

Announcement of SRC

The reorganization of the internal boundaries of a nation are always a 'work –in progress' and even this report ended with the with the pithy remark 'reorganization has a legitimate place in this country'. (relevant extract)

The three most read government reports are the States Reorganization Committee Report, the Shah Commission of Enquiry and the Mandal Commission Report. The SRC report (also called the Fazl Ali report) had two other equally distinguished members , HN Kunzru and KM Pannikar. Fazl Ali was then the Governor of Orissa, and later of Assam, Kunzru had been a member of the Constituent Assembly, and is the only person ever to have declined Bharat Ratna as a matter of principle (for he had opposed it in the Constituent Assembly) and Pannikar was an editor , diplomat, scholar statesman and Parliamentarian .

This column will discuss the background to the most significant alterations in the map of India in 1956. However, the reorganization of the internal boundaries of a nation are always a 'work –in progress' and even this report ended with the with the pithy remark 'reorganization has a legitimate place in this country'. This 267 page report makes for

fascinating reading , and each member of the Commission , including the Chairman has given at least one dissenting note , but the Commission adopted the report when two of the three members agreed on the substantive issue in question.

Before we dwell more on this aspect, I would like to draw the attention of the readers to an earlier report, the Linguistic Provinces Commission Report 1948, which was appointed not by the Government of India, but by the Constituent Assembly on the question of the formation of the Provinces of Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra. However, the announcement of this Commission opened a Pandora's Box, and the Commission received representations from across all linguistic groups, including those which were not in the provinces mentioned in the Terms of Reference . The report acknowledged the fact that 'the formation of linguistic provinces has been an article of faith in the current political thought of the country during the last thirty years, and has received the support of the Congress and the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi'. With regards to the theory and practise of Congress forming its own units on linguistic basis (Andhra, Odiya, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil), the report says that 'freedom has come to us in a way unforeseen, and unthought-of, and has brought in its train problems and dangers never dreamt of. In view of the dangers which now surround our country and in the circumstances that now exist, the Congress stands relieved of all its past commitments, and it is its right as

also its duty to come to a fresh decision on the subject in the light of the present circumstances.

The Committee accepted the fact that the existing provinces were administrative units of British Imperialism, not designed to work democratic institutions, and could do with more scientific and rational planning. However, 'homogeneity of language alone cannot be a decisive factor'. Note here that even 'the' is not used. In determining the boundaries of provinces, the emphasis should be primarily on administrative convenience, and homogeneity of language will enter into consideration only on this count, and not by its own independent force. In rejecting the demands for linguistic reorganization of states, it said 'this enquiry has been an eye opener to us. The work of sixty years of Indian National Congress was standing before us, face to face with centuries old India of narrow loyalties, petty jealousies, and ignorant prejudices engaged in a mortal conflict, and we are simply horrified to see how thin the ice was on which we were skating'.

There was major uproar when the report was released and the Congress had to set up the JVP Committee with Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya to examine the same. They endorsed the report for the present, but left the possibility of reconsideration at a later stage. However, in the aftermath of the Andhra struggle, the SRC was constituted. Major territorial adjustments were made in the states of

Madras, Kerala, Karnataka, Hyderabad, Andhra, Bombay, Vidarbha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Punjab. With respect to Bihar and Bengal, a portion of the Purnea district east of the river Mahananda, and Puruliya sub district of Manbhum district, was transferred from Bihar to West Bengal. The report also recommended the merger of Tripura and Manipur to the state of Assam. The only states and UTs which were left unscathed by the SRC report were Orissa, J&K, Delhi and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Incidentally Lakshadweep (till then Laccadive) Islands did not find a reference, nor did the Commission talk about Goa which was still under the Portuguese.

However among the things which the Commission did talk about was the need to ensure that at least fifty per cent officers' of the AIS services should be from outside the state, and the need for 'regular transfers to and from Centre and the states', as well as the Constitution of new All India services like the Indian Forest Service !