

UNIFICATION OF MAHARASHTRA

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In considering the case for the unification of Maharashtra it is necessary to begin with some observations on the nature and constitution of Federal Governments. It has been pointed out that Federalism is the result of a compromise between the desire to unite and the desire to remain separate within a political state. The factors making for separation may be varied. A sense of separateness may arise out of geographic or economic divisions or divergence relating to race, religion, language, etc. A number of units which may be aware of separate identities because of any or all of these factors may yet wish to form a union to reap the advantages flowing from a larger political or economic unit. The desire for the formation of a union might flow from a feeling of commonness of either civilization or history, of religion or nationality which transcends the more detailed differences keeping the units separate; and this desire might be reinforced by consideration of the political and economic advantages resulting from a union. The larger the political unit the stronger is it likely to prove in defence and the more weight will it carry in the general body of nations. Also a larger unit leads to greater economic self-sufficiency which makes for strength not only in defence but also in economic bargaining. A larger unit can also exploit the internal advantages of large-scale administration; and with large programmes of economic planning or social security the advantages of a large unit become specially insistent. In federalism the advantages flowing from a large area of political and economic administration are reconciled with the desire of units to maintain separate entity and the need to guard local and regional interests. The division into units in a federation, it will thus be seen, is based primarily on historical, political or

geographical factors and is not to be confused with the division into local areas for purposes of administrative convenience. A unitary government has undoubtedly many advantages but where for reasons of the need to bring a diversity of elements together a unitary government is out of account, federation has obviously to be adopted.

Few would advocate the adoption of the unitary principle for the constitution of an Indian Government. Almost every factor that is found to create a sense of separateness is to be found definitely within the vast territories of this country. The economic and geographic regions are many and distinct; and there are marked differences of race, language and religion. In spite, however, of these differences the vast bulk of, at least the non-Muslim, peoples have such a feeling of commonness of tradition and civilization and so realise the advantages and political and economic unity that they are strongly in favour of the formation of Indian union. In these circumstances, the demarcation of appropriate federating units that will serve to build up a strong Indian Union is a task of great and immediate importance with us.

In a large number of federations formed in the past, the states, the provinces or other federating units had ordinarily a long history of politically separate existence before the formation of the federation. Such was the case with the states of North America, the Cantons of Switzerland, Provinces of Canada or the States of Australia. These federations were therefore not faced with the problem of the formation of federating units. In India the problem is acute because the federating act is being performed not by units previously independent but is taking place on the basis of provinces which were formed by historical accident and have been mere administrative divisions of a highly centralised unitary government. These provincial units have no meaning in the new context. They cannot be the federating units because a number of them are of such composite character that they form small potential

federations in themselves. Therefore, if the work of the Assembly forming the constitution of an Indian federation is to proceed on significant and durable lines the attempt to form the federating unit must precede and not follow the finalizing of the constitution of the Union. It is only when the members of the Assembly are organized into groups which represent homogeneous communities and peoples having similar interests in common that the real problem of reconciling separate interests with a unified central government will be duly appreciated and solved.

If the formation of the federating units is thus urgent as a preliminary step, a basis must be indicated on which the quest of the federating units can be fruitfully conducted. The basis is given by the nature of the problem of federalism sketched above. A federation is the result of the coming together of units who are conscious of separate identity; the federating units must therefore be formed of regions, the peoples of which are conscious of separate identity i.e., as distinct from their neighbours and *per contra* are conscious of a feeling of unity among themselves. A sense of oneness among peoples because of commonness of history and tradition, race, language or religion will obviously give the basis of the federating units. Our request is for an area where homogeneity with reference to political action and political allegiance is found existent. Difference in geographical factors or in economic conditions does not ordinarily vitiate a sense of political unity and within even a large political unit it is always possible to provide for regional differences by division into administrative areas or by the introduction of the principle of local autonomy.

On the basis of the test given above the linguistic principle will be seen to yield the proper limits for political units especially in Peninsular India. That the federating units should be unilingual might be easily taken for granted. A variety of languages would make democratic governments very difficult in a unit; and if on no other ground

the creation of new federating units must provide for the people in the federating unit speaking overwhelmingly one language. Given the language test the regions where Marathi is the dominant tongue would yield one large contiguous unit which should be the federating unit for this area. Within the area itself there are also no factors which indicate any smaller federating units being formed. The primary federating unit should obviously be as large as political homogeneity permits. This makes for ease in the working not only of the Union but is advantageous also from the point of view of the federating unit itself. Success of schemes of economic planning and social welfare as well as the possession of political strength depend on the largeness of territory and resources commanded by a political unit. In a federation where large powers in respect of economic matters are vested in the federating unit an unnecessary splitting of areas in the federating units is highly wasteful. The influence that a people will wield in the affairs of the Union will also depend to a considerable extent on their economic and political strength. A set of small units will naturally not command the same position as one large unit and, therefore, the largest possible homogeneous unit should everywhere be formed into the federating unit.

Examining the specific question of Maharashtra it is easy to show that the whole region inhabited by people speaking Marathi should form one federating unit. More than any other region of unilingual people in India unified Maharashtra will be found to have complete political homogeneity. Not only would the language spoken in this tract be one but the literary traditions of all the peoples would be the same. There have been no rigid barriers in the past in any kind of contact over the whole territory of this unified Maharashtra. In social structure the similarity among the most distant parts is remarkable. The three main classes of the people of Maharashtra, Marathas, Mahars and Brahmins are spread more or less uniformly over all this territory and among all these different

caste groups there is not only a feeling of oneness but also a considerable interchange in social relationship. The religious and cultural traditions of the people of the entire tract are the same. The saints they revere, the heroes they worship, the historical memories they treasure are all the same. Within no sphere of social or cultural life could any definite line of demarcation be drawn in the territory of unified Maharashtra and there is no particular part of it which, as a whole, does not share in the sense of commonness. This is not only so today but seems to have always been the case through historical times. Therefore, the political allegiance of a unified Maharashtra will be firmly grounded in the sentiments of the people and in their feeling of unity.

There is no sharp division, even geographical or economic, in the area. The one region in the area of unified Maharashtra which constitutes a separate geographical entity by itself is, of course, the region of the Konkan. The geographical features and the economy of the Konkan resulting therefrom are undoubtedly distinct from those of the rest of Maharashtra. However, nobody has on that account ever suggested that the Konkan should form a separate political unit. As a matter of fact for at least the last 1,000 years the Konkan has never formed a separate unit by itself but has always been unified with parts of the region of Maharashtra above the ghats. For the rest of Maharashtra there are no sharp economic or geographical features dividing one region from another. There are also no divergences in economic interests in the modern sense. There has been no special concentration of industry in any one part and no special dependence on a single product which might result in specialised interest for a particular region. If one examines, for example, the existing administrative divisions between various parts of Maharashtra, one finds that the lines of these divisions are utterly meaningless. The economic or social or cultural life in Kolhapur and other States of the Southern Maratha country are not divergent from those of areas included in

British districts surrounding them. The economy of Berar has more in common with that of Khandesh than with the economy of the districts of Bhandara or Chanda. And the Marathwada area in the Nizam's Dominions form together with the districts of Ahmednagar, Sholapur and Khandesh on the one hand and Berar on the other one typical continuous block of the Deccan Peninsula. The division in different administrations of these territories is certainly neither advantageous for the whole nor for any part thereof. If an attempt were to be made to form more than one federating unit from among the whole area it would merely result in a disastrous weakening of the forces of Maharashtra in the Indian union and it would not have any special meaning in the context of any social, cultural or economic feature.

It has been sometimes alleged that incorporating a whole area which is large into one political unit might result in the dominance over the whole area of a particular point of view and the neglect of many local interests. It has also been said that the area which is economically better off within the larger unit might feel that its interest was being sacrificed by such a union. It might, of course, be doubted whether it is wise for any particular area professing to be part of one whole people to set up a claim for not sharing its wealth with co-citizens. India and other poor countries in the world today are putting forward a plea for special treatment by richer nations of the world. In such a situation a purely sectional view in a small region is to be deplored. However, that may be, there is no region today within Maharashtra that is to a special degree richer than others. North Konkan is the only area which is remarkably poorer than other regions. For the rest, regions of agricultural prosperity such as Kolhapur and the South Satara district, the areas of the Deccan Canals, parts of Khandesh, Berar and Nagpur divisions are all fairly evenly dispersed. It is no longer true to say, as it was perhaps true during the days of boom in cotton prices, that

Berar is a specially rich region; and as to the possibility of future development a combination of hydro-electric and irrigation development has more in store for the districts of the Bombay-Deccan than for the Nagpur-Berar area. Apart, therefore, from the cogency of the plea of a richly endowed area trying to get a special treatment for itself there are in fact no such areas within unified Maharashtra. With regard to the plea of dominance of any particular point of view or neglect of local interests it is obvious that such fears can be provided against in advance. It is difficult to believe that in unified Maharashtra, with franchise and political power evenly spread, any one region will specially dominate others. The conditions of political life are more or less similar throughout this tract and its social and economic problems are closely similar. The bulk of the rural peasantry is similar in disposition throughout the area and political power in a unified Maharashtra, will overwhelmingly pass into the hands of their representatives. The nature of such representation, their political programme or methods are not likely to differ from tract to tract. However, it would still be impossible to provide for machinery by which any special regional interests could be properly safeguarded. The problem of these devices leads us to considerations which will be common to all parts of India. The possibility of forming sub-provinces and autonomous districts or cities within each federating unit must be contemplated. Such extension of the area and concepts of local self-government is in a line with our political development and the genius of our people. The details of such devices must, however, be considered in connection not with the formation of particular federating units but as a part of the entire constitutional structure.

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