

All is / (Is all) well that ends well ?

Although May 1, 1960 was marked with joyous celebrations in both the newly formed states of Gujarat and Maharashtra, the question which was uppermost then, (as well as now) is : Should lives be lost every time lines are drawn? (suggested blurb)

'Let the elections go to hell. I am tired of listening to talks of pleasing this party and that party. To base one's actions and policies on election prospects is the mentality of weak-minded men', this is how Prime Minister Nehru was quoted by the Times of India, Bombay on June 3, 1956. This was a time when the Congress High Command was quite convinced of its ability to contain dissension in its ranks.

However, as politics is all about retaining (and expanding) power, there was a *volte face* in the position of Congress in the aftermath of the 1957 General elections. This was actually the first major electoral debacle faced by the Congress as all those in favour of the unilingual Maharashtra with Bombay came together under the banner of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (SMM) and swept the Parliamentary, Assembly and Corporation elections. The Congress did not fare well even amongst the cosmopolitan electorate of Bombay, and was trounced in 'hundreds of panchayats, and scores of municipalities and district boards'. It did retain its influence in the erstwhile Marathwada region of Hyderabad, and partial support in

Vidarbha, many of whose legislators would have preferred to go by the SRC recommendation.

Meanwhile, lest this impression gain ground that only the SMM was keen on a unilingual Maharashtra, it should be pointed out that the movement for a linguistic state of Gujarat found its first expression in the 1920s when Gandhi set up a separate provincial Congress committee for Gujarat, Kathiawar and Kutch. This sentiment was echoed during the inauguration of Saurashtra at Jamnagar on February 15, 1948 by the then Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who said 'our dream has been realised, namely, the United States of Kathiawar. The next objective should be to attract the neighbouring states, including Kutch, and pave the way for the ultimate realization of a greater dream – a Mahagujarat – which you can achieve by being strong and self-reliant. You must realize that the freedom which you have won also entails responsibilities'

After the passing away of Sardar Patel, the Gujarat Congressman felt abandoned by the Congress High Command. Certainly, none else could have stepped into his shoes. This sense of neglect became sharper after Independence when the First Five Year Plan did not approve any major river projects for Mahi, Narmada and Tapi. These perceptions coupled with the sense that resources were being channelled to the Maratha speaking areas culminated in the Mahagujarat movement of 1956. Whatever be the empirical reality of resource allocation, the fact was that both Marathas and Gujaratis felt discriminated. In a Parliamentary debate in 1956, Shantaram More stated 'Take the seats in the Cabinet. Take the Congress working committee. Who has the greatest domination? The Gujaratis have the greatest domination, not only in the working committee, but also in the Cabinet'

Unlike Bombay where the mass mobilization was done by the Communists, PSP and the trade Unions, the Gujarat movement was led by students, and citizens active in the cultural and educational sphere. The turning point came in August 1956 when the students marched to the Congress House, asking for a separate state of Gujarat. Rather than listen to them, the Chief Minister of Bombay (himself a Gujarati, Morarji Desai) responded with police action, and five students lost their lives, and the movement took a decisive turn with Indu Lal Yagnik, the legendary leader of the Kisan Sabha, the amanuensis to Mahatma Gandhi in Yeravda jail for the first thirty chapters of his autobiography stepping out of his retirement to lead the agitation. Many leaders of the old Guard, including Vidyaben Neelkanth, Shardaben Mehta and Dinkar Mehta not only condemned the Congress, but also supported the movement. It will not be out of place to mention the leadership role of these redoubtable women of the Gujarat Congress.

Finally, on May 1, 1960, the two states came into existence amidst widespread enthusiasm, bursting of firecrackers and celebratory processions. Prime Minister Nehru took it upon himself to inaugurate the state which saw Yashwantrao Chavan as the Chief Minister , while for Gujarat the honour of inaugurating the state was extended to Ravishankar Maharaj , and Jivraj Mehta became first CM.

For Gujarat, it was a moment of glory, for its identity had been merged 140 ago, first with Bombay Presidency under the British, the province of Bombay under the Dominion and the state of Bombay under the Republic. For the Maharashtrians the celebrations commenced quite a few days earlier with illuminations, forts with turrets, gates, watch towers made of bamboo, cloth and paper: it marked, in a way, the return of the reign of Shivaji Maratha! And the iconic Flora Fountain was renamed Hutatma Chowk in memory of the one hundred and six

individuals who laid down their lives in the cause of a unilingual Maharashtra with Bombay as the capital!