

## CONTEXTUALIZING THE STATEHOOD FOR VIDARBHA

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### ABSTRACT

*There are new trends of asymmetrical development and rising regional disparities which have paved the way for political disenchantment and economic frustrations of the people. However, in response to the socio-economic and political background of the country, economic frustrations may transform into political formation culminating into regional movements for statehood demands. As a result of intrastate disparities, uneven development occurred and demands like Vidarbha emerged quite early. In response, new states kept being formed and the process goes on even today. This article attempts to address the issue of statehood for Vidarbha in the growing political development in the state of Maharashtra in the post-polls period. This study is also proposed to demonstrate the hurdles in achieving the statehood for Vidarbha.*

**KEY WORDS:** Statehood for Vidarbha, Smaller States, Maharashtra Assembly Polls, India.

In recent times in the month of July-August, the issue of separate statehood for Vidarbha led to a ruckus in the Maharashtra Assembly with both the houses being adjourned for some time. Notably, once again the long-standing demand for the separate state of Vidarbha has gained fresh momentum in the wake of Maharashtra post-polls politics. With the creation of "Telangana" as India's 29<sup>th</sup> state recently, the shout for a separate state in the Vidarbha also got political dressing in more or less way. Nevertheless, there have been more demands for separate states from all four regions of the country such as a proposition to divide UP into four parts- Bundelkhand, Awadh Pradesh, Purvanchal and Western UP, Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Bodoland in Assam, Coorg in Karnataka. But here, it will make a special study on statehood for Vidarbha in the context of changing electoral consequences in pre and post-poll Maharashtra politics; this article intends to analyze the possibility of achieving statehood for Vidarbha which is backed by the popular movement for a long time.

### VIDARBHA IN THE BACKGROUND

Vidarbha is positioned in the eastern region of Maharashtra and made up of the Nagpur Division and the Amravati Division. (Census of India, 2011) It occupies 31.6 percent of the total area and holds 21.3% of total population of Maharashtra. The people of this region often feel that the political class has over time neglected the issues facing such as its backwardness, farmers suicides,

and situation of severe agrarian distress. These serious concerns have never occupied adequate attention in Maharashtra policies in order to eradicate the regional imbalances. Thus, the demand for Vidarbha rose mainly on the ground of regional economic inequality.

In the initial period of 1955 itself, the (State Reorganisation Commission was set up by the Government of India in 1953) State Reorganization Commission recommended the creation of Vidarbha as a separate state. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar also welcomed this move as his view is based on the socio-economic status of the deprived sections of the society which could be better served in the separate state of Vidarbha in a holistic manner. Later in 1996, the demand for statehood occupied a prominent role in the BJP's electoral manifesto and subsequently it was disappeared due to its alliance with Shiv Sena, which devoted for a Marathi chauvinistic regional identity opposing the idea of curving the state. Hence, the separation with Shiv Sena appears in a fresh light that the people of the region hope present BJP leadership would positively respond to bifurcation since having a full majority at the Centre as well as forming its government at the state level in absenteeism of substantial resistance from regional parties in the region.

### POST-POLL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

As a part of Maharashtra, the Vidarbha region is representing by 62 seats at the state level. According to the

2014 assembly elections, BJP has emerged as a single largest party by winning 46 of its 62 that gives hopes for statehood in the Vidarbha. In terms of percentage, BJP managed to get 75% seats, whereas Shiv Sena permitted to only four seats in the Vidarbha region. In this case, the electoral success of BJP, of course, based on the factor of Narendra Modi popularity, there was also a noteworthy support to the party in this election that the people of the region marked it as their choice in order to fulfill their aspiration of statehood.

In this game of politics if they pursue statehood, BJP would benefit more in the future as it dominates in the Vidarbha region that they will expand their distinctive regional base to become politically strong in the future, and for that matter BJP had experience in getting political benefits in the case of creation of new states in 2000 such as Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. Second reason is the inclusion of Vidarbha's leaders in the mainstream of government such as Devendra Fadnavis and Nitin Gadkari and others who actively participated for statehood, hails from Nagpur part of Vidarbha. Very recently Chief Minister of Maharashtra Mr. Devendra Fadnavis made a clear comment that a separate state of Vidarbha will be formed at an appropriate time. Therefore, it is believed that the "will of the people" will be carried by this strong political leadership and could influence the party in the favorable stand at very quietly. Here we need to talk about the Sharad Pawar's NCP that won merely one seat in the Vidarbha region after broke up with the Congress, which gained ten seats, both are also struggling to take up a clear stand on this contentious issue. While responding to a bifurcation in pre-poll time, Pawar says that "let the people and not the politicians take a decision on Vidarbha state". Interestingly it means to say that let all the people should support the demand, then he would not have any problems. Thus, he made himself flexible to join with any party and it seems there won't be that much resistance from the NCP and Congress.

In a brief, in order to materialize the statehood, there are two difficulties which seem to be more complex for BJP: One is the fear of losing its strength in other parts of Maharashtra thus the BJP feels this electoral triumph should not be seen so much as a referendum in supporting the statehood for Vidarbha. Moreover, still, there is a possibility that Shiv Sena would be joining into coalition government which may bargain its best to stop the bifurcation. Some of the leaders may also argue that in order to hijack the statehood issue they may suggest for framing and implementing 'the regionally relevant plan'

very effectively under good leadership. The second one is 'the absence of strong mass mobilization and losing its relevance in the present political scenario'. Anyhow if they really determine to statehood such level of the allegation does not matter, for example in the case of a separate state of Chhattisgarh, it was created where at that time it did not have any mass mobilization despite it took born as a separate state. Thus, these are the issues in front of the BJP which need to tackle and hold up progress in the context of changing political calculations in a post-poll scenario in granting the statehood for Vidarbha.

## CONCLUSION

Finally to conclude, in any case of creation of the new state, the phenomenon of political regionalism always get associated with the local issues such as sons of the soil tensions and the claims for an internal self-determination. But in this context, one should keep in mind that the state creation not to be in the interest of few people to become powerful elites in the region at the cost of majority people as Ambedkar warned. In fact, the statehood for Vidarbha may also remain like ongoing demand and it makes probable to see how politicians frequently support the idea of statehood for political expediency without necessarily expecting a new state to see the light of day, and that they can shift their position over time. And it has become a useful tool to keep alive in a bid. Therefore, this can be seen as another replication of statehood issue that is drawn into short-term political maneuvers. As Louis Tillin made amply clear that "the demand for statehood arises as conciliation between interest groups competing for position rather than reproducing a radical break in the dispersal of power that raises questions about the representative quality of democracy as well as political economy of development" which are sharp end of the job in the creation of new states in Indian context.

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