

LINGUISTIC & ETHNIC IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF ANDHRA, PUNJAB & ASSAM

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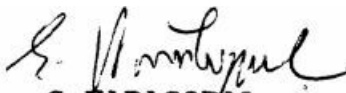
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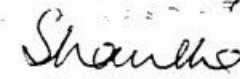
December 1996.

This is to certify that I, R.Radha Rani, have carried out the research work embodied in the present thesis under the guidance of Prof. G.Haragopal, for the full period prescribed under the Ph.D ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of Research Degree of any University.


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Unique has been the position of India in the contemporary world due to its multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature. However, it has been this very uniqueness which has given a number of 'hiccups' to policy makers and has consistently held centre-stage of social theorists. In view of its multiple identity, the task before the policy makers of organising the provincial units has remained never-ending and ever-growing. These identities are constantly in motion. The same identity cannot explain a phenomenon all the time. At any given point of time an identity emerges and asserts depending on the context or circumstances. This thesis calls for a deeper analysis to explain how the identities emerge, articulate, assert and change. It is this dilemma that this study seeks to comprehend. It seeks to focus on the various forms that demands for provincial units have assumed and subsequently the different forms that these very movements have assumed over the passage of time.

Ever since the advent of freedom, India, the land of many languages, has been a witness to linguistic-ethnic issues occupying considerable space in socio-cultural, economic and political domains. The linguistic factor, among the many factors, has been particularly predominant in the demarcation of State boundaries. In fact the saliency of the linguistic-ethnic factor can be gauged from debates over the status of India. In view of the persistent linguistic-ethnic conflicts, the common theme has

been that India is a nation-in-the-making or nation--in-the-becoming rather than a complete nation-State, Perhaps; "the principal impetus for linguistic states came as India's political participation deepened and became increasingly representative of a new post-independent generation of Indians whose habits of mind and valuations were deeply rooted in their own language and culture rather than in enlightened nationalism and internationalism".

As the initial nature of autonomy movements has been based on the linguistic-ethnic principle, this study seeks to examine the political processes associated with the linguistic and ethnic question. The context in which this question is being studied is the query which is repeatedly asked: what are the sections that are basically interested in such a formation? And what interests are gained and safeguarded by mobilising the people in support of such provinces. But it becomes difficult to comprehend that despite the demarcation of linguistic units, the rumblings over demands for newer provinces and thus a separate status has belied the liberal expectancy that the founding of linguistic-ethnic provinces would herald peace at last. So even as groups clamouring for a linguistic-ethnic entity have succeeded in attaining a separate status fresh demands of the ethnic and sub-regional identities in these very States have emerged. Thus there has been in motion a transmutation and transformation of identities.

Jannuzi, F.Tomasson: *India in Transition: Issues of Political Economy in a Plural Society* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1990) p.45.

This question can, perhaps be best understood when viewed from an eco-politico-socio cultural perspective. But is it purely the failure to link appropriate linkages with the overall techno-economic and socio-cultural milieu? Or more aptly, is it the adoption of suspicion and mistrust towards the federal units which can better explain the hurdles faced in greater integration? As one of the observers has aptly opined: "The diversities demanded more space in the form of autonomy and if they were pushed and squeezed-in the stridence at times was so intense as to crack if not break the mould". Since the turbid nature of the issue is more clearly manifested in the cases of Andhra, Punjab and Assam, an attempt to comparatively analyse the problem in these States is made.

Andhra Pradesh has perhaps the honour of being the first State to be carved on the linguistic basis in the post- Independence period. The Punjabis realised their goal only in 1966 in the last major phase of reorganisation after a long struggle. While Assam had to undergo some spruning or territorial fragmentation so that it could attain more homogeneity. Both Punjab and Assam faced serious apprehensions and were under direct focus during the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Assam managed to remain with the Indian mainland minus its Sylhet district but the erstwhile form of Punjab was split with the East Punjab being attached to India. But despite gaining their separate status newer demands of sub-regional and ethnic identities have asserted

²Phadnis, Urmila: *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990) p.30.

in these States. In the Punjab the problem has assumed the proportions of almost severance from the Union. But why was the linguistic-ethnic question inadequate to meet the challenges of the people. An attempt to analyse the hierarchised behaviour namely, the attitude of the Bengalis towards the Assamese, the Assamese vis-a-vis the tribals, Tamils versus the Telugus, Andhras towards the Telanganites, Punjabi Muslims versus Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus and the vice-versa. The factors contributing to the failure of the assimilation theory or more appropriately the reasons for the success of the politics of (diverse) identities in the case of India is sought to be enquired.

India: a single nation or multi-national State?

As language and ethnicity are considered to be important ingredients for constituting a nation, the question that invariably arises is whether India is a single nation or a multi-national State. In order to understand the question it is essential to know what exactly the terms 'nation' or 'Nationality', 'ethnic' denote.

The issue of language, ethnicity, and nationality are interconnected. The term ethnicity generally refers to conceptions of peoplehood. In common parlance, ethnic relates to a human group having racial, religious, linguistic and other traits in common. Weber believed ethnic groups to be those 'which entertain a subjective belief in their common descent. . . . regardless of whether an objective blood relationship exists'. It is thus primarily based on a myth of common ancestry,

which carries with it traits believed to be innate. Nationality on the other hand is conceived to be denoting "a group of persons speaking the same language and observing the same customs".³ For Rupert Emerson, nation is a single people, traditionally fixed on a well-defined territory speaking the same language and preferably a language all its own, possessing a distinctive culture and shaped to a common mould by many generations of shared historical experience.⁴

As such language which represents a distinguishing factor of nationality is an important determinant of national integration. "National Integration" has been defined as nothing but "the breakdown of sectarian group-existence of the traditional society and its supercession by the generalist loyalties and their commitment to the nation". A study group of the Royal Institute of International Affairs lists a number of factors that contribute to national integration: a common language, a common religion, a common racial origin, a common historical and geographical environment and a common will. But "a common language" the report underscored "constitutes one of the most unifying and integrating factors of nationality".⁶ Even J.S. Mill saw nation "as a portion of mankind united among themselves by

Hayes, Carlton J: *Essays on Nationalism* (New York, 1926) pp.4-5.

Emerson, Rubert: *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) p.102.

Majid, Akhtar: "Secularism and National Integration", in Pant, A.D & Gupta, S.K (ed): *Multi-Ethnicity and National Integration* (Allahabad: Vohra Publications, 1985) p.90.

For details see Chapter "Language and Nationality", in Ostrower, A: *Language, Law and Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965) p.50.

common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others and which make them cooperate with each other more willingly than with other people.....".⁷

India: a country or nation?

With this criterion in mind for a nation, many dismiss India to be a nation as it is 'a conglomeration of languages, cultures and races'. It is widely believed that India is certainly a country but not a nation because it meets the requirements of neither a common language nor a common culture. Nonetheless it is certainly a country which contains a number of emerging nationalities with different languages and cultures of their own.⁸ India is thus, called a multi-national State. However language alone does not constitute the badge of nationhood.⁹ In other words, the bonds which make people a nation are not necessarily ethnic and linguistic, although those are undoubtedly the most important factors. Rather as Stalin put: "A nation is a historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture".¹¹ So besides, a common language and a common historical experience,

⁷Cited from Mill's Chapter-16, *Representative Government* in Garner, J.W: *Political Science and Government* (Calcutta: The World Press Pvt. Ltd., 1951) p.107.

⁸Habib, Irfan: "Emergence of Nationalities", in Kurien, K.Mathew & Varughese, P.N (eds.): *Centre-State Relations* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1981) p.31.

⁹Karat, *op.cit.*, p.ix.

Garner, *op.cit.*, p.103.

¹¹From Stalin, J: *Marxism and the National Question*, p.79 in Ostrower, *op.cit.*, p.43.

another factor which can bring about the supposed oneness or unity is territory.

More so the very existence of an absolute interdependence between nationality and language stands suspect in the light of bi-lingual and multi-lingual societies. And generally it is not possible for a common language, hence a common nationality to coincide with a single ethnic territory as is clearly put forth by Fredrick Engels who held "No State borders coincide with the natural boundaries of a nationality that is with the boundaries of language". The maxim 'one people, one State', has thus throughout human history, been honoured most often in the breach. National and ethnic pluralism has been the rule, not the exception. Little wonder, most nations including India are plural societies.

How to distinguish ethnicity from nationality?

But the moot point is how do we distinguish ethnicity from nationality. This question all the more assumes significance in the present examination of autonomy in the case of Andhra, Punjab and Assam movements as these very movements popularly referred to as 'ethnic issues' may as well be called 'nationality problems'. "Nationality" as Deutsch understood, denoted "a community of people who have some characteristics which go to make a nation and who are striving for a measure of political, economic and cultural autonomy". Nationalism thus aims at autonomy in the complete form. An ethnic group, on the other hand, aims just at possessing special constitutional status entailing special rights

in a country, but never at outright sovereignty. Ethnic groups rightly called "pre-national"¹² have just provincial autonomy or sovereignty sans political one as their goal. However, ethnic separatist movements when fail to achieve or regain effective political, cultural and often economic control over their homeland within the rules of the system resort to separation and independence thus, converting ethnic into nationality movements. So an ethnic movement can be prevented from turning into a nationality one by conceding some space at the social, political and economic levels.

The linguistic-ethnic question; Indian context

In India, language - the important ingredient for constituting a nation - has been the subject of continued conflict among the States of the Indian Union. The history of modern India has been a witness to linguistic and ethnic issues occupying the forefront in the socio-cultural, economic and political domains.

Problem of the demand for linguistic provinces

A brief historical sketch

Contemporaneously, the problem of linguistic reorganisation was the logical offshoot of the prevalence of multiplicity of languages, but the problem was engineered by the British policy of the division of Bengal in 1905. In both pre and post-independence periods, state recognition itself has been a

¹²Phadnis, *op. cit.*, p, 35.

¹³Hardgrave, R.L (Jr): *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation* (Third Edition), (U.S.A: Harcourt Brace Jovanoich Inc., 1970) p.98.

critical factor in explaining and giving rise to ethnic and cultural movements.¹⁴

In the British period:

The provincial boundaries of the British regime in India were fixed primarily with an eye on 'administrative convenience'.¹⁵ An outcome of the policy was splitting of people belonging to a particular linguistic group into separate provinces or to bring people belonging to different linguistic groups into one entity. Hence it has been generally believed that in carving out provinces the British were guided by imperial considerations of administrative convenience rather than the linguistic principle. But the success of the policy should be traced more to the Indian society with its multiple embedded identities which provided the space for such a strategy. Besides the other things, this helped the British to keep the Indian people divided and to weaken their unity in their fight for Independence. Subsequently in the Indian camp, it came to be firmly believed that the progress of a people united by bonds of language would be hindered by their being placed under different administrations. Reasoning on similar lines, persistent demands for linguistic provinces emanated from various quarters of the country.

The movement for linguistic provinces which emanated during the colonial period witnessed a number of committees, British as well as Indian to look into the issue of basing provinces on

¹⁴Brass, Paul R: *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1990) p.130.

¹⁵Karat, *op. cit.*, p.31.

linguistic and ethnic ties. The first Committee asked to look into the question was the Montague-Chelmsford Committee.

Montague-Chelmsford Committee:

The Committee discussed a resolution on February 6th, 1918 passed by B.N.Sharma, President of the first Andhra Conference recommending to the Governor General-in-Council:

"the redistribution of provincial areas on language basis wherever and to the extent possible especially where the people speaking a distinct language and sufficiently large in number desire such a change", (pp.25-41).

The response to the resolution was not so warm. But despite the resolution having failed to make any dent did help in making the authorities recognise the principle underlying it.

The Montford Report, 1918:

The report on the Indian Constitutional Reforms, popularly known as the Montford Report published in July 1918 recognised that the then map of British India was *"shaped....with little regard to natural affinities or wishes of the people"* (para 39). The committee concluded linguistic reorganisation of States as impractical, but was in favour of small homogeneous States (para 246). At the same time, however the committee opined that *"it is also a strong argument in favour of linguistic and racial units that by making it possible to conduct the business of the legislatures in the vernacular they would contribute to draw into its arena of public affairs men not acquainted with English"*.

But since this recommendation clearly contradicted the basic premise of colonial rule 'English alone could be the language of the Government; nobody rules in the colonised tongue' it was never followed up.¹⁶

Indian Statutory Commission:

The linguistic issue found a place again in the Indian Statutory Committee appointed to review the working of the Government of India Act, 1919. The Chairman of the Commission, Simon had 'great natural sympathy' with the body of the people who felt their own race and language were very important to them. Hence, expectedly the report of the Commission published in May 1930, recognised though indirectly the strength of the demand for linguistic provinces. It observed:

"The cases of Orissa and Sind, however are only prominent examples of a class of question which arises at many points when provincial boundaries are considered. These boundaries, as a rule, have none of the characteristic of a natural frontier. ... (p. 26) . We therefore propose that the Government of India should set up a Boundaries Commission.... which would investigate the main cases in which provincial readjustment seems called for and work out a scheme with a view to seeing how far agreement is possible.¹⁷

Thus even while admitting the force of the linguistic principle, the Indian Statutory Commission did not commit itself to this

¹⁶Karat, *op. cit.* , p. 63.

¹⁷Cited in Rao, K.V.Narayan: *The Emergence of Andhra Pradesh* (Bombay Popular Prakashan, 1973) pp.94-95 from *Indian Statutory Commission* (Vol-II, p.26).

principle of provincial redistribution.

Formation of Orissa: Floodgates for linguistic provinces opened?

A brief sketch of the formation of Orissa, the first linguistic State in the British period has been made. But a separate province of Orissa based on the linguistic principle was created in 1936, needless to add after a long struggle. Initially, efforts for the creation of a separate province of Orissa started from the beginning of the present century although it was not until the 1920s that the problem could gain some official recognition.

In 1927, the Simon Commission after going into the issue recognised that:

"The province of Bihar and Orissa, constituted in 1912 is the most artificial unit of all Indian provinces. It was formed by bringing under a single administration three areas which differ markedly not only in physical features but in many . . . racial, linguistic and cultural characteristics".¹⁸ **18**

The issue was raised at the first Round Table Conference held in 1930 at London by the Raja of Parlakhemundi who emphatically stated: *"the ideal of an All-India federation is meaningless to the Oriyas unless they get a separate province. Formation of a separate province is a life-and-death problem to us"*.¹⁹ **19**

¹⁸ Pattanayak, A.K: "The Formation of the Province of Orissa", in Jena, B.B & Baral, J.K (ed) : *Government and Politics in Orissa* (Lucknow: Print House (India), 1988) p.15.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Government of India thereby constituted an Orissa Boundary Committee in 1931 under the Chairmanship of Samuel O' Donnell. The Government of India (Constitution of Orissa) Order 1936 was issued creating a separate province of Orissa under the Governor within the federal scheme of the Government of India Act, 1935 thus inaugurating the new province of Orissa on April 1, 1936 making it the first linguistic State to be so created during the colonial times.

The inauguration of Orissa stimulated similar movements in several other parts of the country. Although the substance of the demand for linguistic states was politically developed by the second decade of this century they were not directed at the British but found expression in demands of the Congress and the expectation that this demand would be granted with the attainment of Independence. Little wonder the demand has been become a perpetual feature of the Congress Sessions.

The Issue of Linguistic Provinces: Congress Party's Stand
Partition of Bengal:

"As early as 1905 the Congress Party's support for the linguistic-nationality principle was all-clear when it opposed the partition of Bengal and then extended its support to its annulment in 1911. Its stand became even more clear and strong when it adopted this very principle (i.e.) the linguistic basis for constituting the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee, even

before the actual division of Bihar and Bengal in 1908.²⁰ It has been generally believed that the partition of Bengal paved the way for the Congress' support to the linguistic principle, since the British Government's intention of destroying the solidarity of the Bengali-speaking people and thereby undermine the national movement in Bengal which was based on this very solidarity became quite obvious.

Assam's versus Sylhet case:

In continuance with its belief in 'linguistic compactness principle', it even supported the Sylhet province case in which it was demanded that *Sylhet be made a part of Bengal so that Assam might be wholly more homogeneous and linguistically compact* and Sylhet on its part could retain its cultural identity and long-historical association with Bengal. In fact the idea of forming administrative units viz., provinces to coincide with linguistic boundaries became a potent agitational theme in the hands of Gandhi under whose inspiration the Congress organised itself into linguistic province ignoring the then existing provincial boundaries. Needless to say that in fact it was the adoption of the principle of linguistic compactness which constituted a turning point for the Congress, to quote Nehru, "*it transformed the Congress from a middle class assembly to a mass organisation which helped the Congress to build up its strength deriving support from different regions*".²¹

²⁰Karat, op. cit., p.32.

²¹Ghose, Shankar: *Political Ideas and Movements in India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1975) p.200.

Congress sessions:

It has been generally maintained that the Congress Party's linguistic policy between 1905 and 1920 has not been clear and pronounced despite its support to the principle. Initially the principle made its first official appearance in the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1917 as a result of the Andhradesa movement begun in 1913. But even before the Calcutta session the issue was raised in 1915 when P. Sitaramayya, an Andhrite tried to move a resolution in favour of that principle. But the resolution met with no success.²² The issue was raised by the Andhras again in the Lucknow 1916 session of the Congress, but in vain, as this time also it failed to gather mass support.

It was however, in the Calcutta session of 1917 that the issue saw light, as to quote Sitaramayya "the subject was hotly contested in the Subjects Committee. Even Gandhi thought that the question might wait....but Tilak saw the point, namely the linguistic provinces were an essential prerequisite for provincial autonomy. The subject held the field for over two hours in Calcutta and was ultimately accepted at 10.14 p.m".²³ The principle gained a concrete shape only in 1920 at the Nagpur session when the Congress accepted it for the first time in principle. From then onwards the demand for linguistic provinces became 'a political cry'. It was at that session that a resolution was drawn up with a scheme for the division of the country on the linguistic basis. And in 1921 the Congress went

²²*Ibid*, p.199.

²³**Sitaramayya, Pattabhi:** *History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1935)* p.147 cited in Ghose, Shankar, *op cit.*, pp.199-200.

ahead in establishing provincial committees based on language.

All **Parties** Conference:

The question of linguistic reorganisation surfaced in 1928 when an All-Parties Conference constituted a small committee with Pandit Nehru as Chairman to frame a Constitution for India. While endorsing the demand for linguistic provinces, the committee admitted that the present distribution of Indian provinces has no *rational basis* and believed that its distribution was merely due to accident and circumstances attending the growth of British power in India.

Hence on the whole the present distribution has little to do with geographical, historical, economic and linguistic reasons. Even from a purely administrative point of view it has met with little success. The committee did not merely stop by stating that the existing distribution of provincial boundaries has no basis. It rather went to the extent of lending its support for their redistribution on the linguistic basis and concluded that the two most important considerations in rearranging the provinces should be (i) *the linguistic principle* and (ii) *the wishes of the people*.

Ever since the endorsement of the linguistic principle by the Nehru Report in 1928, the Congress has stood in firm faith of the principle. It reiterated its faith in this policy at Calcutta in 1937 and at Wardha, the following year. Even on the eve of Independence in its election manifesto of 1945-46, the Congress commitment to the principle was conspicuous.

Post-Independence Era:

However, with the attainment of freedom and a change of leadership from the British to the native hands; the Congress developed cold feet with regard to the policy. The Indian leaders started expressing the fear that demarcation of provinces on such a basis (like linguistic) would foster the growth of sub-nationalism in the reorganised States and could add to the process of partitions whereas even the one that had taken place has been very painful and cruel. They felt the only way of maintaining solidarity was to give a commanding position to the Centre in the new set-up. Quite ironically therefore the stand taken by the Indian leaders with regard to the reorganisation of provinces assumed a similar tone as that adopted by the British colonialists during their regime. Perhaps the predominance of the industrialists over the peasantry could account for the leaders losing sudden faith in the linguistic demand since the industrialists were more keen to exploit the labour and economic resources of a wider periphery than be confined to the local market. But the Congress probably extended its support to such a policy during the national movement in order to make the struggle broad-based as all nationalities irrespective of their nationality would extend their whole-hearted support to the goal of the national independence in the fond hope that they can achieve their separate provinces soon after gaining freedom. Moreover it is likely that the magnitude of the problem that this conception involved did not become manifest to the Indian leaders prior to independence, as the entire focus of the Congress

movement was on gaining freedom from the British.²⁴ But in the post-independence era though the Congress maneuvered to avoid the whole issue, it was in vain as the movement for linguistic provinces strong before independence became irresistible after its achievement.

Linguistic Provinces Commission:

In order to pacify the persistent demands for linguistic states, a Linguistic Provinces Commission, the first such Commission in the post-Independence phase, under the Chairmanship of S.K.Dar, a retired Judge of the Allahabad High Court, and other members, Dr. Pannalal and Jagat Narayan Lal was set-up on June 14, 1948 during the formation of the Constituent Assembly to examine the question. The terms of reference of the Commission were :

- 1) What provinces, if any should be created and what broadly should be their boundaries. . . . ?
- 2) What should be the administrative, financial and other consequences in each province?
- 3) What would be the administrative consequences in the adjoining territories.²⁵

In its report released on December 13, 1948 the Commission came out strongly against the formation of linguistic provinces. Even while recognising the clashes, conflicts and grievances in the provinces, it came out strongly against the formation of

²⁴Despande, Madhav M: "Nation and Region: A Socio-Linguistic Perspective on Maharashtra", in Israel, Milton (ed): *National Unity: The South Asian Experience* (New Delhi: Promilla & Co. Publishers, 1983) p.131.

²⁵Rao, K.V.Narayan, *op.cit.*, p.204.

linguistic provinces. The Indian leaders thus mouthed precisely the same premise, as regards the provincial boundaries as that, with which they fought vehemently against the British colonialists. In fact the Commission members emphatically maintained *"if the intention was to create sub-nations in India there could not be a better way of doing it than by linguistic provinces"*. The Commission held that *"after sometime when the future of the Indian states has been more clearly determined and veil-established some of the existing provinces should be reformed. But they make it quite clear that such reformation shall not be based upon linguistic considerations (but) rather upon administrative convenience."*²⁶

JVP Committee

The Assembly perhaps armed with the Dar report decided to follow any principle other than the linguistic while organising the States. But the report of the LPC resulted in strong protests and created discontent among sections of Congressmen especially from the non-Hindi areas who petitioned the working committee to reconsider the issue. The persistent demands for linguistic provinces pouring in from all over the country, necessitated the Congress to appoint yet another Committee at its Jaipur session in late 1948, which became popular as the JVP Committee, consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya to reconsider the report of the Dar Commission in the new political context.

²⁶Ibid, pp.208-209.

The JVP Committee proved to be a mile-stone in the linguistic policy for even though it did not endorse the linguistic policy completely made an exception with regard to Andhra by holding that *Andhra has a strong case* on the ground that it consisted of the largest compact area which was situated in one State. The Commission also pleaded for separate provinces for Mysore, Hyderabad and Travancore.

Formation of Andhra: Foundation of linguistic provinces laid

In the meantime the Andhras were becoming very agitated and their discontent over the issue was mounting. The turning point in the linguistic policy of the Congress came on December 15, 1952 with the passing away of Potti Sriramulu²⁷ on October 19, who went on a fast unto death demanding a separate province for Andhras. The death of Sriramulu engulfed the entire state in chaos and rioting leading to Nehru's much-awaited announcement on December 19 of the creation of a separate Andhra State with the undisputed Telugu districts excluding the city of Madras in the Lok Sabha. As a follow-up to the announcement a Committee under the Chairmanship of Justice K.N.Wanchoo, Chief Justice of Rajasthan High Court cropped-up, whose main task was to consider and report on the financial and other implications of the decision and the questions to be considered in implementing it. The D-Day finally arrived when on October 1, 1953 the Andhra State under the Chief Ministership of T.Prakasam was inaugurated by Nehru with Sanjeeva Reddy as the Deputy Chief Minister.

²⁷A brief biographical account of Sriramulu included in Rao, K.V.Narayan, op.cit., Appendix-III, pp.330-333.

Thus in a way it was the death of Sriramulu that paved the way for the formation of Andhra and speeded up the process of the linguistic reorganisation of India. The success of the Andhra struggle stimulated similar demands for reorganisation in other parts of the country. The Karnataka Sahitya Parishad demanded a Karnataka in 1954 and similarly the Kerala Sahitya Parishad gave a call for the realisation of Aikya Kerala, several movements were launched all over the country demanding separate linguistic provinces.

States Reorganisation Commission

The mass struggles unleashed in 1953 compelled the Central Government to appoint a States Reorganisation Commission to look afresh into the question of linguistic reorganisation of Indian provinces. The Commission consisting of Fazl Ali as Chairman and K.M.Panikkar agreed that '*linguistic homogeneity*' *provides the only rational basis for reconstructing the States* (p.46) after an examination of all aspects of the demand. The Commission accepted the linguistic principle in general but recommended rather reluctantly the formation of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Hyderabad, Rajasthan, Vidarbha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Bengal, Bombay and Jammu & Kashmir.²⁸ Although the Commission granted the wishes of the Malayalee-speaking and Kannada-speaking, the Punjabis bore the brunt of the commission as their demand was turned down and similarly the Commission did not agree to the demand for splitting Bombay into Gujarat and Maharashtra.

²⁸ **Karat, Prakash** op. cit., p.42.

States Reorganisation Act, 1956:

The States Reorganisation Act passed almost at the close of 1956 provided for a bilingual Bombay and a multilingual Hyderabad. The reactions to the report were diverse but the strongest response came in Bombay city which was besieged by riots over the issue. The provision of a bilingual Bombay State even resulted in the birth of two language front organisations, the Samyuktha Maharashtra Samiti and Maha Gujarat Janta Parishad.²⁹ Eventually in 1960, the bilingual State of Bombay was split-up into Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The provision for a multi-lingual Hyderabad recommended in the report was reversed in 1956 itself, resulting in the splitting-up of Hyderabad State into three with Telugu-speaking areas merged with Andhra, the Marathi-speaking areas with Maharashtra and Kannada-speaking areas with Mysore. The merger of the Telugu-speaking areas of the Hyderabad State with Andhra led to the emergence of Andhra Pradesh on November 1, 1956.

Meanwhile the agitation for separate Punjabi Subah continued undeterred. It however, bore fruits only with the issuance of a

²⁹Ghose, **Shankar**, *op. cit.* , pp.202-203 & see also Mathur, P.C., *op. cit.*, pp.99.

date for self-immolation by Sant Fateh Singh- which led Lal Bahadur Sastri and Kamaraj to announce the reorganisation of Punjab in 1966. Its several parts were distributed among three units, the core Punjabi Subah, the new State of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Several new States were also carved-out in response to tribal demands in the north-eastern region of the country from time to time.³⁰

However, the SRC Report and the reorganisation that followed did not mean the end of the process. It rather exacerbated those issues which the report did not resolve.³¹ All the reorganisations except those in the Punjab and the north-eastern region of the country have satisfied the grievances of principal large communities of India.³² The dissatisfaction basically arose in Punjab due to the failure of a clear-cut demarcation between Sikh and Hindu-majority areas, thereby resulting in the non-inclusion of some Sikh-majority areas in Punjab and secondly, the declaration of Chandigarh as the joint Capital of Punjab and Haryana. By 1966, India had been reorganised on the basis of major linguistic groups resulting in what may be termed as legitimacy crowning the principle of lingual reorganisation.

Centre's Reorganisation Policy:

The process of carving out provinces on the linguistic basis was thus a long-drawn process. There were various phases in which new

³⁰Brass, Paul, op. cit., p.147.

³¹Karat, Prakash, op. cit., p.42.

³²Brass, Paul, op. cit., p.147.

and separate provinces were created. For dealing with the reorganisation of States, the State strategy was more pluralist in practice than the ideology which appeared 'integrationist and assimilationist'.³³

In the course of struggles for linguistic States, the Centre apparently developed a set of four formal and informal rules in its reorganisation efforts :

1) The first rule which began as a practice but was formalised in the Constitution itself in 1963 was that recognition would not be granted to those groups which made secessionist demands.³⁴

2) The second rule, a heritage of the partition of the Indian subcontinent is that the regional demands based upon religious differences will not be entertained. The case of Punjab fits into both the cases.³⁵

3) The third rule is that the demand for a province should be able to mobilise large numbers of people from the concerned region in sustained agitations to persuade the Central Government to recognise that the demand enjoys "popular support".³⁶

4) The final rule is that the Centre would not agree to the reorganisation of a province if the demand was made by only one of the important language groups concerned. It was perhaps this rule which was put into practice in the case of ,

³³Ibid, pp.147-149.

³⁴Ibid, pp. 149-150.

³⁵Ibid, p. 150.

³⁶Ibid, pp. 150-151.

Madras Presidency as It has strong support from both Telugu and Tamil -speaking peoples.³⁷

Hence in the post-independence era Andhra Pradesh emerged as the first State to be carved on the linguistic basis, whereas it took a long time and a long struggle before the Punjabi-speaking people could realise their goal. In the case of Assam, the Assamese had to go through an incredible degree of territorial fragmentation so that what is left of the State can unambiguously be a State of their own.

So the struggles begun in the colonial times bore fruit in the post-Independence period. A brief sketch of the origins of the three States under study is made:

Demand for Andhra:

The historical origins of an organised Andhra dates back to 236 B.C- 218 A.D rule of the Satavahanas. The establishment of a factory in Masulipatnam in 1611 marked the beginning of colonial foothold in Andhra. The transfer of the Circar districts to the Company in 1766 and the Rayalaseema in 1800 by the Nizam, perhaps marked the beginning of the splitting of the Telugu-speaking people. The demand for uniting the Telugu-speaking people: began to express itself in this century initially through literary and literary movements from 1913 onwards. The publication of works like *Andhra Charitramu* (when translated History of the Andhras) helped the Telugus realise that in the days gone by they were at par with other people in India in the extent of their kingdoms,

³⁷Ibid, p. 151.

intellectual attainment and their civilisation. It was thus as early as December 12, 1911 the first known recorded plea by the Andhras for uniting the Telugu-speaking people inhabiting contiguous areas and thereby forming a separate province was made on the occasion of the Delhi Coronation Durbar. However a separate province for the Telugus was carved only in 1956, making it the first linguistic province to be so created in the post-Independence phase. Subsequently it was witness to the emergence of sub-regional identities and a transmutation of those identities.

Demand of the Punjab:

The British could bring the Punjabis under their orbit of influence only in 1856, that too consequent to the death of Ranjit Singh. The demand for Punjab (in this century) originated in 1909 after almost six decades of British rule, as a consequence to the Morley-Minto reforms which intensified "....the struggle for political power and for the opportunities which political power confers....".³⁸ The demand arose in protest against the Communal Award granted to the Muslims of the Punjab province on grounds of narrow majority and economic backwardness. The erstwhile Punjab province was split during the partition with East Punjab coming to India's share. In the post-Independence period the Punjabis waged a long struggle to attain their goal of a separate province within the Indian Union which was achieved in

³⁸Cited in Rai, Satya M: *Punjab Since Partition* (Delhi: Durga Publications, 1983) p. 8 from *Government of India., Indian Statutory Commission Report, Vol.1, p.30.*

1966. In the eighties however there has been a transformation of identities as the problem aggravated to secessionist proportions in the form of Khalistan.

Demand for Assam:

The third State under study, Assam, was also a demand which saw light during the British period. The Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 marked the descent of the British on the Assamese soil thus paving its way into the British sphere of influence. Until 1873 Assam remained a peripheral region under the overall control of the Bengal Presidency. In 1874, it was formed into a Chief Commissioner's province but with what Guha³⁹ termed 'strange bed-fellows' as the densely populated Bengali Muslim district of Sylhet and Cachar, a Bengali Hindu district, Garo hills and other hill districts were clubbed to it. Assam was similarly affected by the Bengal partition of 1905 in which the Bengal Presidency was partitioned into a predominantly Bengali Muslim province in the East consisting of Assam, and a predominantly Bengali Hindu province in the West. Assam continued to have an "involuntary partnership"⁴⁰ with Sylhet till the partition of the Indian subcontinent. In the post-Independence phase too, it underwent frequent territorial rearrangements in order to attain some degree of homogeneity. But in the aftermath of the Assam Accord, reached to put an end to the agitation to drive-out the immigrants, fresh identities among the tribals have emerged.

³⁹See Guha, A: *Planter Raj to Swaraj* (New Delhi: ICHR, 1977) p. 27

⁴⁰*Ibid*, p.335.

But despite the reorganisation, and most of the vociferous provinces attaining separate status, more and more demands began to be raised in different parts of these very states calling for 'more autonomy and a separate status' thus inevitably leading to the question: why was the linguistic reorganisation 'inadequate' to meet the challenges of the people? The inadequacy of the linguistic question became manifest in the light of Telangana and Andhra agitations witnessed in Andhra Pradesh. In the case of Punjab, it stood witness to cropping-up of the demand for Khalistan, and the concomitant rise of terrorism, whereas the process of reorganisations in Assam seems to be a perpetual problem. The size of the state has been already reduced drastically. Even now there seems to be no respite in the wake of contemporary demands of Bodoland, Udayachal and similar demands from tribal groups arising from time to time.

The cropping of new demands from different parts of the country has been a strain on the polity necessitating an analysis of the causes behind the trend. In fact in the face of the seemingly incomplete reorganisation, a sequel of the continuing demands, India has been charged of being a nation-in-the-becoming rather than a complete nation-state. Since it has been more than four decades of the first phase of reorganisation (in 1956) and almost five decades of Independence, one is at a better position to analyse the reasons for the apparent failure of the various reorganisations, in the light of ever growing demands, to satisfy the aspirations and urges of the people.

In the course of this analysis, a basic question which crops-up is: who are the people behind the movements demanding linguistic provinces and what interests are gained and safeguarded by mobilising the people in support of such provinces?

This question can be best explained when viewed from an economic perspective. Perhaps the problem needs to be analysed from a politico-economic stance. The call for the carving of linguistic provinces apparently emanated from the agriculturists, as the demands for linguistic provinces assumed strong overtones in agriculturally strong states. Industrialists on the other hand seem to be interested in an integrated whole and hence are against any division of provinces on such a basis. The Indian bourgeoisie have always felt alarmed with whatever they thought would strengthen regional or State forces. In the fifties they opposed the formation of linguistic States and even after more than a decade in 1969, the President of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry moving the resolution on National Integration and the Business Community, remarked that the most serious constitutional and administrative blunders committed by the Indian States are :

- 1) The adoption of the federal constitution, and on top of it,
- 2) The reorganisation of the federating units into linguistic States. In India according to him, the linguistic States have been the cause for the emergence of provincialism in its ugly form.⁴¹

⁴¹See Kirloskar's speech moving the resolution on *National Integration and the Business Community*, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry: Proceedings of the 42nd. Annual Session, (New Delhi, 1969) p.151.

The opposition to the linguistic provinces theory by the industrialists was clearly manifested in the Maharashtra case, where the call for a separate province was strong in Marathi-regions than in Gujarati-speaking areas as the Gujaratis are advanced capitalists having a big stake in the national economy. The Gujarati bourgeoisie, as a result found less utility in championing nationality interests and was more willing to compromise for a bilingual state with advantages of a huge commercial Centre like Bombay, within its orbit.

A strong belief is that the major interest of the big-industrialists is an all-India centralised market and the freedom to exploit the raw material and labour of all nationalities. They have therefore no qualms in riding "roughshod" over demands which may threaten their untrammelled freedom to continue the exploitation of all the regions of the country. There was widespread opposition from these quarters to the popular forces which however won their demand for linguistic provinces.⁴²

Literature Survey:

There have been various studies on the linguistic and ethnic politics of Andhra, Punjab and Assam. A survey of some of the studies on linguistic and ethnic politics in general and studies on Andhra, Punjab and Assam in particular are made.

⁴²Kurien, K.Mathew & Varughese, P.N (ed), op. cit , p.6.

In his study Karat (1973) opines that the demand for States' autonomy crops-up due to the imbalances in the Centre-State relations and flows directly from the political oppression of regional nationalities by the all-India monopolists and landlords (p.136). No wonder there has been widespread opposition from the start. However the creation of linguistic States has strengthened the hands of the regional bourgeoisie (p-48). He concludes by calling for a recomposition of the present system of India by granting more autonomy on linguistic-nationality basis (p.173). He believes this to be the only way to ensure the unity of the country on an enduring basis, as linguistic nationalities given freedom from monopoly landlord exploitation will come together to strengthen the unity of India.⁴³

Arguing on somewhat similar lines, Alam (1984) in his article states that regionalistic demands get flared up because of the contradictions among the ruling classes as the interests of the all-India bourgeoisie/monopoly capital clash with the non-big bourgeoisie at the regional level.⁴⁴

Narain (1984) believes regionalism in India to be a complex amalgam of geographical, historico-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychic factors out of which the economic component forms the crux of it. This is clearly brought out in the Telangana Movement "where economic grievances and

⁴³Karat, *op.cit.*

⁴⁴Alam, Javeed: "Class, Political and National Dimensions of the State Autonomy Movements in India", in Majeed, Akhtar (ed), *op.cit.*, pp.37-64.

demands triumphed over considerations of linguistic homogeneity".⁴⁵

In a study by Reddy & Sharma (1979) it is confirmed that regionalism is a direct reaction to the long and deep-rooted economic injustice in matters like employment opportunities and economic development. This study while tracing the Telangana Movement and its grievances held that economic exploitation leads to a feeling of deprivation resulting "in a new identity solely on the basis of living together in the same area to overcome cementing forces like language, caste and party loyalties".⁴⁶

In his paper Subramanyam (1984) draws a historical sketch of the Andhra Movement. While commenting on the post-formative agitations, he holds the tensions in Andhra Pradesh rose to high altitudes due to historical factors as the Andhra area was exposed to the mechanism of democratic process much earlier than Telangana. Hence Telangana lagged far behind Andhra resulting in an impression that the development of Telangana remained stagnant amidst the overall growth in Andhra Pradesh.⁴⁷

Another work on the same subject by Acharya (1984) argues more or less on similar lines. He holds the disequilibrium among various regions of the state to be the main cause for the emergence of hostile attitudes. Most of the Telangana grievances,

⁴⁵Narain, Iqbal: "A Conceptual Analysis in the Indian Context", in Majeed, Akhtar *op.cit.*, pp.19-35.

⁴⁶Reddy, G.Ram & Sharma, B.A.V (ed): *Regionalism in India: A Study of Telangana* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1979).

⁴⁷Subramanyam, M: "Intra-Regionalism in Andhra Pradesh" in Majeed, Akhtar (ed), *op.cit.*, pp.117-131.

Acharya opined, arose due to the economic conditions of the people characterised by inequalities and regional imbalances. In fact, the two agitations have highlighted that the factor of language as a decisive force has failed to keep the State intact.⁴⁸

Making a comprehensive study of the Andhra Movement, Narayana Rao (1973) is of the opinion that though all the Andhras were conscious of being a historical-linguistic group the bond of language by itself had not been sufficiently strong to make different Telugu-speaking regions- the Circar, Rayalaseema and Telangana-come together unconditionally under one administration. In fact, it was the prospective political and economic advantages that might accrue to each region which really influenced the attitudes of that region towards the creation of an Andhra province rather than an emotional or sentimental commitment to Andhraidentity.⁴⁹

In a study Kumar (1984) opines that regionalism whether communal or linguistic grew in India as a result of the alleged inequitable distribution of the economic resources amongst the different socio-cultural sub-regions. On Sikh regionalism, Kumar holds that although initially it was predominantly communal later it shifted to more pragmatic grounds. Hence he feels that the

⁴⁸Acharya, K.C: "Telangana and Andhra Agitations" in Reddy, G.Ram & Sharma, B.A.V (eds): *State Government and Politics: Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979) PP-510-524.

⁴⁹Rao, K.V.Narayan, op.cit.

regionalism of the Akalis now is more issue-oriented and less religion-oriented.⁵⁰

The paper by Singh, Gopal (1984) seeks to probe the objective material forces which led to the Punjab situation assuming frightening dimensions in recent times. The communal colour lent to the agitation has been the result of the clash between the bourgeois aspirations among the Sikh rural gentry and the bourgeois hegemony of the Hindu traders, merchants and industrialists. In other words, the growing aspirations get blocked by the established hegemony.⁵¹

In line with the prevalent theories on the Punjab crisis, Jannuzi (1990) believes the outburst to be rooted in the 1947 and 1966 partitions and the constant search by the Sikhs for a homeland in which they could be dominant. However, paradoxically Punjab's crisis is associated with its spectacular economic success or what is popularly known as 'Green Revolution'. Since the small farmers, landlords and peasants were not full participants in the economic progress, they were placed in a position of at least relative deprivation as they perceived it. And it is mainly from these bypassed rural poor that the agitation derived its main support.⁵²

⁵⁰Kumar, Pradeep: "Communal Dimension of Regionalism in Indian Federation" in Majeed, Akhtar *op. cit.*, pp.145-158.

⁵¹Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Bases of the Punjab Crisis", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XIX, No.1, January 7, 1984, pp.42-47.

⁵²Jannuzi, *op.cit.*

In his work on the Punjab crisis, Alam (1986) moves away from the usual refrain of the crisis as either arising out of contradictions of Punjab economy, especially the Green Revolution or simply giving long historical account of the Sikh Movement. Rather he believes the crisis to be the outcome of excessive centralisation of political power. Initially the movement began in the sixties centred round more autonomy to the states in general, but later on, it assumed a distinct shift in the late-seventies and eighties to more autonomy to Punjab in specific. Apart from deprivation or exploitation, conditions of restrained capitalist growth in agriculture and weak linkages in the industrial base resulted in the cumulation of discontent.⁵³

Jafar (1987) in his work examines how the Sikh community once a asset for the nation erupted into a frightful volcano. Blaming the British for many of the distortions in India's economic, political and cultural spheres, he squarely puts the blame for Punjab crisis on the British strategy of divide and quit. Doling out the familiar theories on Punjab-of stagnation reached after a high growth-level in the agricultural economy and a weak industrial base, he strongly believes only a sincere Centre can bring a solution to the Punjab impasse.⁵⁴

Pettigrew (1987) holds the Punjab Movement to be a revivalist movement based on Sikh's perception of religion and historical

⁵³Alam, Javeed: "Political Implications of Economic Contradictions in Punjab", *Social Scientist*, Vol.15, No.10, October 1986, pp.3-26.

⁵⁴Jafar, Ghani: *Sikh Volcano* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1988).

tradition. Analysing the Bhindranwale phenomena, Pettigrew attributes his high fame purely to the failure of the Akalis to be the true representatives of the Sikhs and instead settle down to the role of opposition in the state. The Punjab problem necessitates the transfer of decisive power making from the Centre to the state capital in all aspects of development.⁵⁶

Rai (1986) gives a comprehensive account of the Punjab problem since partition. Language generally considered a unifying force which cuts across sectional, sectarian and communal divisions, proves a failure in the case of Punjab. In Punjab it is language which has brought about cracks in the cohesiveness of the Punjabis. In line with other thinkers on the issue, Rai believes it is imperative that more powers ought to be given to the states.⁵⁶

In his volume, Brass (1991) takes a different stance when he holds ethnicity and nationalism as not "givens" but rather "social and political constructions". The kinds of alliances made between centralising and regional or other non-dominant elites is what gives shape to a particular type of ethnic identity and modern nationalism. Bringing out a detailed account of the Punjab stalemate, Brass calls out for more of pluralism and

⁵⁵Pettigrew, Joyce: "In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.60, No.1, Spring 1987, pp.1-25.

⁵⁶**Rai, Satya M:** *Punjab Since Partition* (Delhi: Durga Publishers, 1983).

decentralisation. In short, accommodation of regional political demands he urges is a "must".⁵⁷

Analysing the Assam issue, Gohain (1980) holds the prevalence of the law of undevelopment of capitalism to be responsible for Assam's ethnically polarised reality. In fact, the desire to have a state of their own led the Assamese to go through an incredible degree of territorial fragmentation so that what is left of the state can unambiguously be a state of their own.⁵⁸

However, the outcome of continued influx into Assam resulted in the development of what Baruah (1980) calls a plural society of separate communities instead of a composite society of people. In the vastly changed demographic situation of Assam it becomes a state where the majority linguistic community has the "slightest of margins".⁵⁹

Sarin (1980) in a detailed account of the Assam problem, believes that the problem basically arose due to the perception of the Bengalis as "cultural imperialists" out to assimilate them. This perception resulted in the correcting of socio-economic imbalances and the ethnic division of labour with the newly acquired weapon of political power. In short,

⁵⁷Brass, Paul: *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Practice* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991).

⁵⁸Gohain, Hiren: "Cudgel of Chauvinism", *Economic And Political Weekly*, February 23, 1980, pp.418-420.

⁵⁹Baruah, S.K: "Cudgel of Nationalism or Tangled Nationality Question", *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 15, 1980, pp.543-545.

linguistic nationalism has been employed to counter the invasion in the cultural and employment sectors. However, ironically enough, it was Assamese chauvinism that diminished Assam and lost her tribal population.⁶⁰

Viewing the Assam problem from the familiar mould of a heritage inherited from colonial times, Gohain (1985) in another of his works maintains that the Assam problem should be viewed not as a problem vis-a-vis the Bengalis or Muslims, but rather in its totality as an issue in need of a solution with the participation of all the communities.⁶¹

Gupta (1991) highlights the developmental aspect of ethnic factor thus striking down the general themes of political modernization and development which held "ethnic claims" to be "sources of tension". It is this aspect that he tackles with reference to the political system of India in general and Assam in particular. Recognising its developmental significance, Gupta believes that instead of ethnic lines getting eroded by class formations it is the other way round. Rather than viewing ethnic regionalism and secular nationalism as competing values, it should be realised that regional movements can add depth to nationalism as ethnic politics from the early Andhra Movement to the late Assam Movement have shown.⁶²

⁶⁰Sarin, V.I.K: *India's North-East in Flames* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1980).

⁶¹Gohain, H.N: "Roots of Assamese Chauvinism", in his *Assam: A Burning Question* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publishers, 1985).

⁶²Gupta, J.D: "Ethnicity, Democracy and Development in India:

From these studies it can be discerned that the roots of the demand for states autonomy has its origins in the multi-national or multi-ethnic character of India.⁶³

Lack of uniformity in the economic progress of the various parts of the country and the issue of exploitation by a different nationality generally assumes the shape of a movement demanding an autonomous status in the form of a separate state as is clearly evident in the case of Andhra. The question of linguistic reorganisation of provinces seems to erupt from the bourgeoisie based at the regional level seemingly in protest against constraints imposed by the national bourgeoisie in pursuit of its policy. The call for linguistic provinces, it may be inferred, emanated from the rising agrarian regional bourgeoisie. This trend is most clearly manifested in the cases of Andhra and Punjab.

The subsequent developments in these very linguistic states, however makes it clear that the linguistic question cannot be studied in isolation as it is entangled with the ethnic, economic and religious spheres. This proposition leads to a study of Assam, in addition to Andhra and Punjab, as it is popularly referred to as an "ethnic issue".

Evidently language has played an important rallying point in all

Assam in a General Perspective", in Kohli, Atul (ed) : *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1991).

⁶³See Karat, *op. cit.* , & Habib, Irfan, *op. cit.*

these cases. But *more* importantly, it was economics and political insecurity infused with the factor of language which later pulled the movements to the heights that they have attained during their distinct course. What mattered most in these cases, was not the actual deprivation or grievances - social or economic but their perception or evaluation of deprivation.

In the case of Punjab the lack of openings for the capital generated in agriculture resulted in what Daniel Lerner⁶⁴ called a revolution of rising frustrations. However in the case of Andhra 'the rising expectations' were saved from being totally shattered as the surplus harnessed from the agricultural sector could be absorbed in the fast growing industrial base.

As in the case of Punjab, Assam too suffered immensely from the 'relative deprivation syndrome'. The Assam identity crisis is the eruption of anger at what may be termed as 'Calculated migration'. The stagnant economy and a resource base inaccessible to native Assamese partly accounted for the Assam impasse reaching its pinnacle. Nowhere was the ethnic crisis management a failure (a miserable one) as in Assam. The Assam and Punjab movements seem to be, in short, frantic responses to a lost or threatened identity.

Hence, understudy interestingly are three types of economies shaping the distinctive course of the autonomy movements.

⁶⁴Cited in Narain, **Iqbal**: "Cultural Pluralism, National Integration and Democracy in India", *Asian Survey*, Vol.XVI, NO.16, 1976, p.903.

Comparatively, Punjab has a developed economy, while Andhra has an expanding or developing resource base (which partly explains the early assimilation into the mainstream). At the bottom is the stagnant resource base of Assam, urgently in need to be exploited and made accessible to native Assamese.

In other words, the autonomy movements are the outcome of the failure to balance the multi-ethnic societal demands with available resources.⁶⁵ But rather than over playing the role of ethnic claims as "sources of tension", it is crucially important to throw light on the constructive aspect. Needless to add, ethnic movements help draw the attention⁶⁶ of the ruling bourgeoisie to the economic imbalances of the region and thus realise the aim of setting right the disequilibrium between different regions, in the process having contributed to the healthy practice of federalism, besides just possessing the infrastructure.

Scope of the study:

Why this study:

Inspite of fulfilling the major demands for organising the States on linguistic bases, the task somehow remains unfulfilled. This is mainly due to the demands for separate provinces coming-in from those States based on this very linguistic principle. In other words "the struggle of the States for recognition and a rightful share in the political and economic

⁶⁵Phadnis, Urmila: "Ethnic Dynamics in South Asian States", *South Asian Journal*, Vol.3, No.3, Jan-March 1990, p.95.

⁶⁶Gupta, op. cit., p.144.

sphere continues".⁶⁷ Hence the much sought-after peace and unity after the recognition of the provinces on linguistic basis has been eluding. It is in this background the linguistic and ethnic policy is sought to be studied.

Language as a factor is generally believed to bring about unity among the people. This in turn is supposed to be binding the people emotionally. Hence, the carving of provinces on linguistic lines was believed to bring about solidarity among the people (of the province) contributing to national integration. But in the course of time, it is seen that language factor has been overtaken by some other factor or factors in the case of Andhra, Punjab and Assam. Even though these States have been carved on the basis of language there has been an apparent failure in preventing these regions from demanding 'more autonomy and a separate status'.

Another question associated with the linguistic question is the problem of intra-regionalism as witnessed in these states. The successive militant movements, viz., Telangana and Andhra agitations in Andhra Pradesh, Assam faces sub-regionalism in the form of the demand of 'Bodoland' . In Punjab the call for a separate Sikh Homeland assumed alarming proportions in the recent past. A section of the Punjabis gave a call for 'severing from the Union'.

⁶⁷Karat, *op.cit.*, p.136.

A study of the three states - Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Punjab-based on the linguistic principle, is attempted as they have achieved this status after passing through a prolonged struggle. The dissatisfaction of the Telugus inspite of gaining a (long-fought) separate province becomes evident with the eruption of the Telangana agitation hardly a decade later of its formation. In the case of Punjabis it is a gradual aggravation into the Khalistan demand. The Assamese having gone through an incredibly large degree of fragmentation have not yet come to terms with what has been termed to be their homogeneously-formed unit. This makes it clear that there are some other deeper underlying factors taking place in these three states.

In the course of the analysis it becomes clear that the study needs to be looked from a broader perspective. And when viewed from this angle, it is seen to be entangled with the economic, ethnic and religious issues. Hence the proposition that a single factor keeps the people united has almost lost its validity.

Evidently, linguistic and ethnic bonds play a uniting role only when there are no conflict of issues within a particular region / regions. But in the event of conflict of issues involving especially economic and political matters, these (binding) factors seem to be relegated to the background and the economic and political factor take precedence or primacy over the linguistic and ethnic factor. This proposition needs to be seriously analysed.

Methodology:

This study on linguistic and ethnic politics attempts to analyse various reasons / causes for the rise of a particular demand based upon literature survey on the subject.

This is a study, basically exploratory to compare the emerging identities both in time and space. It is more an attempt at discerning the broader, trends in a comparative perspective, comparative studies with a broader framework may not provide deep insights but they do provide a perspective. Such studies fall in the middle range generalisations, which in turn for better macro level theory building and micro level indepth studies.

The data required for the study is gathered (mainly) from secondary sources, government publications and also from official records. Given the constraints of time, space and framework, no empirical data has been collected. Based on secondary sources, such studies would help to take stock of not only the trends but also the overall thinking on the phenomenon. The present study is partly to take stock of the literature and present thinking and set the agenda.

No one identity can, thus explain a phenomenon all the time. At any given point of time a particular identity emerges and asserts depending on the context. Thus identities are contextual. It is this aspect that many of the studies have failed to explain- the transformation and transmutation of identities. Most of the studies have confined to a case study of a particular State rather than a comparative analysis. This thesis tries to fill

both the failings as it is a comparative analysis analysing the trends over a period of time.

Chapterisation:

The scheme of chapterisation is as follows :

Chapter - I: Includes the methods of study, a brief survey of the literature on the topic. An attempt has been made to explain the study undertaken and to specify various concepts related to the study.

Chapter - II: is devoted to a discussion of the Andhra Movement. It focuses on the formation of Andhra Pradesh as it unfolds itself from the 1920s and the various militant movements engulfing the State in the aftermath of its creation. The Chapter is subdivided mainly into four: The first phase from 1900-1947, covers the movement from its inception till India's Independence. But it was almost a decade of Independence before Andhra Pradesh could be formed. So in the second phase from 1947-1956, the events leading to its reorganisation are discussed. But in the aftermath of gaining a separate status, Andhra witnessed movements for further divisions in the form of Telangana and Andhra agitations, which becomes the theme of the third phase from 1956-1973. The final phase- the fourth- from 1973 onwards is an account of the subsequent developments culminating in the rise of the Telugu Desam Party. The rise of the TDP brings forth the predominance of the linguistic issues, as *atma-gauravam* or self-respect of the Telugu people- the theme of Visalandhra- became the theme of regional politics once again. The linguistic

base as a sufficient condition in the formation of the State is sought to be enquired.

Chapter - III: mainly deals with the Punjabi Movement. The Punjabi movement now spanning over three-quarters of this century has been subdivided into four phases: from 1909 when the demand took some shape with the birth of organisations like the Akali Dal and the SGPC, the spokes-institutions of the Sikhs' interests. The second phase covers from 1940, the period when the demand for a separate state for the Muslims in the form of Pakistan became a reality rousing the hopes of the Sikhs in attaining a similar demand. However, the demand having been backfired, the main contention of the Sikhs in the post-Independent scenario is the granting of atleast a separate province for the Sikhs (within the Indian Union)- this being the theme in the third phase from 1947-1966. In the final phase from the 1966-onwards, the Sikhs do manage to gain a separate province for themselves, Punjab, but it stood witness in the eighties to the cropping-up of Khalistan (a sovereign state for the Sikhs) a demand reminiscent of the pre-Independence days.

Chapter - IV: makes a study of Assam solely. The Chapter is similarly subdivided into three phases: the first phase is an historical overview of the Assam movement from the Ahom invasion of the Assam in the thirteenth century through the British rule till India's freedom. The second phase covers from 1947 till the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. The post-Accord scenario forms the main theme in the final phase from 1985-onwards. The period witnessed eruption of movements among the Bodos and other

tribes mouthing the same charges against the Assamese as those leveled by the Assamese against the Bengalis. The movement has thus turned a full circle.

Chapter - V: consists of a synthesis of the three movements- Andhra, Punjab and Assam under study. A comparative analysis of the movements is attempted in this Chapter. It also consists of the conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER II
THE ANDHRA IMBROGLIO

As part of the exercise in the direction of a comparative analysis of Andhra, Punjab and Assam, this Chapter is mainly devoted to the study of Andhra. The attempt is to capture the various developments occurring in the state and analyse/establish the relation between the linguistic and economic factor in the case of Andhra. This, it is hoped, would bring out clearly the manifestation of regionalism and sub-regionalism.

Andhra Pradesh was the first linguistic State to be carved on such a basis in the post-Independence phase. It was carved in two phases- one in 1953, with the Coastal districts and Rayalaseema called the province of Andhra. Later in the first major phase of reorganisation that India witnessed in 1956 the Telugu-speaking part of Hyderabad was clubbed to it leading to the formation of Andhra Pradesh.

This Chapter is subdivided into four phases: the first phase relates to an historical overview of the Visalandhra movement from 1900 till India's Independence in 1947. It was almost a decade of Independence before Andhra Pradesh could be formed. So in the second phase from 1947-56, the events leading to its reorganisation are discussed. But even after gaining a separate status, Andhra witnessed movements for further division in the form of the Telangana and Andhra agitations, which becomes the predominant theme of the third phase from 1956-1973. The final phase- the fourth- from 73-onwards is an account of the subsequent developments culminating in the rise of the Telugu

Desam Party. This Chapter thus consists of three main parts: the Visalandhra Movement, the Telangana and Andhra agitations, and the last part traces the growth of regionalism as evident in the emergence of the Telugu Desam Party.

The question of linguistic provinces has not been a new development but has been rather predominant since colonial times. It has, however, been noticed that the linguistic question received scant attention during the colonial period as "it obviously suited the British rulers to split people speaking one and the same language into more than one province and to include within the boundaries of one province people speaking different languages", on the principle of what they conveniently called "administrative convenience", as this helped the British imperialist rulers to keep the Indian people divided...".¹

However with the advent of freedom, the issue of linguistic provinces could no more be played down, and after Independence Andhra became the first state to be carved out on the linguistic basis. Thereafter many more provinces were organised on the linguistic basis. But it has been difficult to comprehend as to what are the reasons that lay behind the call for linguistic provinces? It has been generally believed, in accordance with the most popular school of thought that the roots of the call for linguistic provinces can be traced back to the "uneven

¹Dang, Satya Pal: "The Punjabi Suba Movement," in *Punjab Journal of Politics*, Vol.7, 1983, p.151.

development of the regions inhabited by different nationalities which consequently produce various social and economic tensions amongst the regions and also between the different regions and the centre". The uneven development has been in the nature of wide variations in both the industrial and agricultural sectors in different parts of the country which seemingly resulted in the demand for carving of provinces on such a basis (i.e. linguistic basis). The agrarian classes are apparently the forerunners in such a movement as the major interest of the industrial class to the contrary is a centralised market and the freedom to exploit the raw material and labour of all nationalities".²

Therefore, not surprisingly, in Andhra, an agriculturally strong state - the question of linguistic reorganisation has acquired a forceful articulation. But even though the movement for a separate Andhra began in the early twenties, it was not until 1956 that the demand was conceded. Nonetheless it has the honour of being the first linguistic State in the post-Independence era.

First Phase 1900-1947

The Andhra Demand: An Historical Overview

In this phase the origins of the Andhra movement in the colonial period is sought to be analysed. In fact the demand in the present century ought to be viewed as a demand for uniting the Telugu people rather than a demand for a new State altogether, as

²Kurien, K.Mathew & Varughese, P.N (ed): *Centre-State Relations* (Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd., 1981) p.6.

an Andhra State is not a new phenomenon. The Telugus however could not succeed in attaining a separate status during the colonial period, despite representations to various committees. The demand of the Andhras was thus directed at two levels- at the Congress sessions and at the various British Committees. The momentum of the Andhra movement during the British rule till India's Independence is sought to be discussed in this phase.

The origins of an organised Andhra dates back to the Satavahana rule of 236 B.C - 218 A.D. Until the advent of the British in the early-seventeenth century, Andhra came under the rule of several dynasties. The establishment of a factory in Masulipatnam in 1611 heralds the beginning of colonial foothold in Andhra, strengthened with the death of Aurangzeb and the consequent disintegration of the Mughal Empire from 1707 onwards. The transfer of the Circar districts to the Company in 1766 and the Rayalaseema by the Nizam in 1800, perhaps marks the beginning of the splitting of the Telugu people. The demand for uniting the Andhra people came up in the present century right from the beginning, when the partition of Bengal in 1905 made people firmly believe that the progress of a linguistic group would be hindered by their being placed under different administrations.³ Reasoning on similar lines, some Andhras felt that one of the chief causes for their backwardness was 'the partition of the Telugu people' through their dispersal in the Madras Presidency,

³Rao, K.V.Narayan: *The Emergence of Andhra Pradesh* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973) p.27.

the Central Provinces and the native state of Hyderabad and Mysore.⁴

In addition to, the publication of *Andhra Charitramu* (when translated. History of the Andhras) by the Vignana Chandrika Mandali in 1910 gave the much-needed literary impetus as it helped revitalise the interest of the Andhras in their language, literature and their past history. The work proved quite popular as it demolished the myth of the backwardness of the Andhras and thereby sought to help them realise that in the days gone by they were on par with the other people in India in the extent of their kingdoms, their intellectual attainment and their civilisation.⁵

Their rejuvenated interest got concretised as early as December 12, 1911 when the first known recorded plea by the Andhras for uniting the Telugu people inhabiting contiguous areas and forming a separate province was made on the occasion of the Delhi Coronation Durbar. Although as far as the demand for Andhra Province was concerned, nothing concrete came out of the Durbar, it nonetheless proved to be an important landmark in the movement for linguistic provinces. The Durbar helped carve out Bihar from Bengal on the ground that *the Biharis have hitherto been unequally yoked with the Bengalis and have never, therefore had a fair opportunity for development*. A separate province for the

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Rao, Ch.Veerabhadra: *Andhra Charitramu*, Part-1 (Madras: Ananda Printing Press, 1910) pp.3-4.

Biharis naturally raised the until-then-futile hopes of the Andhras with the consequence the question 'why not a separate Andhra Province?' assuming stronger overtones.

But what are the precise reasons for the question of a separate province for the Andhras in particular and the issue of linguistic nationalities becoming popular day-by-day. The factors of the partition of Bengal, the carving of a separate province of Bihar and the publication of the literary work of Andhra *Charitramu*, no doubt provided the much needed impetus but they alone prove inadequate to explain the phenomenal interest of the Andhras in the movement. There seem to be some other factors holding the clue to the movement.

Historically, it can be traced that the demand for Visalandhra gained direction only from the mid-19th century with the emergence of new classes - the peasantry, who assumed the torch bearership of the movement. The rise of the peasant classes has been the result of a boom (or a spurt) in agriculture which became possible, a reality, due to availability of irrigation - the product of the construction of anicuts across the Godavari and the Krishna rivers. The irrigation schemes thus laid the basis for intensive cultivation of rice and other cash crops, generating consequently a substantial base for the emergence of the peasant classes. It was these emerging classes which

⁶Haragopal, G: "Dimensions of Regionalism: Nationality Question in Andhra Pradesh" in *Nationality Question in India*, Seminar Proceedings (Poona: TDSS, 1987) pp.364-365.

supported the idea of a separate province, Visalandhra, for the Telugu-speaking people, as they were perhaps the hardest hit and apparently, the most disillusioned with the Tamil domination in the material as well as political spheres. Despite the fact that the Telugu districts accounted for 40 per cent of the people and 58 per cent of the Madras Presidency, it was the Tamils who were predominant in the twin-sectors of the polity and the economy.⁷ Inevitably, the feeling gained ground among the Andhras, especially the agriculturists - leaders of the movement - that they could hope to better their material and political position only in a separate province of their own. Accordingly they articulated the need for bringing all the Telugu - speaking people under a single umbrella - the Visalandhra State.

As a result of the wide-spread interest that the subject of the formation of a separate Andhra province evinced, it came up for consideration for the first time, officially, at the joint conference of Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts at Nidadavolu in May 1912, under the Presidentship of V.Ramdas. However, the resolution was ruled out by the President of the Conference on the ground that a Sectional Conference was not the appropriate venue for the discussion of a subject of such crucial importance. It was rather felt that a broader group, an Andhra conference, with representatives of all the Telugu districts of the Madras Presidency was the group most fitted for discussing

⁷Rao, P.Raghunadha: *History of Modern Andhra* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1983) pp.80-81.

such an issue.⁸ The outcome of this suggestion was the convening of the first Andhra Conference at Bapatla on May 20, 1913. The resolution on a separate Andhra Province being the most important item of the agenda provoked much discussion.⁹ The growing consciousness of unity among the Andhras made the Bapatla session 'a grand success' thereby giving a fillip to the Andhra movement in general and the issue of an Andhra Province in particular. The discussions in the second and subsequent conferences of the Andhra Maha Sabha also show an increasing appreciation by the Andhra leaders of the necessity of having a separate Andhra Province. Significantly therefore, the coastal belt of the Telugu-inhabited regions served as the fundamental base initially for providing the tempo of the movement for a separatist Andhra Province as the economic interests of the emerging peasant classes of this region in particular received the brunt of the Tamils in the agrarian as well as local market.

The meet of the Andhra Mahasabha at Cocanada, its fourth, was noteworthy in view of the fact that the standing committee of the Andhra Conference prepared a pamphlet titled *Reorganisation of Indian Provinces* authored by Dr.P.Sitaramayya and Konda Venkatappaiah and distributed amongst the Congressmen all over the country.

⁸*Ibid.* , pp.82-83.

⁹Rao, K.V.Narayan, *op cit.* , p.50.

¹⁰*Ibid*, p. 57.

The First Concrete Step: Demand for a separate Andhra Provincial Congress:

The meet of the Indian National Congress at Madras in December 1914 proved to be significant as the Andhras took the first step in the direction of a separate Andhra Province. The meet proved significant in the sense opinion gained ground for having a separate provincial Congress for the Telugu districts. The belief that *a separate Congress circle for the Telugu districts would intensify public life in them, promote popular political education on a larger scale, and emphasize the integrity and individuality of the Telugus*, took firm ground. Moreover a separate Congress Circle for the Telugus, it was believed, would help exert pressure within the Congress to accept the principle of linguistic provinces.

Lucknow & Calcutta Sessions:

But the efforts to create a separate Congress circle for the Andhras came to nought even as late as December 16, 1916 at the Congress session held at Lucknow. The issue sprang up again at the AICC session at Calcutta on April 8, 1917 whereby it was finally accepted after a stormy session in the midst of vehement opposition by Dr. Annie Besant, President of the session, and reluctance of Gandhi to consider the issue immediately.¹¹ The sponsors of the Andhra Movement met with their first success on January 22, 1918 with the inauguration of the new Congress circle

¹¹Sitaramayya, B.Pattabhi: *The History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1935)*, (Madras, 1935) pp.250-251.

for the Andhras thus marking the actual beginning to the struggle of a separate province for the Andhras.

Montague-CheImsford Report:

The demand for linguistic provinces contained in a resolution passed by B.N.Sharma, President of the first Andhra Conference created history when it was taken up for discussion for the first time by the Imperial Legislative Council on February 6, 1918. The Imperial Legislative Council with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford in the Chair and the Secretary of State, Montague in the visitor's gallery discussed the resolution recommending to the Governor General-in-Council:

"The redistribution of provincial areas...on a language basis wherever...and to the extent possible, especially where the people speaking a distinct language and sufficiently large in number desire such a change".

But the resolution was not passed as it went perhaps against the British policy of divide and rule. Significantly it did make the authorities realise once again and more importantly, understand the principle underlying it. This became evident as Chelmsford and Montague on their tour received deputations from other linguistic groups too.

Montford Report:

In the meantime the Montford Report on Constitutional Reforms published in July 1918, conceded that the administrative units would simplify the business of the government with the vernacular as the medium of legislative business and that *the linguistic or*

racial governments would help participation in public affairs of men not acquainted with English. But at the same time colonial interests dictated it to hold that such reorganisation was; premature for it would be very "unwise of revising the constitution of India with.....simultaneously revising the political geography of the entire country".¹² Since there was no reference in the report to the demand of the Andhras, needless to say, they became a thoroughly disappointed lot.

Indian Statutory Commission:

The Indian Statutory Commission came into existence in 1928 to precisely review the working of the Government of India Act, 1919. The Chairman, Simon had great natural sympathy with the body of men who felt that their own race and language were very important to them.¹³ However, its all-white complexion - revealing only too clearly Britain's persistent assumption of superiority, provoked the Congress, the Andhra Political Conference and the Karnataka Unification Conference into boycotting the committee.

Madras Government's Policy of Exploitation: A Continuing Trend

Notwithstanding the turning down of the demand for a separate province of Andhra, efforts doubled in that direction (of achieving a separate province). However, not unexpectedly there:

¹² See the address of the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Andhra Provincial Conference, Guntur, *The Hindu*, Aug.17, 1918. Quoted in Rao, K.V.Narayan, op. cit., p.64.

¹³ Indian Statutory Commission, Vol.XV, pp.484-486. Quoted in Rao, K.V.Narayan, op. cit., pp.93-95.

was opposition from the colonial authorities and also from the Madras Government. Thus local interests prevailed in opposing the rearrangement of the Madras Presidency. The reason behind the opposition became manifest from the Madras Government's continued policy of economic exploitation of the Andhra regions. In continuance with its policy of having a firm grip on the Andhra economy, it took no initiative to harness the hydrographic potentialities of Andhra nor took any steps to arrest agricultural stagnation. On the contrary it was content with treating the river waters as a big source for the levy of water taxes and collection of land revenues as and when it required.¹⁴

Since the agriculturally rich and prosperous coastal districts were directly affected by what has been termed as the evasive and arbitrary irrigation policies of the Madras Government, it was here that a strong separatist movement took root. The support and protection to agriculture would be hampered, they reasoned if they continued to stay any longer in the undivided Madras.¹⁵ Hence the call for a separate province.

Intra-regional demand: Call for a separate Rayalaseema Congress Circle:

However all the regions were not united in the call for Visalandhra. Rather divisive trends surfaced in the movement in 1924 with the call of a separate Congress Circle for the Ceded

¹⁴See Proceedings of the *A. P. History Congress*, Vol.1, 1977, p. 43

¹⁵See **Haragopal, G:** "Socio-Economic History of Modern **Andhra**", *Social Science Probings*, March 1985, p.68.

districts by the Rayalaseema delegates of the Andhra Provincial congress committee. the call for a separate Rayalaseema Congress circle, perhaps emanated from the wide variations in the levels of development between the two regions - Coastal and Rayalaseema districts. The inland Rayalaseema districts of Bellary, Kurnool, Anantapur and Cuddapah were drier and less prosperous than the naturally alluvial rich coastal taluks. In addition the mid-nineteenth century irrigation projects endowed the already rich coastal taluks with an even greater prosperity.¹⁶ It was probably feared by the Rayalaseemas that in the event of the formation of a single entity, they were likely to be dominated by the more-advanced coastal Andhras. The assumption of Presidentship of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee by Dr.Pattabhi in August 1937 helped smoothen the differences between the two regions. The cracks in the united Telugu consciousness were effectively bridged with the signing of the Sri Bagh Pact on November 16, 1937 which enumerated the conditions to be fulfilled should Rayalaseema co-operate with the coastal districts in the demand for an Andhra Province.

By 1936, the Sindhis and Oriyas were successful in their endeavour to realise separate provinces but the Andhras drew a blank. The already flagging spirits of the Andhras took a further dive with the victory of the Congress under the leadership of

¹⁶Brian, Stoddart: "The Structure of Congress Politics in Coastal Andhra, 1925-37," in Low, D.A (ed): *Congress & the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle: 1917-1947*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977) p.m.

C. Rajagopalachari in the 1937 elections to the Madras Legislative Council and Assembly. Although the Congress has been a strong advocate of linguistic states for long, the Madras Congress Ministry headed by Rajagopalachari "*saw much possible harm in taking up that subject then for government action*".¹⁷

Krishna-Pennar Project:

Added to it, the already-damaged political relations between the Andhras and the Madras Government took a dip economically too when the CM Rajagopalachari tried to utilise his position *to develop Tamil Nadu at the expense of Andhra*. As part of its irrigation policy, the Madras Government under Rajagopalachari took a rather active interest in the construction of the Krishna-Pennar Project in order to divert waters of Krishna river to Tamil Nadu thereby injuring the interests of Andhra. However on realisation of the motive behind the project, the Andhrets rose in revolt and the tremendous popular agitation built-up against the project resulted in the commissioning of the Khosla Committee which after going into the technical details of the project held that in its present form it should not be proceeded. Instead the setting-up of Nandikonda (Nagarjuna Sagar) Project was suggested. Thus the Andhras won the battle for the present but the war remained still undecided. For sometime therefore there

¹⁷Cited From *Madras Government's letter to B.N.Datar*, Chairman of the All Karnatak Unification League, Belgaum, G.O.371, Public, dated March 2, 1938 in Rao, K.V.Narayan, op.cit., p.172.

¹⁸**Rao, K. V. Narayan**, op.cit., pp.247-248.

was a lull in the Movement as the Andhras were restless and tired over their futile efforts in achieving a separate province.

But it bubbled with life once again with the convening of a meeting at *Kondapalli* (Krishna district) in 1939 which took the decision of forming an Andhra Rashtra Nirmana Sangham by merging all those organisations which were vociferous in demanding an Andhra Province and to work for the speedy realisation of their goal. It requested the Andhra members of the legislature and the Madras Government to press the British Government to grant an Andhra Rashtra, the birthright of the Andhras, before October 1939 and exhorted the people to be ready for a satyagraha if the province was not established before that date. The issue came up in subsequent meetings held in Guntur and Visakhapatnaia sessions of 1939 and 1941 respectively, in which a strongly-worded resolution was passed manifesting their deep frustration and resentment at the attitude of the Congress Government.

Convention on Linguistic and Cultural Provinces in India:

The issue of linguistic provinces turning into reality soon became evident when the Convention on Linguistic and Cultural Provinces in India met at Delhi under the Presidentship of Dr.Pattabhi on December 8, 1946. It recommended to the Constituent Assembly the acceptance of the principle of linguistic and cultural provinces and setting up of the necessary machinery for giving effect to such a redistribution of provinces

immediately after the attainment of Independence.¹⁹ At the instance of the consultative Committee of the Congress, the Constituent Assembly appointed a Committee to prepare a draft resolution on the subject of linguistic provinces.

Even on the Southern Front there was a probable thaw in the opposition of the Madras Legislature as on April 1947, it recommended the formation of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra as separate provinces under the new Constitution. It also recommended the early appointment of a Boundary Commission or Commissions or other suitable machinery for the redrawing of the provinces. The conceding of the demand by the local interest mobilised the Andhra Mahasabha into a special session in the same month urging the Constituent Assembly *to make all the necessary arrangements for the formation of the Andhra province along with the new Constitution.*

The Second Phase: 1947-1956

The Andhras managed to draw a lot of attention to the need of a separate province in the first phase although their goal was fulfilled only after India's freedom. The demand was conceded in two stages: in 1953 Andhra was formed initially with the Coastal and Rayalaseema districts. The process was completed in 1956 with the merger of the Telangana region to Andhra, thus marking the

¹⁹Quoted from *Indian Express*, Sept.25, 1946 in **Rao, K.V.Narayan**, op.cit., pp.200-201.

emergence of Andhra Pradesh. The second phase gives an account of these developments from 1947-1956.

Some heartening news was in store for the Andhras towards the close of 1947, with Nehru's announcement in the Constituent Assembly that *the demand for an Andhra Province was a perfectly legitimate one. It raised relatively few difficulties.* The Andhra province it was opined could be included among the provinces in the constitution as was done in the case of Orissa and Sind under the Government of India Act., 1935. The leadership probably fearing similar demands from other agrarian-linguistic categories too, made an about-turn and excluded the provision for an Andhra province in the first schedule of the Draft Constitution brought out on February 21, 1948. The waning hopes, flickered with life once again in March 1948, with the statement of Nehru at Vizag that the Constituent Assembly would appoint a Committee very soon to look into the broader aspects of the question of an Andhra Province.

Linguistic Provinces Commission:

The much-awaited LPC came into existence in June 1948 under the Chairmanship of S.K.Dar²⁰ with the job of looking into the possibility of the creation of Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra provinces.

²⁰ See Rao, K.V.Narayan, op. cit., p.204 & Rao, P.Raghunadha, op.cit., pp.125-126.

The Andhra Mahasabha formally handed a memorandum to the commission containing the demand for Visalandhra. But apparently regional cracks became evident when twenty legislators from Rayalaseema under the leadership of Sanjiva Reddy submitted a counter-memorandum urging the postponement of linguistic provinces. The memorandum also contained the demand for a separate Rayalaseema. The memorandum was the probable product of uneven levels of development between the Rayalaseema and the Coastal taluks. It was simply a bigger form of the call for a separate Rayalaseema Congress Circle for the Ceded districts given in 1924. In the event of the formation of Visalandhra, the fears of the Rayalaseemas persisted as to the domination of the more developed Andhras, thereby amounting in no change whatsoever in their (Rayalaseemas) status as the ruled. The change, if any they visualised in such an event might be just the rulers. It was therefore urged that in case a separate Andhra Province, was formed statutory safeguards should be provided for Rayalaseema. Even while opposing linguistic provinces in general., the Rayalaseemas wanted a separate Rayalaseema province with Madras as its capital. Thus the factor of uneven development has acted as an obstruction for the development of nationality consciousness.

Thus taking advantage of the split in the ranks of the Telugu-people, the Report of the Commission recommended that "no new provinces *should be formed for the present*".²¹ Regarding the

²¹Report of Linguistic Provinces Commission, New Delhi, 194B, p.2,

enthusiasm of the people for linguistic provinces, the Commission observed: "These linguistic provinces made a strong appeal to *the imagination of our countrymen and there exists a large volume of public support in their favour.*" The demand for Visalandhra which has powerful overtones especially in the coastal districts of Andhra became in the words of one of its leading advocates "a passion and has ceased to *be a matter of reason*". The commission members held that "*the heat, passion and controversy which gathered round the work of this commission. . . . are themselves proof of the intensity* which exists on this subject. . . . *there is a grave risk in turning it down, and such a risk can only be justified in the interest of national emergency*".(Ibid). The Commission members were therefore in two minds: on one hand they recognised that there was a real and great demand for linguistic provinces, but the fear that such linguistic provinces would militate against the integration of India into one nation pulled them back.

JVP Committee:

The report of the LPC²² did not go well with the linguistic groups demanding separate provinces on the basis of linguistic homogeneity. The Andhras especially were the most disenchanted lot. The Congress sensing the acrimonious mood of the groups felt it prudent to assuage the feelings of the public by creating

Cited in Rao, P.Raghunadha, *op.cit.*, p.126.

²² See Rao, K.V.Narayan, *op.cit.*, for extracts of the text, pp.208-09.

another committee to reconsider the question of linguistic provinces. Thus originated the JVP committee consisting of Nehru, Vallabhbhai and Pattabhi. They were entrusted the task to review the position and examine the question in the light of the decision taken by the Congress in the past and the requirements of the existing situation.

The report of the JVP committee of April 1949, came as a boon to the Andhras, although it was disheartening as far as the linguistic policy in general was concerned. Even while recommending the postponement of linguistic provinces for a few years, it exempted the case of Andhra on the ground that there appears to be a large measure of consent behind it and also the largest compact (Telugu-inhabited) area likely to form part of this linguistic province is situated in one province. *We should, therefore suggest that if a start has to be made, we should take up for study and examination the problems arising out of the separation of the Andhra province. It should also be ascertained whether it would be consistent with the accepted principles. If the necessary conditions are achieved, we commend that measures may be taken to implement it.* (pp.14-16 of the Report).

The conditions mentioned were:

"if an Andhra province is to be formed the protagonists have to abandon their claims to the city of Madras. An Andhra province will have to be confined to the well-defined areas mutually agreed upon and confined to the province of Madras and can be brought about only with the willingness and consent of the other component parts of the Madras province. We do not.....

rule out the possibility of changes or conditions at a later stage.²³

Hence it was made clear to the Andhras that they could have a separate province sans the city of Madras. Madras city, thus became a bone of contention with the Rayalaseema members also demanding a separate province with Madras city as its capital. In order to pacify the violent reaction that the JVP report provoked in Andhra, Sitaramayya tried to explain away the proviso regarding the city of Madras. He held that non-inclusion in Andhra does not mean its automatic inclusion in Tamil Nadu, thereby implying that Madras may be made a separate administrative unit. This explanation convinced none. But the APCC went ahead with the request to the Government of India to create an Andhra Province immediately with the undisputed districts and urged that Madras be made a separate province. The JVP Report earned acceptance by both the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and the Madras Government as it indicated that Madras city is outside the territorial limits of Andhra, thereby implying that "it is a part of Tamil Nadu".²⁴

Partition Committee:

Yet another committee came about under the Chairmanship of Kumaraswami Raja, known as the Partition Committee with the sole aim of creating a separate province for the Andhras. One of the

²³Cited in Rao, K.V.Narayan, *op.cit.*, pp.209-211.

²⁴*Ibid.*

members of committee contented that "until the new capital and seat of the Andhra High Court were made ready, the Andhra Government and Andhra High Court are entitled to stay-on in the Madras city and carry-on all their work including that of the Legislature". The non-Andhras turned down this contention as they wanted the provisional capital of Andhra to be situated within the limits of Andhra Province itself. Thereupon Prakasam submitted a dissenting note. Taking advantage of Prakasam's dissenting note the Government of India which was apprehensive of linguistic provinces shelved the idea of an Andhra Province altogether. Subsequently in the General elections of 1952, the Andhras' resentment towards the Congress became clear when they voted Congress to only 43 out of 140 seats in Andhra.

Formation of Andhra

The Andhra Movement reached its pinnacle on December 15, 1952 when Potti Sriramulu passed away while on a fast-unto-death in support of the Andhra demand. The continuous assertion of the rich peasantry for a separate State especially in the midst of a flaming Andhra culminated in Nehru's announcement in the Lok Sabha on December 19, 1952 of the creation of a separate Andhra state with the undisputed Telugu districts excluding the city of Madras. On the submission of the Wanchoo Report (appointed to look into the matter) on February 7, 1953 Nehru announced the decision of the Government of India to finally create a separate Andhra state consisting of Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, West Godavari, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore, Chittoor, Cuddapah, Anantapur and Kurnool districts and Alluri, Adoni and Rayadurg

taluks of Bellary districts. On October 1, 1953 thus took birth the separate state of Andhra making it the first linguistic entity to be formed on such a basis in the post-independence era and also significantly the first event of the triumph of the rich peasantry (in achieving a linguistic province).

States Reorganisation Commission:

Throughout the freedom struggle and even in the elections on the eve of Independence, the Congress had pledged to create linguistic states, if returned to power. The various linguistic groups demanding separate provinces failed to understand what made the Congress backtrack in its commitment. Perhaps it was in order to broaden the national movement, the Congress leaders mooted and supported the linguistic provinces as language as a cultural variable can easily be articulated and could percolate to the common masses. Little wonder, the Congress party evolved itself from an elitist origin to a mass party. The transformation was clearly summed up in 1936 by Rajendra Prasad, the then President of the Indian National Congress:²⁵

"From being at one time an organisation of a small number of persons educated in schools and colleges (Congress) has now become the largest organisation of the common people drawn very largely from the village population and consisting amongst its members lakhs of peasants and cultivators and a sprinkling of industrial field workers."

²⁵Low, D.A: "Introduction: The Climatic Years 1917-1947:" in Low, D.A(ed): *Congress & the Raj*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977) p.1.

obviously an Andhra Province encouraged other groups in making similar demands, thus compelling the Centre to appoint the States Reorganisation Commission to look afresh into the whole question of linguistic reorganisation of the Indian provinces. The merger of Hyderabad state with India and the contemporaneous commissioning of the SRC elevated the hopes of the Andhras in the demand for Visalandhra. But sub-regional animosity cropped-up again, this time by the protagonists of Telangana. Here too, an underdeveloped material base is believed to be responsible for a separate Telangana. The intra-regional demands- Telangana and Rayalaseema- thus manifests that language has a probable uniting role only when there are no conflict of issues within a particular region. But in the face of differences between various regions, specially concerning economic matters, language as a decisive factor is subsumed and the other factors, particularly economic assumed predominance.

Formation of Andhra Pradesh:

The SRC in its report of September 30, 1955 on Hyderabad recommended reorganisation of the Hyderabad state on the ground that "the specific Deccan culture of Hyderabad....like the unity of this state is something that has been imposed from above".²⁶ It became apparent therefore that the SRC favoured a separate province for the Telanganas. But as the Andhra leaders favoured

²⁶For details on *SRC Report*, see Rao, K.V.Narayan, *op.cit.*, pp.288-294.

Visalandhra, intense negotiations began with the Telangana leaders culminating in the Gentleman's Agreement, a la Sri Bagh Pact fashion. In order to prevent the breakaway of Telangana, the Andhra leaders went more than half-way to meet the genuine demands of the Telangana people. The Agreement assumed statutory status with its incorporation in the States Reorganisation Act. Ultimately with the inauguration of the new state of Andhra Pradesh on November 1, 1956 the groups demanding the linguistic state realised their goal. Thus in the birth of the new state of Andhra Pradesh, the factor of language succeeded, although superficially, in weaving together all the groups belonging to the same linguistic community. The first phase of intensified struggle in the post-Independent India was thus brought to a halt with the formation of a separate province for the Telugus, Andhra Pradesh.

The Third Phase in the Andhra Demand: 1956-1973

Although Andhra was separated from the Madras State in 1953, it was in 1956 that the principle of linguistic reorganisation was accepted and the two regions - Andhra and Telangana - merged after a separation of one hundred and eighty years.²⁷ However the merger or unity proved superficial as cracks developed very soon, thus manifesting sub-regionalism yet again in the form of the Telangana agitation in 1969, having manifested in the Rayalaseema

²⁷Haragopal, G: "Socio-Economic History of Modern Andhra," in *Social Science Probings*, March 1985, p.69.

demand earlier. Thus uneven levels of development proved an obstruction once again in the creation of linguistic consciousness. The third phase deals with the post-formative events of Andhra Pradesh.

Sub-regionalism is not something new to Andhra. Problems were faced even with regard to the merger of the Hyderabad state as the people in that state were more inclined towards having a separate state of their own. But what are the reasons for the rise of sub-regional movements? Apparently the main considerations behind sub-regional movements are economic development and an anxiety for a proper share in the political power

Telangana consciousness- a product of historical factors?

The development of Telangana consciousness is attributed to be a product of historical factors. The three principal regions of Andhra Pradesh - Coastal, Rayalaseema and Telangana districts are marked by different socio-economic backgrounds. As most of the Andhra regions remained under the British rule and were exposed to colonial modern development, the Telangana people having lived under the feudal rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad lagged behind in terms of economic modernisation and industrial development.²⁸ Since the two regions were separated for a long period, they acquired their own distinct social characteristics. The economic

²⁸ Mathur, P.C: "Regionalism in India: An Essay in Dimensionalisation of State Politics in India," in Ramakant (ed): *Regionalism in South Asia* (Jaipur: Aaleka Publishers, 1983) p.29.

progress was such that there was a a wide gap in regional development.²⁹

Origin of the Telangana Movement:

At the surface the eruption of the Telangana volcano after almost twelve years of integrated existence with Andhra was rather puzzling in view of the fact that the people living in the Telangana region belong to the same linguistic stock as those in the other regions. Not necessary that there should be unity among people of the same ethnic stock but the question that inevitably comes to one's mind is : what made the Telanganites mount a series of militant political struggles to opt out of a politico-administrative entity for whose formation they had fought equally militantly just a decade ago?³⁰

The post-reorganisation phase witnessed, as aptly pointed out, the fusion between "people accustomed to life-styles appropriate to monsoon-dependent subsistence agriculture in non-democratically ex-Princely states" on the one hand with "the industrially and agriculturally progressive people of ex-British provinces" on the other.³¹ It is perhaps in this fusion that the brewing identity crisis can be located.

²⁹Haragopal, G., *op.cit.*

³⁰Mathur, P.C., *op.cit.*, in Ramakant (ed)., *op.cit.*, p.18.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

Telangana Movement: Its Issues

In order to have a better understanding of the Telangana Movement, an examination of the primary issues is necessitated. Evidently in the Telangana agitation language ceased to be a rallying point and has been overtaken by economic backwardness and political insecurity.

It has been alleged that statutory provisions guaranteed to them were not honoured. For instance the provision in the Gentleman's Agreement that the posts of the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister were to be distributed between persons belonging to the two regions - Coastal Andhra and Telangana, but it was invariably the Andhrites or the Rayalaseemas who cornered both the posts.³²

One of the oft-repeated charges leveled by Praja Samiti and other separatist organisations was that the Telangana area has been given a raw deal even in regard to educational facilities. This bears testimony when the average literacy statistics for Coastal and Rayalaseema regions is compared. In 1961 average literacy rate stood at 24.49 and 21.12 per cent for Coastal and Rayalaseema respectively, it was as low as 16.22 in Telangana with Hyderabad district accounting for 35.05 percent. The literacy rate varied between 15.7 percent to 31.2 percent in the Andhra region, while the Telangana region excluding Hyderabad district had a literacy rate ranging from 11.47 to 15.17 percent.

³²See Reddy, G.Ram: "Andhra Pradesh: The Citadel of the Congress" in Narain, Iqbal (ed): *State Politics in India* (Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1976) p.24.

More so it was also alleged that Osmania University - the only university of the region was discriminated against and starved of adequate finances.³³

The irrigation sector in the Telangana region is thoroughly neglected. Considered to be one of the basic inputs for agricultural development of an economy, irrigation was not given a "push" in the Telangana region. This was because Andhras pursued the idea for their benefit. Despite Coastal Andhra's rich alluvial tracts, particularly in Krishna and Godavari deltas under perennial canal irrigation, the State government's efforts were directed towards pumping in more funds for irrigation facilities in this region rather than attempting to improve the dry cultivation areas of Telangana. In addition, the Telangana region was denied its due share of irrigation facilities from Pochampad and Nagarjuna Sagar Projects.³⁴ There was thus the reproduction of the macro-model-the typical Madras exploitation of erstwhile Andhra.

To cap it all the Green Revolution of the 60s obviously produced the economic boom in the alluvial rich coastal districts only. The surpluses generated for the rich peasantry created a relatively stable intermediate peasantry with the potential for an upward mobility. The capital generated by the agrarian surplus in coastal Andhra could not be ploughed-back into the agrarian sector, due to its inelastic nature and also of the failure to

³³Ibid., pp.23-24.

³⁴Ibid., p. 22.

engender quick and attractive returns, resulting in the search of capital for better avenues and greener pastures.³⁵ The search led to the penetration of capital into a backward region like Telangana which remained underdeveloped under prolonged feudal dominance. The local traditional business community greatly alarmed by the entry of the new capital from entrepreneurs of coastal districts, literally financed the Telangana agitation for a separate state so that their business may not be affected by the enterprising Andhra entrepreneurs.

The Legal Battle: Telangana versus Andhras
All-Party Accord, 1969:

The outbreak of the agitation witnessed a spontaneous all-party meet in January, 1969, which addressed to the allegedly main grievances of the Telanganas - of constant neglect of the development of their region coupled with discrimination in services and non-availability of opportunities to them. The All-Party Accord reiterated the Mulki rules and thus assured :

1) All Andhras appointed to posts reserved for Telangana personnel would be immediately transferred to the Andhra region of the State.

2) Their posts would be filled by qualified candidates from Telangana or left vacant until such candidates became available.

³⁵Haragopal, G: "Dimensions of Regionalism: Nationality Question in Andhra Pradesh ", *op.cit.* , pp.379-380.

3) Revenue surplus from Telangana would be fully utilised for that region only.

4) The educational sector in the region will be improved.

The reiteration of the Mulki rules contained in Section-III of Public Employment (Requirement as to Residence) Act, 1957 led to an intensive legal battle. The Andhra Pradesh High Court struck-down the State government order of January 21, 1969 transferring Andhras holding posts reserved for Telanganas, in response to the writ petitions filed by 37 teachers challenging the Government Order terminating their services on the ground that they were non-domiciles of Telangana. The Order was struck-down judicially once again by the Supreme Court which declared *unconstitutional* that portion of the Act (Section-3) providing residence qualification for people seeking jobs in the Telangana region on the ground that no such discrimination *could be made between people within a state as to their residence though* such a restriction *could be made for the State as a whole*.

The Court order left the Telanganas a disenchanted lot who thus convinced with their 'low say' intensified efforts towards having a separate state of their own. The Telangana leaders reasoned that if there was a separate state of their own it would then be constitutional to limit employment to those domiciled in the region.

But the subject whether the Mulki rules were revived or not by the judgement of the Supreme Court striking down Section (3) of

Public Employment (Requirement as to Residence) Act, 1957 prolonged the legal battle. In response to this controversy the Supreme Court in its judgement passed in October 1972 held Mulki rules were "laws in force" immediately before the commencement of the constitution under Article 35 (b) thus implying that "any law in force immediately before the commencement of the constitution shall continue to remain in force until altered, replaced or amended by the Parliament".

This time it was the turn of the Andhras who got disenchanted with the ruling of the Supreme Court. Thus giving rise to the demand for severance from Telangana. The Andhras argued that if the Mulki rules were enforced and they were denied employment in the state services in the capital city of the State, of all the places, then there was no longer any reason to keep the state intact. Indeed two separate states could well be created.

Process of Political Conciliations and Economic Guarantees:

The Telanganites demand for full implementation of the Mulki rules and the aggressive reaction of the Andhras for the elimination of all concessions root and branch led to an interesting process of political formulae and conciliations. Since the outbreak of the Telangana agitation in the late 1960s there has been no dearth of efforts in trying to bring the impasse to a close. The unceasing process brought forth a score of formulae— trying to work out a proper niche in the economic and political spheres for both the camps.

But what are the precise reasons for the eruption of the sub-regional movement and as a consequence the decline in the importance of the linguistic base? Perhaps the timing of the Movement is a good indicator for understanding the Telangana Movement which became synonymous with the Mulki struggle. It can probably be explained in terms of the inverse position of the employment base and the availability of manpower. The regional Mulki struggle assumed importance as opportunities for employment narrowed-down and the availability of manpower (suited for the posts) increased in the Telangana region with the spread of literacy thus giving rise to a new class or elite.³⁶ In this process of broadening of the manpower base and shrinking of the employment base, the main casualty proved to be the linguistic base. The linguistic factor thus lost its validity as Telangana literates started competing for jobs until then monopolised by the Andhras (i.e. people belonging to the Coastal districts).

The first attempt in the conciliation process concretised in the All-Party Accord of 1969³⁷ which tried to assuage the Middle-class demands of the Agitation in the employment and educational sectors. It also assured all-round economic development. But since the impact was minimal, attempts continued in narrowing the

³⁶The average literacy rates for Telangana, Rayalaseema and Coastal regions are in 1961 16.22 \ 21.12 \ 24.49 respectively. In 1971 it stood at 19.00 \ 24.30 \ 27.60 and in 1981 26.22 \ 30.17 \ 31.61 respectively.

³⁷For a detailed study see Rao, K.V.Narayan: *Telangana A Study of the Regional Committees in India* (Calcutta: The Minerva Associates, 1972) p.81.

gap between the two sub-groups. Next-in-line of importance came the Eight-point compromise formula of 1971 initiated by the Prime Minister. The other signatory to the formula was Chenna Reddy, leader of the Telangana Praja Samithi- the party which spearheaded the Telangana agitation. It was to ensure accelerated development and expansion of employment opportunities. It was thus a formula to set right the anomalies created in the educational and employment sectors. At the political plane thus, came-about the resignation of Brahmananda Reddy and in his place was installed the man from Telangana, P.V.Narasimha Rao as the Chief Minister.

But the charges of the Centre's biased attitude towards the Telanganas culminated in chalking out yet another Compromise Formula in November 1972, with a Five-point charter"³⁸ which tried to adopt the middle path, assuaging the Middle Classes of both the camps.

1) The Mulki rules should be applied for recruitment to only gazetted posts upto the level of Tahsildar, Civil Assistant Surgeon and Assistant Engineer throughout Telangana.

2) In the case of composite offices such as the secretariat, the Mulki safeguards should apply for every second vacancy out of every three direct recruitment vacancies • in non-gazetted posts.

3) The various service cadres upto the first or second gazetted level should be regionalised.

³⁸See Gray, Hugh: "The Failure of the demand for a separate Andhra State," *Asian Survey*, April 1971, for a detailed account.

4) The educational facilities in Hyderabad and Secunderabad would be extended.

5) There would be a composite police force **drawn** from **both** the regions of the twin cities.

But the Five-point Formula was rejected by the mass of the agitationists, students and the NGOs, who stuck to their respective stands – the Andhras for elimination of all concessions and Telanganas for full implementation of the Mulki rules. In addition, the Andhra non-gazetted employees went on an indefinite strike from December 1972 and secured strong political support with the resignation of nine Ministers from the twenty nine members cabinet. But the stalemate was diffused temporarily with the proclamation of President's rule in the state which remained in force for eleven months.

Finally the curtain was drawn with the presentation of yet another formula consisting of Six-points by the then Home Minister, K.C.Pant.³⁹ The sole intention of the six-point formula was to keep intact an integrated Andhra Pradesh. It brought about a balance in the situation and addressed equivocally to the grievances and demands of both the camps. The finale was reached with the assumption of office of Chief Minister by Vengala Rao on December 10 1973, whose main task was the implementation of the Six-point Formula.

³⁹Ibid., pp.348-49.

The Telangana Movement was thus a politico-economic off-shoot. It is perhaps against the background of economic as well as political denial and exploitation that a link between the political behaviour of the Telangana masses in relation to the Telangana issue could be established.⁴⁰ In this struggle over economic and political resources, the finer and subtle differences in the historical background and cultural patterns gained predominance over linguistic loyalties and other cultural similarities.

Final Phase in the Andhra demand: 1973-onwards
Phenomenal Rise of Telugu Desam Party

The agitation which demanded the separation of Telangana in the sixties is almost an anti-thesis of the movement for Visalandhra in the pre-independence period. Interestingly it is believed that the Krishna and Godavari anicut developments led to the demand for Visalandhra, whereas the Green Revolution of the sixties created sub-regional tensions and cracked the Telugu consciousness⁴¹ culminating in the State being rocked by two violent agitations - the Telangana agitation of 1969 and the Jai Andhra agitation of 1972. The cracked consciousness of the Telugu people was brought together and cemented with the phenomenal rise of the Telugu Desam Party - a joint enterprise of both the regions - in 1983, mainly on the basis of self-respect or

⁴⁰Reddy, G.Ram & Sharma, B.A.V (eds): *Regionalism in India: A Study of Telangana* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1979) p.8.

⁴¹Haragopal, G: "Dimensions of Regionalism, Nationality' Question in Andhra Pradesh," in *Seminar Proceedings* op.cit.,p.30.

atma-gauravam of the Telugu people thus establishing the predominance of the linguistic factor as a uniting force once again. But what are the factors responsible for this renewed Visalandhraspirit? The spirit behind the love for a single compact linguistic entity lies, perhaps in the elasticity and broadening of the base of the Andhra economy.

The Andhra economy experienced an economic boom with the Green Revolution of the sixties. It is precisely from this economic boom that the process of elasticity and broadening of base of the Andhra economy can be traced. The vast areas of fertile land in the coastal Andhra irrigated by the Godavari and Krishna irrigation projects coupled with the modern inputs initiated by the Green Revolution generated considerable surplus. The capital thrown up by the agrarian surplus in coastal Andhra could not be ploughed-back into the agrarian sector: due to its (agrarian sector) inelasticity and also because of the failure to engender quick and attractive returns. It was thus in search of better alternate avenues. As a part of this process there was penetration of capital into a backward region like Telangana which remained underdeveloped under prolonged feudal dominance.

The resentment of the local traditional business community to the entry of the new capital by the entrepreneurs from coastal districts found expression in the Telangana agitation. The Telanganites did succeed in reducing the flow of the Andhra capitalists. Thus resistance to penetration of capital from the Andhra region coupled with increasing threats of land reforms

from the centre gave a new twist to the Andhra political economy. The capital which retreated from the Telangana backward region found new investment pastures in the construction industry sky-scrapers and cinema theatres. The cinema industry thus created a base for lumpen economy in the socio-economic structure.⁴² But since the lumpen sector cannot absorb the entire capital due to its own inexorable limits, it naturally led to its logical corollary, rapid industrialisation from 1973-74 onwards, thus resulting in the emergence of a local industrial class. This class, obviously has its origins in the agrarian surplus of coastal Andhra. Hence by the late 70s, with one foot in agriculture and another in industry, this rising class was looking forward to the emergence of a strong government at the state level which could not only resist any "psychological encroachment on land but mobilise the local resources for further capital support to the growing industrial base and maintain industrial peace." The rise of the TDP at this juncture can be traced to these economic developments.⁴³ In other words the Andhra economy has perhaps reached a stage in the eighties when the rich peasantry and the regional bourgeoisie together are asserting for better conditions of economic growth,⁴⁴ and it is precisely the deep urge on the part of these sections that has given rise to the TDP - the pride of all the regions. Little wonder, the TDP has used the same rhetoric that was largely in vogue during the Visalandhra Movement which includes the restoration of dignity.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p.381.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp.381-82.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p.388.

self-respect and past glory of the Telugu people. The only difference however is this time the dignity and self-respect of the Telugu people is backed by an economic programme which includes: providing a clean and efficient government, security and equal status for women, controlling smuggling and black marketing, bringing down the prices of essential commodities, making inputs available to the agriculturists and generation of employment for the youth.⁴⁵ The important component of the programme was creating a conducive atmosphere for rapid industrial growth thus having as its main thrust the interests of the rising class.

The meteoric rise of the TDP in 1983 mainly on the basis of the focus on self-respect or *atma-gauravam* of the Telugu people reinforces the belief that language plays a dominant role if not, the sole basis for integrating the people. But the fact that the TDP emerged at a time when there were no major regional issues at stake points to some other factor or factors behind the rise of the party. Apparently the rapid industrialisation of the eighties coupled with rapid agrarian surplus in the previous decade led to a fusion of interests. The regional bourgeoisie perhaps found in the TDP an opportunity to gain in the fierce competition it has been facing from the all-India bourgeoisie. Incidentally it coincides with Mrs. Gandhi's strategy of concentration of power at the Centre and the threat of land reforms seemingly in the direction of capital accumulation than capital distribution. The

⁴⁵Ibid. , p. 382

contradiction between the regional and national bourgeoisie perhaps found an answer in the TDP for a stronger regional base. Thus probably the contradiction between the regional and national bourgeoisie with a combination of a fusion of interests and consequently the collective interests of the regional industrialists and the rich peasantry of both the regions, which catapulted the unity demand in the form of TDP as it suited them best. Thus even development can be said to have brought the question of linguistic consciousness to the fore.

Conclusion:

An analysis of the Andhra phenomenon necessitates an understanding of the relation between linguistic and economic process in the development of the Visalandhra formation and the subsequent eruptions thereof in the state. As the main interest of agrarian classes lies in the local market, they naturally were more inclined towards regionalisation and hence the appeal of linguistic identity. Evidently the linguistic demand assumed significant dimensions in the coastal districts due to the rise and presence of an influential peasant classes ever since the construction of anicuts across the Godavari and Krishna rivers in the mid-nineteenth century. The examination and analysis of the Andhra demand brings forth clearly the antagonistic lines drawn across the agricultural and industrial classes. Accordingly the attitude and approach of the Central leadership towards the Andhra demand kept on shifting from one point to the other. The

⁴⁶Ibid. , p.387

shift in the attitude of central leadership can be traced to the dominance of the monopoly capitalistic class whose interest lay beyond the geographical boundaries of linguistic states. In such a context while one pleaded for national integration, the other for regional autonomy.⁴⁷

The Visalandhra demand basically has its origins in the issue of exploitation by a different nationality (i.e. Tamils) and the wide disparities between the Tamil-majority and the Telugu-majority areas. Since the Andhra peasants wanted better protection and support to agriculture it was but natural to think on lines of a separate province and it was precisely on account of this that the demand assumed stronger proportions in the prosperous coastal regions, which has the largest concentration of the rich peasants- a product of the irrigation systems. The Visalandhra demand was thus preceded by the emergence of a new class of peasants- the vociferous initiators and articulators of the demand.

The analysis also brings out relevance of integrating role of language which helped in binding the people belonging to the same linguistic group for a separate state in a multi-lingual set-up, of the Madras Presidency, thus annulling other factors in the process. However, the eruption of the sub-regional movements in the 1960s in the form of a Telangana and Andhra agitation reveals that the linguistic factor is not necessarily a sufficient condition for the State formation. In the Telangana and Andhra

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p.387-88.

agitations, it is the process of uneven or underdevelopment that held the centre-stage. In addition to underdevelopment, emergence of a new middle class in the Telangana as a result of the spread of literacy accounts for sub-regional agitation. Thus the emergence of Andhra Pradesh on the linguistic basis, could not complete the process of integration of the linguistic group.

The rise of an industrial class combined with the powerful peasant class and a sizeable middle class account for emergence of the regional party in 1983. The rich peasantry coupled with the regional bourgeoisie started asserting for better conditions; for economic growth. And it is this assertion that has given rise to the new regional party - the TDP, which appealed to the theme of self-respect of the Telugu people-the theme which was predominant in the earlier Visalandhra movement. Perhaps the TDP was the defence-mechanism of the regional bourgeoisie which was; at some point in conflict with the national bourgeoisie, Incidentally it also coincides with Mrs. Gandhi's strategy of concentration of power and the threat of land reforms was intended more for capital accumulation than distribution. Thus the emerging contradiction between the regional and national bourgeoisie and the fusion of interests of the regional bourgeoisie and the rich peasantry of both the regions catapulted the TDP to power. Besides the regional bourgeoisie and the rich peasantry, the poor were gravitated towards the TDP through its populist welfarism.

Thus the Andhra movement begun as a demand calling for the unification of all the Telugu people dispersed over several

provinces during the colonial times could realise its goal initially in 1953, and more completely in 1956 with the integration of the Telangana regions to the province of Andhra consisting of Coastal and Rayalaseema regions. But after realising a separate province the regional identity of the Visalandhra transmuted into sub-regional identity as evidenced in the cropping of the Telangana and Andhra agitations. However there is a shift once again to a regional identity in the eighties in the form of a regional party, the Telugu Desam Party. It is thus clear from the shifting identities that the democratisation process begun in the British period has been continuing at various levels, vis-a-vis the state and the Nation-state or at the regional and sub-regional levels.

CHAPTER III
PUNJAB IMPASSE

Punjab enjoys the distinction of being the only Sikh-majority state in India. And perhaps the only state to have undergone such a dramatic transformation of its population distribution, composition and thus complexion since Independence. Prior to Independence such a development was related to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the resultant transfer of populations across the border and later with the successive reorganisations of the state till its assumption of the present form of a Sikh-majority state in 1966.

The politics, more so the linguistic politics has taken a unique route in Punjab, popularly regarded as the "sword-arm" and "bread-basket" of India. So unique has been the political scene in Punjab, that initially, even a separate state for them proved elusive for a long time. It was almost two decades in Independent India before the goal of a separate Sikh-majority Homeland conceived way back in 1909, could be realised.

An attempt has therefore been made in this chapter to trace the evolution-the how and why -of the Punjabi movement. It examines the ambiguity surrounding the language issue in Punjab due to the infusion of religious meaning into it. The attempt is to analyze the causes for the inadequacy of the linguistic question to meet the challenges of the Punjabi people as clearly manifested in the cropping-up of the Khalistan demand, despite the granting of a Sikh majority state (as demanded earlier). Hence the present exercise seeks to identify the factors contributing to the present crisis. The Punjabi demand now spanning over

three-quarters of this century has been divided into four phases: from 1909 onwards when the demand first took some shape with the birth of organisations like the Singh Sabha and the Akali Dal- the spokes institutions of the Sikh interests. The second phase starts from 1940s when the idea of a separate state for the Muslims -Pakistan- became a reality thus rousing the hopes of the Sikhs in a similar demand. However the demand of the Sikhs having backfired the main contention in the post-Independence era has been, at least a separate province for the Sikhs (within the Indian Union)- this being the main theme in the third phase. In the final phase the movement from 1966, the year when the Sikhs did succeed in attaining a province for themselves -Punjab- till the cropping-up of a demand for Khalistan (a sovereign state for Sikhs) a demand reminiscent of pre-Independence days is traced.

Even though the demand for a Punjabi state dates back to the beginning of the present century, it was only in the second major phase of reorganisation- the post-independence period- that the demand for a separate Punjab state was granted. This was as late as 1966. it is rather difficult to understand as to why Punjab inspite of being a strong agricultural state like Andhra took so long to realise a separate province of its own. Since agriculturists are basically interested in such an arrangement that it was but natural for the struggle to assume strong dimensions in Punjab too. The most likely reason in the Centre's delay in granting the Punjab demand could be the fact that in Punjab the problem was not just linguistic or economic (as in the case of Andhra) but rather merged or combined with other factors

like ethnic and religious. And it is because of this merger, the factor of languages took a firm foothold in Punjab. So without doubt a vertically divided- Punjab with a different religion, script, language and social tradition provided a more conducive atmosphere than other parts of India for the emergence of the demand for a linguistic entity. Little wonder, the linguistic issue with its infusion of religion had a stronger grip than that was witnessed in Andhra. Its strategic position as one of the border-states could also be one of the reasons for the delay in the Centre granting the demand. Hence for long the Centre tried to resist and avoid the Punjab issue. But with the passage of time as the issue was assuming militant dimensions, the Centre caved-in (to the demand) hoping that the carving of the state at this juncture would put a halt to the ambitions and aspirations of the Punjabi people to attain higher goals.

An Historical Overview:

The Punjab Demand: 1909-1940

It is the period when the demand struck roots and attained a voice through the formation of organisations like Singh Sabha and the Akali Dal. The period witnessed hectic parleys in the light of communal electorates introduced by the British.

The demand for a separate Punjabi-speaking state began way back in 1909 under the British rule. The British could lay foot in Punjab only in 1849 that too consequent to the passing away of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was thus after almost six decades of British rule that the demand for Punjab had its first origins.

Arya Samajist versus Singh Sabha organisations:

The problem assumed serious dimensions with the criticisms aired by the militant Arya Samajists giving birth to Singh Sabha organisations- a movement aimed at consciously creating a sense of self-awareness and identity in the Sikh minds. Thus the Singh Sabha organisations founded in 1873 may be regarded as the foundation on which the Sikh nationalist movement grew. The crux of the Punjab problem lay in "the Sikh community's imperative to preserve its separate identity in the face of what is seen as the threat of re-absorption into the vast Hindu majority and the failure of the Hindu community to accept that imperative as a natural desire of one section of a pluralistic society".² "Instead the Hindu dominant sections went on harping on a century-old theme that *Sikhs were nothing but a part of the Hindu society*, thereby creating bitterness in the minds of the Sikhs".³

Morley-Minto Reforms:

The acceptance of the principle of communal representation by Lord Minto in 1906 and subsequently its inclusion in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 lent a new and wider dimension to the problem of Sikh- non Sikh relations. The granting of the

¹Malik, Harji: "The Historical Legacy" in Singh, Amrik (ed) : *Punjab in Indian Politics: Issues & Trends* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1985), p.33.

²*Ibid.*

³Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Bases of the Punjab Crisis" in *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol.XIX, No.1, Jan.7, 1984, p. 47.

right of communal representation to the Muslims in the Punjab province on grounds of narrow majority and economic backwardness of the Muslims helped stir the hornet's nest. As per the Census Report of 1921, the Muslims constituted about fifty-five per cent of the population vis-a-vis the Hindus and the Sikhs. The reasoning for the special and extraordinary rights to the Muslims constituting a majority was to offset the advantages enjoyed by the Hindus and Sikhs in the economic fields of industry, commerce, trade and banking. The economic domination of the non-Muslims over the Muslims in some parts of the province lent strength to the contention that they were on the threshold of economic exploitation by the non-Muslims viz., Hindus and the Sikhs. The legitimisation of representation and reservation of seats to the Muslims by the Communal Award was stoutly opposed by both the Sikhs and the Hindus. It was demanded that at least the statutory majority of fifty one per cent provided to the Muslims in the legislature should at be reduced to less than fifty per cent so that no one community can boss over the other. The slightest of margins in the number game made the communal problem between the Muslims and the non-Muslims acute. It was aptly opined that "nowhere is the communal feeling potentially so dangerous and so complicated as in the Punjab".⁴

⁴Darling, Malcolm: *At Freedom's Door* (London, 1949) p.xii. cited in Singh, Kirpal: *Partition of the Punjab* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972) p. 4.

In deference to persistent demands for separate representation by the Sikhs they were granted communal representation through separate electorates in 1919 under the Montague- Chelmsford Reforms (p.150).⁵ The Sikhs were awarded seventeen per cent or twelve out of seventy one elective seats in the Punjab legislature.⁶ In 1928, the Simon Commission granted a hike of only eighteen per cent representation although the Sikh representatives clamoured for an increase to thirty per cent. Separate electorates with reservation of seats gave the Sikhs their constituencies from which they elected their own representatives. The British thus keeping in line with their policy of divide and rule vested in the Sikhs an interest in retaining the Khalsa identity distinct from the Hindu. But how did the British succeed in their policy of divide and rule? Perhaps their success (in implementing the policy) should be traced to the multiple identities of the Hindu society. *In fact* the Indian society with its multiple embedded divisions provided the space required for the success of the policy. It is these multiple identities that also set into motion the transmutation of identities evident in India.

⁵Cited in Mishra, Madhusudan: *Politics of Regionalism: Special Reference to Punjab* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1988) pp.72-73.

⁶Brass, **Paul**: *Language, Religion & Politics in North India* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975) pp.318-319.

The communal base of the Sikh politics can be said to have concretised in 1916 with what has popularly come to be called the Lucknow Pact - a pact arrived at by the Congress with the Muslim League over the acceptance of the communal device of separate electorates for the Muslims.

The Singh Sabhas, the initial base on which the Sikh identity took birth gave way to a more concrete base in 1920 in the form of the Akali Dal with the main aim to liberate the Sikh Gurudwaras. The Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) also came into existence unofficially in 1920 with the same purpose. Since the Akali movement coincided with the Congress call for non-cooperation, it invariably got enmeshed with the national movement and almost turned into a national movement, thus ushering what was called the "religio-politico phase of revivalism".⁷ The Akali Dal has been dominated by the middle and marginalised Sikh peasantry and the small Sikh trader, who are strong believers in the Sikh lore full of dialectical and revolutionary energy capable of bringing into reality action-obsessed and militant people.⁸

⁷Chopra, Surendra: "Religion and Politics in the Punjab" *South Asian Studies*, Vol.25, No.182, Jan-Dec., 1990, pp.123-124.

⁸See Singh, Gurbhagat: "Punjab: The Politics of Cultural Assertion" in Shakir, Moin (ed): *Religion, State & Politics in India* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1989), pp.385-393.

The Second Phase: 1940-1947

The Rise of the demand for Pakistan: Splitting of Punjab

In the second phase the demand for a separate statehood of Pakistan turned a reality giving rise to a new fond hope among the Sikhs to be able to secure a separate homeland. This phase witnessed various schemes to bring some sort of solution to the Punjab problem like the Cripps' Declaration, Cabinet Mission Plan, Mountbatten Plan and the Partition Plan.

The climax in Punjab politics can be said to have come in 1940 with the passage of the Lahore resolution of the Muslim League containing the much-acclaimed demand for the creation of a separate Muslim state- Pakistan. It can be regarded as the watershed in Punjab politics. The state of Pakistan was to consist of *"geographically contiguous units, demarcating into regions with such a territorial readjustment as may be necessary"*, thus obviously involving the splitting of the Punjab. Since Punjab had areas where Muslims formed a minority, it was not practical to include the whole of Punjab in Pakistan,⁹ thus necessitating the split.

Cripps Declaration, 1942:

But a new dimension was added to Punjab politics with the arrival of Cripps Mission in March 1942. Until then the Akali Dal did not put forward or even conceive the idea of Sikhs having a

⁹Singh, Kirpal, op.cit., p.7, quotes the letter of Dr.Syed Abdul Latif's *Pakistan Issue*, dated 8th March, 1941, p.98.

separate state. But the draft Declaration issued by Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942, gave an impetus to the demand for the partition of India with such provinces opting out of India should they so desire. *"His Majesty's Government would be prepared to agree upon a new constitution giving the same full status as the Indian Union"*.¹⁰ The draft declaration thus clearly envisaged Pakistan. The declaration greatly alarmed the Hindus and the Sikhs in Punjab because it meant that Punjab being a muslim-majority province could secede from the centre and enter the other dominions which could acquire, *the same status as the Indian Union*". The Hindus and the Sikhs in that case were to be under the perpetual Muslim domination. Hence in a strongly-worded memorandum to Sir Cripps, the Sikhs lodged a vigorous protest by stating that their position in the Punjab has been finally liquidated.¹¹

It was maintained that in order to give substantial protection to the Sikhs, the present Punjab should be divided into two parts and each be given the right of non-accession. Since the Sikhs and the Hindus do not want to go out of India, there is no reason as to why the non-Muslim majority of the central and eastern Punjab should be forced to go out of India against their wishes, went

¹⁰Quoted from Maurice Gwyer & A. Appadorai: *Speeches & Documents on the Indian Constitution*, Vol.11, p.520 in Singh, Kirpal, *op. cit.*, p.7. Also relevant Brecher, Michael: *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959) p.278.

¹¹Extracted from Memorandum, handed to Sir Stafford Cripps' by the Shiromani Akali Dal on March 31, 1942. In Singh, Kirpal., *op.cit.*, p.8.

the argument.¹² But the concerns of the Sikhs for an honourable status for themselves began to increase with the progress of the League's demand.

Cropping-up of the demand for a Sikh State: Azad Punjab

The demand for a separate Sikh state was revived in 1942 to counter the protagonists of Pakistan. If Pakistan was created the Sikhs opined they would necessarily have to ask for a state of their own, although their preference was to live as an integral part of united India, sharing political power with the Hindus and the Muslims. They further held it was not necessary for a nation to be embodied in an independent state 'to realise its nationhood'. However as the progress of the League's demand intensified so also increased the concerns of the Sikhs for a separate status for themselves. The Shiromani Akali Dal had put forth its demand for a Sikh state. It was based on the argument that the Panth (Sikhs collectively) demands the splitting up of existing provinces of the Punjab with its natural boundaries so as to constitute a separate autonomous Sikh state. The Akalis demanded that an Azad Punjab state should be created simultaneously with Pakistan and Hindustan. In an cirticle entitled *Mzad Punjab Scheme'* brought out in 1943, Master Tara

¹²Cited in Singh, Kirpal, *op.cit.*, pp.8-9, from Master Tara Singh's letter to Cripps', dated May 1, 1942.

Singh stressed that *this was* conceived to protect the Sikhs from the communal domination of the Muslims.¹³

Gandhi's acceptance of the division of Punjab:

The contentious issue of the division of Punjab in an united India was finally accepted by Mahatma Gandhi the votary of India-the One Nation in September 1944. In a letter to Mr Jinnah, President of the Muslim League he stated:

I proceed on the assumption that India is not to be regarded as two or more nations but as one family consisting of many members of whom muslims living in certain areas in absolute majority desire to live in separation from the rest of India....The boundary should be demarcated by a Commission approved by the Congress and the League. The wishes of the inhabitants of the areas demarcated should be ascertained through votes of adult population of the areas or through some equivalent method. If the vote is in favour of separation, it should be agreed that these areas shall form a separate state as soon as possible after India is free from foreign domination.¹⁴

However this time the issue of plebiscite in the Punjab became a bone of contention. As Jinnah demanded the whole of Punjab for Pakistan, he did not agree with Gandhi on the question of plebiscite. Hence in a reply to Gandhi he argued that he did not

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Gandhi's letter dated Sept.24, 1944, *To the Protagonist of Pakistan*, pp.132-33. Quoted in Singh, Kirpal, *op- cat.*, p.10.

want separation on the basis of plebiscite in which all inhabitants could participate but wanted the issue to be decided on the basis of what he called self-determination confined to the *Muslims* alone.¹⁵ In fact Jinnah held that:

there is only one practical realistic way of resolving Hindu-Muslim differences. This is to divide India into sovereign parts. Pakistan and Hindustan by recognising the whole of the North-West frontier province, Baluchistan, Sind, Punjab, and Bengal and Assam as sovereign Muslim territories as they now stand.¹⁶

Cabinet Mission Plan:

The stalemate over the division of Punjab which continued for sometime was broken with the commissioning of the Cabinet Mission to India by Attlee, the new Prime Minister of England. Its task was to look into the various ways of solving the problem of granting Independence to India. Thus in view of the near certainty of the creation of Pakistan, the Akali leadership felt obliged to declare just before the arrival of the Cabinet Mission that '*no safeguards and guarantees of constitutional nature, no weightage or protection, promised to the Sikhs by any of the majority communities can be considered adequate to protect the Sikhs and ensure their free and unhindered growth as a*

¹⁵See Singh, Kirpal, op.cit., pp.10-11, for extracts of Jinnah's letter dated Sept.21, 1944, *Mahatma Gandhi, Last Phase*, Vol.1, p.95.

¹⁶In Singh, Kirpal, op.cit., p.11 from Hector Balitho's: *Creator of Pakistan*, p.16.

nationality with a distinct religious, ideological, cultural and political characters' In a memorandum submitted to the Cabinet Mission, the Shiromani Akali dal stated.

as an alternative to the existing province of the Punjab, a new province may be carved out as an additional provincial unit in the united India of the future in such a way that all the Important shrines (Curudwaras) be included in it as also a substantial majority of the Sikh population of the existing province of the Punjab.¹⁷

In other words, a separate autonomous Sikh state thus, as they put it is, 'the minimum demand and political objective of the Sikh Panth as a whole'.

The Congress Party contrary to the views of Jinnah and in line with the support to the Sikhs strongly felt that:

there must be no compulsion to any province or a part of a province by another province. The Congress cannot be a party to any such compulsion or imposition against the will of the people concerned...the right of the Sikhs in the Punjab should not be jeopardised.¹⁸

Mountbatten Plan:

There were obviously vital differences between the Congress and the Muslim League regarding the Cabinet Mission Plan which ended

¹⁷Nayar, Baldev Raj: *Minority Politics in the Punjab* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966) p. 89.

¹⁸Singh, Kirpal, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

in a disaster, with the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan uncertainty once again enveloped Punjab politics. But it acquired a new optimism with the arrival of Mountbatten as the new Viceroy

Not only was Jinnah's idea of settlement- the whole of Punjab and Bengal- rejected out of hand by the new Viceroy, but in fact Jinnah was made to understand that he would have Pakistan only if its writ would run in the areas where the Muslims were a majority.....and the Muslim claim in Assam would be limited to Muslim parts of the province alone.¹⁹

Meanwhile instead of any communal settlement, Punjab stood a witness to communal riots. Hence on April 8, 1947 the Congress among others passed the following resolution reiterating its support to the Sikhs:

these tragic events demonstrated No arrangement based on coercion can last. Therefore it is necessary to find a way out which involves the least amount of compulsion- This would necessitate the division of Punjab into two provinces, so that predominantly Muslim parts may be separated from the pre-dominantly non-Muslim parts.²⁰

Partition Plan:

The Shiromani Akali Dal reiterated that the creation of Punjab "was the only remedy to end communal strife". But Jinnah

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid, p.28 from *Indian Annual Register*, Vol.1, pp.118-119.

continuing in the same vein of opposing the sikhs held that he was against "the surgical operation on the provinces (Bengal and Punjab), which had 'ancient histories of unity' as proposed in the Partition Plan". In response, Mountbatten argued that the *"feeling invoked in his heart (Jinnah's) by prospects of partition of those provinces was the feeling invoked in my heart and the heart of the Congress against the partition of India itself"*.²¹

Sikh-Muslim League Talks:

Consequently the deadlock over the issue of the partition of Punjab led to talks between the Sikhs and the Muslim leaders. In the talks which naturally centred on the issue of a Sikh state the Muslim leaders agreed to the formation of a Sikh state within Pakistan, provided the Sikhs did not insist on the partition of Punjab and agreed to join Pakistan. The Sikh leaders however turned down the offer. Quite obviously the absence of a clear-cut policy of 'how the Sikhs would be treated in the event of establishment of Pakistan apart from assurances of good treatment' led to the breakdown of Akali-Muslim League talks. At their meetings in 1946 and 1947 with Jinnah, the Sikh leaders insisted on some constitutional rights which Jinnah was unwilling to concede.²²

²¹*Ibid.* From *Time to Look Forward* (Speeches of Lord Mountbatten), (London: 1949), pp.20-21; Hodson: *Great Divide*, p.216.

²² Mishra, Madhusudan, *op. cit.*, p.88.

Sikh-Congress Relations:

The Sikh leaders on the other hand maintained good rapport with Congress leaders. The essentially anti-British Gurudwara Reform Movement automatically drew the Sikhs (represented by the SGPC and the Akali Dal) on to a common platform with the Congress. In fact the faith of the Sikhs in the Congress can be traced to the formal party resolution passed at the Lahore session of Congress that "no constitution would be acceptable to the Congress which did not give the Sikhs full satisfaction".²³

But the faith of the Sikhs in the Congress took a beating in the light of reversal of opinion with regard to the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The fears were however given a premature burial with the statement of Pundit Nehru in July 1946 *"the brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and set-up in the North where in the Sikhs can experience the glow or warmth of freedom"*.²⁴

Thus resisting strong pressures from Jinnah and the British advisers the Sikhs permanently linked their destinies with India. Hence the religious composition of its (Punjab's) population was not only such as to posit the Sikhs between the Hindus and the Muslims in the social equilibrium, what is more, each one of them was tied up to it with traditions of historical, cultural and

²³Singh, Amrik, *op.cit.*

²⁴Singh, Kapur: "Sikhan Nal Vishwasghat", *Speech in Lok Sabha*, Sept.6, 1966. Quoted in Mishra, Madhusudan, *op.cit.*, p.86.

economic significance. As result of the different kinds of stakes which these religious communities had in the Punjab, all of them attempted to hold on to it till the end, and in the process, the partition of the region became inevitable.²⁵

Third Phase in the Punjab problem: 1947-1966

Demand for a Sikh State in the post-Independence period:

The third phase consists of the crucial struggle of the Sikhs in the post-Independence period for a separate province at least, within the Indian Union. After a long struggle and commissioning of various committees and formulae like the S.K.Dar Commission, Sachar Formula, States Reorganisation Commission and the Regional Formula the Sikhs could attain a separate province for themselves in 1966 in which they were numerically a majority.

The ambiguity surrounding the language issue in Punjab, due to the infusion of religious identification continued even in the post-independence period, as the demand for a Sikh-majority state revived. But the revival of the demand leads to a serious question. The question (that inevitably arises) is why were the Sikhs who achieved the partition of Punjab, with the backing and support of the Hindus so disillusioned with them as to demand a Sikh-majority state in the post-partition phase.

²⁵See Rai, M. Satya: "The Structure of Regional Politics in the Punjab" in Wallace, Paul & Chopra, Surendra: *Political Dynamics of Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981), p.115.

While analysing the underlying factors for this development, it becomes rather clear that what drives the wedge between the Sikhs and the Hindus is not "the linguistic differentiation between the two communities on religious grounds"²⁶ *per se* but rather the policies pursued by the Government at the Centre. It is maintained that the demand for Sikh state basically arose due to the lack of imaginative and relevant development policies taking the specificities of the regions.

For instance it is pointed out that in the era immediately after independence the Sikhs were concentrated in the central tracts, while the southern and eastern parts were predominantly Hindu dominated. The policy followed by the government in constructing canals for irrigation and other purposes, was such that it primarily benefited the southern tracts and aided the central tracts only marginally despite the fact that the major expense in constructing the canals was borne by the central tracts' farmers from their higher land revenue assessments. Added to it the drainage of this region was seriously disrupted by the canals, whose raised banks inevitably caused flooding on their upstream during the rainy season and since these canals raised the water table in some areas, it even caused loss of crop land through water-logging.²⁷

²⁶Brass, *op.cit.*, pp.326-27.

²⁷Leaf, J.Murray: "The Punjab Crisis" in *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXV, No.5, May 1985, p.476.

These difficulties led to the widespread belief that the needs of the central tracts are not being met partly due to the religious intolerance towards the Sikhs, thus automatically leading to its logical reasoning that a new state -a Sikh-majority state- would protect the Sikhs from such discrimination. Thus arose the twin-demands for a Punjabi-Subah as the political form for the central areas and Haryana as the complementary political entity in the south.²⁸ But Congress leaders professing the principle of linguistic provinces theory throughout the freedom struggle were "unwilling to consider seriously a proposal -Punjab Subah, based explicitly on religious and communal grounds, specially in the aftermath of the partition of India on a religious basis".²⁹ It is obvious that the causes for the demand of linguistic states in Punjab and the denial of the demand go beyond the linguistic question.

S.K.Dar Commission:

In 1948 the Sikh hopes were dashed to the ground when the S.K.Dar Commission appointed by the Constituent Assembly to report on redrawing of state boundaries categorically pronounced against any change. Added to it, Punjab was arbitrarily excluded from the Commission's terms of reference, groups. The demand for Punjabi-Subah was interpreted "as a demand for a Sikh state in camouflage and condemned as a replica of the Muslim League".³⁰

²⁸*Ibid.*, p.477.

²⁹**Brass**, *op.cit.*, p.320.

³⁰**Mishra**, Madhusudan, *op.cit.*, p.97.

Sachar Formula:

In 1949, under the Sachar Formula, Punjab was declared a bilingual state. In order to overcome the difficulties faced in the bilingual state a language formula, popularly referred as Sachar formula named after the Chief Minister of Punjab, Bhimsen Sachar was introduced. Under the scheme, Punjab was demarcated into three areas the Punjabi-speaking, Hindi-speaking and the bilingual. It was provided that in their respective areas up to matriculation the language of the area would be the medium of instruction in all schools, whereas the other language would be taught as compulsory language from the first class of the primary stage up to matriculation.

The Sachar Formula got full support from the Sikhs, including the Akalis. But the trouble arose from the Hindu organizations who resented the introduction of Punjabi in Gurumukhi script as the medium of instruction. Later on it assumed the shape of Punjabi-Hindi conflict, as 'the Hindus sensing what the Sikhs were really after was a Sikh-majority state allowed themselves to be persuaded to declare to the Census Commissioners of 1951 that their mother tongue was Hindi'.³¹ Thus as a result of the undemocratic attitude of the Hindus in Punjab, language was dragged into the web of communalism. The battle over language in effect became a confrontation between Punjabi Hindus and Punjabi

³¹Uprety, Prem Raman: *Religion & Politics in Punjab in the 1920s* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1980), p.7.

Sikhs.

In sum it can be held that the linguistic differentiation of Hindus and Sikhs on religious grounds reached its final stage with the declaration of Hindi as the mother tongue by the Hindus. This "culminated in dividing two groups of people belonging to the same racial stock and speaking the same language, but holding different religious beliefs and an attachment to separate scripts, who as a consequence of political action on the basis of religion have chosen to differentiate themselves further by changing their linguistic identification".³² Thus the seemingly linguistic identity got transmuted into a communal one with this act (declaration of Hindi as their mother tongue) of the Punjabi Hindus.

States Reorganisation Commission:

In the wake of the formation of Andhra in 1953 on the linguistic basis, similar movements were mounted in several other parts of the country necessitating the Government of India to appoint a States Reorganisation Commission under the Chairmanship of Fazl Ali in that very year, to go into the problem of redrawing of State boundaries. No Sikh was nominated to the Commission despite the fact that Punjab was the most disputed issue at that time.³³ Since the Congress leaders were unwilling to consider any proposal based on religious and communal grounds, the Akali Dal

³²See Brass, *op.cit.*, pp. 326-27.

³³Mishra, Madhusudan, *op. cat.*, p.98

in the presentation of their demands before the Commission emphasised "the linguistic basis of the demand proposing the creation of a *Punjabi-speaking* State rather than a Sikh-majority State".³⁴

The main arguments put forward in favour of a Punjabi-speaking state were:

It will remove all causes of unrest and discontent, eliminate language controversies, enable the imparting of education in the mother tongue and help the people to grow and advance.

The result: the formation of a homogeneous geographically compact area inhabited by sturdy people who would strengthen the defence of the north-western border.

Since it will be financially viable, surplus in food and rich in resources, naturally it will secure for the country a contented Sikh community and general peace, (p. 140)

The States Reorganisation Commission in its report considered the Punjab problem as unique in that the demand was equally opposed by people belonging to the same linguistic group (meaning the Punjabis Hindus) and residing in the areas proposed to be constituted into a Punjabi-speaking State.³⁵

Camouflaging the Sikh demand from a religion-based demand to a linguistic-centred Punjabi-state could not convince the States

³⁴Brass, op.cit., p.320.

³⁵Cited in Mishra, Madhusudan, op,cit., pp.99-100 from the *States Reorganisation Commission Report*, p.141.

Reorganisation commission much as it could not ignore the communal part of the demand. In fact, it explicitly stated that the internal tension in Punjab followed communal rather than territorial lines.³⁶ The Commission went so far as to opine that "the proposed state will solve neither the language problem nor the communal problem and far from removing internal tension, which exists between the communal and the linguistic and regional groups, it might further exacerbate the existing feelings". (SRC Report, p.146).

The report cited two main reasons for turning down the demand :

the nearness of *Punjabi-language* to Hindi grammatically and spatially, and more importantly the lack of general support of the Punjabi Hindus to the movement.

Needless to add linguistic homogeneity is generally considered an instrument to bring the people close to the Government but in the case of Punjab it failed to work as Punjabi Hindus denied the Punjabi language and instead declared Hindi to be their mother tongue. Communal identity, thus became a victim twice: in 1947 when the Punjabi Muslims broke away from the common culture of Punjab and the second time in 1951 with the declaration of the Punjabi Hindus of Hindi as their mother tongue, thus rejecting their linguistic heritage.³⁷

³⁶**Chopra, V.D., Mishra, R.K., & Singh, Nirmal:** Agony of *Punjab* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1984), p.87.

³⁷Pettigrew, Joyce: "In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore",

The commission on its part set aside the fears of the Akalis that the Punjabi language would suffer, if Punjabi Subah was not formed. The dismissal by the Commission not only of the demand of a separate province as well as the separate status of the Punjabi-language also, prompted Sardar Hukam Singh of the then Akali Dal to comment in a lighter vein: "*while others got States for their languages, we lost even our language*".³⁸ Thus the slogan of linguistic reorganisation of Punjab instead of becoming a cementing force proved to be a divisive factor of the Punjabi people.

Regional Formula:

The Akali Dal met the rejection of its demand by the States Reorganisation Commission in 1955 by launching the Punjabi-Subah-Slogan Agitation. It bore fruit in the form of the Regional Formula in 1956, resulting in the merger of PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab) with Punjab. Under the formula the Punjab Legislature would henceforth consist of two groups- those elected from the Punjabi-speaking area and the other from the Hindi-speaking ones.

Final Phase of the Punjabi-Movement: Carving of the Punjabi-Subah

However very soon dissatisfaction spread-in with the working of the half-baked plan of a Punjabi-Subah-the Regional Formula,

Pacific Affairs, Spring 1987, p.8.

³⁸See Brass, op.cit., p.320.

culminating in launching of a full-fledged movement in the beginning of May 1960.³⁹ The movement gained all-out momentum by mid-sixties with the declaration of the Punjab State as a food zone during the drought of 1965. A food zone may be understood as a prohibition on the foodstuffs from one area to another. Punjab was so declared as to depress prices within the state to levels that would compel the farmers to sell to the central stockpiles. Quite naturally this policy was much resented by the agriculturists who viewed it as yet another blatant instance of Centre's hostility towards the Sikhs, their state and religion.⁴⁰ This indicates how the cultural and linguistic factors get mixed up with the economic and material. It is the intertwining of the linguistic with economic factors which has been responsible for the success of the anti-centre morcha of the Akalis.

Ultimately a Sikh-majority state was realised in 1966 with the coming of an end of the Indo-Pak War in which the Sikh peasantry played a notable role lending a helping hand to the troops on the frontline. A three-member sub-committee appointed to look into the Punjab problem came out in favour of redrawing the boundaries on a linguistic basis. Accordingly the Punjab Reorganisation Bill was enacted on September 18, 1966 and the State made its first appearance on November 1, 1966. The Punjab province was split into three States- Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjabi-speaking

³⁹Brass, *op.cit.*, p.321.

⁴⁰Leaf, *op.cit.*, p.486.

Punjab in which sikhs formed about sixty per cent of the population.⁴¹

Thus the centre's (delayed) response could be ensured only after a lot of camouflaging on the part of the Sikhs and the centre's conviction of the Sikhs' credentials as 'our' nation-loving people, attested by their notable contribution in the Indo-Pak war. Though the linguistic reincarnation of the Punjabi Subah demand has in fact, materialised since 1966, its communal or communo-territorial overtones have by no means been totally eradicated as some of the basic economic issues still remain to be solved.

Final Phase: 1966-80s

Khalistan Ordeal:

The final phase depicts the post-Punjab scenario which obviously consists of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and its-concomitant demand for Khalistan, a sovereign state for the Sikhs. The phase from the eighties has been the most turbulent period in the whole history of the Sikhs. Thus the Akalis after having exhausted the various strategies what Baldev Raj Nayar termed as "constitutional, infiltrational and agitational (depending on circumstances)" have adopted in this phase the "confrontational" strategy.⁴²

⁴¹Mishra, Madhusudan, *op.cit.*, p.110.

⁴²Quoted in Chopra, Surendra: *op.cit.*, p.124.

"The birth of the Punjabi Suba finally, established an undeniable nexus between the Punjab and Sikh consciousness".⁴³ The region of Punjab however, remained a hotbed of separatist agitation, inspite of gaining of separate statehood. The basically econo-communal problem of Punjab has in recent decades, deteriorated owing to the call given by a section of the community for the establishment of a separate Sikh-Homeland, Khalistan. "From Azad-Punjab in 1930 as a buffer state between India and Pakistan, the Sikh extremists and fundamentalists turned to Khalistan as an autonomous state in India after five decades".⁴⁴ Thus the crisis, in Punjab has in the eighties acquired new dimensions. It has given rise to the demands for secession on religious lines and for more autonomy to apparently protect the group interests of emerging regional interests under the garb of decentralisation of economic power.⁴⁵

Anandpur Sahib Resolution:

There has been a perceptible change in the character of the Punjab problem from early-seventies onwards as it has spilled into the arena of Centre versus States relations. The spurt in Akali activity that began from then on had Anandpur Sahib resolution as its base. The Anandpur resolution envisaged in

⁴³Oberoi, H.S: "From Punjab to 'Khalistan': Territoriality and Metacommentary", *Pacific Affairs*, Spring 1987, p. 39.

⁴⁴Mishra, Hadhusudan, *op.cit.*, p.117.

⁴⁵Kumar, Pramod & Sharma, Manmohan & Sood, Atul & Handa, Ashwani: *Punjab Crisis: Context & Trends* (Chandigarh: Centre for Research in Rural & Industrial Development, 1984), pp.17-18.

Punjab 'Khalsa ke bol bala" (pre-eminence of Sikhs). It also revived the separate nation theory of pre-independence era. The main demands made in the Anandpur Sahib resolution passed in 1973 were:

1) The Illusion of the Punjabi-speaking regions that had been left out in the 1967 delineation, despite the clear acceptance of the linguistic criterion.

2) The oft-sought demand that the central Intervention in states affairs should be limited to foreign affairs, defence, posts, telegraph, currency and railways.⁴⁶

The second demand has been for setting right the heavily loaded unitary bias in the constitution. This demand in effect is seen as resolving the underlying constitutional crisis by reversing the present Indian constitutional arrangement of reserved powers. The concurrent powers, it was argued should go to the States and not the central government. This implication was further underlined in a provision of the resolution that called for the Indian constitution to become '*federal in a real sense*' and to assure that all States are equally represented at the centre.⁴⁷

Although these demands are purely region-oriented they have been enmeshed with religion so as to mobilise the Sikhs. This has resulted in Punjabi Hindus (who constitute 48 per cent of the

⁴⁶See Rai, Satya: "Punjab: Religion Against Politics", in Mainstream, Dec.24, 1983, p.15.

⁴⁷Leaf, op.cat., p.481.

population) opposing the move lending to Hindus being charged "of lack of interest in Punjabis just demands and the genuine economic and political grievances of Punjabis as a whole against the Union Government".

In order to drive a new balance in the federal relations and mitigate the Punjab agitation the Government announced the appointment of a retired Supreme Court judge Justice Sarkaria (a Sikh) to head a Commission to review Centre-State relations in a broader context. The Akalis committed to greater State powers welcomed the decision but continued to press the demands through agitation. The Commission has since submitted its report.

Punjab, the burning cauldron has shaken the entire nation. But why did Punjab erupt? Perhaps the answer lies not merely in the issues of transfer of territory, allocation of water or declaration of Amritsar as a holy city.⁴⁸ Nor can the upheaval be traced to the contentious positions maintained by the centre and the Akali Dal and the disputes between the various groups of terrorists and extremists. Rather the issues it has thrown open for serious consideration by the political system are of a more fundamental nature than mere squabbles over them.⁴⁹ But as held by Jannuzi: "the issues of contention are often less significant

⁴⁸Chopra, V.D. & Mishra, R.K. & Singh, Nirmal, op.cit., p.13.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 68.

than the symbolism that grows around them".⁵⁰

Significantly four theories of analysis have been advanced to explain the contemporary situation of Punjab:

1) that the whole problem is the handiwork or a scheme perpetrated by the Congress(I).

2) an outcome of the deprivation syndrome at the political, economic and perhaps social levels also.

3) the result of the Akalis' strategy to agitate whenever out of power.

4) finally, the most popular and widely-believed theory that the distortions of the Punjab economy crept-in at the time of the Green Revolution has given rise to the present situation.⁵¹

It is the fourth theory of analysis which has gained wide acceptability and has been the most sought-after for explaining the Punjab problem. In accordance with this analytical theory, the Punjab problem has been basically perceived to be an economic proposition. The Green Revolution experienced in the sixties has resulted in a spectacular growth of the Punjab economy. It made a notable dent in the agricultural sector. But the growth under it, although spectacular, has given rise to a crisis situation resulting in uneven and un-uniform development. "The Green

⁵⁰Jannuzi, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

Chopra, Surendra: "Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society: A Case Study of System Breakdown in the Punjab", in Thompson, L.Dennis & Ronen, Dov (eds): *Ethnicity, Politics & Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986) p.199.

Revolution, in fact has tended to make the rich richer and the poor poorer".⁵² The benefits of the Green Revolution has trickled-down unevenly among the various sections of the population as well as across the various regions of the State.⁵³ The fruits of this so-called all-pervasive revolution apparently, has been cornered by barely ten per cent of the agriculturists, who owned almost thirty eight per cent of the land and may be called as capitalist farmers.⁵⁴ Since in the distribution of benefits it was the size of the landholdings which mattered most, "the widening income inequality became a concomitant feature of the success story".⁵⁵ The Green Revolution seemingly benefitted the creamy layer of cultivators, and has resulted in both proleterianisation and immiserisation of a vast proportion of the marginal and landless peasants. In other words, the capital-intensive agriculture introduced by the Revolution marginalised the position of the poor farmers and exacerbated landlessness.⁵⁷ Although the question whether the Green Revolution has caused poverty in the Punjab as such is debatable what is certain is that the small farmers and landless peasants (i.e.who were not full participants in economic progress) were surely

⁵²Ibid., pp.196-197.

⁵³Singh, Gopal, *op.cit.*, p.42.

⁵⁴Chopra, Surendra, *op.cit.*, p.199.

⁵⁵Jannuzi, F.Tomasson: *India in Transition*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1990), p.33.

⁵⁶Narang, A.S.: *Storm Over the Sutlej*, (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House 1983), p.23 and also Singh, Gopal, *op.cit.*

⁵⁷Phadnis, Urmila: *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989) p.258.

placed in a position of "at least relative deprivation - ad they perceived it".⁵⁸ No doubt the Green Revolution led to the trebling of food grain production from 4.6 million tons in 1966 to 11.96 million tons in 1980, but the affluence has been more illusory than real as benefits accrued disproportionately according to the size of the landholdings.⁵⁹

Besides in the economic proposition of Punjab arises the clash of interests between the regional bourgeoisie and the central bourgeoisie. The emerging class of capitalist farmers in Punjab perceived a clash of interests with those of the big industrialists outside Punjab. In fact Punjab politics has acquired a new dimension in the face of this projection of clash of interests between the emerging agrarian bourgeoisie and the central bourgeoisie. The latter are seen to exercise control over industrial licencing (under the Act of 1951 powers to give industrial licences is vested with the central government) and besides other things, a total control over market and political power. Hence the demand for greater autonomy.⁶⁰

The agricultural boost has given rise to a clash at a more local level. The clash has been between the economic interests of the agriculturist castes in the rural areas with those of the Hindu

⁵⁸Jannuzi, *op.cit.*, p.33.

⁵⁹Telford, Hamish: "The Political Economy of Punjab", in *Asian Studies*, November 1992, p.976.

⁶⁰Kumar, Pramod *et al*, *op.cit.*, p.75.

trading castes in urban areas.⁶¹ In short the communal colour lent to the economic relationships has led to the present crisis. In other words the bourgeois aspirations among the Sikh rural gentry have come into clash with the bourgeois hegemony of Hindu traders, merchants and industrialists.⁶² In Andhra where both the emergent capitalist farmers and the productive merchants are Hindus the clash between these two forms of capital has remained a straight-forward economic one. In Punjab on the contrary the contradiction between the merchant capital and the productive capital in agriculture has communal dimensions.⁶³ The internal contradictions, arising out of competition for the market both within industrial and merchant capital, thus acquires a communal character of competition and antagonism between emerging local industrialists from outside Punjab and between Hindu and Sikh traders.⁶⁴

Another facet of the economic success story of Punjab has been the inundation of labour force from neighbouring states, thus affecting the employment opportunities of Punjab's own work force as well as tilting the balance against Sikhs demographically. The problem in Punjab, as Hardgrave opined, "is

⁶¹Singh, Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁶²Alam, Javeed: "Political Implications of Economic Contribution in Punjab", in Singh, Gopal (ed): *Punjab Today* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishers, 1987), p.87.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴Kumar, Pramod *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.61.

⁶⁵Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Basis of Punjab", *op.cit.*, p.44.

partly a question of ethnic balance".⁶⁶ Ironically it is their success as a community which is tilting the scales against them. A heavy influx of migrating labour force into Punjab agriculture has been matched by a parallel process of out-migration of Sikhs from Punjab. As a result the Sikh population has dipped to fifty two per cent from sixty per cent while that of the Hindu population has shot up from forty per cent to forty eight per cent, causing the alarm bells to ring. The immigration has been confined generally at the lower end of the rural economic structure, whereas it was from the middle and upper layers of the rural population that the out-migration took place. The number of migrant workers in Punjab agriculture negligible in 1961, shot up from 1.5 lakhs in 1978-79 to about 4 lakhs by the mid-80s. Thus in the mid-eighties 25%-33% of all male workers in the Punjab agriculture were migrants. These figures obviously leads to the threat of Sikhs getting absorbed into the Hindu majority gaining firm ground, a threat reminiscent of pre-partition Punjab. The main beneficiaries in this complex game(as in any community) needless to add, are the fundamentalists and the extremists who in order to gain leverage, seek to play upon the psyche of the Sikh community by indicating the impending and imminent danger of domination by Hindu majority in Punjab and thus emotionalise the

⁶⁶Hardgrave, Robert L (Jr): "The Northeast, the Punjab & Regionalisation of Indian Politics", *op.cit.*, p.1179.

⁶⁷*Ibid.* Also Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Basis of Punjab", *op.cit.*, p.45.

objective reality to fan communal fires.⁶⁸

Punjab with only 1.6 per cent of the nation's land area and about 2 per cent of the population, provides 73 per cent of the country's procurement of wheat and almost 48 per cent of its rice but when it comes to processed food products the bulk of it are imported from other States.⁶⁹

Although agriculturally Punjab has a strong base industrially its base is rather too fragile. One of the most appealing reasons which has been always given for the low industrial investment and activity in Punjab has been its location as a border-state. Compared to the large-scale industry, the small industries sector experienced growth in the seventies, it nonetheless could not broaden its base. Apart from the low generation of employment in these industries, the distribution of gains, whatsoever, has tended to be concentrated in districts like Amritsar, Patiala and Ludhiana. The Amritsar district occupies the second position in the small industries sector, most of its work consists of cotton and wool processing, the gains from these are generally cornered by the predominantly Hindu businesses of Amritsar. The scene is no better in the large-scale industry sector.⁷⁰ It is not surprising to note that "less than 25 per cent of Punjab's gross domestic product comes from industry, a share which is one of the

⁶⁸Singh, Gopal, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹Telford, Hamish, *op. cit.*, p.980.

⁷⁰*Ibid.* Telford has given a comprehensive picture of the political scene of Punjab.

lowest in India, even below states like Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar though the per capita GDP of these states is far behind that of the Punjab".⁷¹ As a result of tardy industrialisation, the surplus being generated finds its way for investment outside the state or is frittered away in conspicuous consumption.⁷² Thus the lack of openings for the surplus generated from the agricultural sector can partly account for the Punjab crisis, coupled with the fact that there can be two opinions as regards the agricultural successes of Punjab having reached a plateau. So in the face of critical levels reached in both the agricultural and industrial sectors, the eruption seems to be a logical off-shoot of the crisis. It is in this context that Punjab's rigorous drive to achieve a new balance in the federal system should be understood.

"The key to understanding the tragic sequence of events from the attack on the Golden temple to the assassination of Mrs Gandhi lies in seeing how the legitimate and resolvable problems bundled into the arguments about federalism became submerged in the fundamentally unresolvable demands- ideas, associated with separation and terrorism". It has always been maintained that it is quite possible that "the drive for federalism will lose force if the economic problems are erased".⁷⁴ Harry Izmirlian, who after

⁷¹Quoted from Jeffrey, Robin: *that's Happening to India ?* P-34, in Jannuzi, *op.cit.*, p.34.

⁷²See Gujral, I.K: "The Economic Dimension" in Singh, Amrik, *op.cit.*, and Singh, I: *Punjab Under Siege: A Critical Analysis* (New Jersey: Allen, 1986).

⁷³Leaf, *op.cit.*, p.491.

⁷⁴*Ibid*, p. 497.

showing that the Sikhs constituted an independent identity discovered that"....the sikh farmers most frequently provide a surplus of agricultural products....it is not surprising that Sikhs are inclined to view their contribution to the security and the prosperity of the country in terms far greater than the small number might warrant". He goes on to say that "the agitation for greater representation in the political structure makes sense if viewed in this context, from the Sikh point of view both the British and the post-1947 India Government's responses were inadequate".⁷⁵ Hence the Punjab ordeal continues.

In brief in Punjab the linguistic controversy engineered by communal elements, rural-urban dichotomy and convergence of economic, caste and communal cleavages with it, emergence of a class of rich farmers as a result of the Green Revolution and little scope for investment of the surplus of this class, tardy industrialisation and urbanisation provide the background for the eruption of this crisis.

CONCLUSION:

In the final analysis it can be held that the core of the linguistic problem in Punjab is rooted in the question of ethnic

⁷⁵Cited from Izmirlian, Harry Jr.: Structure and Strategy in Sikh Society; *The Politics of Passion*, p.14, in Chopra et al, *op.cit.*, p.77.

⁷⁶Narang, A.S: "Punjab Elections: Retrospect and Prospect", in *Punjab Journal of Politics*, Vol.9, No.1, Jan-June 1985, p.101.

identity. In the pre-independence period it, lay in the Sikh community's drive to maintain its separate identity in the face of special concessions given to the Muslims by the British. Subsequently in the post-partition phase what lent impetus to the movement was the threat of reabsorption into the vast Hindu community. Although the demand was for linguistic-centred state the movement clearly aimed at a Sikh state with language playing the role of what may be called "sugar-coating".⁷⁷ Since the agriculturists were basically interested in the linguistic question, the call for such a demand assumed forceful articulation in Punjab. But the decision to create the state was delayed by the centre on account of the dominance of the monopoly of the capitalistic class at the all-India level whose interests lay beyond the geographical boundaries of linguistic states.

However the Indo-Pak war of 1965 signaled a shift in the attitude of the central leadership towards the Punjab demand. The shift was necessitated on account of the enormous contribution made by the Sikh peasants towards helping the front line Indian troops in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. The demand was finally conceded a year after the war.

But despite granting of separate statehood, the situation in Punjab remains in a flux. The Green Revolution of the late-sixties has brought about a spectacular change in the Punjab

⁷⁷The term used by Singh, Khuswant: *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol.11, 1939-1974 (Delhi: Oxford University Press) p.295.

economy. But it has resulted in unequal sharing of benefits among the various sections and uneven development not only in different regions within the state but also for the population engaged in agricultural pursuits. The growing pauperisation of the marginal farmers and the heavy influx of migrating labour force into agriculture from neighbouring states led to a fear psychosis among the Sikhs. Hence the problem in Punjab can be partly attributed to the question of ethnic balance. But perhaps the Sikhs success as a community ironically assists in tilting the scales against them. As pointed out entrepreneurial spirit has led to an out-migration of Sikhs (there are more Sikhs in India outside the Punjab than within) while agricultural prosperity in the Punjab has drawn Hindu labourers into the state from as far as Bihar.⁷⁸ It is this discontentment- the fear of getting reduced to a minority- among the large agriculturists which triggered the political unrest that the state has been passing through in recent times.

The militant and aggressive dimensions that the Punjab problem has assumed is a result of the competing and conflicting interests of the merchant capital and productive capital in agriculture. The communal colour lent to the agitation has been the result of the conflict between the emerging regional agrarian bourgeoisie, the Sikhs, with the entrenched bourgeois interests of the Hindus both at the national and provincial levels. In

⁷⁸Hardgrave, op.cit., p.1178.

other words the growing aspirations got blocked by the established hegemony. And since the aspirations are located within the capitalist classes belonging to one religious community and the hegemony to another, the situation assumed alarming dimensions.

Further the lack of openings for the surplus generated in agriculture in Punjab may also partly account for the present crisis. Punjab, no doubt has been an agricultural state, but industrially it has a weak base.⁷⁹ And even in the agricultural sector it is not hard to find opinions suggesting growth levels reaching an impasse. In the face of such critical levels reached in both the agricultural and industrial sectors, it is hardly surprising to find such a serious eruption of the crisis. It is obvious that the causes for the demand of linguistic State of Punjab and the denial of the demand go beyond the linguistic question. In fact it indicates how the cultural and linguistic factors get mixed-up with the economic and material. Thus the demand begun as a simple form of a linguistic problem goes far beyond and gets entangled with the larger ethnic and economic spheres.

At one level the Punjab question broadly fits into what Lenin observed on the Central authority and the region. He observed "if in a country the state system is distinctly pre-capitalist in

⁷⁹Telford, *op.cit.*, p.979.

character, there exists a nationally demarcated region where capitalism is rapidly developing, then the more rapidly capitalism develops, the greater will be the antagonism between it and the pre-capitalist system and more likely will the separation of the progressive region from the whole with which it is connected not by modern capitalistic but by Asiatically Despotic."

The crisis of Punjab has to be, therefore, seen in its historical context. A problem started as a linguistic question aggravated into a secessionist movement. This explanation has to be located in the overall political economy. Autonomy for economic development has to be located in the power arrangement. The cultural identity is associated with the economic crisis and restructuring of power. In the final analysis the Sikh movement may be viewed as purely a drive to redress distortions of centralisation and in the process place the federal units on an even keel. A genuine democratic and federal set-up with economic decision making (as envisaged in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution) located more at peoples level, perhaps, is an answer to the type of disintegrating tendencies that contemporary India has been witnessing in the recent past.

CHAPTER-IV
ASSAM TANGLE

Setting aside their ethnic origins for the occasion, the Indian people rose as one man developing a consciousness of nationhood-in their fight against the imperialistic power to gain independence. This was amply brought out by Guha, who commenting on the Bengali vis-a-vis Assamese relations in the Assam, remarked: "even as the two regional middle classes worked together and combined to confront *imperialism at the political level*, they also *fought each other* (italics mine) for jobs, land and hegemony over local culture and politics".¹ So lurking behind the ideal of unity is the chimera of homogeneity, an unattainable and, for many plural polities, self-destructive objective. Little wonder the dawn of independence was a forced witness to cracks appearing in the solidarity or oneness of the national consciousness achieved. As Phadnis opined, "the diversities demanded more space in the form of autonomy and if they were pushed and squeezed-in, their stridence at times was so intense as to crack if not break the mould".² Nowhere has the stridency more clearly visible than in the Assamese movement which appeared, in fact, to be heading to break the mould of the Indian nation. The widespread notion of economic progress as a rationalising instrument out to make affective sentiments redundant, appears to be a failure yet again in the light of an agitation in Assam. The saliency of ethnicity over class is not

¹Guha, A: "Nationalism: Pan-Indian and Regionalism in a Historical Perspective", *Social Scientist*, Vol.12, No.2, February 1984.

²Phadnis, Urmila: *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South. Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 1989) p. 33.

surprising considering the asset of ethnicity 'to combine an interest with an affective tie' as witnessed in the case of Assam. Perhaps Assam shares with Punjab the distinction of undergoing a stupendous population composition initially as a result of colonial administrative designs and subsequently in the post-independence as a result of new domains of autonomy carved out and granted to various hill areas marked by the federal authority.³ This Chapter deals with the Assam movement. The how and why of it in the broader framework.

In Assam we face a peculiar situation in which the issue at stake appears to be not the creation of a new state but rather the control of resources within the state and access to national resources by those who consider themselves authentic or genuine Assamese.⁴ It is this peculiar situation of Assam that we deal with in this chapter. It examines the various causes for the rise of the Ahomiy movement- the causes for the forgotten and neglected feelings. It also deals with the injustice or parochial mentality exhibited by the plains-Assamese towards their hill tribals, ironically these are the same allegations leveled by plains-Assamese towards the Bengalis, sparking-off the sub-regional movement, Bodoland.

³See Gupta, J.D: "Ethnicity, Democracy, Development in India: Assam in a General Perspective", in Kohli, Atul (ed): *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1991) p.156.

⁴Ibid., p.154.

In order to have a proper understanding of the Ahomiy movement it is appropriate to have a brief historical sketch of its origins. This chapter is roughly subdivided into three phases Phase-I makps a historical overview of the movement beginning from the Ahom invasion till Independence in 1947. Although they managed to assimilate the Ahoms, the rulers from the thirteenth century, the situation was markedly different in the colonial period as the fears and apprehensions of their getting assimilated into the vast Bengali immigrant community, this time, was not far fetched. However with the advance of freedom there apparently was no respite as they continued to experience successive reorganisations in the hope of having a State all of their own. This problem was further compounded with the undeterred mass exodus from the erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. It is precisely this scenario, the post-Independent Indian Assam that the second phase discusses. The final phase-the third, depicts the situation in the aftermath of the Assam Accord finalised in 1985.

The Ahomiya movement

Phase-I: From the Ahom invasion-1947:

This phase seeks to trace the origins of the the Ahomiya movement from colonial times till India's freedom. The Assamese assimilated their erstwhile rulers, the Ahoms, a tribe of Burma. But their travails began with the advent of the British and their arbitrary redrawing of provincial boundaries which inevitably left Assam with 'strange bed-fellows' and a margin of 'slightest of numbers', demographically.

The history of Assam is unique dating back to the Ahom invasion of the thirteenth century. Assam owes its present name to the Ahoms who called their province Aham or Asam. The Ahoms belonged to the Shan tribe (a tribe of Burma) from the ancient kingdom of Mungmau or Pong located in the upper portion of Irrawady valley.⁵

A distinctive feature of the Ahom rule in Assam was the absorption of the conquerors by the conquered. The Ahoms were absorbed by the Assamese-speaking Hindus, inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. The Ahoms emerged victors in numerous wars and brought under their fold the hill tribes such as the Nagas, the Mikirs, the Kacharis, Khasis and Jaintias, besides the initial base of the Brahmaputra valley and also overthrew the Koch kings, the powerful kings of north-eastern Bengal. They also succeeded in sending back the Mohammedans, who however held for a considerable time the erstwhile two lower districts of Goalpara and Kamarupa. In fact the Ahoms efforts in keeping the mighty Mughals at bay- at a time when Muslim influence was at its zenith elsewhere in India helped increase their prestige manifold.⁶

The Treaty of Yandabo: The Advent of the British

The British descended upon the scene of the north-east India as early as 1761 marked by the assault on Tripura, but it was more

⁵Das, N.K: *Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity and Social Stratification in North-East India* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1989) p.39.

⁶Ibid, p.40.

than six decades before the Britishers could set foot in Assam. This was facilitated with the dislodging of the Burmese invaders and the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo. The treaty of Yandabo (signed in 1826) can be treated as a milestone in the sense it paved the way of Assam into the British orbit of influence, thus heralding the beginning of the links of Assam with India. But it was as late as 1870s that some of the hill areas of Assam could be finally brought under the British umbrella. The status of Assam, however, remained that of a peripheral region under the overall control of the Bengal Presidency until early-1873. It was only in 1874 that the whole of erstwhile Assam was separated from Bengal and declared a Scheduled district. But even in the newly constituted province of Assam, "it was forced into an involuntary partnership with the populous Bengal district of Sylhet. Imperialism, thus encouraged ethnicity to play a divisive role and hinder the growth of nationalism".⁷ Subsequently it assumed the status of Chief Commissionership in 1912 and in 1921 it took the shape of a Governor's province. But despite the different forms Assam assumed, it was "left (more) an appendage rather than an integral part of British India".⁸

Partition of Bengal: Agony of Assam ?

The genesis of the Assam problem can be traced to the colonial policy of organisation of provinces. An outcome of this policy

⁷Guha, A: *Planter Raj to Swaraj* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1977) p.335.

⁸Chaube, S.K. & Munshi, Sunil & Guha, A: "Regional Development & the National Question in North-East India" *Social Scientist*, Vol.4, No.1, August 1975, p.45.

was clubbing-up of people belonging to different linguistic groups into one entity as witnessed in the case of Assam, or the splitting of people belonging to a particular linguistic group into many entities as evident with Bengalis and Telugus. In fact the agony of Assam can be said to have begun in 1905 with the partitioning of the Bengal Presidency into a predominantly Bengali Muslim province in the east consisting of Assam and a predominantly Bengali Hindu province in the west. Obviously the linguistic question was used in an opportunistic manner in the case of the partition of Bengal.

However the reorganisation of Bengal was opposed tooth and nail by both the Bengali Hindus as well as Assamese. The Bengalis saw through the aim of the Curzon Plan to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.⁹ To the Bengali Hindus it was a deliberate attack on the Bengali nation united by a common history, language and race. They considered it a national calamity in the sense that a fence has been drawn between the Hindus and the Muslims in order to interfere with the solidarity of the Bengali-speaking population and thus weaken their political influence. Moreover they had reservations about being clubbed to what they called a backward region. On the other hand the partition (of Bengal) did not satisfy the Assamese too, who resented their being clubbed into a portion of Bengal as it intensified their fears of getting absorbed into the (advanced) Bengali community. The dust raised in the aftermath of the

⁹See Guha, A, *op.cit.* , p. 71.

partition led to its annulment in 1911 leading to a reunification of west and East Bengal and the establishment of Assam as a separate chief commissioner's province. Assam was no doubt established but with a reduced homogeneity (as always) as it consisted of Sylhet, a predominantly Bengali Muslim district and Cachar, a predominantly Bengali Hindu district. Thus the new set-up of Assam- consisting of the two valleys, the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills, Naga hills, Mizo hills and Sylhet district- continued till the partition of India and of Assam in 1947.

Sylhet: Damocles' Sword?

The inclusion of the Bengali Muslim district of Sylhet in the Assam composition of 1911 proved to be a damocles' sword hung over its head, as Assam was demographically and politically balanced precariously between the Assamese Hindus and the Bengali Muslims. The flood of migration into Assam begun with the Bengal partition in 1905 almost inundated the province in the late-thirties, under the special patronage of the then Chief Minister of Assam, Saadullah of the Muslim League. He encouraged migration on a mass scale on grounds of boosting 'Grow More Food' campaign since the idea squarely fitted into the Muslim League's scheme of creating a Pakistan on the eastern flank on the basis of their numerical strength. The plan received whole-hearted support from the colonial rulers- the British- as well, as it suited their notoriously famous weapon of divide-and-rule. From the statistics available it is obvious that the efforts of the Muslim League and the British did pay-off as between 1901 and

1951 Assam's population increased by nearly thirty five per cent per decade as against its own population growth of twenty per cent per decade, understandably much higher than all the states except West Bengal and Tripura which faced the same flood of migration.¹⁰

Phase-II: 1947-1985

Partition of the Subcontinent:

This phase is an account of the events in the post-Independent era. Assam went through innumerable redrawing of its boundaries after freedom, which carved and granted autonomy to various hill areas so that what is left can be a State of their own. But even more a serious problem was the unhindered immigration of Bangladeshis, and the attendant linguistic conflict culminating in a long-drawn agitation against the influx almost shaking the foundation of the Indian polity. It is precisely the reasons of the agitation that the present phase attempts to analyze. The period covered is till 1985, when hopes of some sort of normalcy were revived with the signing of the Assam Accord.

With the partition round the corner there were serious apprehensions regarding Assam's future in the new set-up. However the Cabinet Mission's plan to carve out a predominantly Muslim zone in eastern India consisting of Assam was rejected outright by the Congress Party ministry holding the reins of power. But

¹⁰Kumar, D.P: *Challenge to India's Unity* (Delhi: B.R.Publishing, 1990) pp.1-2, 11-12.

though Assam managed to remain with India after the partition, its Sylhet district, popular as the 'rice-bowl' was chopped-off and clubbed to the newly-created Pakistan on the basis of the referendum held there.¹¹

Official Passage for Immigrants?

But despite the carving of Pakistan the exodus into the north-east India remained undeterred. In fact after Independence the mass influx received 'official attestation', so to say, with the passage of Influx from Pakistan (Control) Act, 1949, the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 and the Nehru-Liaquat Act, 1950. The Acts were prepared with the actual intention of allowing only genuine cases of immigrants- persons displaced by communal disturbances to return back to Assam, but instead turned into a (official) gateway to mass illegal immigration,¹ as it became difficult to identify and detect the genuine from the illegal ones.

However the separation of Sylhet from Assam proved to be a double-damocles' sword (or twin-danger) as it resulted in the separation of the economically-rich rice-bowl of Assam, Sylhet from it and at the same time left the problem of swarming Muslims into Assam intact. In other words it faced disadvantages on two grounds: 1) the rich Sylhet was separated and 2) there appeared

¹¹See Kumar, D.P, *op.cit.*, p.43. Also Nari, Rustomji: *Imperilled Frontiers* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) p.9.

¹²Kumar, D.P, *op.cit.*, p.45 & Singh, Bhawani: *Politics of Alienation in Assam* (Delhi: Ajanta Publishers, 1984) p.75.

to be no respite from the exodus. Sylhet's economic attributes and the deep economic dent left on Assam due to its separation are aptly captured by an observation in the 1951 Census:

"Though Assam's loss in area as a result of this partition is negligible (It has lost only 1/8th of its existing area), It has lost very nearly 1/3rd of Its entire population along with its vast paddy fields, and the tea, lime and cement Industrie": of Sylhet. Far reaching effects of the loss will continue to be felt by Assam and India for many years to come".¹³

But Sylhet or no Sylhet, the scene remained the same as hordes and hordes of Muslims continued to plough their way into it (and also West Bengal, Tripura and other north-eastern states of India) in search of better economic opportunities, having no qualms whatsoever leaving miles behind their dream homeland Pakistan- created on the basis of their religion, Islam. Perhaps the high density of population (in terms of man-land ratio) in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, coupled with high rates of unemployment, poverty and illiteracy triggered the exodus. The other probable reasons for the exodus were "availability of land, proximity to ancestral homes, absence of any restriction on the mobility of population, demand for labour force from the tea industry, coal mines, construction of railroads and government buildings which the local people could not provide and

¹³See, Dass, S.K: "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam: 1891-1981", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XV, No.19, May 10, 1980, p.852 cited from *Census of India, 1951*, Assam, Manipur and Tripura, Part-1A, General Report, pp-2-3.

improvement of communications".¹⁴ In order to have a good understanding of the Assam tangle it is therefore imperative that we focus on, the immigration aspect and the attendant linguistic turn of the problem.

Immigration into Assam: The linguistic problem

Significantly Assam has the unique honour of having an abnormally high rate of population increase among the Indian states, the outcome of unprecedented immigration, which reached the second highest in the world during 1901-1951. This was exceeded only by Brazil.¹⁵ But when exactly did its problem arise? Or what precisely, gravitated the two communities-Assamese and Bengali- into sharper relief?

Apparently the identity crisis of Assam is a British legacy as the problem arose from the colonial times when the British packed the services in Assam with Bengalis due to lack of qualified Assamese. However the expansion of educational facilities witnessed a spurt in qualified Assamese for entry into government and other services but found their employment avenues already filled.¹⁶ Another problem encountered by the Assamese was the imposition of Bengali on them in 1837, which continued formally till 1882 and practically upto 1921. The woes of Assam can therefore be said to have begun with the establishment of Company

¹⁴Horam, M: *North-East India: A Profile* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1990) p.105.

¹⁵Dass, op.cit., p.850.

¹⁶Rustomji, op.cit., pp.10-11.

rule over Assam following the Treaty of Yandabo. As one of the observers aptly remarked: 'The establishment of the company's authority, consequent necessity of manning the different government departments and the constitution of Assam bringing-in large Bengali-speaking areas, may be said to have marked the beginning of the language problem'.¹⁷ The identity crisis may be traced perhaps to this lack of educated and skilled personnel. The backwardness of Assam, in fact is also reflected in its general dependence on primeval agriculture with a low productive turn-out, highly vulnerable to frequent floods geographically isolated with rather poor transport and communication facilities. Apparently a combination of these factors coupled with the influx of foreign nationals led to the Assam crisis.¹⁸

Since Independence, it has been found that Assam has had language agitations in practically every decade-one in the early-fifties, another at the outset of the sixties, the third with the dawn of the seventies and the fourth, a far-more serious one in 1979 when the movement assumed frightening dimensions in the form of the anti-foreigners' agitation and several skirmishes at regular intervals.¹⁹ Such a scenario naturally gives rise to questions about the antecedents of Assamese nationalism.

¹⁷Kar, M: "Assam's Language Question in Retrospect", *Social Scientist*, Vol.4, No.2, Sept. 1975, p.21.

¹⁸Hazarika, Niru: "The Politics of Assam", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.LV, No.3, July-Sept.1994, p.211.

¹⁹Sarin, V.I.K: *Worth-East India in Flames* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1980) p.58.

Assamese nationalism is not a new phenomenon which developed/overnight with the influx of Bengalis. Rather (generally) considered a post-British phenomenon, Assamese nationalism in fact has been a product of the anti-British struggle. No wonder some of the early martyrs of the freedom struggle have been obviously from Assam. The provincial Assamese leaders have interestingly maintained close links with the Indian National Congress ever since its inception. The elite linkages so to say are evident as practically every session of the Indian National Congress has had attendance from Assam. In fact Assam even had the unique honour of hoisting the Congress tri-colour in 1942, for the first time in the nation's history at a Government building at Gohpur.²⁰ Yet despite its apparently deep involvement and commitment to the values of national unity and consciousness, one was a witness in Assam to a movement aimed at liberating the state from colonial yoke of India. It puzzles one even more as to its timing: why did Assam choose to stage the volte-face after well over three decades of Independence. However the leaders of the Assam movement have declared that their movement and resentment is not against outsiders per se (i.e. non-Assamese), but against foreigners (i.e., persons who are not statutory Indian citizens). Thus the "roots of discontent apparently Lay in fears of cultural annihilation".²¹ It is difficult to understand what made the until-then patriotic Assamese question the

²⁰Misra, U (ed): *Nation-Building and Development in North-East India* (Guwahati: Purbanchal Prakash, 1991) see the Preface.

²¹Rustomji, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

legitimacy of their continuance in the Indian polity.

Fight Over Numerical Strength: Assamese versus Bengalis

Significantly Assam has been marked by a very strange demographic fluctuation. As per the figures of the 1901 census a mere twenty two per cent declared their mother tongue as Assamese against a high forty eight per cent of Bengalis. But over the years the meagre figure of twenty two per cent (of Assamese) increased to just 31.4 per cent in 1931 but had a quantum jump to 56.7 per cent in 1951 to 57.14 in 1961 and 60.89 in 1971. Thus in the Assamese camp the population figures leaped-up, but it was on the inverse in the Bengali and other linguistic groups. Bengalis recorded 16.5 per cent in 1951 as against 26.8 in 1931. Assam has thus emerged in the process as a highly linguistic and ethnically diversified state.

The dramatic increase in the Assamese-speaking population from a minority group of 31.4 per cent in 1931 to 56.7 per cent in just two decades has baffled many. The States Reorganisation Commission after its Assam visit in 1955 went so far as to note: *"upto 1931, when linguistic tabulation was last undertaken, Assamese was not in fact a language spoken by a majority of the inhabitants of the state.,,.,."*²²

²²Sarin, *op.cit.*, pp.62-63.

The sharp percentage variation induced the Superintendent of Census operations of Assam, 1951 Mr. R. B. Vaghaiwalla to comment: *"There is a striking increase in the percentage of people who speak Assamese...With the solitary exception of Assamese every single language or language group shows a decline in the percentage. . . All this decline has gone to swell the percentage of people speaking Assamese in 1951. The figures do not fail to reflect the aggressive linguistic nationalism now prevailing in Assam, coupled with the desire of many persons among them to declare Assamese as their mother tongue in the state of their adoption."* He goes to remark by way of clarification that: *"it is not unlikely that some amongst the persons who have returned their mother tongue as Assamese have done so for devious motives, even though their knowledge of Assamese may not amount to much".*²³

The bandwagon of Assamese-speaking population figures registered an increase, continually decade after decade, popping-up from 56.7 per cent in 1951 to 57.14 in 1961 and 60.89 in 1971. Various theories have been attributed to the demographic transformation of Assam. S.K.Das spells out three causes for the population increase: 1) high immigration, 2) natural rate increase since 1921 and 3) the relative absence of mobility (among the natives).²⁴

²³Ibid.

²⁴See Dass, S.K, *op.cit.*, p.851.

The first theory of population increase, heavy immigration, has been the most popular one cited by most of the observers of the Assam problem. For instance Sarin belonging to this school of thought comments: *"There is no earthly reason to view the abnormal growth rate of population in Assam as due to natural factors. Such abnormal growth rate could be attributed to unabated influx from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and immigration from other parts of the country."* To substantiate his comments he holds: *"The population of Assam (present boundaries) in 1901 was 3.3 million. Had Assam's population increased at the same rate as the rest of India from 1901 to 1971 (130 per cent) her population could now be 7.6 million rather than 15 million, a difference of 7.4 million".*²⁵

In the face of arguments for heavy immigration, the theory of high natural rate increase since 1921, has taken a back-seat. But Das, a strong proponent of this theory, in an opposite vein to Sarin's opines that pressing the panic-button on the basis of simple arithmetical differences between Assam's decennial population growth rates for 1951-61 and 1961-71 and those of India would be factually inconsistent. He shows that between 1951-61 there was also an equally big hike in the rates of India's population from 13.31 per cent to 21.64 per cent. The rate of growth in 1951-61 was 75.33 per cent higher than that in 1941-51 for Assam and 62.58 per cent higher for India- the relative position remaining more or less unchanged. Das

²⁵Sarin, *op.cit.*

attributes the high natural rates to the launching of family planning since 1951. But when compared to the mean national performance and that of other states, Assam does lag behind in its performance of family planning and therefore its high natural growth.²⁶ By way of defence, he remarks: "*if immigration being equally responsible with positive natural growth rate, has caused Assam's population to grow at the highest rate in India between 1901-51, it also demonstrates an equally unique example of the magnitude an original language of a region can grow by adopting most of those immigrants into it*".²⁷

In the beginning "all that the immigrants wanted was land. But an open clash of interests began to take place when they surged forward in all directions from their riverine base in search of more space in the areas held by the autochthons".²⁸ During the initial phases of immigration the generally poor landless peasants from erstwhile East Bengal assimilated themselves with the Assamese as they did not have the numerical as well as cultural viability to resist the process (of assimilation). But over course of time the concentration of the same group in a particular region, sharing the same language and in many cases, a same religion, along with similar economic pattern of existence tended to give a distinct sense of identity to the peasants, thus putting a halt to further assimilation and the movement gradually

²⁶Ibid. , pp.851-857.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p.857.

²⁸From Guha, A: *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, op. cit. , p.206.

bhadralok which had come to dominate the administration during the early years of British rule. Out of this conflict having strong economic roots emerged a stronger middle class constituting of high caste Hindu strata of Assamese and as well as ethnic and tribal people. In the process of their struggle for restoration of a rightful place for the Assamese language and the preservation of a rural-based culture, the Assamese have attained a good degree of identity and leadership. The resurgence of Assamese nationalism, a fallout of the movement has perhaps also provided an opportunity to the weak regional bourgeoisie to go one up in the competition it faces from the national bourgeoisie as it would obviously gain even from a slight loosening of the stranglehold of the national bourgeoisie over the State's natural resources.³³

The inundation left many aspects of Assam- a conglomeration of three groups of native peoples: the Assamese-speaking Hindu population residing mainly in the Brahmaputra valley; the hill tribes-the Garo, Khasi, Naga, Mikir and Mizo-speaking diverse languages and of Mongoloid stock, and the indigenous plains-tribals believed to predate the Assamese Indo-Aryans, popularly known as Bodos or Kacharis-at peril. The demographic invasion affected many aspects of Assam, its population patterns, its economy, its politics, its cultural and linguistic personality, thus putting at stake the very basis of the identity of the Assamese.

³³Misra, *op.cit.*, p.65.

The Assam Movement: its issues

Little wonder the Assam movement harbouring round the fears of wealth and power was a mass movement of all Assamese directed towards the infiltration of outsiders, particularly the Bengalis into the land of the Assamese. The three propositions on which the hate-Bengali campaign became a hit were:

1) the strong repugnance of the Bengalis who were regarded as cultural Imperialists out to assimilate the Assamese.

2) to the Assamese their nascent nationality was no match when pitted against the superior Bengali nationality—superior and powerful in all aspects of education, language, literacy and cultural traditions. Ironically it was colonial subjugation of Assamiya language by the imposition of Bengali, which paved the ground in which Assamiya pre-national ethos could be fermented and consolidated into Assamiya nationality. As Guha opined : *"as an ideology and movement, Assamese nationalism took, shape only....when such questions as the preservation and promotion of the mother tongue, jobs for the sons-of-the-soil and concern over colonial constraints on development began to stir Assam."* Thus the British policy of linguistic hegemony and ethnic isolation acted as stepping-stones for the development of Assamiya nationality.

3) the third theme in the Bengali versus Assamese relations is the strong belief that Bengali cultural imperialism can be combated only by linguistic nationalism. The Assamese strongly resented the efforts of Bengalis to treat them as culturally inferior provincial cousins. Thus it was strategised that unless we assimilate a major chunk of this

population into our fold by giving them our language and
culture, there is danger for us.³⁴

Thus the main three propositions which perhaps helped the movement snowball into a burning cauldron were: alleged intrusion of foreigners, mainly from Bangladesh; to prevent Bengali domination and also to prevent national and outsiders' exploitation Assam.³⁵

However the movement initially launched against the infiltration of all non-Assamese, gradually donned the anti-foreigner garb around 1979 when Bangladeshis or Bengali Muslims became special targets of attack. Such a turn came in September 1979 with the detection of about 45,000 names of foreigners in the electoral list of nearly 7,00,000 voters during the bye-election to the Mangaldoi Lok Sabha constituency. The detection of such a huge number of foreigners in the electoral rolls probably made the Assamese panicky thus transforming the movement into a communal one, with their ire reserved specially for the Bengali Muslims. The fanaticism was in fact so strong that the popular demands of the movement like the establishment of an University at Guwahati, a bridge over the Brahmaputra and an oil refinery at Guwahati were sidelined and the issue of foreign nationals assumed high importance as a political weapon in the hands of whom, Rafiabadi called "the upper-caste Hindus".³⁶

³⁴Sarin, op.cit., p.95.

³⁵Gupta, J.D., op.cit., p. 159.

³⁶See his Assam; From *Agitation* to Accord (New Delhi: Genuine Publications 1979) p.99.

Prior to the nasty-turn of 1979, the spectre of linguism haunting Assam took a purely linguistic form. In the seventies and earlier in the sixties too, the All Assam Students Union had launched movements on the issue of making Assamese the sole official language instead of the prevailing two languages, Assamese and Bengali, and succeeded in making the government accept their demands.

To trace the movement to purely to a contestation over the numbers between the Bengalis and the Assamese may render the study incomplete. It will be in fitness of things therefore, to analyse the effect that the influx has had on its economy and the *vice-versa*. It is also necessary to examine Assam's relation with the Centre.

Assam: its economy

It has been unfortunate that the Assam-the fulcrum of the entire strategic north-east has remained underdeveloped within an underdeveloped economy. In 1981-82, it has been shown that Assam's per capita annual average income of 110 US dollars is rather meagre compared to all major states except six. This poor income is despite the rich resource base of the state which naturally led to allegations of being treated as a colonial hinterland.³⁷ The Centre, it has been alleged has extracted too much of surplus from the resource rich (in oil, plywood, tea)

³⁷Extracted from the *Statistical Outline of India, 1984* (Bombay: Tata Services, 1984) in Gupta, J.D, *op. cit.*, p.157.

state but had given back too little in the form of revenues and grants.³⁸

The injustice, typically meted out by the Centre has been pointed out in three cases:

1) Being the largest producer of crude oil - about sixty per cent of India's crude oil production- it gains less than three per cent of its value in the form of royalties. But what is worse has been the fact that one refinery located outside the state earns three times this royalty and even allowed a refining capacity double to that permitted to Assam.

2) Secondly although Assam is a boss of the tea industry, producing about fifty-five per cent of the country's production, tragically its crowning achievement gets diluted in the face of the fact that the tea-estate owners and as a consequence the dividends from the tea sales are mainly controlled and appropriated by 'Bahiragatas' or outsiders, that is non-Assamese.

3) Even in the case of plywood the alleged injustice to Assam has been glaring. Assam retains the top-position, supplying about sixty per cent of India's plywood, but as far as returns are concerned it is able to retain a tiny portion with a mammoth part swallowed by the Centre in the form of taxes.³⁹

So Assam the largest producer of oil, tea and plywood has remained so in name only, in the sense, the presence of these

³⁸Phadnis, *op.cit.*, p.96.

³⁹Gupta, J.D, *op.cit.*, pp.157-158.

commodities in huge quantities in the state has not substantially benefited the State financially. Its rich-resource-base has not been able to boost its barren financial position as the budgetary position of Assam has consistently projected net deficits in revenue.⁴⁰ Even the British pattern of industrialisation was more on the basis of non-replenishable resources and Assam serving simply as a production base for tea, coal, oil and plywood but related major economic activities were located in Calcutta. However "the present pauperisation of Assam" is attributed by some economists "to the Constitutional provision of Article 270 excluding Corporation Tax from being treated as Income Tax, thus depriving it of an important and elastic source of income- taxes from the trade in tea and oil". Assam thus loses on two grounds: 1) additional grant from the increased resources of the divisible pool and 2) locating headquarters of tea and oil in Assam (from West Bengal).⁴¹

Development overshadowed by colonial interests?

But the lop-sided development of Assam is not something which has cropped overnight. It has rather been a continuing policy right from the times of colonial rule. The initial investment in tea plantation, timber, plywood and oil during the British time was thought to herald a rapid pace of development and the beginning of a new era in Assam's economics. But alas, the

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Joshi, M: *Assam: The Indian Conflict* (New Delhi: Prachi Prakasham, 1981) pp.89–90. Also Goswami, P.C: *The Economic Development of Assam* (Bombay: Asia Publishers, 1963) p.300.

optimism was short-lived, as the British investment in fact induced lop-sided development. To quote Guha: " *The big push in the government and British sectors failed to induce a commensurate growth of the indigenous private sector. What was developing with an amazing tempo was the British-owned and British-managed part of the economy, with labour and middlemen services almost recruited from the Indian provinces.*"⁴²

Raw-material based economy:

Assam possessing a raw-material based economy lacks investment-both private and public-in the twin-sectors of agriculture and industry. Justifiably the private investor's have been apprehensive of investments in Assam as well as other units of the north-east because of its strategic location as a frontier state like Punjab, and the security risk involved as was experienced in the 1962 Indo-China war. This prevents the rise of the bourgeoisie. Added to it the public investment has been too low compared to the national averages. This dismal investment naturally necessitated importing all items from outside the state, including small items like safety pins and naphthalene balls. The extent of the finances getting drained out of the state became quite evident as per a survey carried out (1976) in

⁴²Guha, A: *Planter Raj to Swaraj, op.cit.*, p.35 cited in Sharma, M.L: "Elite Conflicts, Regionalism and the Compatibility Crisis: A Study of the Autonomy Movements in North-East India", *South Asian Studies*, Jan-Dec. 1980, Vol.15, Nos.1 & 2, p.67.

which at least twenty eight imported items could be locally manufactured that too without much market constraint.⁴³

Thus the fate of Assam- producer of almost sixty per cent of the nation's tea and nearly half of the indigenous petroleum and endowed with a high percentage of hydrocarbon resources, uranium, forests and the mighty Brahmaputra remains in economic doldrums. In agriculture, Assam has put-up a poor performance.⁴⁴ The wonder of what popularly came to be known as the green-revolution has not touched even the fringes of the agricultural sector here-though it remains its chief economy with 76.7 per cent of the working force engaged in it. The agricultural production in Assam grew by merely forty per cent between 1950-51 and 1968-69 as against sixty six per cent of the whole country.⁴⁵ "The package of irrigation, fertilisers and high-yielding__seeds responsible__ for the boon of green revolution, remains elusive and a distant dream in the capital-deficit Assam."⁴⁶

The incubus of underdevelopment has not spared even the most prestigious sector, its crowning achievement-the tea plantations in Assam-as it has been marked by stunted growth or stagnation. No doubt, the most profitable tea gardens are retained by monopoly houses but a mass of the gardens have been victims of

⁴³Sharma, M. L, *ibid.*

⁴⁴Kumar, **D.P**, *op.cit.*, p.319.

⁴⁵The statistics (of Assam) of only the period when the Green Revolution created marvels in the agrarian sector in other parts of the country has been cited.

⁴⁶Chaube, *et al.* , p.48.

speculative exchange of ownership. To cap it all, since the Indian tea including Assam has been suffering from the crisis of capitalist over-production, it may naturally lead to its logical corollary: dissolution of many tea gardens and thus spell doom for many of the labourers. Rapid strides of industrialisation could provide the answer and remedied much of the malady of retrenchment of the labourers with their absorption.⁴⁷ But industrially too, Assam has lacked a strong base considering the fact that there is no metal-based industry worth the name in the whole region, that is including the whole of the north-east. There seems to be no effort forthcoming in the exploitation of mineral resources, other than oil.⁴⁸

Although "there was a vast possibility of agro and forest based industries in the dense, thick forested regions of Assam, the main immediate hurdle seems to be the existing communication facilities built purely for administrative and security purposes".⁴⁹ Needless to add, history and topography have certainly acted as bottlenecks in the developmental process as it has been noticed, constraints imposed on communication and consequently on flow of innovative practices was also responsible for traditional agricultural economy maintaining the same old form. But this does not exonerate the centre-both British and now

⁴⁷Ibid., p.49

⁴⁸Ibid., p.48.

⁴⁹Ibid.

Indian- as no conscientious effort seems to have been made to remove these constraints.⁵⁰

Evidently economics alone could not have ignited the ethnic turmoil in Assam. It can rather be regarded as one of the critical factors which succeeded in bringing the Assamese-people belonging to the same racial stock-under a single banner. Thus the poor agricultural and industrial base combined with the domination of the *bahiragatas* (on linguistic basis) in the state's economy may be said to have led to the eruption of the Assam movement. The mass outburst revolved round a long list of neglect, suppression and exploitation. "What Assam is facing today may be looked as the upsurge of the oppressed nationality trying to assert itself".⁵¹

Thus in Assam the problem of "regional planning turns politically charged as ethnicity and economics are ill-adjusted within its framework".⁵² Alayev has maintained that "the economic backwardness of individual areas is a result in a number of cases of the disregard for the interests of some or other ethnic group, and this constitutes an objective condition for setting in motion the forces of disintegration".⁵³ In Assam we face the peculiar

⁵⁰It is perhaps the reason why Assam feels like a *Cinderella of the provinces*- the title of this chapter. Cinderella, the fiction character who underwent agony and suffering in the hands of her step-mother.

⁵¹For a detailed study see Misra, U, *op.cit.* , p.66.

⁵²Chaube, *et al*, p.43.

⁵³Extracted from Enrid, Alayev: "Regional Planning" Social Sciences, 4,6,12, 1974, p.161 in *Ibid.* , p.43.

position in which migrants and local people compete for the same jobs resulting in a situation of gains for the migrants then losses for the natives. Weiner throwing more light on the migrants versus natives held "the larger the benefits accruing from migration for the local population, the more likely it is that the local people will not press hard for restrictions on migration and will make some competitive response; the smaller the gains and conversely, the greater the losses, the more likely it is that the local population will seek restrictions, on the free entry of migrants, demand protectionism in the labour market, and press for reservations on the land".⁵⁴ It is precisely the latter position that we have been witnessing in Assam.

Phase-III: Post-Assam Accord agitation:

In order to put a halt to the agitation in Assam the historic Accord was signed between the All Assam Students Union and Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister on the 15th of August, 1985. This, in turn, led to the birth of two regional political parties: Assam Gana Parishad and the United Minorities Front, both of which participated in the elections subsequently held in Assam.⁵⁵ The silver lining of the accord has been the forging of pan-Assamese ethnic unity and consolidation, as the whole lot of the ethnic Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley stood behind the Assam Gana Parishad in the December polls of 1985 held in the

⁵⁴Weiner, Myron: *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp.352,356.

⁵⁵Niru, op.cit., p.216.

aftermath of the accord.⁵⁶ However the accord is believed to have satisfied only the upper-caste Hindus as it failed to address the middle class problems and has created more problems than it has solved. Although the Accord has spoken of Constitutional, Legislative and administrative safeguards for the Assamese, it has not specified the special steps to be taken in this regard. The accord has helped in the eruption of separatist urges among the tribals like the Bodos who have started demanding their own separate homeland. For the Bengalis their linguistic freedom appeared to be at stake, while for the Muslims the fear of religious as well as cultural suppression has gained active currency.⁵⁷ In addition the accord has been alleged to have overlooked the interests of other ethnic identities and their problems. The present- Assam has been truncated even earlier with the separation of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. And the remaining ethnic groups, the tribals of the plains and hills of Assam, as also the ethnic Bengali-speaking have renewed their demands of homelands in the form of Udayachal and Purbachal and the more aggressive demand of the Bodos, Bodoland. In the post-accord scenario these demands have been revived with renewed vigour as the belief has gained ground that their destiny lies outside Assam.⁵⁸ The six-year old agitation and subsequently several years of the Assam Gana Parishad's rule has put into focus- the differences and separateness of the varied

⁵⁶Kumar, D.P, op.cat., p.324.

⁵⁷Rafiabadi, *op.cit.*, p.100.

⁵⁸Kumar, *op.cit.*, p.325.

communities that make up the mosaic of the Assam society.⁵⁹

Sub-Regional demands:

The demand of the Bodos for a Homeland: Bodoland

Assam has a large tribal population-about 10 per cent of the total population or some 2.2 million are tribals. The Bodos are the most numerous of the plains tribes and constitute about 40 per cent of the tribals.⁶¹ In fact 49 per cent of Assam's population constituted Bodos in 1947 but it dropped sharply to 29 per cent by 1971 due to internal and external migrations and the various reorganisations that the state has undergone.⁶¹ The Bodos were the rulers of the entire plains of Assam, North-Bengal, parts of present Bangladesh and Tripura preceding the rule of the Ahoms. Incidentally their rule continued in some parts till the annexation of Assam in 1873 by the British. The Bodos are believed to have sought a separate entity even during the British regime.

The Bodos formed a political party, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 1967 to fight for a separate province for them. The prime objective of the PTCA was to demand a Union territory for the Bodos and other Plains tribals called Udayachal in order to protect their ethnic identity, language and culture, Another organisation, the All Bodo Students Union was formed, modeled on

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p.326.

⁶⁰*Ibid*, p. 327.

See George, Sudhir Jacob: "The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord" in *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXXIV, No.10, October 1994, pp.880-881.

the same lines, with the same purpose. The Bodos demand for a homeland covers an area of 25,478 sq.kms out of Assam's total area of 78,543 sq.kms. The new state is proposed to be agrarian-based with ninety per cent of the population dependent on agriculture. Their main demand relates to the autonomous preservation and upliftment of their severely economically backward area and identity. The benefits of the Sixth and Seventh Schedules covering all other tribes in the post-independence period, tragically fall short of the Bodos.

The catalyst to the Bodo agitation was provided with the imposition of the Assamese language. Rustomji aptly remarked, that "it is anomalous that the Assamese failed to anticipate the reactions of the tribal people to the imposition of Assamese when they themselves were so sensitive to the issue of language. He further remarked that "Assamese chauvinism, ironically enough, that diminished Assam and lost her tribal population".⁶² The list of demands of the Bodos include besides a separate state, greater job reservations, inclusion of the Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule and creation of District Councils in the Bodo-dominated areas on the south banks of the Brahmaputra.⁶³ The Bodos began their agitation in March 1987 in support of the above demands which continued for six years.

However the Centre as well as the State Government have turned down the demand on grounds of geographical and demographical

⁶²Rustomji, op.cit. , p.37.

⁶³Das, N.K, op.cit. , p.246.

considerations, incidentally, the Bodos do not constitute a numerical majority even in a single district so as to qualify for a separate statehood. The Bhupinder Singh Committee constituted to look into the Bodo question suggested just the formation of a three-tier politico-administrative structure in order to satisfy the requirements for the maintenance of the distinct Bodo cultural identity.

The Bodoland Autonomous Council Bill, 1993 seeking to provide the establishment of an administrative authority in the name of the Bodoland Autonomous Council was introduced on April 12, 1993 in the Assam Assembly. A Bodoland Autonomous Council in Assam with maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution comprising contiguous geographical areas between the rivers Sankosh and Mazbet, the river Panchoi for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Bodos residing there is sought to be established. It is to have jurisdiction over 2000 villages.

Although the pact met only some of their demands it helped allay their fears and brought about some peace in the valley. At least two more areas, which still remain in Assam- Cachar and the Plains tribals, areas north of the Brahmaputra river where the Bengalis and the plains tribals resent the imposition of Assamese language and dominance. They have demanded for Union territories, Purvanchal for Cachar-Karimganj and the other for the Plains

tribals to be called Udayachal or even Bodoland.⁶⁴ Meanwhile another organisation well known as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was born towards the fag end of the Assam agitation.

United Liberation Front of Assam

The foundation of ULFA was laid on the April 7, 1979 incidentally the Assamese new year, at Sibsagar, Assam. The venue was the historic Ranghar (entertainment house) built by the Ahoms rulers. So chronologically the ULFA had its origins in the waning phase of the Assam movement. The most logical and viable alternative before the ULFA appeared to be an armed struggle. The wide-spread fear among the Assamese of becoming a minority in their own state led to the emergence of separatist organisations like the Lachit Sena in the sixties and ULFA in the seventies.

The primary goal of ULFA is the attainment of a Swadhin Asom, meaning independent Assam. It received tremendous support from the Assamese people due to the growing sense of alienation from the Centre, a direct corollary of the mass influx of migrants into Assam threatening the very socio-cultural and demographic structure of Assam.

The root of the problem resulting in insurgency in a way is the sense of helplessness and alienation perceived by the people not only in the matter of control over the natural resources of the region but over the question of pattern of development as well.

⁶⁴ Kumar, op cat. , pp.6-7.

The sense of apprehension is perceivable even in the issue of maintaining the old demographic balance and also for that matter on the issue of preserving the substance of their traditional culture from contamination of unwanted outside influence, as a result of which their views and sentiments are increasingly being marginalised.

The main theme that ULFA appears to harp on is the conflict between the natives versus migrants or popularly to quote Prafullah Mahanta "the tussle between the citizens and foreigners". The ULFA apparently believes in fighting what it calls the continuing colonialism. They hold that since Independence there has been a change of exploiters and not in the form of exploitation.

Conclusion:

In the final analysis the Assamese history begun with the absorption of their erstwhile rulers, the Ahoms, became the *vice-versa* in the colonial and post-colonial periods. They almost got absorbed into the vast Bengali immigrant community, an outcome of being clubbed to disparate communities or what has been termed as 'strange bed-fellows' (like the Bengali districts of Cachar and Sylhet) with the Assam, a continuing trend since the colonial times. This in turn led to a related aspect— influx of the Bengalis into Assam. The influx, begun with the 'involuntary partnership' with the Bengali districts and subsequently packing of services in Assam with Bengalis by the

Britishers, had its echo in the post-Independent scenario with the spread of educational institutions in Assam resulting in educated unemployed among the Assamese. It boiled down to a situation where the migrants and the natives began to compete for the same jobs leading to a conflict of the Assamese vis-a-vis the Bengali bhadralok. Little wonder the movement was led by the Assamese middle class. Besides the middle class, the regional bourgeoisie also found in the agitation an opportunity to gain from the competition it has at some point with the national bourgeoisie. Initially the Bengalis got assimilated into the Assamese community but as their numbers grew the process (of assimilation) was resisted leading to the immigrant problem assuming serious dimensions. The Assamese waged a long struggle not only to realise a separate province and increase the homogeneity of their province but also to assert the distinctness of the Assamese language from Bengali.

But to treat the Assam crisis as solely an outcome of the immigration problem would be analysing and judging just half the issue. Rather the problem is a combination of many other factors. In fact it is a combination of the demographic invasion of *bahiragatas* along with the retarded industrial and agricultural base- a result of the centralising drives. In addition to, is the inaccessibility of their own resources. In sum, it boils down to a fight of the native Assamese to gain control over their own resources. And the fight is directed at two levels-to drive out the immigrants and for more economic development.

The very identity of the Assamese appeared to be at stake with the demographic imbalance affecting its population pattern, its economy, its politics and its linguistic and cultural personality. The movement thus aimed at aspirations and urges at three levels- social, economic and political levels.

The attesting of an agreement between the leaders of the Assam agitation, AASU and the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 addressing some of the major issues of the movement was apparently believed to put a halt to the crisis. However the post-Accord situation fractured the Assamese consciousness as sub-regional assertions emerged among the Bodos and other ethnic groups in the form of demands for Bodoland, Udayachal and Purbanchal. Insurgency made its appearance in the form of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) to attain what it called *Svadhin Asom*, meaning an independent Assam.

The Assamese movement has thus covered a full circle. The movement basically a fallout of seeming discrimination by the Central authorities faced similar allegations by its constituent units. In her zeal to promote unity by prescribing Assamese as the official language for the entire state including the hill districts, ended only in alienating and ultimately paving the way out for the hill districts from its orbit.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Rustomji, *op.cit.*, p.152.

Thus in the wake of the Assam movement and its fallout, what is discernible is the percolation of democratisation to lower levels and identities, a continuing trend since the colonial times. The movement launched in response to distortions in the various aspects of Centre versus federal units found a similar expression (a similar pattern exists) subsequently within the unit. The spillover is especially due to the serious imbalances in the social, political and economic spheres. In sum, the Assamese identity which emerged and asserted as a regional identity transmuted into a sub-regional one in the aftermath of Assam Accord as evidenced in the demands of Bodoland, and Purbanchal asserting for cultural autonomy, increase in power and more even distribution of economic benefits.

CHAPTER V
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
CONCLUSION

In the foregoing Chapters a study of the movement of the reorganisation of provinces in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Punjab has been made. It was interesting to deal with the specificities and peculiarities that the movement in each of the three States has taken shape.

In this Chapter- the Fifth- a comparative analysis of the three States under study is made. The comparative analysis of the crisis as it evolved over time through different stages in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Punjab brings out clearly the significance of the economic in combination with the politico-socio-cultural component in understanding the formation of the linguistic-ethnic provinces and identities and the subsequent developments thereof in the three States taken up for study.

Andhra occupies the first position in being carved as a province on the linguistic basis in the post-Independence era, while Punjab came into existence in the last major phase of reorganisation of provinces. In the case of the third State, the already-existent, Assam, it had to 'simply go through an incredible degree of fragmentation, so that what is left can be homogeneously Assamese.' The 'incredible degree of fragmentation' of Assam is perhaps a feature which it shares with Punjab. Punjab has similarly undergone a stupendous population change, related initially to the partition of the Indian subcontinent and subsequent successive reorganisations of the State until it

assumed its present form of a Sikh-majority State in 1966. Thus under focus are three States whose economies can be categorised on a relative scale into three stages: Punjab has a more or less developed economy in terms of its agricultural wealth. The economy of Assam can be termed on a relative basis as 'stagnant' or Underdeveloped.' In between these two economies lies the Andhra economy which is in what may perhaps be called the 'transitional' or rapidly developing phase.

The case of Andhra Pradesh:

Historically the roots of the Andhra demand can be traced to the partition of Bengal in 1905, which perhaps firmly put in place the theory that 'progress of a linguistic group would be hindered by their being under different administrations.' So some Andhras reasoned on similar lines, and thereby launched the struggle against the dispersal of the Telugu people in the Madras Presidency, the Central Provinces and the native States of Hyderabad and Mysore. But the demand for Visalandhra can be said to have gained momentum only during the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the construction of anicuts across the Godavari and Krishna rivers, helping in the growth of agriculture and thereby in the emergence of new classes- the peasantry. It is in these new classes that the demand for Visalandhra grew, as they were directly affected with the Tamil domination and the attendant inadequate economic opportunities and political power. The Madras Government, however, opposed any rearrangement of provinces. But

the demand of the Andhras saw light with the death of Potti Sriramulu in 1952 on account of an indefinite fast.

Prior to its formation, Andhra encountered the issue of exploitation by a different 'nationality' and imbalances in the levels of development amongst the various regions- Tamil and Telugu-majority areas. This culminated in the growing consciousness of the cultural affinity / akinness leading to the Visalandhra movement. Initially a separate State, Andhra could be attained in 1953 with the Coastal and Rayalaseema districts making it the first linguistic entity to be so created in the post-Independent period. The process was however completed in the first major reorganisation of provinces (after Independence) in 1956, with the clubbing of the Telangana region to Andhra, marking the emergence of Andhra Pradesh. But perhaps the failure to correct the disparity in the levels of development between the two regions of Andhra and Telangana, belonging to a single mass of Telugu-speaking people in its post-formative years (since 1956) led to the outbreak of the Telangana and Andhra agitations in the sixties. Or as Weiner opined, "such crisis erupts in a situation when migrants and locals compete for the same jobs, resulting in gains for the migrants, then losses for the natives".¹ In addition to the job market, another situation in which the migrants are regarded as a threat, especially a

¹Weiner, Myron: *Sons of the Soil* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp.352,356.

political threat, is when "they are numerous, wealthy or politically cohesive".² Apparently we witnessed both the fears in the case of Telangana. However sub-regionalism has manifested itself even when the Andhra demand was in the formative stage, in the form of Rayalaseema's plea for 'an autonomous status' on similar grounds of uneven economic development and inadequate political power.

Hence in its pre-organisation period, the gap in the levels of development -economic and political- between regions belonging to two different linguistic groups resulted in a greater stress being put. 'on ties of language and of a common Telugu culture'. It was therefore, the eco-politico-cultural factor, which was responsible for integrating the people belonging to the 'same linguistic stock' but subsequently it was the politico-economic variable (i.e. disparity in the political and economic levels of development between different regions within the state) which brought about quite opposite results. The outcome: divisions among the Telugu-speaking people, belonging to the same linguistic group instead of consolidation proved a failure in cementing ties this time.

This brings out clearly that language plays a uniting role only when there are no conflict of issues concerning economic opportunities and political power within a particular given

²*Ibid.*, p.355.

region. What necessitated the outbreak of the Telangana agitation was 'the alleged attitude of great betrayal' indulged in by the Andhras towards the Telanganites. The assurances of even overall development of all Telugu-speaking people, so vociferously declared by the leaders of the Visalandhra movement, supposedly remained 'mere empty words'. No major effort seemed to have been initiated to bring the Telangana region on par with the more advanced Andhras thus resulting in the eruption of the Telangana agitation. The subsequent Andhra agitation was perhaps in response to the strong centralising drives initiated under Mrs. Gandhi's rule and the threat of land reforms in favour of capital accumulation than for capital distribution.

The Andhra economy experienced an economic boom with the Green Revolution of the sixties. Green Revolution was one of the responses or concessions to the agrarian unrest articulated by the rich farmers at one level and labour at another. The vast areas of fertile land in the coastal Andhra irrigated by the Krishna and Godavari irrigation projects coupled with modern inputs initiated by the Green Revolution generated considerable surplus.³ The capital (so generated) in search of better avenues wanted to enter select rich parts of the economically backward Telangana region. But since the capital was apparently in search to appropriate rather than develop the region it was obviously

³See Haragopal, G: "Dimensions of Regionalism: Nationality Question in Andhra Pradesh" in Seminar Proceedings on *Nationality Question in India* (Poona: TDSS, 1987) pp.379-380.

resisted by the Telanganites. The likely entry of the capital also alarmed the local business community of the Telangana region. The objective conditions for the agitation were thus provided by the general backwardness of the region coupled with the apprehensions of the local entrepreneurs. In other words the growing disparity of the regions and the backwardness of the region was used by the local 'bourgeoisie' to their advantage by whipping-up passions of the Telanganites in the form of the Telangana agitation.

Finally the capital found its way into the construction industry- sky-scrapers and cinema theatres. But since the entire capital could not be absorbed, it naturally led to its logical consequence, witnessing rapid industrialisation from 73-74 onwards, thus giving rise to a new industrial class. Thus by the late-70s, this rising class with interests both in the agricultural and industrial sectors, was looking forward to the emergence of a strong Government at the State level to resist threats of land reforms from the Centre and as well mobilise the local resources for further capital support for the growing industrial base and maintain industrial peace. Thus rose the Telugu Desam Party at this juncture to perhaps play the dual role of the struggle against the Centre as well mobilise the resources locally.⁴ But to trace the success of the TDP solely to the new industrial class would render the explanation inadequate as one

⁴Ibid., pp.381-382, 386.

fails to understand as why the poor supported the TDP. Perhaps the explanation could be traced to the fag end of the Telangana agitation when the leadership coopted and the movement subsided with the various formulas like the six-point formula. The sub-regional identities were further knocked-off with the Garibi *Hatao* programmes of Mrs. Gandhi which gravitated the poor towards her. Thus the poor shifted their identity and loyalty from a regional leader to a leader with a pro-poor bias. In the eighties however the situation was markedly different as both the Janata Party and the initiators, the Congress abandoned the programme. The void so created was quickly filled by N.T.Rama Rao who renewed the anti-poverty stance with his subsidies programmes leading to a shift of the poor from *Anna* to *Anna*. Thus NTR with his charisma and populist welfarism managed to sway the people to his side. There was thus a demonstration of interplay of identities. In sum, the Telanganas shifted from a sub-regional identity through an economic programme to a national leader and shifted back through another economic programme to a regional base in the form of the TDP.

In Andhra Pradesh, since the alleged exploiters (i.e. Anihras) in the post-formative phase initially belonged to the same linguistic group as the exploited (i.e. Telanganas) the problem probably rose to a call for greater autonomy. However in the case of Punjab and Assam since the alleged exploiters / discriminators (i.e. Centre) did not necessarily belong to their ethnic-linguistic groups, the movement in these two States rose to grave

proportions demanding an autonomous status altogether which in other words, almost meant 'severance from the Union'.

The case of Punjab."

Historically the demand for a separate Punjabi-speaking State began way back in 1909 under the British rule in the face of special concessions given to the Muslims by the British. Subsequently in the post-partition phase what lent impetus to the movement was the threat of re-absorption into the vast Hindu community. Hence it can be held that the core of the linguistic problem in Punjab is rooted in the question of ethnic identity.

Perhaps no state of India has undergone such a remarkable transformation of its population distribution, composition and complexion since Independence as Punjab. The population change of Punjab was related initially to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and resultant transfer of population across the border and later with successive reorganisations of the state till it assumed its contemporary form of a Sikh-majority state in 1966.⁵ The latest reorganisation (in 1966) was in response to the Indo-Pak war of 1965 which signaled a shift in the attitude of

⁵Krishan, Gopal: "The Dynamics of Punjab Demography Since Independence". A Paper presented at the ICHR Sponsored Seminar on *Contemporary History of the Punjab*, (Chandigarh: Dept. of History, Punjab University, 1995) p.1 (unpublished).

the central leadership on account of the enormous contribution made by the Sikh peasants towards helping the frontline Indian troops. It was hoped that the protagonists of the linguistic State would be satisfied. But this hope was belied by the subsequent developments in the State.

In spite of granting a separate State in 1966 the situation in Punjab continues to be in a state of flux. The Green Revolution in the Punjab has helped it in becoming one of the most prosperous States of India. However it has resulted in unequal sharing of benefits among the various sections and regions within the State and also for the population engaged in agricultural pursuits. Perhaps the growing pauperisation of marginal farmers, the heavy influx of migrating labour forces into agriculture from neighbouring states, the clash of interests between the emerging neo-rich and the national bourgeoisie, the conflict between the bourgeois aspirations among the rural gentry with the bourgeois hegemony of Hindu traders, merchants and industrialists, low industrial investment and activity due to its location as a border-state could be some of the causes said to have triggered the present political crisis that the Punjab has been going through.

The phase from the eighties has been perhaps the most turbulent period in the whole history of the Sikhs. The crisis in Punjab deteriorated to the demand for secession on religious lines- a

separate Sikh Homeland, Khalistan- and autonomous status to protect the group interests of emerging regional interests.

The problem of Punjab has thus spilled into the arena of Centre versus states conflict. The failure by the Centre to develop a long-term perspective of industrial development, economic growth and social change, it has been alleged, has literally reduced the State to the status of a satellite state. Therefore not surprisingly it was felt that the policy of the Centre towards the Punjab state was more or less similar to the one followed by the British Government. Even after three decades of its formation, the Punjab state continues to be in a stalemate thus lending urgency "to the vital need of readjusting the political relations between the Centre and the State, guaranteeing a measure of economic and cultural autonomy to the State and altering the present overall strategy of social, political and economic development".⁶

As compared to Andhra, the problem in Punjab has assumed violent proportions as the economic aspirations coupled with ethnic, linguistic and religious factor started shaping the reality. In Andhra it was on the economic base that the demand was raised. As both the emergent capitalist farmers, traders or merchants and industrialists happen to be ethnically not distinct, the nexus

⁶Azad, Nirmal S: "Distorted Economic Development: Affluence and Backwardness in Punjab", in Singh, Gopal (ed): *Punjab Today* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishers, 1984) p.59.

between these two forms of capital on the one hand and clash of interest at another level keeps the Andhra situation within manageable limits. But in the Punjab the contradiction between the merchant capital and productive capital in agriculture has strong ethnic overtones as the aspirations and expectations of the emerging regional agrarian bourgeoisie came in conflict with entrenched (Hindu) bourgeois interests both at the national and provincial levels. It acquired more of ethnic overtones and gave rise to secessionist tendencies manifested through terrorism and extremism.⁷ The attempt at sharing power on a new basis by the national bourgeoisie with the regional bourgeoisie concretised in the Rajiv-Longowal Accord of July 1985 has brought about a perceptible change gradually in the Punjab situation. Thus a political problem necessitated a political solution rather than being viewed as a law and order problem. Perhaps the quantum of force used (by the Centre) in the Punjab indicates the magnitude of the problem.

Probably the linguistic factor combined with the religious, economic and political factors integrated the Sikh people in their fight against the Centre. However in the absence of its merger with religion and ethnicity, the linguistic factor in Andhra failed to have such a foot-hold. But the linguistic factor

⁷Alam, Javeed: "Political Implications of Economic Contributions in Punjab" in Singh, Gopal (ed): *Punjab Today*, op. cit., p.87. Also Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Bases of the Punjab Crisis" *Economic And Political Weekly*, Vol.XIX, No.1, January 7, 1984, pp.42-47.

as an integrating link cannot be dismissed completely as the phenomena] rise of the Telugu Desam Party seemingly on the basis of *self-respect of the Telugus* combined with populist welfarism reinforces the belief that language plays a vital role in integrating the people. This model had the potential to subsume, if not swallow, the sub-regional identity.

The case of Assam:

In the third State under focus- Assam, the linguistic question assumed a different form. The issue at stake there was not the carving of a separate state but rather the control of resources within the state and access to national resources by those who consider themselves genuine Assamese.

The effects of partition of Bengal in 1905 was 'indirect' in the case of Andhra and Punjab as it made them just realise the potency of remaining as a linguistic group. But Assamese were directly affected as they got clubbed with Bengal. En the aftermath of the annulment in 1911, Assam was no doubt made into a separate Chief Commissioner's province but with a reduced homogeneity as Sylhet, a predominantly Bengali Muslim district and Cachar, a predominantly Bengali Hindu district were joined to it. In fact the crisis in Assam (the migration factor) can be traced precisely to this inclusion of Sylhet. The exodus into Assam had begun since then as the Muslim League was keen on creating a Pakistan on the eastern flank on the basis *or*. their numerical strength.

Although in the post-Independent scenario, Sylhet was chopped-off from Assam and clubbed to the newly-created Pakistan, the problem of swarming Muslims into Assam for several reasons like poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, remained intact causing a demographic imbalance. The economic backwardness of the Assamese coupled with the influx of the Bengalis can be said to have: given rise to the identity crisis.

During the initial phases of immigration the generally poor landless peasants from erstwhile East Bengal assimilated themselves with the Assamese as they did not have the numerical as well as cultural viability to resist the process (of assimilation) . But over course of time "the concentration of the same group in a particular region sharing the same language and in many cases: a same religion, along with similar economic pattern of existence tended to give a distinct sense of identity" to the peasant, thus putting a halt to further assimilation⁸ and the movement gradually transformed from a struggle for occupation of land to an aggressive struggle for a share in power.

Evidently economics alone could not have ignited the ethnic turmoil in Assam. It can rather be regarded as a catalyst: which succeeded in bringing all the Assamese belonging to the same ethnic stock- a single banner, akin to the Visalandhra and Punjabi movements. Thus the retarded development combined with

⁸Misra, U: *North-East India: A Quest for Identity* (Guwahati: Omsons Publishers, 1988) p.61.

the domination of the *bahiragatas* or outsiders (on linguistic basis) in the state's economy may be said to have led to the eruption of the Assam movement. But more significantly the movement may be traced as a struggle of the genuine Assamese for control and access to their own resources. The mass outburst revolved round a long list of neglect, suppression and exploitation- the general complaints figured even in the Visalandhra, Telangana, Punjab and Khalistan movements. What Assam is facing today may be looked as the upsurge of the oppressed groups trying to assert themselves.

We face the peculiar situation in Assam in which "the migrants and local people compete for the same jobs resulting in a situation of gains for the migrants then losses for the natives"⁹ (as in a zero-sum game). A similar situation persists even in Punjab and the Telangana. It is in such a situation that the local population tends to seek restrictions on the free entry of migrants, demand protectionism in the labour market and press for reservations on land.

Another commonalty Assam shared with the Punjab was with regard to the issue of language. Just as the SRC turned down the separate status to Punjab on grounds of the nearness of Punjabi-language to Hindi grammatically and spatially, so also in the case of Assam it took a long time to get out of the

⁹Weiner, op.cit., pp.352-356.

¹⁰Ibid.

imposition of Bengali and thus assert the distinctness of Assamese.

In the post- Assam accord scenario, we have the cropping of sub-regional demands in the form of Bodoland. The imposition of the Assamese language apparently ignited the Bodo agitation. In the Assamese camp the fear of becoming a minority in their own State led to the emergence of separatist organisations like the Lachit Sena in the sixties and later- on the United Liberation Front of Assam, regarded generally as the direct descendant of All Assam Students Union. The main theme the ULFA appears to harp on is, to quote Prafulla Mahanta, "the tussle between the citizens and the foreigners." The ULFA apparently believes in fighting what it calls the *continuing colonialism*.

The Analysis:

The comparative analysis of the crisis as it evolved overtime through different States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Punjab is a clear pointer to 'struggles for more even distribution of benefits of resources, increase in the share of political power and what they called due recognition of the self-respect and dignity of the groups. ' Thus inherent in the movements are three democratic aspirations at the social, economic and political levels, vertically and horizontally striving for "pluralism, regionalism and decentralisation".¹¹

¹¹Brass, Paul: "Punjab Crisis and Unity of India" in Kohli, Atul

The linguistic base in the formation of the State is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the overall development and equilibrium. It is precisely the reason why the States of Andhra, Assam and Punjab went on looking for alternatives which are found in different forms of political articulation once the linguistic base has been accepted.

Incidentally the crisis in these states at various stages coincided with the rise of Mrs. Gandhi to power and the subsequent concentration of power at the centre and "the steady erosion of democratic processes and institutions".¹² Perhaps in her zeal "to defend the multi-national status, India during her regime made excessive use of power to centralise decision-making in Delhi, nationalize issues and incessantly intervene in the State and local politics,"¹³ resorting to force rather than persuasion and negotiation to resolve conflicts. The crisis in the various States is perhaps a defence-mechanism against the use of force by the Indian State.

Apparently centralisation is the by-product of apprehensions and fears of the national elites towards ethnic identities as "harmful cleavages out to undermine national integration,

(ed) : *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1991) pp.212-213.

¹²Alam, Javeed: "Political Implications of Economic Contradictions in Punjab" *Social Scientist*, Vol.15, No.10, October 1986, p.5.

¹³Brass, Paul, *op. cit.*, in Kohli, Atul, *op. cit.*

development and modernisation".¹⁴ But to treat all who agitate for change in their rights and prerogatives as enemies of the state is anomalous. Rather the various urges and aspirations should be treated as indicating democratic dynamism. Similarly, the cry for greater autonomy by the states need to be viewed as "indicating federal dynamism and not necessarily its negation".¹⁶ As Rasheed-ud-din Khan aptly opined, "every urge for autonomy is not a divisive but most probably a complementary force; it would not lead to balkanisation but to restructuring of national identity; it is not a fissiparous but a normal centrifugal tendency in a federation; it should not be taken as a call for disintegration of the national sovereignty, but its re-integration".¹⁷ Moreover, since political sovereignty is an attribute and a privilege of both the centre and the States, hence justifiably the demand for more autonomy.

The process of democratisation thus could not be halted with the formation of the provinces; rather subsequent developments suggest the process (of democratisation) percolated to the lower levels and different classes of society. We have therefore, democratic aspirations at the regional level asserting for more

¹⁴Chima, Jugdep S: "The Punjab Crisis: Governmental Centralisation and Akali-Center Relations", *Asian Survey*, October 1994, p.859.

¹⁵Jannuzi, F.Tomasson: *India in Transition* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1990) pp.47-48.

¹⁶Phadnis, Urmila: *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 1990) p.98.

¹⁷Khan, Rasheed-ud-din: "The Regional Dimension", *Seminar*, No.164, April 1973, p. 36.

balanced economic development, more share in power and greater cultural autonomy. The assertions of Bodos in Assam, Telanganas in Andhra suggest the manifestation of such aspirations in these classes. Reliance on force and intimidation should give way to a more accommodating approach as the claims of self-determination of any group would be judged only in the light of concrete conditions obtaining in a society and actual practice of the state.

"India thus faces what may be called a *democratic paradox*: on the one hand nation-building processes emphasize the forces that bring about assimilation into one system and on the other, the dynamics of democratic competition often amplify the need for collective expression by ethnic groups".¹⁸

"The state", Brass observed, "sets into play a continuing process of conflict and competition among the main institutions and centrally organised social forces for control over the state which is both a resource as well as a distributor of resources". He viewed the various movements as "attempts to secure their quantum of control over this resource so as to influence its distribution towards the interests they represent".¹⁹ "The class

¹⁸Chima, **Jugdep S**, *op.cit.*, p.860.

¹⁹Brass, Paul (ed): *Ethnic Groups and the State* (London: Croom Helm ltd., 1985) pp.25-26 cited in Mukherji, Partha N. : "Class and Ethnic Movements in India: In Search of Pertinent Paradigm for Democracy and Nation-Building in the Third World" in Rudebeck, Lars (ed) : *When Democracy Makes Sense* (Sweden: Uppsala

and ethnic-oriented movements in India, their role in nation building and the democratic process are inter-linked and inter-woven in a complex dynamic relationship, all the time attempting to find and create democratic space".²⁰

Summing-Up:

To sum up the genesis of the prevalent identities can be traced to colonial times when the organisation of provinces was done to suit their administrative convenience: An outcome of the policy was to bring people belonging to different linguistic groups into a single unit as in the case of Assam, or the splitting of people belonging to a particular identity into separate provinces as in the case of Andhra Pradesh (and later Punjab). This inevitably led to its logical corollary: the recognition of linguistic and ethnic ties as a binding factor to amalgamate the dismembered parts of groups belonging to particular linguistic entities.

But it will be irrelevant to trace the genesis to colonial times alone without reference to how and why the British succeeded in their policy of divide and rule. Perhaps the Indian society, with its embedded multiple identities provided the space required to the British to carry out the strategy, it becomes clear from the (comparative) analysis that no one identity can explain a phenomenon all the time. Rather there is shifting or

University, 1992) p.25.

²⁰Mukherji, Partha, *op.cit.*, p.27.

transmutation of identities. At any given point of time an identity asserts depending on the context \ situation. The identities are thus contextual. Thus the linguistic identity in the case of the Telugu-regions of the Madras Presidency or the Visalandhra Movement brought about unification among the Telugu people. But soon after its formation, sub-regional identities in the form of Telangana and Andhra agitations erupted. However in the eighties there is a coalescence of identities as evident from the massive mandate received by the Telugu Desaro Party. But cracks reappeared in the present times with the resurgence of the Telangana movement. Moreover the regional base of Andhra has not been able to absorb the class identities as manifested by the presence of Naxalism in several pockets of the State.²¹

In the case of Punjab, communal identity became a victim twice, in 1947 and 1951: once the Punjabi Muslims broke away from it and second, the Punjabi-Hindus disowned Punjabi as their mother tongue. Thus there has been a transmutation of identities. A problem thus started as a simple linguistic question in Punjab gradually turned into a communal issue and steadily into a secessionist movement. So also in the case of Assam, a movement apparently begun as a linguistic problem aggravated into secessionist one leading to a call for 'Assam for Assamese only'. In the post Assam accord scenario, however there has been reversal of roles as identities have asserted among the Bodos and

²¹ The Naxalite movement has not been tackled in the present study.

other tribes calling for severance of ties from Assam. Thus in all these cases there has been multiple identities and the attendant transmutation or transformation of identities.

But the question as to why the regional and sub-regional, movements have become a perpetual feature in the Indian polity assumes significance. Perhaps the answer lies in looking at these movements as a percolation of the deoocratisation process to lower levels and different classes. But the issue of how to treat the various demands for more autonomy has become debatable. Two contradictory views have apparently risen. One to treat any movement for autonomy as a negation of nation-building and the other to view the movements as strengthening the forces of nation-building and thereby indicating federal dynamism. The global scenario offers instances of both the types of regimes centralised and federal states. The state-centred regime in the erstwhile Soviet Russia resulted in disintegration of the state while the position of China gives an opposite picture. However going by experiences faced by India it is clear that some sort of democratic space is a 'must' as whenever there had some sort of squeezing-in as witnessed during Mrs Gandhi's rigorous centralising drives, movements for autonomy multiplied. Perhaps state-centred regime does not provide the answer in the case of India.

In order to place the issues and identities that the reorganisation process has thrown-up, a deeper probe is necessitated. Scholars in India, in fact should adopt a

comparative perspective to analyse all the States in India so as to arrive at a theory to explain a phenomenon of shifting identities and perhaps a lasting solution to the type of disintegrating tendencies that the contemporary India has been witnessing. The present study can perhaps be placed at an intermediate level as it consists of a comparative analysis of three States instead of a case study or an analysis involving all the States.

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