Populist Policies in New States of India – A Study

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1. Introduction: The Federal Reorganization of a Republic

The formation of new states within the Indian Union represents a unique and critical process of political birth, distinct from the emergence of sovereign nations. Unlike the classical model of a new state achieving independence through revolution or decolonization, these sub-national entities are carved out of existing ones through a constitutional process, operating within the robust, yet complex, framework of the world's largest democracy. The creation of states like Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh (2000), and most recently, Telangana (2014), is not an act of secession but one of federal reorganization. It is a political response to deeply felt aspirations for identity, development, and self-governance.

The moment of a new state's inception in India is one of profound hope. It embodies the promise of addressing long-standing grievances whether cultural marginalization, economic backwardness, or political neglect that the larger parent state was perceived as failing to remedy. The slogan of "Delhi *door nahin*" (Delhi is not far away) captures this optimism, suggesting that a smaller, more accessible state capital will be more responsive to the people's needs.

However, the transition from a powerful regional movement to a functioning state government is fraught with challenges that mirror those of sovereign new states, albeit within a constitutional container. This paper argues that the politics of new states in India are shaped by the dynamic interplay of three core dimensions: the **institutional dimension** of building an administrative apparatus from a fractured inheritance; the **societal dimension** of managing the heightened expectations of diverse social groups within the new entity; and the **federal dimension** of negotiating a complex relationship with the Central Government and the parent state. By examining this intersection, we can understand why some new states, like Haryana, have been hailed as successes, while others, like Jharkhand, have experienced prolonged political instability and a perceived failure to fulfil their founding promises.

2. The Institutional Dimension: Forging a New Administration from an Old Bureaucracy

The immediate task for a new state government is to construct a cohesive administrative machinery from the structures inherited from the parent state. This process is less about building from scratch and more about dismantling, integrating, and repurposing existing systems.

2.1. The Legitimacy Deficit: From Movement Leaders to Administrators: The leaders who spearhead the statehood movement often command immense *agitational legitimacy*. They are celebrated as champions of the people's cause. However, this legitimacy does not automatically translate into *administrative competence*. The fiery orator and skilled protest leader must transform into a prudent manager of finances, infrastructure, and public services. This transition is often problematic. The political culture born of protest can persist, leading to a style of governance that is confrontational and reliant on rhetoric rather than delivery.

Furthermore, the first governments are often coalitions of the various factions that constituted the movement. These factions, united by the goal of statehood, may have vastly

different visions for the new state. Once the common enemy the parent state disappears, these internal differences surface, leading to fragile governments, frequent defections, and political instability. Jharkhand's history, with its rapid succession of chief ministers and periods of President's Rule, is a testament to this challenge, where the legitimacy earned in the movement failed to coalesce into stable, effective governance.

2.2. The Bureaucratic Mosaic and the Capital Conundrum:

A new state inherits a bureaucracy that is often fragmented and demoralized. Civil servants from the same region but previously serving under different administrative divisions of the parent state must be integrated. This leads to complex issues of seniority, cadre allocation, and institutional culture. The location and development of a new capital city, like in Uttarakhand (Gairsain vs. Dehradun) or the massive project of building Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh, become all-consuming political and financial undertakings. These projects can divert colossal resources and administrative attention from other critical areas like health and education, creating a significant opportunity cost for the new state.

The division of assets and liabilities with the parent state is another major flashpoint. Disputes over water shares, power projects, mineral rights, and financial allocations can fester for years, creating a permanent source of inter-state tension that hinders development in both entities. The sharing of the Krishna and Godavari river waters between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh remains a contentious issue, requiring constant intervention from central tribunals.

2.3.Security and the "Law and Order" Transition:

New states, particularly those born from regions with a history of civil unrest or Naxalite influence like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, face the immediate challenge of establishing a monopoly on legitimate force. They must integrate local police forces and develop a security strategy tailored to their specific context. The presence of a strong Maoist insurgency in the forested areas of these new states presented a severe security challenge that the nascent administrations were ill-equipped to handle, requiring heavy reliance on central paramilitary forces. This can create a paradox where the new state, created for self-rule, finds its internal security policy heavily dictated by the Centre.

3. The Societal Dimension: The Politics of Identity and Aspiration:

The demand for a new state in India is almost always rooted in a distinct socio-cultural identity be it ethnic, linguistic, or geographic. Once formed, the politics of the new state becomes a complex negotiation between this unifying identity and the internal diversity within its new borders.

3.1.The Rise of Sub-Regionalism and Demands for Autonomy:

The formation of a new state often unleashes or intensifies sub-regional aspirations within its own territory. The very logic used to justify the new state's creation that a distinct cultural region was neglected by a distant capital can be replicated internally. In Telangana, after its formation, there emerged a strong demand for a separate state of Telangana. This seems paradoxical, but it highlights the continuous nature of identity politics. Similarly, in Uttarakhand, there is a persistent political and developmental divide between the hilly *Pahari* regions (Garhwal and Kumaon) and the plains of Udham Singh Nagar. The new state government must now manage these internal sub-regional demands for a fair share of resources and political representation, lest new movements for further bifurcation emerge.

3.2.The Distribution of Resources: Patronage and Social Coalitions:

The euphoria of statehood creates sky-high expectations for rapid development and job

creation. The new political elite, having promised a golden era, now faces the pressure of distributing limited resources. This often leads to a politics of patronage that runs along ethnic, caste, and regional lines. Control over the state machinery becomes the primary means of rewarding supporters.

A key dynamic is the restructuring of social coalitions. The formation of a new state can upset existing caste and class hierarchies. For instance, the creation of Jharkhand was expected to empower the Adivasi (tribal) communities. However, in practice, a more educated and politically organized non-tribal elite often captured the new institutions, leading to widespread disillusionment among the very communities the state was meant to uplift. The politics of reservation (affirmative action) becomes intensely contested, as different groups jockey for a guaranteed share in government jobs and educational institutions in the new administrative setup.

3.3. Civil Society: From Agitation to Accountability:

The vibrant civil society that was instrumental in the statehood movement comprising student groups, cultural organizations, and intellectuals faces its own transition. With the goal achieved, this broad coalition often fragments. Some elements may enter politics, while others strive to transition into a watchdog role, holding the new government accountable to its promises.

However, the new government, sensitive to criticism and eager to project an image of success, may view a robust civil society and independent media as an impediment. There is often an attempt to co-opt or silence critical voices, arguing that "now is the time for development, not protest." This can stifle the very democratic spirit that fuelled the statehood demand and create an environment where corruption and poor governance can flourish without adequate scrutiny.

4. The Federal Dimension: Navigating the Centre-State-Parent State Triad:

A new state in India operates within a multi-layered federal system, making its relationship with the Central Government in Delhi and its parent state its most critical external dynamic.

4.1.The "Special Category" Debate and Financial Dependency:

While new states hope for financial self-sufficiency, they often begin their journey with fragile economies and limited revenue-generating capacity. They immediately enter complex negotiations with the Central Government and central bodies like the Finance Commission and the NITI Aayog for special grants and assistance. The now-defunct concept of "Special Category Status" was a potent political tool in this regard. The demand for this status by states like Uttarakhand (which initially received it) and the prolonged agitation for it by Andhra Pradesh after the loss of Hyderabad to Telangana, highlight the intense financial dependency and the political capital spent on seeking preferential treatment from the Centre. This dependency can be used as a lever of political control by the ruling party at the centre, influencing the political choices of the new state's government.

4.2 The Enduring Shadow of the Parent State:

The relationship with the parent state is rarely amicable after bifurcation. There is often lingering resentment, particularly if the division involved contentious issues like the sharing of a capital city (Hyderabad), water resources, or revenue-rich regions. Andhra Pradesh's sense of loss after Telangana's formation is a prime example. These disputes over assets, liabilities, and water become permanent features of inter-state relations, requiring adjudication by central tribunals and the Supreme Court. This perpetual negotiation drains administrative energy and can hamper cooperative development projects.

4.3.The Political Instrument of State Creation:

The decision to create a new state is ultimately a political one, taken by the Parliament of India. This process is deeply influenced by the calculations of national political parties. The timing of statehood announcements is often linked to electoral strategies, aimed at harvesting votes in the region or weakening political opponents. The creation of Telangana, for instance, was a culmination of decades of struggle but was ultimately enacted by the ruling UPA government at a politically strategic time. This reality means that the new state's political class often feels a sense of obligation, or conversely, resentment, towards the national party that facilitated its birth, shaping political alliances for years to come. The new state's political representation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha also alters the federal balance of power, giving its leaders a new platform to negotiate with the Centre.

5. Case Study: The Contrasting Trajectories of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh

A comparative look at Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, both formed on the same day in 2000, provides a powerful illustration of how the interplay of these dimensions produces divergent outcomes.

Jharkhand: The Paradox of Plenty and Political Instability:

Endowed with immense mineral wealth, Jharkhand was envisioned as an Adivasi-led prosperous state. However, its institutional dimension was weak from the start. It suffered from extreme political instability, with multiple short-lived governments and rampant corruption. The societal dimension was marked by a sharp disconnect between the aspirations of the Adivasi population and the reality of their continued marginalization, as a non-tribal political and business elite captured the benefits of the state's resources. The federal dimension saw the central government frequently imposing President's Rule, further stunting the growth of stable institutions. The "resource curse" was in full effect, where wealth fuelled corruption instead of development.

Chhattisgarh: A Tale of Relative Stability:

In contrast, Chhattisgarh experienced a much more stable political environment, especially in its first decade under a single, strong chief minister. This institutional stability allowed for a more coherent, though contested, governance approach. Societally, while it faced a severe Naxalite insurgency, the state government, with strong central support, pursued a dual strategy of security and development. The federal dimension was one of alignment with the centre for much of its early years, facilitating the flow of resources for security and infrastructure. While not without its own problems of inequitable growth and conflict, Chhattisgarh demonstrated how political stability can provide a foundational platform for administration, even in a challenging context.

This contrast shows that similar initial conditions (tribal identity, mineral wealth, Naxalism) can lead to vastly different political outcomes based on the management of institutional stability and social contracts.

6. Conclusion:

The politics of new states in India is a continuous negotiation between the emancipatory promise of statehood and the entrenched challenges of governance. The initial hope that a smaller state would automatically mean better governance has often been tempered by reality. The dimensions explored the struggle to build effective institutions, the management of intense societal expectations, and the navigation of a complex federal structure create a political environment that is both dynamic and demanding.

Success is not guaranteed by the act of creation alone. The path forward for India's new states requires a conscious shift from the politics of agitation to the politics of administration. This necessitates building impersonal, transparent institutions that can resist the pressures of patronage; fostering an inclusive development model that bridges internal social divides rather than exacerbating them; and pursuing a relationship with the Centre based on cooperative federalism rather than perpetual dependency or conflict.

The experiment of creating new states is a testament to the flexibility and resilience of Indian federalism. It is a process of continuous internal re-imagination, allowing diverse groups to find a space and a voice within the national framework. The journey of states like Telangana, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand is still unfolding. Their ultimate success will be measured not by the fervour of their movements, but by their ability to translate the political empowerment of statehood into tangible human development, social justice, and democratic deepening for all their citizens. Their story is a critical chapter in the ongoing evolution of the Indian republic.

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