

Summer Ordeal

Indian federalism is not unique. In many ways the system is more unitary than federal. Yet what exists as federal structure is likely to get further complicated with the ever rising demand for bifurcation of states. But small is not always beautiful. Nor does creation of smaller states guarantee development of a region. Self-styled development hawkers now preside over a large number of separatist tendencies that are mostly non-violent. Populism sells even in a desperate situation and all political groups, regional or national, wax passionately about helping the poor. The original idea of reorganising states on the basis of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, holds little water today as populists dominate the polity with their feet on shifting sands and fingers in exchequer. With more and more states getting bifurcated and demand for smaller states never losing momentum, the so-called mainstream—or national—parties are increasingly losing relevance. The bifurcation of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, has not really resolved the basic problem of mass deprivation for which bifurcation was made in the first place. Nor did it help much in bolstering separate cultural identity as it was argued at the initial phase of Jharkhand movement.

Now even district-level reorganisation is being projected as a panacea by different ethnic groups. It is nowhere so super-charging and volatile as well—as in the north-east and North Bengal. For all practical purposes Darjeeling is now Gorkhaland. And yet the agitation, otherwise peaceful, for complete separation from the state of West Bengal has created an atmosphere in which a bloody inter-community riot-coupled with police brutalities is the logical conclusion. The ruling marxists of Bengal who can go to any length to protect their vested interests, have their own way to tell the world how to deal with the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha which is spearheading the separate Gorkhaland agitation. They are waiting to complete the 3-tier panchayat election business, to have adequate paramilitary forces at their command.

Meanwhile, they have launched a political campaign to isolate the Gorkha agitationists in the Darjeeling hills in their usual fashion of blaming it on the American agencies, particularly CIA, to create destabilisation in the state, as it is part of American design to balkanise the entire north-eastern region. It is the old tactical line of communist parties to isolate someone by discovering police and CIA connections. As they themselves manage the police establishment, CIA comes in handy to substantiate their ploy to unleash terror.

Faced with growing assertiveness of middleclass people of different ethnic and religious groups, the ruling circles at the federal level, irrespective of their political colour, find it easy to pacify the aggrieved by way of allowing them to share the exchequer-related privileges while thwarting the possibility of a genuine mass upsurge in the bud. The process of atomisation seems endless. Why the Nepali speaking people of Darjeeling insist on a Gorkha identity to articulate their aspirations remains as vague as it was at the start of Gorkhaland agitation by Subhas Ghising who is now in oblivion, a few years back. Unlike the Tibetans under the Chinese rule, they do not face any cultural and religious oppression.

The issue of under development, rather unequal development, is not very specific to Darjeeling hills. It's a general phenomenon. And it cannot be otherwise under the present state of Indian economy.

Despite separation from Bihar-Jharkhandis continue to suffer from identity crisis. The same is true of Chattisgarh. These two states are extremely rich in basic mineral wealth and human resources. Yet the people of these two states are the worst victims of exploitation by 'outsiders'. Administrative reorganisation is no answer to the ruthless onslaught launched by the captains of the corporate world like Mittals and Tatas who have no problem to cope with too many borders and local chieftains who rule in the name of people. Their separate existence may have created a few jobs for the middleclass educated but that is not going to solve the basic problem of dispossession and widen avenues to get empowered. State identity cannot flourish in a situation where local entrepreneurs and toilers lag behind. Those who invest in these states come from outside having no plan to get integrated with cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the region.

Assimilation of ethnic isolationism with mainstream society-building mechanism even within a state boundary seems to be a long-drawn process. Linguistic re-organisation has not resolved this crisis. And non-linguistic parameters, mainly under development cannot resolve it either. No doubt creation of newer states in recent years has empowered a tiny minority to amass wealth and privileges but aspirations raised during state-formation agitation remain mostly unfulfilled. In this part of the globe, democrats are not committed to strengthening democratic institutions and this feeds a sense of frustration even in newly created states.

Unless Gorkhaland agitationists succeed in projecting a broader perspective, the marxist ruling dispensation won't hesitate to unleash a rein of terror.

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