

Hyderabad: To whom does it belong?

The story of the division of Madras Province depends on the teller of the tale. The key personality was Jawaharlal Nehru. It is, therefore, interesting to read what he wrote in his famous “Fortnightly Letters to Chief Ministers”.

This casts light around the decision to de-merge Telangana from Andhra Pradesh and the ownership of Hyderabad City. The creation of Andhra was not unanimous. Most of the opposition came from the Rayalaseema region, which feared domination and exploitation by the much more aggressive and richer Coastal Andhra region. Thus it is no surprise that Nehru acknowledged this dissent. As late as 16th June 1952, he wrote that:

“While Swami Sitaram fasted (who had fasted three weeks from 25th May to 15th June 1952) for an Andhra Province, I get agitated telegrams from people in Rayalaseema protesting against this fast and saying that, if necessary, they will fast against the creation of an Andhra Province.” (Letters, Volume 3, p.26)

Nehru continues:

“The real difficulty, however, concerns the city of Madras. Some Andhra leaders insist on having it; the Tamil leaders, on the other hand, say that they will never lose it, whatever happens. What then are we to do about it? Compel the Andhras or coerce the Tamils?”

“A proposal has sometimes been made that Madras might be separated from both and made into a small separate State. This proposal was considered by the Dhar Committee some years ago. They said that while it was conceivable that an international centre like Bombay might be separated, they did not think that Madras should be considered in that way. It was too intimately connected with provincial life to be isolated from it. (Letters, Volume 3, pp.26-27)”

In fact, the Coum River, dividing the City, was even proposed as a border of the two States--- Andhra and Tamil Nadu! Nehru ruled out separate political status for Madras City. Compared to this Madras proposal, the idea of making Hyderabad a Union Territory (UT) within Telangana State must be seen as even less workable, let alone acceptable to Telangana.

Telangana surrounds Hyderabad City for nearly 200 miles in every direction. It is the centre of Telangana’s economic, social and political structure. It has been so for over 400 years. A study – “Metropolitan Hyderabad and its Region” - by Manzoor Alam and Waheeduddin Khan states:

“The Hyderabad Urban Region – the biggest of the States’ four urban regions – occupies about 41% of the State’s geographical area, contains 35.3 and 39.0% of its overall and total urban population, respectively, and has 33.4 per cent of its urban centers, including its only million – city.”(p. 17).

Thus the Hyderabad Urban Region is coextensive with Telangana! If Madras was important to Tamil Nadu, Hyderabad is vital to Telangana. Conversely, Hyderabad is totally dependent on Telangana for its power, drinking water and waste disposal.

In 1967 Hyderabad alone contributed 34% of the States' commercial taxes, while in 2010-11, the same share for the whole of Telangana (including Hyderabad) was 46%. Without Hyderabad, Telangana has no centre and might as well not exist as a separate political entity. Absurd as it may sound, if Hyderabad City is to be UT, then logically Telangana should be a UT too!

Even the idea of a UT and joint capital for five to ten years is a non-starter and will only create further and more intense antagonism and conflict. And the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) sees the UT as a ploy to deprive Muslims in Hyderabad of whatever little political power they have gained since 1948. For while in 1901, Muslims constituted 41% of the population of the City, they were 44% in 1951 and 36% by 1961.

Today they constitute 41 % of the City's population as in 1901. If the proposed UT limits are extended to Greater Hyderabad Metropolitan Area, their proportion-- and consequent political strength in the proposed UT-- fall to zero as the Home Ministry in Delhi will exercise full political control. In fact, Hyderabad today is the only city in India where Muslims have a dominant physical and political presence and it will remain so in Telangana State.

The creation of Hyderabad as an issue is really because of the sarf-i-khas (Nizam's "Crown lands") covering all of the old "Atraf-I-Balda" (now Ranga Reddy) district, which have been annexed illegally by Seemandhra land-grabbers. The Imperial Gazetteer of 1909 describes the "Atraf-I-Balda" district:

"It is a sarf-i-khas or "crown" district and has a total area of 3399 square miles, including the city of Hyderabad (26 square miles). The area of the "crown" lands is 2040 square miles, the rest being jagir" (p.106).

Thus the Nizam personally owned all the lands in Ranga Reddy district and Hyderabad City and these were transferred to the Government in exchange of the Nizam's Privy Purse. These properties have been unscrupulous grabbed by Seemandhra real estate lobby with the complicity of the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

The problem of illegal acquisition of sarf-i-khas lands (as also Wakf lands) cannot be solved in favor of the Seemandhra real estate lobby even if Hyderabad becomes a UT - in fact the scam will be exposed faster.

No one is proposing to turf out Andhra or Rayalaseema persons from Hyderabad once Telangana is created. Today it is claimed that Hyderabad has 5 lakh Bengalis residing in it along with 8 lakhs Seemandhra persons. The last time Hyderabad had an exodus was in 1948-52 when nearly 177,000 Muslims migrated to Pakistan - no one wants a repeat of that great loss of talent.

Similarly, the Andhra desire to annex Madras City was confined to a small section, which had investments and other connections in that City which they gave up when Nehru rejected their

claim. Nehru tackles the argument that Andhras have contributed to the development of Madras thus:

“It is perfectly true that the Andhras have had an important share in building up that city and much of their cultural life has centered on it. But it is equally true that Madras city is the intellectual, cultural and nerve center of Tamil Nadu. If Madras State could have continued jointly as now, everyone could have their own share in it.” (Letters, Vol. 3, p.215)

It was really the British that built Madras up from a fishing village from 1770s’ onwards. Hyderabad owes its development to the Nizams, when Nizam-ul-Mulk, then Subedhar of the Deccan, moved his capital from Daulatabad to Hyderabad. Its real growth into a beautiful Royal City took place in the reigns of Nizam VI and Nizam VII (1869-1952).

After that it went downhill all the way while it grew to its present unsustainable size. The Seemandhra claim to Hyderabad is even more ridiculous than if Nizam VIII had claimed it (with better justification) by the right of development made by his ancestors and the fact that when his Privy Purse was abolished his sarf-e-khas lands should have been returned to him!

Hyderabad belongs to those who live in it, work in it, depend on it and to those who love it and want to preserve its historic nature – not to those who just speculate on its rising real estate values and, that too, after illegally acquiring its lands.

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