

## **Ambedkar, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel on Linguistic States**

*Suggested blurb:*

*The dissenting note of K M Pannikar of the SRC (1956) read ‘the consequence of the present imbalance, caused by the denial of the federal principal of equality of units, has been to create feelings of distrust and resentment in all the states outside Uttar Pradesh.*

Strange as it may appear, with reference to the reorganization of states on linguistic lines, Ambedkar and Gandhi were closer in their positions than Nehru and Patel, whose views on the subject underwent a major change in the aftermath of Independence. Ambedkar has in fact written a monograph *Thoughts on Linguistic States* in 1955 in which he not only comments on the work of the Commission (SRC report) but also discusses the limits of linguism, possible solutions, the issue of administrative and economic viability as well as protection and safeguard of minorities. There is a chapter on Hyderabad as the possible second capital of India to remove tension between the North and the South, besides maps and statistical appendices on linguistic families, population of various cities and provinces, budgetary position of states and

the Centre a, data on castes *etal*. Very briefly he argues that *one state one language is not the same as one language one state*. He took the SRC to task for recommending one state each with a population of six and four crores, four with population between two to four crores and eight with a population between one to crores and three with a population less than a crores. This was in his view, a 'consolidation of the North, and the balkanization of the south'. To buttress his argument, he quoted the dissenting note of K M Pannikar 'the consequence of the present imbalance, caused by the denial of the federal principal of equality of units, has been to create feelings of distrust and resentment in all the states outside Uttar Pradesh. Not only in the Southern states, but also in Punjab, Bengal and elsewhere, the view was generally expressed before the Commission that the present structure of government led to the dominance of UP in all India matters... that it will be a danger to our unity if such feelings are allowed to exist, and remedies are not sought and found now, will also not be denied.'

Indeed, in the aftermath of the Partition, 'danger to unity 'of the country was a very real threat. It appeared that India needed a strong Centre, and anything that came in this way should be ignored. This brought Nehru, Patel and even C Rajagopalachari together to check the 'fissiparous forces'. Patel needed all his influence in the Constituent Assembly to

reverse the position which Congress had been taking from 1917, with the formation of the Andhra circle in that year, and the Sindh circle in 1918. After the Nagpur Congress of 1920, the provincial congress committees had been organized by linguistic zones in Karnataka, Orissa, Maharashtra, and Bengal *etal.* Significantly, these were not in sync with the administrative divisions of British India. It needs to be mentioned here that even though Nehru was the Prime Minister, the majority of the Congress members were aligned with Sardar, and if he had not extended his support on this issue, there was a very real danger of a house divided. Nehru had Patel's support for his November 27, 1947 speech in which he responded to N G Ranga that compared to issues like security and economic development, language issues sank into insignificance. In his work 'Nehru and the language politics of India, Robert D King remarks 'Nehru , by ensuring his (Pattabhi Sitaramayya's) appointment to the Committee along with Patel, whom Nehru *could trust absolutely on this issues, if not others* (emphasis added) was not about to leave recommendations on the suddenly explosive topic of linguistic provinces in hands he could not control'

However, this did not hold true for Gandhi. The Mahatma was steadfast in his views about the salience of language in the public life of the nation. He was clear that the states of the new nation should be defined on the basis of language. In his prayer meeting on October 10, 1947 when the post Partition trauma was at its height, he said 'I do believe that

we should hurry up with the reorganization of linguistic provinces... there may be an illusion for the time being that different languages stand for different cultures, but there is also a possibility that with the creation of linguistic provinces, it may disappear. I shall write something (about it) if I get the time...i am not unaware that a class of people have been saying the linguistic provinces are wrong. In my opinion, this class delights in creating obstacles... Just days before his death ( January 25,1948) , he said ' the congress had decided some twenty years ago that there should be as many provinces as there are major languages ... moreover , if linguistic provinces are formed it will also give a fillip to regional languages ..

Alas, he was shot dead on 30<sup>th</sup> January, and the issue of linguistic reorganization of states was put on the back-burner, but such was the force of popular will that the demand resurrected in the very first year of the Republic!

(832 words)