

Reorganization of States with special references to the Northeast Region of India

The reorganization of states in India has been an intricate and evolving process since 1947, the year of Independence from British Rule. This paper examines the complex history of the reorganization of states with special emphasis on the northeastern part of the country. The paper explores the historical background, social conditions, political movements, and economic implications of the reorganization. Beginning with the formation of states under the British, this paper highlights the flash points such as the subsequent reorganization commissions formed after independence and sub-committee to understand the demands of the tribal areas of northeast. It also discusses the territorial lessons from globalization. How the process of globalization has shaped territorial distribution. The historic reorganization of states was mainly based on the linguistic and ethnic identities of the majority of the population of the prospective region to maximize the acceptance of new boundaries.

Keywords: Northeast region, autonomy, sixth schedule, self-government, reorganization

Introduction

The process of reorganization of states in India after independence has been a compelling and crucial aspect of India's independence history. Charismatic leaders like Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, VP Menon, *etc.*, were committed to preserving the diversity of India along with effective governance. This process was made quite a few times to satisfy the growing demands of the local populace. It is a matter of debate, whether there should be larger states or smaller states. Just after independence, most of the states were formed to improve governance and administrative efficiency. But many communities demanded the reorganization on linguistic lines. The agitation started in the southern part of India in the form of the Vishal Andhra movement demanding Telugu-speaking state to be segregated out of the Madras province. Consequently, the Union Government set up committees to examine the demand for the reorganization of states on linguistic lines.¹ In 1956, the Reorganization Act was passed allowing reorganization on linguistic lines. In addition, in the 1960s and 70s, states like Arunachal, Punjab, Haryana, and Maharashtra were created, the latest one being Telangana in 2014.

The paper also refers to the reorganization of states in the northeastern region of India. The reorganization of states in northeastern India was a much more tedious job as the tribal communities were not willing to accept the limited autonomy offered by the government under the 6th schedule of the newly written and adopted constitution of India. Many Communities in northeast India wanted total independence from the union of India. These demands soon turned violent and insurgent groups started to fight the Indian army through guerilla warfare. However, the insurgent groups were contained by the army, and states like Nagaland, were carved out of Assam to ensure permanent peace

¹Jawaharlal Nehru established the State Reorganization Commission in 1953. Fazal Ali, the retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was named as its Chairman; H. N. Kunzru and K. M. Panikkar were its other two members.

in the region. Many former princely states like Manipur were also incorporated into the Indian Union, and all the tribal areas were given limited autonomy in subjects related to their internal matters.

Reorganization of independent India

India on the eve of independence was in a chaotic condition, not only economically but also socially. India was divided into more than 500 disjointed princely states which were ruled by independent rulers accepting the British as 'paramount power'. The princely states were enjoying limited autonomy concerning their internal affairs. After the partition, the independent princely states were given the choice to either join India, and Pakistan or remain independent. The majority of the princely states joined India or Pakistan depending upon geographical feasibility and perks offered to them by Jinnah or Nehru. On the Indian side, this tedious job was handled by Sardar Patel and VP Menon. However, there were some of the princely states that wanted to be independent like the Maharaja of Kashmir, or some of them, wanted to join Pakistan but were situated in mainland India like the Nizam of Hyderabad and Junagarh. These two Muslim-ruled states were incorporated through military action by the Indian army (Operation Polo in Hyderabad). The rulers of all the princely states were guaranteed remittance from the government, named Privy Purse.

After the adoption of the Indian constitution in 1950, the constitution guarded a four-fold classification of the Indian union into Part A, B, C, and D states. Part A states comprised nine erstwhile governor's provinces of British India. Part B states consisted of nine erstwhile princely states with the legislature. Part C states consisted of the erstwhile chief commissioner's province of British India and Part D consisted of Andaman and Nicobar Islands only. This arrangement of states was based on political and historical facts. As mentioned above, there was a demand among the communities that the states should be divided on a linguistic basis. The demand gained momentum gradually with the start of the Vishal Andhra movement. It demanded that the Telugu-speaking areas should be separated from the erstwhile Madras province of which they were part and be made into a separated Andhra province. To look into the demand the government appointed the SK Dhar committee in 1948, the commission submitted its report concluding that the reorganization of states should be based on administrative convenience including historical and geographical considerations, and not linguistic. In December 1948 a new commission was appointed which comprised Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabh bhai Patel, and Pattabhi Sitaramayya to study the same demand. This committee submitted its report in 1949 and again rejected the idea of forming states on linguistic lines.

The Vishal Andhra movement escalated due to the central government's indecisiveness. Potti Sriramulu, a congress leader went on an indefinite fast that led to his death after 56 days. This caused great unrest, and finally, the Prime Minister announced the formation of a separate Andhra state in December 1952. Again in 1952, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a fresh committee to look into the matter under the chairmanship of Fazal Ali. This committee submitted its report in 1955 and suggested that the whole country be divided into 16 states and 3 centrally administered areas on a linguistic basis. The Nehru government partially agreed and divided the country into 14 States and 6 Union Territories under the aegis of States Reorganization Act-1956.

By the passing agitations broke out in 1960 to bifurcated Bombay province into Gujrat and Maharashtra. The Marathi manus and the Samyukta Maharashtra movement demanded a separate Marathi-speaking state. Marathi, Gujarati, Kutchi, and Konkani were the main dialects of Bombay. After the division Marathi and Konkani-speaking populations became part of Maharashtra while Kutch and

Gujrati became part of Gujarat. Further, the formation of Nagaland took place in 1963, Haryana was carved out of Punjab in 1966, and Himachal Pradesh was formed 1971. Meghalaya Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh came into being in 1987, followed by Telangana in 2014.

Reorganization of North–Eastern States

The northeastern states, initially also known as the seven-sisters, today comprise eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. The annexation of Sikkim took place in 1975 and is now considered part of the northeastern states. The northeast region of India in the 1950s was characterized by challenging geographical terrain. Nested in the eastern Himalayas and had international borders with China, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The northeastern states previously were largely dominated by Assam as a major entity. Manipur was located east of Assam and was a princely state, Meghalaya was a part of Assam, Mizoram was initially known as Lushai Hills district and was administratively under Assam, Nagaland was a separate territory in the 1950s, Arunachal Pradesh during 1950s was known as NEFA (Northeast Frontier Agency), Tripura located in the southern part of the northeast was also a princely state.

The northeast is connected with the rest of India through a narrow Siliguri corridor popularly known as ‘Chicken Neck’ which is just 22 km wide, it is also very strategically placed as it shares international borders with China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar. The political arrangement of northeast India was divided into two main divisions. The first one was the Indian province of which Assam was a part and secondly, there were princely states like Manipur, Tripura, and Khasi states. In fact, the majority northeast Indian states were carved out of Assam, Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972 Arunachal, and Mizoram in 1987. There were two princely states Manipur and Tripura during the colonial period.

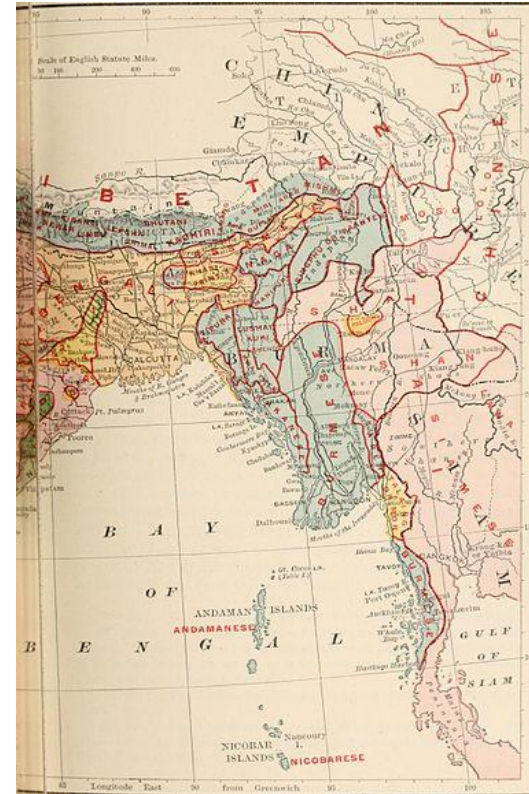


Figure 1 British India map of Northeast India

After India gained independence the constituent assembly constituted a special sub-committee under Gopinath Bordeloid a congress leader from Assam to suggest what kind of administrative arrangement should be made for the tribal areas of the northeast region. Based on the recommendation of the Bordeloid committee, the constituent assembly of India inserted Schedule 6 in the constitution which deals with the administrative, social, and political autonomy of the tribal areas of Assam. Under the provision of Schedule 6, district councils and regional councils were also to be set up in the tribal areas of Assam. Special autonomy concerning administrative subjects is given to these district and regional councils. Now it is observed that there were many operational shortcomings in the functioning of autonomous district and regional councils. The political aspirations of leaders belonging to these hilly areas were not satisfied with the limited autonomy for instance the case of Nagaland, part of them did not accept the limited autonomy and continued the armed struggle to gain independence from India.

The formation of states such as Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram are an outcome of long-drawn political movements and, a desire for more autonomy. The desire for more political autonomy was highly visible in the views expressed by the tribal leaders to the Simon Commission of India when the Simon Commission toured the hill areas of the northeast almost all the hill districts had various demands most of them expressed the demand that Assam legislature should not have the power to legislate upon the subject concerning their district. However, the 6th schedule did not satisfy the demand of the tribal leaders, and this led to a movement for more autonomy in part of northeast India after the independence. There was violent agitation in the areas of Nagaland while democratic and peaceful agitation was visible in Manipur and Meghalaya.

Manipur was a princely state during the British Raj and Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh ruled the state. After India gained independence in 1947 negotiations between the Indian government and Maharaja of Manipur started on joining the Indian Union. The Maharaja signed the instrument of assessment with the Indian government with the assurance that the internal autonomy of Manipur would be maintained. Under public pressure, the Maharaja of Manipur was forced to conduct elections to the state legislative assembly in 1948 and the state became a constitutional monarchy. In the state legislative assembly on the question of merger with the Indian union, there were sharp differences of opinion. However, the Congress party was successful in pressuring the Maharaja to sign the merger agreement in September 1949. The state of Tripura was also a princely state like Manipur, its last ruler Bir Bikram Kishore Debbarman, and his successor Kirit Bikram Kishore Deb Brman, was just thirteen years old. The council regency formed Queen Kanchan Prava Devi. Tripura faced a crisis, internal threats, and threats from external forces on the advice of the government of India the queen dissolved the Council of Regency, and a year later on 9th September, she signed the Tripura merger agreement. Tripura became part of the Indian Union as C category states like Manipur.

The demand for separate states in part of northeast India is a long-drawn struggle. The multiple reasons can be attributed to such demand. Northeast India is a very diverse region with numerous ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. Many communities in the region for instance the Nagas have distinct identities and seek greater autonomy to preserve their unique culture out of other communities of the northeast. The region is geographically isolated from the rest of India, due to challenging terrain and connectivity issues have led to marginalization and underdevelopment. These factors promoted the call for greater self-government again and again. Additionally, the concerns over the equal distribution of resources, and development funds within the northeast have triggered demand for separate states. Many communities of northeast want to have greater political autonomy to shape their destiny, make decisions about their unique culture, and manage local affairs independently. Some even argue that smaller states are well governed. The problem of insurgency has led some to call for separate states as a means to attain political objectives.

Similar was the demand of the Bodo Land movement, which was a socio-political movement in the state of Assam. The movement sought to create a separate state comprising of Bodo people. Bodo's are the single largest tribal community of Assam. They demanded a separate state as they considered their identity different from that of the Ahoms of Assam. In 1966-67 the demand for a separate state was raised under the banner of the plain's tribal council of Assam a political outfit. In 1987, all Bodo student unions demanded a fifty-fifty division of Assam. The demand soon turned violent, but by 2003 the government of India was able to strike a deal with the insurgent group the Bodo Liberation Tigers. Accordingly, the Bodoland Territorial Council was formed. It is an autonomous council under

the 6th schedule. Another group led by Ranjan Daimary was not satisfied with the agreement; the group named 'National Democratic Front of Bodoland' continued a non-violent struggle. Soon the group was divided into two factions NDFB-P and NDFB-R, after continuous fighting with the much stronger Indian army both the groups agreed to negotiate with the government of India and there is a separate Bodoland territorial council comprised of four districts, also individually funded by the Government of India.

Conclusion

The process of globalization is a watershed event in human history. It utterly influenced our understanding of various issues which include territories and borders. It emphasizes the idea that economic relationships go beyond geographical boundaries. Similarly, regional collaboration has gained importance, showing that globalization interconnecting nation's regional cooperation still plays a crucial role in addressing shared challenges. However, the demand for a separate state persists in small pockets of northeastern states, but largely the separatist tendencies have died down due to the long tiring process. The majority of the insurgent groups have wanted and realigned themselves back into mainstream society. Still, there are some shortcomings in the working of the autonomous district and regional councils of north northeast which need to be addressed. Overall, the valuable insights from the reorganization of Northeast India should serve as an insight for policy-makers. They highlight the inclusive approach (unity in Diversity) to the reorganization of the state especially in a country like India with immense diversity and unique challenges.

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