

The Telengana Question

The Telengana Question Returns. But the persons in authority have reasons to say 'no', albeit the aggrieved of Telengana hope to build a separate identity. Ironically the demand and achievement of linguistic state began with Andhra Pradesh (AP) and yet it is in AP that the demand for bifurcation of the state has been there almost from the beginning. Maybe this is due to a flawed understanding of relationship between language and people. Languages are essentially biogeographic entities whereas standard languages are languages with a gun, that is, they are entities of power. As against standard language there are link languages that grow naturally over a large area due to biogeography, trade and religious and cultural communication.

Telugu represents a set of languages whose broad divisions are the four broad divisions of AP, namely North Coastal AP, South Coastal AP or Kosta, Telengana and Rayalseema. The standard accent free Telugu is from somewhere between Khammam and Guntur. It also has full Sanskrit alphabet and many Sanskrit words. All these regions have been brought together somewhat artificially due to a political understanding of language and viable economic size of the state. Language (or dialect) is defined biogeographically. Thus Telengana is a biogeographic region separated from the Coastal Andhra by the Eastern Ghats in the East and from Rayalseema by Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers in the south. Within this broad region one can still detect smaller subdivisions, both biogeographically and language-wise. Also language and accent change occur in a continuum and bilingualism exists across all borders.

Standard language on the other hand is a political power entity. That is why it is sometimes called language with a gun. It can stretch or be imposed on widely different regions. Such is the case of Standard Telugu, Official Hindi and English. Children in Telengana region fail in Telugu because they make 'mistakes' in the use of standard Telugu used in school. People from Telengana are looked down because they cannot speak 'proper' Telugu. Sometimes people from Telengana themselves say that they do not speak proper Telugu just as people from Bidar say that they do not speak proper Kannada!

Link language is a language, which spreads over a well defined large biogeographic region due to trade, travel, religious and cultural communication. Dakhni can be taken as an example. Dakhni is spread across Deccan and Deccan Plateau as such is a bigger region with a well-defined biogeographic identity.

Now Dakhni linguistically is of the same origin (Khari boli of Meerut division) as are Hindi and Urdu. It came to South through Nirgunia wandering Sadhus, Sufis, armies of Allauddin Khilji, Malik Kafur, Tughlaq and Aurangzeb and traders, artisans who came along with them. Even some gypsy communities like Lambadas, Pardhis, etc., brought the language to the South. It acquired specific literary characters of its own from 12th Century onward through the writing of Nirgunia and Sufi saints. Gulbarga, Bidar, Golconda, Bijapur and Aurangabad appeared as the major literacy centers between 14th to 17th Centuries. Today it is the common lingua franca of all Muslims in this Deccan region, the language of

Sufis and traders and understood by almost all people and spoken as a bilingual language by most urban dwellers.

Dakhni is a significantly different language compared to its origin in Meerut region. It has borrowed vocabulary from Marathi, Kannada and Telugu in varying quantities in the different sub-regions. These languages in turn have borrowed phrases and words from Dakhni in the Deccan region.

Another example of a link language is *Nagpuria* or *Sadan* spoken in Chhota Nagpur/ Jharkhand region. Although linguistically it is quite different from any of the tribal languages spoken in the region it is understood by all. And like Dakhni there is a mutual exchange of vocabulary in different sub-regions of the area.

For one thing there is a biogeographic logic for the demand for separate Telengana state. A biogeographic region defines its flora, fauna and human society. Thus Telengana defines a people, a speech community or if one likes a nation. They are defined in terms of the food they grow and eat, the kind of houses they live in, kind of dresses they wear, kind of religious/ local deity festivals they have. There are even festivals across religion such as *pir panduga* where the ancestors are brought alive and carried around to a common worship ground, fed and appeased with dances and songs! All communities take part in it. If Telengana is created today, it will go the same way as Jharkhand and Chattisgarh have gone. These mineral rich regions are attracting rapacious multinational giants. The ruling politicians in these states are not equipped to deal with them and sell the resources cheap. Thus the exploitation of natural and human resources will increase enormously. So the demands for these identities can give good results only if they are achieved along with socialist or libertarian demands of freedom from exploitation, equality and rational uses of resources.

□ *[Contributed]*