

From Marginalization to Autonomy: The Struggle for a Separate Andhra State

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Abstract: The Separate Andhra Movement, which emerged within the Madras Province during the early 20th century, played a crucial role in the formation of the Andhra Pradesh state post-independence. It was a significant chapter in the history of regional politics in India, driven by the linguistic and cultural aspirations of the Telugu-speaking people who felt marginalized within the Madras Presidency, where they were under the dominance of Tamil political and cultural influences. This paper examines the origins of the movement, its evolution, key leaders, events, and the political negotiations that culminated in the creation of Andhra Pradesh. It also explores the role of the Indian National Congress, the opposition to the movement, and the eventual triumph of the Telugu-speaking people's demands. The movement had far-reaching implications for regional autonomy and set a precedent for the linguistic reorganization of states in post-colonial India.

Keywords: *Separate Andhra Movement, Madras Province, Telugu-speaking people, Indian National Congress, linguistic reorganization, Andhra Pradesh, regional autonomy, Dravidian politics, anti-Tamil sentiments, historical movements.*

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Introduction

The history of India's struggle for independence and its subsequent nation-building process is marked by numerous movements, each shaped by the aspirations of distinct cultural, social, and linguistic groups. Among these, the Separate Andhra Movement, which sought the creation of a separate Andhra state within the Madras Presidency, occupies a significant place in the history of regional movements in India. It was a struggle rooted in the desire for recognition and respect for the Telugu-speaking population, who, despite their sizable presence in the Madras Province, felt marginalized by the political, administrative, and cultural dominance of the Tamil-speaking majority.

The movement's origins can be traced to a variety of factors, including the linguistic and cultural discontent among the Telugu-speaking people, the rise of regional identity politics, and the broader context of the Indian freedom struggle. The demand for a separate Andhra state did not emerge in a vacuum but was the product of decades of political, social, and cultural mobilization by intellectuals, leaders, and activists who sought to preserve and promote the Telugu language, culture, and way of life in a region that had historically been under the sway of Tamil political elites. This desire for a distinct political identity, coupled with the growth of nationalist sentiments during the British colonial period, catalyzed the formation of the Separate Andhra Movement.

At the heart of the movement was the belief that the Telugu-speaking people of the Madras Presidency, who constituted a substantial portion of the population, were being politically sidelined in favor of the Tamil-speaking majority. The political

structures of the Madras Presidency, with its Tamil-majority administrative apparatus, were seen as unjust and unrepresentative of the needs and aspirations of the Telugu people. The demand for a separate Andhra state, therefore, was not just a call for territorial reorganization but was fundamentally about cultural autonomy and the recognition of the Telugu-speaking community's distinct identity.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Telugu-speaking people of the Madras Presidency began to assert themselves politically, socially, and culturally. The formation of cultural organizations, most notably the Andhra Mahasabha in 1913, marked a critical turning point in the consolidation of Telugu identity. The Andhra Mahasabha, founded by leaders such as P. Subbarayan and others, became the primary platform for articulating the grievances of the Telugu-speaking people and organizing efforts toward the demand for a separate state. These efforts were not limited to just the cultural sphere but also extended to political mobilization, as leaders like P. Subbarayan, Tanguturi Prakasam, and others came to the forefront of the movement, articulating the political and economic demands of the Telugu people within the broader framework of the Indian National Congress (INC).

The movement for a separate Andhra state was closely linked to the broader Indian independence struggle, which was gaining momentum during this period. The Indian National Congress, led by figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, was central to the national struggle for independence, but the party's approach to regional issues was often marked by

pragmatism and compromise. While the INC was firmly committed to Indian unity and the independence struggle, it was also sensitive to the growing demands for regional autonomy, which were being voiced by various linguistic and cultural groups across the country. The Congress leadership, under the guidance of leaders such as Nehru, began to recognize the importance of addressing regional grievances, including the demand for a separate Andhra state.

However, the demand for a separate Andhra state was not without its challenges and opposition. The movement faced resistance not only from the British colonial authorities but also from political elites within the Tamil-speaking regions, who feared that the creation of a separate Andhra state would weaken the political unity of the Madras Presidency. The opposition came primarily from the Justice Party, a political organization that represented the interests of the Tamil-speaking elites and was an influential force in the politics of the Madras Presidency. The Justice Party, which later became the Dravida Kazhagam, viewed the Separate Andhra Movement as a potential threat to Tamil political power and unity within the larger Madras Province.

Furthermore, the leadership within the Indian National Congress was also divided on the issue of regional autonomy. While some leaders, especially from the Telugu-speaking regions, supported the idea of a separate Andhra state, others within the Congress were reluctant to endorse such a move, fearing it would set a precedent for other linguistic groups to demand their own states, thereby fracturing the unity of India. The Congress leadership, which was focused on the larger objective of national independence, was cautious in addressing the issue of linguistic and regional divisions, believing that it could potentially undermine the unity required for the independence movement. However, over time, the growing strength of the movement and the mounting demands of the Telugu-speaking population forced the Congress to reconsider its stance.

The demand for a separate Andhra state was also shaped by the evolving nature of Indian nationalism, which increasingly recognized the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity. By the early 20th century, the idea of linguistic reorganization of states was gaining prominence, as intellectuals and political leaders began to argue that India's diversity should be reflected in its political structure. This sentiment found expression in the demand for a separate Andhra state, which would not only satisfy the cultural and linguistic aspirations of the Telugu-speaking people but also serve as a model for the broader reorganization of states along linguistic lines after India gained independence.

In 1953, after years of political struggle, negotiations, and compromises, the demand for a separate Andhra state was finally realized. The Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, agreed to the creation of a separate Andhra state, marking a significant milestone in India's political history. On October 1, 1953, Andhra Pradesh was officially created as the first linguistic state in India. The success of the Andhra movement not only fulfilled the aspirations of the Telugu-speaking people but also set a precedent for the later linguistic reorganization of states across India, which culminated in the States Reorganization Act of 1956.

The Separate Andhra Movement, thus, serves as a critical chapter in the history of regional movements in India. It highlights the complex interplay between regional identity, linguistic pride,

and national unity, and it provides valuable insights into the ways in which regional demands can shape national policy. The movement also underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic identity in the process of nation-building and offers a glimpse into the political challenges of balancing regional aspirations with the larger goal of national integration.

In the broader context of post-independence India, the movement for a separate Andhra state also illustrates the growing importance of regional autonomy and the role of language and culture in shaping political identities. The movement's success, in many ways, paved the way for similar demands across the country and helped to shape the political landscape of post-independence India. It also raised questions about the nature of federalism in India and the extent to which the central government should accommodate the diverse linguistic, cultural, and regional identities that make up the fabric of the nation.

The Separate Andhra Movement in the Madras Province was not only a pivotal moment in the history of regional politics in India but also a significant chapter in the broader narrative of India's journey towards independence and post-independence nation-building. It marked the convergence of cultural, linguistic, and political aspirations, and its legacy continues to influence discussions on regional autonomy and the future of federalism in India.

Cultural and Linguistic Factors

The roots of the Separate Andhra Movement lie deeply in the cultural and linguistic assertiveness of the Telugu-speaking people in the Madras Presidency, which was then dominated by Tamil political and cultural elites. The increasing awareness and recognition of the distinctiveness of Telugu culture and language were crucial in shaping the demands for a separate state. This period in Indian history was marked by the rise of linguistic identity politics, which would later be a driving force for the linguistic reorganization of states after India's independence. The origins of the movement can thus be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the Telugu people, historically marginalized in the Madras Presidency, began to assert their identity more forcefully.

The British colonial administration, which organized the Madras Presidency, did not view the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region as a matter of governance but rather as a unified political entity under the broader structure of the empire. The result was that the Telugu-speaking people in the Madras Presidency found themselves politically and culturally alienated. The lack of recognition of their language, Telugu, within the administrative, educational, and cultural spheres further fueled these sentiments of marginalization.

In terms of administration, the Tamil majority controlled the administrative machinery of the Presidency, often to the detriment of the interests of the Telugu-speaking population. The dominance of Tamil in government institutions, such as schools, courts, and the civil service, contributed to the disempowerment of the Telugu-speaking population. This was particularly noticeable in the education system, where the medium of instruction was primarily Tamil, with little regard for the needs of the Telugu-speaking students. The lack of Telugu-language schools, textbooks, and teachers exacerbated the frustrations of the Telugu people, as it hindered their access to education and socio-political mobility.

The cultural dimension of the issue was equally significant. The Telugu-speaking people in the Madras Presidency felt that their language and cultural heritage were not being given adequate importance in comparison to Tamil. There was a deep-rooted sense among Telugu intellectuals, artists, and cultural leaders that their language, literature, and traditions were being overshadowed by the prominence of Tamil culture. The Tamil language, culture, and political influence became symbols of domination within the Madras Presidency. Telugu culture, rich with its classical traditions, folklore, and religious practices, was beginning to be seen as distinct and deserving of its own platform for recognition.

In response to this growing cultural alienation, several movements began to emerge in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the most important of these was the Andhra Mahasabha, founded in 1913 by P. Subbarayan and other prominent Telugu leaders. The Andhra Mahasabha played a significant role in asserting the cultural identity of the Telugu-speaking population and demanding recognition of their language. The organization's influence extended beyond mere cultural advocacy; it became a political platform to articulate the demand for a separate Andhra state.

The Andhra Mahasabha not only called for the preservation of the Telugu language but also worked to address social, economic, and political issues specific to the Telugu-speaking people. The organization's membership and support grew rapidly as it began to unite intellectuals, social reformers, and common citizens under the banner of Telugu pride and autonomy. In doing so, it set the stage for a larger, more formal political movement for statehood. The demands of the Andhra Mahasabha reflected a growing awareness of the Telugu-speaking people's unique cultural and linguistic heritage, one that deserved political autonomy.

The cultural and linguistic factors were integral in shaping the demand for a separate state, and as the movement gained momentum, these aspects were coupled with the broader nationalist movement in India. In an era when the Indian independence struggle was beginning to gather force, regional aspirations, like those of the Telugu-speaking people, found a new expression within the framework of the larger nationalist agenda.

Political Mobilization and Leadership

The political mobilization for a separate Andhra state was energized by the leadership of prominent figures, many of whom had been influenced by the larger Indian nationalist movement. The leadership of the movement was instrumental in transforming cultural demands into a broader political struggle for statehood. As the years passed, the demand for a separate Andhra state moved from a cultural aspiration to a full-fledged political movement.

P. Subbarayan, one of the earliest and most influential leaders of the movement, was a key figure in this process. Subbarayan, a prominent intellectual and political leader, was one of the first to publicly demand the separation of Andhra from the Madras Presidency. He sought not just the recognition of Telugu culture but also political autonomy for the Telugu-speaking people. His efforts helped lay the foundation for the Andhra Mahasabha and set the stage for a broader political mobilization that would later include the Indian National Congress.

Another crucial figure in the leadership of the movement was Tanguturi Prakasam, often referred to as the "Andhra Kesari" (Lion of Andhra). Prakasam's contributions were central to the popularization of the demand for a separate Andhra state, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. He became the voice of the Telugu-speaking people, advocating for their cultural and political rights at both regional and national levels. His leadership helped rally the masses to the cause of separate statehood, and his fiery speeches and public demonstrations became symbolic of the broader Telugu nationalist movement.

The formation of the Andhra State Congress in the early 1930s was another important milestone in the political mobilization for a separate state. The Andhra State Congress was dedicated to the goal of securing political autonomy for the Telugu-speaking population within the framework of the Indian National Congress. The establishment of this body signified a shift towards a more structured political approach to achieving the goal of a separate Andhra state. The Andhra State Congress lobbied vigorously within the INC, advocating for recognition of the Telugu-speaking people's grievances and pushing for the formation of an Andhra state.

The support of the Indian National Congress was crucial to the eventual success of the movement. Although the INC was primarily concerned with the struggle for national independence, it had to contend with the growing demands for regional autonomy, which were gaining strength across the country. Leaders from the Telugu-speaking regions, including Prakasam and others, made significant efforts to bring the cause of separate statehood to the forefront within the Congress. The party's role in the movement was ambivalent at first, as national leaders feared that the demand for a separate Andhra state might set a precedent for other regional aspirations, potentially undermining the unity of the country.

However, the growing support for the movement among Congress members from the Madras Presidency, coupled with the pressure of public sentiment, forced the party leadership to address the issue. The INC's eventual endorsement of the movement, particularly in the years leading up to independence, was critical. It allowed the leaders of the Andhra movement to push their cause within the political mainstream, giving them the necessary platform to achieve their goals.

Opposition to the Movement

While the demand for a separate Andhra state gained momentum, it also faced significant opposition, both from within the Madras Presidency and from the Indian National Congress itself. One of the primary sources of opposition came from the Tamil political elites, who saw the demand for a separate Andhra state as a direct threat to their political influence in the Madras Presidency. Tamil political organizations, such as the Justice Party, later the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), were strongly opposed to the separation. The Justice Party, which represented the interests of the Tamil-speaking elites, feared that the creation of a separate Andhra state would weaken their political power and divide the Tamil-speaking population.

The Dravida Kazhagam, founded by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, initially sought to unite the Dravidian peoples, including Tamils, Telugus, and others, in a common struggle against the perceived dominance of the north. Over time, however, the DK became increasingly focused on Tamil identity and politics,

and it viewed the demand for a separate Andhra state as divisive and detrimental to the unity of the Tamil people.

Moreover, the opposition to the movement was not limited to Tamil political elites. Even within the Indian National Congress, there was resistance to the idea of creating a separate Andhra state. Nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi were initially wary of the implications of linguistic divisions within India. The Congress leadership feared that such a move might encourage other regional demands, thus posing a challenge to the unity of the nation. For a time, the Congress leadership sought to contain regional demands by emphasizing national unity over regional autonomy.

The Role of the Indian National Congress

Role of the Indian National Congress (INC) in the Separate Andhra Movement was pivotal, as it was the principal political party that shaped the nationalist discourse in India. While the INC initially hesitated to support the demand for a separate Andhra state, over time, it became more sympathetic to the cause due to the growing influence of regionalism within the party. The Congress, particularly under the leadership of Nehru, came to recognize that the linguistic and cultural diversity of India could not be ignored and that the aspirations of regional groups like the Telugu-speaking people needed to be addressed within the framework of national unity.

As the demand for a separate Andhra state grew louder, the INC gradually began to endorse it. This shift in the party's stance was particularly evident after the formation of the States Reorganization Commission in 1953, which was tasked with addressing the demands for linguistic reorganization of states. The creation of Andhra Pradesh on October 1, 1953, as the first linguistic state in India, was a landmark event, marking the culmination of years of political struggle and cultural assertion by the Telugu-speaking people.

The Outcome and Formation of Andhra Pradesh

The culmination of the Separate Andhra Movement came in 1953, with the creation of Andhra Pradesh as a separate state. This victory was not only a triumph for the Telugu-speaking people but also set a precedent for the future reorganization of states in India along linguistic lines. The success of the Andhra movement was a landmark achievement in Indian politics, symbolizing the recognition of linguistic and cultural identities within the broader framework of national unity.

The formation of Andhra Pradesh was a significant milestone in the larger process of India's political reorganization. It not only satisfied the long-standing demands of the Telugu-speaking people but also paved the way for the creation of other linguistic states across India, which would be formalized with the States Reorganization Act of 1956. The creation of Andhra Pradesh, therefore, marked the beginning of a new chapter in India's federalism, wherein linguistic and cultural diversity was recognized as a basis for the political organization of the country.

Conclusion

The Separate Andhra Movement was a pivotal moment in India's pre-independence history, representing the intersection of regional, linguistic, and nationalistic aspirations. It marked a turning point in the struggle for linguistic reorganization, which would later shape India's political map. The movement, which began as a cultural assertion by the Telugu-speaking people of the Madras Presidency, eventually led to the creation of Andhra Pradesh, the first linguistic state in independent India.

Despite facing significant opposition, the movement's success had broader implications, not only for the Telugu people but also for the rest of India. It influenced the political discourse surrounding state reorganization and autonomy, setting a precedent for the reorganization of Indian states on linguistic lines after independence. The struggle of the Andhra people also highlighted the complexities of India's diversity, wherein language, culture, and identity became integral to the political discourse, reshaping the nation's federal structure.

The formation of Andhra Pradesh was not just the realization of a political demand but also a triumph of linguistic and cultural identity within a nascent Indian democracy. It exemplifies how regional movements can influence national policy and shape the political landscape of a country.

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