the state on material and recognition aspects. Additionally, they have been longing for territorial recognition through administrative and political units. The elite assertive politics revolves around territoriality and ethnic concerns. Therefore, they play a vital role in reintegrating the historical, territorial and ethnic political claims. With such territorial and ethnic concerns, the tribal communities have demanded centrally located towns in their territory such as Utnoor, Bhadrachalam, Eturunagaram, and Mahabubabad as new districts.

The ground realities or background conditions that shape the tribal demands for new districts are discussed in detail in the next chapter. The following section focuses on the political contexts and the role of organisations and various actors in championing the district demands.

⁵⁰ Elite section is defined as those who have received education, who are generally aware of the political process, and are either part of civil society organisations, or traditional leaders or party leaders.

4.3. Genesis and Genealogy of Demand for Districts

It is essential to understand the trajectory of the tribals' demand for districts, the changing nature of politics for districts, and recent district border change in the tribal areas. The socio-spatial difference and civic recognition foreground emerging demands for districts in the tribal areas. The tribals' mobilisation to protect their rights and interests, and the state's response play a vital role in the gradual emergence of the districts' demand. As discussed in the third chapter, during the British and the Nizam's rule, the tribal areas were excluded from general administration and their territorial uniqueness was recognized. The Schedule Districts Act XIV, 1874 was passed, and an officer was appointed to govern these areas called 'Agency Areas'. This Act aims to govern and protect the tribal areas from encroachment, land alienation, and indebtedness. The protective laws such as the Land Transfer Act of 1917 applied in Bhadrachalam areas, and Tribal Areas Regulation 1359 *Fasli* (1949) applied in Warangal and Adilabad district areas were enacted in the aftermath of tribal revolts and movements such as the Manyam rebellion in 1922 and the Komaram Bheem revolt in the 1940s. Despite these protective laws, particularly after the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, many non-tribals from the plain areas started infiltrating into the tribal areas (Bhukya, 2017; Rao, 2014). The migration of the non-tribals into the tribal areas, land alienation, and state intervention in the name of development have increased in the tribal areas.

In this context of growing insecurity for the tribal identity and areas, the idea of having a separate district for tribal areas originated at Bhadrachalam in Khammam district in 1959, when tribal areas of the East-Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh were added to the newly created Khammam district. Some of the educated tribals pitched the demand and some of the bureaucrats personally had supported a separate district for the tribal areas for two main reasons: a) to allow the tribals to govern themselves; b) the former district's headquarters was far from the tribal areas (the headquarters was more than 150 km away from tribal areas)⁵¹. The support from the bureaucrats gave moral support, which influenced the tribal elite's ethnic and territorial consciousness. Later, with the rise of the Naxalite movement and the

⁵¹ Ascertained from my interview with Ponem Srinivas on 4 June 2019 at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad District.

increasing elite sections within the tribal communities, the tribals started asserting their rights and recognition.

The tribals of Srikakulam district in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh revolted against dominant caste peasants in 1969. The government passed the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Area Land Transfer (Amendment) Regulation I of 1970 Act as a result. This Act made illegal transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals (Rao, 2014a). Despite this powerful protective law, the land issue continues to central as this law was either not implemented strictly or deliberately violated. Along with land problems and outsider's entry into the tribal areas, the entrance of the Naxal movement brought new political development in the tribal areas. Vempatapu Satyanarayana, a non-tribal Naxalite leader, drawing inspiration from the Naxalbari peasant struggle, formed *Girijan Sangham* in 1967. This tribal organisation fought against the landlords and sought to establish the poor tribals' rule in their areas in Srikakulam (Singh P, 2016).

After the Srikakulam revolt of 1969, the Naxal movement spread to the entire forest covering Viskhapatanam, Bhadrachalam, Eturunagaram, Jagitil, and Utnoor. In 1970, Chandra Pulla Reddy's group, a faction within the Naxal movement, worked actively among the tribals but it was suppressed during the Emergency (1975-1977). Again, Naxalite activities resumed with the spread of the Radical Students Union (RSU) of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI (ML), also known as the people's War Group (PWG) led by Kondapally Seetharamaiah (Bhukya 2017:168). In 1977, the Girijana Rythu Coolie Sangam (GRCS) was founded by PWG as a civic body to openly work among the Adivasis and mobilize them for their ideology and fight against the state (ibid:169). The GRCS started mobilising the tribals to fight against land alienation and to demand self-governance.

Though tribal areas are contiguous, the tribal communities' struggles were restricted to their local areas. They were not politically consolidated at the state level because of the communities' distinct languages, culture, and local political factors. But, the Naxalite movement and newly emerged section from tribals played a crucial role in connecting these areas and consolidating the tribals' territorial identity (Venugopal, 2013: 90). The Naxals' strengthened their base and influence in these areas by mobilising on tribal issues. The state's

attempt to wipe out the Naxals and to reclaim the resource-rich tribal areas has resulted in constant churning in the tribal areas. This interface and political state of affairs in the tribal area inadvertently assisted in invoking tribal identity that is embedded in the sense of territoriality and identity recognition⁵². Thus, the tribal community's politics got intellectual coherence and became a consolidated movement across the state.

It is within this context that the demand for self-governance was emerging. Ponem Srinivas, state president of ASP, considered that “the important reason for rising demands for territorial recognition and self-governance was to prevent the alienation and exploitation of tribal communities” (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019). He further said that “during the 1970s and 80s, the Naxals and the Left-leaning groups mobilized the communities taking the issues of tribal concerns. So, the district's creation for tribal areas featured as the important issue for both the tribal leaders and the Naxalites to consolidate themselves, respectively”.

Thus, based on the common issues and problems, the newly emerged elites and political organisations played a crucial role in the political consolidation of the tribal communities. The demand for separate district that emerged initially in Bhadrachalam tribal areas spread to other tribal areas of Warangal and Adilabad districts. Naxalites have intermittently promoted the demand for the districts. Bhujang Rao, a Gond tribe who has been actively engaged in tribal movements and associated with the Forum for Human Rights, in Adilabad viewed that “our demand for self-governance is centuries old. But, from the 1980s, as part of the collective assertion of the tribal communities, the demands for districts in the tribal areas such as Utnoor, Bhadrachalam, and Eturunagaram as districts from Adilabad, Khammam, Warangal districts respectively emerged more vehemently and ideologically” (Interviewed at Indravelli in Adilabad district, 20 April 2019).

From the 1970 and 1980s, the demand for autonomy and self-governance has seen ascendance on the ground of areas and communities' inequality and exploitation which can be referred to as internal colonialism (Weiner, 1978). The development and consolidation of movements in tribal areas are not unique to a tribal area; it is a pan-India tribal problem and

⁵² Ascertained from interview with Atram Bhujang Rao on 20 April 2019 at Indravelli in Adilabad District.

assertion which take the form of identity movements. Ruling elites and bureaucrats perceived that tribal assertions stemmed from economic backwardness and law and order problem. Thus, they sought state intervention in the tribal area to carry developmental work and eliminate the Naxals from the tribal areas. With this backdrop, ITDAs as separate institutions were set up from 1975 to pacify the tribals and to address their issues and problems in their areas. There were broadly two reasons why these institutions were brought in: first, to develop tribal communities' material conditions, and second, to counter the Naxal influence in the tribal areas. Initially, these ITDAs were set up in the towns that served as district headquarters. However, due to tribals' objections and requests, ITDAs were relocated to towns such as Utnoor in Adilabad district, Eturunagram in Warangal district, and Bhadrachalam in Khammam district. These towns are centrally located in the tribal areas and become socio-politically significant for the tribal communities. Thus, these towns were the natural and inevitable choice for the people to demand the government to establish the ITDAs. While relocating the ITDAs from district headquarters to towns in tribal areas, the demand emerged that instead of creating a government Agency, full-fledged districts should be created which allow the tribes to exercise self-governance. The demand came from tribal elites, yet it could not forge a mass base⁵³.

In 1974 the Andhra Pradesh District Re-organisation Act was passed. Based on this Act, Chenna Reddy's government created Ranga Reddy district in 1978 by carving out areas from Hyderabad and Medak districts. During this phase, the government sidelined the tribal elites' demand for districts on the pretexts of the menace posed by the Naxalites. In 1980 a meeting of tribals was organized by GRCS and RSU against land grabbing by non-tribals in tribal areas. The tribals proceeded for the meeting despite prohibitory orders. Thus, the tussle resulted in killing dozens of tribal and hundreds were injured by police firing at Indravelli. After the 'killing of tribals at Indravelli' (the incident discussed in the previous chapter), the government has increased its security apparatus and started paying attention to tribal development. But the tribals felt that the successive governments had failed to solve their grievances, and they had been subjected to exploitation, land alienation, and neglect. Realizing the need of having political organisations, the educated Gonds formed Raj Gond

⁵³ Ascertained from interview with Komuram Prabhakar at Eturunagaram in Mulugu district on 3 June 2019.

Student's Union (RGSU) with clandestine support from the Naxalites. The RGSU was fighting against land issues and was trying to reclaim land from the non-tribals. The RGSU faced heavy criticism from non-tribals that members of the organisation are Naxals, and the police accused RGSU of an offshoot of the RSU. On this pretext, they started arresting and harassing RGSU's members (Bhangya, 2017:171). To escape from this tag and avoid police attention and arrests, they changed the organisation's name to GSS in 1984.

Along with fighting land issues, the GSS started actively demanding self-rule in the tribal areas. The self-rule strategies were employed to reclaim control of tribal areas and counter both the state and the non-tribals from interference. The GSS revived *Raicenters* (traditional tribal council system) among the tribal communities, particularly the Gonds, to take socio-political decisions (ibid). These *Raicenters* reflect the philosophy and practices of what is called participatory democracy. In this process of claiming self-rule and democratization, the GSS, with the support of Naxals, raised the demand for districts to achieve self-rule in tribal areas. The Naxalites pressed for this demand because within the tribal district, they would create their ideological support base and ground for their activities. The Naxalites felt it was necessary particularly after the increased presence of state apparatus i.e., police and other developmental agencies in the tribal areas. Interestingly, the Naxalites were interested in forming new districts for the tribal areas, but they were reluctant to revive *Raicenters*. Because in the *Raicenter* system, the traditional council plays a central role in deciding the socio-political affairs of the tribal community. The consolidation of the tribal traditional system could weaken the tribal support to the Naxals' struggle against the state⁵⁴.

This ideological fissure increased with the rise of identity politics at the national and international levels from the 1970s to 80s. The indigeneity question was gaining significance at the international level. International Indigenous Day, declaration of the Decade of indigenous community, and other indigenous concerns and rights have been institutionalized internationally. Indigenous politics at the international level asserted itself mainly for the right to territoriality, self-governance and protection of their culture (Anaya, 2009). At the same time, the national political scene was dominated by the rise of identity politics, which was characterized as the 'second democratic upsurge' by Yogendra Yadav (2002) and 'the rise of

⁵⁴ Ascertained from an interview with Sidam Bheem Rao at Indravelli in Adilabad district on 20 April 2019.

the plebians' by Christophe Jaffrelot and Sanjay Kumar (2012). After 1990, particularly after V.P. Singh's government decided to implement the Mandal commission, caste-based articulations have been reinvigorated. This process of identity-based politics had also influenced tribal communities' politics.

In Indian democracy, community identity started playing a vital role in negotiating and bargaining with the state over public goods and recognition, particularly after the Mandal episode. Due to increasing identity consciousness and the rise of identity-based politics, the Left parties and organisations, led mainly by leaders from upper caste backgrounds, were losing hold among the tribals. With the rise of caste and community-based politics, debates on caste and community assume public saliency. Maraju Veeranna, who was associated with the CPI (M-L), played a crucial role in bringing the discussion on the caste and tribe questions within the Left ideology in Andhra Pradesh. The Maraju Veeranna group took a strong position on community, caste, class, territorial injustices, and felt that addressing them together would only foster justice (Bhukya, 2010: 247). Thus, taking a position on these issues made him a popular leader among the masses, particularly among the tribals and the Dalits. Maraju Veeranna also raised and popularized Telangana separate state demand by conducting more than 250 meetings in towns and villages in the late 1990s. He also believed and advocated that the smaller state and smaller districts would better serve the benefits of the tribal communities. Veeranna's significant political act played a crucial role in mentoring and guiding many oppressed communities and caste organisations that emerged in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in the mid-1990s. Besides, he played an active role in forming CPI (M-L) Janashakti, strengthening organisation in the tribal areas, and mobilising the tribals. He started community-wise organisations with educated youths. In the mid-90s, the Janashakti played a leading role in forming community-wise civil society organisations⁵⁵ such as TudumDebba (TD) for the Gonds and Koyas, and Nangara Bheri (NB) for the Lambadas to air their voice and protect their socio-political and economic interests (Bhukya 2010:247). Interestingly, these organisations were named after the traditional musical instruments of the Gonds and the Lambadas, respectively. After the death of Veeranna in 1999 and the decline of Naxalite movement, these organisations changed their names. Tudum Debbawas changed to Adivasi

⁵⁵ Ascertained from interview with Ramdas, at Uttoor on 11 May 2019.

Hakkula Porata Samithi (AHPS), and Nangara Bheri as Lambada Hakkula Porata Samithi (LHPS). They distanced from the radical Left organisations and exclusively emerged as community identity-based organisations.

As India liberalized its economy in the late 1980s, the state and market forces began to look for more opportunities to extract resources. In the meantime, the forest department's attempt to protect and control forests and wildlife brought severe pressure in the tribal areas. The above-mentioned forces have fostered tribal political consciousness. Fearing the greater penetration of exogenous forces in the tribal areas, motivated civil society and traditional leaders realized the need for districts for tribal areas.⁵⁶ In the 1990s, the demands for districts re-emerged among the intellectuals and the civil society organisations mainly led by educated sections of tribals. The demand for a separate district for the tribal areas was raised so that tribes could have a self-governing institution that helps resist these exogenous exploitative and alienating forces in the tribal areas.

After the emergence of TD and NB from the mid-1990s, other intellectuals and activists associated with civil society organisations such as civil liberties and human rights organisations played a crucial role in mobilising tribals to demand separate districts. The demand for districts in tribal areas of Telangana evolved with the tribal politics as they grew out of their socio-political and economic concerns. These organisations have emerged as agencies, raising issues of marginalization, alienation of tribals, and concerns of territorial identity.

Against this backdrop, in the early 1990s, leaders of Tudum Debba had organized a meeting at Bhadrachalam in Khammam district to demand self-governance and new districts. This meeting was attended by tribals, civil society groups, traditional leaders, and some concerned bureaucrats like M.V.P.C. Sastry and intellectuals from all over the state. Ponem Srinivas, a leader of ASP, who played a key role in organizing the meeting, recollected that “the attendees of the meeting realized that though many laws exist for the protection of the tribals interests, they are not being implemented, and the tribals’ rights and interests are being subordinated despite several movements and protests by the tribals. Therefore, self-governing

⁵⁶ Ascertained from an interview with AtramSaguna on 20 April 2019 at Indravelli

units in the form of districts with tribal councils were demanded” (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019). He further highlighted that “the resolution came after Indravelli incident (1981) which took place just a decade ago, which was immediately reminiscent of suppression of tribals. It was collectively asserted that given the uniformity of the tribal areas, the Agency/tribal areas-based district should be created and ITDA towns as their headquarters out of erstwhile Adilabad, Khammam and Warangal districts” (ibid). The tribals meetings consolidated intellectual support to the demands for the new districts.

Again, demanding the tribal districts, several forums of tribal people jointly organized a conference on ‘Threats to Tribal Identity and Importance of Self Rule’ on 20 November 1994 at Bhadrachalam, Khammam district (Rao and Bhushan, 1995:24). The conference was attended by nearly 300 tribals delegates from Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad, Vizianagaram, Vishakhapatnam, Srikakulam, East Godavari, and West Godavari districts and Hyderabad, representing organisations of tribals, tribal employees and students, some scholars of tribal studies and activists. Subsequently, a public meeting was held in the evening, which was attended by more than 5,000 people, and the meeting was addressed by Prof. Biyala Janardhan Rao (ibid). This meeting was conducted in the backdrop of issues and challenges such as land alienation, displacement of tribals, atrocities against tribal women, tribal employees and tribal sarpanches, implications of proposed bills on forest and resettlement and rehabilitation, the recommendations of the Bhuria Committee (1995) which recommended recognition of tribal territorial rights and self-governing units. Rao and Bhushan (1995:25) note that ‘in the conference and meeting, in the face of threats to tribal’s lands, livelihood and cultural identity posed by the dominant role of the state and outsiders influence have triggered for a strong reassertion of demanding for new districts in the tribal areas to have self-rule’.

With the rise of the second phase of separate statehood movement in Telangana in the mid-1990s⁵⁷, many intellectual and political leadership of Telangana was mobilising tribals for the cause of statehood. Scholars like Prof. Biyala Janardhan Rao played an instrumental role in mobilising the tribal communities for the separate state. Recollecting his

⁵⁷ Movement for the separate state of Telangana first came in 1969. Though this phase evoked popular sentiment, it could not mobilise all communities. Unlike the first phase, the second phase started after 1990s have sparked debate on addressing and accommodating various communities and castes.

role, Komuram Prabhakar, who belongs to the Koya tribe and is a PESACO-ordinator of Eturunagaram ITDA, said that “during the 1990s, Prof. Biyala Janardhan Rao, who studied tribals of the Godavari belt and formed Adivasi Adhyayana Vedhika at Warangal, influenced and mobilised us for the separate state of Telangana. He wished for Telangana state formation wherein the tribal areas should get the Scheduled Districts to govern themselves” (Interviewed at Eturunagaram in Mulugu district, 3 June 2019). Thus, in the late 1990s, Biyala Janardhan Rao successfully forged the confluence of tribal movement and Telangana struggle in the following ways: First, he started convincing tribals that the tribal movement and Telangana movement shared similar objectives given that they are fighting for ‘self-rule’. Second, he was against exploitation, marginalization, and socio-cultural alienation of the people. Third, he believed in the need for autonomy for small units such as smaller states and districts to bring real participatory democracy (Rao, 2015)⁵⁸.

The tribals participated in separate state movements with the expectation that they would get self-governing rights and their interest would be protected. In this regard, K. Anil, the PESA Co-ordinator for Kothagudem district (Bhadrachalam ITDA), considered that “majority of the tribal civil society organisations started supporting and participating in the Telangana struggle with the hope that they would get justice by getting new districts in a separate state of Telangana” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, 27 May 2019). This mobilisation in the tribal areas for Telangana reflects the mutual interests of the Telangana and tribals movements for self-governance.

In 2002, the TRS party was formed as a political expression of the Telangana movement. Issues like *Nidhulu* (finance), *Neelu* (water) *Niyamakalu* (employment), which Janardhan Rao articulated, become central issues of the slogan for the Telangana movement (Rao, 2015). KCR emerged as a popular and able mass leader who mobilized all sections of the society for the separate statehood movement. To mobilise the tribal communities for the separate state and to gain their political support, KCR promised new districts and self-governance in the tribal areas. Thus, KCR and others had engineered a separate state sentiment in the tribal areas. However, the larger collective mobilisation of the Telangana movement overshadowed the tribal demand for the districts.

⁵⁸ See Rao (2015) for Biyala Janardhan Rao’s contribution to Telangana movement and tribal mobilisation.

A section of tribals started demanding Manya Seema state when the Telangana movement gained momentum in the early 2000s. The demand for tribal-state originated in the Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, but later it spread to the tribal areas of Telangana (Reddy and Mahender, 2014). This demand encompassed Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam, East Godavari, West, Visakhapatnam, Vijayanagaram, and Srikakulam (The New Indian Express, 2013). The proposed tribal state, Manya Seema, touches Telangana, Coastal Andhra, and Uttar Andhra, including the Godavari basin. Bhadrachalam, a centrally located town, is proposed as its headquarter (Nandhivarman, 2010).

Manya Seema Sadhana Samithi (MSSS) and the majority of tribal public representatives sought and mobilised tribals for the creation of a separate state for Manya Seema. Rallies, dharnas, and bandhs were organised by the MRSS. The MRSS state convener and former MLA Chanda Lingaiah Dora, as well as tribal MLAs P. Rajanna Dora (Salur), AtramSakku (Asifabad), T. Balaraju (Polavaram), Uke Abbaiah (Yellendu), tribal leaders KunjaBiksham, Soyam Babu Rao, PunamSinganna Dora, and representatives from 14 tribal organisations, passed a resolution demanding Manya Seema (The New Indian Express, 2013). Palla Trinadha Rao (2013) notes that “the demand for a separate state for the tribals encompassing the contiguous tribal areas in the state, has been present in vogue from 1986. The demand has been raised purposely time and again co-terminus with Telangana movement.” Indeed, the demand for a separate state emerged based on their distinctive culture, history, territory, and marginalization. Drawing a parallel between the demand for separate Telangana state and separate Manya Seema, Lingaiah said that “Telangana’s proponents demanded a separate state, alleging cultural differences and the denial of their rights after merging of Telangana in Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, our demands are more legitimate. Our languages, cultures, and customs are distinct. We have been robbed of our riches and resources” (cited The New Indian Express, 2013). He further contends that “Our demand is not motivated by political gain or self-interest, but rather by the conviction that tribal self-rule is the only way to protect tribal rights and resources” (ibid). Against this backdrop, Prof. Kancha Ilaiah, who defends the Manya Seema demand in regional new papers, contends that ‘separate district should be created for the tribals whenever separate state of Telangana is carved out’ (cited in Kuffir, 2010). According to Ilaiah, tribal identity

and rights can be protected, their development can be ensured only by separating their territory and establishing tribal 'self-rule'.

The demand for Manya Seema was seen as essential for protecting their land, identity and avoiding displacement due to the Polavaram project. This demand was popular in Bhadrachalam, the area most affected by this project. The bifurcation of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh was seen as detrimental to the tribal interest because the inter-state borders cut across tribal areas. Even Srikrishna Committee (2010: 375) expressed apprehensions that if the Telangana state is created without assuring necessary protection to the tribals then tribals will be more alienated and exploited. The Committee proposed and supported a separate state for tribal areas to secure tribe's autonomy and identity (ibid). However, due to political reasons, as the Telangana movement had support of political parties and media coverage, emotionally pitched Telangana movement for a separate state eclipsed tribals' demand for separate districts during this phase. The Telangana movement trumped the tribal-state demand.

In its bid to win elections and form the first government in the newly created state, the KCR-led TRS party promised new districts in Telangana in its 2014 election manifesto. After TRS formed its first government in the new state of Telangana in 2014, tribal civil society leaders, particularly in Khammam and Warangal districts have asserted and intensified their protest for the creation of the tribal districts, and reminded the TRS government of its promise to create new districts (Deccan Chronicle, 2014). Sunam Rajaiah and Payam Venkateswarlu, the then MLAs of Bhadrachalam and Pinapaka (ST reserved constituencies), also raised the demand (ibid). So the idea of creating more districts and changing borders in Telangana emanated strongly from the tribal communities.

On 2 September 2015, the Telangana Cabinet decided to create more districts. Towards this end, a committee headed by the Chief Secretary was appointed to make recommendations on the feasibility of creating more districts in Telangana (Oneindia, 2015). "The district demands in tribal areas regained momentum following the reported decision of the State Cabinet to constitute a high-level panel consisting top officials to look into the proposed reorganisation of the districts in the State to create new districts" (The Hindu,

2015a). Later on, in June 2016, the Telangana government led by KCR announced that new districts would be created under Andhra Pradesh District Reorganisation Act, 1974, as was promised during the Telangana movement and 2014 election manifesto (TRS Election Manifesto, 2014: 30). With this announcement by KCR, the old demand for tribal districts based on the ITDA towns as headquarters got rekindled and began to gain more traction. Girijana Samkshema Parishath (GSP) held ‘Gondwana Sammelan’, a national tribal convention with major tribal organisations, in Bhadrachalam on 21 and 22 February 2016. In this convention, “the tribals demanded the central and state governments to declare all the districts in Scheduled Areas spread across the Gondwana region in the country as Adivasi districts” (Adivasi Resurgence, 2016). Sonde Veeraiah, GSP state convener, considered that ‘the meeting lends momentum to the long-cherished demand of the Adivasis inhabiting scheduled areas of Khammam district and other areas for Adivasi districts with ITDA towns such as Bhadrachalam as headquarters’(ibid).

Though initial mobilisation for the district was done by Tudum Debba (later as AHPS) and other organisations, the protests by tribal civil society organisations had metamorphosed into a widespread movement demanding a separate district, particularly from 2015. There seems to be little difference between the Gonds, the Koyas, and the Lambadas, and other tribal communities on demanding district in all the tribal areas. The diverse tribal communities represent their diverse interests, but they formed a political coalition to fight economic alienation, cultural survival, and guard the territory. The communities perceived powerlessness and identity concerns act as a uniting force for demanding new districts. They know that any split in their demand further jeopardizes their larger unity for the district. Political actions and positions of the tribal communities were linked with the territorialization of their areas with district borders. The element of difference at the site level can be found between the communities. Greater difference emerges while claiming benefits and the balme game unravels in interesting forms; these aspects will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

There were protests *rallies*, *bandhs*, and *dharnas* in the tribal areas, particularly in Uttoor, Bhadrachalam, and Eturunagam towns (Srinivas, 2016a; 2016b; Sridhar 2016; The Hindu 2015d; 2016a). Organisations such as ASP, AHPS, Tudum Debba, LHPS, Naikpod Seva Sangam (NSS), Girijana Sankshema Parishad (GSP), Kolam Sangam (KS),

Kondareddies' Sangam (KS), Adivasi Mahalia Sangam (AMS) Adivasi Nirodyoga Sangam (ANS), Sevalal Sena (SS) Adivasi Gondwana Students Organisation (AGSO) and concerned individuals have actively involved in demanding districts (Mahender, 2016). The organisations and their unity radiated hope and channeled the demand for the districts. To further intensify their protest for new districts, Komuram Prabhakar recollected that “demanding these towns and agency areas as tribal districts, we have not only led movement in our areas, but representatives of almost all the organisations from all three districts collectively observed fast for 48 hours at Indrapark in Hyderabad on 6 October 2016”(Interviewed at Eturunagaram in Mulugu district, 4 June 2019). Demanding tribal districts, they have submitted representations to Ministers, MLAs, Collectors, ITDA Project Officer (POs), and to the K. Keshav Rao Committee constituted by the government and the officials of Revenue Departments to study the rationale for new districts. Prolonged protests were also carried at Utnoor, Bhadrachalam, and Eturunagaram towns (The Hans India, 2006). In Utnoor, the protest was led by Tudum-Debba (AHPS), GSP, ANS, AGSO, AMS (the Gonds primarily represent all these organisations), LHPS, Nagara Bheri (Lambadas) NSS (Naikpod), and KS (Kolam). In Eturunagaram organisations such as Tudum-Debba (ASP), GSP, ANS (mostly represented by Koyas), LHPS, SS (Lambadas) were leading the protest. In Bhadrachalam ASP, GSP, ANS (Koyas) LHPS, SS, Nagara Bheri (Lambadas) NSS (Naikpod), and KS (for KondReddis) were actively mobilising the tribals for the new districts (Mahender, 2016). See below table for organisations involved in demanding districts.

Table 4.2.: Tribal Organisations Demanded for the New Districts

Place of Protest	Organisations involved	Tribal Communities Associated with Organisations
Utnoor	Tudum-Debba, Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samithi(AHPS), GirijanaS angshema Parishad (GSP), Adivasi Sangshema Parishad(ASP) Adivasi Nirodyogula Sangham (ANS), Adivasi Gondwana Students Organisation (AGSO), Adivasi Mahila Sangham (AMS)	Gonds
	Nagara Bheri, Lambada Hakkulla Porata Samithi(LHPS), Sevalal Sena(SS), Girijana Sangham(GS),	Lambadas
	Kolam Sangham (KS),	Kolams
	Naikpod Seva Sangh (NSS)	Naikpods
	Pradhan Purohit Sangham(PPS)	Pradhans
	Thoti Sangham (TS)	Thotis
Eturunagaram	Tudum-Debba, AHPS, ASP, GSP, AGSO and AMS	Koyas
	Nagara Bheri, LHPS, and Sevalal Vidyarthi Sena(SVS)	Lambadas
Bhadrachalam	Tudum-Debba, AHPS, ASP, GSP, and AMS	Koyas
	Nagara Bheri, LHPS, SS, and GS	Lambadas
	NSS	Naikpods
	Kondareddies Sangham	Kondareddies
Mahabubabad	Nagara Bheri, LHPS, SS, and GS	Lambadas

Source: Prepared by Researcher based on fieldwork

These civil society groups identified themselves as harbingers of demand for the districts. Interestingly, all the community leaders and organisations have come together to demand districts, keeping aside their differences. Thus, there has been an alliance between the communities concerning the demand for separate tribal districts. This alliance resonates Butlers' argument of 'equivalence in political demands without becoming each other' (cited in Gudavarthy, 2020: 8). Butler pointed out the difference between the condition and limits of identities. Identities gain specific indifference but the same difference also constitutes the limit on its final realization (ibid). Similarly, alliance was forged among diverse tribal communities for demanding districts but each community has its own socio-political goal. To paraphrase Gudavarthy (2020) the solidarity that emerges out of difference for aspiring higher status or recognition among tribal communities, could be seen as making claims for the secular ethos. The Telangana government's announcement of district creation provided

opportunities for political consolidation of collective identity and grievances. Cognizant of the possible disjuncture in their territorial unity and dismemberment, representatives of various organisations became more vocal and assertive in the process.

Almost all the parties extended support to the tribal demand for separate districts at the constituency level. KCR-led government created twenty- one new districts on 11 October 2016. In 2018, the government created two more districts due to intense mobilisation of tribal groups and electoral constraints. Currently the total number of districts in Telangana stands at thirty-three. Districts in the tribal areas were created without considering the areas and towns demanded by the tribals. Instead, district borders were carved and towns were selected with political motives. On the ground of the Scheduled Areas having different procedure i.e., mandatory consultation processes, and questioning the government's authority to redraw district borders in tribal areas in the lack of the above, the ASP challenged the reorganisation of district borders in tribal areas by filing a petition in the High Court of Telangana (Mahesh 2016).

To challenge the process, tribals have invoked PESA, FRA Acts, and Article 244(1) that allow tribals to govern by themselves. Any decision should be taken after consultation and consent of the tribals. The governor's approval is required to pass state legislation, which impacts the tribal areas, demography, identity and tribal rights. The Telangana District Formation Act (TDFA) (1974) empowers the state to change borders of the existing districts. Without clearly specifying how district borders should be drawn in the tribal areas where the tribal/Scheduled areas are governed by the PESA and the FRA Act. Though there is a provision in TDFA (1974) for consulting and taking the opinion of people in general, the ultimate authority to carve out borders lies with the state ruling elites after receiving feedback from the concerned district bureaucrats and representatives of the district (GoT, 2016a). When asked about the consultation process, Vedama Bojju, PESA Coordinator of Adilabad district, and also State General Secretary of Adivasi Gondwana Students Organisation, echoed the widespread feeling that 'neither the erstwhile district officials, nor the ITDA nor the government representatives consulted them before creating new districts' (Interviewed at Indravelli, 19 April 2019). He further said 'it was only when they came to know about the government's initiation of the creation of the district process, some of the tribal activists

submitted representations to the district level officials and the public representatives. The government lends deaf ears despite the growing intensity of the demand for districts in the tribal areas'. The civil society members and educated sections have highlighted the fact that the politicians and successive governments have all long weakened the tribal areas and institutions in gross violation of the letter and spirit of the Constitution. It was commonly asserted that constitutionally consultation is *sine qua non* for the creation of district in the Scheduled/tribal Areas. The recent creation of districts in Telangana represents an act by stealth as it conspicuously avoided popular participation and bypassed the laws of the land. This resembles the colonial power drawing of borders of African countries at the Berlin Conference in 1885, which did not involve the local people and was done with little regard for indigenous peoples' cultures and histories (Bookman, 2013: 163). Most tribals have a wide-spread feeling that the state and the bureaucrats remain insensitive to the procedure and demands.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has tried to outline the demographic profile of the communities and areas in which they have been residing and described the trajectories of demands for tribal districts. The educated and politically conscious class and civil society organisations have played a crucial role in shaping their mobilisation for the districts in areas where they are territorially concentrated. The initial struggle was for protecting their land, economic interests and to forestall their marginalisation, in ways which secure robust tribal self-governance. Despite the difference in ideologies and interests of organisations, there is a realisation that districts must be created for their traditional tribal territories. The diverse and competing communities have come together to seek districts and articulated their consolidated voices during the peak of the districts formation process in Telangana. This imposed huge moral and political pressure on the ruling elites of the state. Tribals' districts demand and their articulation created ethnic identity consciousness among the territorially concentrated tribal groups. The creations of the districts offer various tribal groups the best chance to demand evenhandedness and accommodation. The rise, ubiquity of the assertion, simultaneity, convergence, and connectedness for demanding districts from all tribal areas of the former districts had been striking.

The next chapter focuses on how tribals ground their moral and political claims to consolidate their ethnic and territorial identity. Border change constitutes a complex hierarchy of material and symbolic power relations and institutionalizes the borders' power matrix. Towards this end, the next chapter discusses the constructions of moral and political claims of tribals centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation for the new districts.

Chapter 5

The Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation: Demands for District Border Change in Tribal Areas

5.1. Introduction

In liberal democracies, the culture and political preferences of the dominant communities are leveraged over minority communities' culture and political preferences (Keating, 1996: 8-9; Kymlicka, 1995; Raz, 1986; Phillips, 1995: 8-9). In doing so, the dominant societies' narratives become meta-narratives while minorities' voices are considered micro-narratives, ones that receive less attention. Nonetheless, the territorially concentrated minority communities with their 'own societal culture'⁵⁹ also germinate narratives of their socio-political issues and experiences that are significant in forming nationalities. This has resonance in tribal areas as well. In this context, the federal units play a vital role in accommodating the territorially concentrated tribal/ethnic communities (Bookman, 2013; Horowitz, 1985; Kymlicka, 1995). Additionally, the tribal communities have been invoking territorial and ethnic differences to demand new sub-units including districts (Prakash, 1999; Xaxa and Puia, 2020). In this sense, the political and administrative unit formation in federal systems, become sites of articulations of recognition, redistribution, and exercising power.

This chapter addresses how demands for districts in the tribal areas of Telangana entail distinctive forms of politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation. The previous chapter discussed the trajectories of new district demands in the tribal areas and the role of tribal organizations and actors, which addresses the questions of 'who' and 'how' districts were demanded. This chapter focuses on 'why' separate districts were demanded and how the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation grounded the demands for new districts. These hold key to understand tribal politics in Telangana and beyond.

All political formations are expected to have ideological and socio-political contents, including values, principles, and experiences, that define identity and interest of political

⁵⁹ In a different context, Kymlicka (1995: 76) used the term 'societal culture' to refer to a territorially concentrated culture centered on a shared language.

groups. In this regard, Snow and Benford (2000:616) note that “any collective activity or movement must define situations and unjust conditions, identify causality and imputing blame to culpable agents be it individuals, collective process or system”. Similarly, Morgan (2011) contends that “the people who are making claims assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended and how their conditions and aspirations could be used”. Gramson (cited in Morgan, 2011:45) calls these claim-making or movement-building processes as ‘ideological packages’. The tribals’ moral and political claims making process is part and parcel of their protracted struggle, which largely coalesce around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation. Their socio-political experiences and expressions are part of their ideological politics to differentiate themselves from other social groups, which reflect the ontology of tribal politics. Therefore, it is necessary to have a normative and explanatory account of the tribals’ moral and political claims which are couched around the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation for new districts. The claim-making process empowers social movements and other non-state actors to engage with the state or elites in the government, which has different criterias/normative justifications for formations of districts, and accommodate different competing group interests. Thus, this chapter helps in highlighting congruence and incongruence between the normative justifications of the tribal communities and the state.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The second, the third, and the fourth sections focus on the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation, respectively. The fifth section focuses on the government’s criteria for creating districts and the difference between the government rationale and the tribals claims for the district. The last section concludes the chapter.

5.2. The Politics of Recognition: Territorial, Socio-cultural, Symbolic, and Language Concerns

The socio-cultural aspects play a vital role in identity politics. In this regard, Huntington (1996: 21) underscored that people identify with cultural groups, from primitive groups to

civilizational levels⁶⁰. Further, Ross (1997: 302) notes that culture determines political priorities by defining the symbolic and material items people value and establishing normative order in socio-political life.

In deeply divided societies, two sets of social contexts influence the politics of recognition. First, collective beliefs and practices constitute a sense of belonging and collective identity, which in turn seek recognition of differences while challenging the majority community's super impositions. Second, the cultural/group dignity assertions emerge in a graded social hierarchy, which becomes a source of discrimination and marginalisation. In these contexts, the politics of recognition essentially involves perceived injustice, requiring protection and a sense of harm to the collective cultural agency (Taylor, 1994). The tribal communities, concentrated in particular territories, have their own language, socio-cultural beliefs, and practices, which differ from mainstream society and do not fall under the caste hierarchy⁶¹ (Xaxa, 2008). The territorial, socio-cultural⁶² and political aspects play a vital role in fashioning the tribal politics of recognition. The following section focuses on how the sense of threats or seeking for cultural recognition has been deployed in tribals' politics of recognition to demand districts for tribal areas.

5.2.1. Territorial Consolidation through District Borders

Territorial politics is one of the essential parts of tribal politics of recognition because the area or territory is embedded in their historical and cultural constructions, which provide them a sense of collective identity. The key inquiry in this section is how the historically, culturally, and politically salient differences have a territorial basis and role of symbolic and material aspects in forming territorial identity.

Territory undergirds political and social power in a defined geographical space (Sack, 1983:133; Kolers, 2009). The production of territories gives physical substance and

⁶⁰ Huntington (1996: 21) contends that in the post-cold war era, the cultural politics based on ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions play a significant role in dividing people than economic ideology.

⁶¹ Along with the difference, the tribals are also subject of discrimination and marginalisation.

⁶² Culture can be defined objectively as a community's customs, habits, traditions, values, beliefs, ways of living, way of thinking, and behaviour, and subjectively as a sense of belonging to a society with a shared history. (Keating, 1996: 9). Different cultures provide communication as well as a means of perceiving social reality, as well as social cohesion and integration mechanisms (ibid).

symbolic meaning to dichotomous notions of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ (Penrose, 2002:280). In this regard, Penrose (2002) lists how the territories harness the emotional power of space. First, the natural division of space, connected with the physical territory- refers to the time-immemorial origin, and people have a sense of naturalness (ibid: 280-281). Second, the relationship between kinship and place means the environment with which people’s emotions are attached. Third, personal attachment to a place or territory. Fourth, the emotional power of territory stems from ‘humans have a proclivity for using history, memory, and myth to strengthen their bonds with certain places’ (ibid: 282). Thus, territoriality at the national level or within the country invokes material and symbolic power. The collective ‘imagination’ exists firmly in social and political practices and assertion of belonging (Anderson, 1983: 4; Davis, 2012: 95; Keating, 2015:131-132; Paasi, 2002: 805). Equally, Davis (2012: 95) argued that the “imagination of places and homelands, particularly, is embedded in the social relations and history around which narratives of belonging are woven”. Belonging entails a sense of rootedness in a socio-geographical site (ibid). Thus, there is a normatively significant relationship between people and their places (Bookman, 2013).

Belonging in tribal politics occurs through demarcating areas for the district. In tribal politics, the territory has both normative and political values, as territory signifies the relation between the native people and the land they live (Bhukya, 2010; 2017; Ivison et al., 2000; Kolers, 2009; Sen, 2018; Tully, 1994). Guha (1983:279) considered that ‘the territorial identities are formed based on consanguinity and contiguity’. Damodaran (2013: 2013a) holds a similar view that the land or territory is an important reference in defining the word indigenous and environmentalism. The relation of indigenous community with the land is an important maker of their identity. Thus, along with the social, the spatial notion plays an essential role in constructing tribals’ recognition politics and their engagement with the state and the mainstream society. The tribals’ demands for the districts were based on ethno-cultural differences with territorial borders (see maps 4.1; 4.2; 4.3, in the previous chapter). The territoriality and borders of political units shield the ethnic concerns and interests. In this regard, Sen (2018: 76) notes that drawing boundaries is an essential process of crystallising the collective self, but breaking the territory through borders leads to the sense of mis/non-recognition.

The territorial claims are entwined with the recognition, and autonomy/self-government politics, a phenomenon known as ‘territorial pluralism’ (Basta et al., 2015; Keating, 2015: 30; Lluch, 2014). The common territorial identities, drawn based on historical and politically recognised areas, are the glue that holds them together. From the beginning of colonial rule, tribal politics has been marked by resistance to governmental interference in their autonomy and control over their land. The communities invoke the past for their present claims on the territory to demand overlapping new district borders. The tribal communities, particularly the Gonds of Adilabad district and the Koya of Khammam district, stress their historical unit and community rule in larger traditional territory, once known as Gondwana raj⁶³. Territorially, the Gondwana areas are spread through the Central Provinces and Berar (present-day eastern Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh areas) and parts of the north-eastern Telangana state (which includes the areas of present Asifabad and Adilabad districts) (Poyam, 2016).

The present territorial notion is traced to their past rule and territorial identity. Atram Suguna, a Gond women and state General Secretary of Adivasi Mahila Sangham (AMS), echoes a wide spread view that “the tribals have had their own Gondwana territory, an ancestral land, wherein the tribals were connected with distinct, culture, tradition, community rule, economy, language, food habits, customs, and ethos, which are different from caste dominated mainstream society” (Interviewed at Indravelli in Adilabad district, 20 April 2019). She highlighted how the territory of the Gondwana state got disjointed by successive governments’ drawing of inter-states borders. Though tribals demanded Jharkhand and Manya Seema states and districts for their territory and self-governance, they never got materialized⁶⁴. The ideological distinctions have been produced based on the territorial-based historical and social aspects to differentiate themselves and morally legitimatise their claims for the new districts.

⁶³ The Gondwana, or the homeland of the Gonds, comprised the kingdoms or chieftaincies under the principality of Garh. The chief kingdoms within Gondwana were Khatola, Magadh, Mandla, Silwani, Deogarh, Kherla and Lanji. Its main seats of power were in Chanda, Deogarh and Garh Mandla, all ruled by sovereign Gond chieftains. They existed under the political domination of the Mughal Empire before 1730 (Prasad, 1999: 363).

⁶⁴For instance, Prasad (1999:366) noted that the Gond’s rule in Gondwana declined due to the domination of the Marathas and imposition of the colonial rule.

Territorial identity is a fundamental anchor of past and present belonging. Thus, the discourse of ‘indigeneity’ has also played a central role in the politics of recognition (Davis, 2011:102). While invoking indigeneity and areas for new districts, Atram Suguna said that “the term ‘Adivasi’ refers to communities who have been living in a certain territory since many centuries and enjoyed ‘self-rule’”(Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). The assertion of Adivasi (native of the land) or indigenous identity, serves a political purpose to construct territorial identity (Hardiman, 1987:16). As Waldron (cited in Ejobowah, 2015: 222) avers that “historical rights are acquired on account of certain important events that occurred at an earlier point in time and are based on principles of ‘first occupancy’, ‘prior occupancy’ and ‘territorial in formativeness’”.

Territorial formativeness, which means that a specific stretch of land is integral to a community’s life and identity, is central to tribal politics (cf. Ejobowah, 2015: 225). Bhujang Rao (Interview at Indravelli, 20 April 2019), pointed out that “these are the places where our forefathers lived, ruled and fought for identity and autonomy. To get recognition to these historical legacies, we have demanded separate district”. Thus, the emotions attached with discrete territory have been marshaled for territorial consolidation by district borders.

Additionally, tribals associate the forest areas with their symbolic identity (Sen, 2018). The tribals’ sustenance and socio-cultural belief systems are associated with the forest. A symbiotic relationship exists between the tribes and the forest. The territorial consolidation is stressed more in the background of infiltration of outsiders and the penetration of the state into the tribal areas for various reasons such as extraction of forest resources, development projects and enclosing their areas for wildlife and forest protections. The insecurity of losing forest track due to division of areas has also influenced the demand for the districts. The territory has also been defended from material concerns. Territory carries two functions: first, it protects the existence and security of the people who reside in it. Second, in this separate area, insiders have the prospect to fulfill their needs through the state’s essential public goods and control over the natural resources. Therefore, territory functions as a springboard for the opportunities.

The constitutional recognition of Scheduled Area (SA), PESA and Forest Right Act, 2006 (FRA) signify the territorial identity that emboldens them to claim territorial-based districts. Thus, tribals deployed the tribal/ITDA/Schedule Areas to carve out their borders and demand districts. In this regard, Vedama Bojju, asserts that “ITDAs were established based on the tribal population, social and cultural composition, economic and developmental concerns. Based on the same differences, we were demanding districts in our territory” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). These arguments underline that setting up ITDA for tribal areas provide plausibility and legitimise their demand for new district to consolidate their territorial identity. Tribals intended to create boundaries consistent with their traditional territory and state recognised areas. M. Tagore argues that the “general decentralisation (applied to plain areas) merely cannot be extended to the tribal/Scheduled areas⁶⁵ because our areas have separate laws and governance process”(Interview at Bhadrachalam in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, 26 May 2019). This assertion underlines that their self-governance provision must be territorially recognised.

Indeed, land, past rule/legacy, legal recognition, forest, contiguity, and consanguinity, etc., play an important role in forming tribal territorial identities and for demanding new districts. The recognition of their territory with the district border would allow them to get symbolic and political recognition. There was an enduring fear that division of their areas through borders would create territorial disruption by impacting traditional ties and breaking social and political cohesions. Tribals expect that the government would create districts without breaking their areas, in ways which would also recognise and legitimise their claim over territory. The following section discusses the socio-cultural aspects of the politics of recognition.

5.2.2. Socio-Cultural Aspects

In tribal societies, religion and politics are intertwined (Haimendorf, 1982; Hardiman, 1987; Sundar, 2006). The sacred geography of hills, forests, trees, rivers, ecological

⁶⁵ “The tribal areas in these districts are called Agency areas because of the protective jurisdiction exercised over them by the chief administrator of the district (the Collector) as an agent of the Governor. Nowadays these tracts are also referred to as “scheduled areas ”” (Reddy, 1988).

balance, shrines and sacred places become a legitimating myth of unity⁶⁶ (Haimendorf, 1948: 240–268, Tillin, 2013:43). These sacred and material aspects of nature play an influential role as tribal identity makers. In a different context, Kymlicka (2010: 38) considered that regaining control of traditional territory has profound political and economic significance the indigenous people. There was a strong belief among the tribals that small districts serve the purpose of socio-cultural preservation and consolidation against the influence of the dominant cultures. Thus, the subtext of cultural difference has political expressions.

Tribal activists have expressed their concern that despite the constitutional protection through Articles 28, 29, and 19(5), tribal communities have been unable to safeguard and promote their language and culture (Xaxa, 1999). Stressing the need for a separate district for protecting their culture and language, Madavi Manikrao, district president of Kolam Sangham, viewed that “our concern was that breaking and merging of areas poses a great threat to our culture and language” (Interviewed at Birsai pet in Adilabad district, 12 May 2019). Further, regarding discrimination based on language and loss of their cultural coherence, Ponem Srinivas shared a concern that “earlier we had our own Koya language, but by imitating the non-tribals, we lost our language. If we do not imitate them, we are disrespected and discriminated” (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 July 2019). Thus, it is explicit that cultural and language concerns were also important factors in demanding districts for the tribal areas. Additionally, the SA, PESA, and FRA recognise and empower the tribals to carry governance in consonance with their religious beliefs, cultures, and traditions. These Acts were invoked to counter the hegemonic dominance of the non-tribals in tribal areas. The demand for districts emanates from protecting their distinctive language and culture while effectively implementing the laws to provide the *raison d’etre* of exploiting and dominating forces. Recognition through districts would provide them denied status. Apart from the above cultural and language concerns, the sacred places and symbolic/struggle sites play vital roles in the tribals’ politics of recognition. This is highlighted in the following section.

⁶⁶ For instance, their clans are named after particular sacred animals and plants.

5.2.3 Sacred Geographies and Symbolic/Struggle Sites

Scholars have highlighted the significance of myths, traditions, ancestry, historical and cultural symbols in sustaining ethnic allegiance, sense of belonging, and forming nationalities (Anderson, 1983; Barth, 1969; Brass, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Horowitz, 1985; Renan, 2004; Smith, 1984). Similarly, historical incidents, sacred places, and socio-cultural events/symbols, and commemorations of martyrs have been vital in creating tribal territorial and ethnic consciousness for recognition. The sites and cultural practices provide them symbols of identity. The importance of social and political cities and celebrations and memory are being deployed to reclaim their identity, which is discussed briefly in the following section.

5.2.3.1. Nagoba (Keshlapur) Jatara Celebration

The Nagoba (Serpent God called *Shesh Nag*) temple, built by the Mesaram clan of the Gond tribe, is located at Keshlapur village in Adilabad district. The tribals offer prayer for 10-12 days to Nagoba in January every year. A fair and festival is conducted in the Keshlapur village during these days of cultural-religious practices. The fair/*Jatara* has been celebrated since the pre-independence period. In the year 1944, on the advice of Haimendorf, the Nizam's government officially recognized and started conducting the fair (Haimendorf, 1982: 175-177). The government introduced the administrative practice of *darbar* (public meeting for submitting grievances to the government officials) on the third day of the *Jatara*, wherein tribals can voice their grievances and concerns to the officials and representatives of the government (see Image 5.1). During two days of the *darbar*, all government departments take grievances from the tribals and put up make-shift stalls to provide information regarding the government schemes and programs for the tribal welfare at the *Jatara* sites. Additionally, *public darbar* is conducted on second day, which is attended by ministers, public representatives such as MLAs, MP, Collector, ITDA P.O (Image 5.2). This initiative was taken after realizing the significance of *Jatara*, where vast number of tribals gather, and to address the issues faced by the tribals in composite Adilabad district (Haimendorf, 1979: 527-29). The practice of conducting the *darbar* continued even in the post-independence period.



Image 5.1: Officials of various departments in darbar at Keshlapur jatara in Adilabad District picture captured by the researcher on 17 January 2018



Image 5.2: Public Darbar at Keshlapur Jatara in Adilabad district, picture captured by the researcher on 19 January 2018

Thus, the Keshlapur *Jatara* serves two essential functions in the tribal identity construction and its significance. First, it establishes the historical and cultural connection and symbolic recognition over the territory. Second, it offers the tribals a platform for political articulation and assertion, an important venue where tribals engage with the government. The sacred place and fair represent the symbolic, traditional, and cultural distinctiveness of the tribals provide vital glue for all tribals in the surrounding areas to come together. Given the significance of

the cultural sites, the formation of a new district was expected based around this place (Mahender 2016; The Hindu 2016a).

5.2.3.2. Komaram Bheem's Anniversary Celebration at Jodeghat

Jodeghat is located at Babejhari village in Kerameri mandal of Asifabad district. In Jodeghat, the Gonds and the Kolam tribes, under the leadership of Komaram Bheem (a Gond) and Komaram Nooru (a Kolam), had revolted against Asaf Jahi Nizam of Hyderabad. This revolt for self-governance and identity was suppressed, and Komaram Bheem, Komaram Nooru, and others were killed by the Nizam and colonial governments in 1940. In this struggle, Komaram Bheem gave the famous slogan of '*Jal, Jungle, Jameen Hamara Hai*' (water, forest, and land belong to us). This slogan underscores the rights of the tribals over forest, territory, and self-governance. Tribal organizations and activists invoke this slogan in Telangana and other parts of India to assert ownership of resources, recognition, and self-governance. This struggle for autonomy and self-governance remains a moral source for contemporary tribal political articulation.



Image 5.3: Gathering of tribals for celebration of Komaram Bheem's Death Anniversary at Jodeghat in Asifabad district, picture captured by the researcher on 6 October 2018

Komaram Bheem and other tribals' martyrdom is commemorated and celebrated on their anniversary with great pomp at Jodeghat on 30 October every year. Thousands of Adivasis, MLAs, MPs, Ministers, and district administrative officials attend the commemorating

meeting (see Image 5.3). In this meeting, the government presents activities undertaken for tribal development and the special socio-cultural recognition given to the tribals. During such events, tribals put across their demands and problems to the government. Given the significance of the site, the KCR government constructed a museum and a memorial by spending Rs 25 crore at Jodeghat in 2014 (Bussiness Line, 2014). All government activities at this site and annual commemorations, thus provide historical legitimacy for the tribals to make moral and political claims of ‘difference’ and identity recognition. Therefore, this historic site is another important dialogical space for the tribals to raise their issues and assert their identity. While making claims for the district, the centrality and significance of this site was stressed within a demarcated territory (Mahender 2016; Singh, 2016c). The following section discusses how the Indravelli Martyrs site has been used for making moral and political claims for tribals ethno-territorial politics.

5.2.3.3. Commemoration of Martyrs at Indravelli Amaravirula Stupa

The martyr’s *stupa* (a memorial pillar) site is located near Indravelli town, 10 km away from Utnoor in the Adilabad district. The Indravelli *Amaravirula* (martyrs) *stupa* is situated in the heart of tribal territory. Constructed after twelve tribals were killed in police firing it commemorates the lives of tribal martyrs who gathered for a meeting in 1981 to demand their rights and oppose land alienation at the hands of non-tribals (Raghuram, 1981; Singh P, 2016:113). Reflecting on the incident, Haimendorf (1982: 327) notes that ‘the killing at Indravelli was compared to the British suppression of a protest at Jallianwala Bagh.’. This incident and the site has become essential in constructing tribal politics as it serves as a symbol of fighting against internal colonialism and opposing their exploitation. The site gains significance from the fact that it is associated with the tribals’ community emotional and symbolic struggle in their historical consciousness. It has become part of their cultural ritual and socio-political practice to pay respect and conduct ceremonies at the site annually (see Image 5.4).



Image 5.4: Tribal gathering at Indravelli Stupa, picture captured by researcher on 19 April 2019

The tribals conduct a meeting at the memorial site every year on 20th April to commemorate and pay tribute to the martyrs. This meeting became a platform for thousands of tribals to voice their demands and grievances. Politicians and elected representatives attend this event because it is seen as a mark of respect to the tribal martyrs and is useful to promote their image of being concerned with the interest of tribal communities and their past struggle. The local officials closely observe issues raised at the event to report to the government. One of the main reasons for demanding Utnoor as a district for tribal areas emanates from the concerns that the sites will have more relevance, create a potential platform for tribal voice and be central in connecting with the Adivasis (Mahender, 2016).

There are other sacred places in undivided Adilabad like the *Jangubai* temple located at Paramdoli Bidwad, *Gandhaeri Khilla* near Asifabad, *Adelli* goddess at Jammuldhara in Lingapur mandal in Asifabad district, and *Adelli Pochchamma* in Kawal village of Jannaram mandal, Manchirail district. Thousands of tribals visit these sacred places to sacrifice animals and offer seeds to the local deities to propitiate the god before sowing of seeds. In addition, annual exhibitions are conducted as a mark of respect and cultural practices. Atram Anil (a Gond) contended that “these cultures and social belief and practices are collective activities, could be passed on to the future generation if we stand united in a single district without hurdles of borders” (Interviewed at Lingapur in Asifabad district, 19 April 2019). This concern underlines the protection of collective cultural practices.

Highlighting the significance of the sacred and symbolic sites, Kudametha Tirupathi, a Gond and AHPS president of Mancherial district, viewed that “the district to the tribal areas encompassing these historical and sacred sites and cultural connections would give a true sense of recognition to our past struggles and present community cultural concerns” (Interviewed at Mancherial, 23 April 2019). The respondents expressed that these historical and sacred sites provide them social and moral support to shield their territory, which is under state’s attack in the name of development and wildlife conservation projects.

The Nagoba *Jatara*, the Jodeghat, the Indravelli, and other popular historical and cultural sites’s connectivity and centrality in their territory, have fueled recognition politics for demanding Utnoor as a district. These sites and celebrations are symbolic, which are connected with the culture, attached to their memory and identity that are crucial in recognition politics and grounding demand for the district. The celebrations/commemorations at these places play a vital socio-cultural function of unity and collectivity. The government’s conduct of *darbar* to solve the tribal problems also serves a political utility. The sacred and political significance of these places gave impetus to demand district. Attempts are made to ensure that they are not separated from these sacred and politically salient spaces. With these, they would have had a collective voice and sense of belonging without any diversion, and the site and celebrations would gain more significance in the new district. The tribals believe that the new district borders accommodating all three sites within a single district would explicitly or implicitly provide recognition to their identity (The New Indian Express, 2016a).

5.2.3.4. Sammakka-Sarakka Medaram Jatara: Connecting with the Past Rule

Sammakka-Sarakka *Jatara* is celebrated at Medaram village near Eturunagaram in Warangal district. Sammakka and Sarakka, mother and daughter respectively, who belonged to the Koya community and were natives of Medaram village, got killed while bravely fighting a battle against the Kakatiya ruler (Kakatiyas ruled Warnagal between 1000 AD and 1380 AD). Sammakka and Sarakka fought for their autonomy and to protect the community rule. To commemorate their struggle, a fair is held biannually at Medaram. The celebration symbolises the extraordinary courage of a female tribal warrior against the powerful king to protect tribal autonomy (Raoo, 2017). The Koyas consider Sammaka and Sarakka as goddesses with

divine and miraculous power and worship them. Thus, the sites of struggle and the holy stream, a tributary of river Godavari that flows through Medaram, have played a crucial role in shaping the belief and culture, and politics of tribal communities. The fair is celebrated without any of the brahminical rituals and practices⁶⁷. The site of the fair became a sacred place of claiming tribal authority over territory and a sense of identity (see Image 5.5). The *jatara* plays an important role in constructing tribal identity and projecting differences to claim over cultural and administrative space⁶⁸. The demand for Eturunagaram as a separate district out of the composite Warangal district stems from this.



Image 5.5: Sammakka-Sarakka Jatara at Medaram picture taken from (<https://bit.ly/3nvOnmb>)

5.2.3.5. Bhadrachalam Temple: Reclaiming a Spiritual and Symbolic Space

In 17th century, Pokala Dammakka, a Koya woman, lived in Bhadrareddypalem (now known as Bhadrachalam) in the composite Khammam district. She found an idol of lord Sita-Rama in an anthill on the banks of the river Godavari. She thawed the anthill by pouring water that was fetched from the river Godavari, and subsequently, she constructed a hut temple with the help of people from her community. This temple became a popular sacred site among the Koyas and surrounding villages. Kancharala Gopanna, the Tehsildar (revenue official) of the

⁶⁷ According to a government report, the fair is attended by more than 10 million people, Asia's biggest tribal fair/Jatara (Raoof, 2017)

⁶⁸ The government of Telangana sanctioned Rs 200 crore in 2018 to develop permanent facilities like drinking water, roads etc., at MedaramJatara and 300 acres of land has been pulled to facilitate *jatara* in this site.

Tekulapally area (neighbouring Bhadrachalam areas) in the Golkonda kingdom governed by Abul Hasan Qutb Shah (1672), visited the temple site, even though the territory was under the British administration and not within Shah's jurisdiction. Goppana took a portion of revenue that should have gone to the state, to construct the temple where Dammakka had built her hut-temple. With the construction of a new temple complex, the temple emerged as one of the popular sacred sites for the tribals and the non-tribals. Madavi Nehru, ASP Coordinator of composite Khammam district, opined that "the site and temple originally belonged to the tribals, but non-tribals, particularly Brahmins have taken over the temple, and the Bhadrachalam town. We can regain the symbolic and spiritual recognition if Bhadrachalam district is formed as tribal district and Bhadrachalam town as headquarters" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 25 May 2019). Thus, the demand for Bhadrachalam district was embedded in the politics of recognition.

The above described sacred and struggle sites, are potent symbols of collective identities and uniting force for the cultural and territorial identity. Indravelli Martyrs site, Nagoba (Keshlapur) *Jatara*, and Jodeghat play a crucial role in demanding Utnoor as district for tribal areas of the erstwhile district. Sammaka Sarakka-Medaram *Jatara* plays a central role in constructing a cultural identity for demanding Eturunagaram as a district in the tribal areas of the former Warangal district. The Bhadrachalam temple case reflected their politics of essential difference to reclaim their space by having a district based in Bhadrachalam town⁶⁹. These sites and celebrations highlighted their territorial and ethnic connection and collective belonging. The emotions and spiritual connections associated with these sites and celebrations are crucial to form tribal nationalities.

These sites signify ideas, values, and commitments that are fundamental to tribal politics and act as a social signifier for generating a difference that gives symbolic value to the tribal communities. These sites and celebrations act as what John Armstrong calls 'symbolic border guards'⁷⁰ (Davis, 2013: 93). Imagining places and their significance are embedded in social ties and history around which narratives of belonging/homeland are

⁶⁹ Significance of these sites in three demanded districts areas is clear by looking at the government spending crores of on the constructing of museum at Jhodeghat, Medaram for Koya museum at the SammakaSarakkajatarasite, and in Sabarimuseum at Bhadrachalam.

⁷⁰ "These symbolic border guards relate to the whole field of cultural practices, including religion, language etc.," (Davis, 2013: 93).

woven. Ascribing and claiming legitimacy through these sites, and linking territory with communities identity is a clear political project⁷¹. These celebrations and commemorations are carried within the language of modern identity politics. The tribals have a dominant feeling that drawing borders which overlap with their areas would serve an intrinsic advantage as they exercise their social, symbolic, and spiritual beliefs and practices collectively. Naming the new district after tribal leader or after sacred sites and overlapping district borders with their territory would provide a symbolic feeling of being recognised and give them a sense of belonging. The district's creation would strengthen their symbolic presence, visibility, and recognition. The tribals have seen that the border change or having a district for their territory is the last chance to get their territory's political form of recognition by devising appropriate borders. Fortification of territory with the district borders gives them a sense of social and economic security and leverage to partake in the administration and governance of their affairs. This reflects the connection between the social and spatial locations, which are important for tribal identity and politics. Thus, there is a widespread belief that their regions are well knitted culturally, geographically, and by diverse other ties to create district units.

They invoke not only socio-cultural, historical, and territorial components but also form constitutionally recognized socio-political rights. These constructions become means of self-fashioning and reinforcing their image of a larger 'collective self' and 'other'. Thus, the self-fashioning for recognition is invariably linked to configuring what Charles Taylor (1994) and Fraser (2002) respectively call the politics of recognition and politics of dignity. Therefore, their politics of recognition are invoked to legitimize their demand for tribal districts in tribal areas.

5.3. Politics of Redistribution: Land, Resource, Forest Rights and Development

Interestingly, Bookman (2013:12) points that 'in countries where ethnicity has emerged as relevant cleavage in the society, economic competition may occur along ethnic rather than class lines'. Redistribution is one of the vital components of justice (Fraser, 2002). Scholars like Bijoy (2011), Baviskar (2003; 1995), Corbridge (1988), Nathan and Xaxa (2012),

⁷¹ Scholars such as Nandini Sundar (2007) in the case of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, and Ajay Skaria (1998) in the case of the Dangs in Gujarat, have highlighted that the Adivasis intermix with the sacred and secular authority where balance between the communities and the state arrive through tribal cultural aspects or recognition politics.

Savyasaachi (2012) and Padel and Samarendra (2012) have highlighted that the tribal economic, livelihood, and resource are reasons for their strong attachment with the region and assertion of difference. Even as the tribal areas lose control over resources and territory thanks to economic exploitation, land alienation, forced displacement for wildlife conservation and development projects, they remain at the bottom on the development indicators (Haimendorf, 1982; Nathan and Xaxa, 2012; Munshi, 2012; Reddy, 1988). The STs are the more disadvantaged segment of India's population. They are at the bottom of all developmental indicators and have borne the brunt of displacement and dispossession (Bakshi et al., 2015: 49, Baviskar, 1995; Nathan and Xaxa, 2012). To claim over the resources (state and natural resources), they have been asserting their ethnic and territorial identity sometimes on the logic of sons of soil and indigeneity. Against this backdrop, the following section narrates the redistributive claims that featured district demands in the tribal areas.

5.3.1. Struggle over the Land

Land is enlivened in multiple dimensions, as humans engage with it as identity, sacred space, ancestry, sustenance, the geographical domain of their self-determination, and the property that they own etc,. Thus, land is not just a public good that serves as an important means for production, but for the tribals, land is vital for both material and spiritual concerns. The Adivasi political struggles have been primarily centered on the rights over land and forests. The existing studies have observed that historically the non-tribals and the state encroach tribal areas and alienate their land, and have been responsible for hostilities in tribal areas of the erstwhile Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal (Girglani, 2015, Haimendorf, 1983; Kotes, 2019; Rao, 1952; Rao, 1988; Rupavath, 2009; York, 1989). Rao's (1987) study on tribal villages of erstwhile Warangal district also highlighted that the non-tribals, especially the feudal lords and moneylenders, with the help of state apparatus, have alienated tribal land⁷².

⁷²The government has introduced many laws to prevent land alienation and to protect the tribals from exploitation. Initially, the colonial government recognized the acute land problem of the tribals and brought the Scheduled District Act XIV in 1874 to protect them from land alienation and indebtedness. The government appointed a special Officer in tribal areas to govern the tribals (Rao, 2014a:1). Further, it introduced Land Regulation Act in 1917 to govern the tribal areas and protect their land. The Nizam government issued the Tribal Areas Regulation 1356 *Fasli* (1946 A.D) and Tribal Areas Regulation 1359 *Fasli* (1949 A.D) to protect the tribal land in Telangana. Then in the post-independence period, A.P.

The Acts such as LTR 1 of 70, PESA 1996, FRA 2006 aims to protect the tribal land and to prevent land alienation. The PESA empowers the *Gram Sabha* to conduct inquiries on the transfer of tribal land. The LTR 1 of 70 Act has not only power to protect land alienation but also land restoration. Despite the existence of these laws, the land problem continues to be severe in tribal areas. There are two main factors for tribal land alienations: First, non-tribals alienating the tribal land. Second is diluting tribal land for development, resource, wildlife, and forest protection. The first factor is that the numbers of non-tribals have increased in the tribal areas (Haimendorf 1983). Subba Reddy (2006: 1431) pointed out that the non-tribals occupy 50% of the cultivable land in Scheduled Areas in Telangana. Laws have been enacted and enforced, but the tribals allege that the non-tribals are capturing their land through fraudulent means. The successive governments have failed miserably to check the transfer of tribal land to the non-tribals. There is a feeling among the tribals that a clandestine nexus exists between the *Sahukar* (moneylender/businessmen) and the *Sarkar* (government).

The gravity of the land problem in the tribal areas can be understood with the number of cases filed under the LTR Act (see table 5.1). The tribals have filed more than five lakhs LTR cases. The magnitude of the land issue continues to be acute.

Table 5.1: Cases Registered under Land Transfer Regulation (LTR) Act

Sl. No.	Case Details	No. of Cases	Extent in Acres
1	Total number of Cases Registered	5,2,827	2,07,434
2	Total number of Cases Disposed	5,1943	2,04,848
3	The number of Cases decided in Favour of STs	31,166	1,05,505
4	Land Physically Restored to STs	22,696	8,18,32

Source: Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Telangana 2019⁷³

Scheduled Area Land Transfer Regulations 1 of 59 Act (known as LTR 1 of 59) was introduced to prevent land alienation and it was applied to tribal areas of composite Adilabad, Khammam, Warangal and Mahbubnagar district (Rao, 2014a: 4-5). Later the LTR 1 of 59 was amended as AP Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulations 1 of 70 Act (known as LTR 1 of 70). This Act prohibited the transfer of tribal land to the non-tribals. According to this Act “it was legally presumed that unless and until contrary proved, the land in the occupation by non-tribals would be deemed to have come from the tribals through transfers” (ibid).

⁷³ The regulation is being implemented in the Scheduled Areas of erstwhile Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad and Mahbubnagar Districts.

Though the non-tribals cannot legally register lands for ownership in the tribal areas, they continue to alienate the tribal land. Reflecting on this situation, Atram Suguna pointed out that “though LTR Act and PESA assured land protection, in reality, the non-tribals holds a major portion of land, due to their money, muscle, and political influence. It is futile to expect the implementation of laws and equal treatment with non-tribal dominated plain districts” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019).

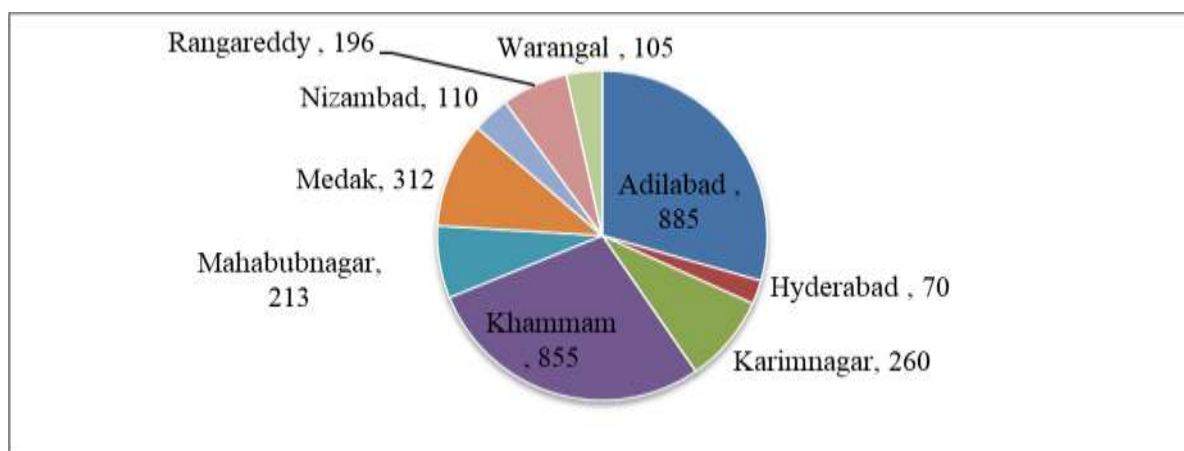
Tribal activists expressed that their situation worsens with the government legalisation of land rights of the non-tribals in the tribal areas. The Telangana government initially introduced *Sada Bainama*⁷⁴, the land record filtration process, which allows the non-tribals to register their land if they have evidence of land purchase. Prabhaker alleges that “the government is allowing the non-tribals to register their land under the *Sada Bainama* from 1980s, while disregarding the fact that the land cannot be transformed to the non-tribals in the Scheduled Areas” (Interviewed at Eturunagaram, 3 June 2019). This highlights the irony that the government allows the non-tribals to register their land in the tribal area instead of restoring it to the tribals.

The second factor is the dilution of tribal land for development activities, resource extractions, and wildlife and forest protection purposes. While referring to the larger scenarios in tribal areas in India, the Expert Group Report (2008: 12) notes that “the situation in the Scheduled Areas is on a different footing. With economic reforms, there is demand to weaken regulations against tribal land alienation and to allow commercial corporations to lease mineral-bearing land in Fifth Schedule territories”. Similarly, Walter Fernandes (cited in Expert Group Report, 2008:12) pointed out that “though STs are only 8.08 % of the country’s population, they make 40 % of the total displaced/affected population from 1947 to 2004. The resettlement has been very gloomy. Further among the tribals affected by planned development, only a third of the displaced persons have been resettled”. The tribal areas of Telangana are rich in mineral resources, which have been witnessing mining of coal, dolomite, iron, and extraction of sand, etc. (SANDRP, 2020).

⁷⁴*Sada Bainama* is a land registrations process where rural agriculture land either bought or sold/transferred on papers but not registered in revenue records. Thus, those who do not have *patta* (registered certificate) are allowed to register their land and get entitlement certificate/*patta* from the Revenue Department, regardless of not having legal sanctity.

Besides the acquisition of tribal land in the name of development and for mining activities, in Telangana, the tribals now face fresh exploitation in the name of expanding the green cover in the state and to protect wildlife, particularly tigers. The Telangana government launched *Harithaharam* (green drive) in July 2015 to plant saplings to increase the green cover in the state. Accordingly, the government created plantation sites in districts. This programme serves two purposes to the state government: first, to increase greenery and establish control over the tribal and forest land, second, to show these sites as green cover to get environment clearance for the irrigation and other developmental projects, from the Ministry of Environment and Forest. Interestingly, more sites have been created in the tribal areas. The figure (5.1) below illustrates that more sites have been created in the former Adilabad and Khammam districts. Comparatively former Warangal district had fewer sites, but most of these are located in tribal areas. The creation of sites has resulted in continuous conflict between the forest department and the tribal communities over the land. The skirmishes between the tribals and the forest department, is an everyday phenomena. The forest department, which Guha (2001) describes as ‘India’s largest landlord’, attempts to evict the tribals from their land through *Harithaharam* and other programmes.

Figure 5.1: District Wise number of Harithaharam Plantation Sites



Source: Prepared by the researcher using data from Forest Department, Government of Telangana, 2019

In most tribal areas, the tribals have been facing harassment almost everyday from the forest department over land, collection of forest resources, and restrictions of their movement in the forest. In some villages of Jannaram, Khanapur, Utnoor, Tiryani, Sirpur, and

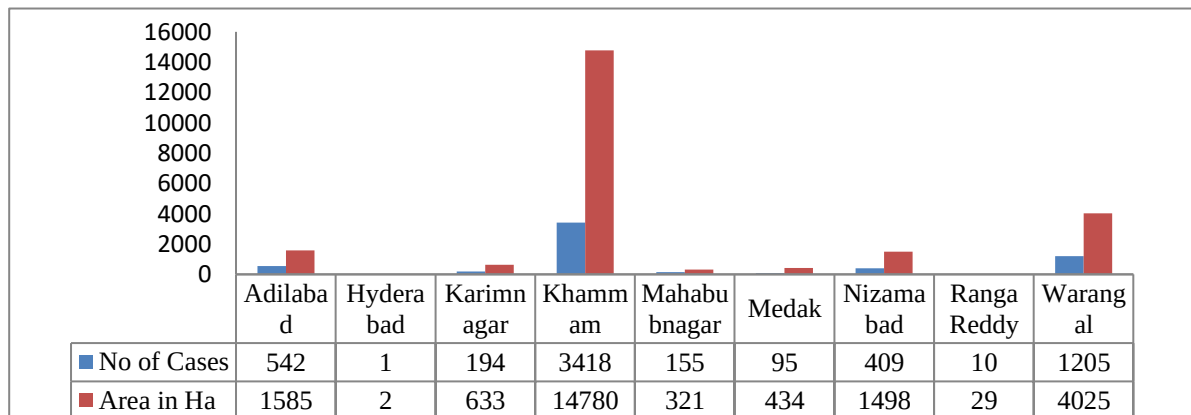
Lingapurmandals of erstwhile Adilabad district, the tribals have been asked to vacate their places for the Kawal Tiger Reserve (KTR). The KTR⁷⁵ was forcefully established in 2012 amidst resistance from the tribal communities who perceived that the identity of their areas was being changed with the establishment of the KTR. This becomes a source of conflict between the tribals and forest department. While the former reclaims their territory, the latter seeks to establish control over their claimed areas⁷⁶. Further, the tribals were aggrieved that the forest department is not planting indigenous trees but commercial trees such as eucalyptus which impacts their survival. Bhujan Rao said that ‘on the one hand the forest department is taking away their land by not providing the right to cultivate the land, on the other hand, the state is not providing nutritious food and not allowing them to collect forest products. Therefore, the tribals are struggling for survival’ (Interviewed at Indravelli in Adilabad district, 20 April 2019).

Further, there is a widespread feeling among the tribals that the government treats them as encroachers in their land and entraps them in false cases. In figure 5.2, we can see that more cases are registered in erstwhile Khammam, Warangal, and Adilabad than in other districts. This shows the gravity of the tension between the forest department and the communities over land and forests. Komaram Sone Rao, grandson of Komaram Bheem, argued that “we have been residing here for generations, even before the forest department came to existence and our forefathers have fought for our rights, resource and also to protect the forest. But the forest department is harassing and implicating us in false cases. All these would have been solved with a separate district and more autonomy to the tribal communities” (Interviewed at Asifabad in Komarambeem-Asifabad district, 25 April 2019). The forest department uses forest and wildlife protection Acts to capture their land to create plantation sites and establish control. The bureaucratic vocabulary is constructed to delegitimize tribal rights over the forest and impose governmentality (regulation and control) over them. There is a sense that the state is using a knuckle-duster policy of control over territory for resources and forest area, particularly in the name of protecting wildlife and forest.

⁷⁵ GO, Ms. 27(EFST& Dept Dt. 10 April 2012)

⁷⁶ “The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which was amended and strengthened in 1991, and the establishment of a wide network of strictly protected parks and sanctuaries are two measures that directly answer to wildlife conservationists' arguments” (Guha, 2006).

Figure 5.2.: Encroachment-Cases Registered in Forest Department



Source: Forest Department, Government of Telangana 2019.

The communities assert their historical rights over the land by deploying their own ethnic and territorial identity to oppose the plantation sites and control of the forest department. This results in a conflict between the tribals and the forest department. To create state hegemony in the tribal areas, the state comes with multiple laws such as Wildlife protection Act 1972 and other Acts to protect forest and wildlife and, on the other hand, G.Os for resource extractions. The clash between the forest department and tribal communities occurs over the space where legal pluralism is seen as a democratic norm.

Ironically, the tribal areas are infamous for displacement due to the construction of multipurpose dams such as the Polavaram project, wildlife protection zones such as the Kawal Tiger Reserve, and other Wildlife and forest Zones. The Expert Group Report (2008: 9) notes that “tribals predominantly inhabit forest areas, about 60% of the forest cover of the country and 63% of the dense forests lie in 187 tribal districts, i.e., districts covered under Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution. The commercial and industrial overexploitation of forest products including timber and minerals create hazards for ecological balance”. The report further considered that “The tribals have traditionally recognised the importance of sustaining forest cover and biodiversity, particularly wildlife conservation, for their community’s survival.” (ibid).

Interestingly, to counter the state hegemony, the tribals also deploy the argument of environmentalism of tribes⁷⁷. I use the phrase ‘environmentalism of tribes’, drawing from Martinez Alier (2002) and Guha’s (2002) environmentalism of the poor, to imply the protection of environment and wildlife based on the tribal cultural beliefs and practices and living sustainable life. Hence, ecological politics provide symbolic capital over natural resources (Baviskar, 2003: 52). The tribals have asserted tribal way of life in consonant with their worldview on ecology and nature. This is essentially seen as spiritual and emotional against the secular and scientific worldview of modern conservationists, which is seen as disenchanted and lacks concerns for justice. Studies on political ecology in India have defended tribal communities’ rights over the resources (Baviskar, 2003; Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Guha, 2007; Rangarajan, 1995; Saberwal, Rangarajan, and Kothari, 2001; Sivaramakrishnan, 1995; Swain, 1997). Tribals’ struggle for legitimacy and control over their areas trigger their demand for newer districts in the tribal areas to exercise their self-governing rights.

5.3.2. Resources: Source of Claims and Conflicts

The tribals depend on forest ecosystems and natural resources for their survival and cultural/spiritual needs. The tribal areas are rich in coal, limestone, iron ore, sand, water, and other forest resources. With liberalization of the economy, mining has a detrimental effect on Adivasis like deforestation and displacement (Padel and Das, 2010; Kumar, 2016; Oskarsson, 2013; 2015). Mining in tribal areas has resulted in intense assertion by tribals over natural resource and protecting their territory, securing their land and cultural rights (Baviskar, 1995; Guha, 2007; Springate-Baginski and Blaikie, 2007; Kumar and Kerr, 2012). Sundar (2007) viewed that ‘the violent fighting between the Maoist groups and the security forces is partly related to industrial expansion on tribal land and control of tribal areas for resources. Simultaneously, they are also fighting to protect their land rights in the face of threats from the non-tribal farmers, moneylenders, and the forest department’.

The forest bureaucracy is widely accused of harassing the tribals. The tribals are aggrieved by bureaucratic apathy and oppressive control over them by tagging them as

⁷⁷ The ‘environment of the tribes’ could be defined as tribals’s socio-cultural belief practices and sustainable resources use, employed to the protection of environment and wildlife.

‘encroachers’. As a reaction, the tribals struggle to establish their control over the natural resources and forest rights. Vedama Bojju contended that “a false narrative is being created that they are encroachers, to delegitimise the tribal rights over the resources and forest in our ancestral territory” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). This underlines the fight between the government and communities over the resources.

These areas have abundant resources, yet majority of tribals live under conditions of poverty because of misgovernance and negligence by the ruling class. One of the major grievances raised during interviews was discrimination in river water allocation, utilization and the inadequate mechanisms to address the issue. The river Godavari and its tributaries flow in most parts of the tribal areas of erstwhile districts of Adilabad, Warangal, and Khammam. Their grievance is that tribal areas contribute most to the catchment areas of the Godavari river in Telangana, but the allocations of water to their areas are minimal. Highlighting the tribal areas of the composite Adilabad district, Banoth Ramarao, a Lambada, viewed that “the Godavari river flows from northwest to the southeast in the areas. Penganga river is located on the north, Kadam river project in the south, Vativagu and Tummidihatti, Pranahita in the east, and Sonala river stream in the west to the tribal areas. Despite being surrounded by rivers and water streams, neither we have water for drinking nor irrigation. In contrast, water is being diverted to other plain areas and major cities” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 11 May 2019).

Many of the respondents highlighted that the tribals are drinking stream water and suffer from diseases like dengue and typhoid. In addition, they face severe water shortage during summers. Even now most tribal women have to walk miles to carry water on their heads for domestic purposes. Tribals feel that if water is allocated for irrigating their land, it will contribute to their economic upliftment. Diversion of water from the Godavari to other plain areas through the Kaleshvaram project at the cost of not supplying water to the tribals in the region has agitated the tribals. Displacements due to the Polavaram project constantly foreground tribals’ assertion for their ethnic and territorial identities, and to claim self-governance as a consequence.

5.3.3. Does FRA 2006 undo the Historical Injustice?

The Forest Right Act 2006 (FRA) acknowledges that historic injustice has been done to the tribal communities concerning recognizing their rights over the forest. This Act guarantees right to land and common ownership over the forests⁷⁸. Additionally, “the FRA Act provides tribals decentralized decision-making powers in general and particularly, to protect the tribals from the corporate looting of mineral resources” (Karat, 2016: 8; Vajpeyi and Vaishnavi, 2020:16).

However, the tribals expressed that many of their land claims have not been recognized, as assigning title-deeds on their land were put on hold or the Act recognised lesser area than the actual area they are entitled to get. Their applications are pending either at the office of the Collector office or the forest department. They alleged that the forest department is halting the processes of providing land ownership rights to them. Table 5.2., indicates the number of claims (applications) for land ownership, the number of land ownerships distributed, and the number of applications rejected. The table highlights that 50 % of the claims have been rejected. Most interviewees believed that their right to the forest was denied because of the revenue officials’ callous attitude and the forest department’s dominant role in preventing access to their land rights, particularly in erstwhile Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal districts. During fieldwork, the researcher has witnessed tribals making frequent visits to ITDAs. In fact, some said they have been visiting the ITDAs of Uttoor, Eturunagaram, and Bhadrachalam for more than five years for getting their land entitlement certificates. In tribal areas, this issue also gained prominence during the Telangana Assembly Elections in 2014 and 2018.

⁷⁸ Under this Act, the STs residing in the forests would be granted legal rights to possess land up to 10 acres per family. Along with this, the tribals would be vested with the privileges of collecting minor forest produce, grazing their livestock, establishing their homes and hearths in their natural habitat.

Table 5.2: Status of FRA 2006 Implementation in Telangana till 31 June 2019⁷⁹

Claims	No. of applications Received	No. of Titles Distributed	No. of Claims Rejected
Individual Claims	183252	93639	
Community Claims	3427	721	
Total	183679	94360	83577

Source: Ministry of Tribal Welfare, Government of India 2019:57

In February 2019, the Supreme Court gave a judgment to evict millions of tribals from forests (Sethi, 2019). Reflecting on the Court's judgement, leaders of tribal organisations have argued that it was a central and state governments' conspiracy to uproot the tribals from their land and forest areas. They considered that it was precisely for this reason that the governments have not rigorously defended the tribal rights in the Court.

5.3.4. The Governance Concerns

The laws such as LTR-1 of 70 Act, PESA, and FRA 2006 govern the tribal areas and allow the tribal communities to protect their material interests. Tribals invoked these Acts to demand separate districts by arguing that tribal districts would provide effective governance and protect their economic interests. In this way, the drawing of district borders should reinforce the tribal areas and be in consonance with the spirit of these Acts. M. Tagore viewed that "we defended creation of separate district for tribal areas because that would create territorial integrity and assist in implementation of special laws to protect the tribal land, natural resources, and identity" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). He further added that "we assumed that if the tribal areas were dissected, the non-tribals would invariably control the new districts, and special laws would not be strictly implemented. Consequently, infiltration would increase and the land rate in the tribal areas would also surge". The above arguments about SA, FRA, LTR 1 of 70, cement their politics of 'sons of

⁷⁹The total number of claims received were 2,31,368 covering 8,37,675 acres of land. So far 94,278 titles have been granted covering 3,05,977 acres of land as on January, 2015. (Government of Telangana (2015-2016). See <http://twd.telangana.gov.in/developmental-schemes/>.

soil', to use Weiner's (1978) phrase, which also underlines the native tribals' claims over resource and redistributive rights within a given territory.

5.3.5. Institutional Failure

It is incumbent upon the state to protect the rights of the tribals and their territorial interests, and the government is encumbered to do any necessary interventions towards this end. The Governor of the state is supposed to protect the rights and interests of tribals. If the laws are passed contrary to the tribal interests, then the Governor has the power to halt the application of such laws. He is supposed to supervise the administration and submit an annual report to the President. Along with the Governor, at the district level, the district Collectors and the ITDA Project Officers respectively are in charge of protecting the tribal communities' economic interests, undertaking developmental measures for the tribals, and preventing tribal exploitation and land alienation (Kannabiran, 2015: 28). The expression that came from the tribals is that institutions like Governors, Collectors and POs have failed to protect them from losing their land, opportunities, employment, resources, agriculture, and economic exploitation.

Reflecting on the failure of the Governor, Prabhakar vented his anger that "we have never heard or seen any of the governors' report on the tribal areas since long time. The Governor never visited our tribal areas, but he is (then Governor, E.S.L. Narasimhan) busy paying visits to temples" (Interviewed at Eturunagaram, 3 June 2019). There is a realisation that only through our representation in these institutions would we be able to protect our economic interests and prevent exploitation". Further, K. Anil, a Koya and PESA coordinator of Bhadrachalam district, asserts that "we have been demanding Tribal District Council (TDC) like north-eastern states to have control over resources and plan our development as per our wishes, as the TDC will have discretionary power" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 27 May 2019). The above responses underline widespread views about and conditions behind tribal district demands.

5.3.6. For Demographic Dividend

Tribals' demand for districts is tailored to increase their demographic strength so that they can emerge as the majority community in new districts. Bookman (2013:141) contends that "as long as the ethnic group rather than the individual is the relevant unit within society, pressures will exist to increase the relative numbers of 'desirable' people." Changing ethnic demographic strength serves the implication on the socio-political and economic aspects (ibid:1-2). Thus, there is a link between the size of ethnic groups and the exercise of economic and political power in sub-state units (ibid). Concerning demography, two interests emerged: first, the traditional territorial configuration should not be disturbed, and second, a new district should be created where they would form the majority.

The tribals have been involved in the political project of construction of 'us' (tribals) versus 'them' (non-tribals) to leverage their demographic position. Official statistics, regulatory mechanisms and governing technologies recognise and institutionalise the social differences between the tribals and non-tribals (see Davis, 2013; Anderson, 1991; 1983). Tribals contend that with the formation of new districts, they would be counted within the districts, and the political demands based on demographics would pay a richer demographic dividend to seek goods from the state, achieve ethnic proportionality in education, employment, business, control over resources, and development activities. Taral Balakumar said that "an educated class has emerged within the STs, who need to get jobs at the district level. If a district is created, we would get more jobs such as teachers and police at district level" (Interviewed at Guluru mandal, in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019).

Additionally, demographic change through new district borders accompanies commodification of land. There is fear that the non-tribals would alienate the tribal land because of the low price of land in the tribal areas. This could also lead to migration from plain areas into tribal areas. The non-tribals population have gradually increased and started dominating in the market towns such as Jainoor, Indravelli, Utnoor, Jannaram, Echchoda in composite Adilabad district, Mulugu, Eturunagaram, Tadvai in former Warangal district, Bhadrachalam, Palvancha, Pinapaka, Aswaraopeta, Manugru, Yellandu, and Singareni in former Khammam district. The perceptions of marginalization and deprivation have

engendered an intense and antagonistic situation in tribal areas, facilitating division and resentment between the tribals and the non-tribals. Majority of them expressed concerns that non-tribals would dilute the tribal laws to erode the identity of the tribal areas, do real-estate business in the tribal areas and take away jobs. Banoth Ramaroa argued that “the tribals are growing in their capacities only recently. Thereby, we cannot compete with more advanced mainstream society” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 11 May 2019). Likewise, concerning minor tribal communities’ interests, Marshakola Tirupathi, who belongs to Thoti community, argued that “the PVTGs are numerically minor communities, which have been facing the problems of widespread poverty, illiteracy, and lack of political awareness. Thus, merging them into the plain dominated district would be a threat to their survival. (It is with these concerns we have been demanding for separate districts” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 12 May 2019). The underlying concern is that the tribals would not get the attention and focus in the non-tribal dominated district where their employment opportunities would be reduced. However, if tribals are placed in the same district, their traditional governance structure and political connections through civil society organisations may help them transmit information regarding welfare and developmental activities. The tribal concentrated district would also be convenient for the officials to organise, conduct and administer people.

5.3.7. The Development Drive

The redistributive or developmental policies in these areas are supposed to be ethnically skewed. The government allocates more funds and incentives based on the geographical location i.e., concentration of the tribal population, backward and forest areas to develop the tribal communities and increase their participation in the developmental process. This would serve two purposes: firstly, to counter the disproportionate dominance of certain groups, and secondly, to protect the distinct communities’ socio-political interests. In a federal or decentralised polity where ethnic and state borders overlap any benefit distributed by the state are also *ipso facto*, distributed and benefited by the majority group (Horowitz, 1985: 597). The hitherto disadvantaged group would gain advantage only when they are placed at the center of redrawing border process.

The central government and the state governments devise policies for the tribals based on the tribal population. A firm belief among the tribals is that if their population is more, they will receive more funds and special allocation, and there would be a focused development. The tribals were invoking certain constitutionally guaranteed funds as Article 275(1) provides special and district-specific funds. To implement welfare schemes under this article, the Union Government should provide grants-in-aid to the states to meet the cost of schemes, meant for STs (Basu, 2009: 406). Invoking Article 275(1), Prabhakar argues that “if districts are formed based on Scheduled/Tribal Areas, then based on ST population we would get funds under Article 275(1), which must be utilized for tribal areas and communities within the district, so that we would have greater scope for the development of districts declared in the tribal areas” (Interviewed at Eturunagaram in Mulugu district, 3 June 2019). Based on the concentration of the tribal population, the government gives developmental priority. The following table shows how priority districts are created.

Table 5.3: Priority Districts in India

Priority type	Number of Districts	ST population
Priority-1	94 districts	having $\geq 50\%$ ST population, (also including 14 Left Wing Extremism/Naxalites (LWE) affected districts)
Priority-2	69 districts	having $\geq 25\%$ but less than $<50\%$ ST population including 7 LWE affected districts.
Priority -3	14 districts	LWE affected, having $<25\%$ ST population
58% of STs inhabits in priority 1 and 2 districts (having $\geq 25\%$ ST population)		

Source: Consolidated by the researcher based on the data collected from the Ministry of Tribal Welfare (2019)⁸⁰

The tribal concentration within the district plays a vital role in receiving funds and development focus. If the ST population in the district is more than 50% then the district will get more grants-in-aid and can also avail other benefits as a predominant tribal district.⁸¹ As a result, they are more likely to receive the status of the priority-1 district. Hence, the

⁸⁰ P36-37, <https://tribal.nic.in/writereaddata/AnnualReport/AREnglish1920.pdf>

⁸¹ Till 2016, only the former Khammam district was placed in priority-2 district, and Adilabad and Warangal did not feature in the priority list as the population of STs was less than 25 percent.

predominant tribal district will receive more funds and attention from the central and state governments. Article 339(2) notes that the central government can direct the state government to take up programmes for the welfare of STs. Certain specific schemes and development programmes are initially implemented only in the backward/tribal predominant districts (Srikrishna Committee Report, 2010: 80)⁸². Besides, the NITI Aayog/five-year plans earmark special funds in Tribal Sub-Plans and ITDA areas. Thus, the tribals hoped that with the creation of separate districts of Utnoor, Eturungaram and Bhadrachalam, their areas would receive developmental priority. The districts would also give space for ventilating their voices in the administration and politics at the district level to demand more developmental funds. Thus, there has been a realisation that the demography would pay dividends within new districts.

5.3.8. Scope for Infrastructure Development

New districts and headquarter would create a scope for infrastructural development. Concerning infrastructural development, the demand for Utnoor, Bhadrachalam, and Eturunagaram as districts emerged on two grounds. First, district headquarters' town would get the infrastructure and all the facilities which a district is supposed to have such as Collectorate Office, schools, district hospital, agriculture offices, etc. Second, the towns would have a market that would help improve their economic opportunity.

5.3.9. Recognising ITDA Area for Redistribution

The reasons for demanding ITDA based areas as district and ITDA towns as district headquarters are as follows: the areas are officially recognised for governance and development as these areas receive special funds from the central and state governments, the central location of ITDA headquartering towns, and viable for governance and socio-political connections. In addition, there was anxiety among the tribals that breaking ITDA areas would lead to dissolving their ethno-territorial identities and socio-political unity, which would impact their redistributive claims. Vedama Bojju contended that “dividing the core tribal areas would impact the heart of tribal territory as with the district border change, the tribals areas

⁸² “The 'value of output per agriculture worker,' 'agriculture wage rate,' and '% of ST population,' as well as the number of Left-wing afflicted areas,' are usually used to determine a district's backwardness” (Srikrishna Committee Report, 2010: 80).

may become periphery in the non-tribal predominant district and it would dent economic opportunities” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). Thus, there was a consensus among the tribals that creating districts overlapping ITDA areas would protect their material interests.

The tribals elicited a sense of economic injustice relying upon their areas’ relative economic backwardness, land alienation, resources, conflict with the forest department, inadequate funding, and unfair exploitation of natural resources in their areas. These material concerns constitute a ripe milieu for the perception of injustice at all levels of material access and progress. For tribal communities, land, forest resources, institutional benefits could be a source of material dignity. Thus, the politics of redistribution is one of the essential components of tribal politics in grounding their demand for the district.

The interesting point is that the government’s rationality, which was legitimised for creating new district borders, spans from the development concerns of backward areas to economic viability. Indeed, economic factors are among the most important factors for district creation placed by the government. Based on the government’s rationale, the tribals asserted that their areas fulfill the government criteria for forming new districts. Therefore, the tribals have also chimed the administrative rationale in grounding their redistributive concerns. After discussing redistributive politics, the following section focuses on the tribals’ politics of representation to demand districts for their areas.

5.4. The Politics of Representation

Drawing of borders, impact the rights, interests, and concerns of all ethnic groups who have been involved in the ‘politics of presence’⁸³ (Phillips, 1995). The demands for drawing borders to create new districts were justified because small districts would serve the purpose of good governance by increasing people’s participation in ways which secure substantive and symbolic representation. Towards this end, the tribals sought separate districts for two types of representations, namely, formal/symbolic and substantive representation⁸⁴. These in turn serve two crucial purposes. First, the district is essential for the identity and visibility of the

⁸³ The politics of presence attach substantially more weight to group difference.

⁸⁴ Formal representation is the number of people who represent a particular group in legislature. Substantive representation ensures that those who represent the group act in the interest of the group that they represent.

tribals. Second, it is also considered necessary to shield their territory from the ‘others’ by reinforcing the district borders.

The demand for districts also emerged because tribals were neglected and under-represented, despite the erstwhile three districts symbolically identifying themselves with the tribal communities. Sudheer, from a Koya tribe, says, “our voice was not represented properly, and our rights were not being exercised in our territory” (Interviewed at Enkoormandal in Khammam district, 2 June 2019). Given the different social contexts and political expression, the tribal areas differ from mainstream ones. The representation at the district level would provide the positions through which they can counterbalance the state and the officials who tend to disregard the governance norms of tribal areas and act as a check on the government’s arbitrary use of power. The creation of districts in the tribal areas will create a balance of power between the ruling elites and tribal community elites who can have the leverage to protect their community interests. It also serves the purpose of policy-making and developmental strategies centered on the Adivasis. Creation of new tribal districts will rectify the existing inequality of representation and also ensure proportionate representation.

The desire for autonomy and self-governance in the tribal areas has always been the leitmotif of tribal politics. The historical and famous slogans *Jal, Jangle, Zamin hamara hai* (water, forest and land belongs to us) and *Mava Nate Mava Raj* (our village/area and our government) are signposts for their political articulation and assertion for self-rule and governance in their areas. Thus, the slogans indicate a deep sense of politics of self-governance in their territory. In their view, a separate district represents the glorious historical past and would bring a positive change in the minds of the masses to feel empowered by achieving political power and social control in the area. In this regard, Marshakola Tirupati contends that “new district for Adivasi areas were demanded so that the tribals can easily channel their political aspirations and exercise their collective agency” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 12 May 2019). Thus, there is an underlying point that the district identified with the tribals would configure new power relationships at the district level institutions such as Zilla Parishad chairman or other posts, where they would emerge as key players. This is why the tribals had been demanding for a district to address their issues and have better access to the state resources.

Further chiming widespread view Nenavath Ramdas said that “making Bhadrachalam, Utnoor, and Eturunagaram towns as the district headquarters and traditional areas as their borders would become the face of the tribal symbolic representation” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 11 May 2019). The tribals were apprehensive about losing their unity if the state divides their areas through new district borders. There were concerns that the borders would become a barrier to their political consolidation and political articulation. To avert this, tribal communities sought for representation so that they can play critical roles in the new districts.

Meanwhile, there is an apparent dissatisfaction among the tribals with the role of their public representatives. Tribal activists blame the domination of the non-tribals for not letting their representatives to work to protect tribal interests. For instance, Madavi Tagore argued that “In constitution, Article 19 (5)(d) does not allow the non-tribals to freely move in the tribal areas, but in reality, the non-tribals are settling in tribal areas and have greater influence on all our representatives from *Sarpanches* to MLAs. The representatives need votes, parties select the tribal candidates and dominant district level leaders act as their patrons for funding their elections” (Interview at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). Additionally, Ponem Srinivas said that the “Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) is supposed to act as a miniature of the State Assembly of tribals, make regulation for the needful, identify their issues and problems and send it to the Governor, after which the state government have to implement the policies in the tribal areas. But TAC is not following this procedure because TAC works at the behest of ruling party. Thus, the interest of the party and the leader are placed above the interests of the tribals” (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019). There is a sense that the ST representatives are not vouching and pursuing the tribals issues and problems in the government and the Assembly instead they are seen to act as agents of political parties and the non-tribals. The representatives in the tribal areas seem to be formal/procedural representatives and are not acting substantively to protect the tribals’ interests due to the systemic reduction of their role. The only way that the tribals think they can deter these problems is through decentralization of power and having a new district.

The tribals considered that the Governor, TAC, ITDA Project Officers, and Collectors have failed to protect the interest of tribals i.e., prevent tribal land alienation,

infiltration of outsiders, secure forest rights, and free them from the harassment of the forest department etc. As politicians enjoy power over bureaucrats through transfers and promotions, most bureaucrats are bound to follow the dictums of politicians. Thus, the interest of the politicians and others will not allow the officials to work for the tribals. They have been seeking their community's representation, which is legitimized on the ground that the local communities' representatives will have understanding and experiences of the people's issues and problems. So the community representative will work more effectively than the officials. There is an increased political consciousness among the tribals for the need to govern themselves instead of being governed through a bureaucratic agency.

The representatives of various tribal organisations feel that their fight for self-rule or self-governance in their territory is a perpetual struggle. As a result, they viewed that demarcating the tribal territory as separate administrative and political units would help in protecting their interest and providing recognition. Ponem Srinivas recollects that "in 1996, during submission of Bhuria Committee report and drafting of PESA Act, the Committee supported the view that the district administration in areas under PESA should run like Sixth Scheduled Area in tribal areas. The Sixth Schedule guarantees to establish Autonomous District Council (ADC) which specially focuses on the development of tribals" (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019). He went on to 'demand for formation of districts based on the Agency mandals as districts to have ADC, so that the same will provide the authority to the council to enforce laws, exercise self-governance, power to allocate funds and to make resolutions. The demand for Scheduled districts emerged with the concern that the tribals will exercise all the powers and authority over various departments like revenue, police, health, education, agriculture etc. The PO and District Collector will be responsible for all deeds and misdeeds and accountable to the tribals'⁸⁵. Thus, the demand is not only mere recognition of territory but to gain control and representation over the administration. The recognition and redistribution issues are also linked with the lack of representation or what Fraser (2009) calls 'participation parity' of the tribals in institution at the central and state level.

⁸⁵This view/opinion was articulated in interviews by Anil, Ponem Srinivas and Chenchodu Srirama Murthy.

Realising the significance of constituencies in electoral mobilisation and getting largess from the government, they are well aware of the demographic dividend that in turn pays rich electoral, social and symbolic dividends. The demands for the districts also emerged from the concerns that they would likely get more ST reserved Assembly and Parliamentary seats in the new districts. As Horowitz (1985: 597) points out in a different context, “some electoral arrangements have the purpose of augmenting the electoral power of particular ethnic groups”. So, the tribals believed that district borders would change the demography, which in turn would leverage their position in the political and administrative realms.

5.4.1. Decentralization through New District for Self-Governance

The promoters of political decentralization believe that decisions made with direct participation from the people are likely to accommodate diverse societal interests than those made by the higher-level political authorities in the system (Crook and Manor, 2000). Thus, decentralization is seen to play a vital role in lending substance to and giving agency to the people in the domain of representation politics. Decentralization through the creation of new districts is supposedly based on the specific socio-cultural contexts. Border changes towards this end must cater to the needs of people in their areas and people expect that their ethnic and territorial concerns must be accommodated.

Tribals often challenged the notion of decentralization for not considering their culture and contexts and for imposing perceived neutrality-based governance which often promote the interest of the dominant community. The politically articulated demand by tribals needs to be considered as a challenge to the state’s paternalistic attitude towards the tribal communities and asserting their own agency. Reflecting on such demands in different contexts, Rajni Kothari had considered that “many of these assertions (of ethnic identities demanding greater autonomous areas for themselves) must be seen as inevitable corollaries of the democratic battle for a more participatory and decentralised polity and economy” (cited in Srikrishna Committee Report, 2010: 346). The smaller districts would work as a steel frame and would serve multiple tasks as they would be appropriate to their areas. They are expected to recognize tribals’ distinctive identity and help the tribals to secure their material interest

and political representation through decentralization of power. The underlying motivation for such demand for border change was to claim self-governance in their areas.

The above arguments indicate that the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation played vital role in grounding the tribals demand for the districts. The following section discusses the government's rationale for creating new districts and their congruence with the tribals' grounding of moral and political claims.

5.5. The Regime's Rationale for Changing District Borders

The government should have certain criteria and build consensus among people to create new districts. The following section throws light on the government of Telangana's rationale for the creation of new districts by examining Government Acts, Guidelines, and Government Orders.

The KCR-led state government designed certain criteria and guidelines for changing borders in Telangana, but some exceptions were mentioned concerning the tribal areas. The Telangana Districts Formation Act, 1974⁸⁶ and Telangana District Formation Rules, 2016 (see Annexure) stated that "the existing districts are reorganized for better administration and development of the area". The Telangana District Formation Rules, 2016, mentioned the following rationale for districts' creation. First, "area, population, people's demand, the land revenue and other revenues in respect of areas affected by the new district proposals". Second, "the historical association, geographical contiguity, physical features, common interests and problems, cultural and educational requirements, infrastructural facilities and economic progress of the areas". Third, "administrative convenience and better administration". Fourth, "interest of economy" (GoT 2016a; 2016a). However, these rationales were not clearly laid out with regard to the tribal areas.

The initial guidelines issued on 19 August 2016, did not specify the extent of the area (GoT, 2016a). The guideline issued by the Telangana government on 12 September 2016 listed the following criteria for district creation: the area proposed to be territorialised as a

⁸⁶ The government introduced the Telangana Districts (Formation) Act, 1974, by adopting Andhra Pradesh District (Formation) Act, 1974 in 2016.

district should not be less than 1000 sq.km (GoT, 2016b). The population should not be less than six lakhs, but it will not be applicable in tribal areas, remote and difficult terrain, forest area, and, areas with security issues. The proposed district headquarters in each district should be accessible to the people. The new district should be proposed based on criterias such as importance of place, geographical contiguity, physical features, common interests, cultural, educational, infrastructural facilities and economic progress of the area. The area's development concerns, the various other developments undertaken or contemplated by the government about the area should be viable for better administration. The district headquarter should have the basic infrastructure (banks, markets, transport facilities) and should be viable for establishing law and order (ibid).

The government defended that the administration will be taken closer to the people and district would be conducive to effective implementation of the government policies and schemes through closer involvement of the people, especially for the upliftment of the conditions of weaker sections of the society through various welfare measures (GoT, 2016, (GO 199) 12 September 2016). The final bill which was presented in the legislative assembly in December 2016 broadly stated that its objective is to bring the government closer to the common man, for decentralized development of various areas of the state, and to have better administration (Government of Telangana, December 2016). An interview with a district-level bureaucrat,⁸⁷ who played a vital role in preparing the ground report of dividing borders, highlighted that “administrative, economic, culturally bound areas and geographic proximity were considered while preparing a proposal for the new districts”. Thus, the government employed the above rationale for formation of new districts. The broader rationale that emerges from the government and the claims made by the communities are summarized in the following table.

Table 5.4 reflects the broader ideological principles of both the tribals' demands and the government's rationale for forming new districts. The tribal politics of belonging and the state creation of belonging are very different. These reflect the justification and production of two conflicting projections for the formation of new districts. The demand for recognizing the tribal territory is to exercise their 'ethnic citizenship' as termed by Mamdani (2002; 2001) and

⁸⁷ The bureaucrat agreed to express his views on the condition of anonymity.

Ndegwa (1997). Ethnic citizenship (group rights) differs from equal civic citizenship, as unlike the former the latter demands that everyone be treated equally regardless of their identities. The government laid out the ambiguous or purely designed criteria for districts' border change for decentralization, which provide much scope for political leaders to fulfill their political ambition and maneuver in their favour while forming new districts.

Table 5.4: Differences in Tribal Demand and Government Rationale

Aspects	Tribal's demand	Government Rationale
Demography	Area (traditional tribal/Scheduled/ITDA Areas) and population (mostly including majority of tribals)	Area (not less than 1000 sq.km) and population (more than 6 lakhs) but exception in the tribal areas
Recognition	Historical, territorial/geographical unity, socio-cultural and legal identities, also cultural and political requirements.	Historical association, geographical contiguity, physical features and cultural connection
Redistribution	Economic connectivity and viability, land, resources, jobs and market opportunities, developmental funds, to develop infrastructure. Legal identity to protect their economic rights and resources.	Infrastructural facilities and economic progress of the areas and economic interest of the state (revenue for the state), educational requirement and common interests, and problems
Representation	Active participation and increasing representation, for exercising collective agency, and steps toward self-governance	Increased participation and greater involvement of people in the administration
Administrative Rationale	Viable and community-centric administration, facilitate the social capital (ethnic governance imperative)	Administrative convenience (smooth state machinery's functional imperative)

Source: Prepared by researcher

Regarding tribal areas, the criteria or guidelines seem to recognise tribal distinctiveness and difference yet the criteria prescribed are vague. Thus, the ambiguous rationale provides an exceptional and complex space in a clearly defined territory where different actors interpret accommodation in different ways, to suit their political interests and exigencies. This was a deliberate attempt of the state's ruling elites with the nexus of elites at the district level for political gain. Thus, decentralizing district units for decentralisation does not necessarily provide complete recognition, redistribution, and representation to the communities. These are contingent on the contexts and actors' interpretations at the districts

and the state level. Yet the questions remains: how are the political interests being fulfilled and how were the tribals accommodated? These two questions are discussed in the subsequent chapters.

5.6 Conclusion

The issues, experiences, and ideas that have been discussed in this chapter were major catalysts in their demand for the districts. The politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation amplified their normative and political support base for demanding districts. The moral and political claims emerge from the essential structure of their consciousness and experiences. There is a realisation that districts and political-administrative units have instrumental and substantive value for tribal governance and politics. To realise this, the tribals have been demanding that territorial border of districts should follow the ethnic boundaries and ethnically connected towns should be made as district's headquarter. Achieving tribal districts as demanded does not mean securing all rights and demands. Yet to some extent, they may get opportunities at the district level to protect their identity, interests and alleviate their poor conditions. Towards this end, it is important to understand how the communities' collective attempts and demands to translate cultural areas into political areas get accommodated. It is also equally important to have a rounded understanding of the politics over drawing of new districts borders and selecting headquarters in Telangana. These aspects will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6

Intra-State Border Change in Tribal Areas of Erstwhile Adilabad District: Reconfiguring the Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed the moral and political basis of tribals' claims for the formation of new districts and how the state responded to these claims with a set of its own rationale. The district as a political unit represents the site of power and authority whereupon socio-political actors and interests⁸⁸ navigate their politics. In this context, re-drawing borders configure and reconfigure the political, social, and economic relations of groups within the district. A separate district could amount to ethno-territorial recognition or the lack thereof. Re-drawing district borders is not a sporadic or sudden affair but comes about after considerable political and socio-economic considerations.

In the case of tribal communities in Telangana, they do not have a political party of their own that exclusively works for their interests. As a result, the state-level parties' interest influences whether the demands for tribal districts get accommodated or not. To be sure, parties and leaders determine to a great extent the terms of recognising and accommodating tribals' territorial demands. Even as tribal actors interact with parties and state/national-level leaders in their demands for tribal districts, there is much scope for co-option of their actors and collective demands. Tillin (2013), in a different context, contends that this process entails the 'politics of compromise' wherein interests of movement are compromised for political convenience and interests. Nevertheless, the co-optation and appropriation of important actors do not invariably distance these actors from the community claims and identity, but reconfigure their original demands. Thus, these observations move beyond the binary of the state/government versus the tribals which has for long chained extant literature on tribal political mobilisation and accommodation (see Bhukya, 2010; 2017; Haimendorf, 1983; Sundar, 2007).

⁸⁸ The actors denote to people who influence or get influenced by the others, and interest/ideas reflect the discourse which creates an ideological battle ground for different actors from different social and political vantage points.

Scholars viewed that drawing state borders depends on the ‘political opportunity structure’ that parties with their electoral strategies, political contexts, and interests present (Hausing, 2018; Suri, 2016; Tillin, 2012). Similarly, political parties and leaders use demand for the district for selective political gain. It also gives them political credit and clout in the new districts. Districts are essential units for party leaders for cultivating their political support, build party organisations, and provide patronage through government appointment or distribution of developmental goods. The state’s intra-border change represents the interlinkage between the political interests of leaders and parties at the state and district levels. The nexus between the state and district/constituency level leaders and political interdependence shapes the district borders. Rosiere viewed that “in no case, administrative boundaries are the result of happenstance. They always express a political will” (cited in Hohler, 2013:31).

When particular segments of the society get mobilised, it is bound to affect change in the power dynamics at the state and district levels. It is argued that moral and political claims centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation play significant role in demanding districts. Yet, it is the actors and political interests that shape border changes. The power dynamics generated by economic, political, and social factors play a vital role in accommodating (or assimilating) territorially concentrated tribals’ demands. The incumbent party and the officials’ legitimisation of new district borders and headquarters on administrative and governance rationales camouflage the political, economic, and social interests. Further, the new district borders are drawn in specific socio-political contexts to cater to the economic and administrative requirements of the ruling elites. There are broadly four imperatives, namely political, socio-cultural, economic, and administrative, which influence the governments’ decision to draw the borders. These have been employed as the explanatory variables to understand the formation of new districts in tribal areas. Employing these four imperatives, this chapter and the succeeding chapters focus on this complex relationship and interpretation of accommodation. Thus, it is essential to analyse the role of district and constituency level politics and understand how the tribals’ demand for Utnoor town-based territorial district got accommodated. The above holds key to understand the congruence and incongruence between the moral and the real political domains.

Against this background, this chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section discusses the role of political, economic, social, and administrative imperatives in forming new districts. The second section highlights the implications of new district borders and selection of headquarter towns on tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

6.2. Political Imperatives: Role of Actors and Interests in Gerrymandering District Borders

The process of creating new districts underscores variegated political interactions and the strategic influence of political leaders. To understand the political imperative, it is essential to contextualise the emergence of districts demand.

6.2.1. Contextualisation of Ethnic Mobilization for District Demand

As discussed in the fourth chapter, the Telangana movement appropriated the demands for districts in the first decade of 2000 on the ground that new districts would be created after the formation of Telangana state. Ahead of the 2014 assembly elections, the KCR-led Telangana Rastra Samithi (TRS) party declared in its manifesto that more districts would be created in the new state (TRS Election Manifesto, 2014). Once the TRS came to power, the demand for Utnoor districts re-emerged (Mahender, 2016, The Hindu 2016a). The mobilization for the district, a long pending demand, intensified once the KCR-led government announced its intention of forming new districts in 2015 (Singh, 2016a). Civil society organizations such as Tudum-Debba, Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samithi (AHPS), Adivasi Sangshema Parishad (ASP), Girijana Sangshema Parishad (GSP), Adivasi Nirodyogula Sangham (ANS), Adivasi Gondwana Students Organisation (AGSO), Adivasi Mahila Sangham (AMS), Nagara Bheri, Lambada Hakkulla Porata Samithi (LHPS), Sevalal Sena (SS), Girijana Sangham (GS), Naikpod Seva Sangh (NSS), Kolam Sangham (KS), and PPS were actively involved in demanding and protesting for Utnoor as a district with ITDA areas or covering three contiguous ST reserved assembly constituencies, namely, Asifabad, Boath, and Khanapur, and name them after Komaram Bheem (The Hans India 2016; Srinivas, 2016a).

Almost all the tribal communities univocally expressed the demand for Utnoor town as headquarter of the district, making it the epicenter of the protests (Singh, 2016a; The Hindu, 2016). Sidam Simbu, a popular leader from the Gond community, was instrumental in bringing together all tribal organisations and making alliances for the demands based on common experiences and political agenda⁸⁹ (The Hindu, 2016a). Marshakola Tirupathi, who belongs to the Andh community, said that “despite the competitive nature and distrust between the Gonds and the Lambadas, it was Sidam Simbu’s efforts that brought different community organisations together for demanding Utnoor district” (Interviewed at Utnoor in Adilabad district, 12 May 2019). Common platform and agenda like the state given category of STs, contiguous territorial location, and common concern for protection of their identity, culture, and language bind the tribals together to invoke their historical demand for tribal districts (see Singh, 2016a; 2016c).

However, the gap and difference between tribal communities’ districts demand and the government’s rationale that are vaguely defined ensure that the ruling elites at the state and the district levels deploy their interests in carving borders and selecting headquarters. The transient space between the state’s normative claims and its actual boundary drawing becomes the operation ground for political acts. The district and state-level leaders as strategists play a prominent role in steering the district creation process. Thus, it takes the shift from the normative and ethnic justification and claims deployed by both the state and tribal communities.

6.2.3. The Government’s Initial Proposal for Bifurcation

In its 2014 election manifesto, TRS had stated that fourteen new districts would be carved out of the existing ten districts. Towards this end, it had outlined broad criteria for creating districts (Election Manifesto of TRS, 2014). But, after coming into power in 2014, TRS has changed the number of districts for accommodating politically triggered demands. In early 2015, the government announced its intent to create new districts. A committee headed by Chief Secretary Rajiv Sharma was formed in September 2015 to study and report on the viability of creating new districts in the state (Deccan Chronicle, 2015). After hearing about

⁸⁹ However, the gradual deterioration of his health and death in 2018 resulted in weakening tribals’ district demand after new districts were formed (Telangana Today, 2018a).

the government's plan of districts reorganisation, there were intense politicisations for the formation of new districts. In this context, the tribals started intensifying their demands for creating Utnoor district based on predominant tribal mandals or three ST reserved constituencies i.e., Asifabad, Boath, and Khanapur (The Hindu, 2016a). Conversely, the government proposed the creation of two new districts—Adilabad and Mancherial—by dividing horizontally the western and eastern side areas of erstwhile Adilabad respectively (Singh, 2016a).

Mancherial town, located on the bank of the Godavari River in the south-eastern part of the district, is the second biggest town, after the Adilabad town which is located in the north-western part (bordering Maharashtra) of the composite Adilabad district. Selection of Mancherial town was justified by the government because the town is located in the area surrounded by rich natural resources and has a good prospect for the market and infrastructure development (Interview with an officer at Adilabad district Collectorate, 16 April 2019). Apart from economic reasons, Mancherial was also supported on the ground of distance from headquarters. It is nearly 150 km away from Adilabad town. Thus, it seems that the officials and the state government were not interested in the tribal demands.

On the political front, influential non-tribal TRS leaders like N. Divakar Rao (Mancherial MLA), Puranam Sateesh (MLC), Durgam Chinnaiah (Bellampalli MLA) backed the demand for Mancherial district (Deccan Chronicle 2015a). The government proposed Mancherial district included Mancherial, Bellampalli, Sirpur (Tandur), and Asifabad assembly constituencies. Likewise, the proposed Adilabad district had Adilabad, Boath, Khanapur, Nirmal, and Mudhole constituencies (Singh, 2016c). Of all three ST reserved constituencies, Asifabad was proposed to be merged into Mancherial district, whereas Boath and Khanapur were placed in Adilabad district (ibid, 2016b). In this proposed bifurcation, longstanding demand of the tribals was completely neglected despite witnessing strong tribal protest. In the initial proposal of dividing two districts, tribal areas, which are located in the central part of the composite district, would be split, and Utnoor town remains with the Adilabad district. The proposed bifurcation of districts- Adilabad and Mancherial would have 57% and 43 % of the total 4.95 lakhs ST population of the composite district, respectively (ibid). Despite having greater tribal population, the proposed Adilabad district was not named

in memory of any legendary tribal leader or historic place. In contrast, the proposed Mancherial district, even with a lesser tribal population, was named after Komaram Bheem, a tribal legend (ibid). The government decided to name the Mancherial district as Komaram Bheem because of the Jodeghat village (39 kms from Asifabad town) where Komaram Bheem fought for tribal autonomy, was under the proposed Mancherial district (ibid). The naming of the district after the tribal leader was necessitated in two contexts: first due to tribals' demographic strength in the composite district; second, to pacify the tribals who had been intensely protesting for Utnoor town-based tribal district.

Once the government's proposal to carving of two districts came out, the tribals strongly opposed the move for ignoring their demand. The tribals organised rallies and gave calls for *bandhs*, as a result (The New India Express, 2016a). It is noteworthy that the non-tribals staunchly opposed not only the proposal to name Mancherial district after the tribal leader Komaram Bheem but also demanded the exclusion of tribal areas, located in the north-western part of the proposed district. This was mainly to avoid the symbolic association of the district with the tribal identity, as naming the district in memory of a tribal leader would tantamount to creating a tribal district. There was a widespread perception among the non-tribals that their places would be declared tribal territories and tribal rights-related laws would be adopted, which would derail their opportunities (The Hindu, 2016a; The Hans India 2016). But the tribals were least concerned about naming the district as they were preoccupied with the demand of Utnoor-based tribal district.

The three contiguous ST reserved assembly constituencies of Khanapur, Asifabad and Boath cover most of the tribal areas, which have been demanded as a district (ibid). Utnoor town demanded as a district, comes under the Khanapur constituency, and became the epicenter for all protests and political activities. Ajmera Rekha Naik (from Lambada community) who represented the TRS party in Khanapur assembly constituency (2014-2018), extended her support to the tribal demand for the district by visiting the protest site several times. There were two principal reasons for extending her support to the Utnoor demand. First, the demanded area and Utnoor town is under her constituency. Second, the demand had widespread support in her constituency. Given the popular demand, she could not avoid it at the cost of political benefits. Thus, she had ensured protesters that she would take the issue of

Utnoor district demand to KCR. Similarly, Ramesh Rathod⁹⁰ (Lambada) has always been a potential contender and a strong Opposition leader to the MLA Rekha Naik in the constituency. He actively participated and intensified the Utnoor demand to get a political mileage over the ruling party. Thus, Ramesh Rathod and Rekha Naik have competed to support the demand of creation of Utnoor district. Although Rekha supported the demand for Utnoor, she was expected to espouse the government's position on forming districts. Likewise, when the demand gained momentum, Rathod Bapuraro (Lambada) and Kova Laxshmi (Gond), two MLAs of ST reserved Boath and Asifabad constituencies respectively, and from TRS party, extended their support to the formation of Utnoor district. This raises a question as to why Utnoor based district was not created despite the support of three ST MLAs from the ruling TRS.

6.2.4. Rise of Demand for Nirmal District: Pitch for Trifurcation

In the beginning, there were only two district demands, namely, Utnoor and Mancherial. While preparing the proposal for new districts, sporadic demand emerged for formation of Nirmal district. This district is to be formed from Nirmal and Mudhole constituencies located in the eastern part of the former Adilabad district. Nirmal is one of the major towns in the composite district. Indrakaran Reddy⁹¹, the then Housing, Law, and Endowment minister in the TRS government, and representing the Nirmal constituency, played an important role in raising the demand for Nirmal district. Pillalamarri Srinivas (2016a), who works with Deccan Chronicle, reports that 'Indrakaran Reddy prompted people to demand the district, so that he can lobby for the new district and get political advantage'.

⁹⁰ Ramesh Rathod belonged to the TDP party (shifted to Congress in 2018) and he had represented Khanapur Constituency from 1999-2004. He was also elected as MP of Adilabad for 2009-2014. While he served as an MP, his wife Suman Rathod was elected as an MLA of Khanapur constituency from 2009 to 2014.

⁹¹Indrakaran Reddy won the 2014 assembly election on Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) ticket, but defected to TRS party and became a minister in the government. He was also MP of Adilabad parliamentary constituency for two terms i.e., in 10th and 14th Lok Sabha and was also elected as ZP chairman of the composite Adilabad district. Therefore, he is considered to be an influential leader in the composite Adilabad district.

G. Vittal Reddy,⁹² MLA of Mudhole constituency, asserted that the Adilabad headquarters was very far (135 kms) for people living in Mudhole; therefore, to do justice to the people of Mudhole and Nirmal constituencies it is essential to create Nirmal district (Singh, 2016a). Thus, Vittal Reddy's support bolstered the demand for the Nirmal district. Indrakaran Reddy and Vittal Reddy strongly lobbied to create Nirmal district and received support from KCR. Both MLAs, belonging to the dominant Reddy caste, and Indrakaran Reddy being a minister, influenced the district creation process. After the joint decision of KCR, Indrakaran Reddy, and Vittal Reddy, Nirmal district was proposed with 15 mandals of Mudhole, Nirmal, and Khanapur assembly constituencies (Singh, 2016b). This resulted in the trifurcation of the former district (Singh, 2016c). On 30 June 2016, the government added Nirmal to the list of districts that would be created (The New Indian Express, 2016).

On 18 August 2016, the government issued a draft notification for creating 27 districts, of which three districts-Adilabad, Mancherla, and Nirmal, will be carved out of erstwhile Adilabad district, amidst protests by the tribals (Srinivas, 2016a; Iyer 2016). The tribal organizations argued that the tribal areas were dissected to create districts for the plain areas (Pilla, 2016). The predominant tribal mandals such as Kaddam, Dasturabad and Khanapur (mandals under Khanapur constituency) were merged in the Nirmal district in order to increase the district's territorial size. AtramJangu, a Gond and leader of ASP, also linked the creation of Nirmal district to the economic and resource perspective (Interviewed at Laxmipur village, Kaddam mandal in Nirmal district, 17 April 2019). He said merging tribal-dominated mandals in Nirmal served will serve three potential purposes. Firstly, it will increase the geographical size of the proposed Nirmal district to legitimize a district. Secondly, it will supply water from Kaddam and Pocharam projects, located in tribal areas, to the plain areas. Third, as a corollary, it will also help Indrakaran Reddy politically in his constituency and economically as he owns several acres of land in and around Nirmal town.

The proposal to trifurcate Adilabad district evoked protest from the headquarter town of Adilabad for reducing the areas of Adilabad district (Singh, 2016b). Jogu Ramanna, MLA of Adilabad constituency and the then Forest Minister, expressed apprehension that creating

⁹²Vittal Reddy won the May 2014 assembly elections on a Congress party ticket but switched to the ruling TRS in August 2014.

more districts would be an existential threat to the Adilabad district as Adilabad town is located in the northern corner of the former district (ibid). In addition, Ajmera Rekha Naik and Rathod Bapu Rao, MLAs of Khanapur and Boath, raised feeble objections to create the Nirmal district to project that they are not against the tribals demand. Given that the tribals in Khanapur constituency were demanding for Utnoor district, it became inevitable for Rekha to show her opposition towards the creation of Nirmal as the demand for Utnoor district will not be considered as a consequence. However, as mentioned earlier, since KCR supported the proposal of the Nirmal district, the protests against the creation of Nirmal turned out to be feeble from these representatives and the TRS supporters (ibid).

In Mancherial, MLA Devakar Rao and a Member Legislative Council (MLC) Puranam Sateesh played a crucial role in jettisoning the tribal areas from the Mancherial district. The Nirmal and Mancherial district cases reflect that ministers and political leaders decided on new district borders and headquarters to suit their political interests. Making such a decision involves a complex process and is contingent on intertwined socio-political imperatives, a case made more complex by the oppositional stands taken by the tribals and non-tribals. Under this rubric, while the tribals are firm on their demand for tribal districts, the non-tribals were unwilling to associate with the demand for predominantly tribal districts.

To create and increase the territory of Adilabad, Mancherial, and Nirmal, the tribal areas, located in the central part, had to be dissected. The demand of tribals for creating a district based on three ST reserved constituencies was impacted by placing the mandals of these constituencies in different districts⁹³. Thus, the contiguous ST reserved constituencies were divided among the three proposed districts, which dented chances of Utnoor becoming tribal areas-based district. In this process, the tribals' demand for the district was neglected entirely (Srinivas, 2016a).

The TRS government's proposal for creating Nirmal, Adilabad, and Mancherial districts, had influenced the MLAs of three reserved constituencies, namely Khanapur, Boath,

⁹³ The Khanapur constituency's three mandals, namely Kaddam, Dasturabad, and Khanapur, were combined into the Nirmal district. In contrast, the other two mandals, Indravelli and Utnoor, remained with Adilabad district, and the Jannarammandal was merged with Mancherial district. Boath constituency was placed under the new Adilabad district, and Asifabad constituency was proposed to be a part of Mancherial district.

and Asifabad, to restrain from actively voicing the tribal demands, which could be seen by the party as an unnecessary provocation at a critical time in the areas. Initially, Rekha Naik participated in the rallies demanding Utnoor district as the town was under her constituency. However, she did not channel the demand for Utnoor district in the government like Indrakaran Reddy for Nirmal district. The following reasons were reported in the field interviews for her tacit participation, particularly after the emergence of demand for the Nirmal district. Firstly, Utnoor town is not the home town of Khanapur constituency. Secondly, opposing the creation of Nirmal would be seen as opposing an influential Minister like Indrakaran Reddy. Thirdly, she tried to avoid making Utnoor as central because her political opponent Rathod Ramesh is a native of Utnoor town, whereas she is a non-native. He has been raising her nativity question in every election. If Utnoor district is created, the town will emerge as central in the constituency and the district. Hence, it would leverage Rathod Ramesh's position since he is a local. Thus, it is said that the TRS party and MLA Rekha planned to contain the opposition party leader's domination in the new district. But noticeably, she did not completely distance herself from the tribal protest. This shows that while she was trying to capture the significance of being with the tribal demands, she also subtly signalled her determination not to compromise her political interests. In this way, the politics of Khanapur constituency, whose jurisdiction included Utnoor town, influenced the redrawing of district border and the choice of a town for district headquarters.

In the Boath constituency, MLA Rathod Bapuaro (TRS party) expressed his support for Utnoor district but did not protest vehemently due to the following reasons. Firstly, towns such as Utnoor, Adilabad, and Nirmal are almost equidistance for most areas of Boath constituency. Most tribals wanted to be part of Utnoor district for their ethnic concerns. In contrast, the majority of the non-tribals preferred to be part of either Adilabad or Nirmal. The non-tribals' opposed to be part of Utnoor because the district would be identified with the tribal identity, and tribal-related laws would not allow their interest to be fulfilled. Conversely, staying with Adilabad would give a more inclusive image of the district for the non-tribals. Secondly, Rathod Bapuaro enjoys the confidence of non-tribals, and comparatively, he has more support base among the non-tribals than other tribal leaders. He is seen as a moderate and passive candidate who does not take extreme positions on tribal issues that hurt the non-tribals. The votes of the non-tribals play a decisive role because the tribal

votes are divided among the candidates based on the party or community line⁹⁴ (Singh, 2017). In this fractured situation, Bapurao maintained a kind of political pragmatism for his interest. G.K. Ramesh, who belongs to Munnur Kappu caste (BC) from Ichchoda town in Boath constituency, considers that “Bapurao enjoys greater support of BCs who constitute majority in the constituency, a fact demonstrated in the previous two elections when they have voted en-bloc for Bapurao” (Interviewed at Ichchoda in Adilabad district, 27 April 2019). It is plausible that more than the tribals, Bapurao relies on the votes of the non-tribals. Therefore, he neither strongly resisted the proposal to trifurcate the district into Adilabad, Nirmal, and Mancherial districts, nor did he strongly pitch for the creation of Utnoor district.

Thirdly, Rathod Bapurao was a government teacher. He had resigned and switched into real-estate business in Adilabad and Nirmal towns, and subsequently entered politics. In 2014, with the help of Joggu Ramanna⁹⁵, MLA of Adilabad, he got the TRS ticket and became an MLA. The tribal areas constitute a major part of the new Adilabad district. The creation of Utnoor district might reduce the geographical size of Adilabad district as only four mandals would remain with it. Not surprisingly, the demand for Utnoor district was seen as an existential threat to Adilabad district. Against this backdrop, Bapurao supporting Utnoor demand would be seen as attracting conflict of political interests from two powerful ministers i.e., Joggu Ramanna in the case of Adilabad and Indrakaran Reddy in the case of Nirmal as the creation of Utnoor would dent the chances of Nirmal and Adilabad becoming districts. Most of the tribals expressed their resentment against both the ministers i.e., Indrakaran Reddy and Joggu Ramanna, from the composite district, for not taking the demand for Utnoor district seriously but acting contrary to it for their political gain.

The tribals echoed two overriding reasons for ignoring their long-standing demand and dissecting tribal areas. Firstly, the dominant leaders have created new districts to consolidate their political positions by claiming credit for creating plain area-dominated new districts while dismembering tribal areas. Secondly, to protect the economic interest of leaders’ and maintain a clientelist relationship with the real-estate dealers by creating new towns as district headquarters.

⁹⁴ The 1.74 lakh electorate encompasses 80,000 ST voters of which 40,000 are Lambadas, 35,000 are Gonds which renders tribals a minority in the constituency and non-tribals the majority (Singh, 2017).

⁹⁵ He hails from Adilabad and had served as a minister of Forest and Environment from 2014-2019.

Utnoor town did not have influential tribal leaders within the TRS party who could challenge socio-politically dominant satraps, establish political channels and influence the ruling elites in Hyderabad. Though the tribal representatives were supporting the tribal demand for the district in a tacit manner, they were not leading the protests because they had their limitations due to constituency level compulsions and political interests. Additionally, the Utnoor demand is also not based on their constituencies' headquarters towns. The ST representatives and politicians acted pragmatically after realizing the rigidities and fluidities in redrawing borders and selecting headquarters.

6.2.5. Demand for Asifabad: Shift from Ethnic Concerns to Political Exigencies

The government's draft notification issued on 18 August 2016 had already specified the creation of three districts out of Adilabad. First, Adilabad district with Boath, Adilabad, and three mandals of Khanapur and two mandals of Asifabad constituencies. Second, Nirmal district with Mudhole, Nirmal, and three mandals of Khanapur constituency. Third, Mancherial district with Bellampally, Sirpur (T), Asifabad, Mancherial, Chennur constituencies, and Jannaram mandal of Khanapur constituency. Meanwhile, the government's decision to name Mancherial district after the tribal leader Komaram Bheem received backlash from the non-tribals. The non-tribals were protesting on two planks. First, the district should not be named after a tribal leader that symbolises the district's identity. Doing so would erode their dominance and tantamount to being treated as equals in economic and political realms. Second, if necessary, the tribal areas, contiguously located in the north-western part of the proposed Mancherial district, should be excluded. While the non-tribals opposed the inclusion of tribal dominated areas in Mancherial, the tribals continued their demand for Utnoor district.

Against this backdrop, Kova Laxmi (Gond), MLA of Asifabad constituency from TRS, was quick to propose the creation of Asifabad district for the tribal areas, which would encompass two constituencies, namely, Asifabad and Sirpur-T (Srinivas 2016a). She contends that this demand is required to protect tribal culture, identity, and development (ibid). Interestingly, the demand gained traction among the non-tribals of Asifabad town. However, the majority of the tribals were still seeking the creation of Utnoor as a district (Srinivas

2016b). All those leading protests for the Utnoor district saw that this sudden demand is politically driven. The majority tribals did not support it because Asifabad is not a centrally located town in the tribal areas and is not significant in their politics and governance unlike Utnoor town (The Hindu, 2016). Additionally, though Asifabad town was a seat of Gond Rajas, presently it has a predominant presence of non-tribals and has a composite character. Thus, the town is not central to tribal politics.

To vindicate her recent proposal for Asifabad district, Kova Laxmi contended that this is imperative given that it is difficult to achieve the demand for Utnoor district since the tribal areas would be divided among the three districts (Interviewed at Asifabad, 26 April 2019). She considered that the creation of Asifabad district would do justice to the tribals, especially given the town's historical significance as one of the headquarters of Gond Rajas and a former district headquarters before it was shifted to Adilabad⁹⁶. She commended the government for recognizing areas where Komaram Bheem achieved martyrdom while fighting for self-rule and identity.

As a representative of Adivasis and a woman from political family background, Kova Laxmi enjoyed patronage and support from KCR. Puranam Sateesh (a non-tribal), MLC and an influential leader in TRS who had played a key role in forming Mancherla districts, backed her demand for the Asifabad district. In response to this, the KCR's government appointed the K. Keshav Rao Committee on 28 September 2016 to study the Asifabad demand and create Jangaon, Sircilla, and Gadwal as districts. The Committee was asked to submit its report within five days (New Indian Express, 2016a). The Committee, in its report, suggested that Asifabad district should be created for tribals (Mahender, 2016). But the Committee did not suggest creating a Utnoor town-based district, despite the fact that most tribal organisations submitted their representation to create Utnoor district to the Committee (ibid). Apparently, the Committee was appointed to vindicate the ruling party's political decision to redraw district borders and selection of district headquarters'.

On 4 October 2016, accepting the proposal of Kova Laxmi, KCR declared that along with the notified/proposed three districts, Asifabad district would be formed with two

⁹⁶ The town was made as headquarters of the district in 1913, but later Adilabad was made a district in 1941.

assembly constituencies, namely, Asifabad and Sipur-T. Earlier these two constituencies were proposed under Mancherial district, except two Mandals of Asifabad constituency to remain with Adilabad district. The Asifabad district was named in memory of Komaram Bheem; earlier, it was proposed that Mancherial would be named Komaram Bheem. The government named the district in memory of the tribal legend, thinking that it would give symbolic recognition to the tribals of Asifabad district, and the government can claim that it has accommodated tribals with the creation of the Asifabad district. Thus, the TRS party has co-opted the tribal demands with partial accommodation. Though Asifabad was declared a district for the tribal areas, most areas were left out of the district, and Utnoor was not recognized as its headquarter. Majority of the tribals expressed that Asifabad does not fulfill their demand of having a district and continued to protest for the creation of Utnoor district (The Hindu 2016b). On this, Kanaka Venkatesh of HYA considered that “the district was neither demanded nor has social base for it, merely naming the district after an Adivasi leader Komaram Bheem does not do justice to the tribals. The district was created mostly to divert the demand for Utnoor district and meet the TRS party’s political purpose” (Interviewed at Marlavai, in Asifabad district, 26 April 2019). The formation of Asifabad district is inconsistent with the tribal demand. It has not accounted for what the Adivasis have demanded i.e., an exclusive district for tribal areas with Utnoor as its headquarters. The poignant civil societies’ leaders consider that to salvage herself from having district on the concocted claim, Kova Laxmi ascribed the district identity to Adivasis. The selective interpretation and the leaders’ interests brought fissure in the consolidated demand and stultified the collective articulation for the district.

Many tribals consider that Puranam Sateesh has been a patron of Kova Laxmi by supporting her politically and financially. Some of the local TRS leaders viewed that Puranam Sateesh and KCR supported the Asifabad district because it serves a dual purpose: first as the TRS-government wanted to appease the non-tribals of Mancherial by shifting the naming of the district in memory of the tribal leader from Mancherial to Asifabad. Second, the creation of the Asifabad district would help the TRS to make a claim of accommodations of tribal demand and pacify them. Thus, directly or indirectly, the creation of Asifabad was supposed to help the TRS party, MLA Kova Laxmi (Asifabad) and Koneru Konappa (MLA, Kagaznagar) politically. The TRS party and tribal representative’s mutual benefits influenced

the creation of the Asifabad district. The above deviation from the ethnic and the territorial demand reflects what Bookman (2013:195) underlined in a different context, “cooperation and compromise are more likely to succeed when territorial ambitions are contained”. By creating Asifabad, the TRS tried to outflank the tribal organizations’ demand and competing political actors at the district level. Kova Laxmi’s justification that the creation of the Asifabad district gives recognition to the Adivasis reflects the subtle political ways of co-option of tribals demands. The state and the district level elites were claiming that the new district recognises and accommodates the demand of tribal communities. The TRS tribal leaders of the Asifabad district showed their triumphalism in achieving the tribal district. They tried to use it as one of the significant issues in the 2018 assembly elections.

The political representatives are supposed to act as the liaison between the tribal aspirations and the government in drawing borders. Vedama Bojju contended that “the elected representatives were acting under the aegis of their party leaders and for their political interests. They were in a shabby compromise by showing political docility to their party on the accommodation of the tribal areas. Officials did not act on their representations, nor relied on the majority tribals’ opinion, but acted on the instructions of politicians” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). Majority of respondents felt that Rekha Naik, Rathod Bapurao, and Kova Laxmi, the three MLAs of ST constituencies, were complicit with their party’s interest rather than raising the tribals’ collective demand. From the above discussion, one can infer that the structural factors such as inter and intra-party competition among the tribal leaders and their dependence on the non-tribals for votes and resources have made them complicit in the demand for tribal districts and current configuration of borders.

Therefore, the district creation process serves the mutual interests of the leaders/representatives of tribal communities and the ruling elites at the state and district levels. Political expediency plays an important role in interpreting tribal recognition and accommodation. Since all three leaders belong to the TRS, these leaders interpret that the new borders and the headquarter towns established with the creation of Adilabad and Asifabad districts, have given recognition to the tribal communities. Nonetheless, most tribals feel that their demands were not considered, as they wanted Utnoor-based district. Thus, new districts’ formation was based on the ‘political opportunity structure’ and the ‘politics of compromise’.

6.3. Economic Imperative

Economic factors also play a vital role in considering the demand for new districts' borders and selecting the town for headquarters. Basta (2015:151-152), in a different context, contends that 'the ruling elite use decentralization of power to establish their control over resource-rich areas to increase their financial strength to implement policies.' Thus, the 'location' of resources plays a critical role in the accommodative capacity of multi-national states (ibid). Most of the tribal areas in Telangana are endowed with natural resources such as coal, iron ore, limestone, clay, forest and forest products, water, sand, and other natural resources. Coal is found abundantly in Tiryani, Asifabad, Kerameri, Lingapur, and Sirpurmandals, Iron ore in Kaddam, Uttoor, Dasturabad, Khanapur, Lingapur, and Sirpurmandals. Limestone is found in Asifabad, Kerameri, Uttoor, and Kaddam (Adilabad District Census Report, 2011: 21). Given the presence of these resources, tribals sought to enhance their control over natural resources by forming a single district for their traditional territory with effective implementation of laws. But the tribals perceive that the government dismembered their territory to control natural resources.

Additionally, most tribals viewed that there were two significant reasons involved in dismembering tribal traditional areas. Firstly, after establishing the Kawal Tiger Reserve (KTR) in 2012, which overlaps with most of the tribal areas, the forest department is trying to control the areas (Singh, 2015). Second, the government's *Haritha haram* programme for planting saplings to increase the green cover in the state, has been forcefully implemented in the tribal areas. KTR's initiative to increase plantation sites as part of *Haritha haram* has been a source of conflict between the forest department and the tribals. The above concerns reflect Bookman's (2013: 173) argument "the most direct economic inducements are those that induce people to procreate, to assimilate and to relocate".

Along with access to natural resources and territorial control, attempts to augment revenue of the government influences for the way in which new districts are formed and headquarters selected. The towns' infrastructure and availability of resources such as land and market, also play a vital role in influencing the government's decision to choose a town for the district headquarters. The establishment of new district headquarters increases income to

the state in the form of Sales taxes, Registration, and Stamps fees through increased land registrations. The town's selection as the district headquarters increases buying and selling the land to construct new residential complexes, offices, shops, businesses, etc. After the formation of Nirmal, Mancherial, and Asifabad districts, the sizes of these towns have rapidly grown, and drastic change can be seen in terms of infrastructure, market, and increasing population. Harpal Singh (2016b), The Hindu correspondent, reports that "the moment the government proposed the Nirmal district, the land rate in the Nirmal town has skyrocketed. The value of the land increased 300 fold. Over the last three years, hundreds of housing layouts have been sold in a few days. The loans against gold have shown a record increase as investors are raising money to buy the property". In conjunction with this, respondents alleged that due to revenue deficit in the state, KCR is seeking revenue by forming districts and selecting towns for headquarters from plain areas.

Against this backdrop, the ruling party is least interested in the tribal areas because the non-tribals are not allowed to buy or sell the land, as the areas fall under the LTR Act, PESA, and FRA. The location of Utnoor areas in the Scheduled Areas dented the chance of its selection as district headquarters. The officials and state ruling elites see less scope for developmental activities and market expansion in Utnoor because the non-tribals who primarily run business would be less interested in investing in tribal areas. The officials who were supposed to prepare preliminary reports in the district creation process were least interested in selecting Utnoor as headquarter despite the strong demand by the tribals. The economic viability and resource generation were essential criteria for creating the new district headquarter (Interview with an official at Adilabad district Collectorate, 19 April 2019). Due to the economic imperatives, Asifabad, Nirmal and Mancherial plain areas towns were preferred over Utnoor because these towns were seen as viable for economic activities, especially for land and market activities. Utnoor was not considered due to its location in the Scheduled areas. The state officials were looking for the state's material needs, whereas the tribal communities demanded district based on cultural identity and control over the resources. Hence the resources concerns indicate different priorities of the communities and government over selecting towns and setting borders.

6.4. Social Imperative

The tribals demanded Utnoor district based on their population, socio-cultural and territorial identity. Apart from tribals' interests and identity, the interests of the non-tribals⁹⁷, also play a significant role in shaping district borders and selection of towns for headquarters (Singh, 2015).

The non-tribals has always prominently featured in tribal politics as they constitute the 'significant others', to use Taylor's word (1994), in the construction of tribal identity. The tribals alleged that their lands got alienated to the non-tribals and that they were exploited by the latter as they are economically and politically more powerful. Notwithstanding this, the non-tribals' demands for relaxation of the LTR Act and attempts to conduct their economic and political activities without restriction in the tribal areas seem to be among the factors that influenced the drawing of borders and selection of towns for district headquarters. The 'Agency SC, ST, BC, and Minority Aikya Vedika', the organization of the non-tribals, has been protesting against those legislations that protect STs' lands and deny the opportunity to the non-tribals (Singh, 2015). In the case of conflict between the tribals and the non-tribals, demographic factors play a crucial role. In another context, Bookman (2013: 192) highlighted that "Any attempt to raise the population of one ethnic group in comparison to others is divisive". The sub-state divisions foster and accentuate inter-ethnic conflict as groups attempt to solidify their numbers within the new territorial unit. The drawing of borders becomes more exciting and political because the non-tribals are also potential stakeholders in the tribal territory and its socio-political affairs.

The non-tribals felt insecure that if a separate district is created for predominant tribal areas, it would restrict their chance to buy or sell land, economic activities, and that they would have fewer priorities in the political domain⁹⁸. On this, Kanaka Venkatesh highlights that "the non-tribals did not extend their support to the tribal district because if a district is created for the tribal areas, then tribal areas laws would be implemented seriously, which would control the influence of the non-tribals" (Interviewed at Marlavai in Asifabad district,

⁹⁷ In this study the word 'non-tribals' would mean all those other than the STs, who have been residing in the tribal areas, engaging in economic activities such as business, agriculture and so on.

⁹⁸ Ascertained from interview with Vinkare Prakash, a non-tribal and a member of Agency SC, ST, BC and Minority Aikya Vedika at Adilabad on 19 April 2019.

21 April 2019). The tribals from Jannaram, Khanapur, Kaddam, and Dasturabad mandals considered that mandals are part of their traditional territory but have been merged into Nirmal and Mancherial districts to protect the interests of the non-tribals and their leaders. In this context, Kudumetha Tirupathi from Mancherial district considered that “by virtue of the non-tribals’ dominant position in the social and political realms, they engineered their lobbies from district to state levels to be part of the plain district. The officials were parroting the words of politicians and preparing the report accordingly without giving importance to the tribals and tribal related laws” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). The tribals believed that some non-tribals manufactured a propaganda which characterises that the proposed tribal areas-based district would be home for Naxalite activities to deny territorial recognition and self-governance to the tribals.

The absence of tribal political party created a vacuum to pitch their demand for tribal districts. The non-tribals who dominate the district and constituency level politics have a decisive influence on the ruling TRS and other parties. Those tribals associated with the TRS party act under the party’s influence. There is a predominant view that though the TRS-led government projected that district creation is for participatory governance, development, economy, and welfare of all sections, drawing borders underlines the act of pandering to the non-tribals with an end to improve their electoral and economic opportunities. Though the officials were aware of the tribal distinctiveness and constitutional safeguards, they denied them the right to self-govern, arguing that any special district for the tribals would make them more backward and parochial (Interview with officials at Adilabad district collectorate, 19 April 2019). Even the officials justified the partitioning of tribal areas on various neutral grounds such as population, size of new districts, etc., (Singh 2016d). However, such neutral criteria would serve the dominant community’s interests. P. Nagender, a Naikpod, contends that “undermining the tribal traditional territorial integrity with new district borders sanction dominance of non-tribals” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 12 May 2019). Therefore, tribals perceive that the non-tribals have influenced the process of changing district borders to create a hurdle in consolidating tribal identity over territory and reinforcing their socio-political dominance in the new district. Selection of non-tribal dominated towns of Asifabad, Mancherial, Nirmal, and Adilabad shape the district identity, which eclipses the tribal symbolic identity in the new

districts. This is seen to give the non-tribals a '*de facto*' power and domination in the tribal predominant areas.

Due to sharp political competition, the new districts have been coveted by representatives in order for them to draw credit and gain political clout. Despite Asifabad, Boath, and Khanapur being ST reserved constituencies, the non-tribal votes and their election funding are valuable in winning the elections. Thus, it is essential to maintain a support base among the non-tribals. For example, the towns of three ST reserved constituencies are primarily composed of the non-tribals. Additionally, the tribal demanded Utnoor town does not represent an assembly constituency. These factors restrained the representatives because if they support Utnoor, they may lose support base in the major towns and also from the non-tribals in their constituency. Thus, there was no sufficient lobby from the representatives of Utnoor district, unlike the ones that obtained in Nirmal, Mancherial, and Asifabad districts.

The tribal elected leaders defend the decision based on political exigencies, which result in the ruling party's co-option of tribal demand as per its political interests. After creating Asifabad district, Kova Laxmi, the present ZP chairperson of Asifabad district and former MLA of Asifabad, never misses the opportunity to highlight her significant role in creating the district. But her iteration depended on the gallery for whom she was playing to. For instance, while she defends the creation of this new district before the tribals on ethnic ground, she invokes that republican principle of recognition⁹⁹ i.e., Asifabad district is created based on the constituency's town when she defends this before the non-tribals.

The merging of the tribal areas in the predominant non-tribal areas and selecting plain areas-located towns serve the dominant section's interests. In Nirmal and Mancherial districts, the non-tribals emerged as the dominant community. Though the Adilabad district comprises majority tribal areas, the non-tribals still hold significant control over its socio-political affairs. In this district, the competition between communities i.e., the Gonds and the Lambadas, is vehement. The Gonds seem to have emerged as the *staatsvok*¹⁰⁰ community of Asifabad district. The case of Asifabad reflects the combination of the government's political,

⁹⁹ Position wherein all are treated equal regardless of one's identity (ies).

¹⁰⁰ Derived from Bookman (2013) who uses the term '*staatsvolk*' to refer to a dominant community in a political unit.

economic, and social imperatives in selecting the town as a district headquarter. Thus, the above section highlighted that the socio-cultural imperative had played a crucial role in drawing district borders and selecting the district's headquarters.

6.5. Administrative Imperative: Creation of Four New Districts in the Erstwhile Adilabad

Amidst the anxiety and trepidation of tribals, KCR-led government formed four new districts on 10th October 2016, namely, Adilabad, Mancherial, Nirmal, and Asifabad-Komaram Bheem from the erstwhile Adilabad district (Kurmanath, 2016). The new district borders and the headquarter towns can be seen in figure 6.1. The following section briefly discusses the profile of new districts to understand the congruence of new districts with tribal demand.

6.5.1. Adilabad District (New)

After the reorganization of Adilabad district, the new district includes 18 mandals with a geographical area of 4,153 Sq. Kms. It has a population of 7.08 Lakhs, out of which 2.24 lakhs are STs (Adilabad District Report nd.). The mandals, namely, Adilabad (Urban), Adilabad Rural*¹⁰¹Mavala*, Bheempur*, Sirikonda*, Gadiguda*, Jainath, Narnoor, Utnoor, Indravlli, Ichoda, Neradigond, Boath, Bazarhatnoor, Gudihatnoor, Talamdugu, Tamsi and Bella remained with Adilabad district (GoT 2016). The district covers Adilabad, Boath (ST reserved), and two mandals of Khanapur (ST) constituencies. The district is constituted with majority of tribal mandals, which constitute large part of the tribal traditional territory, except the plain area mandals such as Adilabad (Urban), Adilabad Rural, Mavala, and Jainath that form the Adilabad assembly constituency.

6.5.2. Asifabad District

Komaram Bheem-Asifabad district was carved with 15 mandals with a geographical area of 4367.25 Sq. kms and a total population of 5,15,812, out of which 1,33,627 constitute STs (Asifabad-Komaram Bheem District Website). The Asifabad district covers two assembly

¹⁰¹ * Represents the new mandals which were created after the formation of the new district.

constituencies i.e., Asifabad (ST) and Sirpur-T. It includes the following mandals: Penchicalpet*, Lingapur*, Chintalamanepally*, Sirpur (U), Jainoor, Tiryani, Asifabad, Kerameri, Wankidi, Rebbena, Bejjur, Kagaznagar, Koutala, Dahegoan, and Sirpur-T (GoT 2016b). In Asifabad the seven mandals to the eastern side of the district are dominated by the tribals and are part of the core mandals of tribal territory. The western side mandals are plain area mandals where the non-tribals are in predominant number.

6.5.3. Nirmal District

Nirmal district was created with 19 mandals with a geographical area of 3,845 Sq. kms and has a population of 7,09,418, out of which 80,576 are STs. The assembly constituencies of the district include Nirmal, Mudhole and three mandals of Khanapur (the other two mandals are in Adilabad district) (Nirmal District Website). The mandals of Nirmal district are Nirmal Rural*, Soan*, Narsapur G*, Dasturabad*, Mamada, Pembli*, Basar*, Dilawarpur, Kaddam Peddur, Khanapur, Laxmanchanda, Sarangapur, Kubeer, Kuntala, Bhainsa, Mudhole, Lokeshwaram and Tanoor (GOT, 2016c). The mandals like Kaddam, Dasturabad, Khanapur and some of the bordering villages of Mamada mandal, which have been part of the traditional tribal territory, were added in the new Nirmal district.

6.5.4. Mancherial District

Mancherial district includes 18 mandals with a geographical area of 4,016 sq.kms and a total population of 8,07,037, out of which STs constitute 56,969. The district covers three Assembly constituencies, viz., Mancherial, Bellampalli, and Chennur in Mancherial district (Mancherial District Website). Mandals included in this district are Bheemaram*, Naspur*, Hajipur*, Kannepally*, Chennur, Jaipur, Kotapally, Luxettipet, Mancherial, Mandamarri, Dandepally, Jannaram, Kasipet, Bellampally, Vemanpally, Nennel, Tandur, and Bheemini (GoT 2016d). Jannaram and some villages of Dandepally mandals demanded to be part of Utnoor district but merged in this district.

The above profile of the new districts gives an overview of its borders and areas. Employing administrative imperatives, Administrative Officials of Adilabad district (Interviewed at Adilabad, 19 April 2019) rationalized the formation of new districts on the principle of

equality. The districts, they averred, were formed by equally dividing the four parts of the district. This principle is also seen to ensure that the newly formed districts comprise of almost equal number of mandals which range from 15 to 19, each encompassing two assembly constituencies, and a population ranging from 5 to 8 lakhs. This reduces the distance and improves people's participation and governance. Thus, the governance imperative was employed to draw new districts' borders and select the towns for district headquarters (see Figure 6.1 for new districts borders).

Figure 6.1: New Districts Border and Headquarters



Source: Created by the researcher using maps from Adilabad District Census Book 2011.

After discussing the role of four imperatives in forming new districts, the following section discusses the accommodation of the tribals demand for the new district.

6.6. Dissecting Tribal Territory: Bordering, Ordering, and Othering

The tribals' demanded areas and Utnoor town constitute and symbolise the tribal's social and political identity. The borders have been carved amid the tribal areas. Towns located in the composite plain areas have been selected as district headquarters. Adilabad and Asifabad districts cover most tribal areas, and few mandals were merged in plain areas dominated Nirmal and Mancherial districts. Tribal predominant mandals such as Jainoor, Sirpur, Lingapur, Tiryanai, Kerameri, and Vankadi, located in the eastern side of the traditional tribal territory, were merged with Asifabad district. Narnoor, Utnoor, Indravlli, Ichoda, Bella,

Tamsi, Talamadugu, Bazarhathnur, Gudihathnur, Boath, Echoda, and Neradigonda mandals, located in the northern side of the traditional tribal territory, remained with Adilabad district. Jannaram and some areas of Dandepally mandals, located in the south, were relinquished to Mancherial district. Kadem, Dasturabad, and Khanapur mandals, located in the south-eastern side were ceded to Nirmal district.

Majority of the tribals from these mandals have reported that despite their demand for Utnoor district, they were placed in the non-tribal and plain areas dominated districts. The tribals of Mancherial and Nirmal districts feel that they are not connected socially and politically as they were associated with Utnoor. The tribals demand that they should be placed in Adilabad district, which has larger tribal population and an ITDA headquarter. The tribal areas which were partitioned negated tribal distinctiveness and their areas have become peripheries in the new districts. Dissecting territory and reducing tribals' demographic strength not only reduce their influence in the domain of politics and governance but also deny their recognition over traditional territory. Some tribals were nostalgic about the otherwise problematic erstwhile district for their ethnic's focal importance and unity.

Yet, as tribal traditional territory got dismembered, their aspiration to become *Staatsvolk* (the dominant community) in the single district that overlapping their territory has been shattered. The dissecting of tribal areas resembles the provincial-states creation in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region wherein Hausa-Fulani, a major ethnic community's demographic strength, was permanently reduced by dividing their territory into three states when they were vulnerable (Horowitz, 1985:577). Similarly, artificial political and administrative boundaries were superimposed over the naturally and culturally connected tribal territory (Srinivas, 2016a).

The tribals viewed that since the new Adilabad district consists of most tribal areas (13 out of 18 mandals), its headquarter should have been shifted from Adilabad to Utnoor. They contend that Adilabad town reflects the identity of the plain area and cannot represent the identity and aspirations of the tribal areas. Unlike Adilabad, Utnoor is a centrally located town and associated with tribal identity. Further, some respondents expressed that all the predominant tribal mandals should have been placed in one district. Expressing a similar

view, Atram Bhujang Rao noted that “if the government had real intention in tribal recognition and accommodation, then all the tribal mandals should have placed either in Asifabad or Adilabad districts” (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). In the same vein, Mangam Mahesh observed that “new Adilabad district has a more tribal population than the Asifabad district. But those associated with TRS from Asifabad area are claiming that creation of Asifabad district has given recognition to the tribals” (Interviewed at Keshlapur, 7 February 2019). These expressions underscore that the creation of new districts mark conscious attempts by the local politicians to reduce the symbolic significance of tribal majority areas. Therefore, the creation of the Asifabad and Adilabad districts has been used to neutralize the Adivasis and their demand for a territory-based district with tribal leaders’ support.

Most tribal respondents believe that their areas were dismembered into four districts to prevent the tribals from determining and maintaining their political dominance as the majority, which could have been averted had Utnoor district been created. The TRS government is involved in the cosmetic accommodation¹⁰² of tribals. The drawing of borders entails limiting and controlling the communities’ consolidated political identity, which in some ways also underscore the imposition of state governmentality¹⁰³. As a result, the new borders set off ripples of fear among the tribals that their rights and protections under the Constitution would be tampered, which would invariably lead to their ‘otherisation’ in their own areas (Mahesh, 2016). As a result, what emerges from the tribals’ narrations is that the district division serves two contradictory purposes: one was to co-opt the tribal politics, and the other was to reduce the tribals’ symbolic identity and demographic weight.

The following section attempts to comprehend the consequences of boundaries on the tribals’ politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation though it is not easy to gauge the magnitude of their implications.

¹⁰² Cosmetic accommodation means only a few tribal areas are accommodated in order to fulfil political interest of ruling elites.

¹⁰³ Governmentality is understood as a form of rationalization of state administrative control and regulation of ethnic communities.

6.7. Impact on the Politics of Recognition

The new district borders are likely to provoke a search for new forms of belonging and socio-political associations given that borders play a vital role in reconfiguring identities. This is to be expected because identities give a sense of collective recognition or non-recognition and misrecognition depending on how groups feel accommodated or assimilated. The following section focuses on the effect of re-drawing borders on the tribals' politics of recognition.

6.7.1 Denial of Territorial Recognition

In Asifabad district, tribals were given symbolic recognition by naming the district after Komaram Bheem. While tribal recognition does not find a place in Adilabad, tribals were reduced to marginalised minority status in Nirmal and Mancherla districts. In a different context, Webb (2010: 2369) aptly pointed out that the hegemonic position of the modern state plays a crucial role in reproducing inequalities of recognition.

Nonetheless, the division of tribal areas into four new districts has significantly impacted tribal territorial unity, as the contiguous 'Adivasi territory' or 'area' within a single district unit seems to be a bygone identity now. The tribals' territorial concerns of 'being with' and 'being for' got adversely impacted as a consequence of dissecting the territory. In this regard, Kudumetha Tirupathi views that "without considering our struggles, history, socio-cultural difference and ethnic connection and distinct need of the development within traditional territory, the officials and the ruling party leaders have dissected the tribal territory, which impact larger socio-political identity" (Interviewed at Indravelli, 20 April 2019). The majority of the tribals perceive that their cultural, linguistic, and territorial difference and constitutional recognition were not acknowledged while constituting important political and administrative unit. There is anxiety that the territorial division would cause not only the loss of their culture, language and identity but also become subject of discrimination in the graded social system and reduced them to a vulnerable minority. Thus, their concerns for consanguinity and contiguity are impacted by borders. In a different context, Bookman (2013:195) notes that "If ethnic demands are separated from territorial demands, the link between ethnic group size, political power, and economic power is disrupted (or power of ethnic group is reduced)". Therefore, making the new district borders not to overlap with their

traditional territory denies the tribals territorial recognition and breaks their socio-political connections through demographic fragmentation.

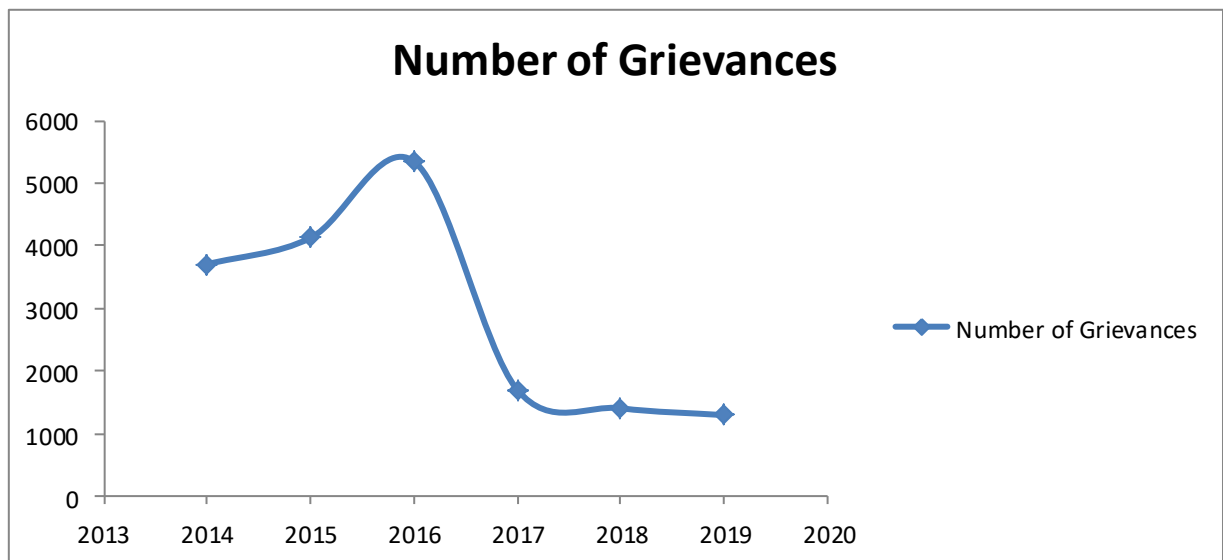
The fact that members lose connection with their territorial identity violates the ‘community sense of place’ and ‘spiritual’ connection with traditional landscape (Cresswell 1996; Trudeau 2006). Majority of the Adivasis emphasise that their spiritual relationship with sacred geographies, struggled spaces and sites, and cultural space are being impacted by new borders. The tribals are being treated as outsiders within their territory as the district borders play a role in constructing new belonging at the district level. The act of reducing the status and significance of tribal communities has ‘inflict(ed)’ on their ‘dignity’—to use Taylor’s words (1994). Tribals are wary that the transformation brought by borders in social, political, and economic realms would gradually dissolve their traditional ties, social solidarity and community identity-based political unity. Kanaka Venkatesh said that ‘earlier the state has made efforts to control tribal territory by establishing KTR, and now socio-political division has been generated among the tribals themselves due to borders’ (Interviewed at Marlavai in Asifabad district, 21 April 2019).

Due to the creation of four new districts, the Jodeghat, Indravelli, Nagoba *Jatara* and other struggle and cultural celebrations sites have been divided among four districts by dividing the tribal territory. Jodeghat, the land where Komaram Bheem fought for tribal rights, is included in the Asifabad district. Indravelli stupa, Nagoba *Jatara*, and ITDA Uttoor remain with the Adilabad district, Ramji Gond-*Udala Marri tree* where Ramji Gond was hanged, is placed under Nirmal district. Other sacred sites, the Gandhari Killa and Addeli Pochhamma in Jannaram mandal, are under Mancherial district. Thus, tribal collective history, areas, and places were parted and scattered across different districts.

New district borders have impacted tribals’ cultural celebrations/festivals, annual commemoration of martyrs, and the official *Darbars* conducted at these sacred sites. Due to administrative divisions, only tribals of the district where the site is located are invited for official activities and for grievance redressal. Since 1944, the annual public *Darbar* has been conducted at Keshlapur *Jatara* for tribals of the composite district to receive their grievances related to land, irrigation, debts, loans, conflict with the forest department, health issues etc.,

and seek redressal on their issues. The *Jatara* and administrative tradition i.e., *Darbar* has become part of the tribal identity and helps them solve their governance issues. But with the creation of borders, there is a decrease in the number of tribals attending the *Darbar*, and grievances applications have reduced drastically. This trend is illustrated with a line graph below (see figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Year Wise Number of Grievances Received at Keshlapur Darbar



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the data collected from ITDA Utnoor.

When enquired with respondents about the nature and reduction of a number of grievances, they viewed that only the grievances of tribals of the new Adilabad district are considered, and the tribals of other three districts were not allowed (Telangana Today, 2018). To illustrate, the Keshlapur *Jatara Utsav* Committee members are selected only from the new Adilabad district (Telangana Today, 2020). Mangam Mahesh highlighted that ‘Adilabad district officials removed Madavi Sonerao (from Asifabad district) from Keshlapur *Jatara Utsav* Committee since he is not from the newly formed Adilabad district’ (Interviewed at Keshlapur, 7 February 2019). The historical and cultural sites are not only significant in their community identity but they also have an important function in negotiating with the state and attract its attention through public *Darbar*. Hence, placing them in different districts reduces their collective negotiating power. The new district borders subtly and gradually dismantle the larger collective identity employed in the political and developmental domains.

The drawing of borders contrary to the tribal demand and controlling governance in tribal areas reflect the tendency to reduce tribals to minority status in different districts. This disrupts their socio-political unity and they are increasingly subjected to the imposition of the dominant language, culture, values etc. Most tribals expressed displeasure that constitutionally recognised differences, which have a greater normative standing than ostensibly "neutral" norms that guise the dominant values, were not respected in order to prevent their ethnic and tribal territorial consolidation. The tribal organization leaders' argument underlines that dividing their areas by carving out district borders is aiding the non-tribals' undeclared projects of 'internal colonialism' and 'cultural imperialism' that robs their collective socio-political rights and identity overtime. Thus, re-drawing district borders has two drawbacks in tribal areas: First, it pre-empts tribal territory by dissecting their traditional territory and making it part of the plain predominant district. Second, it also pre-empts the challenges to the dominant culture and political attributes.

6.8. Impact on Drawing Borders on the Politics of Redistribution

New district borders serve implications on tribal's economic concerns include land, forest, access to the government's special benefits, availing welfare schemes, and other resources.

6.8.1. Tribal Land and Resource Concerns

Land and other resources have been central to tribal conflicts. The increasing demographic strength of non-tribals who are technically advanced, has increased competition over land, other resources, and employment opportunities in the tribal areas. Despite land featuring as a central aspect in tribal political articulation, leaders of tribal organizations expressed their concern that the intra-state border has been changed to weaken Acts such as 1/70, PESA and FRA, and other Government Orders like GO No 3, which protect the economic interests and rights of tribal communities. Adding to the above argument, P. Nagender noted that "Collector, Special Deputy Collector (SDC)¹⁰⁴ and ITDA PO are supposed to implement the tribal rights laws strictly, but they are snubbing in the new districts due to the non-tribal pressures for their developmental activities" (Interviewed at Utnoor, 12 May 2019). There is a

¹⁰⁴ The office of the SDC came into being for protection of the tribal land rights in the tribal predominated districts.

fear that with increasing migration, alienation of tribal land in the new districts will occur. Adding to the above view, Pendur Rajeshwar a leader of ASP, contended that “the drawing of border and assimilating tribals in plain dominated district make the tribals subject to be exploited and marginalised because the tribals are less educated, culturally different and cannot compete with the non-tribals in the plain areas dominated Nirmal and Mancherial districts.” (Interviewed at Laxmipur village, Kaddam mandal in Nirmal district, 18 April 2019)

After forming new districts, the non-tribals under the ‘Agency SC, ST, BC, and Minority Aikya Vedika’ an organization, have intensified the protest to revoke the LTR Act and PESA (Singh 2015). They have taken rallies and *dharnas* in tribal predominant towns such as Adilabad, Utnoor, Jainoor, Indravelli, Kerameri, and Ichoda, demanding that the non-tribals should be allowed to register their land in the tribal areas (ibid).

During the 2018 assembly election, political parties and leaders, including some tribal leaders contesting the election, promised to provide land registration rights to the non-tribals. Atram Bhujan Rao, pointing at Indravelli stupa site and surrounding places (as the interview was conducted near stupa, 20 April 2019), expressed that “we are commemorating our martyrs who died while fighting against land alienation, exploitation and for protection of tribal rights. But today on this very historical site and around its vicinity, you can see the growing real-estate business, construction works and alienation of land by the non-tribals” (also see Singh 2019). Thus, political support to the non-tribals is unpopular among the tribal communities. The tribal leaders considered that the non-tribals are establishing mini-industrial areas such as ginning, quarrying, logging, mining, and real-estate business on tribal land. The protest for revoking of tribal land rights laws and opposing the naming of the district after a tribal leader reflects the growing assertiveness of the non-tribals and their socio-political clash with the tribals. The bureaucrats and the political leaders seem to be complicit in the whole process of commercial activities and tribal land alienation. This indicates that systemic, developmental compulsion has been put on the tribals land and resources. The tribals feel that making plain dominated areas as headquarter and dividing tribal areas have emboldened the non-tribals to demand revocation of tribal land protection laws on the ground of development.

6.8.2. Increasing Domination of Forest Department: Conflicts with Communities

There has been increasing tension between the tribals and forest department as each see the other as encroacher of the land in the forest areas. The denial of forest rights to tribals under FRA 2006 continues in the new districts. The forest department does not recognize tribal rights on land and delegitimises their collective rights over the forest as a consequence. Most tribal respondents expressed displeasure that after dividing the tribal territory, the forest department is directly or indirectly emboldened to establish its control over the forest land occupied by tribals for centuries.

This resulted in the forest department's increased harassment of tribals on the pretext of protecting forests and tigers (Sadam 2021; Singh J, 2021). The harassment is severe in Jannaram and Dandepally mandals of Mancherial district, Kaddam, Dasturabad and Khanapur mandals of Nirmal, Utnoor, Indravelli, and Narnoor mandals of Adilabad district, Lingapur, Sirpur (U), Tiryani and Kerameri mandals in Asifabad district, as these areas are under the tiger protection zone. Highlighting this on a different ground, P. Nagender, a leader of Niakpod Sangam, contended that "the Adivasi territory is rich with minerals such as nickel, coal, and limestone, wood, sand, etc., thereby to extract these resources the forest department is trying to evict the tribal villages in the name of *Haritha haram* and Tiger reserve although there was no evidence of the presence of tigers in these areas" (Interviewed at Utnoor 12 April 2019). Similarly, during an informal group discussion (17 April 2019) in Dongapalli, a Kolam village located at Jannaram mandal in Mancherial district, the tribals stressed that 'after changing district borders, the forest department's harassments have increased. On the one hand the forest officials do not allow the tribals to collect moha fruits, *tinduleaves*, bamboo, and other forest products. On the other hand the tribals are denied developmental activities such as roads, water supply, *Indiramma* houses, etc.¹⁰⁵ Even the water pipeline of *Mission Bhagiratha*, a government project to supply water to every household, was stopped in order to establish state control over the tribal areas'. They were annoyed that after the Supreme Court order on 13 February 2019 to evict illegal tribals from forest, the forest department was emboldened to establish a *Kafkaesque*¹⁰⁶ style of rule by deploying all forest

¹⁰⁵Government's scheme for constructing house for the poor and underprivileged sections

¹⁰⁶Reminiscent of the oppressive or nightmarish qualities of Franz Kafka's fictional world.

and wildlife protection laws with knuckle-duster method, without having any regard for laws that protect tribal rights. This has resulted in violent incidents and regular skirmishes between the forest department and the tribals (Raj, 2020). The tribals feel that the division of tribal territory has politically weakened them. This realization and the following two reasons foreground why the tribals of Adilabad and Asifabad districts do not support the creation of Mancherial and Nirmal districts: firstly, a sense of having a separate district identity, and second their harassment from forest officials or political action was confined to that particular district, and they belong to the minor tribal communities such as Kolam, Thoti and Andh¹⁰⁷.

6.8.3. The Missing Centrality of Tribal Concerns

One of the reasons for the re-organization of districts is that it would positively impact the state's capacity to deliver goods and provide administrative services. The tribals expected that the districts would be drawn based on their ethnic areas.

Presently the ITDA at Utnoor is under Adilabad district and the tribals are territorially and demographically divided. As a result, the Adivasis residing in Asifabad, Mancherial, and Nirmal will receive less focus. In the new districts, the administration is being run through DTDOs (District Tribal Development Officer). This division has not only reduced the unity of ITDA areas but also relegated the role of Utnoor town from its hitherto central role in the tribal socio-political affairs. Kanaka Lakker Rao, Chairman of ITDA Advisory Committee, said that “after the creation of new districts many tribals are not visiting the ITDA because of the confusion among the tribals about which office, i.e., new district office or ITDA should be visited for their problems” (Interviewed at Utnoor, 19 April 2019). Further, CH. Dilesh, a member of the LHPS, said that ‘the *Indra Kranthi Pathakam*¹⁰⁸ provide them works related to irrigation and digging canals, and the ITDA had the authority on selecting the areas and the beneficiaries. This had ensured special focus on the tribals. But after the creation of four districts, they are not getting work because the district collectors are less interested in specific focus on the tribal areas, and there is a lack of coordination among

¹⁰⁷ This view is ascertained from three group discussions, one with the tribals of Laxmipur village of Kaddam mandal in Nirmal district on 18 April 2019, and second, from Dongapalli village and third one was with few tribal women of Alinagar village on 17 April 2019. Both these villages are under Jannaram mandal in Mancherial district.

¹⁰⁸ This is a Telangana government's programme aimed to eradicate rural poverty.

the officials concerning the selection of beneficiaries' (Interviewed at Uttoor on 15 May 2019). Thus, these arguments have highlighted the missing central focus on tribals while reducing the role of ITDA. But the division of districts has impacted the implementation of this Act and protection of socio-economic and political interests of the tribes. Harka Vasanth Rao pointed that "the PO cannot put sufficient pressure on the non-tribals in order to protect the tribal interest in new districts. Since the non-tribals have emerged dominant in the new districts, PO cannot confront the non-tribals and the political leaders who may affect his job prospects by withholding a promotion or transferring to a non-significant department" (Interviewed at Asifabad, 26 April 2019). Thus, the ITDA and other officials' role is systematically reduced to a spectator.

The tribals are dismayed that they receive less attention in the new districts as their demographic strength has been reduced. On this, Harkka Vasanth Rao contends that "now there are only some pockets of tribal areas in plain dominated Nirmal and Mancherial district, the tribals of these areas are not just likely to receive less focus but it will also impact on the collective politics and the social ties among the community members" (Interviewed at Asifabad, 26 April 2019). Dividing the tribal areas and placing them in plain-dominated districts is likely to eclipse the tribals from the central focus of the state. Apart from this, merging tribal areas for providing better services has not lent their satisfaction to the new borders.

6.8.4. Shrinking of Employment Opportunities for the Tribals

Government jobs such as school teachers, vidya volunteers (hired teachers), contract teachers, police constables, panchayat secretaries, and junior assistants, etc., are reserved at the district level¹⁰⁹. With the division of the districts, these jobs are reserved based on the demography of the new districts (Balakrishna 2018). For instance, those under Adilabad are considered non-locals in the other three districts; thus, they lose job opportunities. Due to less ST population, Mancherial and Nirmal district tribals get fewer quotas than Adilabad and Asifabad districts. In this regard, Mangam Mahesh said that "now that my village is in Adilabad if I want to

¹⁰⁹ With the inclusion of Article 371 (D) in the Constitution through 32nd amendment on 1 July 1974, the district level jobs are reserved for the local residents and residents from other districts are treated as non-locals in various state government recruitments.

apply for a job in Asifabad, I would be considered a non-local in Asifabad district in the land where my ancestors fought for tribal rights. With the division of the district, we have become the ‘other’ for jobs and other works in our territory” (Interviewed at Keshlapur, 7 February 2018). Additionally, there is a subterranean fear among the tribes that given their socio-economic background, the non-tribals would edge out the tribals in the arenas of government employment and market opportunities.

After discussing the impacts of drawing borders on the politics of redistribution, the following section focuses on the impact of the border on tribals’ politics of representation.

6.9. Impact of Borders on the Politics of Representation

Re-drawing of borders has changed the political milieu in new districts. The politics of representation, especially in the institutional (formal) and non-institutional (social) domains, grounded the demands of separate districts for the tribal areas.

6.9.1. The Question of Collective Agency in the New Borders

The demand for districts came from tribals to exercise a robust collective agency by increasing their demographic strength. Bookman (2013: 206) considers that “the weaker the ethnic group's territorial concentration, the more difficult it is to establish a correlation between size and power”. The new district border has implications on the tribal demographic strength and their effort to gain power. The dismembering of tribal territory has weakened their unity and solidarity that in turn affect the collective agency of the tribals. Dividing their territory connected with all sacred sites and cultural connections, impacts their symbolic representation in the new districts. Though the tribals are trying to associate their symbolic identity with Asifabad and Adilabad districts, they feel that their larger identity recognition including recognition of the integrity of tribal areas and sacred sites has not ensued from the state.

The tribals highlighted that their symbolic and historical places such as Indravelli, Keshlapur, Jodeghat, and other sites are supposed to be used for airing their voices and problems. But the non-tribal leaders and parties dominate on celebration days for their political interest and to show their paternalistic concerns. This subtly neutralize tribals’

agency and a collective voice. Though Asifabad is seen as symbolically associated with tribal identity, the tribals feel that constricting Komaram Bheem's struggle only to the Asifabad district dilutes its larger symbolic significance as this struggle was meant for the entire tribal territory. The tribals from Mancheri, Nirmal, and Asifabad feel that their connection with ITDA, Indravelli, and Keshlapur is gradually weakening.

6.9.2. Impact on Electoral Arena

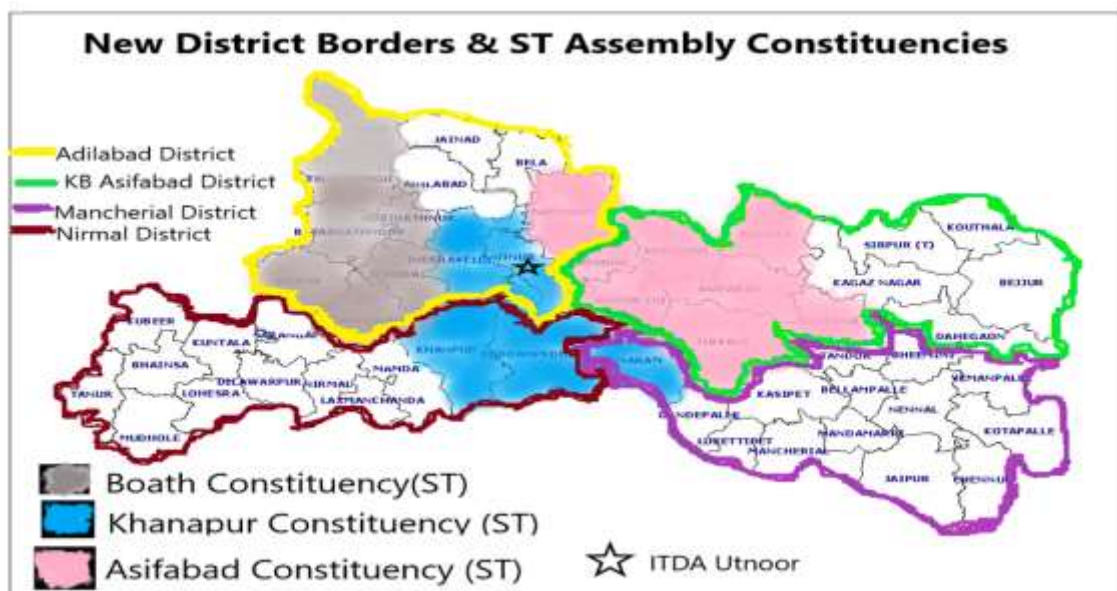
The changing of borders also reconfigures the politics of electoral mobilisation. Dividing the tribal territory into four districts has reduced the number of tribals in each district. As a result, their significance in the electoral domain is reduced. Thus, political parties would neglect or limit their political opportunities, and parties tend to shy away from their issues. The non-tribals who are politically and financially strong would be further strengthened with their increased demographic weight in the new districts. This creates another layer of compulsion for the tribal representatives not to act in their interests. Hence, the present arrangement of district borders will not halt the messing of non-tribals into tribals' self-governance affairs. One can infer that after altering the district borders the process of co-option and assimilation of tribals and their interest result in neutralizing tribal politics, which otherwise would have been more vibrant to protect the collective interests of the tribal communities had tribal districts been created.

The government has argued that the new districts were created in order to increase people's participation in governance (GoT 2016). In contrast, the tribal feels that dividing the tribals has reduced their numbers, thereby limiting their participation and representation. This is seen to adversely affect 'participation parity'—to use Fraser's words (1998)—particularly in Mancheri and Nirmal districts.

6.9.3. Impact of Borders on ST Reserved Constituencies

The demand for Utnoor district was based on three contiguous ST reserved constituencies—Khanapur, Boath, and Asifabad, which covers most of the tribal territory in the composite Adilabad district (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6. 3: New District Borders and ST Assembly Constituencies



Source: Created by the researcher using maps from Adilabad District Census Book 2011.

There is a mismatch between the new district border and three ST reserved constituencies, covering their traditional territory. After drawing new district borders, all mandals in Asifabad constituency are in the Asifabad district except Narnoor that is merged with Adilabad district. The MLA of Asifabad constituency has to attend meetings in Adilabad district since Narnoor mandal comes under it. ITDA meetings are held at Utnoor in Adilabad district. In the case of Boath MLA, it is convenient for him since his entire constituency and ITDA are placed in Adilabad district. The Khanapur constituency case is complex. The constituency's mandals are dismembered among the three districts of Utnoor, Mancherial and Nirmal as Utnoor and Indravelli mandals are merged in Adilabad district, Jannaram mandal was merged with Mancherial district, and the rest of the mandals are in Nirmal district. Since the constituency is divided into three districts, the MLA has to attend official meetings at three districts, and coordinate with ITDA at Utnoor. In this complex division, the tribals expressed that the representatives and the officials are neglecting them due to a lack of coordination and focus. Besides, the tribals have highlighted that the constituency areas were divided because most of the constituency areas overlap with tiger protection zone borders. Thus, the forest department played a key role in dividing the tribal areas to establish complete control over the areas.

With these new borders attempts to solve people's problems becomes more complex. Madavi Hanmathu complains that "Mancherial district officials should address our problems since our mandal is a part of the district, but they send us to Utnoor IDTA. Then the ITDA, sends us back saying that we should approach our district officials. Sadly, we are placed in Mancherial district, ITDA is located in Utnoor, and our representative's office is in Khanapur, Nirmal district" (Interviewed at Singaraipeta in Mancherial district, 17 April 2019). Thus, dismembering the constituency have caused manifold problems in governance. The new borders are perceived to be inimical to the tribal territorial and political consolidations which adversely affect their ability to negotiate with the state, and political parties.

The election system has a role in fostering or retarding ethnic consolidation. The border decides the socio-political strength of the communities. Atram Anil expressed his apprehension that "the re-organisation of constituencies may take place. We will lose our strength in the new districts as we are numerically reduced in all-new districts" (Interviewed at Lingapur, 19 April 2019). The reduction of tribal demographic strength in the new districts is likely to diminish their importance during the delimitation of their constituencies. As a result, the electoral system of Fast-Past-The-Post (FPTP) would reduce their significance. Thus, the new borders would jeopardize their representation.

On this B. Ramarao considered that 'the state government tends to represent most of the districts in council of ministers. Hence, if the tribal territory-based district was created, it would have leveraged the tribals' position to get the ministerial post to the tribal representatives" (Interviewed at Utnoor, 11 May 2019). Furthermore, most of the tribals believed that power was assigned to bureaucrats such as the district Collectors and PO of ITDA. The colonial rulers created an agent structure because they thought that the tribals were not capable of governing themselves. Hence, the intervention of an outsider was seen as essential to civilize them. But today, there are educated or elite sections within the tribals that challenge the bureaucratic structure and demand greater self-governance. Thus, the notion that the benevolent state should take care of the tribals through its bureaucracy is challenged.

6.9.4. Effect of District Creation on Decentralization in Tribal Areas

The tribals conceive that decentralization in tribal areas is invariably linked to their identity that also remains as a fulcrum for governance. While emphasizing distinct tribal identity, Harkka Vasanth contends that “the government has failed to recognize the historical tribal areas, social context and political struggles, and laws such as Scheduled Areas PESA, LTR and FRA while devising unit for decentralization” (Interviewed at Asifabad, 26 April 2019). The new borders represent the failure of the government to comprehend and accommodate distinct tribal areas. Bookman (2013: 206) argued that “The administrative separation of ethnicity and territory effectively reduces the likelihood of ethnic self-governance”. The mainstream areas in the new district overshadow the fragmented tribal areas due to their size, numeric strength, and social and political dominance. There is predominant anxiety among tribals that their areas’ assimilation into a plain areas-dominated district would gradually take away their self-governing rights. The new districts have become a new site for the tribals to scale up their community identity-based politics for representation and power.

6.10. ‘Sectarian Ethnic Turn’: Competing Inequality

The dissection of tribal territory has reconfigured tribal politics. Group dynamics and divisions are inevitable in a democratic system (Horowitz: 1985: 53-54). The state’s redistributive and recognition politics play a vital role in generating competitive claims among tribal communities. Socio-cultural differences, ethnic-based competition over political representation and material aspects seem to outweigh tribals’ larger collective consciousness that has taken place while demanding for tribal predominant district. In other words, the heterogeneous character of the communities in the new districts exacerbates inter-community struggle over scarce resources and power.

The composite character of the erstwhile district ensured that tribals’ rights and interests were occasionally regarded in governance and politics. The new districts open up new socio-political realities, where there is a scope for both hurdles and avenues of opportunities for each community. The Gonds are mostly concentrated in two districts, i.e., Asifabad and Adilabad. The Lambadas are significantly concentrated in the Adilabad district but they constitute the second largest tribal community in Asifabad; they are sparsely located

in Nirmal and Mancherial districts. The Gonds seem to be getting priority and patronage in Asifabad district as they occupy most influential positions such as ZP chairman, PESA Coordinator, and Library chairman. Likewise, Kova Laxmi, ZP chairman, and AtramSakku, MLA of Asifabad constituency, who have emerged as key leaders in the Asifabad district belong to the Gond community. Significantly, the district is named after a Gond legend Komaram Bheem. Other communities such as the Lambadas, Kolams, Naikpods, Andhs, and Thotis continue to be under-represented (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Political (Institutional) Representation in New Districts

District	Post	Name	Community
Asifabad	Z.P. Chairman	Kova Laxmi	Gond
	Library Chairman	Kanaka Yadav Rao	Gond
	PESA Coordinator	Vasanth Rao	Gond
Adilabad	Z.P. Chairman	Rathod Janardhan	Lambada
	PESA Coordinator	VedamaBujju	Gond
Adilabad	ITDA-TAC Utnoor Chairman	Kanaka Lakker Rao	Gond

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on information from fieldwork.

In Adilabad district, Lambadas and Gonds, who are more or less equally distributed in the district, compete for representation. Horowitz (1985) contends that inter-ethnic competition provides incentives. To balance the representation of communities, the TRS selected Gond and Lambada candidates as ZP chairman in Asifabad and Adilabad districts, respectively. In this process, political parties recognize the significance of the dominant communities such as Gonds and Lambadas, but minor communities such as Kolams, Pradhans, Andhs, Thotis, and others continue to be neglected¹¹⁰. The Gonds and Lambadas bargaining power have increased in new Asifabad and Adilabad districts (see Table 6.2 for the institutional representation of various communities). Though they did not get the desired district borders and headquarters, their representations have increased in these districts unlike the erstwhile Adilabad district where they were represented significantly. The communities' competitive claims and assertion over the new districts demonstrate that though they did not succeed in getting new districts for their own, they did not fail wholly either. However, in Mancherial

¹¹⁰ The government has brought specific policies for the minor tribal communities to reduce the disparities and unequal representation between communities. Yet, the communities feel that the policies or schemes are insufficient to give them the fillip to compete with other major communities.

and Nirmal districts which are predominantly plain areas, the tribals are underrepresented and marginalised.

The link between ethnic size and power is relevant. Given this tribal groups compete to establish their community identity as an overarching identity and are trying to leverage their positions in realms of governance and politics in Asifabad and Adilabad districts. Thus, new district borders and opportunities have exacerbated inter-community competition and tensions. Given the tight competition between the Lambadas and Gonds in the Adilabad district, sometimes a community needs an alliance with the non-tribals to get their community representation. For instance, during the Parliamentary election in 2019, Soyam Bapurao, who has been pitching against de-scheduling the Lambadas from the ST list, won the election on Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket. In fact, the combined support from his Gond community and the non-tribals because of the BJP and Modi's leadership factors ensured his success. The Congress fielded a Lambada candidate who lost the competitive election¹¹¹. The political representatives can turn the social anxieties into ethnic aggression against other groups for their political benefits. The reserved seats and positions reinforce tension between tribal groups which sometimes impels elector alignment with the non-tribals to outbid the other group. Hence, a new kind of realignment is visible in new districts.

The possibility of larger tribal solidarity and consciousness is impeded even as various tribal groups present differential claims and magnitude of backwardness. In this competitive setting, virtually all political events have ethnic consequences. Until the creation of new districts, all the communities lived in socio-cultural harmony, and conflict never got manifested openly. But after the formation of districts, communities begin to stock differences, which have resulted in the rift. The clashes between the communities triggered critical events in new districts, which is discussed below.

The communities' cultural artifacts and statues of community leaders were installed in Komaram Bheem museum at Jodeghat in the Asifabad district. In 2017, the members of Gonds led by SoyamBapurao burnt a statue of *Samki Matta* (Lambada' goddesses), which was placed in the museum at Jodeghat. This led to protests from the Lambadas who

¹¹¹ These inferences were drawn from the field as the researcher was present during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

demanding reinstalling the statue and punishing the culprits. This spiraled to other tribal areas and finally resulted in violence. The Gonds questioned why the symbols of Lambada community's statue was placed at the Komaram Bheem museum, an exclusively historical struggle site of the Gonds and the Kolams. This underscores Gond's assertion for their symbolic and cultural dominance in Asifabad district. The Gonds and other tribals believe that the Lambadas are the largest tribal community in the state, and they are taking away a lion's share of reservation benefits, so they should be de-scheduled from the ST list. Conversely, the Lambada leaders viewed that that "the Lambadas are backward, majority of them are illiterate, mostly live in poverty, and are politically under-represented. Only a few people have received developmental and welfare benefits. In Adilabad and Asifabad districts, the Gonds are dominant, and the officials favor them in providing welfare and development benefits while the Lambadas face indifferent treatment from the officials'. B. Jagan, a Lambada leader, pointed out that 'the government issued GO-24 in 2018 to create Local Scheduled Tribes (LST). All communities are recognized as the LST except the Lambadas. All communities except the Lambadas, are given priority benefits and local employment in Asifabad and Adilabad district'(Interviewed at Utnoor, 12 May 2019). With the creation of new districts competition and political conflict among communities are apparent. Thus, the politics seem to be diffused and confined to the borders of new districts wherein each community is trying to leverage its position by claiming the recognition and legitimacy of their respective identity. This hyper recognition politics is marked by essentialism and sectarian interests rather than shared ethos and experiences.

The existing economic inequality/deprivation, competition over scarce resources and competition for political and cultural representation have resulted not only in conflict between the tribals and the non-tribals, but have also led to conflict among the tribal groups themselves. The communities' competitive resentments find political expressions in new districts, particularly in Adilabad and Asifabad. The tension between communities seems to favour the official legitimization of not creating a single district for the tribal areas. Reflecting on this community competitive claims, the officials(Interviewed at Adilabad district Collectorate, 18 April 2019) expressed on the condition of anonymity that 'the creation of Utnoor district for tribal areas would have created ethnic rigidity and clannish political development, would have turned tinder box for the ethnic conflicts between the

Lambadas and Gonds, and not conducive to accommodate both the communities with single district as it has been carried now under the Asifabad and Adilabad’.

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the politics behind the drawing of district borders and headquarters selection while focusing on four major imperatives, namely political (actors, interests, and institutions), economic, socio-cultural, and administrative imperatives. It has also examined the implications of re-drawing borders on the politics of recognition, representation and redistribution, and inter-communities’ relationships. This chapter has shown that the government has not accommodated the tribals demanded Utnoor as a district; instead, the traditional tribal territory has been dismembered into four districts. The ruling elites have ignored the communities’ connection with their territory while drawing new district borders.

The MLAs, ministers, tribal elected representatives, and the ruling party saw ‘political opportunity structure’, in drawing borders. They have played a critical role in shaping borders in the tribal areas and selecting towns for headquarters. The incentives to create and consolidate their political clouts, claim recognition or credit for creating new districts have significant bearings over new districts borders and headquarter selections. Interestingly, the tribal representatives were interested in their political consolidation while also using the more significant tribals’ identity and claims. The leaders associated with the TRS party interpreted the creation of Asifabad and Adilabad districts as accommodation from their political vantage points. There is a widespread belief that the division within the tribal political elite coincides with the state and interest of state elites, thus, reinforcing the ruling party's dominance. The desire to fulfill the political interests is also paralleled by the concerns for competing interest of social groups and development through revenue collections and resource for the state. However, the accommodation of tribal demand for district was subservient to all above mentioned political, economic, social, and administrative imperatives.

Re-drawing borders has resulted not only in fissure in the movement for demanding district, but it has also led to intense competition among the communities themselves for recognition, redistribution, and representation in the new districts. The dissecting tribal areas also led to the consolidation of simmering differences among the tribal communities and

establish the sectarian dominance of some tribal groups like the Gonds and Lambadas in the new districts at the cost of losing tribal collective consolidation.

The next chapter focuses on the politics behind the creation of new district borders and the selection of district headquarter towns and how the tribal demands had been accommodated in the erstwhile Khammam district.

Chapter 7

Politics of Intra-State Border Change in Tribal Areas of the Erstwhile Khammam

7.1. Introduction

The tribals concentrated areas adjoining the Godavari River belt and eastern half of the Khammam district witnessed intense political mobilisations for the creation of a new district for tribal territory with Bhadrachalam town as its headquarters (see map 4.2 in chapter 4). The former Khammam district was bifurcated such that the western portion formed the new Khammam district, and the eastern side with predominant tribal areas constituted the Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district. However, the tribals were dissatisfied with the creation of the district for many reasons. First, some mandals that were claimed to be part of traditional tribal territory were excluded from the new district. Second, instead of selecting the tribal demanded Bhadrachalam town, Kothagudem town, located in the plain areas, was selected as district headquarters. Against this backdrop, the drawing of district borders is considered a political act and is shaped by the socio-political contexts.

Redrawing of district borders is considered to have significant implications for territorial identity and re-shaping local power relations. Taking this into account, this chapter examines how the borders of new districts were drawn and why the tribal concentrated mandals were excluded. In doing so, it attempts to understand the politics behind the selection of town as the district headquarters. What are the implications of the new district borders and headquarter on the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in the tribal areas? This study contends that four imperatives, namely, political, economic, social, and administrative, shape the re-drawing of district borders and selection of headquarters. This chapter consists of two parts. The first part describes the role of political, economic, social and administrative imperatives in re-drawing borders and selecting towns for headquarters. The second part highlights the implications of new borders and headquarters on the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation.

7.2. The Political Imperative in Re-drawing Borders and Selecting District Headquarters

Political party/leaders at the state, district/constituency level play a crucial role in gerrymandering district borders in order to change the demographic composition and selection of headquarter towns for their political interests. The following section focuses on the socio-political contexts and role of actors such as leaders, parties, and organizations in demanding and drawing district borders and selecting headquarter towns.

7.2.1. From Manya Seema Demand to Bhadrachalam District

Tribals have been demanding separate political units such as states and districts to protect their territory, identity, and self-governance for a long time. But tribal territory had been subjected to division for several times, due to inter-state and intra-state border changes in the past. The tribals perceive that re-drawing inter-state and intra-state borders has affected their traditional tribal territory and socio-political identities. Many respondents highlighted that the tribals broached for Manya Seema state for their areas during the movement for a separate Telangana state. The demanded Manya Seema state spans across former tribal areas of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, and Khammam in Telangana, East Godavari, West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam districts in AP (News18, 2011). Bhadrachalam town had been the epicenter of tribal movement. The Manya Seema Rashtra Sadhana Samithi (MRSS), an umbrella organization, played a key role in propelling the demand (Reddy and Mahender, 2014). Interestingly, the Srikrishna Committee (2010:374), constituted to study the demand for Telangana state, acknowledged the tribal's demand for a separate state. The Committee reported that in the case of formation of a separate Telangana state, a tribal-state should be formed to prevent exploitation and marginalization of the tribals. The Committee further cautioned that dividing tribal areas into two states, namely Telangana and Andhra Pradesh would do grave injustice to the tribals who are territorially concentrated (ibid).

The Committee's suggestions have emboldened the tribals and their territorial claims. Despite the Committee's recommendation, the government sidelined the tribals' state demand apparently due to the political and economic interests of the dominant segments from

both Andhra and Telangana regions (The Hindu 2014). The tribal areas (seven mandalas)¹¹² from composite Khammam district were merged into East Godavari and West-Godavari districts of newly formed AP in 2014. This act was amenable to their displacement and the construction of *Indira Sagar Polavaram*¹¹³ (hereafter simply Polavaram) project¹¹⁴ (dam) (The Hindu, 2015a). Thus, the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated without considering the demands of the tribals (Suchitra, 2015). In this regard, questioning the procedure and merging of tribal areas in two states, Komaram Anil pointed out that “the government used Article 3 to form two states at the expense of tribal areas, but it has bypassed Article 244(1) and PESA Acts by not consulting the tribals. The constitutional provisions were not followed while dividing the tribal areas” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, Bhadrachalam district, 27 May 2019). Thus, merging the seven mandals in AP state was detrimental to the tribal politics of the state and the larger project of maintaining their territorial integrity.

The reduction in the tribal areas due to the merging of seven predominant tribal mandals in the AP has implications on tribal demography and their politics in the composite Khammam district. The inter-state border change has impacted the size of tribal areas, which subsequently influenced the tribals to reclaim their territory to protect their rump territory and identity. To realise this, they intensified their long-pending demand for integrating the Bhadrachalam district with areas of composite Khammam district. In this regard, Sonde Veeraiah, convener of GSP, argued that “Bhadrachalam district demand emerged to uphold self-governance and to undo gross injustices meted out to tribals in all realms, particularly by the transfer of seven tribal mandals to AP as per the AP State Reorganisation Act in 2014” (cited in The Hindu, 2015a). Their territorial and ethnic consciousness remains animated in their struggle for political and administrative units. Thus, the tribals have created an essential

¹¹²Bhadrachalam (except Bhadrachalam revenue village), Kunavaram, VR Puram, Chintoor, Burgampadu, Velairpadu and Kukunoor mandals were merged with AP through an Ordinance.

¹¹³The Srikrishna Committee report (2010:203) notes that “the Polavaram project is constructed on Godavari river near Ramayyapet village of Polavaram mandal of West Godavari district in AP. The project is a multipurpose major terminal reservoir project for development of irrigation, hydropower and drinking water facilities to East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, West Godavari, Krishna and other districts of AP” (ibid).

¹¹⁴“The project will submerge nearly 339 habitations, 91 Gram Panchayats and 216 revenue villages in Andhra Pradesh. Of these, 74 Gram Panchayats and 193 revenue villages and 264 habitations are in Khammam in Telangana. Most of the villages are located in Bhadrachalam Integrated Tribal Development Agency area while a few others are located in the East and West Godavari districts” (Suchitra, 2015).

ground to make Bhadrachalam as its headquarter for the remaining tribal territory in the composite Khammam district.

7.2.2. The Demand for Bhadrachalam as a District for Tribal Areas

The Bhadrachalam town is located on the banks of the river Godavari. Given the central geographical location of Bhadrachalam town and being the headquarter of ITDA, the town emerged as the pivot of tribal governance and political activities (Nitin, 2015). As discussed earlier in chapter four, there has been a long-standing demand for the creation of a new district for tribal areas comprising 24 ITDA mandals or five ST reserved assembly segments (Bhadrachalam, Yellandu, Pinapaka, Aswaraopeta and Wyrā), and Bhadrachalam town as headquarter of the district (see figure 4.2 in chapter four for the district map and profile of the area)¹¹⁵(Mahesh, 2015; Sridhar, 2016; The Hindu, 2015b). Sonde Veeraiah said that “the Bhadrachalam town forms the nucleus of the vast tribal hinterland and it is also the headquarters of the ITDA. It was the natural choice for becoming a district headquarters from the Adivasis vantage point” (cited in the Hindu, 2015a). This underscores the centrality of Bhadrachalam town in tribal demands for a district. Apart from the tribal organisations, the Bhadrachalam town-based district was also actively supported by various political parties.

Though the demand for Bhadrachalam district has been there since the 1950s, after the formation of the separate state of Telangana in 2014, members of civil society organizations, tribal activists, and leaders have mobilized the tribals, and carried out intense protests to achieve their long-cherished demand (Deccan Chronicle, 2014). Tudum Debba, Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samithi (AHPS), Girijana Sangshema Parishad (GSP), Adivasi Sangshema Parishad (ASP), Naikpod Seva Sangh (NSS), Kondareddies Sangham (KS), Sevalal Vidyarthi Sena (SVS), Lambada Hakkulla Porata Samithi (LHPS), Nagara Bheri and other organisations have played a vital role in mobilising people for demanding district for the tribal areas (Sridhar, 2016). In this regard, “in 2015, the GSP conducted “Gondwana Sammelan”, a national tribal convention, in Bhadrachalam, wherein they demanded the Central and the state government to declare all Scheduled Areas spread across the Gondwana

¹¹⁵ From a long time, the demand emerged as a part of collective mobilisation of the tribals for the three tribal districts in Telangana, namely, Bhadrachalam, Eturunagaram and Uttnoor to be carved out of Khammam, Warangal and Adilabad districts respectively.

region in the country as tribal districts” (The Hindu, 2015c). The tribal protests for Bhadrachalam district have played a crucial role in reminding the TRS government to fulfill its 2014 manifesto of forming more districts (ibid). Further, the KCR’s government announced that new districts would be formed and constituted a High-Level panel consisting of secretariat officials to study the viability of re-organisation of districts in 2015(The Hindu, 2015a). The decision of the government to form a committee boosted the tribal organizations to organize a mass movement for the district” (The Hindu, 2015b). In this regard, Muchcha Kavesh, a Koya, from Bhemavaram village in Dhumugudem mandal, recollected that “given historical demand for Bhadrachalam, during Telangana movement, KCR and other leaders had promised that once Telangana is formed, separate districts for tribal areas and ITDA towns as headquarters would be created to allow the tribals self-governance” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 29 May 2019). The tribals were under the impression that the district demanded by them would be created (Srinivas et al, 2015).

Nonetheless, the tribals organised several meetings, protests, and rallies for demanding district with Bhadrachalam as its headquarters and opposing the merging of tribal areas in the plain area districts (The Hindu, 2016e). The Bhadrachalam town was an epicenter of all protests for the tribal district (The News Minute, 2016). Sunnam Rajaiah of CPI (M), the then MLA of Bhadrachalam constituency, had undertaken an indefinite fast for a separate district (The Hindu, 2016e). Interestingly, even the “non-tribals and the political leaders of various parties from Bhadrachalam have floated a forum called “Save Bhadrachalam” in September 2015 to take forward their demand of Bhadrachalam town-based district, as the non-tribals of Bhadrachalam believe that gross injustice was done to the Bhadrachalam revenue division during bifurcation of state (Mahesh, 2015; Nitin, 2015). Conversely, during this phase (2015-16), demand for Kothagudem towns as the headquarter for district with tribal predominant areas have also emerged (The Hindu, 2015a). Apart from tribal organisations, the Left parties- CPI (M), and CPI (ML) New Democracy (simply CPI-ML) have also demanded Bhadrachalam town-based district. But they had different positions on the nature of districts.

7.2.3. Difference and Deference between the Tribal and Left Politics

The tribal areas in the former Khammam district have been considered as a traditional base for the Left parties—CPI (M), CPI, and CPI-ML. The Naxals and Left parties established their support base in tribal areas by mobilising the tribals on land and other issues. In the 1970s and 80s, Naxals and CPI (ML), who tried to establish their base, supported the tribal district demand¹¹⁶. The Naxals have supported the tribal demand for the district comprising ITDA areas for self-governance. Nevertheless, the method of the Naxal movement and their ultimate goal of a classless society through class struggle deviate from the tribal concern of identity and self-governance.

Meanwhile, CPI, CPI (M), and CPI (ML) establish a strong base in the tribal areas by raising tribal issues in the electoral process¹¹⁷. Indeed, the Left parties won most of the time in this district's reserved Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies. Generally, the Left parties are seen as champions of weaker sections as they have fought for the landless people regardless of their social background. They have pitched their demand for land redistribution irrespective of the different areas they are based. With this understanding, scholars like Prasad (2004) and Sundar (2007) tend to see no separation between Left-wing politics and tribal politics. In the ethnic identity-dominated areas, the CPI (M) supported the ethnic issues and further the party's interest in the process. In this regard, Gudavarthy (2020:18) views that "in India, although the Left argued for a universal class politics, in reality, they spoke from a certain group/caste vantage point". The Left parties employ their strategy of clientelism¹¹⁸ for electoral mobilisation to maintain their political base. However, as Madavi Tagore pointed out, "Left politics support base among the tribals has gradually been declining. The tribals were attracted to the Left, not because of its ideology. In fact, most of the tribals do not have deep familiarity with the Left ideology. The Naxals and the Left parties were taking tribal issues from tribal identity point of view" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019).

¹¹⁶ "Adivasis are to be treated with special concern in this interpretation not only because of the historic marginisation and discrimination they have faced, but ultimately as part of a project to form a classes society" (Bates and Shah 2014:18).

¹¹⁷ Ascertained from interview with Madavi Tagore at Bhadrachalam on 26 May 2019.

¹¹⁸ Understood as the party working for the people for its own interests, similarly, people support it for their own interests.

Along with tribal organisations, Bhadrachalam town as headquarters of a new district received strong support from political parties like CPI (M), CPI (M-L)¹¹⁹, and Naxals¹²⁰. After the government's tentative announcement of district creation, the CPI (M) started protesting for Bhadrachalam district, to maintain the parties' traditional support base in the constituency¹²¹. Sunnam Rajaiah, a Koya and Bhadrachalam MLA from CPI (M), was leading the protest for Bhadrachalam district (The Hindu 2016f). Thus, tribal civil society organisations such as ASP, NS, KS, SVS, LHPs, CPI(M) and CPI (M-L), all led protests together for a common cause, that is the creation of a district with Bhadrachalam as its headquarters. Despite this common ground, there are plausible differences over the political nature of the demanded district.

It is noteworthy that the CPI (M) demanded Bhadrachalam based district which is not ideologically congruent with tribal activists' demand. Machcha Venkateshvarulu, CPI (M) party's district secretary, and a non-tribal, considered that "originally the demand for Bhadrachalam district came from the tribal organisations, but CPI (M) party played an active role in mobilizing the tribals. Our party MLA Sunnam Rajaiah led protests demanding Bhadrachalam district from 2014, i.e., immediately after the formation of Telangana' (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 27 May 2019) (see Deccan Chronicle, 2014). He further considered that "along with the tribals, other marginalised sections, such as SCs, BCs, minorities, and the poor people are residing for generations in the demanded district areas. We have demanded Bhadrachalam district not only for the tribals, but also for the benefits of other weaker sections of the society. Interestingly, Sunnam Rajaiah reinforces CPI (M) stand, that "the Bhadrachalam district would evidently help the tribals, but we cannot neglect other weaker sections of the society who are living in this area for generations" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 27 May 2019). The CPI (M) did not support the Kothagudem demand because the town is not central to the backward tribal areas such as Cherla, Dummugudem, and other areas. It is also an industrial town that does not have a great scope for the development of the weaker sections. The CPI (M) stand underscores that the district should be carved out to help all sections, and that it should not be based on exclusive identities. Nevertheless, the CPI

¹¹⁹The CPI (M-L) won six times in Yellandu assembly constituency.

¹²⁰ The non-tribals of the town and leaders of the parties such as the Congress and the TRS expressed their solidarity at the constituency (Bhadrachalam) level.

¹²¹The CPI (M) won eight times out of twelve elections from 1967 to 2018 (<https://ceotelangana.nic.in/>).

(M)'s position contradicts the tribals' claim over their identity, territory, and self-governance. Interestingly, the tribals perceive that the non-tribals alienated their land and exploited them. Therefore, tribal politics has an ethnic character. But, the CPI (M)'s stand on the Bhadrachalam district conveniently bypasses the tribal identity recognition demand.

The CPI (M)'s stand on the district did not go well with the perspective of the tribals. The tribals contend that the Left parties have never represented their interests genuinely as they always work according to their party's and leaders' interests. The tribal activists view that the CPI (M) supported Bhadrachalam and CPI supported Kothagudem to protect their electoral interest and traditional support in these respective towns. Madavi Tagore, a tribal activist went to the extent of alleging that "as part of CPI (M)'s electoral consolidation in the tribal areas, the party leaders are encouraging the non-tribals to cut the forest as part of parties' drive of land to the tiller. This is causing depletion of forests, but the blame is laid on the tribals by the state authorities, who use this as an excuse to take away their autonomy and natural right to own the land from their own territory" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). Further, he argues that CPI (M) never allows tribal interest to be represented because its leaders are encouraging the non-tribals to settle in the tribal areas¹²². With respect to the tribal leaders present in the CPI (M), the respondents to this study viewed that though leaders who belong to the tribal community are given party tickets, as tribal representatives they fail to represent their interest as they are trained to work for protecting the interest of the Left parties.

Moreover, tribal activists feel that CPI (M) appropriated tribals demand for the Bhadrachalam district. In doing so it diverted the cause of a separate tribal district to a district for all. The CPI (M) is seen to be appeasing all sections for their political interests, while tribals are looking for their own territorial, cultural, political, and economic protections. Thus, the non-tribals influenced in systematic changing of district identity. The non-tribals of the Bhadrachalam town also fought for the town, but they were all fighting for a mere administrative district, which sees district as essentially downsizing the administration, and symbolically associate the town with a temple rather than with tribal identity (The Hindu, 2015c; Mahesh, 2015).

¹²² Ascertained from interviews

7.2.4. Politics over District Headquarters: Bhadrachalam vs Kothagudem Town

The demand for Bhadrachalam as a district was a longstanding one. In 2015 a group of tribals demanded to make Kothagudem as the district headquarters of Bhadrachalam emerged. Interestingly, the TRS government was toying with the idea of forming a Kothagudem town-based new district whose areas geographically cover the majority of the tribal areas. This came contrary to demand of tribals (The Hindu, 2015a). The tribals perceived that political mobilisation to make Kothagudem town the district headquarters of Bhadrachalam stands in juxtaposition to their long-standing demand for Bhadrachalam. This is seen to have dented the chances of selection of Bhadrachalam as district headquarters. The selection of Kothagudem by TRS government however prompted various tribal organizations to mobilise and univocally assert their demand for a district encompassing the tribal/ITDA mandals or all ST reserved constituencies, with Bhadrachalam as its headquarters (ibid). The demand for Kothagudem, particularly by the non-tribals, changed the whole configuration of politics for the district's creation and selection of a headquarter town. An interesting chain of claims and counter-claims for both the towns ensued as a result.

The following arguments emerged among the tribals supporting Bhadrachalam town as a headquarters. Firstly, the demand for Bhadrachalam as headquarters of the district had a longer history than demands for other towns. Madavi Nehru, District Coordinator of ASP, echoed the widespread view among the tribals that “the demand of ITDA/Sub-Plan areas as a separate district and the ITDA towns as headquarter, emerged for focused development and identity recognition” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 25 May 2019). Adding to the above argument, he further viewed that “the idea and demand for smaller districts in Telangana originated at Bhadrachalam”. The Bhadrachalam district demand with Bhadrachalam town as its district headquarters is seen to have a longer pedigree of legitimate demand unlike the relatively recent demand by non-tribals to make Kothagudem town its headquarters (The Hindu, 2015a). Factors like developmental need, history of Bhadrachalam demand, and tribal identity were highlighted by the tribals to prefer Bhadrachalam over other towns as headquarters.

Secondly, Bhadrachalam is central to the traditional tribal territory, which has been socially and politically connected before both inter and intra state borders were carved out. Bhadrachalam town is a place of confluence of Adivasis from Telangana, AP, Chattishgarh, and Odisha states (Mahender, 2016). Thus, the geographical location and tribal communities' socio-political association with the town were stressed for qualifying the town as its headquarters. Bhadrachalam was also defended on the ground that it provides a shield to the areas' identity, identified as Scheduled Areas and selecting Bhadrachalam town would give symbolic recognition. The district headquarter town was defended because the Fifth Scheduled areas-based district should have towns from the Scheduled Areas (Radhakrishna, 2016). Gummadi Narasaiah, a five-time tribal legislator from Yellandu constituency, argued that "tribal areas should remain part of tribal districts with Bhadrachalam as headquarters regardless of the size of the district. Any denial amounts to negation of tribals' right to self-rule" (cited in Radhakrishna, 2016).

Thirdly, as the ITDA headquarters is located at Bhadrachalam it is considered as a secretariat for governing the tribal areas. Home to the ITDA headquarter and being located in the core tribal areas, Bhadrachalam has become central to governing tribal areas (The Hindu, 2015a). Fourthly, 'the Bhadrachalam town has been the epicenter for the tribal social and political activities' (The Hindu, 2015a). Madavi Nehru (cited in The Hindu, 2015d) contends that "it is the ideal destination for Adivasis, who frequently visit the town in large numbers to access health, education and other daily needs and is the central town for tribal political activities". Thus, to make a full-fledged district for tribal areas, the town was considered a natural choice for the district headquarter (Sridhar, 2016). The demand for Bhadrachalam as a district headquarters was also legitimised on the ground that it would not only restore its past glory but would also compensate the injustice done to the people of Bhadrachalam given that they were victims of inter-state borders change (Mahesh, 2015; The Hindu, 2015a).

Fifthly, the tribals invoked the 'distance criteria', which featured as one of the essential criteria for the government to carve out districts. To strengthen their demand, the tribals underscored the rationale historically invoked in the shifting of ITDA headquarter. To be sure, ITDA was initially set up at an old district headquarter at Khammam on 12 March 1975. Later it was shifted to Palvanha town on 17 December 1979 on the ground that it was

near to the tribal areas. But the tribals were not happy with this shift. They fought that ITDA headquarter should be further shifted to Bhadrachalam town on the contention that it is not only central to the tribal areas but is also a socio-culturally connected town. Considering tribals' concerns, the ITDA headquarters was once again shifted to Bhadrachalam on 9 February 1993 (ITDA Bhadrachalam 2019). Thus, the tribals argue that shifting ITDA on the ground of distance and recognising the town's importance in the areas virtuously makes the town the most qualified and suitable town for headquarters in the new tribal district (The Hindu, 2015d). Therefore, the distance argument had been brought more vigorously to gain the moral currency for their district demand, which is also in consonance with the state criteria.

The tribals resisted the selection of Kothagudem as a headquarters for the tribal-dominated areas for the following reasons. Firstly, they opposed Kothagudem town because of the composite character of the town i.e., the non-tribals are numerically more than the tribals. Thus, the town does not reflect the aspirations of majority of the tribals and does not open up opportunities. The tribals argued that the developmental opportunity that Kothagudem opens up would be confined to the plain areas and would be taken away by the non-tribals at the cost of tribals in their areas (Mahesh, 2015). Secondly, the town is not centrally located, located as it were towards the southwest area of the demanded district which is far from most of the tribal areas (Sridhar, 2016). Thirdly, geographically and ecologically, Kothagudem is unsuitable for headquarters as the town is located in coal-concentrated areas, which are more prone to earthquakes, dust, and air pollution (ibid). Sonde Veeraiah (cited in The Hindu, 2015b) said, "Kothagudem is not the right choice for a district headquarters from the environmental point of view considering the extensive coal mining operations". Fourthly, the demand for Kothagudem town neither had historical roots nor a sound social-cultural basis of the tribals who are ethnically associated with the territory. The tribals feel that this demand was politically motivated. Fifthly, the selection of Kothagudem as a district headquarters would result in losing the identity of the tribal areas. Sonde Veeriaiah (cited in Sridhar, 2016) contended that "selection of Kothagudem is not only illogical but contrary to the spirit of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution". MurlaRamesh, a local leader of Kondareddy tribe, argues that "Kothagudem town is under the plain and industrial area, where the tribal laws and rights would not be implemented properly" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 25 May 2019). There is a

strong feeling among the tribals that creating Kothagudem town as headquarters of the district would tantamount to reinforcing internal colonialism and non-tribals' dominance in the tribal areas. Thus, the tribals were defending Bhadrachalam as headquarters because it would help in upholding the Adivasi right to self-rule and other provisions guaranteed to them under the Fifth Schedule of India's Constitution (Sridhar 2016). The district headquarters also provides development, employment, education, business, and other livelihood means and strengthens the socio-cultural connection. Thus, from the above discussion, it can be drawn that the tribals demanded Bhadrachalam district and its headquarter for their territorial accommodation and protection of their ethnic identity.

However, the non-tribals and some of the TRS party leaders who favored Kothagudem town as district headquarters defended the same with the following reasons. Firstly, making Kothagudem town as the district headquarters was justified while accepting the fact that the demand for Bhadrachalam had a long history. It is however argued that after merging the seven tribal majority mandals of the erstwhile Bhadrachalam town in AP, the town has lost its central location (ibid). Secondly, Kothagudem is the biggest town in the proposed district. Thirdly, given that many major industries are located in the town, making it as the district headquarters would create and accelerate infrastructural development and employment opportunities. Fourthly, as Kothagudem town is located in the plain area, there would be more scope for development and opportunities for all sections of the population in the area. In contrast, Bhadrachalam town is under a Scheduled area where the LTR Act restricts outsiders and the non-tribals. Fifthly, Jalagam Venkat Rao, former MLA of Kothagudem constituency, said that 'Bhadrachalam town has frequent floods from the Godavari River, so it would be difficult to govern from the town' (Interviewed at Kothagudem, 28 May 2019). Even the District officials echo the views raised by supporters of Kothagudem that merging of tribal-dominated areas of seven mandals has dented chances of selecting Bhadrachalam town as a district headquarters. The size of Kothagudem towns, location in the plain area, development indicators, and infrastructure are seen to be more favorable in selecting the town as the district headquarters (Preliminary Report, Khammam District, 2016).

Apart from these, politics at the district level was also critical factors in deciding the fate of district headquarters. The majority of the predominant tribal mandals were added to the Badradri-Kothagudem district, but some mandals were merged in Khammam, Mahabubabad, and Mulugudistricts. The Kothagudem town was created as district headquarters for the tribal areas dominated district despite resistance from tribals and their demand for Bhadrachalam. Interestingly, Kothagudem is the only major town located in the plain areas, where the non-tribals are present in a significant number in Bhadradri Kothagudem district. The Kothagudem town has been a hub for industrial activities. In comparison, the Bhadrachalam town has traditionally been identified as a tribal town, headquartering the ITDA. A temple site that an Adivasi woman constructed initially adds to the town's significance.

When we examine this issue from the distance and centrality factor (as discussed earlier), both towns are not located in the central place of the new district. Kothagudem is located towards the south-western part and Bhadrachalam is located towards the eastern part of the district, but the latter one is considered central to the traditional tribal territory. Joga Pullaiah, a leader of Naikpod Sangam, viewed that “local dominant leaders have influenced both the state elites and the officials to get Kothagudem as district headquarters. Bhadrachalam demand was out maneuvered easily because the Adivasis lacked lobbying in the government” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). Further, Madavi Nehru contended that “just giving reason of Scheduled Area and LTR Act to oppose selection of Bhadrachalam was a lame excuse and masquerades the non-tribal dominant interests to sabotage the tribal demand of Bhadrachalam” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). So, there was intense politics behind the shifting and creating of new district headquarters in tribal territories. It then becomes essential to understand the role of political actors and interests in creating the Kothagudem district and how Bhadrachalam demand was ignored. It is also essential to understand the politics behind choosing a town as headquarters and drawing borders.

7.2.5. Role of Public Representatives in Gerrymandering District Borders

In a representative democracy, political parties and leaders play a vital role in representing the interests and aspirations of different sections of society. Though electoral and non-electoral

politics have distinctive bearings on tribal politics, elected representatives are seen as agents to represent tribal interests and constitute an important part of the formal link that the tribal groups have with the ruling elite at the state level. Against this backdrop, it is essential to analyse the role of representatives/leaders in forming new districts out of the erstwhile Khammam district.

The tribal demanded district included six constituencies: Bhadrachalam, Yellandu, Pinapaka, Aswaraopeta, Wyra—all of which are reserved for STs, and the Kothagudem assembly constituency is a general constituency. Before the recent round of creating new districts by KCR government, majority of the tribals were certain that Bhadrachalam would be created as a district as it was a long pending demand. Prior to 2016, the non-tribals were silent and did not place competitive demand until the government announced the district reorganization in 2015. As Bookman (2003) argued, “that if ethnically distinct ruling elite lacks a majority in the total population, it is likely to become conscious of this defect, and begin playing a key role to forestall its own displacement”. In 2016, non-tribals led by Jalagam Venkat Rao, the then Kothagudem constituency MLA and a prominent TRS leader in the erstwhile district, raised a demand that Kothagudem town should be selected as a district headquarters instead of Bhadrachalam. Despite a lone non-reserved constituency in the newly formed Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, Kothagudem constituency MLA used his dominant position and network to leverage Kothagudem town among the state elites. He could influence this decision because he hails from a politically influential family¹²³. Thus, an MLA with a dynastic background and political clout in the district leveraged his bargaining or influential position with the state-level leaders.

The concerted effort of Jalagam Venkat Rao and supporters of Kothagudem town, has received more political traction than the tribal demanded Bhadrachalam. Note that the areas are dominated by tribals (Seshu, 2015). Additionally, the tribals contended that Jalagam’s family played a key role in changing the identity of the tribal areas by encouraging the settlement of non-tribals in industrial base towns like Kothagudem and Palvancha. The concentration of development and infrastructure in these towns fulfills the non-tribal interest

¹²³ His father Jalagam Vengal Rao served as the fifth Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh from 1973 to 1978, as a Union Minister in Rajiv Gandhi’s government, and represented Khammam parliamentary constituency twice. Venkata Rao’s brother Jalagam Prasad Rao is also an influential leader in the district.

to create his support base. Apart from the above reasons, tribal activists recollect that the Jalagam family preferred a plain area over the tribal area in the former district for developmental activities. Before 1956 the tribal-dominated areas, including Bhadrachalam, located towards the eastern side of the Godavari river, were under the East-Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The areas to the western side of the river from Kothagudem to Khammam town were under Warangal district in Telangana. Khammam district was formed with the areas mentioned above in 1953. However, the rise of Telangana movement in the late 1960s influenced prominent political leaders of Khammam district to neglect the tribal areas. As developmental activities were concentrated in the western side of the Godavari river, the leaders were under the impression that in case of state bifurcation tribal areas (eastern part) would be disconnected from Telangana.

It has to be noted that JalagamVengal Rao from the Khammam district had influenced the governments to set up more industries in the Kothagudem and Palvancho towns and surrounding areas for their political interests. Therefore, more industries such as Paper Mill, Sponge and Iron India Ltd., Nava Bharat Ventures Ltd, National Mineral Development Corporation Ltd (NMDC) and Thermal Power Station were established at Palvancho town. Likewise, Kothagudem Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL), Kinnera Steels (P) Ltd., and (Torus) Industrial Estate are located at Kothagudem. Some tribals reported that some of these industries were initially planned to be set up at Bhadrachalam but finally shifted to Kothagudem with the influence of non-tribal political leaders. Adding to this Joga Pullaiah said, that ‘the Jalagam family used their influential positions to explore the resources in tribal areas, but setting up of industries and other developmental activities were carried in and around Kothagudem and Palvancho towns, where non-tribals were encouraged to settle in these areas to outweigh the tribal population’ (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). Due to the state bifurcation, the tribal areas have been neglected. Majority of the tribals were unwilling to be part of AP because they had to travel 250 km to reach the district headquarters in the East-Godavari district. Additionally, they feared that merging their areas in AP would result in their displacement by the Polavaram project.

Against this backdrop, the TRS seemed to be interested in consolidating the political position of Jalagam Venkat Rao so that it makes inroads in the new districts. Indeed, the

initial trigger for the movement for a separate state of Telangana took in the Khammam district in 1969. Despite having such a historical background in the district, the TRS, which spearheaded the movement, was not electorally successful. The TRS party won only one seat i.e. Kothagudem constituency out of ten constituencies in the district in 2014¹²⁴. The TRS party did not win more seats in this district even after the formation of Telangana, despite winning majority seats, i.e., 63 in the state. The TRS was a mass, and/movement-based party until Telangana state formation. But with the formation of the state, the movement party is trying to establish itself as a dominant state party by making a strong base in the areas where its political position is weak, particularly by creating a support base through the local leaders. The TRS's strategy is to consolidate its base in the non-tribal-dominated constituency and to expand into the tribal areas.

With the formation of new districts, leaders saw an opportunity to get politically consolidated in the new districts. Jalagam Venkat Rao started demanding Kothagudem as the district headquarters because selecting the town would shape its symbolic identity as a plain area district, which would help appease the non-tribal voters and consolidate his base in his constituency and in the new district. He was the lone MLA of the TRS in Khammam district to win in 2014 assembly elections. He defeated Vanama Venkateswara Rao, who had served as a MLA of the constituency three times. Thus, given the vibrant political competition in the constituency, Jalagam Venkata Rao engineered the demand of Kothagudem district in order to create an image and get political brownie points (Seshu, 2016). Majority of the tribal activists opined that in order to get the political credit for his role in the district formation and for the selection of headquarters, Jalagam Venkat Rao competitively lobbied for the creation of Kothagudem as a district. Jalagam Venkat Rao's political background and political clout in the constituency matched with the TRS party's political interest of consolidating leaders at the district and the constituency levels¹²⁵. The TRS was less inclined to select Bhadrachalam town as a district's headquarters because if the Bhadrachalam is chosen then the political credit was likely to go to the then MLA Sunnam Rajaiah from CPI (M) party, who was actively involved in demanding selection of Bhadrachalam as headquarters for the tribal

¹²⁴ In the constituencies that come under Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, the YSRCP party had won in Yellandu, Wyra, Pinapaka and Aswaraopeta, and CPI (M) had won in Bhadrachalam Assembly constituency in 2014 election.

¹²⁵ Based on field notes.

areas-based district. Thus, there is a widespread belief in these areas that the Kothagudem based district was formed to create TRS party's mark and establish a strong political control in the new district. It was essential for TRS to support the emergence of strong leaders in the new district to disturb the traditional base of opposition parties such as Left parties, Congress and Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP), and create a strong base in the new district (Deccan Chronicle, 2016). The following section focuses on the five ST reserved constituencies' political influence on redrawing district borders and selection of headquarter town.

As pointed out earlier, five constituencies out of six covering Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem are reserved for the STs. Initially, representatives of all these constituencies had expressed their support to Bhadrachalam town-based district demand (Deccan Chronicle, 2014). But towards the end, they have acted according to their political interests while carving the district borders. Among all the ST reserved constituencies, Bhadrachalam constituency experienced intense political mobilisation over creating tribal district and Bhadrachalam town as headquarters. The Koyas are the predominant population in the constituency. The then MLA of Bhadrachalam constituency, Sunnam Rajaiah, belonged to the Koya community, has won elections in the constituency several times. Rajaiah and his party have strong traditional support in the Bhadrachalam constituency. So, the CPI (M) supported the demand of Bhadrachalam district to maintain its base (Deccan Chronicle, 2016). For the CPI (M), Bhadrachalam town demographically has a composite character. Hence, it was justifying that Bhadrachalam town protects the interests of tribals and other weaker sections of society.

After the state's bifurcation in 2014, four tribal predominant mandals of Bhadrachalam constituency were merged in AP. The merging of tribal mandals turned out as Sunnam Rajaiah and his party's Achilles heels, who enjoyed traditional support in these mandals. In this context, the only option for the CPI (M) was to consolidate tribal groups in Bhadrachalam and other tribal-dominated constituencies. Sunnam Rajaiah led the protest at Bhadrachalam town with the tribal organisations demand for a district with Bhadrachalam town as headquarters (Deccan Chronicle 2014). He was the only MLA who had been at the forefront of leading the Bhadrachalam district's demand (The Hindu, 2016b). The interest of CPI (M) was to create the tribal demanded areas as a district and make a strong base among

them, while also not losing support base from non-tribals, especially among the SCs and the poor. But the tribal organisations have no hesitance in exposing the varied stands and politics of CPI (M). The members of tribal organisations have attributed that there is no difference between the CPI (M) and other parties such as the TRS and Congress. Further, tribals viewed that the TRS government did not consider the Bhadrachalam town as headquarters because CPI (M) represented the Bhadrachalam constituency.

Similarly, the drawing of borders has adversely impacted the Yellandu constituency. The constituency has rich deposits of coal. The Singreni Collieries Company Limited and other companies are located in the constituency. The Bayyaram and Garlamandal in the constituency are rich in iron ore. STs constitute nearly 50 % of the population in the constituency (Telangana Today, 2018). Apart from the politics over resources such as coal and land, opencast mining has been a major issue in the constituency's politics. The constituency comprises five mandals, namely, Yellandu, Bayyaram, Garla, Tekulpalli, and Kamepally. While drawing the borders, the constituency witnessed intense politics because the mandals of the constituency were divided among three districts i.e., Kothagudem, Khammam and Mahabubabad.

The Yellandu constituency has a strong base of CPI (ML). The CPI (ML) has emerged out of the Naxal movement¹²⁶ and enjoyed support among the Koyas and Lambadas in Yellandu constituency. After reserving the seat for STs in 1978, the party won seven out of nine assembly elections. Gummadi Narsaiah, who belongs to the Koya tribe, a CPI (ML) leader and five time MLA, actively voiced for the tribal district with Bhadrachalam as headquarters. The CPI (ML) party's concern is that if the tribal district is created and the constituency is not divided, their support base would remain intact, and there would be scope for them to make inroads into other constituencies. Thus, CPM (ML)¹²⁷ strongly supported districts for tribal areas and towns that are headquartering ITDAs as districts' headquarters (The Hindu, 2016e). Given the political support of the opposition party and the leaders in the

¹²⁶Chandrapulla Reddy led faction group in Naxalite started contesting election after 1978 as CPI (ML) New Democracy.

¹²⁷Koram Kanakaiah had received Congress party ticket with the support of Ram Reddy Venkatreddy (non-tribal) a prominent leader in Khammam district and former minister in undivided AP. Kanakaiah was elected as a Congress MLA in the 2014 elections. However, he shifted to the TRS in 2014 along with Tummalla Nageshwar Rao (a non-tribal), another prominent leader in the district.

Yellandu constituency, the then MLA KoramKankaiah, who belongs to the Koya tribe, formally expressed his support to the tribal organisations for demanding district but did not involve actively in the protests¹²⁸. The tribal activists pointed out that in the Yellandu constituency, most non-tribals are outsiders who came to work in coal mining. They are united in protecting their interests in the area, which tribal groups oppose. So they support parties and leaders with whom they would not feel threatened. The non-tribal voters play a crucial role in the tribal reserved constituencies. When the district division process took place most of the non-tribals of Yellandu constituency wanted to be part of Khammam district, which constituted a part of majority plain areas.

In contrast, the tribals wanted to be part of the Bhadradi-Kothagudem district, which covers most tribal areas or assembly segments. Koram Kankaiah was disinclined to disturb his support base among the non-tribals by supporting tribal demand. Newspapers reported that when the government finally proposed new districts, he endorsed the non-tribals' demand that the Yellandu constituency remains with Khammam (Seshu, 2015). Thus, he was following the party line. This would help him appease the non-tribals and convince the party elites at the district and state level that he abided by the government's decision to create the district, i.e., dividing constituency between two districts (ibid).

Similarly, Wyra constituency is located at a crucial juncture as it connects the three newly created districts of Bhadradi-Kothagudem, Khammam and Mahabubabad. MLA Banoth Madanlal, who belongs to the Lambada tribe, won with YSRCP¹²⁹ ticket but later switched to TRS. Some tribal activists contended that MP Poguleti Sudhakar Reddy played a vital role in selecting Kothagudem as headquarters because the town is under his parliamentary constituency. Madhanlal could not assert the tribal demand to challenge leaders like Sudhakar Reddy and Jalagam Venkat Rao, who played stellar roles in selecting Kothagudem as the district headquarters and drawing new district borders.

The Wyra constituency is composed of Wyra, Enkooru, Singareni, Konijerla and Julurupadumandals. Enkooru, Julurupadu, and Singareni have a significant presence of

¹²⁸ Ascertained from interviews.

¹²⁹ Poguleti Sudhakar Reddy (a non-tribal), MP of Khammam constituency, had supported Madanlal's entry into politics, so that he follows his footstep. Both the MP and the Wyra MLA switched to the TRS in May 2016.

tribals. The tribals of these mandals demanded that they should be placed in Bhadrachalam district because of their socio-territorial affinities. Conversely, the non-tribals from this constituency wanted to be part of Khammam district. The other notable political reason expressed was that Wyra is a big town near Khammam town which the non-tribals wanted it be included in Khammam district. So in this tribal and non-tribal conundrum, Madanlal, MLA of Wyra, was silent and did not openly support the tribal demand. The tribals alleged that he deliberately prevented these mandals from becoming part of the Bhadrachalam - Kothagudem district because he did not want to place some of his constituency areas in other districts to consolidate his position in the Wyra assembly segment that remains with the Khammam district.

Likewise, the ST reserved Pinapaka constituency¹³⁰ is spread over Pinapaka, Manugur, Gundala, Burgampahad and Aswapuram mandals. Payam Venkateswarlu, a Koya, was elected as an MLA in 2014 on YSRCP ticket in the Pinapaka Assembly constituency in the 2014 elections¹³¹. Later he switched over to the TRS party with the support of Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy¹³². Along with Sunnam Rajaiah, Bhadrachalam MLA, Payam supported the demand for a tribal district in 2014 itself (Deccan Chronicle, 2014). However, after joining the TRS, he did not demand the district and followed the party line. Presently the entire Pinapaka constituency comes in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district. The constituency is mainly composed of the Koyas. Respondents viewed that they were all socially, politically and geographically connected to the Bhadrachalam town, but their MLA never substantially represented their demand for the Bhadrachalam town as district headquarter¹³³.

Similarly, Tati Venkateswarlu, MLA of Aswaraopeta constituency, supported the demand for Bhadrachalam to be the district headquarter, but he did not actively participate in the protests (Deccan Chronicle 2014). In the 2014 assembly elections, he was elected with

¹³⁰The Congress won the first election in 2009 after delimitation of constituencies. Earlier, CPI and Congress won five times each in Burgampahad constituency that was replaced by Pinapaka Assembly constituency (<https://ceotelangana.nic.in/>). In this constituency nearly 33% of the voters are STs.

¹³¹Payam Venkateswarlu started his career with the CPI when he was elected as MLA from the then Burgampahad constituency in 2004, which became part of Pinapaka Constituency after delimitation of constituencies in 2008. It is one among the three constituencies in Telangana where YSRCP won in the 2014 elections.

¹³²He was elected as an MP of Khammam parliamentary constituency on YSRCP ticket in 2014.

¹³³Drawn from field interviews.

YSRCP ticket but switched to the ruling TRS to receive the ruling party's patronage and support of the non-tribal leaders at the district level¹³⁴. Initially, Venkateswarlu endorsed the tribal demand for the district, but after switching to TRS, he did not actively pursue the demand (ibid). The changing stand of Tati Venkateswarlu and Payam Venkateswarlu reflects that they followed party and influential leaders' decision, to select Kothagudem as district headquarters instead of extending their support to the tribal demanded Bhadrachalam district. Therefore, we can note that though constituencies are reserved for the tribals, they must have the patronage of a local leader who has clout at the district level. When asked about reasons for tribal representative depending on the non-tribal dominant leaders, a respondent pointed out that contesting for election is costly, and tribal contestants need to get financial backup from the non-tribals. If the tribal leaders are associated with district-level non-tribal leaders such as ministers, MP or an influential MLA, then the local non-tribals would support that candidate because they would not feel threatened for their interests, as he would be servile to a dominant leader.

At the district level, influential leaders like Jalagam Venkat Rao and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy and others associated with the ruling party influenced the decision to create Kothagudem district. In addition, in Bhadrachalam, many respondents expressed that KCR has an aversion towards tribals of Bhadrachalam. The reason is that the TRS party never won in the predominant tribal constituency of Bhadrachalam. In 2014, the TRS party could win only in Kothagudem constituency, a non-tribal predominant constituency. Some of the tribal leaders expressed that the unwillingness of KCR to support the tribal demand had helped the non-tribals to get Kothagudem town as the district.

Members of civil society groups and tribal activists believed that the prominent parties of the state such as the TRS and the Congress marginally represent the interests of tribals. The ruling parties have always flouted laws of the tribal areas. For instance, employing general criteria for creating a district gave more space for political maneuvering in the tribal areas. This is reflected in the selection of Kothagudem as the district headquarters

¹³⁴Tati Venkateswarlu with the support and encouragement of TummalaNageshwar Rao (who belongs to the dominant Kamma caste and was a minister in the KCR government) switched to the TRS party from YRSCP. He was appointed as the chairman of Telangana State TRICOR (Tribal Cooperative Finance Corporation Limited).

despite the town being the only non-reserved constituency in the district. This is contrary to the tribals demand for Bhadrachalam as headquarters because the district was formed with six constituencies out of which five are ST reserved, and only one was non-reserved. In this regard, Komaram Anil contended that “the district level non-tribal leaders of the TRS party engineered the decision in their favour, while preparing the proposal of drawing of the borders and selecting headquarter” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam 27 May, 2019). The tribal activists averred that the ST representatives who were supposed to represent the voice of the tribals were silent or acted strategically as per their interests.

Though few ST representatives supported the tribal demand, they did not pursue it valiantly (The Hindu, 2016a). The representatives’ role in demanding districts reflects that they were conditioned by the party’s position and their own political interests. The ST representatives have not held any common meeting or programme by to marshal and protect their personal and community interest. Only Bhadrachalam MLA Sunnam Rajaiah vigorously demanded for Bhadrachalam town as a district headquarters where CPI (M)’s and his interests were involved as the constituency has a traditional vote base. The representatives of Yellandu, Wyra, Pinapaka, and Aswaraopeta constituencies were toeing the line taken by the party lines and their influential leaders due to compulsion of constituency level politics.

7.3. Social Imperative in Redrawing Border and Selecting Headquarters

The Bhadradri-Kothagudem district has a significant number of non-tribals, despite the fact that most areas are recognised as Scheduled Areas. Though the constituencies are reserved for STs, the non-tribals in these constituencies are crucial in influencing election outcomes. Politics in the tribal areas seemed to be in a continuous flux as the tribals perceive that providing access to land and economic activities in the tribal areas to the non-tribals would further accelerate land alienation of the tribals. Thus, protection of the land, resources, and territory from the non-tribals have been significant issues in tribal politics. In contrast, the non-tribals consider that the tribal areas’ laws restrict their socio-economic rights. Thus, there have been demographic and identity concerns from both sections. Given the socio-political reality, the non-tribals tried to influence the re-drawing of border and select districts’ headquarters to protect their interests and legitimize their rights in ways that systematically

privilege their access to power resources and symbolic belonging in the new district. The non-tribals wanted Kothagudem as the headquarters because the town has a demographically composite character in the tribal areas dominated district and is central to the non-tribal politics.

Interestingly, political leaders and non-tribals from Kothagudem town demanded a district based on mere administrative criteria, which views the district as a means of downsizing the administration, and symbolically associates the town with the temple (Bhadradi) identity rather than with tribal identity (The Hindu, 2015a; Mahesh, 2015). These neutral administrative criteria masquerade non-tribal interests. Though the tribals were not against the temple, it was the non-tribals' deliberate assertion that temple town should be created as a district that tacitly changed the identity and nature of the district's demand from the tribal demanded district. Further, supporters of Kothagudem created a ground for their town by delegitimising the Bhadrachalam town by highlighting that the tribal areas were merged into the AP, and the town remains at the corner of the existing tribal areas. The Bhadrachalam town was not selected as a district headquarters, but the new district created in the tribal area was named after God whose temple is located at Bhadrachalam town. The TRS leaders and district officials viewed that formation of the district with majority tribal areas and naming after Bhadradi God recognizes the tribals and accommodates their demand. However, most of the tribal civil society leaders are dissatisfied for ignoring their demand of Bhadrachalam as district headquarters¹³⁵. With regard to naming of the district as Bhadradi, which is named after the Bhadrachalam town's deity Bhadradi, Joga Pulaiah said that "giving a name just performs the function of a prefix, but does not give any real recognition to the tribal communities, and leads to assimilating into the dominant culture" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 June 2019).

¹³⁵ The TRS registered a landslide victory in December 2018 assembly elections by winning 80 out of 119 seats in the state. Interestingly, TRS lost all five ST reserved segments under Bhadradi-Kothagudem district. The tribals interpreted the 2018 assembly election result as their resentment towards the TRS party for not forming districts according to their demand. The Congress won in Bhadrachalam, Yellandu and Pinapaka constituencies. Ramulu Nayak, who opposed merging of tribal areas into the plain district, won the Wyra seat as an independent candidate. In Aswaraopeta constituency Mecha Nageswara Rao of Telugu Desam Party won by defeating TRS candidate Thati Venkateshwarulu.

At the district level, leaders like Jalagam Venkat Rao, and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy (both non-tribals) have orchestrated their own rational that influenced selecting headquarters i.e. Kothagudem town and exclusion of the tribal areas. Tribal representatives did not want to take the side of the tribals completely in order to receive the electoral support from the non-tribals as well in a multi-corner electoral contest. In this process, the TRS leaders and supporters of Kothagudem town have outmaneuvered the tribal leaders and representatives who have been demanding Bhadrachalam as a district. The non-tribals, particularly those who belong to the ruling and dominant castes, have the social capital under the modern euphemism of networks, wherein caste and social connection generate camaraderie. This process facilitates the safety net to achieve desired goals and fulfill political and social interests, such as creating Kothagudem town as the district's headquarters.

However, the tribals opposed Kothagudem due to the composite demographical character of the town. Komaram Anil is of the view that “the headquarter is like the heart and brain of a district. Because headquarter has the office of various government departments and markets. If town is located in plain areas, it will give an impression of the plain district” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 27 May 2019). Respondents highlighted that re-drawing district borders was politically motivated. They emphasized the unscientific merger of their mandals like Julurupadu despite the town being just 20 kms away from Kothagudem town and with nearly 60% tribals. The mandal was initially placed in Khammam district though later with a protracted struggle itandal was added to the Kothagudem district. Similarly, Tekulapally mandal was also merged in the Khammam district, but later on after witnessing resistance from the tribals, the mandal was added to the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district. The tribals of Kamepally, Garla, Bayyaram, Enkooru, and Singarenimandals were merged in different districts, yet they demanded to be part of Bhadradri-Kothagudem district because of their socio-territorial affinities. Thus, losing their territorial unity and district identity through borders would mean ‘losing the nerves’, to use Elwin’s (2007) words, to describe a psychological trauma. But the non-tribals assert that these mandals should remain with Khammam district because Bhadradri-Kothagudem is formed with more tribal predominant areas. Ponem Srinivas highlighted that apart from the resources, Kammas, the dominant caste, played crucial role in merging tribal mandals in Khammam district to protect their economic interests and gradually revoke the LTR Act (Interviewed at Bayyaram, 4 June 2019).

While the non-tribals supported the selection of Kothagudem as headquarters for protecting their own interest and identity, the tribals opposed Kothagudem to protect their interest and identity. Thus, identities and interests are tied up with symbolic recognition of the district headquarters. Thus, the TRS was trying to create a base among both the sections in a divided society by forming a district with majority tribal areas (to create an ethnic imperative) and selecting a plain area-based town as headquarters of the district. This is how the ruling party tried to project that it accommodates the interest of all sections.

7.4. Resource Imperative

The government's interest was also involved in selecting a plain area-based town as district headquarters because Scheduled/tribal Areas are under protective laws, and the non-tribals are not allowed to register lands, do business and to invest or undertake developmental/infrastructural activities. Thus, creating a district at Bhadrachalam does not serve the government's developmental purpose and does not provide avenues to generate revenue (Interview with a government officer at Khammam district, 28 May 2019). On the contrary, the formation of Kothagudem district would serve two purposes. One, the government would earn revenue and have control on resources, and the interests of the non-tribals will also be accommodated by selecting plain area town as headquarters. Further, Ponem Srinivas considered that "the very intention of ruling TRS for small districts was to pacify the local leaders involved in the real-estate business and to provide patronage to the district level leaders. Kothagudem town suits to fulfill the ruling party's economic and political needs better than the Bhadrachalam town" (Interviewed at Bayyaram, 4 June 2019).

Additionally, the tribal areas are resource-rich areas, which are important for the ruling party to fulfill its governance need in the state. In this scenario, Yellandu constituency has been divided among three districts. Bayyaram and Garlamandals, which are rich in iron ore and Barites, were merged into the Mahabubabad district. Kamepally, rich in coal, remained with Khammam. Singareni and Enkoor of Wyra constituency, rich in coal, were placed in Khammam district despite stiff resistance from the tribal communities. Tribal activists have stressed that the above mandals were merged into the plain district to break the

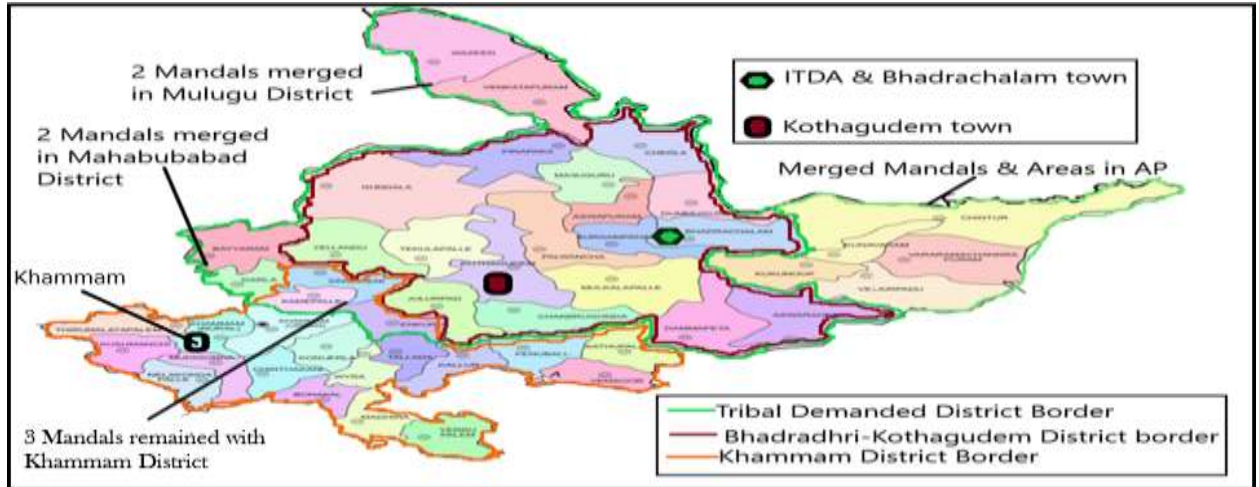
unity of tribal communities by simultaneously reducing their demographic strength in new districts so that the government also remove gridlocks to take away the resources.

7.5. Administrative Imperative

Amidst the intense protests and mobilisation for Bhadrachalam as a district on 10 October 2016 the government of Telangana led by KCR officially bifurcated the erstwhile Khammam district. The bifurcation was rationalised on the ground of division of mandals as the Khammam district (new) included 21 mandals with Khammam town as its headquarters. Likewise, Bhadradri-Kothagudem district consisted 23 mandals, with Kothagudem as headquarters (GoT, 2016). In this process, the tribal-dominated Venkatapuram and Wazedumandals were merged into Mulugu district; Garla and Bayyaram were ceded into the Mahabubabad districts; Enkoor, Singareni, and Kamepallymandals remained with the Khammam district (see map 7.1). The merged ITDA mandals are contiguous tribal traditional territory which contained a significant number of tribals. Further, the formation of new districts grounded five constituencies in each districts.

The former Khammam district official reports have rationalised re-drawing of district borders and selection of new headquarters on the following criteria. First, physical factors such as reducing the distance from 220-240 k.m and connecting with the town. Second, cultural-ethnic and demographic factors: Bhadradri-Kothagudem district was justified on the ground of tribal concentration/almost covering with the Scheduled areas, with a total population of 10.69 lakhs and the new Khammam areas were justified on the ground of the plain areas with a total population of 13.89 lakhs. Third, economic factors include the location of industries and resources concentration in the new districts (Khammam District Preliminary Report, dated 20 July 2016). Despite these administrative rationales, the tribals continued to protest over the borders.

Map 7.1: Intra-state Border Changes in Composite Khammam District



Source: Borders and signs are drawn by the researcher on the Map taken from Khammam District Census 2011

7.6. Bordering, Ordering, and Othering

The tribal predominant mandals of Enkooru, Kamepally, Karepally-Singareni, Garla, Bayyaram, Venkatapuram and Wazedu were part of the erstwhile Khammam district, and were under ITDA Bhadrachalam (see table 7.1). But, Enkooru, Kamepally, Singareni mandals were merged into the new Khammam district. Garla and Bayyaram were ceded into the Mahabubabad district, despite of all these mandals being located within 50 km from Kothagudem town (see table 7.1). Venkatapuram and Wazedu were initially added to Jayashankar-Bhupalapally in 2016 but became part of Mulugu district that was formed in 2019. All these mandals were within the tribal demanded district borders. Mainly, Enkooru, Kamepally and Singaareni in the new Khammam district and Garla and Bayyaram in the Mahabubabad district have witnessed backlash from tribals against their merger into present districts (The Hindu, 2016e). The tribals seek to be part of the tribal dominated Bhadrachari-Kothagudem district (Mahender, 2016). The clamor for tribal district with Bhadrachalam as headquarters took a back seat in these mandals, but they continued to raise their voice to be part of the Bhadrachari-Kothagudem district (Radhakrishna, 2016). The majority of the village *panchayats* in the tribal areas of the aforementioned mandals have officially conducted *Gram Sabhas* and passed resolutions opposing their areas being placed under the plain district. As a

result people from these mandals had submitted representation and memorandum to the elected representatives, Collector, ITDA Project Officer, and other officials. But, the officials and the ruling elites have not considered their concerns. The tribals of these mandals argue that the arbitrary merging of the tribal areas, is against the spirit of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. Thus, they seek the re-union of their traditional territory and being in tribal majority district. Consequently, it is essential to understand why the tribals are opposing to be in the present districts.

Table 7.1: Details of Tribal Predominant Mandals Merged in New Districts

Name of the Mandal	Total ST Population in Mandal	Distance from Kothagudem	Present District
Singareni	64% (Lambadas-46%, Koya-16% other tribes- 2%)	45 k.m.	Khammam
Enkooru	39% (Lambadas-27%, Koya-11% other tribes 1%)	30 k.m.	Khammam
Kamepally	49% (Lambadas- 44%, Koya-4% other tribe 1%)	31 k.m.	Khammam
Bayyaram	50.71% (Lambadas-38.53, Koya-8.13 and other tribes-4.04%.	61 k.m.	Mahabubabad
Garla	51.56% (Lambadas-46.80%, Koyas 3.15% and other tribes 1.61%)	64 k.m.	Mahabubabad
Wazedu	59.62% (mostly Koyas)	163 k.m.	Jayashankar-Bhupalapally in 2016, Mulugu in 2019)
Venkatapuram	39.2% (mostly Koyas)	136 k.m	Jayashankar-Bhupalapally in 2016, Mulugu in 2019)

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on ITDA report Bhadrachalam 2019

Table 7.1 indicates that the above-mentioned mandalshave significant tribal population and they are near Kothagudem town (less than 65 k.ms)¹³⁶. The other reasons are their socio-political and territorial connection areas with the Bhadradi-Kothagudem district, and association with the IDTA. They are being neglected in the Khammam district and also losing education and employment opportunities in the new districts. Kusum Sudhir highlights that since “the Fifth Scheduled/tribal areas are connected to ITDA, we would get certain developmental benefits if we are connected with the tribal territory in Kothagudem district

¹³⁶ The tribals from Karepalli mandal said they have more socio-economic connection with the towns located in Bhadradi-Kothagudem district such as Yellandu, Kothagudem and Bhadrachalam towns, particularly with Yellandu town which is just 5 kms away from their mandal.

wherein the tribals will have more employment opportunities and developmental prospects” (Interviewed at Enkoor in Khammam district, 2 June 2019). He further said that “towns such as Palvancha, Kothagudem, Munuguru and Bhadrachalam are industrial towns, which are located in the district provide more opportunities if placed in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district and the Kothagudem district is a hub for educational institutions”. Most government-funded schools like Ashram Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Schools, Tribal Welfare Residential Schools, and Navodaya schools are located in the Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district. In addition, intakes in these schools are reserved exclusively for tribals of the district and tribals from other districts are not given chance. The tribals also highlighted that after the re-drawing of district borders, the job aspirants from these merged mandals are not eligible for district-level jobs such as teacher, police, panchayat secretary, and so on in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem. So, their concern is that by placing these mandals in the Khammam district, they will not only miss the opportunity in government educational institutions but also lose employment opportunities.

The opportunities argument also extended to the political realm. Given that these mandals are under the reserved assembly constituencies, there is a fear that merging of their areas can lead to their loss of being connected to the reserved constituency. The tribals are concentrated only in the four mandals, and thus they are a minority. They are not chosen for the district level posts such as ZP Chairman, Market Committee Chairman, Library Chairman, PESA co-ordinators, MLAs, MPs and so on in Khammam district as the non-tribals have demographic and financial strength. They feel that in the future they may also lose the only ST reserved Wyra constituency in Khammam district in non-tribal dominated Khammam district. There is a feeling that it might lead to their political alienation.

The drawings of district borders are invariably seen as a weakening of tribal territorial identity. Kusum Sudhir pointed that “the inter-state and intra-state borders were drawn to weaken the tribal territorial and ethnic connections as seven mandals of tribal territory were merged with AP, and seven more mandals were merged with three different districts” (Interviewed at Enkoor in Khammam district, 2 June 2019). The fulcrum of the argument of tribals is that losing connection with the tribal areas translated into losing identity, which is connected to their dignity.

Given that significant politics involved in drawing district borders and selection of headquarters, the following section will focus on the implications of borders on the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

7.7. Implications of Borders Change on the Politics of Recognition

Redrawing of district borders and selection of new headquarter reconfigures the tribal politics of recognition in the tribal areas of composite Khammam district. As most tribal mandals covered Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, government officials and TRS leaders claim that the creation of district has recognised and accommodated the tribal's demand for a separate district for the tribals (Preliminary Report, Khammam District, 2016). The tribals considered that having district with ITDA town as headquarters covering Scheduled/tribal Area would provide socio-political recognition to the tribal communities. Hence, majority of the respondents of this considered that the tribal politics of recognition revolves around the district headquarters and ceded mandals. The fact that Bhadrachalam town was not selected as district headquarters led to resentment among the tribals and a feeling of non-recognition of their identity. In other words, the tribals feel that despite including the larger part of tribal areas within the district border, it does not provide them recognition because the district headquarters is located in the plain areas, and seven predominantly tribal mandals have been merged in other districts. Thus, the tribals perceive that their symbolic identity got receded to the background as a result.

On this, M. Tagore said that “the non-tribals not only establish their political control but also impose cultural domination. The district headquarters is identified with the plain area town. As a result, the same identity is extended to the entire district. With this, tribal areas' symbolic identity is under threat” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 27 May 2019). Adding to the above, the reorganization of borders such as inter-state and intra-state borders leads to non-recognition and misrecognition. This is interpreted by the tribals as an attempt to culturally assimilate them in the graded society, which inflicts on their dignity. Madavi Nehru illustrates the process of assimilation as follows: “the temple in Bhadrachalam belongs to Koya tribes, but the Brahmin priests and non-tribals have appropriated the temple over a period of time, especially after merging of Bhadrachalam area with Khammam district in

1956. The tribals have been assimilated in the dominant culture” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam 25 May 2019). Despite dividing tribal areas across inter-state and intra-state borders, the tribals together have emerged as the *staatsvolk* (dominant community) in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district, since the district overlaps with the tribal areas.

7.7.1. Impact of Borders Change on Spatially Concentrated Tribal Communities

The TRS party leaders and supporters justified intra/inter-border change by saying that the government recognised and accommodated the tribal demand by forming Bhadradri-Kothagudem with the larger part of the tribal areas. Because tribals are heterogeneous groups who are concentrated in certain areas, redrawing borders impacts their ethnic concentrated areas and demography. Though Koyas and Lambadas, the two major tribal groups, are spread all over the tribal or ITDA mandals, majority of the Koyas are concentrated in the northern, eastern, and south-eastern parts of tribal territory, Lambadas inhabited the western and north-western mandals of tribal territory. The Koyas feel that their demographic strength has been reduced after merging seven Koya predominant mandals with AP on the one hand, and merging Venkatapuram and Wazedu mandals with Mulugu district on the other hand. Konda Reddies, a PVTG community, have been reduced to two thousand after state-bifurcation. Thus, the Koyas and Konda Reddies perceive that they are victims of inter-state and intra-state borders change as they lost their territorial integrity.

Similarly, most Lambadas expressed that they were at the receiving end of borders change because their inhabited areas such as Enkoor, Singareni, Kamepally, Garla and Bayyarammandals were merged with Khammam and Mahabubabad districts. The area from Palvanha in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district to Dornakal-Mahabubabad which is seen as Lambada’s traditional territory was divided among Khammam, Mahabubabad, and Bhadradri-Kothagudem districts. Thus, their traditional areas have been dissected into many districts, weakening their strength and unity. Since their dominated belt was divided, the Lambadas of Garla and Bayyaram mandals did not demand to be a part of the Kothagudem district as they had been placed in Mahabubabad district where they are predominant. But the tribals from other mandals in Khammam district express their anger against merging them with the non-

tribal dominated district. They demand that they be a part of the Bhadradri- Kothagudem district.

Naikpods, a minor community sparsely spread over the new Bhadradri-Kothagudem district, seem to be undivided by the state and district borders. They are of the view that politicians and officials of ITDA and the district are trying to pay attention to their issues in the new district, but they were neglected earlier and did not enjoy any sense of recognition in the composite Khammam district. For instance, their long struggle for recognition of their festival *Laxshmi Devara at Korajula Gutta* was recognized. After the new district's was formed, the government allocated five acres of land for the cultural site where the annual fair is conducted¹³⁷. Therefore, the significance of tribal identity has increased in Bhadradra-Kothagudem district compared to the composite district. The following section discusses the impact of borders change on the politics of redistribution.

7.8. Impact of Borders Change on the Politics of Redistribution

The tribals articulated that redrawing of borders and new district headquarters has impacted the politics of redistribution. Tribals launched their struggles to establish control over the land, forest, and access to state resources. On this Machcha Kavesh pointed out that ‘by dividing the tribal areas and not creating their demanded town as headquarters, the state is diverting the tribal’s historical struggle over resources, land, and territory’ (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 29 May 2019). The tribals argued that implementing LTR, PESA Act 1996 and FRA 2006 continue to be inconsequential in the new districts. A clear pointer to this is the fact that non-tribals’ real-estate, business, land alienation, and market exploitation have continued unabated in the tribal areas, despite the protective laws.

The tribals in these areas are making all efforts to get their entitlement certificates over *Podu land* under FRA Act in new districts. However, this has increasingly become difficult and expensive for the following reasons. First is the increased government’s control over forest land wherein the forest department has expanded the forests/green cover to control resource rich forest areas. The tension further increased after the Supreme Court’s judgment in February 2019. The forest department is becoming more active in establishing complete

¹³⁷ Ascertained from interview with JogaPullaiah at Bhadrachalam on 26 May 2019

control over the tribal areas and began to treat them as illegal settlers in their land. Second, the government of Telangana has brought a rule for mandatory registration of land ownership. Third, the TRS government has introduced *RythuBandhuScheme* (agriculture investment support scheme) from 2018 to provide investment assistance to farmers by providing four thousand rupees each per acre for the Karif and the Rabi seasons. The *Rythu Bandhu* scheme and mandatory land registration necessitated the tribals to register their *Podu land* to avail the benefits from the hitherto un-registered land. Nevertheless, Adivasis argued that the state is not recognising their rights and the benefits are denied to them on fictitious grounds like lack of records, even after the *grama sabha* passed resolutions approving land rights to tribals. Joga Pullaiah (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019) points out that the state ruling elites are using the Forest and Revenue department to deny rights provided by FRA to the tribals on their lands.

Harassment of tribals by the forest department increased after district borders change, which in turn deepens their fear over land and forest. The following reasons were identified for the increasing conflict. First, KCR's government has started constructing Kaleshwaram and Seetharam¹³⁸ irrigation projects, which are seen as prestigious projects. In order to get permission for these projects from the Union Ministry of Environment, the state government must do compensatory reforestation in the non-forest land. To fulfill this criteria and get permission for the projects, the government has started planting saplings in the tribal areas. Second, the state continues to use tribal lands to plant saplings under *Haritha haram* sites. Thus, increasing greenery is used as the popular pretext for taking away tribal land and forests. Adding to the above experiences, Sonde Veraiah blames that "the KCR's government is trying to occupy the land and forest by bringing new Revenue laws such as *Sada Bainama* (Plain paper transaction), which allows the non-tribals to register land in the tribal areas where they are prohibited from doing the same" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). VattamNageshwarao contended that the tribal laws are diluted and new laws are imposed because of "*Chattam palakula chuttam*" (law/rule is relative of rulers) (Interviewed at Karepalli, 2 June 2019).

¹³⁸While the Kaleshwaram irrigation project is constructed on the Godavari River in Kaleshwaram, Bhupalpally district, the Seetharam project is constructed at Dummugudem in Bhadrachalam district on the Godavari River.

The respondents of this study reported that the government's callous attitude to implement tribal laws to prevent tribal land and resource alienation continues in new district as well. Since the resource-rich mandals have been moved to the plain districts, there is a consensus among the tribals that the availability of resources have played a crucial role in ceding the resource rich mandals like Bayyaram (rich in iron-ore), Garla (rich in barites), Singareni, Karepalli and Kamepalli (rich in coal) and merging of seven mandals for constructing the multi-purpose Polavaram dam to districts based in the plain areas. In the agency areas which encompass the tribal belts from Adilabad to Khamman and where there is abundant availability of sand, the non-tribals have taken away sand. The tribal areas are transformed into zones of extractive resources as a result. The creation of new district also entails infrastructural development, the construction of buildings for various district level government offices at Kothagudem town are examples of this. The significance of Bhadrachalam town has been reduced in the new district. The majority of the tribals near Kothagudem town feel threatened of their land and culture, and a similar feeling was expressed in those mandals which were added to the other districts. While changing borders, the availability of resources and political interests are key determinants. This inadvertently posed a stumbling block for creating tribal districts as wished by the tribals.

In the new district, PO of ITDA Bhadrachalam has to work through the District Tribal Development Officers (DTDOs) and co-ordinate with the Collectors of different districts. The tribals are not habituated to the DTDO system and are confused about whom to approach to resolve their problems and issues. Most of the time, DTDOs forward tribal issues to the PO and Collectors, which compel the tribals to visit the ITDA again, thus, the process seems to be complex and tedious. The officials of ITDA and many activists at the ITDA stated that the number of visitors on Monday *Darbar* (public meeting) at ITDA have reduced gradually. When asked about the reasons, Chode Chalapathi¹³⁹ pointed out two major reasons. "First, the tribals from mandals that have been merged into other districts have a sense of border to visit the ITDA, and also are confused about which authority to approach to resolve their issues. Second, majority of the tribals are disenchanted with ITDA as frequent visits to ITDA did not help them to solve their problems (interviewed at Bhadrachalam 29 May 2019).

¹³⁹ He helps tribals by taking their problems and issues to the officials and acts as a mediator.

The tribal activists reported that the border disconnects them from getting information of ITDA or any other matter related to the tribals as they are being placed in the non-tribal-dominated district. Further, Madavi Nehru (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 25 May 2019) highlighted how non-tribals exploit the ignorant tribals by saying that the Telangana Scheduled Tribal Cooperative Finance Corporation Limited (TRICOR) loan beneficiary must be selected and processed by Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO) at the mandal level. The non-tribals influence the officials to ensure that their proxy be selected as a beneficiary. After receiving subsidy benefits such as a tractor or any other machines whose market value is more than one million, the non-tribals tend to take away the goods by giving a small amount to the proxy beneficiary. This is how the *benami* transaction and proxy governance occurs in the tribal area, wherein the deserving tribals would not get the benefits. Some of the respondents of this study expressed that in order to solve the lethargic way of functioning of ITDA and bring transparency in governance; the governance should be structured along the lines of the Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule where representatives of tribal communities play an important role in protecting the interests and development of the tribals.

The tribals also expressed their concern that they were allocated funds based on the tribal population. This apparently put them at a disadvantage and entail considerable lost of benefits, as ceding of predominant tribals mandals into other districts have significantly reduced their number. The government's insouciant attitude in spending funds allocated to the tribals also continues to be an issue even after the formation of new districts. Ponem Sinivas sharply brings out this when he said: "they have sub-plan funds with the government, which is legally bound to be spent on the tribal development, but the government is diverting tribal funds to other welfare and populist schemes such as *Aasara* pension¹⁴⁰, *Mission Kakatiya*¹⁴¹, Kaleshwaram projects¹⁴², which will serve the interests of politicians, contractors and also the non-tribal voters."

¹⁴⁰ A welfare scheme to provide pensions to senior citizens, widows, Goud community, patients suffering from diseases like elephantiasis and AIDS, physically disabled and *beedi* workers.

¹⁴¹ A government programme for restoring all the minor irrigation tanks and lakes in Telangana State.

¹⁴² The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project is a multi-purpose irrigation project on the Godavari River.

However, since the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district largely encompasses the tribal areas, the developmental and implementation focus on these areas has increased compared to the former district.

7.9. Impact of Borders Change on the Politics of Representation

Representation in tribal politics features as one of the important dimensions of justice. The demand for districts was made to increase the tribal representation in the district so that they can be important part not only of the decision-making process, but also effectively influence the formulation and execution of policy and other developmental activities. The identification of district with tribal identity or naming districts after the tribal leaders or significant tribals places are demanded as they are invariably tied up with symbolic recognition.

7.9.1. Implications of Borders Change on Demographic Strength of Tribals

The changes in demography that come along with new borders are linked with political and economic power (Bookman, 2013:2). The tribals sought for consolidation of their demography for the following reasons. First, if the tribal areas are placed in a single district, it would help them increase ST reserved constituencies. Predominant tribal district(s) would also increase the population of tribals' in each constituency. Second, when the tribals are clubbed together with particular constituencies, the areas would be identified with the tribal identity. This would leverage their social and political positions and increase their participation within the new district. Third, demography plays a key role in determining the state's decision to give largesse to the tribals, which would remain central to governance and politics. The new Kothagudem district seems to have increased the tribals' demographic strength, which pays political, electoral, social, and symbolic dividends and leveraged their position and power in the new district compared to the erstwhile composite district.

The Bhadradri-Kothagudem district was created with five assembly constituencies, and out of these, four were ST reserved constituencies, namely, Pinapaka, Bhadrachalam, Aswaraopeta, and Yellandu and one mandal of Wyra constituency. The Kothagudem constituency is the only non-reserved constituency. In a representative democracy, those who have more votes and seats within a political unit are likely to have a strong voice, and parties

and government give importance to them. Consequently, having majority constituencies in a district not only increase the institutional representation of tribals but also increase their symbolic presence in the new district. Nonetheless, there is dissatisfaction among the tribals that the ST representatives failed to substantially represent their issues and demands but often work under the direction of ruling parties. The ST representatives have been unable to achieve the tribal demanded borders and town as headquarter district, despite majority constituencies being ST reserved (four out of five). The only non-reserved constituency was made as headquarters instead. This indicates that the government subdues tribal representation by not choosing a town from tribal areas as headquarters and by merging tribal mandals with other districts. This was facilitated by the tribals' elected representatives who trade their political ambitions at the cost of their community's interests. Ponem Krishna trenchantly expressed his dissatisfaction with how electoral politics impacts tribal politics in the following way: "From MPs, MLAs to the lowest level i.e., *Sarpanch* and Ward members, are decided by non-tribals. Even the tribal leaders who actively raise issues are being co-opted and marginalised or made as the followers of non-tribals" (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam, 2 May 2019).

7.9.2. Impact of Borders Change on Constituency and Representatives

The tribal concentrated seven mandals of erstwhile Khammam have been merged into AP, and the remaining seven mandals have been merged into different districts in Telangana. With the change in inter and intra-state borders, the tribals have been reduced to a minority in their traditional areas. This forecloses the possibility of 'participation parity' in the administrative and political unit that were created to realise decentralization. For instance, after merging of seven mandals in Andhra Pradesh, the three ST reserved constituencies of Bhadrachalam, Aswaraopeta, and Pinpaka saw a dip in the number of tribals. From Bhadrachalam constituency, four mandals were merged with AP, and two mandals were included in Mulugu district. Thus, the Bhadrachalam and Aswaraopeta constituencies are most affected by the change in inter-state and intra-state borders.

There is an anxiety among the tribals that two reserved constituencies' areas¹⁴³ and ST population have reduced and this may result in losing the status of a reserved constituency in the next round of delimitation of constituencies. The change and creation of (new) district borders also impact the functioning of representatives. In this regard, PodemVeeraiah, MLA of Bhadrachalam constituency (two mandals of his constituency are under Mulugu district), expressed that 'he has been facing the problem of representing the tribals in two districts as he has to attend the ZP meetings of both the districts and two ITDAs at Bhadrachalam and Eturunagaram to raise the tribal issues and solve their problems' (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam district, 31 May 2019). He further contended that new districts are not created to accommodate the demand of the tribals but to serve the political and economic interests of TRS, the ruling party. Similarly, Yellandu constituency MLA has to attend official meetings in three districts as his constituency mandals are divided and placed under three newly formed districts, namely, Mahabubabad, Bhadradri-Kothagudem and Khammam. Tribal activists and leaders from the ceded mandals have argued that they are losing reserved positions in the plain districts. In this regard, VattamNageshwar Rao (Interviewed at Karrepalli in Khammam district, 2 June 2019), district president of ASP, highlights that the ITDA PESA Coordinator's post has been created in Bhadradri-Kotahgudem district but not in Khammam district. There are more ST reserved positions and posts in the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district but the tribals from plain district do not get equivalent opportunities. Border change has significantly diminished the bargaining power and representation of the tribals and it has also reduced their demographic strength.

7.9.3. Lack of Tribal Decentralization

The tribals demanded districts in order to achieve identity recognition and self-governance such that districts in tribal areas should reflect self-rule and that they be administered in consonance with their socio-cultural practices, a point categorically mentioned in the provision of the PESA Act 1996. Conversely, Sonde Verraiah said that "decentralization in tribal areas is supposed to recognize tribal territory. But the ruling elites are dismantling it by making it as a marginalised periphery in the plain areas dominated districts" (Interviewed at

¹⁴³ The Bhadrachalam constituency continues to remain with only four mandals-Wazedu, Cherla, Dummugudem and Venkatapuram, and Bhadrachalam town. Aswaraopeta constituency has only four mandals-Aswaraopeta, Chandragonda, Dummapetta and Mulkalapally.

Bhadrachalam, 26 May 2019). In addition, most leaders of tribal organizations expressed that Sixth Schedule model of governance wherein Tribal Councils protect tribal rights and interests, should be implemented in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district. In the current district, to use Hausing's (2021) words, 'identity preserving powers over land and resources, social and customary laws, and religious practices', have not been given to them to ensure substantial decentralization and self-governance.

7.10. The Politics of the Belly: Competitive Claims of Communities

Jean Francois Bayart (cited in Berman 2015: 252) uses the phrase "the politics of the belly" in the context of the politics of ethnic patronage wherein the vertical and horizontal cleavages within and between the ethnic communities were expressed in the growing competition and conflict over resources and territorial control. The politics of the belly unfolds in the cases of tribal communities in Telangana as well where they make competitive claims for the formation of new districts. The significance of tribals has grown in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district but they have been marginalised in Khammam district. The Koyas and Lambadas are two major demographically dominated and more politically advanced tribal communities like the Kondareddies and Naikpods. The Koyas who dominate the eastern side areas of the former district emerged as the titular community in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district. Three MLAs out of four ST constituencies (Pinapaka, Aswaraopeta, Bhadrachalam), ZP chairman and various market committees, district library chairman, Agriculture co-operative society chairman, and District-PESA Coordinator posts are represented by the Koyas. As Koya-dominated areas cover the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district, their representation and influence have increased compared to other communities in district.

The Lambadas feel that they are being marginalised due to the change in district borders as their traditional areas have been merged into preponderant plain areas-of Khammam and Mahabubabad districts. These districts do not have ITDA. Ranjeeth, LHPS member, contended that "the merging of the Lambada dominated mandals in the plain district further weakens the community representation. As in Khammam and Mahabubabad districts, neither do they have a PESA Co-ordinator nor have access to the ITDA, nor parties prefer for posts" (Interviewed at Palvancha, 28 May 2019). Further, he adds that in 'Bhadradri-

Kothagudem district, the Koyas are preferred in all posts and benefits. Along with controlling three assembly segments they have predominantly receive benefits from ITDA, whereas the Lambadas face indifferent treatment from the ITDA officials particularly after the rift in Adilabad in 2017'. The minor communities such as the Kondareddies, Naikpods and others continued to be underrepresented. They argued that their community members are not preferred by parties for important posts like MLA, MP and ZP chairman. Nevertheless, all communities wanted to be part of the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district for identity, development and representation. The tribals are underrepresented in the newly formed Khammam district. Thus, the change in district borders leverage positions of some communities at some places and marginalised them at other districts.

7.11 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the role of organizations, parties, actors and various groups in re-drawing district borders and the selection of headquarters. It also examined the implication of new borders and headquarters on the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation, and inter-community claims. This study finds that socio-political differences have manifested in generating politics over the drawing of district borders and selecting town as headquarters. The Bhadradri-Kothagudem district encompasses large part of the tribal areas, but some of the tribal predominant mandals were excluded and the tribal demanded town was not selected as headquarters of the district. Given that tribal elected representatives trade their community interests for their personal political ambitions and interests, the government's governance, economic, social, and political imperatives trump tribal rights and interest. These have important bearings on the ways tribal areas, identities and rights are accommodated and excluded in decentralised governance in Telangana and beyond.

Chapter 8

Formation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad Districts: The Politics of Accommodation of Tribal Territories

8. 1. Introduction

[A] boundary does not exist in nature or by itself. It always owes its existence to man

(Davis et al., 2019:32)

Borders are not ‘givens’ and as the above quote suggests human beings are at the heart of drawing and redrawing of borders. The act and process of drawing and redrawing borders of political units are tailored to serve a determinate set of socio-political purposes. With this understanding, this chapter focuses on the politics over the formation of new districts in the tribal areas of the composite Warangal district. In this district, the Koyas are mostly concentrated in the eastern part (hitherto Eturunagaram areas, it is now formed as Mulugu district). The Lambadas are concentrated towards the south-eastern part (presently under Mahabubabad district). The Lambadas and Koyas had stressed that new district’ borders should be coterminous with their respective traditional areas, so that their community could emerge as a key player. Confronted with these demands, politics became a more diffused game in tribal areas of the former Warangal district. As Bates and Shah (2014:64) underscore in a different context: “the political tension made identity politics a key maker, and many boundaries claimed to enclose people of particular ethnic or community belonging”. The Koyas and Lambadas are inspired by other communities elsewhere who seek recognition in their perceived territories/homelands to demand separate districts for their traditional areas.

The demands for Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts emerged from communities’ identity concerns in order for them to emerge as a titular community so that they can harvest the advantage that governance, socio-economic and political opportunities offer. Bookman (2013:24) considered that “ethnic groups’ territory is recognised, if the governments designate the ethnic’ territory with administrative borders wherein a group often emerges as a titular”. Thus, when the ethnic and administrative border coincides, there is relative advantage to some

groups, and disadvantages to other groups, regardless of the political characteristics of the state, and the degree of decentralization”. Similarly, Horowitz (1985) considers that material benefits in multi-ethnic communities are organised along ethnic lines. One community’s ethnic concern may result in the further proliferation of ethnic consciousness among other groups. In this line Keating (1996: 5) considers that “societies where rewards and status are explicitly based on ethnic or other ascriptive characteristics encourage the proliferation of ascriptive status groups”. It is precisely here that the proliferation of demands for the districts by spatially conscious Koyas and Lambadas can be situated even as they respectively demanded Eturunagaram or Mulugu district and Mahabubabad district. These communities demanded that their traditional territorial areas where they constitute the largest community must be made coterminous with their demanded districts. For both, their vision of self-governance involves securing a viable territorial zone where they can dominate in their concentrated areas.

Out of the former Warangal district, five districts were created in 2016¹⁴⁴. Mahabubabad district was formed by carving out areas where the Lambadas are predominantly concentrated in 2016. But the long-standing demand of the Koyas for a separate Eturunagaram or Mulugu town-based district in the areas where they are concentrated was ignored. Instead, larger part of their areas was placed under the newly created Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district in 2016. As a result, Koyas intensified their demand for a separate district for their areas. However, after a long struggle from the tribals and the non-tribals, Mulugu district was created as the thirty-second district of Telangana in February 2019. Interestingly, Mulugu district was formed two years after the re-organisation of the ten districts into thirty in 2016. To a large extent, the borders of newly created Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts overlap with the ethnic areas of Koyas and Lambadas respectively. After intense political struggles, these new districts seem to have virtually accommodated the tribal demands.

Yet, these new districts fail to satisfy these communities because some of the mandals in their traditional territory have been excluded from the new districts and ceded to

¹⁴⁴ The five districts are Warangal, Hanmakonda, Mahabubabad, Jayashankar-Bhupalpally and Jangaon. Mulugu district was carved out of Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district in 2019.

other districts dominated by the plain areas. The selection of towns for headquarters of the districts also has generated significant politics. Thus, it is intriguing to comprehend the congruence and incongruence between the tribal communities' demand for districts in their ethnic concentrated territories and the role of strategic interest of political elites in drawing of district borders.

This chapter examines why the long-standing tribals demand for the creation of districts was ignored in 2016 and the circumstances that led to the creation of the Mulugu district in 2019. It also analyses why the ruling elites willingly created Mahabubabad district in 2016 while they prolonged the creation of Mulugu district. Further, the chapter traces the reasons for selecting Mulugu town as district headquarters instead of tribal organisations' demand for Eturunagaram. Thus, this chapter focuses on when and how districts and their headquarters are drawn and selected with special attention on the role of four imperatives, namely, political, sociological, economic, and administrative. It also fleshes out the impact of borders change on the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

This chapter is broadly divided into three main sections. While the first section focuses on the formation of the Mulugu district, the second section examines the creation of Mahabubabad district. The last section examines the implications of new district on tribal politics.

8.2. Creation of Mulugu District: The Politics of Creating District

The demand for district for tribal areas with Eturunagaram town as headquarters had a long history. This demand featured along with the demands for Bhadrachalam and Utnoor, in the larger tribal collective mobilisation to form tribal/ITDA area-based districts. However, the demand for Mulugu town as a headquarters for tribal areas/geographical areas emerged and intensified during 2015-2016. The emergence of the demand for Mulugu town-based district has reconfigured the politics for the new district in the Koya territory. The following section examines the trajectory of demand for Mulugu district in the tribal areas and the role of various actors in re-drawing district borders and selecting town as district headquarters.

8.2.1. The Tribals' Demand for Eturunagaram Based District

Eturunagaram town is a centrally located town in a territory where the Koyas are concentrated. As ITDA headquarters, it plays a central role in governing the tribal areas. Initially, the ITDA was established in 1975 at Warangal. However, in 1986 it was shifted to Eturunagaram due to the central geographical location of the town in the tribal areas. With this shift, the town became the epicenter of tribal's political activities and administrative works. In addition, it acted as a space for socio-political connections as tribals visit ITDA frequently to get their problem solved and seek developmental benefits. In terms of population and geographical size, Mulugu town that falls in plain areas is bigger, but it is not centrally located in the tribal demanded district. Thus, the Adivasi organisations such as TudumDebba (TB), Adivasi HakkulaPorata Samithi (AHPS), Adivasi Sangshema Parishad (ASP), Adivasi Gondwana Sangshema Parishad (AGSP) and others had demanded that Eturunagaram based district should be created with ten mandals¹⁴⁵. These tribal organisations have played an important role in mobilising the tribals for the formation of a new district.

As discussed in the fourth chapter, the demand for a district in the tribal areas and Eturunagaram as headquarters was not a standalone demand. It arose as a part of the collective demands of the tribals i.e., all three ITDAs regions should be formed as districts for the tribal areas. In terms of the demography, the Eturunagaram ITDA area is mostly populated by the tribals, particularly the Koyas. In this region, 10 mandals are under ITDA, which formed bases for the Koya demanded district (see chapter 4, map no. 4.3). Thus, the Koyas concentrated in the clearly demarcated territories have made ethno-territorial demands with the concern that if their demographic strength is reduced by territorial disintegration, it would severely impact on their social unity and political power.

Therefore, the demand for a separate district for tribal areas with Eturunagaram as headquarters emanates from community identity and territorial concerns. Making Mulugu town as the district headquarters, however, pushed Eturunagaram town to a corner, despite

¹⁴⁵The ten mandals include Mangapet, Tadvai, Eturunagaram, Govindraopet, Mulugu, Venkatapur, Kothaguda of Mulugu constituency, Nallabelly and Khanapur of Narsampet constituency, and Gudur of Mahabubabad constituency.

continuous demand by tribal organisations to make the latter the district headquarters. The following section discusses the politics behind this shift in the selection of town.

8.2.2. Selection of Mulugu over Eturunagaram as a Headquarter Town

Although demand for Eturunagaram district with ITDA mandals had a long history, the announcement of the creation of new districts in Telangana by KCR's government in 2015 acted as a trigger for intensifying the demand for the district. Accordingly, a vigorous politics unfolded in the tribal areas around the demand for a Mulugu town-based district which will encompass predominant tribal areas. Though Eturunagaram had a longer history, demand for the Mulugu district emerged as a popular demand from 2015.

The emergence of demand for Mulugu town as the district headquarters reconfigures politics in tribal areas over district's creation and the selection of a headquarter town. This opens up a new faultline wherein tribal organisations demanded Eturunagaram district, and Mulugu district was demanded by the non-tribals. Tribal organisations, logging for Eturunagaram as a district, defended their demand on the ground that the Eturunagaram town is a centrally located town to the demanded district (The Hans India, 2016). They contended that as an ITDA headquarters, it should be a natural choice for the district (ibid). Eturunagaram town has subsequently emerged as a central site of tribals' socio-political activities even as various actors begin to consider that creating a district around this town would leverage the identity and bargaining position of the tribals in politics and administration. It is also considered that the formation of Eturunagaram based district would give symbolic recognition to the tribals.

Tribal organisations and activists opposed Mulugu town as headquarter for the newly created district based on the following grounds. First, the town is located at the western corner of the tribal areas. Second, Mulugu town is in a plain area and is not recognised as a Scheduled Area. The plain area based headquarter would cement the dominance of non-tribals in the tribal majority district because making Mulugu the district headquarters would create favourable conditions for the non-tribals to be at the helm of governance and politics. Third, the demand for Eturunagaram was much older, whereas the demand for Mulugu emerged only lately due to the dominant groups' socio-political influence. Thus, Mulugu town is not

symbolically identified with tribal identity. The tribals viewed that selection of the town as district headquarters would not serve the recognition of the tribals.

Conversely, the non-tribals raised the demand for Mulugu for the following reasons. Mulugu is the biggest town and represents the ST reserved constituency. They argue that the town would facilitate developmental works and be more amenable to infrastructural projects like building new offices and market complexes because of its favourable location in the plain areas. This would also augur well for the state to generate revenues. Non-tribals also contend that making Mulugu the district headquarters would not only act as a gateway for the tribal areas but also provides scope for the development of all other sections of society (Suthari, 2017).

Correspondingly, the supporters of Mulugu opposed Eturunagaram town as district headquarters on the following grounds. First, the town is located in the Agency area where LTR 1/70 Act would be applicable. This would hamper undertaking developmental activities and business establishments. In contrast, Mulugu town is a non-scheduled area dominated by non-tribals who mostly control business, economy and politics. D. Malikarjun, a non-tribal, said that “had Eturunagaram been created, it would have been difficult to develop the town, as the tribals are against converting the town into Municipality by saying that it is against the spirit of the Scheduled Area and LTR 1/70 Act” (Interviewed at Mulugu, 3 June 2019). Thus, making Mulugu town as district headquarters was justified as *sine qua non* to accommodate the interest of all sections and for facilitating diverse business activities. On the contrary, Eturunagaram is seen as a small town and not well-connected in terms of transportation.

Thus, the non-tribals defined their preference of Mulugu town over Eturunagaram. To be sure, the selection and location of district headquarters reflect the established social relationship and differing socio-political interests of different groups and individuals. Not surprisingly different communities pitch their demand for district headquarters and district formation to suit their socio-political affairs. But, given the non-tribals’ economic and political strength and better network in the media, their demand for Mulugu could muster critical support which overtime outmaneuvered the tribal’s demand for Eturunagaram town.

8.2.3. Role of Political in Shifting the Demand from Eturunagaram to Mulugu

The political configurations in Mulugu constituency played a vital role in making the demand for Mulugu more popular than Eturunagaram. Therefore, it is essential to understand the various political configurations that present themselves to demand different towns as headquarters for the tribal areas. Political leaders and location of Mulugu town in the plain areas played crucial role in the emergence of demand for the Mulugu town- based district. Mulugu town, an ST reserved assembly constituency under Mahabubabad parliamentary constituency, is the only constituency which covers most of the areas of the tribal demanded district. It consists of seven¹⁴⁶ tribal-predominant mandals and one plain area mandal. Despite the constituency consisting of majority of tribal areas, it was named after the major town in the constituency, i.e., Mulugu, in the plain area. Azmeera Chandulal, a Lambada, represented Mulugu assembly constituency from 2014 to 2018. He was elected from the TRS party and was appointed as a Tribal Welfare Minister in KCR's government in 2014. Since he belonged to the largest tribal community in the state, and had a loyal relationship with KCR particularly during the Telangana movement, he was appointed as the minister. Given his influential position within the government, the tribals of the Mulugu constituency expected that the minister would materialise their long-cherished demand for the district.

However, when the government announced the proposal to form new districts in early 2016, the tribal demanded district area was merged with the newly proposed Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district (Deccan Chronicle, 2016a). It was reported that "Chandulal suggested to the Chief Minister that the assembly constituencies of Mulugu, Bhupalpally, Parkal, Narsampet, Manthani of Karimnagar district, and Pinapaka of Khammam district be combined to form Sammakka-Saralamma district" (ibid). Thus, Chandulal proposed a district with larger areas that includes many assembly constituencies. Later on, the MLA's and the government's proposal of merging tribal areas into the Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district ignored the tribals' long-standing demand, and came as a big blow to the tribal organisations (Mahender, 2016).

¹⁴⁶The seven tribal pre-dominant mandals are Mangapet, Tadvai, Govindraopet, Mulugu, Venkatapur and Kothaguda.

After knowing that their areas would be dissected to merge with other districts, various tribal organisations intensified their demands for a tribal district (ibid). The tribal organisations had submitted their memorandums to Chandulal, the Tribal Welfare Minister, Azmeera Seetaram Naik, MP Mahabubabad constituency, District Collector, and ITDA PO, demanding Eturunagaram district. Apart from these, they uploaded their grievances on the web portal launched by the state. In this entire process of forming new districts in the Telangana, Eturunagaram was the epicenter of protests of tribal organisations.

Members of tribal organisations contended that in the Scheduled Areas consultation with the tribals is mandatory to bring about fundamental changes in the identity of the areas or political and administrative decisions that impact on their lives. In other words, they argued that in the process of re-drawing borders in the tribal areas, the tribals should be seen as the main stakeholders. As per PESA Act 1996, consultation of tribal stakeholders is not just a political responsibility but also the legal responsibility of the state. While drawing the district borders, the government and the officials however followed this in the breach. Majority of the tribals believed that the representation and interest of the tribals would be served if they were on the board and given a chance to air their voice and act effectively to protect their interests. The political interest of the elected representatives of the tribals wherein they trade their community interest for power created a scope for the ruling party to maneuver the creation of districts to cater to the strategic interests of the party and leaders. The tribal leaders, who are associated with the ruling party, defended the government's decision to merge tribal areas. Conversely, the leaders of opposition political parties and civil society groups persevere with their demand for tribal the districts and mobilised the tribals towards this end. However, the government did not consider demands for tribal districts. This reflects the gap between the majority tribals' aspirations and their representation in the government decision.

The government proposed to form Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district with Bhupalpally town as the district headquarter¹⁴⁷. The tribal areas were merged in the newly formed district despite continued protests and resistance from tribal organisations (The Hans India, 2016). S. Madhusudhana Chary, the then Speaker of the legislative assembly and MLA of Bhupalpally constituency, played a crucial role in the formation of Jayashankar-

¹⁴⁷ The district was christened after Prof. Jayashankar, a mentor of Telangana movement.

Bhupalpally district to gain the credit of forming a new district in his constituency (ibid). The merging of tribal areas was justified for creating a suitable size of the new district. In this process, the government discarded the demand of Eturunagaram/Mulugu on the administrative imperative i.e., a district merely with the tribal areas/single constituency would be too small (ibid). However, tribal organisations have opposed being part of Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district because majority of the district and its headquarter town are in a plain area where the non-tribals are predominant. Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district covers three major constituencies, i.e., Mulugu, a ST reserved constituency, Bhupalpally and Manthani, both being general constituencies.

Tribal organisations and activists continued their demand for a separate district for tribal areas. While stating the reason for opposing to be a part of Jayashankar-Bhupalpally, Paparao, Kannaigudem mandal president of AHPS, viewed that “the tribals felt that the Bhupalpally district did not fulfil the long-standing demand of the tribals. The district neither reflects tribal identity, nor was it convenient for governing the tribal areas due to geographical disconnection and distance between Bhupalpally town and tribal areas” (Interviewed at Kannaigudem, Mulugu district, 3 June 2019). Thus, the tribals resisted being part of Bhupalpally and sought for a territorial identity-based district.

Significantly, during the formation of the districts in 2015-16, the non-tribals from Mulugu town started to demand and vehemently led the protests to create a district. Nonetheless, they wanted Mulugu town as the district headquarters instead of Eturunagaram. The non-tribal leaders played a crucial role in mobilising people for the creation of a district with Mulugu as headquarters. Munjala Bhikshapathi, the President of Mulugu District Formation Committee and who belongs to the BC category, went on a hunger strike demanding Mulugu town-based district (The Hans India, 2016 a). The local electronic and print media highlighted his protest and hunger strike, which subsequently garnered much sympathy and concerns particularly from the non-tribals. Thus, the demand became a popular and emotional issue for the majority of non-tribals¹⁴⁸. The demand for Mulugu reached the mass level, and the Mulugu Zilla Sadhana Joint Action Committee (MZS-JAC) was formed with all opposition parties. Interestingly, the tribal leaders from various parties supported

¹⁴⁸ Drawn from interview with D. Malikarjun at Mulugu on 3 June 2019.

MZS-JAC. The MZS-JAC subsequently led the protests and *dharnas* for Mulugu district (Mahender, 2016). The intense demand and protest from Mulugu particularly by the non-tribals further complicated the tribal demand of Eturunagaram as district headquarters.

Interestingly, there was a competition over the selection of town as headquarters of the district. The non-tribals and the opposition parties' demand for Mulugu as district headquarters came in contrast to the tribal organisations demanded Eturunagaram as headquarters, though geographical areas remained the same for the demanded district. Interestingly, both the tribals and non-tribals proposed that the district should be named after Sammakka-Sarakka, in memory of the famous Koya women warriors (The Hans India, 2016). This was important for the non-tribals to receive support from the tribals who occupy majority of the areas, and indicate that formation of the district would not amount to any deviation from tribal identity concerns. Indeed, the tribals expressed that non-tribals and political parties had co-opted the tribal demand for the district by just seeking naming of district after the tribal women while legitimising Mulugu town as headquarters (Deccan Chronicle, 2016a). Subsequently, the protests of tribal organisations were only limited to Eturunagaram, and it did not receive large support from political parties and non-tribals. Thus, the demand for Eturunagaram was receded to the background.

8.2.4. Strategic Interests of Leaders

As the above account demonstrates, political factors and non-tribals played a key role in shifting popular mobilisation for Mulugu district. The tribal leaders' support for the Mulugu district helps them receive electoral support from the non-tribals. For the opposition party leaders and some of the non-tribal leaders, TRS leaders were target of political attacks as they blamed that minister Chandulal and MP Sitaram Naik have not exerted pressure on the government to create Mulugu district for their political reasons. Thus, the leaders of the opposition party and the non-tribals were able to find a common denominator i.e., divulging the role of Chandulal for not trying enough for the demanded district. The political mobilisation in favour of Mulugu district also assists the leaders in using popular sentiments for their political benefits in the constituency.

Prominent Koya tribal political leaders like Danasari Anasuya (popularly known as Seethakka), who was then with TDP and shifted to Congress in 2018, and Podem Veeraiah from the Congress party, both former MLAs of Mulugu constituency, were in the forefront of protests for Mulugu district (Mahender, 2016). Despite being tribals, they supported Mulugu because over a period of time there was a realisation among the tribal political leaders of various parties that there were fewer chances of selection of Eturunagaram town as their headquarter. On the other hand, Mulugu town had a better chance given its location in the plain areas, the geographical size of town, and support from the influential non-tribals. Reflecting on supporting Mulugu demand, Podem Veeraiah expressed that “though the demand that emerged from tribals was for Eturunagaram as district headquarters, the KCR led-government which was seeking for revenue through new districts did not consider Eturunagaram due to its location in the Scheduled Areas. So to get the district for the tribal areas we have shifted our support to Mulugu town as headquarters with the same geographical areas as a district” (Interviewed at Bhadrachalam district, 31 May 2019). The tribal areas were merged in the newly proposed Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district to fit into the administrative rationale. Given the rise of significant popular mobilisation by the non-tribals for Mulugu, tribal leaders endorsed Mulugu based district for tribal areas during the initiation of the creation process of districts wherein the areas were proposed to come under Jayashankar Bhupalpally (Mahender, 2016). This reflects that “cooperation and compromise are more likely to succeed when territorial ambitions are contained” (Bookman, 2013: 195).

During the protest, both Seethakka and Veeraiah demanded KCR to fulfill his promise of forming a tribal district with Mulugu as the headquarters (Deccan Chronicle, 2016a). Seethakka contended that “albeit the demand for Mulugu district was justifiable, the government had ignored it consciously. If Mulugu district is created, it would be a tribal district, thus, making it difficult for the ruling party leaders to plunder the natural resources that the region is endowed abundantly” (cited in The Hans India, 2016). The above claim of Mulugu based tribal district serves double benefits to the opposition leaders. It addresses the concerns of the non-tribals while asserting the significance of tribal identity. Thus, the tribal leaders of opposition parties saw “political opportunity structure” (Hausing, 2018), in supporting Mulugu demand. Seethakka and Veeraiah took this opportunity to pitch strongly for the Mulugu town-based district for the tribal areas and to corner the TRS and Chandulal.

Though Chandulal did not support the protest for Mulugu district, he proposed to KCR to form Sammakka-Sarakka district by including many constituencies (Deccan Chronicle, 2016a). When asked about the role of Chandulal in district reorganisation, he pointed out that “realising the demand from the people, he took the issue to the Chief Minister and Secretaries, but the demand was not considered because the demanded district has only one assembly constituency” (Interviewed at Mulugu, 4 July 2019). Chandulal did not actively lend his support for the district creation as his party and its leadership was unwilling to create a district with a small territory encompassing seven mandals within one assembly constituency. Chandulal did not endorse any particular demands whether it is Mulugu or Eturunagaram. He did not take any side in this deeply divided issue to avoid the risk of being identified with any particular group or demand. It was also perceived that supporting Mulugu would have diminished the chance of Bhupalpally district, which was lobbied by Madhusudhana Chary, the then Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and an influential person in KCR’s government. Thus, Chandulal did not want to invite any conflict with such leaders. Both of them were influential leaders in the erstwhile Warangal district. Although they were well aware of the district demand in tribal areas, they did not vouch for the tribal demanded district to secure their political interests. Another point highlighted during my field-interviews with leaders of tribal organisations was that the Koyatribes are the majority in the Mulugu constituency, but Chandulal belongs to the Lambada tribe¹⁴⁹. In order to secure his political position and counter the dominance of Koyas it seemed essential for him to be part of a district which has more assembly segments particularly in the plain areas. His proposal of the larger district with more assembly segments was against the interest of Mulugu demand. This gave the much-needed space for the opposition leaders in the constituency mainly to Seethakka and Verraiah as they were toeing with the idea to capture popular support in Mulugu constituency. This made them to be vocal and lead the protest for the Mulugu district.

The tribal organisations’ demand of Eturunagaram did not receive needed support from tribal leaders at the constituency and state levels. Tribal activists argued that one of the reasons for the demand of Mulugu getting prominence over Eturunagaram is that the local media was reporting from Mulugu town and effectively highlighted the demand. On the

¹⁴⁹ “Mulugu constituency’s total voters are around 1.91 lakhs, of this the Koya electorates are nearly 95 thousand, Lambadas electorates are 16 thousand” (The New Indian Express, 2018).

contrary, Eturunagaram received less focus. It is in these contexts that the government initiated the process of forming districts.

Initially, KCR's government had issued an official draft notification to create twenty-seven districts in 2016 (Rao, 2016a). However, after facing protests from many corners and political pressure from elected representatives along with the twenty-seven districts the formation of four more districts i. e. Sircilla, Jangaon, Asifabad, and Gadwal were announced without issuing any draft notification in the public domain (Mahender, 2016). The proposal of four more new districts while not considering popular Mulugu district demand has caused further discontent among those demanding the Mulugu district. In this context, Seethakka questioned the government's decision: "why is the government not accepting the historic demand of Mulugu district, when it could accept the demand of Sircilla, Jangaon, Asifabad and Gadwal districts which are not historical demand" (cited in The Hans India, 2016).

By the time of district's creation in October 2016, non-tribals and the political leaders from tribal communities had popularised the demand for the creation of Mulugu headquarter based district for tribal areas. Various civil society organisations continued to oppose Mulugu as headquarters and demanded Eturunagaram instead. All political parties supported the demand for Mulugu, except CPI (ML), which pitched for Eturunagaram. The CPI (ML) had called for *bandhon* 4 October 2016 to create Adivasi districts with Eturunagaram, Utnoor, and Bhadrachalam as their headquarters in respective tribal areas (The Hans India, 2016). The CPI (ML) had been supporting tribals demand of creating ITDA based tribal districts with the view that this would allow the party to strengthen its support base among the tribals. Some of the influential tribal political leaders' support to the Mulugu has generated fissure in tribals' demand. These parallel protests for two towns undergird different political motives of supporters of Mulugu and Eturunagaram respectively.

The Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district was created on 10 October 2016 by merging tribal areas (Kurmanath, 2016). Thus, the TRS government did not consider the demand of the Mulugu or Eturunagaram based district for tribal areas. This further provoked mobilisation for the district. The protest continued even after the declaration of 31 new districts in the year 2016. The silence of Chandulal on the sustained mobilisation for the Mulugu district allowed

the opposition leaders in the constituency like Seethakka and PodemVerraiah to establish their support base in the constituency gradually. Seethakka was very vocal and mobilised for the district demand and criticized Chandulal particularly keeping view on ensuing the 2018 assembly elections. Thus, the opposition leaders such as Seethakka effectively harnessed the popular emotions unleashed by the popular mobilisation for the district. This was critical to sustain her popular support in order to defeat Chandulal in the 2018 assembly elections (The News Minute, 2016). Seethakka, who was championing Mulugu demand, completely neglected Eturunagaram demand. Rega Naresh, a Koya, points out that “the tribal leaders supported the creation of Mulugu mainly to receive votes from the non-tribals. This had a detrimental effect in completely sidelining the tribal historic demand” (Interviewed at Mulugu, 4 June 2019). Therefore, in due course of time the emergence of Mulugu as a popular demand brought about fissure in tribal politics due to different political interests of key actors which ensured that the demand for Eturunagaram fizzled out. Thus, the entire process reflects the “politics of compromise” (Tillin, 2013).

After two years of creating new districts, Seethakka, who contested from Congress party, used the district demand as an important issue in her 2018 assembly electoral mobilisation by fortifying anti-TRS public sentiment. As demands for and the creation of districts became one of the important issues in the 2018 assembly elections, Chandulal, the incumbent candidate, and the opposition leaders assured the formation of Mulugu district. After realizing the growing discontent for not creating a tribal district and the sustained popular sentiment for the creation of as tribal district, KCR and Chandulal, in their election campaigns at Mulugu in November 2018, announced that “as soon as the TRS forms the government, they would create a district for the tribals with Mulugu as its headquarter” (Telangana Today, 2018b). The political conviction of the elites towards creation of a tribal district changed when they witnessed opposition from people and the desire to win the elections trump their willingness to fructify the demand for a tribal district.

KCR’s announcement needs to be read carefully because while promising that a tribal district would be created, he declared that Mulugu, not Eturunagaram, will be the district headquarters. The Mulugu town-based demand was considered because it had political support of leaders from the opposition parties and non-tribals. Though this accommodation

serves symbolic recognition of the areas but the tribal organisations demanded towns were not considered for headquarters. In the 2018 election, Seethakka emerged victorious by highlighting the government's negligent attitude towards the district demand and the weak leadership of Chandulal. In addition, the increased community consciousness also helped in her victory among the tribal communities after the 2017 clash. As the Koyas, who constitute majority in the constituency, perceived that Chandulal, being a Lambada, did not represent their wishes and deliberately did not play any role in the creation of the district that would constitute the Koyas as the majority. Thus, Seethakka was a natural choice for the Koyas, though she did not rack up any community-based feeling during the electoral mobilisation. Similarly, most non-tribals considered that Chandulal had failed to represent their demand and did not pressurise the government to create a district despite being a minister in KCR's government. In contrast, Seethakka was seen as a leader of the district demand movement. Thus, she enjoyed support from both the sections, i.e., the tribals and the non-tribals.

Although TRS emerged victorious in the state with a clear majority in the 2018 assembly elections, it has lost a majority of the seats in the tribal areas. By realizing the discontent in the tribal areas, KCR formed the Mulugu headquarter based district on 17February 2019 in a bid to control the possible political damage that an anti-Adivasis image may entails. This was also seen as a strategic attempt by KCR to pacify the tribals and establish his undisputed leadership among all sections of Telangana (Rao, 2019). The creation of Mulugu district was politically warranted in order for the TRS to create legitimacy of the formation of district in the tribal areas. The TRS government claimed that the district is created for the Adivasis, but the selection of the headquarter town reflects the plain areas (non-Scheduled Areas) identity-based district. The district was not named after famous Koya deities, Sammakka and Sarakka as demanded by the tribals and non-tribals of Mulugu district (The Hans India, 2016). Even after the formation of the district, the tribals continue to demand for naming of the district in memory of these tribal deities (The Hindu, 2020). Most of the tribals areas have been included in the newly created Mulugu district. Nevertheless, some tribal areas have been excluded¹⁵⁰.

¹⁵⁰ The excluded tribal areas are Kothaguda and Gangarammandals.

The formation of the Mulugu district serves TRS in two ways. While it pacifies the tribals on the one hand, it simultaneously appeases the non-tribals of Mulugu on the other hand. To put it differently, the electoral politics in the constituency has directly or indirectly influenced the creation of Mulugu district for the tribal areas. Sustained protest forced the TRS to consider the Mulugu demand in 2019 while Eturunagaram demand was ignored. Electoral compulsion of TRS also played a vital role in considering the demand. With the exogenous factors such as parties and electoral interests, fissure was generated in the tribals' long-standing demand. However post the formation of Mulugu district, the Koyas try to attach their identity to the district and establish their community dominance in the district.

After examining the politics behind the creation of Mulugu district, the following section focuses on the creation of Mahabubabad district from the former Warangal district.

8.3. Formation of Mahabubabad District

Mahabubabad district was created with sixteen mandals¹⁵¹. The district is named after the headquarters town- Mahabubabad, located on the bank of the Pakala river, a tributary of the river Krishna. The district's total population is around 7.7 lakhs, out of which STs constitute around 2.9 lakhs i.e. 37.80% of the district population (Mahesh, 2015). Among the STs, the Lambadas constitute a numerical majority (ibid). The majority of the villages and hamlets including the Mahabubabad town are the habitats of STs (<https://bit.ly/3hlBrfC>). Thus, these areas are considered as the heartland of the Lambadas tribe, though they are spread all over the state of Telangana and constitute a major tribe in the state.

8.3.1. Political Mobilisation for Mahabubabad District

The contiguous assembly segments of Mahabubabad and Dornakal in the composite Warangal district have predominant tribal population, particularly the Lambadas. These constituencies are reserved for STs. After the re-emergence of Telangana movement in the early 2000s, the Lambadas as a principal group in the area demanded Mahabubabad as a district comprising all the mandals of Mahabubabad and Dornakal constituencies, and nine mandals of five

¹⁵¹The 16 mandals of Mahabubabad district are Mahabubabad, Nellikudur, Kesasamudram, Guder, Dornakal, Maripeda, Narishimulpet, Kuravi, ChinnaGuddur, and Danthalapally, Kothaguda, Gangaram, Thorur, Peddangara, Garla, and Bayyaram. The last two were part of Khammam district.

surrounding constituencies¹⁵². The demand was made as an attempt to ensure that the community plays a central role so that developmental works reach the most needed people in the new district. In other words, the urge for development and identity security prompted the Lambadas to demand a district. During the separate Telangana movement, the Lambadas were mobilised for a separate state of Telangana with the hope that a new district would be created in their concentrated areas. KCR had promised the formation of Mahabubabad district as early as 2002, in order to mobilise the Lambadas towards the larger cause of a demand for a separate state. Convinced that a separate district would cater to their developmental needs and provide them a sense of identity recognition, the Lambadas actively participated in the Telangana movement. In the meantime, the Lambadas intensely protested for the creation of Mahabubabad district from 2015 to 2016 i.e., until KCR led government finally formed the district (Srinivas et al., 2015).

On 25 October 2015 the non-tribals, involving several scholars, intellectuals, retired government employees and others, had launched Manukota Intellectuals Forum (MIF) to demand Mahabubabad town-based district. MIF joined the Lambadas, who had been demanding for creation of Mahabubabad district from early 2000. It subsequently played a vital role in mobilising people and intensifying the demand (Edwin, 2016). MIF legitimised the demand by forming a 10-point formula, which includes “historical, geographic, demographic, socio-economic, cultural, educational, employment, infrastructure, aesthetic and hydrological aspects about Mahabubabad division and its surroundings areas” (ibid). MIF stressed that their demand needs to be considered because more than 250 backward tribal villages and surrounding areas are dependent on Mahabubabad for various needs like education, health, employment, market, and transportation. The town’s supporters argued that Mahabubabad is the oldest *taluk*, and had been a revenue division, hence it deserves to be the headquarters of a new district (ibid). Apart from the factors mentioned above, people stressed the advantage of having the town as district headquarters because it is well connected through railways and road network and has adequate water resources. While demanding for the

¹⁵²Mandals which come under Mahabubabad and Dornakal constituencies are: Mahabubabad, Nellikudur, Kesamudram, Guder of Mahabubabad constituency, Dornakal, Maripeda, Narishimulpet, Kuravi, ChinnaGuddur, and Danthalapally of Dornkal constituency. The nine mandals are Kothaguda and Gangaram of Mulugu constituency, Garla and Bayyaram of Yellandu constituency, Thorrur, Peddavangara and Raipaarthi of Palakurthi of constituency, Nekkonda, Chennaraopet and Khanapur mandals of Narsampet constituency, Parvathagiri mandal of Wardhanapet constituency.

district, the location of tribal villages and their connection with the Mahabubabad town was asserted in order to create legitimacy based on the tribal identity (ibid). Thus, the MIF legitimised their demand by featuring the needs of tribals and the imperative of recognising the tribal areas.

8. 3.2 Undisputed Political Support for Mahabubabad District

Apart from the above discussed mobilisation, the constituency level politics and leaders have played an influential role in formation of the Mahabubabad district. Three tribal representatives from the Lambadas community who are associated with TRS, namely, Shankar Naik and D. S. Redya Naik who respectively represented Mahabubabad and Dornakal STs reserved constituencies and Seetaram Naik who represented Mahabubabad Parliamentary constituency (reserved for ST) lend their support to the demand for the formation of the district.¹⁵³ As the tribals actively participated in Telangana movement, TRS enjoyed traditional support in the Mahabubabad constituency. During the Telangana movement, KCR had assured that justice would be ensured to the Lambadas of Telangana as they were neglected in the united Andhra Pradesh. As mentioned earlier, he had promised that Mahabubabad district would be created after the formation of Telangana. When the district creation process started tribals of this area invoked the promises and protested for the district. D.S Redya Naik, Shankar Naik, and Seetaram Naik, all three public representatives from this area, backed and lobbied for the district. The MLA, Banoth Shankar Naik strongly demanded Mahabubabad by contending that “Mahabubabad is equipped with proper infrastructure and has abundant natural resources making it ideal to be made as a district. I will do everything to make sure that Mahabubabad will be made a district” (Interview cited in Srinivas et al., 2015). This statement highlights the political willingness of the representative to fight for the district. The representative was emboldened because they did not face conflict of interests with the non-tribals and the elites in the government.

Since the demand had a strong backup of the representatives from TRS, and as the new district promise was made by KCR, the demand was conceded during the formation of 31 districts in 2016. But there was disagreement over the inclusion and exclusion of mandals.

¹⁵³ In 2014 elections, Dornakal MLA, D.S. Redya Naik was elected on the Congress party ticket but switched to TRS in 2014.

Initially, the government considered creating Mahabubabad district with the following mandals: Mahabubabad (Urban), Mahabubabad (Rural), Gudur, Kesamudram, Nekkonda, Kothaguda, Dornakal, Kuravi, Narsimhulupeta, Maripeda, Nellikudur, Thorrur, Kodakandla, Chinna Gudur or Dasarathi* Peddavangara* and including erstwhile Khammam district mandals of Bayyaram, Garla, Yellandu, Tekulapalli and Kamepalli (Rao 2016a). These mandals are mostly from Lambada ethnic belts. But in the final notification Yellandu and Tekulapalli mandals were merged with Bhadradi-Kothagudem, and Kamepalli remained with Khammam district, Chennaraopet, Khanapur, Nekkonda, Raiparthy and Parvathagiri mandals remained with Warangal district, and Kodakandla was ceded to Jangao district.

The state-level elites considered the demand of Mahabubabad district in 2016 when 31 districts were formed. The district was formed with 16 mandals¹⁵⁴ of which 14 mandals were from the erstwhile Warangal district, and two mandals were from the former Khammam district. Mahabubabad district covers two ST reserved constituencies and two mandals each from Mulugu, Yellandu and Palakurthi constituencies. The Lambadas of Mahabubabad district viewed that though they are the major group in Telangana, they did not receive much recognition in a separate state. They continued to be subject of neglect and discrimination by the ruling class. Therefore, the district's creation has given them some sense of territorial recognition.

The MLAs/representatives and ruling party saw the 'political opportunity structure' in forming Mahabubabad district. Seetaram Naik, Shankar Naik and Redya Naik played a crucial role in creation of the district. They effectively invoked the community sentiment in order to strengthen their demand for district and establish the support base of TRS among the Lambadas as well as non-tribals. These serve the social imperative in forming new district. The credit for the formation of Mahabubabad district was given to Seetaram Naik, Redya Naik, and Shankar Naik, who were at the forefront of lobbying for Mahabubabad district. However, they did not play any role in forming Koya demanded Eturunagaram district. One of the major reasons why the Koya leaders asserted the demand for Eturunagaram district was

¹⁵⁴ The mandals include Mahabubabad, Nellikudur, Kesamudram, Guder of Mahabubabad constituency, Dornakal, Maripeda, Narishimulpet, Kuravi, ChinnaGuddur, and Danthalapally of Dornkal constituency, Kothaguda and Gangaram of Mulugu constituency, Garla and Bayyaram of Yellandu constituency, Thorrur and Peddavangara of Palakurthi constituency

that they considered that Mahabubabad was formed principally for the Lambadas. This came as a disappointment for the Koyas of Warangal who, like the Lambadas, are territorially concentrated. However, both the movements for the formation of districts were later controlled by the non-tribals who influenced the selection of headquarters town for the district. In Mahabubabad district, the non-tribals did not have much problem with Mahabubabad since it is not located in the Scheduled Areas. Indeed, they used the tribal identity to legitimize their demand for Mahabubabad district. There was a compatibility of interests of tribals, non-tribals and the government in selecting Mahabubabad town as district headquarters. In the case of Eturunagaram the non-tribals came up with Mulugu town as district headquarters as an alternative to Eturunagaram, which is located in the Scheduled areas. Thus, the town's location, i.e., Scheduled Areas and plain areas, played a crucial role in endorsing the tribal demand for the district and selection of headquarters town.

8.3.3. New Borders: Incompatible Interests of Communities

The Mulugu district borders cover most of the tribal areas, but some contiguous traditional tribal areas were excluded. Koyas from the excluded mandals of Kothaguda and Gangaram, which are merged with Mahabubabad district have been demanding to be a part of Mulugu district. These mandals are part of Mulugu assembly constituency. Given their proximity and connection with Mulugu district, the Koyas from these mandals have been demanding to be reunited with the Mulugu district. Similarly, Garla and Bayyarammandals of Mahabubabad district were part of the former Khammam district before the formation of new district in 2016. These mandals were part of tribal demanded Bhadrachalam district, so they were expected to be included in Bhadrachalam district. The other common association with these mandals is that they are all ITDA/Scheduled area mandals. While Kothagudem and Gangaram are under Eturunagaram ITDA, Garla and Bayyaram are under Bhadrachalam ITDA. But all these mandals were added to the plain area dominated Mahabubabad district (Radhakrishna, 2016). The Koyas from Kothagudem and Gangaram mandals have been demanding to be included in the Mulugu district because of their connection with their community-dominated areas, location of ITDA in Eturunagaram, and affinity with Mulugu district i.e., the distance between their areas and Mulugu town is short, which helps them to quickly access the services from the district.

The Koyas from these mandals had passed a resolution in the *Gram Sabha* against ceding their areas into a plain area dominated Mahabubabad district (Mahesh, 2016). Seethakka, the present MLA of Mulugu who belongs to Kothagudamandal, has been voicing that Kothaguda and Gangarammandals should be added back to Mulugu. She has repeatedly raised the status of these mandals in Telangana Legislative Assembly debates¹⁵⁵. The Koyas claim that the ruling party did not take into consideration their demand. While responding on the merger of these mandals into Mahabubabad district, Ponem Srinivas said that these mandals are rich in natural resources like barytes, iron ore, and dolomite (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019). In order to control resources and generate revenue to Mahabubabad district, these mandals were merged in the district. Thus, there is a widespread view that to meet the resource need of the people of plain areas and the state, and to fulfil the political interests of leaders and parties, the areas were merged in the Mahabubabad district despite resistance and protracted struggle to be part of their ethnic majority districts, i.e., either Mulugu or Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem districts (Rao, 2016a).

The tribals feel that merging their areas in the plain areas dominated district amounts to denying their self-governing right and negation of the spirit of PESA Act and other tribal laws. Gummadi Narasaiah, a five-time tribal MLA from Yellandu constituency who belongs to CPI-ML, stated that “the Adivasi areas should remain part of Adivasi districts, regardless of the size of the district. The move to carve out new districts is, in a basic sense, the negation of the right to self-governance and tribal identity” (cited in Rao, 2016b). The identity and unity argument was invoked by the tribals in order for them to be united in their ethnic district.

Initially, Lambadas of Kothaguda and Gangaram mandals wanted to be part of Mulugu district for the following reasons. First, distance factor as Mulugu and Eturunagaram are closer to the tribal areas than Mahabubabad town. Second, their connection with ITDA and location in Mulugu district. For these reasons, the Lambadas, along with Koyas, fought against merging their areas in Mahabubabad district. There was an amicable relationship between these communities over social and political issues.

¹⁵⁵ See Seethakka’s speech in Telangana Assembly, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzGk9CapNlo>

However, after the 2017 rift between the Lambadas and the Gonds in Adilabad over the question of reservation, the Koyas started to consider Lambadas as their competitors. The Koyas feel that Mahabubabad district is a Lambadas-dominated district, and they would not be able to compete with them in getting benefits and occupying lucrative positions. Conversely, the Lambadas of Kothagudem and Gangaram mandals fear that placing them under the Mulugu district would be detrimental to them as the Koyas dominate in the social and political realms in Mulugu district. They fear that they would become a minority in the Mulugu district, which would result in their marginalisation in political and administrative domains. They also alleged that government officials favour the Koyas but not the Lambadas. The Lambadas in Govindaraopetmandal and other areas are of the view that the Koyas dominate in Mulugu district. They consider that they are being sidelined and neglected by the officials in the district¹⁵⁶. There is a feeling among the Lambadas that the officials of both Eturunagaram and Bhadrachalam ITDAs treat them indifferently in providing benefits, particularly after the rift between the communities in 2017. As for the Koya dominated Mulugu district is concerned, photo of the tribal welfare minister Sathyavathi Rathod who is from the Lambada community, was not included in the poster at the Sammakka Sarakka *jatara* because of the hostility of the Koyas towards the Lambadas. The Koyas are trying to control all the cultural affairs and representational spaces in Mulugu district. Nevertheless, the Lambadas occupy major posts and emerge as a demographically dominant community in Mahabubabad district. Thus, the Lambadas are content to be in Mahabubabad district as they are predominant in the district and connected with the community.

Similarly, Vekatapuram and Vazedumandals were part of the erstwhile Khammam district but were merged into Jayashankar-Bhupalpally in 2016. The Koyas constitute a majority in these mandals. They wanted to part of Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district¹⁵⁷ but were opposed to be part of Jayashankar-Bhupalpally because Bhupalpally is neither administratively convenient nor connected to their community. Nevertheless, they are happy to be part of Mulugu district which was formed out of Jayashankar-Bhupalpally district in

¹⁵⁶ Ascertained from interview with Ravinder Naik, a leader of LHPS, at Eturunagaram, 4 June 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Ascertained from an interview with Vuyika Ramchander from Venkatapuram mandal, conducted at Mulugu, 4 June 2019.

2019. Now they feel that their ethnic community emerged as the *Staatsvolk*¹⁵⁸ in Mulugu district. The tribals from these mandals believe that Eturunagaram town should have been created as a district since it is centrally located and closer to them, whereas the Mulugu town is far from their areas and located in the plain areas. The Mulugu district border is associated with the identity of the Koyas given that they are territorially concentrated here. Given this they perceive the territorialisation of Mulugu district amount to ethnic-territorial recognition of the Koyas.

The Koyas and the Lambadas have been asserting their identity association with the new districts and are trying to preempt the space in Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts respectively. The creation of ethnic-based districts may reduce conflicts among the bellicose communities in these areas.

Thus, the Koyas in Mulugu and Lambadas in Mahabubabad district feel connected with their own sense of identity in the district. Confining the new district borders to ethnically homogenous communities not only helps them socially but also ensures their centrality in the new districts. This marks a shift from the larger collective tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation to one where each community seeks particularistic community and territorial interests. In the larger contexts, the tribal areas-based districts were demanded based on larger tribal communities' identity while differentiating from mainstream politics and society. But the cases of Mulugu and Mahabubabad reflect the differences within the larger collective aspirations. In other words, the assertions and identifications with new districts reflect differences within the larger state-sponsored ST identity.

8.3.4. Impact of Re-Drawing District Borders on Electoral Politics

In 2018, KCR prematurely dissolved the Telangana state legislative assembly hoping that his party will enjoy the goodwill among the people for its major development works and restructuring of governance by proliferating administrative and political units within the state. TRS registered a landslide victory in the 2018 Telangana assembly elections, winning 88 seats out of 119. However, the party lost in most of the tribal areas due to tribal's dissatisfaction with the re-drawing of district borders. The tribal-demanded Mulugu town is one of the

¹⁵⁸ Taken from Bookman (2013).

assembly constituencies where the TRS lost. In the interviews, tribals claimed that the major reason for voting against the TRS is that KCR's government did not create the district that the tribals demanded and did not select the towns proposed by them as headquarters. There is a feeling among the Koyas that TRS neglected them since they are concentrated only in few districts. The Mulugu/Eturunagaram district demanded by Koyas was not created when the districts were re-organised in 2016. Yellandu constituency was dissected to be merged into three districts, Mahabubabad, Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem and Khammam. Even Bhadrachalam district demand of the Koyas was not considered. Thus, the failure of the government to create districts and select headquarters town whose borders are coterminous with areas concentrated by the Koyas led to their discontent against the TRS. In this backdrop, TRS was unable to win in Koya predominated assembly segments such as Mulugu, Bhadrachalam, Pinapaka, Asaraopeta, and Yellandu.

However, TRS created Mahabubabad as district where the Lambadas are concentrated. This significantly garnered electoral support for the TRS in Mahabubabad and Dornakal constituencies where it won both seats in 2018 elections. The creation of the Mahabubabad district is seen as a triumph by the Lambadas, the credit for this is given to the TRS party and its leaders. Without missing a chance, TRS had arranged for a pompous inauguration of the district in 2016 with minister Chandulal as a chief guest as he is from the Lambada community. The MLAs and MPs from the Lamabada tribe were invited to the inauguration of the district in order to give symbolic recognition to their community. Thus, the tribals said that the TRS won in Mahabubabad and Dornakal constituencies, despite the fact the candidates were not so popular. TRS won both the assembly segments and a Parliamentary seat in Mahabubabad unlike in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem and Mulugu districts, where TRS lost all ST reserved seats¹⁵⁹. Thus, the politics of accommodation and assimilation of ethnic communities were in full display in the 2018 assembly elections. In sum, the formation of Mahabubabad and Mulugu were specially tailored to meet various socio-political interests and resource imperative and came through selective ethnic accommodations.

¹⁵⁹The ST reserved constituencies are Mulugu in Mulugu district; Bhadrachalam, Wyr, Yellandu, Aswaraopeta and Pinapaka in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district.

8.4.1. Implication of Borders Change on the Politics of Recognition

The formation of Mulugu district for the Koya-dominated areas, and Mahabubabad district for the Lambada-dominated area leveraged their ethnic positions in their respective districts. These communities feel that their ethnic territories are being recognized by territorializing the district which in turn strengthen their demographic weight within their respective districts. Thus, these communities emerge as the dominant communities or what can be called *Staatsvolk*. Each tribal group is encapsulated within its own territorial base and new districts are symbolically identified with the tribal communities.

However, the tribals raise the issue of assimilation of parts of their territorial areas in other districts which profoundly impact their culture. It is in this regard, Komuram Prabhakar pointed out that “for us, the sacred sites are core to our community’s belief system. But, Sammakka and Sarakka memorial sites are placed in the Mulugu district. Whereas a sacred place of Pagadidharaju who was Sammakka’s husband, has been placed in Mahabubabad district, despite the site being closer to Mulugu town- i.e., 20 kms away” (Interviewed at Eturunagaram, 3 June 2019). The Koyas of Mulugu have been legitimising their demand to include Kothaguda mandal in Mulugu district as the sacred places of Pagadidharaju has been ceded to Mahabubabad district. Before redrawing borders, the government and tribals used to celebrate all three sites together although Pagadidharaju’s site is neglected in Mahabubabad district. Tribals feel that their area, culture, gods and goddesses have been divided. Concern and assertion for sacred sites underlines that development and decentralisation should be inconsonance with the sacred and cultural aspects. Thus, the tribal activists criticised the ruling elites for creating borders over their traditional contiguous areas, which divide people and their sacred sites.

Additionally, new district borders also impact tribal unity in celebrating Medaram *jatara* (carnival). Prabhakar said that “all tribal groups from the erstwhile district participated as volunteers and the Sammakka Sarakka *jatara* board members were selected from all areas of the composite district. Despite being part of their traditional territory, after creating district borders, the temple board members are selected only from Mulugu district” (Interviewed at Eturunagaram, 3 June 2019). Adding to the above views, the Koyas resist the state for

occupying their cultural spaces. The Koyas of Mulugu district opposed the state government's proposal that the central government give national status to the Medaram *jatara*. The tribals expressed their apprehensions that such recognition would take away their rights and culture (Ceremilla, 2018: 26-25). The tribals have demanded that Mulugu district be christened after Sammakka and Sarakka. The district gives a sense of identity to the tribals, but there is dissatisfaction with the excluded mandals.

8.4.2. Impact of Borders Change on the Politics of Redistribution

There is a widespread belief among the tribals that resource concentration in their areas has played a crucial role in redrawing district borders. In other words, the availability of resource in their areas has influenced the state elites to draw the borders either to accommodate the tribals with the demanded territorial areas or assimilate them in plain areas dominated district.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the tribals from Kothaguda and Gangarammandals have been demanding to be a part of the present Mulugu district. Likewise, tribals of Garla and Bayyaram mandals wanted to be a part of Bhadradri-Kothagudem district. Mulugu and Bhadradri-Kothagudem districts are symbolically identified with tribals and Scheduled areas which entail protection of their material interest. All these mandals are rich in resources. For example Bayyaram¹⁶⁰ is rich in iron ore, Garla in barytes, Kothaguda and Gangaram mandals in dolomite and barytes (<https://bit.ly/2X6TjUi>). There is a prevalent notion among the tribals that the government merged these mandals in the plain areas to change the identity of the areas and break the unity of the community to extract the resources. Ponem Srinivas argued that “the consultation with the tribals as per the laws of tribal areas was bypassed, and tribal areas merged in the plain district for resources. These changes would impact the tribals severely” (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019). Governments are known to alter geography in order to force undesirable people to move from desirable territory which in the long run negate the identity (ies) of territorially concentrated groups in subtle ways (Bookman, 2013). Thus, the role of resource is an influential factor in the state's decision to dissect contiguous mandal, and merge them with plain districts.

¹⁶⁰ The Geological Survey of India has revealed that 70.53 million tonnes of iron ore are available at Bayyaram (cited in The Hindu, 17 November 2017).

In the case of Bayyarammandal in Mahabubabad district, the people are protesting against iron ore mining, as they will lose their land and source of survival. Generally, the establishment of the mining company is justified on the grounds of creation of jobs. Datla Srikanth, a 25-year-old Koya, disagreed with this and said that “why will the company appoint the locals who are not skilled. A special provision of jobs to the locals and development are mere false promises to divert people’s attention from their feeling of alienation” (Interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, 4 June 2019).

Governments justified redrawing of the district borders on the ground that it expedites the implementation of welfare schemes and make them accessible to all sections. But, tribal activist’s opined that in the tribal areas *Rythubandhu* benefits do not reach the tribals. Certificates of land ownership (*Patta*) claimed under FRA are being prevented by the forest department. While tribals are not given rights, non-tribals are encouraged to legalise their illegally occupied lands by *Sada Bainama*. Under this arrangement, non-tribals who are residing in the tribal areas from 1980, are given land rights where LTR 1 of 70 are supposed to operate. Members of AHPSs cited the Koneru Ranga Rao Committee’s (2014: 48) report that stated 48% of the Scheduled Area land is in the hands of the non-tribals (<https://bit.ly/3yTAPoQ>). In this scenario, the illegally occupied land would be legalised by *Sada Bainama*, further reinforcing injustice on the tribals¹⁶¹. Interestingly, a few years ago although there were not many residential buildings in the tribal areas, many residential buildings have been constructed by the non-tribals in recent times. The non-tribals, mostly dominant castes such as the Reddys, Kammas and Vellamas influence the government and alienate land by stealth from the tribals¹⁶².

Tribal activists also contended that the allocated funds for tribal development or for Scheduled areas are not being spent on tribals. Instead they are diverted¹⁶³ for popular schemes and developmental works in the plain areas such as the Kaleshwaram irrigation project, laying of roads, construction of flyovers in Hyderabad and to provide *Aasara*

¹⁶¹ Drawn from interview with Paparao at Kanaigudem of Mulugu district on 3 June 2019.

¹⁶² Ascertained from interview with Komuram Prabhakar on 3 June 2019.

¹⁶³ A total 2,00, 049.6 crores have been diverted in 20 years (<http://www.mcrhrdi.gov.in/group1-2018/week4/SCST%20SDF%202017.pdf>).

pensions etc.¹⁶⁴ The tribals from Mulugu district thought that the resources located in their areas are supposed to be used or spent for the development of tribal areas but they are being taken away. Paparao (Interviewed at Tadvai in Mulugu district, 3 June 2019) said that though the Godavari river flows through the Adivasi areas, the water is not allocated to irrigate the tribal areas where rain-fed agriculture is carried. Water is not channeled even for drinking purposes in the tribal areas, instead it is being diverted to plain areas of Warangal and Nalgonda district through the Devadula Lift Irrigation Project¹⁶⁵. Referring to the role of district headquarters in the development of tribal areas, Pendur Rajesh, a Koya, said that “the headquarter at Mulugu helped the non-tribals more than the tribals as the town is located in plain areas. Hence, the non-tribals are outmaneuvering the tribals in establishing market or any other developmental activities” (Interviewed at Tadvai in Mulugu district, 3 June 2019). This indicates the economically influential role of the non-tribals and their control over the market. Apart from the government’s acquisition of their land on the grounds of developmental works and protection of forest and wildlife, they highlighted that the role of the non-tribals in obtaining the tribal land continues even in the new districts. Thus, the tribals claimed that government officials continue to neglect protecting the interests of the tribals despite formation of small districts that can be visited in a day.

However, the supporters of TRS have different views on the above. Dubbakatla Raju, who belongs to Koya tribe, says that “the TRS is trying to protect the interests of all tribal groups. While Mulugu was created for the Koyas, Mahabubabad was created for the Lambada tribes. It is because of KCR led government that the tribals have received recognition and justice” (Interviewed at Mulugu, 4 June 2019). The fact of the matter is that the creation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts leveraged the bargaining positions of the Koya and the Lamabada respectively, compared to their position in the erstwhile Warangal district.

8.4.2.1. Role of ITDA and District Officials in the New Districts

Eturunagaram ITDA areas-based district was demanded and subsequently it was formed with most tribal areas but Eturunagaram was not selected as headquarters. Concerning the role of

¹⁶⁴ Ascertained from interviews with Komuram Prabhakar and Ponem Srinivas.

¹⁶⁵ It is an irrigation project constructed on the Godavari river at Devadula in Mulugu District.

ITDA, the officials¹⁶⁶ said that it continues to function in the same manner as it used to before the redrawing of borders. Nonetheless, the tribals believe that the ITDA mandals with tribal concentration got merged in Warangal and Mahabubabd districts. The ITDA PO has to coordinate with different District Collectors and supervise the developmental works in the tribal areas as a result. Generally, the junior level Officials are appointed as Project Officers in ITDA, whereas the District Collectors are senior Officials. In this scenario, it is difficult for the POs to command the senior officers to implement tribal laws and developmental activities.

Tribal respondents of Mahabubabad district viewed that despite the creation of the district with significant tribal numbers, tribal orientation is missing in the governance. They continue to face several problems as a result. But in the case of Mulugu district, tribals feel that they are getting increasing attention in the new district relative to the previous district. This indicates that borders change has differentially impacted on the economic interests of tribals. The following section analyses how borders change reconfigure the tribal politics of representation.

8.4.3. Impact of Borders Change on the Politics of Representation

In the erstwhile Warangal district, tribal representation was marginal in institutions¹⁶⁷. They had to compete with the dominant non-tribals. Unlike before where tribals are relegated to the background, the new districts overlap with majority of their traditional territories, and they not only have leveraged the tribals' position but also have given scope for increasing tribal representation. As a result, the new districts have contributed to increasing the symbolic and political representation of the Koyas and Lambadas in Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts, respectively. As the district borders overlap with the ethnic concentration of these tribes, the tribals feel that they have got the status of *Staatsvolk* in the new districts. In Mulugu district, the Koyas expressed their contentment that the formation of district has increased their representation sample this: While Seethakka, a Koya woman, represents Mulugu constituency, the post of ZP Chairman of Mulugu district has been given to a non-tribal. However, a Koya woman was appointed as vice-chairman of Zilla Parishad. In Mahabubabad

¹⁶⁶ Interview with ITDA APO (Assistant Project Officer) and other officials at Eturunagaram ITDA, 3 June 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Institutional sphere includes representative posts like ZP Chairman, MLA etc., and non-institutional sphere includes the symbolic association with tribal identity.

district, there are two assembly constituencies and one parliamentary constituency, whose representatives belong to the Lambada community. In this district, the post of ZP chairman has been allocated to a Lambada. In both the districts, parties prefer to give posts such as ZP chairman, Market Committee chairman, Agriculture Committee chairman, District Library Chairman to the dominant tribals. Since the district borders circumscribe the ethnic areas, these districts do not face intense intra-community competition from other communities.

Some of the tribal civil society leaders expressed hope that re-organisation of assembly constituencies may be considered in creating two Assembly Constituencies for tribals in Mulugu district i. e. Mulugu constituency for the western side and Eturunagaram for the eastern side of the district. Nevertheless, they have expressed an apprehension that the merging of Kothaguda and Gangaram mandals in Mahabubabad district may dent this possibility. Thus, apart from increasing the representation of the tribals, the newly created districts gave the symbolic recognition to these communities in places where they emerged demographically dominant in the district. The tribals from Kothaguda and Gangaram mandals under the Mulugu constituency feel that although their MLA is in Mulugu district, they have been placed in Mahabubabad district. The Koya respondents from these mandals expressed that they might lose constituency in the future; they may be politically marginalised as a result.

The Mulugu district provides symbolic identity for the tribals, which coextend with the tribal areas. Yet, the district has not been named as Sammakka-Sarramma as demanded by the tribals. The tribals also feel that the temple board members in the Sammakka-Sarramma *Jatara* are being appointed from the non-tribals who are not associated with tribal culture. Further, they expressed dismay that the district-level important positions are being given to the non-tribals. For instance, the post of ZP Chairman is allotted to a non-tribal by the TRS party in tribal predominant district. The Koyas believe that the division and ceding of tribal areas has reduced their influential status in the district. This was deliberately done by the government because of their nexus with the non-tribals in order to leverage their influence in the district to make the minority group i.e., the non-tribals powerful and the majority community i.e., the tribals as subordinate.

The tribals consider that tribals' representation is missing in the bureaucracy in new districts. Komuram Prabhakar described that "the tribals are under-represented in the bureaucracy. Most of the bureaucrats appointed in tribal areas are from upper castes and mainstream areas, who are indifferent towards the tribals and most often, fail to understand languages and the problems of tribals" (Interviewed at Eturunagaram, 3 June 2019). The respondents have highlighted the nexus between the leaders and bureaucrats. Governing tribal areas goes against the much-talked idea of 'self-governance' in the tribal areas. Accountability and transparency are missing in the ways ITDA function, spend government funds, and govern tribal areas.

When asked about why there is a representational gap between the people's aspirations, and concerns, a respondent viewed that in order to win elections and to receive funds to fight elections the candidates have to depend on the non-tribals for financial support and votes. Apart from this it is political parties that allocate tickets. It is difficult to win elections without party ticket¹⁶⁸. As a result, they mostly follow their party line, which is led and controlled by non-tribal leaders. The tribal activists argue that the tribal representatives trade tribal material and political interests to promote their self-interests. The Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) works under the direction of the ruling party and its members rarely go against the party¹⁶⁹. Thus, the tribal activists have exposed the government and the current functioning of representative system. The borders have further caused disarray and disunity in the tribal areas.

The tribals argued that in 1996 although Scheduled Areas were demarcated, decentralisation of powers was not done in reality due to political unwillingness. As per the law, the President of India should carry governance in the tribal areas through Governors, District Collectors and other officials. In tribal areas, people will first approach the MRO or the PO, then they will approach the Joint Collector and the Collector. But the problems of tribals mostly remain unsolved as the officials are influenced by non-tribals, parties, and political leaders. The tribal areas express that they do not have self-rule and self-governing power and authority. So, there is a need to provide them self-governing rights to solve their

¹⁶⁸ Chhibber et al. (2019) observed that the numbers of Independents who win election in India are very few compared to those who win on a party ticket.

¹⁶⁹ Ascertained from an interview with Komuram Prabhakar at Eturunagaram on 3 June 2019.

problems and issues. According to PESA Act the tribals should govern themselves according to their customs and traditions. But it is clear that the officials and the non-tribals influence the governance. In order to solve these problems and provide proper self-governance, tribals demand that the Mulugu district should have a Tribal Autonomous District Council (TADC), which exercises the legislative, executive and judicial powers in the tribal areas. Thus, TADC would be carried according to tribals' tradition and culture and helps protect their rights, identity, and interests. In the case of Mahabubabad, the tribals have been demanding the establishment of ITDA for their district. They have also demanded recognising their areas as Scheduled Areas. Therefore, the role of culture and traditions and territorial identity is being asserted to claim increased representation.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the formation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts. Both these cases affirm tribal territorial accommodation. Various political, social, and economic imperatives influenced the formation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad as districts.

The creation of Mahabubabad district which overlap with the Lambada concentrated areas in 2016 accommodates Lambadas's demand. The selection of Mahabubabad town as district headquarters also did not have much conflict of interests with the non-tribals and the government, as the town comes in the plain areas. Added to this, TRS has a strong traditional support among people. In this regard, three elected representatives from TRS easily facilitated the formation of Mahabubabad district. But in 2016, the Koyas' demand for Mulugu was not considered as it lacked support of Mulugu MLA. But Mulugu was formed in 2019 only after sustained movement for the district and due to electoral compulsion. However, Eturunagaram town, demanded by majority of tribal organisation was not selected as district headquarters. Instead Mulugu was selected despite the fact that it is located in the plain area. Therefore, all four imperatives- political, economic, social and administrative, played significant role in the formation of districts and the selection of towns for district headquarters.

Indeed, to materialise the demand of the Mahabubabad district in 2016, the urge for political consolidation and demographic strength of the communities have had considerable influence on the ruling elites and officials. But Mulugu district was formed in 2019 on after

sustained movement for this emerge and parties and leaders saw a favourable political opportunity structure to consolidate their electoral base. The formation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts was also facilitated by the overlap of ethnic territories with district borders where political entrepreneurs can use district borders change to appease communities for their electoral interests. In sum, the creation of districts in the Koya and the Lambada predominant areas paved the way for realignments of politics and communities, which also entails a credo of importance to the Koyas and the Lambadas within their territorial units.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Drawing borders for administrative and political units are a politically contentious issue in deeply divided societies like India. Existing studies have highlighted the role of religion, language, and ethnicity in drawing national borders. Similarly, studies on inter-state borders changes have contended that language, ethnicity, regional identities, developmental issues, and politics have shaped the borders of new/provincial states. Existing scholarship has underlined that communities deploy their identities and self-governance claims to form nationalities for demanding political units. Though several studies have focused on drawing borders at the national and inter-state level, the formation and institutionalisation of intra-state borders has remained an understudied area. To fill this gap, this study has examined the politics of intra-state border change. The study mainly focused on territorially concentrated tribal communities' demand for districts, and the factors that influenced drawing district borders in Telangana in 2016 and 2019. In doing so, it has attempted to address the questions of how the tribals grounded the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in their demand for new districts. This study examines how factors such as political contexts, state and district levels leaders' incentives, social groups' interests, economic concerns of the ruling party, and administrative rationale have influenced drawing new district borders and the selection of towns for district headquarters. It also explicates how the new district borders and headquarters have important bearings on the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

Based on empirical accounts, this study attempts to understand tribal communities' demands for districts and the factors that influenced the drawing of districts borders in tribal areas of Telangana. The central research question that this study seeks to examine is: how drawing of intra-state borders configures and reconfigures the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation in tribal areas of Telangana? The study employed an historical institutional approach to understand the power dynamics that underpin drawing of borders and shaping of institutions at the district level.

To make a rounded understanding of the research question, this study has been organised into nine chapters. While the first chapter contextualised the research problem and provided the structure of the study, the second chapter defined and contextualized drawing of borders of political units. The second chapter then examines the creation of political units at the national level and describes the multiple strategies of accommodation adopted in deeply divided societies. Among the strategies, it has discussed how federalism/decentralisation has emerged as a normative as well as a political strategy to accommodate diversity in liberal democracies. In addition, the chapter has discussed the drawing of the border at the provincial/state level in Indian federal structure. The variegated roles of linguistic, ethnic, and political factors are examined as points of reference and departure to explicate the territorial and ethnic identity formations, and to contextualise the drawing of the border at the district unit in India's federal system. The second chapter also defined the concepts of the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation. The third chapter has focused on the historical construction of tribal boundaries, and the fourth chapter describes the profile of the areas and political mobilisations of the tribals for new districts. The fifth chapter has highlighted the tribal communities' moral and political claims centered around the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation. The sixth chapter has analysed the role of four imperatives, namely, political, social, economic, and administrative, in drawing borders of new districts and selecting towns for district headquarters, and their implication on the politics of accommodation and identity on tribal communities in the erstwhile Adilabad district. The seventh chapter has examined drawing of new district borders and accommodation of the tribals' demand in the composite Khammam district. While the eighth chapter deals with factors behind the formation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts out of the former Warangal district, chapter nine concludes the study.

Districts are essential units in federal/decentralised systems. In India, they gained increased saliency in governance and politics after decentralisation of power through the Seventy-third Constitutional Amendment Act. However, the debate on the size and nature of the districts is complex, and the demands for new districts have come from various corners of the country. The tribal areas of Telangana are no exception to this. Territorially concentrated in determinate areas, the tribals have demanded districts in the composite districts of Adilabad, Khammam, and Warangal districts. Majority of the tribal traditional areas are

recognised as Scheduled Areas and governed by ITDAs. These traditional territories have become the site of tribal historical struggle for identity and self-governance. Initially, the demand for a tribal areas-based district emerged at Bhadrachalam in the erstwhile Khammam district in the 1950s. While demand for Eturunagaram and Utnoor towns-based districts for the tribal areas in the composite Warangal and Adilabad districts respectively, became prominent from the 1990s, the demand for Mahabubabad district emerged in 2002.

Towns such as Bhadrachalam, Utnoor, and Eturunagaram are centrally located in tribal areas of the former districts of Khammam, Adilabad, and Warangal. These towns house ITDAs and have been the epicenter of tribal politics. Tribal predominated territories also constitute Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved assembly and parliamentary constituencies. Given this, various tribal organizations demanded that new districts should be created with contiguous tribal predominant mandals/ST reserved constituencies/ITDA areas, and centrally located tribal towns should be made district headquarters. The tribal communities' demand for districts emerged as part of their larger struggle for the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

The demands for districts in Telangana or elsewhere need to be seen as a larger attempt to secure identity, redistribution or access of/to resources and political representation. To be sure, the state's recognition of tribal areas as Scheduled Areas in places where tribals have resided for generations shaped their ethnic and territorial identity consciousness. This historically foregrounds their demand for new districts. Issues of self-governance and identity have always been central to the political agenda of the tribals. Seen from this perspective, tribal demand for districts underscores two things. First, there is an increasing dissonance between tribal identity and mainstream identity, which leads to the assertion of a separate tribal identity. Second, the assertion of a separate identity underpins tribals' aspiration for recognition and self-governance.

This study highlights that tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation provide the catalysts that drive the demand for districts. Tribal regions were well-knotted socio-culturally and geographically. Their historical and sacred sites and symbolic celebrations are repositories of their memory and political influence, which forge

social unity and concerns for recognition, redistribution and representation. The politicisation of rudimentary social differences between tribal and mainstream society shapes the politics of recognition. Apart from recognition concerns, the tribals nurture a sense of relative deprivation regarding resource and development aspects. Their demand for districts presents a case to draw and reconfigure demographic balance in ways which leverage the distinctive needs of recognition, redistribution and representation of tribal communities vis-a-vis the mainstream society. It is held that increased demographic strength of tribals by carving out contiguous areas into tribal districts would leverage their position in claiming redistribution in the new districts. Further, the underlying motivation for such identity-based border change was to claim self-governance in their areas. Underrepresentation of tribal groups in public institutions underpins their politics of representation. It is precisely here that demands for creation of separate tribal districts are made to solve their problems and identity concerns. The tribal communities perceive the commensurabilities between their identities claims and crafting of new institution i.e., political and administrative units in the decentralised structure. Interestingly criteria employed by Telangana government to create new districts are tailored to accommodate these and other administrative concerns of the state. The formation of districts for territorially nested communities on the ground of decentralization is intertwined with the politics of recognition, redistribution or access to resources, and power-sharing in deeply divided societies.

Border changes are not matters of casual happenstance; they involve significant political, and socio-economic considerations, even as they reconfigure socio-political relationships among groups. The government's rationale behind creating districts are, inter alia, to have decentralised governance, cultural recognition of the people of particular areas, and to increase people's political participation. Government elites and political leaders in the state often deployed competing rhetorical rationale to legitimise the process of formation of new districts and selection of district headquarters. Beyond facile and good intentions in the formation of new districts and headquarters selection lay the strategic interests of ruling elites both at the state government and at the district levels. Thus, this study has attempted to examine and understand where, how and why the district borders are drawn and why particular towns were selected for district headquarters.

This study contends that four imperatives, namely, political, social, economic, and administrative imperatives influenced drawing borders of new districts and selecting towns as district headquarters. It demonstrates that the accommodation of tribals' demands for tribal-based districts varies from district to district. The accommodation of tribal demands for the districts is contingent on how these imperatives interact with various interpretations and demands in ways that reconfigure the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation.

The state proposed ambiguous criteria in the formation of districts gave room for the public representatives and leaders to influence the process to draw districts as per their political interests. New districts are coveted as they help leaders to get credit and clout in the new districts. The state and district level elites always consider that the new districts would provide the opportunities to reshape politics and establish their control over new districts. Not surprisingly, the ruling party tends to draw borders based on a determinate set of considerations like 'political calculus', revenue generation, and accommodation of dominant social groups' interests. The demands for new districts for tribal areas act as the common denominator for tribal organisations and leaders to rally around a common platform. Nevertheless, some tribal and non-tribal political leaders (MLAs, MPs and Ministers) have differential degree of influence in drawing borders and selecting towns as headquarters for districts. Because districts borders are drawn and changed to suit the political interest of the ruling party, tribal demand for Utnoor, Eturunagaram, and Bhadrachalam towns-based districts got sidelined.

Tribal politics operate within the framework of post independent India's representative democratic institutions where self-interested community elites/leaders pragmatically use collective demands to suit their political interests. Under these rubrics, various tribal representatives who have been associated with different political parties emerged as the key players in negotiating with the governments. This process brought dynamic changes in tribal politics and their engagement with the state. For politicians, membership in parties means accessing state resources and power through patronage.

Previous tribal studies romanticised the state-tribal conflicts wherein the revolt/rebellion and movement were central in their binary analysis. As a result, they have not sufficiently focused their attention on the role of public representatives and parties in coopting tribal demands. This is a glaring gap given that larger community claims are best understood only when we can ascertain the strategic and complex interest of leaders. This study argues that the act of perceived accommodation through district borders change are coordinated activity wherein tribal representatives negotiate with district and state-level officials/leaders in the power corridor. The ambitious party leaders and tribal public representatives maneuvered in re-drawing district borders and selecting towns for headquarters according to their political interests. The creation of new districts accrues personal recognition/credit to the representatives of their constituencies where districts are created which in turn creating political clout for them. Given this possibility, political competition in the constituencies is influenced by or driven by such political incentives. Not surprisingly, representatives coveted the formation of a new district in their constituencies. It needs to be underlined here that formation of districts entails a complex process where the strategic interest and influence of ruling party's MLAs, ministers, and tribal leaders interact to determine the nature and extent of accommodation or assimilation of tribal territorial and ethnic-based demands for districts. This study foregrounds the political exigencies that shaped the tribal areas' accommodation or exclusion.

Tribal leaders of the TRS party asserted that the government has recognised their identity and accommodated tribal district demands by creating Asifabad, Adilabad, Mulugu, Bhadradri-Kothagudem, and Mahabubabad districts. The government did not consider the tribal demanded Utnoor district but Kova Laxmi, the then MLA of Asifabad constituency, played a key role in forming Asifabad district. After the creation of four districts from Adilabad, tribals' collective mobilisation and demand for Utnoor fizzled out. Nevertheless, the TRS party leaders justified that Adilabad and Asifabad district were created for the tribals. Likewise, the Bhadradri-Kothagudem district was created for the tribal areas of Khammam district without considering the tribal demanded Bhadrachalam town as headquarters. It has to be noted that Kothagudem MLA played a crucial role in selecting Kothagudem town as district headquarters. Similarly, the tribals had demanded Eturunagaram/Mulugu towns-based district.

However, the government did not consider the Mulugu/Eturunagaram demand in 2016. The then MLA of Mulugu constituency did not channel the demand until close to the 2018 assembly elections. This explains why Mulugu district was not created in 2016 but became a reality in 2019. The KCR-led government formed districts and selected towns as headquarters where the TRS leaders/MLAs demanded. Despite the fact that opposition parties and civil society organizations have demanded the creation of Bhadrachalam, Eturunagaram, and Utnoor districts, TRS leaders did not strongly channel or lobby for these demands to suit their political interests. In this regard, Sunnam Rajaiah, MLA of Bhadrachalam constituency, supported and actively led protests for demanding Bhadrachalam town-based district. However, Rajaiah's demand for Bhadrachalam was not considered as he belonged to CPI (M). Likewise, Ajmera Rekha (TRS), MLA of Khanapur constituency initially supported the Utnoor district demand due to her political interest. She did not actively pursue this as the TRS party did not support this demand.

The demand for Mahabubabad district was considered in 2016, because the new district has two ST reserved assembly constituencies and was represented by TRS. Shankar Naik and Redya Naik, MLAs of Mahabubabad and Dornakal constituencies respectively played a crucial role in forming the Mahabubabad district. Similar unity among MLAs was missing in the case of Bhadrachalam demand, as out of the five ST MLAs from contiguous constituencies only three MLAs, namely Sunnam Rajaiah, CPI(M), Payam Venkateswarlu (TRS) and Tati Venkateswarlu (TRS) demanded Bhadrachalam town based district. The other two MLAs—Ramulu Naik (TRS) Wyra MLA, and Koram Kankaiah (TRS), Yellandu MLA--changed their positions and accepted the government proposed district. Likewise, three ST representatives (Rekha Naik, Kova Laxmi and Rathod Bapurao of TRS) supported Utnoor demand, but Rekha and Rathod Bapurao did not valiantly channel the demand. Interestingly once she saw a political opportunity in co-opting the larger tribal demand, Kova Laxmi pitched for the formation of Asifabad town-based district. Therefore, re-drawing borders and selecting towns for headquarter, reflect the use of 'political opportunity structure' and 'politics of compromise' as explained by scholars in the case of formation of states (provincial) or inter-state borders change (Hausing 2018; Tillin 2013).

The selection of Asifabad, Mulugu, Kothagudem and Mahabubabad towns as district headquarters underscores the MLAs' interest in selecting their constituency towns as headquarters. Interestingly Uttoor and Eturunagaram towns did not receive strong support from their representatives and failed in securing separate districts. It is noteworthy that the Bhadrachalam constituency is based at Bhadrachalam town. Yet Sunnam Rajaiah, the local MLA who actively mobilised tribals for the district belongs to CPI (M). The government selected Kothagudem town as the district headquarters instead because Jalagam Venkat Rao, the Kothagudem MLA from TRS party, championed the demand. The above comparison illustrates that new districts were formed and towns were selected as headquarters when they receive sustained support of TRS party MLAs. Districts demanded by opposition party MLAs were invariably not considered.

There is a symbiotic relationship between leaders at the district and state level. As a result, the agency of tribal leaders (MLAs) has to navigate this hierarchical political structure. Despite their connection with parties, tribal representatives have not divorced from their connection with the communities. Indeed, their political actions are interpreted through the prism of communities' collective moral and political claims. In most cases, tribal district demands got coopted and interpreted to suit the ruling party's interests, a situation made more amenable by tribal representatives who often trade their community's interest for short-term personal political gains. It is against this context that we must understand why and how the ST elected representatives' stands have impaired accommodation of tribals demands for the Eturunagaram, Mulugu and Bhadrachalam based districts.

The original commitment of the government to create districts for effective governance and decentralisation was later used to consolidate party's political strength. The division within the tribal political elite creates favourable condition for the ruling party or government to perpetuate their dominance. Thus, one can infer that the nature of political opportunity drives the politics and demands of creating new districts. The accommodation of tribal district demands is often subservient to fulfilling political interests of the ruling party and tribal representatives/leaders. In other words, the formation of districts for decentralisation is dictated by political expediencies. Therefore, the political imperative played a critical role in shaping the creation of new districts and the selection of towns for

headquarters. The accommodation and recognition of tribals demand for district could be seen as paternalistic and benevolent attitudes of the government or ruling elites.

One of the major findings of the study is that though the claims are collective in nature and have considerable relevance for all tribal communities, both the indigenous (tribal leaders) and exogenous (non-tribal leaders/parties) actors played crucial roles in shaping the border and reconfiguring the tribal politics. Thus, we see different patterns of accommodation of their district demand.

This study found that material and political interests of social groups—tribals and non-tribals—played a vital role in shaping new district borders and selecting towns for headquarters. The territorial and ethnic differences had been deployed to demand and create new districts. Tribal organisations have opposed Asifabad, Kothagudem, and Mulugu towns as district headquarters because of their locations in the plain areas and the composite demographic character of the towns. Most of the tribals demanded Utnoor, Bhadrachalam, and Eturunagaram as district headquarters. The demands for these towns have been primarily based on cultural recognition, redistribution, political representation, and administration expediency.

Similarly, the non-tribals residing in and around the tribal areas were also concerned about protecting their economic and political interests. Non-tribal leaders navigate the politics of drawing borders and selecting towns to realize their interests. Majority of the non-tribals and their leaders demanded towns located in plain areas as district headquarters, and wanted to be part of the plain dominated district rather than being part of tribal predominant district. The non-tribals tried to undermine the selection of towns demanded by the tribals and their organisations to prevent them from being seen as part of tribal districts and to protect their interests.

Tribal organisations demanded towns of Utnoor, Bhadrachalam, and Eturunagaram were not selected as district headquarters because these towns are located in the Scheduled/Tribal areas. Conversely, Asifabad, Kothagudem, Mulugu, and Mahabubabad towns were selected as headquarters of the new districts due to their geographical location in non-tribal dominated plain areas. The tribal areas in Adilabad were dismembered due to

pressure from the non-tribals to form plain-based districts. Similarly, the tribals from Kothaguda and Gangaram mandals wanted to be part of Mulugu district. Seven mandals, part of tribal demanded Bhadrachalam district, were ceded to the plain areas/non-tribal dominated districts. The tribals were seeking reunion of these mandals to reclaim their territorial identity, sustain their social connections, and protect their economic and political interests. Nonetheless, the non-tribals from the above-mentioned ceded mandals opposed being part of tribal predominant districts and wanted to be part of the plain/non-tribal dominated district in order to protect their social and economic interests, secure political opportunities and to be free from restrictions imposed by Scheduled Areas regulations.

The ruling party preferred demographically larger and composite towns to accommodate diverse social and political interests. This is reflected in the selection of Asifabad and Adilabad towns, which are relatively larger towns than Utnoor. Similarly, Mulugu is a bigger town than Eturunagaram. Likewise, Kothagudem town is bigger than Bhadrachalam and Mahabubabad is the largest town in the district. The towns selected for headquarters play significant role in shaping the districts' symbolic identity. The non-tribals and tribals sought both symbolic identity and protection of their interests. The non-tribals believe and claim that when district headquarters are located in the plain areas, they represent the composite character of the districts. Unlike the non-tribals, tribals demand that selection of district headquarters should reflect tribal characters especially when it is done for tribal predominant districts. These competing claims/demands underline the interests of different social groups in the new districts.

Even as tribal communities negotiate their demand for tribal districts with the government, it gives space to local MLAs to maneuver the larger claims and communities' interests in ways which serve their political interests. When MLAs or public representatives do this they often align with the interests of the government or ruling party. The government claims that the interests of all sections have been accommodated. In these contexts, the tribal representatives and the ruling party leaders consider that the formation of the new districts recognise tribal identities and accommodate their demands.

Nevertheless, most tribals fear that the demographic change that stemmed from re-drawing of district borders would be detrimental to the tribals. There is a predominant fear among the tribals that including tribal areas into plain areas dominated district, and selecting towns as headquarters from plain areas would change tribal areas' legal and symbolic identity. As a corollary, the tribals feel they would be assimilated and further marginalised in the new districts. The tribals perceive that these are deliberate attempts to create borders in tribal areas to fulfil the interest of the dominant sections and the ruling elites in ways which are more amenable to control land, resources, and forests in the tribal areas. Though the tribal communities demand new districts to facilitate their social security, culture and land rights, resources, development and policy attention, the current borders are shaped by political exigencies and selective accommodation of the interest of tribals and non-tribals. In the case of tribal areas of erstwhile Adilabad district, selecting towns from plain areas and splitting of tribal areas increased tribals' dependency on the non-tribals. These in turn create barriers in the projects of decentralisation and self-governance. The tribals feel that dividing them through selective drawing of district borders and selection of towns as headquarters have aided the non-tribals' undeclared projects of 'internal colonialism' and 'cultural imperialism' that robs their collective spatial and political identity consolidation. Thus, the drawing of district borders has two drawbacks: First, it pre-empts tribal territory by dissecting their traditional territory and making it part of the plain territory. Second, it also pre-empts the challenges to the dominant culture and political attributes. The tribals contend that the TRS and its leaders did not support tribals' districts demand to pander to the non-tribals and to protect their interests. In other words, while the preferred demands of the non-tribals were considered, tribals' long-standing demands for tribal districts was ignored and got hijacked by electoral motives and resource needs.

Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts were formed because of the ability of community leaders to mobilise and pursue the demand as their political interests were allied. In contrast, Utnoor and Bhadrachalam towns lacked similar political support by the elected representatives and the non-tribals. As a result, these towns were not considered as district headquarters and were included in other districts. Thus, the study underlines that social imperative also played a crucial role in drawing borders and selecting district headquarters.

Drawing district borders becomes attractive for leaders and parties as it offers them the political opportunity to consolidate their positions and accommodate various social interests. The parallel concerns for revenue collection, resource development and infrastructure are also important drivers of drawing districts border change. Against this backdrop, leaders have furthered their economic objectives by drawing new district borders while excluding some tribal areas and selecting towns from plain areas for district headquarters. The predominantly tribal mandals with resource concentration have been ceded to plain areas-dominated districts. The concentration of natural resources in tribal areas also influenced the merging of tribal areas into plain areas district. Towns such as Asifabad, Kothagudem, Mulugu, and Mahabubabad, which are located in plain areas, were selected as district headquarters for districts predominantly formed with tribal areas. This study demonstrates that the location of towns plays a decisive role in selecting them as district headquarters. Under this rubric while Mahabubabad which is located in the plain area and which is dominated by the non-tribals is selected as a district headquarter, the towns of Eturunagaram, Utnoor and Bhadrachalam, demanded by tribal organizations, lose out in the selection process as they are geographically located in Scheduled/tribal/forest areas.

A plausible explanation given for this is that towns located in the plain areas are better positioned to attract capital investments and infrastructure than the towns in tribal areas. Selecting towns located in tribal areas are obviously not favoured by the non-tribals as the restrictive laws which protect tribal rights do not allow the former to buy and sell lands in these areas. Moreover, with the development of infrastructure and markets in the newly created headquarter towns, the state would receive more resources through taxes earned from land transactions and market and infrastructure developments. The stand of parties and leaders, social groups, and the location of resources play a vital role in the accommodation or exclusion of tribal areas and selection of towns as headquarter for the new districts.

The ruling party leaders and government officials invoked administrative rationale from time to time to create new districts. The bifurcation of Khammam district was justified on the ground that both the newly created districts cover five assembly constituencies. The same rationale was used to justify the division of Adilabad district even as two assembly constituencies were contained in each district. Likewise, Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts

formation was supported on the ground of distance from headquarters, and also on pretext that the new districts accommodate the long pending demands of tribals and backward areas.

The borders of newly created districts and selection of towns for district headquarters recast the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation. In the former Adilabad district, the tribals demanded Utnoor district comprising contiguous tribal predominant/ ITDA mandals, or the three ST reserved constituencies of Asifabad, Khanapur and Boath. However, four new districts were created in Adilabad district without considering the tribal demanded Utnoor district. The political and social dynamics at the district level have influenced the way in which the tribal areas are demarcated. This explains why new district borders do not always correspond with traditional tribal territory. It is against this backdrop that the tribals expressed their dismay over the adverse implications that re-drawing district border have on their territorial integrity which often ruptured their traditional socio-political ties. Nevertheless, the new districts provide new sites of forging belonging and exclusion which are amenable to new forms of socio-political mobilisations. It is precisely here that tribal communities assert and reclaim their identity in the newly formed Asifabad and Adilabad districts. The ruling party leaders created four districts, defended the new borders and headquarter and recognition of tribal territory, particularly with the formation of Asifabad and Adilabad districts.

In the erstwhile Khammam district, the tribals demanded a district consisting of predominant tribal mandals, which also covers five ST reserved constituencies—Bhadrachalam, Pinapaka, Aswaraopeta, Yellandu, and Wyr, and with Bhadrachalam town as district headquarters. These areas cover half of the eastern part of the composite Khammam district. The government has divided the erstwhile district into two districts while merging four mandals in other new districts—Mahabubabad and Jayashanker Bhupalapally. The eastern part of the erstwhile Khammam is placed under the Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district and the western parts form new Khammam district. Thus, naturally, the Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district covers major tribal areas. However, the tribal demanded Bhadrachalam town was not selected as headquarters for the district. Instead Kothagudem town which is located in the plain areas was made as headquarters. Interestingly, the contiguous seven mandals ceded to other districts consisted of predominant tribal areas and were part of the tribal demanded district. Here too, the political interests of the ruling party and influence of social groups and

the state' need for resources played crucial roles in shaping the new district borders and headquarters. The tribals from excluded mandals demand reunification with the new districts formed with the majority tribal areas. Nevertheless, in terms of demography, symbolic identification, and political representations, the new Bhadradri-Kothagudem district has relatively leveraged the position of the tribals.

The Koyas and the Lambadas were the predominant tribal communities in the erstwhile Warangal district. The Koyas demanded Eturunagaram/Mulugu district, and the Lambadas demanded Mahabubabad district to ensure predominance of each tribe. Though the government considered the Mahabubabad district, Eturunagaram areas were merged into the newly created Jayashanker-Bhupalapally district in 2016. However, due to the sustained political mobilisation, the Mulugu district was created for the Koyas predominant areas in 2019. With the formation of Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts, the Koyas and Lambadas emerged as significant groups in the new districts.

Despite ceding of tribal predominated mandals to the plain areas dominated districts, Bhadradri-Kothagudem, Mulugu, Asifabad, Adilabad and Mahabubabad districts were formed with majority tribal areas. In these districts, the demographic strength of tribal communities within has increased compared to former districts. The new districts provide tribals a necessary launching pad to secure their political and social interests and provide them economic opportunities. Since identity is a fulcrum in governing tribal areas, increasing their demographic strength in new district leverage the identity position. These are some of the positive developments which became increasingly visible after the formation of these districts.

However, new district borders adversely impact contiguous ST reserved constituencies in other places. After redrawing district borders while the entire Baath constituency comes in Adilabad district, Asifabad constituency comes in Asifabad district except for Narnoor mandal. The Khanapur constituency, whose areas overlap with the Kawal Tiger reserve and forest reserve and are rich in resources, was dissected into three districts. Likewise, in the former Khammam district, Pinapaka and Aswaraopeta constituencies are entirely placed in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district. But the two mandals of Bhadrachalam,

three each of Wyrandand Yellandu constituencies, have been merged in other districts, contrary to the tribal demands. Similarly, the two mandals of Mulugu constituency i.e., Gangarama and Kothaguda have been merged in Mahabubabad districts. The respondents of this expressed their anxieties that dividing tribal constituencies into different districts is likely to alter the reservation of constituencies for STs in the next round of delimitation of constituencies.

The state-provided resources and institutions define the contours of tribal cultural and redistributive politics. Borders change resulted not only in fissures of the movement for demanding district which are mediated by politically expedited accommodation, it also unleashes intense competition among communities for distinctive recognition of their identities, representation in public institutions in the new districts, and access to state resources. The communities confined in new districts strive to mobilise their identity, based on these new borders. These mobilisations harness their simmering difference and aim to establish their dominance in the district. For instance, the mobilisations of the Gonds in Asifabad, Koyas in Mulugu and Bhadradri-Kothagudem district, and Lambadas in Mahabubabad district bear these out. The Gonds and Lambadas compete in the newly formed Adilabad district. The new districts have produced new socio-political bonding among the communities whereby they seek symbolic identity recognition, representation, and welfare and developmental benefits from the state. There is no doubt that major communities such as the Koyas, Lambadas, and Gonds have benefited and increased their sphere of influence in the new districts. But minor communities such as Kolams, Thotis, Andhs, Pradhans, Naikpods, Kondareddies, and others continue to be under-represented within the new districts. The minor tribal groups feel deprived of the material benefits and identity security that new districts offer as the prominent tribal groups take away a larger share.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to expect that creating new districts would protect tribals' identity and secure their material interests as the tribals lack 'identity preserving powers over land resources' within the new districts (Hausing, 2021). The tribals seek to establish their power on land, resources, and other aspects, which give them a sense of self-governance. Therefore, the demand for Tribal Autonomous District Council (TADC) resonates very well in the newly formed areas of Bhadradri-Kothagudem, Mulugu, and

Asifabad districts. The Sixth Schedule type of model would provide the TADC to enforce protective laws and self-governance in the tribal areas. In Mahabubabad, tribals have been demanding recognition of their areas as Scheduled areas.

The whole process of forming new districts for decentralisation and development owed a great deal to participation and cultural recognition. The tribals envisioned that districts border change would be endowed with such decentralisation, ensuring tribal participation and identity recognition wherein district borders overlap with their areas. But it must be noted that the decentralisation and developmental rhetorics were deployed to fulfill several intertwined socio-political and economic interests. It is against this grain that Telangana government's initial rationale for recognising regional specificities and exception to the tribal areas should be weighed objectively as they are apparently not driven by politically neutral objectives.

In this sense, TRS's decision to have more districts may be seen as driven by pragmatic considerations rather than as a rationally driven decentralisation exercise. Indeed, the party's strategies were to facilitate political patronage and consolidate social base by accepting the demands of district-level leaders who seek political credit and consolidation by creating new districts. Districts creation and selection of new district borders have been coordinated political affairs between the state ruling elites and tribal representatives and leaders in the tribal areas. Though this whole process is marked by a clientelistic relationship between the TRS party leader and district level tribal leaders, it also provides certain agency and representation to the tribal representatives based on unequal and hierarchal relationship which marks other forms of transactional relationships. Therefore, the drawing of new district borders and the selection of towns for district headquarters were driven by the convergence of strategic interests of political leaders and parties, resources concerns, development, and the imperative of social groups' accommodation.

In this process, the demand of the tribal for districts were coopted and subjected to the dynamics of political interest of their representatives, party leaders and ruling elites. There was a fusion of the tribal community identity and political interest in the accommodation process. This marriage took place based on the political expediency of the ruling party, district-level leaders, and communities' interests. This study highlights that the politics of

recognition, redistribution and representation claims have been used to carve out borders. Yet, various actors, interests, and institutions, have also shaped re-drawing district borders. Tribal identity formation and deployment of identity politics involves a dual process of assertion and acquiescence. From more pragmatic concerns, the assertion and acquiescence of tribals will serve their economic, political, and cultural interests. This argument has implications beyond the conventional binary explanations of state versus tribals.

The creation of smaller administrative and political units in decentralized political systems is not always based on the common good, but it is a profoundly political process which serves multiple interests. At play here is the intense interaction, exchange, bargain and negotiation of various state and non-state actors (tribal representatives, community leaders, party leaders) in redefining the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation in as much as they attempt to redefine the terms of controlling tribal areas and shape district borders change and select district headquarters. This underscores that understanding the formation of districts in India needs to be looked from a complex convergence of strategic interests of the ruling party, district levels leaders and tribal representatives, and organizations.

With the formation of new districts such as Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem, Mulugu, Mahabubabad, Asifabad, and Adilabad, the tribal communities' demographic strength and representation have increased within the new districts. The government's benevolent attitude towards the tribals especially regarding tribal development and welfare contradicts what the tribals envisage for themselves the terms of recognition and exercise of their agency through self-governance. The tribal communities have been challenging the benevolent or paternalistic attitude of the government by asserting the politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation and trying to fulfill their long-pending demands of *mavana temava raj* (in our village, our rule) and *hamar gadem hamar raj* (in our areas our rule) in the new districts.

This study demonstrates that the tribal communities in Telangana had engaged in a long-drawn historical struggle and larger identity claims to demand new districts for themselves. The findings presented in this study indicate that though the claims are of collective nature, individual actors drawn from indigenous and exogenous communities have

played a crucial role in shaping districts border change and in reconfiguring tribal politics. Thus, territorialising district units for decentralisation and ethnic accommodation is a complex process. Forming units and accommodating the demands of the tribals depends on the socio-political contexts and the complex strategic interest that state, district level political elites, tribal representatives and leaders espouse for themselves. In the ultimate analysis, political commitment to re-drawing borders on the ground of decentralisation is contingent on complex factors which include, among others, electoral calculations, political competition, and political networks. These in turn are tailored to cater to the needs and interests of groups/communities, while being amenable to state's control of resources and revenue generation. Therefore, the convergence of different administrative, socio-political and economic interests has driven the formation of new districts in Telangana and beyond.

We argue in this study that though there is dissatisfaction over the selection of towns as district headquarters and exclusion of contiguous tribal mandals from tribal predominant district to non-tribal dominated districts, tribal communities' demographic strength has comparatively increased in newly formed Asifabad, Adilabad, Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem, Mulugu and Mahabubabad districts that reconfigures the tribal politics of recognition, redistribution and representation. The new districts also resulted in the 'competition among unequals' whereby the communities started asserting and making identity claims to leverage their positions to seek symbolic identity recognition, representation and control over the state and natural resources.

One of the limitations of this study is its limited analytical and temporal focus on tribal areas of Telangana during 2016 and 2019. Insights gathered from state-specific study of this kind provide helpful insights into the local dynamics of the politics of recognition, redistribution and representation yet they are not sufficient to illuminate our understanding of how these may have important bearings at the meso and macro levels. Future research endeavours may compensate this obvious limitation by undertaking comparative case studies of borders change at the district, state and national levels.

Although our research observations and findings are grounded in specific areas, namely in the tribal areas of Telangana, their significance is by no means limited. We have

tried to locate them in the larger politics of territorialisation of political units and the role of identity politics in crafting federal/decentralised institution in deeply divided societies. We have highlighted how the crafting of federal/decentralised institutions i.e., formation of political and administrative are influenced by construction of nationalities/identities, and multiple factors such as strategic political interests, economic concerns and accommodation of interest of social groups. We underlined that designing district institution not only help in accommodating territorially concentrated tribal communities, but it also leverages their claim for the recognition, redistribution and representation of their identities on the one hand, and their moral and political claims on the other hand. In sum, this study is expected to contribute to our understanding of the ‘paradox’ of liberal democracies, that is, the compatibility or incompatibility between group identities and crafting of federal institutions in liberal democracies at the grassroots level.

This analytical focus of this study is limited only to three districts in the state of Telangana. Future research may build on and extend the scope of their study in order to have a larger sample of case study in India. This would enable a more sophisticated comparative study of districts border change in India and beyond. A set of possible study areas can be identified and suggested for future research to overcome the limitations of this study. These are as follows:

- The number of new districts has increased in the Indian states. In this background, a comparative study could be conducted with analytical focus on two or more states. This will be very helpful in making a comparative understanding of the complex factors which drive drawing of district borders/intra-state borders change and how this help accommodate people’s demands and aspirations and crafting of democratic institutions in decentralized structure. For instance, a comparative study of the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Telangana states may be taken up.
- A comprehensive study could be conducted to examine the role of political parties in governance and politics at the district level.
- Research can be carried out to understand the correlation between the formation of new districts, people’s participation and effectiveness/efficiency of governance in decentralised political systems.

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Atram Suguna, (Gond women), President of Adivasi Mahila Sangham, interviewed at Indravelli in Adilabad District on 20 April 2019.

Atram Bhujang Rao, (Gond), Human rights activist, interviewed at Indravelli in Adilabad District on 20 April 2019.

Banoth Ramarao, (Lambada), Adilabad District President of Lambada Hakkula Porata Samithi (LHPS), interviewed at Utnoor on 11 May 2019.

B. Jagan, (Lambada), Utnoor mandal President of Nagara Bheri, Interviewed at Utnoor in Adilabad District, on 12 May 2019.

Chandulal Ajmera, (Lambada), former Tribal Welfare Minister and MLA of Mulugu Constituency, interviewed at Mulugu on 4 June 2019.

CH. Dilesh, (Lambada), Utnoor Mandal President of Nagara Bheri, interviewed at Utnoor on 15 May 2019.

Chode Chalapathi, (Koya), activist, interviewed at Bhadrachalam in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem District on 29 May 2019.

D. Malikarjun, (non-tribal- BC), activist, interviewed at Mulugu on 3 June 2019.

Dubbakatla Raju (Koya), AHPS leader, Interviewed at Mulugu, 4 June 2019.

G.K. Ramesh (non-tribal-BC), Interviewed at Ichchoda in Adilabad district on 27 April 2019

Harka Vasanth Rao, (Gond), PESA Coordinator of Asifabad District and Adivasi Sangshema Parishad (ASP) leader, interviewed at Asifabad on 26 April 2019.

Joga Pullaiah (Naikpod), a leader Naipod Sangam, interviewed at Bhadrachalam on 26 May 2019.

K. Anil (Koya) interviewed at Bhadrachalam in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district on 27 May 2019.

Kanaka Lakker Rao, (Gond), Chairman of ITDA Advisory Committee, Utnoor, Interviewed at Utnoor on 19 April 2019.

Kanaka Venkatesh (Gond), Associated with AHPS and president of Haimendorf Youth Association, interviewed at Marlavai in Asifabad district, 21 April 2019

Komuram Prabhakar (Koya), leader of AHPS, interviewed at Eturunagaram in Mulugu district on 3 June 2019.

Kova Laxmi (Koya women), ZP Chairman of Asifabad district and former MLA of Assifabad constituency, interviewed at Asifabad on 26 April 2019.

Kudametha Tirupathi, (Gond), Mancherla District President of AHPS, interviewed at Mancherla, 23 April 2019.

Kusum Sudheer, (Koya), interviewed at Enkoor mandal in Khammam district on 2 June 2019.

Madavi Hanmathu (Gond), interviewed at Singaraipeta in Mancherla district, 17 April 2019.

Madavi Manik Rao, (Kolam) District president of Kolam Sangham, interviewed at Birsai Pet in Adilabad district on 12 May 2019.

Madavi Nehru, (Koya), ASP Coordinator of composite Khammam district, interviewed at Bhadrachalam on 25 May 2019.

Madavi Tagore, (Koya) a leader of AHPS, interviewed at Bhadrachalam in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district on 26 May 2019.

Mangam Mahesh, (Gond) leader of Adivasi Nirodyogula Sangham (ANS), interviewed at Keshlapur, in Adilabad district on 7 February 2018.

Marshakola Tirupathi, (Thoti) leader of Thoti Sangam, interviewed at Utnoor on 12 May 2019.

Muchcha Kavesh, (Koya), ASP President of Enkoor mandal in Khammam District, interviewed at Bhadrachalam in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district on 29 May 2019.

Murla Ramesh, (Kondareddy) a leader of Kondareddy Sangham, interviewed at Bhadrachalam on 25 May 2019.

Nenavath Ramdas, (Lambada), a leader of LHPS, interviewed at Utnoor in Adilabad district on 11 May 2019.

P. Nagender, (Naikpod), District President of Naikpod Sangam, interviewed at Utnoor in Adilabad district on 12 May 2019.

Paparao (Koya) Kannaigudem mandal president of AHPS, interviewed at Kannaigudem in Mulugu district on 3 June 2019

Pendur Rajesh, a Koya, interviewed at Tadvai in Mulugu district on 3 June 2019.

PodemVeeraiah, (Koya) MLA of Bhadrachalam constituency and former MLA of Mulugu constituency, interviewed at Bhadrachalam district on 31 May 2019.

Ponem Srinivas, (Koya), state president of Adivasi Sangshema Parishad (ASP), interviewed at Bayyaram in Mahabubabad district, on 4 June 2019.

Rathod Bapurao, (Lambada), Boath constituency MLA, interviewed at Adilabad on 22 April 2019.

Rathod Rameesh, (Lambada), Ex MP & MLA, interviewed on 23 April 2019 at Utnoor, in Adilabad district.

Ravinder Naik, (Lambada) a leader of LHPS, interviewed at Eturunagaram on 4 June 2019.

Rega Naresh, (Koya), ASP leader, interviewed at Mulugu in Mulugu district on 4 June 2019.

Rekha Naik, (Lambada women), Asifabad constituency MLA, personal communication on 27 April 2019.

Danasari Anasuya (popularly known as Seethakka), (Koya women), Mulugu MLA, personal communication on 5 June 2019.

Shankar Naik (Lambada), MLA of Mahabubabad Constituency, interviewed at Mahabubabad on Mulugu on 4 June 2019.

Sidam Bheem Rao (Gond), a member of traditional council, interviewed at Indravelli in Adilabad district on 20 April 2019.

Sonde Veeraiah, State convener of Girijana Samkshema Parishath (GSP), interviewed at Bhadrachalam, on 26 May 2019.

Taral Balakumar, (Lambada) member of Girijana Sangham (GS), interviewed at Guduru mandal, in Mahabubabad district on 4 June 2019.

Vinkare Prakash, (non-tribal-SC), a member of Agency SC, ST, BC and Minority Aikya Vedika, interviewed at Adilabad on 19 April 2019.

Vedama Bojju, (Gond), PESA Coordinator of Adilabad district, and State General Secretary of Adivasi Gondwana Students Organisation (AGSO), interviewed at Indravelli on 20 April 2019.

Vuyika Ramchander, (Koya), AHPS leader of Venkatapuram mandal, interviewed at Mulugu on 4 June 2019.

Informal Group Discussion conducted in Dongapalli, a Kolam village, in Jannarammandal in Mancherial district on 17 April 2019.

Informal Group Discussion conducted in Laxmipur, a Naikpod village, Kaddam mandal in Nirmal district on 18 April 2019.

Informal Group Discussion conducted with few tribal women of Alinagar village in Jannaram mandal in Mancherial district on 17 April 2019.

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2018 Telangana Assembly Election Results in ST reserved Constituencies

S.No.	Constituency Name	Party	Candidate Name	Community
1	Asifabad	Congress	Atram Sakku	Gond
2	Boath	TRS	Rathod Bapurao	Lambada
3	Khanapur	TRS	Ajmera Rekha Naik	Lambada
4	Mulugu	Congress	Dansari Anasuya	Koya
5	Bhadrachalam	Congress	Podem Veeraiah	Koya
6	Wyra	Independent	Lavudya Ramulu	Lambada
7	Yellandu	Congress	Haripriya Banoth	Lambada
8	Aswaraopeta	TDP	Mecha Nageswara Rao	Koya
9	Pinapaka	Congress	Kantha Rao Rega	Koya
10	Devarakonda	TRS	Ravindra Kumar Ramavath	Lambada
11	Mahabubabad	TRS	Banoth Shankar Nayak	Lambada
12	Dornakal	TRS	D. S. Redya Naik	Lambada

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Intra-State Border Change: Dynamics of the Politics of Recognition, Redistribution and Representation in Tribal Areas of Telangana

by Jadhav Prathap Singh

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