

Uttarakhand Part III

Readers have asked why the column on Uttarakhand is being published after Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, although the announcements for all the three states came together in 2000. The reason for this is that the state formed in 2000 was Uttaranchal, renamed Uttarakhand on January 1, 2007. In fact, the activists who led the agitation for statehood were keen on this name, as also the only regional party, the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal, which was formed only for the creation of the state. Ironically, after the state was formed, the UKD lost the rationale for its existence, and the state has been alternately voting the BJP and the Congress to power. In 2006, just as the movement for the change of name was gaining ground, the then Chief Minister ND Tiwari took the 'wind out of the sails' of this agitation by getting the State Assembly to pass a unanimous resolution for changing the name to Uttarakhand from January 1, 2007.

The name finds reference in the early Hindu scriptures as the combined region of Kedarkhand (present day Garhwal), and Manaskhand (the present day Kumaon). It embraced a wide diversity of geographical, ethnic and cultural identities. Whereas most of Garhwal is dominated by rugged mountain ranges, steep slopes and deep valleys, many parts of Kumaon have a softer terrain, and an enchanting view of the high Himalayan peaks. The district in the foothills of Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar is part of the plains, both culturally and geographically and has settlers from West Punjab and East Bengal, besides the Tharu tribes. Uttarakhand is also

home of different tribal communities with their distinct languages and traditions: the Bhotias, the Rajis and the Jaunsaris Haridwar was the starting point of the pilgrims proceeding to Kedarkhand, but given its topography, and the presence of the Ganga canal system ,it was part of Meerut Division in UP. It came under the jurisdiction of Garhwal from 1975.

However the vast majority of the highlanders were Brahmins and Rajputs (about 83%), the latter often claiming descent from famous clans of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Scheduled Castes constitute another 10 percent. Therefore, the introduction of a UP (Uttar Pradesh) Government Order dated 29 March 1994, providing 27 percent reservation of seats for the OBCs ('Other Backward Classes'), both in the institutions of learning and in employment in the led to a spontaneous outburst in the hills as it would have excluded a considerable percentage of the hill population from the two most important routes to economic and social mobility (education and government posts) .The government of Uttar Pradesh took no account of this, and the legislation was widely seen as the 'final straw' in what was perceived to be decades of neglect and exploitation. Moreover, they felt voiceless and marginalized as the region has only 19 MLAs in an Assembly of 431 (including one nominated Anglo-Indian MLA).

In the opening weeks of the mass agitation two critical themes emerged which saw it shift from an 'anti-reservation' struggle to the demand for a separate State These centered on the closely related issues of development and politics. While there was a feeling that the region was subjected to 'internal colonialism' by Uttar Pradesh (voiced in newspapers, at meetings and in discussions), it was generally conceded that the region has started to receive more 'development' funds from both the

State and Central governments over the past decade . The main grievance now was that the economic and developmental marginalization of the hill areas was due to the fact that *plains-based* planners in the distant State capital of Lucknow were unable (as well as unwilling) to understand the development needs of the *hill* population, environment and economy.

The insensitivity of the state government to the concerns and issues of the highlanders , especially the firing at Rampur Tiraha in Muzaffarnagar on October 2 , 1994 which led to confirmed death of six activists and allegations of molestation and rape of women by UP Police was the final nail in the coffin . Although the then CM Mulayam Singh Yadav ordered a judicial enquiry , the hills were aflame with anger and indignation, and government employees and students organized protest marches . The anger was directed against the state government, and relief was sought from the Union government , as the protestors were proud Indians opposed to the politics of the SP -BSP. Incidentally, in the initial phase, both the Congress and the BJP were 'quiet' for they were also looking at the larger picture of UP and India . For the record , the BJP MP from Tehri Manvendra Shah(the ex Maharaja of Tehri) did file a petition against the OBC reservation order . The High Court gave relief only with respect to admissions in educational institutions . By 1996 , the Union government under Dewe Gowda had conceded the demand , and the BJP then took it up officially, though in the new round of state reorganization in 1998, it preferred the name Uttaranchal for its 'allegedly fewer separatist connotations'.

With the BJP firmly supporting the reorganization of the state , and the changed political complexion, both in the state and the Centre, the UP Legislative Assembly and Council passed the Uttar Pradesh Reorganization Bill , and after seeking Presidential approval , the then Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister , LK Advani introduced the same in the Union Parliament on December 22, 1998. The reasons for the delay were twofold : the reluctance of the prosperous Punjabi landowners who felt that they would lose their 'clout' in the new state , and on the inclusion of Haridwar district , the majority population of which was ethnically more aligned with the state of UP. As most MLAs from these two districts were also aligned to the BJP , the resistance was overcome , and the new state of Uttaranchal came into existence on November 9, 2000 amidst much fanfare in the interim capital of Dehradun when Nityanand Swami , a BJP legislator from Dehradun was sworn in as the first CM by Surjeet Singh Barnala , the first Governor of the state . But the first CM was not from the hills and the capital was Dehradun , not Gairsain. this led to this pithy comment by Shekhar Pathak, a well-respected activist , and the chronicler of the Chipko movement :

'We are happy (khushi) to have our won state, we feel sadness (udasi), because our hopes did not come true, we are full of resentment (akrosh) because our demands were not respected .

