

# Uneven Development and Regional Backwardness: The Roots of Sub-Regionalism in Andhra Pradesh

**S. Sudhakar Reddy**

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, S.V.University, Tirupati.

## Abstract

Sub-regionalism refers to the assertion of a distinct identity, interests, and developmental concerns by a specific geographic or cultural region within a larger state or administrative unit. Unlike full-fledged regionalism that often involves a call for statehood or autonomy, sub-regionalism begins with demands for equitable development, political representation, and cultural recognition. It usually arises when a sub-region perceives persistent neglect or discrimination by the dominant regions within the state, leading to a collective consciousness around issues of identity and justice.

The state of Andhra Pradesh was formed in 1956 through the merger of the Telugu-speaking areas of Hyderabad State (known as Telangana) with the newly formed Andhra State (carved out of Madras Presidency in 1953). This unification, based on linguistic lines, was formalized under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. Andhra Pradesh thus became the first linguistic state in independent India. However, this merger was not without reservations. Telangana had a different historical experience under the rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad and had relatively underdeveloped socio-economic conditions compared to the Andhra region, which had enjoyed earlier access to British administration, irrigation, and education. The state was broadly divided into three regions: Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema, and Telangana, each with distinct geographical, economic, and cultural characteristics.

Soon after the formation of Andhra Pradesh, concerns began to surface in Telangana regarding unequal development, lack of political representation, and violation of merger assurances. The Gentlemen's Agreement, which aimed to safeguard Telangana's interests post-merger, was repeatedly cited as being inadequately implemented. Telangana's grievances were rooted in a perception that the region was being exploited economically, particularly in matters of irrigation, education, and employment. These issues led to mass discontent and the first major agitation for a separate Telangana state in 1969. Although the movement lost momentum in the 1970s, the underlying dissatisfaction persisted, gradually intensifying in the decades that followed. This long-standing sense of regional neglect and backwardness laid the foundation for a strong sub-regional identity that ultimately evolved into a demand for separate statehood.

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region perceives persistent neglect or discrimination by the dominant regions within the state, leading to a collective consciousness around issues of identity and justice.

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**Keywords:** Sub-Regionalism, Telangana Movement, Regional Disparities, Uneven Development, Andhra Pradesh Reorganization, political Mobilization, Cultural Identity, Inclusive Development, Regional Planning, Federalism in India, Gentlemen's Agreement, Girglani Commission, Grassroots Movements.

### **A. Historical Background of Telangana Region**

The Telangana region was part of the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad, ruled by the Nizam dynasty until 1948. Unlike coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, which were under direct British administration (Madras Presidency), Telangana had a different administrative, social, and economic structure. The Nizam's rule was feudal, autocratic, and linguistically diverse, with Urdu being the official language. The agrarian structure was dominated by landlords and jagirdars, and access to modern education and infrastructure was limited. As a result, Telangana remained economically and socially backward, especially in terms of literacy, healthcare, and industrial development, compared to the Andhra region, which benefited from early exposure to British reforms and irrigation facilities like the Krishna and Godavari delta systems.

### **Integration with Andhra to Form Andhra Pradesh (1956)**

After India's independence, the Hyderabad State, including Telangana, was integrated into the Indian Union through Operation Polo in 1948, following military action against the Nizam's resistance to join India. Meanwhile, in 1953, the Andhra region was carved out of the Madras Presidency to form Andhra State after a strong demand for a separate Telugu-speaking state. In 1956, the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) recommended the reorganization of states based on linguistic lines. Although the SRC initially suggested that Telangana remain a separate state due to its backwardness and distinct identity,

political pressure and aspirations for Telugu unity led to the merger of Andhra State with Telangana to form Andhra Pradesh on 1st November 1956.

### **Gentlemen's Agreement and Early Concerns**

To address the apprehensions of the Telangana people about being dominated by the more developed Andhra region, the Gentlemen's Agreement was signed between leaders of both regions. It assured safeguards for Telangana, including:

- Proportional representation in government employment and education
- Separate expenditure of Telangana's revenue for its development (Mulki Rules)
- Establishment of a Regional Council for Telangana
- Domicile rules to protect local employment

However, these safeguards were repeatedly violated or diluted, leading to growing dissatisfaction and mistrust. Telangana leaders and people began to feel that their region was being exploited, especially in terms of diversion of water resources, lower budget allocations, and lack of employment opportunities. This ultimately led to the first major uprising in 1969, known as the Telangana Agitation, demanding a separate state. Though the movement was quelled at the time, the historical roots of inequality and neglect continued to shape Telangana's sub-regional consciousness.

### **B. Indicators of Uneven Development**

The Telangana region's long-standing demand for a separate state was deeply rooted in the visible disparities in development between Telangana and the other regions of Andhra Pradesh—Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. These inequalities were reflected in various economic and infrastructural indicators, fueling a sense of injustice and reinforcing sub-regional sentiments.

#### **Comparison of Economic Indicators: Telangana vs Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema**

Telangana consistently lagged behind Coastal Andhra in key economic parameters. Coastal Andhra, blessed with fertile river deltas (Krishna and Godavari), saw greater agricultural productivity and prosperity, while Telangana, with its dry and semi-arid lands, was more dependent on rainfall and less productive. Per capita income, literacy rates, and access to public services remained lower in Telangana for decades.

Economic studies and commission reports, including those by the Srikrishna Committee (2010), revealed that Telangana received a smaller share of developmental expenditure and investments, despite contributing significantly to the state's revenue—particularly through Hyderabad, a growing urban and economic hub.

#### **Infrastructure Development: Irrigation, Roads, and Electricity**

Telangana suffered from poor irrigation infrastructure, even though it had major rivers like the Krishna and Godavari flowing through it. Large-scale irrigation projects such as the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam and Polavaram primarily benefited the Coastal Andhra region, while Telangana's irrigation potential remained underutilized.

In terms of road connectivity, electrification, and rural infrastructure, Telangana's districts were markedly underdeveloped. Many villages lacked motorable roads, regular power supply, and modern communication facilities, further widening the rural-urban and regional divide.

#### **Employment Opportunities and Industrialization**

The employment landscape also revealed stark inequalities. While Hyderabad served as a hub of employment and education, rural Telangana had limited job opportunities. Government jobs, a major

source of employment, were perceived to be dominated by people from Andhra and Rayalaseema regions, allegedly in violation of domicile rules (Mulki rules), which sparked widespread resentment.

Industrial development was heavily concentrated in and around the Andhra coastal belt, whereas Telangana remained largely agrarian and under-industrialized. Even industries that did emerge in Telangana were criticized for failing to generate local employment.

### **Budget Allocations and Regional Investments**

Successive governments were accused of favoring Andhra and Rayalaseema in budget allocations for sectors like education, health, transport, and irrigation. Telangana leaders pointed out that revenues generated from Telangana—especially Hyderabad—were not proportionately reinvested in the region.

Several reports and budget reviews showed that Telangana received less funding for capital works and welfare schemes, contributing to the perception of neglect and economic discrimination. This disparity not only fueled economic grievances but also strengthened political mobilization based on sub-regional identity and injustice.

### **C. Perceptions of Neglect and Backwardness**

While statistical indicators of development disparities presented an objective view of inequality, what truly intensified the Telangana movement was the deep-seated perception of neglect and marginalization among the people of the region. This collective sentiment became the emotional and political fuel for the demand for separate statehood

### **Public Sentiment and Regional Narratives of Marginalization**

Among the people of Telangana, there was a growing belief that their region was being systematically ignored in terms of development, employment, and education. This perception became a dominant public narrative—repeated in political speeches, local media, literature, songs, and student movements.

People felt that despite the richness of Telangana's resources—particularly revenue from Hyderabad, mineral wealth, and water from the Krishna and Godavari rivers—the benefits were being diverted to other regions, especially Coastal Andhra. This sense of being “used but not developed” created a strong feeling of alienation and injustice, particularly among the youth and rural populations.

This sentiment became more than just a grievance—it turned into a regional identity rooted in pride, resistance, and a call for self-determination.

### **Failure to Implement Safeguards and Agreements**

One of the most frequently cited causes of frustration in Telangana was the repeated violation or neglect of promises made during the merger in 1956. The Gentlemen's Agreement, which was supposed to safeguard Telangana's interests, was rarely implemented in spirit.

Key safeguards—such as exclusive budgetary allocations for Telangana, proportional employment opportunities, protection of local domicile (Mulki rules), and the functioning of a Telangana Regional Council—were either ignored, diluted, or withdrawn over time. This eroded trust in the state's political machinery and gave rise to widespread skepticism about any assurances from the government.

The 1972 Jai Andhra movement, which was sparked by the Supreme Court's upholding of Mulki rules in favor of Telangana, further deepened the divide. For Telangana, this became a powerful example of how even legal safeguards were not acceptable to the dominant political class of the Andhra region.

### **Political Representation and Perceived Dominance of Other Regions**

Despite the formation of Andhra Pradesh with the promise of equal political participation, Telangana leaders and citizens increasingly felt underrepresented in key political and administrative positions. Chief

Minister posts, cabinet portfolios, and bureaucratic appointments were perceived to be dominated by leaders from Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema.

This underrepresentation reinforced the belief that Telangana had no real voice in decision-making, and that the political process was skewed against their interests. The absence of Telangana voices in key policy matters—especially related to irrigation, education, and job creation—deepened the sub-regional divide. The rise of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001 capitalized on this sentiment, framing the demand for statehood as not only an economic or administrative necessity but as a struggle for dignity, equality, and self-governance.

#### **D. Role of Educational and Health Infrastructure**

The underdevelopment of educational and health infrastructure played a critical role in reinforcing the sense of sub-regional disparity in Telangana. The limited access to quality institutions, unequal distribution of government-funded services, and the findings of various commissions painted a stark picture of systemic neglect. These gaps further intensified the region's demand for separate statehood and brought public focus to basic human development indicators that were seen as persistently ignored.

#### **Disparities in Access to Education and Health Services**

In Telangana, access to government-run schools, colleges, universities, and healthcare facilities was significantly lower compared to the Coastal Andhra region. Many rural areas in Telangana lacked even basic primary schools and health sub-centers. Dropout rates were high, literacy levels were low, and the availability of higher education institutions was skewed in favor of Andhra and Rayalaseema regions.

Likewise, the region faced acute shortages of doctors, nurses, hospitals, and primary health centers. Maternal and infant mortality rates were higher in Telangana, and public health services remained under-resourced and inaccessible in tribal and rural belts. While districts like Guntur, Krishna, and East Godavari saw the development of government colleges, teaching hospitals, and university campuses, Telangana lagged behind despite its population size and revenue contribution.

This educational and health backwardness was not merely a statistical concern—it shaped daily struggles for citizens and symbolized the region's broader exclusion from the benefits of state-led development.

#### **Regional Development Reports and Commissions (like the Girglani Commission)**

In response to growing demands from Telangana for justice in public employment and development, the Girglani Commission was appointed in 2001 to examine the implementation of presidential orders on public employment and domicile rules in Telangana.

The Commission's findings confirmed what the people of Telangana had long believed:

- Violations of local reservation rules in public services were rampant.
- Non-Telangana employees were overrepresented in posts reserved for locals.
- Infrastructural and institutional growth was disproportionately lower in Telangana.
- Budget allocations for education and health in Telangana had not kept pace with needs or population growth.

The Commission clearly highlighted the systemic neglect and misuse of administrative rules, which only deepened the sense of betrayal in the region. These findings further validated the argument that Telangana's integration with Andhra Pradesh had failed to ensure equitable development.

The Srikrishna Committee Report (2010) also reiterated the backwardness of Telangana in key human development areas, supporting the claim that the region had been deprived of its fair share in education, health, and welfare.



### **E. Rise of Sub-Regional Consciousness**

As the disparities between Telangana and the rest of Andhra Pradesh became increasingly visible and widely discussed, a strong sub-regional consciousness began to emerge in Telangana. This consciousness was not limited to economic grievances—it evolved into a broader cultural and political assertion of identity, rooted in historical pride and a demand for dignity, equality, and self-governance.

#### **Emergence of Cultural Identity and Pride**

Telangana's people began to reclaim and celebrate their unique linguistic, historical, and cultural identity. The region's dialect of Telugu, folk traditions like Bathukamma and Bonalu, and historical icons like Komaram Bheem and Sammakka-Sarakka were highlighted as symbols of Telangana's distinctiveness. Earlier, Telangana's dialect and customs were often marginalized or mocked in mainstream media and education, which were dominated by the more standardized Andhra Telugu. Over time, this led to a cultural resurgence, where regional festivals, folklore, and heritage were reasserted with pride, and positioned as part of a larger political narrative: that Telangana was not just a region but a nation within a state, with its own historical continuity and collective identity.

#### **Role of Intellectuals, Writers, and Student Bodies**

The Telangana movement drew strong support from academics, poets, authors, journalists, and artists, who used their platforms to articulate the sub-regional sentiment. Influential intellectuals like Prof. Jayashankar became the ideological backbone of the movement, writing extensively about the injustices faced by Telangana and calling for political autonomy.

Writers and poets used Telangana dialect in their works to counter the cultural hegemony of Coastal Andhra. Songs, street plays, poetry recitations, and short films became powerful tools of political communication, helping to mobilize people emotionally and intellectually.

Student organizations, especially from universities like Osmania University and Kakatiya University, played a critical role. They organized protests, debates, cultural programs, and mass mobilizations that spread awareness among the youth. The student-led agitations of the 2000s echoed the earlier 1969 movement and added a new generation of leadership to the cause.

#### **Grassroots Movements and Civil Society Involvement**

Perhaps the most defining feature of the Telangana movement was its broad-based support from civil society. Farmers, women, teachers, trade unions, daily wage workers, and professionals participated in rallies, strikes, and public meetings. The movement was not confined to political elites—it grew from the grassroots and was sustained by the common people.

Organizations like the Telangana Joint Action Committee (TJAC) played a pivotal role in coordinating diverse groups under a common cause. Methods of protest ranged from relay hunger strikes, bandhs (shutdowns), and sit-ins (dharnas) to mass cultural processions and torchlight rallies.

This all-inclusive nature of the movement transformed it into a people's movement, marked by emotional resonance, cultural reaffirmation, and grassroots democratic engagement. The rise of TRS (Telangana Rashtra Samithi) under K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) became a political manifestation of this sub-regional awakening.

### **F. Political Mobilization Based on Regional Disparities**

The widening gap in development between Telangana and the other regions of Andhra Pradesh eventually translated into active political mobilization. Regional disparities were not just discussed in academic or

civil society circles—they were turned into a central electoral and political issue, creating a strong platform for the Telangana statehood movement.

#### Role of TRS and Other Regional Parties

The formation of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001, under the leadership of K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR), marked a turning point in the political expression of Telangana's sub-regionalism. TRS was established with the sole agenda of achieving a separate Telangana state, and it quickly became the voice of regional aspirations.

TRS effectively highlighted the long-standing grievances of the region—unequal development, injustice in job allocations, poor infrastructure, and cultural marginalization. It united diverse social groups—students, farmers, women, unemployed youth, and employees—under one political vision. Through consistent advocacy, protests, and parliamentary participation, the party transformed Telangana from a demand to a powerful political agenda.

Other parties like the Telangana Praja Front and several civil society-based organizations also contributed to the discourse, but TRS remained at the forefront, gaining credibility through consistent agitation and electoral victories.

#### Use of Development Disparity as a Rallying Point

TRS and supporting organizations used regional data on underdevelopment as the foundation for their mass mobilization campaigns. They highlighted disparities in irrigation projects, school and university establishments, health infrastructure, and employment rates.

Public speeches, manifestos, and campaign materials focused on how Telangana, despite contributing significantly to the state's revenue (especially through Hyderabad), received less than its fair share in developmental benefits. This narrative resonated deeply with the people and helped solidify collective regional consciousness.

Development disparity became more than a grievance—it became a call to action. The message was clear: statehood was the only solution to the systemic bias entrenched in the united Andhra Pradesh.

#### Mobilization through Electoral Politics

As the Telangana sentiment deepened, electoral politics became the vehicle for formal expression of the movement. TRS contested elections with the promise of delivering Telangana statehood, and over time gained significant political mileage and influence both at the state and national levels.

Mass support translated into votes, which increased the leverage of pro-Telangana forces in legislative assemblies and in Parliament. The Congress Party eventually aligned with the Telangana demand, partly due to electoral calculations and pressure from TRS and its allies.

This mobilization reached its peak during the 2009 and 2014 elections, and finally culminated in the formation of the state of Telangana on June 2, 2014, following the passage of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act in the Indian Parliament.

#### Conclusion

The emergence of sub-regionalism in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in the form of the Telangana movement, was not a momentary upheaval but the culmination of decades of perceived injustice, systemic neglect, and regional imbalances. At the heart of this phenomenon lay multiple, interlinked factors:

- Uneven development and economic disparity between Telangana and other regions, especially Coastal Andhra.
- Inadequate infrastructure, especially in irrigation, education, and healthcare.

- Neglect in political representation and violations of constitutional safeguards like the Gentlemen's Agreement.
- Perceived cultural marginalization, where Telangana's unique identity was sidelined.
- Mobilization of civil society, student bodies, and political forces, which gave structure and momentum to the demand.

These factors, collectively, nurtured a strong sense of regional consciousness and eventually shaped a robust sub-regional movement, resulting in the formation of a separate state.

The grievances of the Telangana region were not just expressions of emotional discontent; they were rooted in tangible evidence and acknowledged by various commissions and policy reviews. Reports like those of the Girglani Commission and the Srikrishna Committee documented the violations of employment policies, infrastructural gaps, and failure to uphold the promises made at the time of the state's formation.

More importantly, the Telangana agitation gave voice to grassroots-level suffering—of farmers without water, students without universities, and patients without hospitals. These were not simply political arguments; they were lived realities of millions. The movement, therefore, reflected legitimate democratic aspirations for justice, dignity, and equitable development.

### **Implications for Regional Planning and Inclusive Development in India**

The Telangana movement offers profound lessons for India's federal structure and regional development strategies. It underscores the importance of inclusive governance and decentralized planning. Policymakers must recognize that national development is incomplete without regional equity.

Key takeaways include:

- The need for regular monitoring of regional disparities within states and proactive policy interventions.
- Empowerment of local governance bodies to ensure that development is tailored to the specific needs of sub-regions.
- Strengthening institutional mechanisms to enforce safeguards in education, employment, and resource allocation.
- Recognizing and respecting sub-regional cultural identities as part of India's rich pluralism, rather than viewing them as divisive.

In the larger context, Telangana's experience reinforces the principle that unity in diversity must be matched with equity in development. Only then can India's democracy remain vibrant, just, and truly representative of all its people.

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