

History of Telangana (www.timesoftelangana.in)

Telangana, as a geographical and political entity was born on June 2, 2014 as the 29th and the youngest state in Union of India. However, as an economic, social, cultural and historical entity it has a glorious history of at least two thousand five hundred years or more. Megalithic stone structures like cairns, cists, dolmens and menhirs found in several districts of Telangana show that there were human habitations in this part of the country thousands of years ago. Remnants of iron ore smelting found at many places demonstrate the hoary roots of artisanship and tool making in Telangana for at least two thousand years. The reference to Asmaka Janapada, part of present Telangana, as one of the 16 Janapadas in ancient India proves that there existed an advanced stage of society.

One of the first five disciples of the Buddha, Kondanna is a typical name from Telangana and though there is no exact information about his native place, the earliest known Buddhist township of Kondapur in Medak district is believed to be after him. The Buddha himself famously acknowledged that it was Kondanna who understood him properly. The Buddhist sources say that Bavari, a Brahmin from Badanakurti in Karimnagar sent his disciples to all the way to north India to learn Buddhism and spread the message in this region. Megasthenes, who visited India in the 4th century BCE, wrote that there were 30 fortified towns of Andhras and a majority of them were in Telangana. In the historical age, Telangana had given rise to mighty empires and kingdoms like the Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Ikshvakus, Vishnukundins, Chalukyas, Kakatiyas, Qutb Shahis and Asif Jahis.

The emergence and flourishing of these powerful political formations is in itself a proof of existence of a sturdy economic, social and cultural structure. Thus Telangana has been a vibrant social entity by the time of the Buddha and continued to be so for the next two and a half millennia. Endowed with such rich cultural heritage, despite the attempts by historians and scholars from Andhra region to obfuscate and erase its history, Telangana always retained and fought for its self respect and self rule. Due to the official efforts to ignore, erase, belittle and look down Telangana history and turn it into an appendage or a footnote, particularly during 1956-2014, much of Telangana history is either not properly researched or not recorded even if it was studied. Telangana rose again and secured its political identity now and is in the process of resurrecting its own glorious past. Here is an attempt to reconstruct the history of Telangana, the wonderful musical instrument with a thousand strings.

Pre-history (Up to 1000 BCE)

Even though extensive exploration has not been done, particularly subjected to neglect after 1956, the archaeological department under the Nizams' government had done tremendous work in discovering the traces of pre-historical human habitations in Telangana. These studies found that human habitations in parts of Telangana can be seen from the Paleolithic age consistently. Either the same locations or extended locations showed people continued to live and develop through the later stages of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Metal ages. Excavations discovered stone tools, microliths, cists, dolmens, cairns and menhirs. All the ten districts of Telangana showed these traces even when a proper, scientific and official research and excavations have not been done and thanks to the efforts of either the first generation researchers before 1950s or individual amateur explorations.

Pre-Satavahanas (1000 BCE – 300 BCE) (www.timesoftelangana.in)

In the historical age beginning from 1000 BCE there are some references of Telangana as a geographical entity as well as Telugu as a linguistic entity, in the contemporary Buddhist and mythological texts. However, it needs a detailed research to discover finer aspects and establish the stage of development of pre-Satavahana society. Though the official research into this aspect was stalled for about six decades, some enthusiasts like Thakur Rajaram Singh, B N Sastry and Dr D Raja Reddy did their own painstaking explorations and showed that there was a flourishing society before the emergence of the Satavahanas. Particularly Dr Raja Reddy proved with numismatic evidence that there were rulers before the Satavahanas with Kotalingala as capital and issued their own coins. In these excavations the coins of Gobada, Naarana, Kamvaaya and Samagopa were discovered and at least two other rulers' names came to light. Thus Telangana happens to be the first region in the subcontinent to have issued punch-marked coins with even insignia. The Buddhist texts as well as accounts of foreigners like Megasthenes and Arrian talked about this region as having thirty forts, many of which have to be explored.

Satavahanas (250 BCE – 200 CE)

After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, around the third century BC there arose the first significant kingdom under the Satavahanas from this region. The earliest capital of the Satavahanas was Kotalingala and then moved to the other popular capitals like Paithan and Amaravati (Dharanikota) only after two centuries of their rule. However, the first capital was either ignored or brushed aside to give prominence to the later place in coastal Andhra. The coins issued by the Satavahana kings Simuka (BC 231-208), Siri Satavahana, Satakani I, Satasiri, Satakani II, Vasittiputta Pulumayi, Vasittiputta Satakani and their governors were discovered in Kotalingala. Numismatic and epigraphic evidence showed that the Satavahanas ruled a larger area of the peninsula, with oceans as borders on three sides. Literature like Gathasaptashati, painting like Ajanta flourished during the Satavahana rule.

Post-Satavahana (200 CE – 950 CE)

After the fall of Satavahanas in the third century AD, Telugu-speaking areas were divided under various small rulers and till the emergence of the Kakatiyas, for about six or seven centuries this fragmentation continued. Even as the mainstream Andhra historians maintained that it was a dark period in Telangana history without any political formation, the current research found that Telangana was ruled by various kingdoms like the Ikshvakus, Vakatakas, Vishnukundins, Badami Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Vemulavada Chalukyas, Kalyani Chalukyas, Mudigonda Chalukyas, Kanduri Chodas and Polvasa dynasty. A detailed research into this period is yet to take place.

Kakatiyas (950 CE – 1323 CE)

The sub-feudatories of the Rashtrakutas emerged themselves as independent kings and founded the Kakatiya dynasty around 950 AD and this kingdom became strong and united whole of Telugu-speaking lands and lasted for more than three centuries and a half. The kingdom saw powerful kings like Ganapatideva, Rudradeva and Prataparudra as well as the first ever woman ruler in the subcontinent Rudramadevi. The Kakatiyas ruled from Hanumakonda in the beginning and shifted their capital to Warangal later.

The Kakatiyas are known for their irrigation public works, sculpture and fire arts. Thanks to the well-planned irrigation facilities and a perfect system of chain tanks to suit the undulating nature of the terrain, the Kakatiya kingdom flourished economically leading to cultural progress also. Envy of this affluence, several neighbouring kingdoms as well as Delhi Sultanate tried to wage war on Warangal many times and failed. Finally in 1323, Delhi army could lay seize on Warangal fort and capture Prataparudra, who, according to the legend, killed himself on the banks of the Narmada unwilling to surrender when he was being taken as prisoner of war to Delhi.

Post-Kakatiya Interregnum (1323 – 1496)

After Prataparudra was defeated by Malik Kafur in 1323, the Kakatiya kingdom was again fragmented with local governors declaring independence and for about 150 years Telangana was again under different rulers like Musunuri Nayakas, Padmanayakas, Kalinga Gangas, Gajapatis, and Bahmanis.

Qutbshahis (1496 - 1687)

Sultan Quli Qutb Shah, subedar for Telangana under the Bahamanis, with Golconda as his capital, declared his independence in 1496 and seven sultans of this dynasty ruled not only Telangana but the entire Telugu-speaking land including parts of present day Maharashtra and Karnataka. The Moghul empire waged war and defeated Golconda in 1687 and for about three decades Telangana was again witnessed chaos and fragmented rulers.

Asaf Jahis (1724-1948)

In 1712, Emperor Farrukhsiyar appointed Qamar-ud-din Khan as the viceroy of Deccan and gave him the title Nizam-ul-Mulk . He was later recalled to Delhi, with Mubariz Khan appointed as the viceroy. In 1724, Qamar-ud-din Khan defeated Mubariz Khan and reclaimed the Deccan suba. It was established as an autonomous province of the Mughal empire. He took the name Asif Jah, starting what came to be known as the Asif Jahi dynasty. He named the area Hyderabad Deccan. Subsequent rulers retained the title Nizam ul-Mulk and were called Asaf Jahi Nizams or Nizams of Hyderabad. The Medak and Warangal divisions of Telangana were part of their realm.

When Asaf Jah I died in 1748, there was political unrest due to contention for the throne among his sons, who were aided by opportunistic neighbouring states and colonial foreign forces. In 1769, Hyderabad city became the formal capital of the Nizams.

Nasir-ud-dawlah, Asaf Jah IV signed the Subsidiary Alliance with the British in 1799 and lost its control over the state's defense and foreign affairs. Hyderabad State became a princely state among the presidencies and provinces of British India.

A total of seven Nizam's ruled Hyderabad. (there was a period of 13 years after the rule of Asaf Jah I, when three of his sons (Nasir Jung, Muzaffar Jung and Salabath Jung) ruled. They were not officially recognised as the rulers:

- Nizam-ul-Mulk, Asaf Jah I (Mir Qamar-ud-din Khan)
- Nasir Jung (Mir Ahmed Ali Khan)
- Muzaffar Jung (Mir Hidayat Muhi-ud-din Sa'adullah Khan)

- Salabat Jung (Mir Sa'id Muhammad Khan)
- Nizam-ul-Mulk, Asaf Jah II (Mir Nizam Ali Khan)
- Sikander Jah, Asaf Jah III (Mir Akbar Ali Khan)
- Nasir-ud-Daula, Asaf Jah IV (Mir Farqunda Ali Khan)
- Afzal-ud-Daula, Asaf Jah V (Mir Tahniyath Ali Khan)
- Asaf Jah VI (Mir Mahbub Ali Khan)
- Asaf Jah VII (Mir Osman Ali Khan)

Post-independence

When India became independent from the British Empire in 1947, Hyderabad remained an independent princely state for a period of 13 months.

The peasants of Telangana waged an armed struggle to liberate the region. Scores of people lost their lives in the armed struggle. The private militia named Razakars, under the leadership of Qasim Razwi unleashed terror in the state by resorting to looting and murder.

On 17 September 1948, the Indian government conducted a military operation called Operation Polo to bring Hyderabad state into the Indian Union. It appointed a civil servant, M. K. Vellodi, as first chief minister of Hyderabad State on 26 January 1950.

In 1952, Dr. Burgula Ramakrishna Rao was elected chief minister of the Hyderabad State in its first democratic election. During this time, there was an agitation by locals in the state to ensure proper representation was given to locals (mulkis) of Hyderabad.

First Telangana Movement

In early 1950s, people of Telangana region in Hyderabad state, started organizing themselves with a demand for separate state. In 1953 the Indian government appointed the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) to look into various statehood demands in the country. The Commission was headed by Fazal Ali, Kavalam Madhava Panikkar and H.N. Kunzru

The SRC toured the whole country to seek representations from various sections of the society. People of Telangana region submitted several memorandums to the SRC and expressed their wish to constitute Telangana as a separate state. Telangana intellectuals such as late Prof Jayashankar and political leaders such as Sri HC Heda, Sri Konda Venkat Ranga Reddy gave memorandums containing historic, political, economic, social and cultural justifications for creating the Telangana state. The Commission submitted its report on 30 September 1955, and recommended formation of Telangana state.

During the period between 1955 September and 1956 November, the people of Telangana launched a series of protests demanding statehood by implementing the SRC recommendations. But intense lobbying by leaders from Andhra state in New Delhi resulted in the merger of Telangana region in Andhra state to form the Andhra Pradesh state.

Telangana leaders insisted on a Gentlemen's Agreement before the merger could take place. The agreement was signed by Andhra and Telangana leaders and provided safeguards with the purpose of preventing discrimination against Telangana by the Andhra leaders. However, the agreement was violated from day one by the Andhra leaders.

1969 Telangana Agitation

Non-implementation of Gentlemen's Agreement and continued discrimination to Telangana region in government jobs, education and public spending resulted in the 1969 statehood agitation.

In January 1969, students intensified the protests for a separate state. On 19 January, all party accord was reached to ensure the proper implementation of Telangana safeguards. Accord's main points were 1) All non-Telangana employees holding posts reserved for Telangana locals will be transferred immediately. 2) Telangana surpluses will be used for Telangana development. 3) Appeal to Telangana students to call off agitation.

But the protests further intensified, as more and more students and employees joined the statehood movement. Police firing on protesters led to the death of about 369 youngsters during this phase of the agitation. Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called for a high-level meeting to discuss the statehood issue. After several days of talks with leaders of both regions, on 12 April 1969, the Prime Minister developed an Eight Point Plan. Sri M. Chenna Reddy, founded the Telangana Praja Samithi (TPS) political party in 1969 to spearhead the statehood movement.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi had called snap parliamentary elections in March 1971. In these parliamentary elections, Telangana Praja Samithi won 10 out of the 14 Parliament seats in Telangana. However, Indira Gandhi's Congress (R) Party scored a landslide victory on a platform of progressive policies such as poverty elimination (Garibi Hatao). She was reluctant to accept the Telangana statehood demand at that juncture. Sri M Chenna Reddy then merged TPS in Congress (R) party, after formulating a Six-Point Formula to safeguard Telangana's interests. The statehood movement continued until 1973, but subsided later.

Final Telangana Movement

Since mid 1990s, the people of Telangana started organizing themselves under various organizations with a demand for separate state of Telangana.

In 1997, the state unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) passed a resolution seeking a separate Telangana. Though the party created the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand in 2000, it did not create a separate Telangana state citing resistance of its coalition partner, Telugu Desam Party.

Sri Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao (KCR), who was then the Deputy Speaker of AP State assembly, had started background work on Telangana issue in early 2000. And after detailed discussions and deliberations with a plethora of Telangana intellectuals, KCR announced the launch of Telangana Rashtra Samithi on May 17th 2001.

KCR had resigned to the post of Deputy Speaker and MLA before launching the Telangana Rashtra Samithi party. Prof Jayashankar, the ideologue of statehood movement extended his support to KCR.

In 2004, TRS entered into a poll alliance with Congress party. The party won 26 MLAs and 5 MPs and entered into both the AP state and Indian government. Telangana issue found a place in UPA-1 Common Minimum Program. Statehood issue was also mentioned by President Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in their speeches.

TRS president KCR, was initially allotted the Shipping portfolio. But another UPA ally DMK demanded Shipping portfolio and threatened to walk out of the coalition, if its demand was not met, KCR voluntarily relinquished the Shipping portfolio to save the fledgling UPA-1 government. KCR remained as a Union Minister without portfolio, before being given the Labour and Employment portfolio. As the UPA government continued to dilly-dally on the decades old demand for Telangana state, KCR resigned to his ministry in 2006.

When a Congress leader made a belittling statement on the statehood movement in September 2006, KCR resigned to the Karimnagar Lok Sabha seat and won it with a thumping majority. The massive majority achieved by KCR in that election proved the strong statehood aspirations in the region.

In April 2008, TRS party MLAs resigned also walked out of the state government in protest against the delay in Telangana formation. But, TRS could retain only 7 MLA and 2 Lok Sabha seats in this by-election.

In 2009 elections, TRS allied with TDP, CPI and CPM parties. The grand alliance did not yield the desired result, as the Pro-Telangana vote got split between TRS, Congress, PRP and BJP. In the end, TRS could win only 10 MLA seats and 2 MP seats.

Intensifying the movement

On Nov 29th, 2009, KCR had announced an indefinite hunger strike demanding statehood to Telangana. But en route, the state police had arrested him and sent to Khammam sub-jail. The movement spread like wildfire with students, employees, peoples' organizations plunging into it. In the next 10 days, the whole of Telangana region came to a standstill.

The state government, headed by Sri K Rosaiah had called for an all-party meeting on 7th December. Leaders of TDP and PRP parties promised that they would support a Telangana statehood resolution if it was tabled in the state Assembly. As KCR's health was deteriorating very fast, on Dec 9th 2009, the UPA government announced that the process of statehood for Telangana would be initiated.

But within 2 weeks, resistance from Seemandhra leadership resulted in UPA backtracking on this issue. KCR then brought all political forces in Telangana region together to form the Telangana JAC – an umbrella body of several organizations and parties, with Prof Kodandaram as its Chairman. TRS cadre and leaders actively participated in several agitations and protests launched by TJAC.

State Formation

After 4 years of peaceful and impactful protests, the UPA government started the statehood process in July 2013 and concluded the process by passing the statehood bill in both houses of Parliament in Feb 2014.

In the General Elections held in April 2014, Telangana Rashtra Samithi emerged victorious by winning 63 of the 119 seats and formed the government. Sri K Chandrashekar Rao was sworn in as the First Chief Minister of Telangana. The Telangana state was inaugurated formally on June 2nd 2014. (www.timesoftelangana.in)