

CULTURAL ROOTS OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: A STUDY OF THE TELANGANA MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The available literature on the Telangana movement offers historical, political, and economic perspectives that define Telangana as a 'backward' region and the movement as an offshoot to this backwardness. The backwardness generally discussed pertains to the economic standing of the people of Telangana. From the vantage point of a fresh perspective, this chapter uses regional culture as a vantage point to understand the emergence of the mass movement. It explores the context in which the idea of separate statehood for Telangana took shape and discusses how the movement can be understood as a new social movement. The chapter also attempts to understand the contours of the movement's history in terms of how the culture of Telangana was marginalized and how Telangana activists, especially employees and students, mobilized against the dominant Andhra culture, leading ultimately to widespread, robust cultural assertion. The movement for a separate Telangana state has been hailed by many intellectuals as a democratic struggle of the people of a region against political domination and economic exploitation. The central government's decision to create a new state is seen as an official recognition of the people's aspiration for identity and self-rule. Interrogating such perceptions, this article examines the process by which a Telangana identity has been constructed and throws light on different factors that contributed to it. The Telangana identity is built partly on fact, and partly on half-truths, prejudices, and false hopes. Apart from intellectuals, the resurrection of the regional identity has been facilitated by the opportunism of political parties, in particular, the unjustifiable inaction of the left.

Keywords: Telangana movement, mobilized against, political, and economic perspectives, Regional Politics

INTRODUCTION

The available literature on the Telangana movement offers historical, political, and economic perspectives that define Telangana as a 'backward' region and the movement as an offshoot to this backwardness. The backwardness generally discussed pertains to the economic standing of the people of Telangana. From the vantage point of a fresh perspective, this chapter uses regional culture to understand the emergence of the mass movement. It explores the context in which the idea of statehood for Telangana took shape and discusses how the movement can be understood as a new social movement. The chapter also attempts to understand the contours of the movement's history in terms of how the culture of Telangana was marginalized, and how Telangana activists, especially employees and students, mobilized against the dominant Andhra culture, leading ultimately to widespread, robust cultural assertion. Unlike many other regions whose cultural narratives have been continuously documented, Telangana's identity was long overshadowed by the dominant cultural discourse of the combined Andhra Pradesh. As a result, much of its unique heritage rooted in the traditions of the Deccan plateau, the legacies of the Kakatiyas, the syncretic culture of the Nizams, and the vibrant folk life of rural communities remained underrepresented in mainstream scholarship. Understanding the socio-cultural identity of Telangana is therefore crucial, not only to appreciate its intrinsic cultural richness but also to analyse how historical forces, linguistic traditions, social structures, and political movements have interacted to shape the region's contemporary character. This article aims to offer an analytical perspective on the making of Telangana's socio-cultural identity by

exploring its historical foundations, folk and classical artistic expressions, social dynamics, and the influential role of the Telangana statehood movement. Adopting a descriptive and analytical approach, the study seeks to unravel the layered processes through which Telangana has constructed, preserved, and redefined its cultural identity both before and after the formation of the state. The socio-cultural identity of Telangana is deeply rooted in its long and layered historical evolution, beginning with the Satavahana period, which marked one of the earliest organized political and cultural formations in the Deccan. The Satavahanas fostered a vibrant cultural milieu through their patronage of Prakrit inscriptions, trade networks, and artistic traditions, while the region simultaneously witnessed the flourishing of Buddhism and Jainism. These religious movements left a profound imprint on Telangana's cultural landscape, evident through rock-cut caves, monastic sites, and the emphasis on non-violence and ethical living embedded in early social practices. The political decision to create Telangana was accompanied by an immediate and visible reassertion of cultural consciousness. With statehood, Telangana reclaimed the right to define its own cultural priorities and revive traditions that had long been overshadowed. The government officially recognized Bathukamma and Bonalu as state festivals, not just as religious events but as symbols of linguistic pride, women's heritage, and regional identity. Historical sites associated with Kakatiya culture such as Warangal fort and Ramappa temple were revived with renewed significance. There was also a deliberate effort to normalize and celebrate the Telangana Telugu dialect in government institutions, educational spaces, and media. This linguistic and cultural confidence marked a decisive shift from the earlier era of marginalization. State formation thus reshaped Telangana's cultural consciousness by validating long-suppressed narratives and enabling the region to articulate its heritage on its own terms. The creation of the state was not merely a political reorganization but a profound cultural revival that reaffirmed Telangana's distinct identity within the national landscape. It allowed communities to reclaim ownership of their history, festivals, folk traditions, and language, thereby transforming the statehood movement into a process of cultural reconstruction and renewed collective pride.

LITERATURE REVIEW

R Srinivas et.al [2024] This study examines the political, social, and economic factors driving the demand for statehood in Telangana, a region historically marked by underdevelopment and inequality since its merger with Andhra Pradesh in 1956. The study highlights the broader context of regional autonomy movements in India, following the creation of new states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttaranchal, which have inspired similar demands across the country. Utilizing a qualitative study approach, the study employs case study methodology, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis to gather insights from a diverse group of participants involved in the Telangana movement. The findings reveal that perceptions of socioeconomic inequity, regional identity, and local resource control are central to the push for statehood. The analysis also considers the implications of Telangana's statehood on regional development and identity, contributing to the understanding of statehood claims in India. The study methodology includes purposive sampling to ensure a representative viewpoint from various stakeholders, with data analyzed thematically to identify recurrent patterns and themes.

Swamy G et.al [2024] The Telangana Movement, which culminated in the formation of the state of Telangana in 2014, was a result of sustained socio-political struggles and aspirations for regional identity, autonomy, and justice. Among the key contributors to this movement

were Dalit-Bahujan communities, whose voices and activism played a pivotal role in mobilizing grassroots support and articulating the demands for statehood. This paper examines the involvement and impact of Dalit-Bahujan communities in shaping the Telangana Movement, with a specific focus on Adilabad district. Using a combination of historical analysis, qualitative interviews, and secondary data, this study highlights the socio-political dynamics, cultural expressions, and leadership that these communities contributed to the larger movement.

Durgam Bhaskar et.al [2022] The movement for the formation of Telangana state revealed the interrelationship between region, caste and power. The emergence of Telangana is unique in the sense that it raises a number of issues concerning dynamics of regional social formation, and power structure. Unlike in many states in India, the former state of Andhra Pradesh represented a unique feature of regional specificity of caste formation and dominance patterns. In this context this paper is an attempt to examine the factors which contributed for Telangana people's active participation in the contemporary Telangana movement and with what vision and values they fought for the separate state. It also analyzes the role of Dalit-bahujans in contemporary Telangana movement, who have been neglected and undermined by existing literature and political structure.

Gaurav J. Pathania et.al [2020] The university space, the most endangered zone in Indian democracy in the present, is witnessing the ideological churnings, contradictions, and emergent possibilities of affinity among radical voices contesting culturally hegemonic practices. Student activism in general and anti-caste activism in particular offer a complex interplay of caste, gender, culture, and politics in the university space, traditionally defined as neutral. Envisioning a democratic, socially just, and genuinely secular nation, historically marginalized students challenge and critique hegemonic narratives. This article argues that anti-caste activism on campuses invokes the democratic space of universities, where ideological meanings are constructed and deconstructed to unveil the suppression of historically marginalized voices in contemporary network society. The dominant culture and politics are actually rooted in the iron laws of ancient hierarchies intrinsically opposed to the self-historicizing and well-informed democratic aspirations of student activism.

Telangana Movement: Cultural Perspective

As every region has its own art and culture, Telangana state also has its own art and culture. Since it has the signature culture and art forms and other folklores, it became the most positive strength for the social movements in the Telangana state. Folk lore or folk arts are the high impacted reflections of the culture and thoughts of the social society or the 'folk', people. Hence this is the key fact for Telangana movement why the folk songs became a canal for the flow of the social movement in the hearts of the Telangana people to fight for their rights and injustice against them while expressing the social, ritual, emotional realities and morals of common people belong to their own caste and region. The various phases and forms of Telangana movement like armed struggle, peasant moment, dalit movement and other movements are largely influenced through culture revolutionary folk songs but in the second phase of Telangana movement, the folk song played a pivotal role and spearheaded the movement in the cultural revolutionary platforms like Dhoom Dham and played crucial role in the formation of Telangana.

Political Landscape

The political landscape of Telangana is shaped by the long-standing demand for a separate state, and its political parties continue to be influenced by issues of regional identity, development, and governance. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), which led the statehood movement, is a dominant political force, with K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) serving as the Chief Minister for multiple terms. Other significant political parties in the state include the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Indian National Congress (INC). The state's politics often revolve around economic development, employment opportunities, irrigation projects, and the welfare of farmers, along with issues of social justice for various marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.

Telangana movement, a desire for equity

The demand for a separate state of Telangana from the viewpoint of diverse social and cultural groups inhabiting the three regions of the state. These social groups have visibly and vocally participated in the movement, articulating their reasons for wanting or not wanting the separate state of Telangana. The chapter also puts into perspective regionalism and regional identity as a basis for contemporary demands for statehood and argues that while this does not necessarily reflect an unhealthy trend (when viewed in terms of providing a platform to different social groups to express their genuine concerns), such demands have to be viewed on a case by case basis. Several factors have to be taken into consideration - the genuine nature of the demand has to be objectively assessed; whether the constituent units will be better off on division as well as the possible national repercussions. The Telangana movement can be interpreted as a desire for greater democracy and empowerment within a political unit. As stated earlier, subregionalism is a movement which is not necessarily primordial but is essentially modern - in the direction of a balanced and equitable modernization.

Cultural Significance Of Telangana

Telangana is culturally different from the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh; the latter is essential because the Telangana movement articulated and presented its case as they are different from the people of the Andhra region, which was merged with the Telangana region in 1956. On the other hand, they argued that they have been subjugated and culturally suppressed. The movement also blamed 'Andhra communities and dominant castes' for their political hegemony over the region. In the context of the formation of the new State, knowing the composition of its population is historically significant. Telangana's social and cultural design differs from Andhra Pradesh in terms of Caste, religion, language dialect, food habits, and religious rituals. In this context, the study presents the socio-cultural aspects of the Telangana people.

In Indian society, caste is a fundamental social component and has always formed the basis for public policy. Structurally, the community is built on Caste, which has functional value. Functionally, it is a complex and culturally unique social system that combines some aspects of descent based on hereditary occupation and strictly follows endogamy.

METHODOLOGY

The Telangana movement used a combination of time and space biased media by the political parties and people. During the movement period the old forms of media. and the age old traditions which were dormant or neglected under the dominance of Western popular culture that was imposed on the people of the region got revived. The movement with the help of time biased media (Martyrs Memorials and Telangana Talli statues) created an emotional bond and

awareness among the masses. Simultaneously, the space biased media grew in strength (electronic and print media houses and web sites). The Telangana Rashtra Samithi party (TRS) successfully accommodated and represented large sections of the people. It was able to make the Telangana movement inclusive. The rich cultural symbolism of the movement including the art and artifacts of the diverse communities living in the region were all put to use to bring together groups of people. The differences between various religious and ethnic communities, which have proven to be the bane of many socio-political movements in India, were celebrated instead of being avoided or undermined. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi did not shy away from using the cultural symbols of almost all the communities during the course of the movement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A whooping majority of the people who were interviewed said that they participated in the movement 88%. (Fig. 1). Similarly, an overwhelming majority of 94% of people said that Telangana state is very important for them. Though 94% of the people said that they need a separate state it would be interesting to know how and what made the people aware of the issues and the injustice done to the region as claimed by the politicians and academicians.

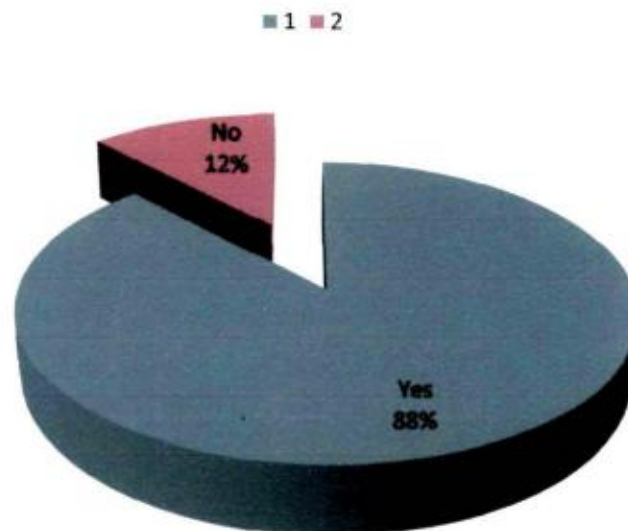


Fig.1 Have you participated in the Telangana movement

The Telangana region had a high rate of illiteracy rates during the Nizam's period and also thereafter; this partly explains people's dependence on indigenous media. It is interesting to know that it was the indigenous media (including time biased media) that was the backbone for the Telangana people and for the movement in the last six decades.

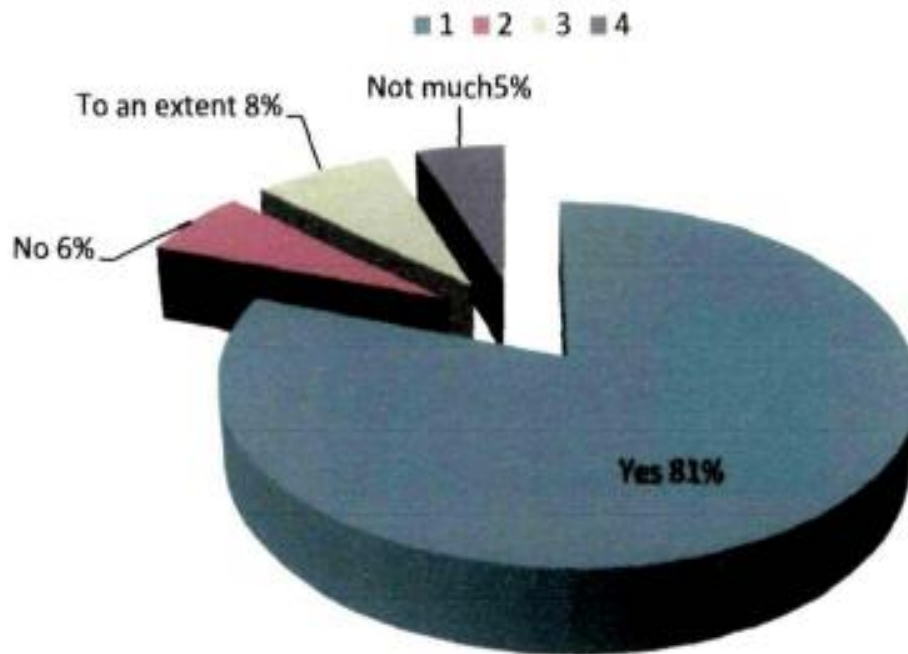


Fig.2 Do you find any media bias in its approach towards the Telangana movement

When the question was put across to the respondents regarding bias in the media reporting with regard to the Telangana movement, it was interesting to find out that a majority of the people 81 % (Fig. 1. 7) sensed a biased approach towards the movement. This perception was not unique to the common man but even members of the academia and intellectuals of the region felt the same way.

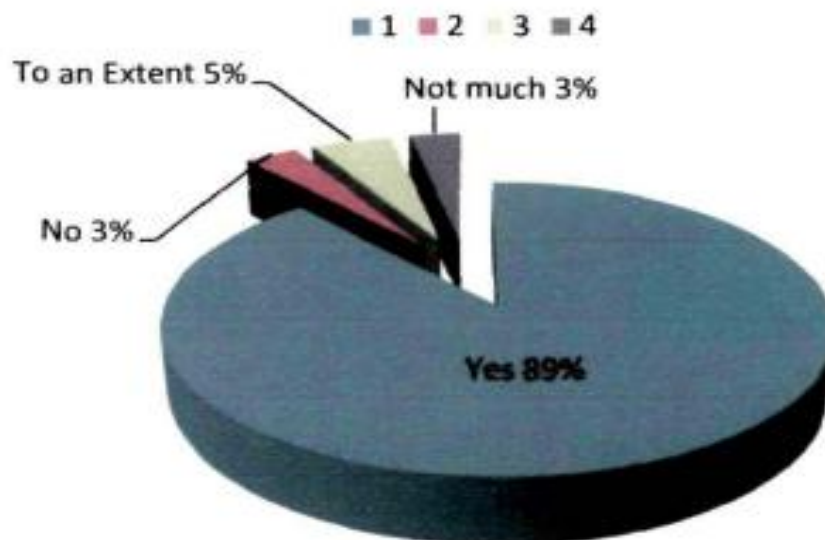


Fig.3 Do you feel that the communication technologies like print, radio, television including the internet and mobile communication helped in building up the Telangana Movement?

An overwhelming majority of the people 89% (Fig.3) said that the communication technologies have indeed helped the movement to grow stronger and also make people aware of the

movement. We see a symbiotic relationship between the movement and the media, accommodating each other and also accommodating the other media environments in the larger media ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The Telangana Movement stands as one of the most significant regional movements in contemporary Indian history, culminating in the formation of Telangana as India's 29th state in 2014. While economic disparities, administrative neglect, and political marginalization are often highlighted as major causes, this study emphasizes that regional identity and cultural factors were equally powerful forces that shaped, sustained, and legitimized the movement. The assertion of a distinct Telangana identity—rooted in history, language, culture, traditions, and collective memory—played a decisive role in mobilizing the masses and transforming long-standing grievances into a unified political struggle. At the heart of the Telangana Movement was the construction and assertion of a shared regional identity. The people of Telangana perceived themselves as culturally and historically distinct from the dominant Andhra region. This perception was not merely symbolic but deeply embedded in lived experiences of discrimination, unequal development, and cultural marginalization. Folk traditions, local dialects, festivals, and historical narratives became tools through which people articulated their sense of belonging and difference. The movement thus evolved beyond economic or administrative demands and became a struggle for dignity, recognition, and self-respect.

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