

Statehood Movements in India: A Theoretical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Socio-Cultural factors rooted deep in the Indian state coupled with ambition of better governance and augmented engagement of diverse population in the democratic decision making have been creating thrust for statehood movements in India. Principle of regional autonomy exemplified in religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic liberty is believed to mitigate the challenges of a participatory democracy and socio-culturally diverse entity as large as India. Statehood movements in India have disguised itself in many forms carrying its individual demands and nature. Some social movements carrying challenges of appropriating regional identity in electoral politics have led to creation of new states in India. While it is inconceivable to separate regional issues from 'normal politics' in a decentralised democracy, different political theorists perceive differently regarding the co-existence and co-extensiveness of party politics and social movements. Again, cultural nationalism represented by the desire to earn political self-determination within the federal structure of multicultural India to safeguard the diverse cultural identity may also be highlighted in the statehood movements of India. This research aims to establish a theoretical basis for comprehending the demands for statehood in India. It explores the features of these movements and evaluates the different processes connected to them from multiple viewpoints. This paper assesses the contributing factors to the demands for statehood, the fundamental causes behind this increase, and the practicality of implementing such a strategy.

Keywords: *Statehood Movements, Autonomy, Ethnicity*

Demand for separate statehood has been common confrontational address for the Indian state. These requests have largely stemmed from aspects related to language, culture, ethnicity, and religion. Subsequently, the push for better governance and greater political engagement seized the rationale behind these demands. The desire of crafting out a new state have been linked with the desire to uphold and shield the distinct identity rooted in language, ethnicity, culture, religion etc. Again, the proponents of creation of new states believe that most of the limitations whether political like low voter turnout, minimum political engagement of people in a democratic set up, ethno-cultural and religious clashes, issues pertaining to governance and developmental equilibrium can be mitigated through the partition of state boundaries and granting distinct state identities. Hence, these demands have been advocated by different political factions sporadically, sometimes aloud and in other times as a perpetual under current.

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Regional autonomy has been a close conceptual development in terms of establishment of new states. Ethnic diversity, linguistic distinctiveness resulting in the sense of desire for upholding identity disparateness contributed significantly to this. The desire for this partition and the acts following it have not been perceived as unconstitutional or contradicting national interest because the Constitution of India enshrines a strongly established provision for this, specifically detailed in Article 2 and Article 3. The present study aims at presenting a theoretical analysis of statehood movements in India and also investigates the nature and processes involved in these movements from various perspectives. The objective of this paper is to critically assess the factors that contribute to these growing demands and also the feasibility of accommodating such demands.

Features of Statehood Movements: The Indian Chronicle

There were social movements in India that were transported to movements for political autonomy demanding separate statehood by using regional identities set in electoral politics of a federal system. The multi-ethnic federal system of this country acknowledges and also celebrates these cultural diversities. The success of transmuting a socio-cultural issue to a political demand have been manifested in the establishment Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and lately Telangana. These successes indicate a clear interconnection between politics of institution and politics outside of institutional frame, between political apparatus and social movements as well as the electoral politics of the state. While political parties are often intertwined with social movement variables and actors, movements for statehood are more than just conflicts outside the state. Disentangling statehood movements from what is commonly referred to as "normal politics" is often incorrect. Movements and politics are inseparable from the core, as Sidney Tarrow argues that movements require cultural frames, common understanding, narratives and symbols that resonate with people and justify their claims (Tarrow, 1994). In case of statehood movement the narratives could involve historical injustice, cultural diversities or even right to self-determination.

Non-aligned political framework in India pertaining to grassroot movements have survived since 1970s due to the rise of fresh societal movements. This attribute resulted from the fact that the movements sprang up in India's pre-existing majorly volatile political framework. Hence, as a result the developmental process in many parts of India came under direct scrutiny. These movements stood out as a reaction or substitution to failed organizations conventionally responsible as opponents like political parties, left leaning academicians, labour unions etc. failing to adequately representing the needs of the marginalized.

Rajni Kothari contends that the transition towards a more comprehensive vision of decentralized development and democratic governance, wherein political engagement began to focus on regional concerns, is accountable for the emergence of new movements (Kohli, 2001; Kothari, 1984). In India, the study of societal movements and political factions is done in separation due to instability in party structure being the intricate backdrop. Thus, studies of political parties and that of societal movements form different scholarly traditions. Mostly societal movements are viewed as tool for social change. The concern of being co-opted as a similar scholarly route create critical dilemma among social activists who choose to remain politically neutral. Statehood movements through the lens of social movements tends to indicate spread of democracy and people's awakening at grassroot level regarding their basic rights (Kothari, 1984).

The study looks at current social movements that focuses on advocating autonomy and right to self-determination as a means that gives rise to a wide range of political institutions

accommodating increased people participation in policy making process (Kaviraj, 1994). Samaddar says the claim for autonomy gave rise to emerging political identities that questioned state power. He views desire for autonomy to be resisting the power of state. He views it to be a 'symbol' in politics that addresses issues of rights and justice (Samaddar, 2005). Rajni Kothari believes the call for autonomy encompasses public emotion and its expression towards denial of ruling authority. Changes in perspectives and radical awareness and growing senses about individual rights or rights as a community with common identities, aspirations, traits and commonalities beyond embodiment of a mere pre-determined political cluster is what gave rise to this foundation (Kothari, 1984). Sudipta Kaviraj viewed the grassroot regionalist movements of 1980s as a result of the Indian State's centralizing tendencies with efforts to superimpose uniformity by veiling diversities under a common identity. He believed that these movements can resist the homogenization of identities and marginalization of diversities. The efforts to gain autonomy against homogenization can rightly be seen as more democratic and pursuit to more decentralization (Kaviraj, 1994).

As mentioned by Bebbington, he believes, it is rare that social movements arise merely around the issue of poverty, but when it is redressed as something not being addressed in a political and social structure, as a challenge to the status-quos of political arrangement or its failure then it can take the form of social movements. Here he also mentions 'contentious politics (Bebbington, 2009)' in this context which refers to "concerted, counter homogenic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge the dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries (Leitner et al., 2008)". This view is important here to understand the context because economic disparity, exemplified by poverty in this case which is also rooted deeply as a reason and cry for political autonomy, do not merely call for social movements but when it is connected to structure of governance and challenge to status-quo then it pushes the thrust for social movements. It is the reason why many authors proposed replacing the term 'social movements' with 'contentious politics. This can be extended to include examples of statehood movements too where right to self-determination as denied by the established system motivates the members to fight against the status quo.

The connection between political parties and social movements can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Schlesinger argues that, main objective of political parties remains winning election to public office and gaining control of the government as a group (Schlesinger, 1985). Kitschelt views that political parties are invested primarily in organizational structure, defining roles, readjusting division of labour and functioning along command. Political parties are more of institutional in nature while being involved in electoral politics and function within institutional channels. While, social movements function outside the structural and institutional channels, e.g. through street politics (Kitschelt, 2006). However, Wenner says these distinctions does not imply political parties and social movements are polar opposite entities (Wenner, 2015). There has been presence of parties within the context of social movements in India's statehood struggle and often it has been a prime motivating factor of such movements. Prevalent literature in the context of social movements in India uses the term 'Social Movement Organization' to refer to parties also. Mere ideology is unable to keep social movements alive and strive for a prolonged period. Organizations like NGOs, churches, and parties can only channelize the monetary, social, human and other resources necessary for movements to survive (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Here, political parties provide the organizational and structural power to social movements for sustainability. The ideological credibility of parties among the masses draws larger

patronization (Basu, 2001). Basu said, “social movements may eventually become formalized as parties or that parties could spark movements (Basu, 2001)”. Anup Kumar in his research on Uttarakhand, makes a distinction between non party popular movements and party movements (Kumar, 2011). Kumar highlighted that the new regional movements conceived out of economic and political deprivation which developed as developmental regionalism faced the paradox of failure as a political alternative. And internal contradictions within the ‘Jan Andolan’ which stands as a common phenomenon in such struggles and its dependency on press and media gave open opportunities to existing political parties to accommodate themselves into the movement and hijack the core socio-ecological issues by colonizing the platform created by the movement (Kumar, 2011).

In Indian context, social movements as rigidly non-party movement may not be considered completely. Tillin in her in-depth analysis of the establishment of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand in 2000 (Tillin, 2013), discusses about the role and support of national political parties in reshaping these statehood movements marking the vested strategic interests. It reveals that such movements are not to be studied outside the local, regional, or national party settings and political climate in which it arose (Tillin, 2013). According to Tillin, in this case, the different organizations, whether national, regional political parties, or social movements, had different aspirations of ideals for the states to be given, and statehood was the least commonality). This ‘politics of compromise’ means quietening the very ideological essence of the social movement. In previous statehood movements where political parties were involved, their attitude towards ideological substance of the movement symbolized a compromise between contrasting views about the aspirations for the state (Tillin, 2013).

It is difficult to distinguish between social movements and party politics. Basu discusses the 'dual strategies of political parties (Basu, 2001)' in relation to the nature of parties inside social movements. Political parties, according to her, might have two identities: one of a moderate political party and the other of an active social movement (Basu, 2001). She says while social movements tend to become uncompromising in its nature about its ideologies and objectives, political parties while rooting for electoral success and appealing votes make it compromising in nature. Hence parties by nature can weaken the ideological backdrop of a movement (Basu, 2001). Kitschelt conceptualized ‘movement parties (Kitschelt, 2006)’; which are political parties originating from social movements. The adopt strategic practices similar to social movements in electoral politics representing a hybrid concept. It however effectively bridges the gap between party politics and social movements and subsequently reemphasize that social movements and political parties are not be clearly distinguished.

Sanjib Baruah argued that demand for statehood movements in India and its reasons is internal and formed within the purview of this nation state, and hence they can be termed as sub-national rather than separatist (Baruah, 2007). He says states failing in providing due share to the masses contribute largely to such movements. The incapability of the state to cater to the interests of diverse communities calls for such mobilization and radicalization of thoughts. With special emphasis to Assamese sub-nationalism against pan-Indian nationalism, Baruah argues that insurgencies, abuse of human rights by state security forces, ethnic violence among others are mainly due to the nature of the Indian state being federal in form but centralized in spirit. Baruah believes that in a multi-ethnic political set-up, loose federation not only upholds better democracies but also builds better economic opportunities. Hence, many political experts are seen advocating the enhanced autonomy

whether manifested in statehood or regional autonomous council for avoiding failure of a state as diverse as India to meet varied needs.

Statehood movement has also been studied from class perspectives. The fight for autonomy and right to self-determination is also seen as a type of elite manipulation. This view is upheld by 'instrumentalist view of elite identification (Brass, 1991)'. The exponent of this view of elite identification suggests that in the context of ethnic identity or national identity, elites are not organically developed groups with inherent commonalities, but rather consciously constructed and manipulated for strategic interests. Here it means that ethnicity is a political and social construct by elites who compete for community power and resources. The desire of the local elite to consolidate power and exercise authority is what gives spark to movements for autonomy. This elite competition to gain power gives these movements calculated nature. Mawdsley claims elite interests and manipulation may be disguised in social movements and regional mobilization (Mawdsley, 2002). Shah's research on statehood movement shows such movements did not address the issues of the marginalized. At certain point regarding Jharkhand movement Shah argued that the activism unintentionally and unfortunately further marginalized the region's already marginalized or poor people (Shah, 2011). This critical view better justifies the elite touch to these movements and reflects the government's top to down approach in addressing their issues.

Regardless of the causes behind the social movements in India since the 1970s, history points out the reciprocally reinforcing relation between rise of such social movements, the shifting monopoly of the Congress party as dominant one, the birth and rise of new political parties, many of which had taken up regional or part-identities to politicize them. Over time, non-party movements started tilting towards electoral politics. It started getting more credibility with changes in the nature of electoral politics which embraced the mobilization of various marginalized people. Eventually it was reflected in Indian statehood movements and demand for autonomy. Statehood movements which started off as guarantor of protection to language, culture and ethnicity, later adopted state, party and electoral politics. The creation of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) are few examples of statehood movements being impacted by state and electoral politics.

Statehood Movements and Nationalism

Sovereignty is intrinsic to nationalism. Political self-determination represented by nationalism leads to the establishment of nation state, because at core nationalism believes that a nation should be governed by its own, without external interference. Whether civic nationalism or ethnic nationalism, the aim of creating nation state is that nation and state boundaries align. Another idea of nationalism believes that state should be based on a nation irrespective of that national identity being factors like culture, language, history, ethnicity, religion. Hence nationalism can give rise to statehood movements for any particular nation or national identity. This sort of cultural nationalism in multi-cultural India is what gives push to demand for autonomous and separate political representation within its federal structure. In multi-national state where people of different countries live, they struggle to find common allegiance and faces conflicting interests. And as such patriotism to government in power at center clashes with patriotism to one's county of origin. In this situation, people's civil-political and cultural identities co-exist and this phenomenon is also expressed as ethical patriotism.

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The concept of nationalism, which emerged in modern Europe, subsequently disseminated to various regions globally. The emergence of nationalism in Europe was associated with the goal of forming modern, sovereign nations based on national identity, adhering to the principle of one nation, one state. Nationalism in India emerged from political awareness, resistance to colonial exploitation, and a strong aspiration for self-governance. Cultural consciousness at regional level protects the distinct cultural identities clustered in a many scattered pockets of a larger multi-cultural entity.

Political nationalism was prime element in India's freedom struggle as the rooted common emotion was against the colonial loot. With independence, however, came up the challenge of reorganizing provinces or states. This issue was not addressed by the colonial government as no proper procedures; principles were followed during drawing of state boundaries. Cultural nationalists started claiming for redrawing or rearranging the state boundaries. The issue of nationalism needs to be looked at from both 'statist' and 'ethnicist' viewpoint. Statist view on nationalism is based on the believe that role of the state in shaping and promoting national identity often comes at the cost of individual liberty and rights of minorities. Ethnicists on the contrary based on the belief that nation is built on shared cultural and ethnic emotions and expressions, on common ancestry. Statism propounds for integration of multiple cultures into mainstream culture, which may lead to cultural diffusion. On the other hand, ethnicists oppose this diffusion and assimilation out of the apprehension of distinct cultural, ethnic identities getting lost in the mainstream. It also bears the fear of superimposition of uniformity over diversity and creation of cultural hierarchy, where majority and minority play the role in determining dominant and subordinate culture(Nanda, 2006). While this if happens not only will undermine various other opportunities for the subordinates in the hierarchy, economic being one amongst; it will also disrupt the notion that 'culture' which is a soft element can not desirably have hierarchy.

To feed the demands of cultural nationalism, arrangements by the state was made from time to time since independence. Accommodating cultural nationalism within federal structure of the state while reorganizing state boundaries can be seen in many cases. For e.g. in 1956 along linguistic lines, along ethnicity in North East India. On demands for cultural, linguistic and regional development, creation of Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in 2000 and Telangana in 2014. There are still call for independent states in many parts of India. Administrative failures, disbalanced governance and regional disparity in economic terms among others contribute towards these demands. And cultural nationalism trying to address either marginalization or politicization of ethno-cultural issues are partially responsible for such rise.

Statehood Movement and Demand for Autonomy

The concept of autonomy is deeply associated to the demand for statehood movements. The statehood movements develop within the federal setup to ensure certain degrees of autonomy to strengthen the concept of decentralized democracy. Demand for autonomy stems out from issues encircling minority rights, indigenous rights, substantive right to self-determination in fiscal administration and other power politics. While in political parlance, 'autonomy movements' essentially is distinct from mere statehood movements yet desire for self-governance and self-legislation remain a common idea. The federal structure of Indian state legally allows for such autonomy. Whether statehood movements or autonomy movements, demand for autonomy is mutually shared prerequisite for both.

Reorganization of States in India

It was immediately after independence that demand for reorganizing state boundaries on linguistic line started to rise. The demand for statehood in India and their accord can be classified in three phases. At first, the demand was on linguistic differences. Chaired by S.K. Dhar, the Linguistic Provinces Commission was appointed by the Indian government in June 1948, to study the feasibility of such reorganization on linguistic lines. The commission's report, submitted in December 1948, advocated administrative convenience as the criteria rather than linguistic one. Nonetheless, persistent demands and protests regarding the report led to the establishment of the new Linguistic Provinces Committee also known as JVP committee in December 1948. The JVP Committee also did not see linguistic distinctions as a viable foundation for restructuring state boundaries. In 1953, Andhra Pradesh became the inaugural Indian state delineated on linguistic grounds. The separation of the Telugu-speaking regions from the state of Madras was executed. Potti Sreeramulu's demise following a hunger strike for 56 days exemplifies the protests intensity during that period. The establishment of Andhra Pradesh prompted numerous further demands based on linguistic criteria. The Government of India ultimately appointed a Commission, comprising Justice Fazl Ali, K.M. Panikkar and H.N. Kunzru, to examine these issues in detail. The commission presented its report in September 1955. The Commission's report was approved with specific amendments, and the State Reorganization Act was ultimately enacted in 1956. Consequently, requests were addressed with the establishment of 14 States and 6 Union Territories under the Seventh Constitutional Amendment.

Based on ethnic divisions, the second wave of state rearrangement demands began in the country's northeast. Compared to the rest of India, North East India has a unique ethnic diversity. Right from the colonial era, administration in this region was taken up with caution. Soon after Independence, the newly formed Indian Government carried on the measures and self-legislation and autonomy was addressed. However, the measures were not felt sufficient by the people of the region with unique ethnic identities and demand for right to self-determination in terms of separate states were made. Accordingly, in 1963 Nagaland was created out of Assam and Nagaland became the first Indian state created on the basis of ethnicity. In North East India, state borders were significantly redrawn in the 1970s. The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act of 1971 divided the Northeast into three new states: Meghalaya, Manipur, and Tripura. Later, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were accorded statehood. However, the North East region always had the unsettled political climate and it continues to give rise to demand for autonomy and statehood movements.

During the third phase, the primary focus was on concerns concerning cultural diversity and other aspects of development. It was the cause of the formation of new states in the year 2000, such as Uttarakhand, which emerged from Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, which emerged from Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand, which emerged from Bihar. The establishment of Telangana in 2014 made it possible to conduct an investigation into the practicability of such a call from the point of view of economic and developmental considerations. There is no denying that political parties have been playing an increasingly important role in these movements.

Reason for the Demand of Statehood

There are other historical reasons too which instigated the statehood demand in India. An in-depth analysis suggests that in colonial time the establishment of provinces were based purely on business and administrative convenience and interests and the ground realities of Indian states were completely neglected. It was not considered that the diversity in nature

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and culture will also require different treatments and separate set-up. Post-colonial India made efforts to create provinces or states considering the diversities and in Indian way, however, accommodation of such diversity in political set up was not welcomed from administrative perspectives. Although accommodating cultural nationalism have been tried to be taken care of, but it is also the nature of Indian state that makes it difficult to place all nationality on an equal platform.

Ineffective implementation of decentralized governance and prolonged inability of the Indian state to address economic and ethno-cultural issues of different region continued garnishing an imbalanced system. It is not very long back that minimum government and maximum governance have taken a front seat. This idea has given rise to limited interference by central government and thus limiting centralization and imposition and have also emphasized on maximum governance i.e. better and effective addressing of issues by the system.

Rationality of Statehood Demands

Conventionally creation of new states is viewed as a means giving ways to parochial and anti-national tendencies. Further, it is believed to weaken the Central Government and political nationalism. However, the supporters of statehood demand point out to the rationality behind these decisions. It views that reorganization of states responding to cultural, ethnic and linguistic bases promote democratic ethos. The basic idea behind carving out a new state with autonomous and political self-determination is to enable marginalized masses to express themselves politically and increasing their involvement in the electoral politics. Creating larger political consciousness among the marginalized section is a win for democracy in itself. Additionally, administrative convenience of smaller administrative clusters promises better governance and fiscal viability.

Critical analysis suggests that political fragmentation is one of the prime risks of statehood demands. There are also risk of hegemony of dominant community over power structures. On economic front, rational distribution of limited state resources possibly can impose threat to dispute over the very reason behind such demands. Again, some view that creation of smaller states merely transfers power from old structure to new structure without empowering the already existing administrative institutions that can possibly bring change if empowered. Against these conventionally viewed risks, the supporters of statehood demand put forward points in its favour. Although risks loom, but in a country as diverse and as large as India, which has also been historically tampered by colonialization and have disturbed pockets like North East, Kashmir, which is surrounded by volatile neighbours, porous borders, insurgent issues- here catering to different needs of different segments to pacify the internal climate is perceived as inescapable.

CONCLUSION

Demand for statehood have been an intrinsic part of Indian political structure, both historically and contemporarily. Although 'unity in diversity' beautifully connotes a patriotic mythos in Indian context, yet it is vivid that the cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic diversities along with historical factors multiplied by disturbed sack scattered geographically calls for more than a uniform imposition. Calls for autonomy and statehood movements come with risks of fragmentation and scarcity of resource allocation. Indian state has witnessed demands approaching from different lines, be it linguistic, ethno-cultural, economic and regional disparity, and Indian state have taken up some bold and radical decisions since independence to address the very issues. The strive of the state of India to

mitigate such rise of demand for political self-determination is evident in its efforts to accommodate differences within the federal structure of the state. How much successful these creation and accommodation have been is a matter of open analysis, but way forward to deal with all such future demands needs to be considered depending on individual demands. As 'one size doesn't fit all' approach applies in favour of statehood movements and demand for autonomy, it can also be applied in the reverse case scenario as blanket autonomy and statehood can not be a single solution to all the demands and needs. Economic and social viability over political considerations can justify such accommodations in the long run.

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