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THEMENSCHWERPUNKT

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Stefan Rother

Civil Society and Democracy in South and Southeast Asia – An Introduction

Rini Sefyani and Patrick Ziegenhain

Civil-society Support — A Decisive Factor in the Indonesian Presidential Elections in 2014

Lorenz Graitz

The Role of Civil Society in the Creation of India's New State of Telangana

Andrea Fleschenberg

Mapping Pakistan's Heterogeneous, Diverse, and Stratified Civil Society and Democratization — Gendered Tales of Collaboration, Networking, and Contestation

Maria-Gabriela Manca

ASEAN's Claims to Human Rights and Democracy: What Role for Regional Civil Society?

Stefan Rother

Democratizing ASEAN Through „Alternative Regionalism“? The ASEAN Civil Society Conference and the ASEAN Youth Forum

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Karl Husa, Alexander Trupp, Helmut Wohlschlägl (Hgg.): Southeast Asian

Mobility Transitions. Issues and Trends in Migration and Tourism (Kerstin Schiele)	136
Viola Thimm: Geschlecht und Bildungs migration. Lebensentwürfe und Weiblichkeitsbilder malaysischer Bildungsmigrantinnen in Singapur (Frauke-Katrin Kandale)	137
Sylvia Yazid: Indonesia's Civil Society in the Age of Democratization. NGO-Responses on the Issue of Labor Migration (Sophia Hornbacher-Schönleber)	139
Yuling Pan, Dániel Z. Kádár (Hgg.): Chinese Discourse and Interaction. Theory and Practice (Peter Jandok)	141
Robert Heuser: Grundriss der Geschichte und Modernisierung des chinesischen Rechts (Astrid Lipinsky)	142
Barbara Mirtler: A Continuous Revolution. Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture (Mascha Jacoby)	144
Felix Wernheuer: Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union (Marcel Will)	145
Frank Käser (Hg.): Deutschland und das Große Kanto-Erdbeben von 1923 (Albrecht Rothacher)	147
Paul Morris et al. (Hgg.): Imagining Japan in Post-war East Asia. Identity Politics, Schooling and Popular Culture (Torsten Weber)	149
Sven Saaler: Japanisch-deutsche Wissenschaftsbeziehungen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (Matthias Hennings)	151

NEUERE LITERATUR

151

AUTORINNEN UND AUTOREN DIESER AUSGABE

158

SONDERTEIL

Tätigkeitsbericht der Geschäftsführung, 2013–2015	I
Protokoll der ordentlichen Mitgliederversammlung der DGA	XII
Satzung der DGA (Neufassung Mai 2015)	XV

Refereed article

The role of civil society in the creation of India's new state of Telangana

Lorenz Graitl

Summary

The creation of India's 29th state on June 2, 2014, realized a 58-year-old demand for the division of the state of Andhra Pradesh due to internal economic inequalities. The center's decision to create a new federal unit was preceded by massive protests that had been going on since 2009. These mobilizations were organized by various social movements as well as parties like the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) who now forms the government of the state. Apart from their success in the institutional field of politics, the protests for Telangana, in which large parts of the population were involved and through which many social movement organizations were founded, led also to the creation of a new civil society. Uniting in the name of a neglected region, this civil society often provided a space in which traditionally marginalized groups could raise their voices and articulate their particular interests. Thus this civil society promoted a process for democratization outside the parliamentary system in that it provided an alternative sphere for participation.

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Keywords: Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, social movements, democratization, framing processes

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Introduction

Since 2009, the political landscape in Andhra Pradesh has been in constant turmoil. The region saw massive demonstrations, sit-ins and other forms of protests, including a 42-day general strike. The main reason for this was the collective grievance in the Telangana region, which felt that it was economically and politically subjugated by the Seemandhra¹ region — the other part of the state. The Telangana Movement, consisting of various social movement organizations and parties, fought against the unequal distribution of water and employment. This inequality was explained by the influence of high caste groups from Seemandhra who largely dominated the state and the economy. From the Telangana Movement's point of view the only solution to overcome what was seen as an internal colonization was the establishment of its own state. A separate Telangana, it was hoped, would lead to structures of administration that were more participatory, democratic and equitable in the distribution of resources and revenues, which in turn would lead to general economic prosperity. The new government of the recently formed state of Telangana is now faced with the challenge to at least partially fulfill the hopes and dreams associated with regional independence.

The present article seeks to outline the role that civil society has played in the struggle over state creation. Although the decision to establish Telangana by the Indian government was most likely motivated by electoral politics and there was no regional referendum, it can be claimed that the Telangana Movement acted as an effective pressure group with a clear agenda. Without the continuous efforts and agitations of the movement, which created almost daily public disputes over the unresolved Telangana question, the division of Andhra Pradesh would never have happened. However, the influence of the Telangana movement goes beyond achieving statehood as it also contributed to a low level form of democratization in the region. Firstly, it provided possibilities for democratic participation outside the institutional field of parliamentary politics through its own grassroots structure. Secondly, the ongoing public dispute over the detachment of Telangana led to considerable changes in the media landscape, which established itself as a “vernacular public arena” (Neyazi et al. 2014). Thus, previously muted voices could make themselves heard in public. However, this process of democratization has had its limits as the Telangana movement — in some cases — led to new exclusions and rifts.

Theoretical Concepts

For a long time the leading paradigms in the field of democracy research did not attribute any significance to mass mobilizations and they explained democratic transition mainly with macro level influences such as changes in the economic

¹ Seemandhra comprises the two regions Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema.

system. In contrast, social movement theory not only focused on how democratization benefits collective protests but also asked the question of whether social movements can themselves promote or initiate democratization (Della Porta 2014). Under certain conditions, social movements have indeed contributed to the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracies. The concept of democratization is not limited to these transitional changes and many scholars — as well as activists — use a much broader conception of the term. Della Porta argues that democracy and democratization go beyond the institutional frameworks in the liberal conception of parliamentary democracy. Proponents of a “participatory democracy” criticize liberal democracies, claiming that they are based on merely formal equalities, mostly delegate decision making to an elite and are highly bureaucratized, with little involvement from citizens apart from elections (Della Porta 2014: 37–38). The Republic of India would be one example. Even though India is a long-established democracy where relatively free and fair elections — with the exception of the state of emergency established under Indira Gandhi’s rule between 1975 and 1977 — have been held since Independence, social and economic inequalities prevent some sectors of society from enjoying the benefits of citizenship that is formally granted to all (Sahoo 2013: 19–21). In Andhra Pradesh in particular, the political landscape and the Legislative Assembly have been dominated by two castes, *Reddys* and *Kammas*, which hail mostly from *Seemandhra* (Vaughter-Chatterjee 2009). Among the Members of Legislative Assembly, *Other Backward Classes* (OBC), *Dalits* and *Adivasis* have been severely underrepresented.

Examples like this are the reason why proponents of the “participatory democracy” model seek to go beyond what they see as the confines of delegations in liberal democracy, which are seen as hierarchical, centralized and often oligarchic, and instead try to implement modes of direct participation under egalitarian and horizontal conditions (Della Porta and Diani 2009: 240). While most social movements promote democracy, their success is relatively rare, often limited and also very difficult to measure. There are, however, many well-documented examples where movements effectively pursue a strategy of agenda setting which has resulted in policy change. In some cases, states have created counselling bodies for non-governmental actors or created models where citizens on local levels can directly influence political decisions, such as budget control (Della Porta and Diani 2009: 229–232). In many other cases, the influence of social movements on democratization is more subtle and indirect. Political activism can result in the creation of a public space that is distinct from government institutions but is still capable of influencing public affairs (Della Porta and Diani 2009: 246). This public space is filled by the “civil society.” The United Nations defines this as

a complex social arena, with individuals and groups organized in various forms of associations and networks in order to express their views and fulfil their interests. They could constitute anything from a global advocacy movement down to a village self-help group. (UNRISD 2003)

The nature of India’s civil society after the economic liberalization of 1991 is described as a “vernacular public arena” by Neyazi et al. (2014). As opposed to the times of the “Nehruvian state” when the national public was largely occupied by an English-speaking elite, the “vernacular publics” enable diverse social groups, including *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, religious minorities, women, the poor and the new middle classes, to participate in the political life. This means that also the “subalterns” who could not speak (Spivak 1988) are now able to take part in this “expanding space of sociopolitical negotiation and interaction” (Neyazi et al. 2014: 1–3). Vernacularization, a growing influence of the discourse, style and habits of the common people or the multitudes leads to a reassembly and redefinition of the public (Neyazi et al. 2014: 1–2). As a consequence of these diversification processes, the public arena is increasingly democratized (Neyazi 2014: 78). Due to its role in the political system, which is not restricted to providing information for citizens but also to serve as a space for the articulation of interests and interventions, the transformation of the public sphere coincides with a trend of expanding and deepening of democracy in general (Neyazi et al. 2014: 3; Neyazi 2014: 78).

A further democratization in India would mean establishing more inclusive structures that would secure the rights of economically marginalized groups and enable them to become more involved in the political process (Sahoo 2013: 19–21). Sahoo (2013: 21) thus defines democratization as a:

Political process where people are: (1) encouraged to actively participate in promoting ideals of democracy such as equality, pluralism, representation and participation; (2) mobilized to redress the oppressive social structure and imbalance of power relationship; (3) claim freedom and welfare rights from the state; and (4) demanding accountability and questioning the legitimacy of the state where necessary.

With the vernacular public arena voicing resonant public opinions which can intervene in political processes, this is no longer the sole privilege of the middle class. How public opinions constitute themselves is addressed by the frame theory by Benford and Snow (2000). They argue that the reasons for how and when social movements mobilize cannot be explained by external factors like available resources or political opportunity structures alone. Benford and Snow’s constructivist view stresses how people perceive their political environment and how they are engaged in active practices to make sense of it. A frame is a certain lens through which one views the world. As frames are not merely personal perspectives, they constitute themselves through the collective negotiation over meaning. According to Benford and Snow (2000), every social movement has to engage in three basic framing processes. The first is diagnostic framing which serves to identify and to define a political problem and its causes. Farmers in third world countries who suffer from poverty and starvation can explain their situation in many different ways. In this example, the farmers could attribute their situation to unfavorable environmental

conditions or to the negative effects of neo-liberal globalization. There not only has to be a problem; it must also be actively identified. The following step is prognostic framing which outlines possible solutions for eliminating or mitigating the identified problem. To successfully fulfill this task, plausible and feasible courses of action have to be offered. Finally, the motivational frame encourages people to actually get involved and become active for the cause that is articulated. This can be achieved by stressing the particular urgency of the problem, presenting a historical situation in which change is possible or through emotional appeal. Under certain conditions, frames can function as master frames that have a particular resonance. This happens when several different problems in a society can be situated within a larger explanatory model. If that is successful, mobilization is not limited to a particular interest group, but can encompass a larger coalition of social movements and other political actors.

This article has the following outline. It begins with an analysis of the historical reasons that gave rise to the demand for the separation from the 1950s. After which, the revitalization of the movement after 2009 and the three dimensions of the movement — economic, political and cultural — will be explained. The next part focuses on the question of how the mass-mobilizations were made possible through the construction of a master frame that could be used by various groups to connect their particular interests with the larger demand for regional independence. This is followed by a description of the competing visions of what the realization of “Telangana” means for different factions of the movement. The final part will attempt to elaborate how the case of Telangana can contribute to the general discussion of the relationship between social movement activism and democratization.

Historical Background

The modern dispute over Telangana began when the two Telugu-speaking regions Telangana and Seemandhra were merged in 1956. Until then they had been politically separated for several centuries. During colonial times, Seemandhra was part of the Madras Constituency, which was one of the territorial subdivisions under direct British rule. Telangana, however, belonged to the Hyderabad State which was governed by the Muslim *Nizam*. Like the other Indian princely states, Hyderabad was only indirectly ruled by the British. From 1946 until 1951 there was a peasant uprising directed against landlords and the *Nizam* under the leadership of the Communist Party. This is known as the Telangana Rebellion and is often seen as a predecessor of the Telangana Movement. After the end of the British Raj in 1947, the *Nizam* refused to join the Indian Union and wanted to establish Hyderabad as an independent country. However, Hyderabad was forcefully annexed by India in what became known as “Operation Polo”. In Indian historiography this is regarded as an

internal “police action”, however it can also be considered as a war between two countries.

The conflict between the regions Telangana and Seemandhra started even before both were merged to form Andhra Pradesh in 1956. In Telangana the medium for instruction in schools and the language for administration was Urdu. The general level of education and literacy was low compared to other parts of India.² People were mostly following caste-based occupations. By contrast, in Seemandhra a large part of the population was English-educated. Because the capitalist mode of production was more advanced, people possessed entrepreneurial skills and were also well versed in setting up businesses. Thus economic mobility was higher and it partially transcended the traditional lines drawn by caste. After the Hyderabad State was annexed to the Indian Union there was a high influx of migrants from Seemandhra. Due to their English education, those migrants were soon overrepresented in the public employment sector which included positions like civil servants and teachers. In Telangana this was seen as a violation of the Mulki Rules that were decreed in the Hyderabad State in 1920 that stated only locals should be considered for the state service (Haragopal 2010). This triggered the Non-Mulki Movement in 1952 during which six student protesters were fatally shot by the police (Reddy 1999: 61). During the same time, Seemandhra itself was a place of large scale agitations. In the first years of the postcolonial era, the region remained part of the Tamil majority Madras State. Telugu speakers felt disadvantaged with regard to public employment and political participation. Potti Sriramulu, a follower of Gandhi, started a fast-unto-death protest demanding a separate state for Telugu speakers in Madras. Only after his death from 56 days of fasting on December 12, 1952 and the (violent) protests triggered by the outrage over his demise, did the Indian government concede. (Mitchell 2009: 189–212; Lahiri 2014: 40–60).

As a result, the new state of Andhra — encompassing the Seemandhra Region — was founded on October 1, 1953. India's first linguistic state lacked a capital city with a developed infrastructure and the region was also poor in natural resources. This was an important reason for the desire to unite the Telugu population in one state. Telangana had a developed capital city in Hyderabad and also possessed large coal deposits. At that time the Communist Party also championed the cause of Vishalandhra (“Greater Andhra”) through the idea of uniting all Telugus. This lobby from the Andhra Region coincided with the desire of the Indian government to reorganize its states along the lines of language. By establishing homogenous units it hoped to prevent regional conflicts in the future and to stabilize the federal structure. Thus Seemandhra and Telangana were merged to form Andhra Pradesh in the context of the States Reorganization Act of 1956. Because relevant parts of Telangana's population were opposed to this merger from the beginning, leaders of both regions signed a Gentlemen's Agreement that was meant to safeguard the

2 See the numbers of the Indian Census of 1931 documented in Benichou (2000: 264).

interests of Telangana. Among other things the Gentlemen's Agreement included the continuation of the Mulki Rules and also sought to share political power through fair distribution of posts (documented in Reddy and Sharma 1979: 322–324). The neglect of this agreement and the rising exclusion of Telangana's population from wealth and employment lead to the first Telangana Movement in 1969. Its participants were mostly students and employees who feared that their places in university admission and in public employment would be taken away by people from Seemandhra. The mass demonstrations were violently suppressed by the police leading to the deaths of 369 students (Raju 2013: 195). In 1969 this movement was institutionalized through the formation of Telangana Praja Samithi (Telangana People's Association). Even though this party enjoyed success during the 1971 general elections, winning 11 out of the region's 14 Lok Sabha seats, it was short lived. The party was coopted into the Congress Party later that year through renewed assurances to safeguard Telangana's interests and with the offer of political positions for some of the party's leaders (Gray 1974: 338).

Due to this cooptation and the violent repression, many students were disappointed with the failure of institutional politics and joined the Naxalite guerillas. In their view, armed struggle was now the only remaining option to realize Telangana (Interview with Kodandaram, Hyderabad, September 12, 2014). Despite the fact that the collective grievances in Telangana remained, the failure to resolve the conflict by means of institutional politics lead to the near disappearance of public agitations for a separate state in the following decades.

Rise of the Second Telangana Movement and its Three Dimensions

The Telangana movement consists of three dimensions, cultural, economic and political,³ which frequently overlap each other.

The merger with Seemandhra was not only perceived as economic exploitation but also as cultural imperialism that suppressed Telangana's unique culture and identity. Newspapers, television and cinema were mostly controlled by the *Kamma* and *Reddy* castes from Seemandhra (Srinivasulu 2003: 13; Benbabaali 2013; Shaw 2014). The dialect from Coastal Andhra was established as the standard Telugu language. Speaking in Telangana dialect was associated with "backwardness" and lack of education (Gray 1971: 464). In Telugu movies the Telangana dialect was used only for the roles of villains or jokesters (Srinivas 2008: 90–91). As a reaction to these tendencies a movement for self-respect and for a cultural renaissance formed itself in the 1990s, primarily initiated by middle class groups like the Telangana Intellectuals Forum. Many writers dealt with Telangana's problems in novels, poems and short stories using only the regional dialect. In addition, many

folk artists used song and theatre to educate the rural population about the larger political factors behind problems they were facing. These events were later called Telangana *Dhoom Dhams*. They attracted large crowds and distributed programs in the forms of CDs and MP3s. The celebration of region-specific festivals was essential for creating a community of shared suffering. Hindu festivals like Bonalu and Bathukamma,⁴ and the Muslim Moharram, were revitalized and politicized. Participating in them was often an act of protest against the perceived cultural and political suppression in the area. The efforts of the cultural movement raised political awareness and its "identity work" (Herkenrath 2011: 56) led to a consolidation of the regional sense of solidarity.

Perhaps the most important factor for the "development of underdevelopment" in Telangana (Kannabiran et al. 2010: 70) was how water was distributed in united Andhra Pradesh. Although two major rivers — Krishna and Godavari — flowed mostly in Telangana, the water share largely benefited Seemandhra. The latter had a well-developed canal system which was lacking in Telangana. In addition, the existing tanks (water reservoirs) in Telangana were neglected by the government after 1956 (Kodandaram 2007; Pingle 2011). As a result Telangana farmers often depended on bore wells for irrigation, which were very expensive to build in the first place and also required electricity (Raghava Reddy, Hyderabad, August 13, 2014). Under these conditions and especially in times of drought, farmers were often not able to produce crops, which led to extreme poverty and also to many cases of suicide (Sridhar 2006). Other sectors of society in Telangana had faced similar inequalities since the 1950s. Large parts of the land in Telangana were bought up by wealthy people from Coastal Andhra. The Telangana population often could not compete with the "settlers" who were better educated and could rely on established networks. Locals were underprivileged in their access to higher education and employment opportunities.

Similarly, for several decades many people in the Telangana region did not feel that they were adequately represented in the political system. When the power sharing proposals in the Gentlemen's Agreement were never realized and the TPS ended after two years, disappointment with the political process became widespread. The regional government was seen as controlled by outsiders who impeded any participatory possibilities of the locals with regards to the resources and the revenue of the area. In 2001 the wish to be politically represented led to the foundation of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) whose main agenda was to achieve statehood for the region. As a small party, the TRS sought to establish Telangana through electoral alliances with bigger parties who made promises in this direction. Thus it aligned with the Congress Party in 2004 (who won the Assembly elections) and with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 2009, which was not elected in the regional government. In both cases, it is believed that these parties did not make any sincere

3 Interview with N. Venugopal, Hyderabad, August 11, 2014.

4 See Bhriugabanda (2011) for a detailed description of Bonalu as a political event.

effort to divide Andhra Pradesh and that support for Telangana was only meant to secure electoral majorities (Tillin 2011: 37). In 2013, one year before the Lok Sabha Elections, the Congress government decided to accept the demands for Telangana. Subsequently, the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Bill was passed in both houses of the Indian Parliament with the support of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Before the Telangana State was officially created on June 2, 2014, elections were held for the new assembly. Even though Congress expected gains through the state creation, it was actually the TRS who emerged as the winner in the election. After successfully competing without a coalition partner and achieving an absolute majority of seats, the TRS now forms the government of Telangana with K. Chandrababhai Rao (KCR) as Chief Minister.

Telangana as a Master Frame and Space for Participation

Even though there was no referendum in the region, the great success of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi in the assembly elections for the new state can be seen as evidence of the huge support that the demand for separation from Andhra Pradesh had.

In Telangana certain sections of the civil society had been active since the 1990s. It reached a critical mass again after the eleven day indefinite hunger strike of the TRS leader KCR in November 2009. When he was arrested by the police and the media reported that his death would be imminent, agitations and protests erupted in the entire region. This, however, was not just a spontaneous outburst of mass agitations but also the result of framing processes (Benford and Snow 2000) that had been initiated by the new Telangana movement in the 1990s. A diagnostic frame — identifying the causes of economic and political problems of Telangana — as well as a prognostic frame — presenting separation from Andhra Pradesh as the only solution — had already well been established by the conscious efforts of the Telangana Movement, which sought to educate the general population on these topics. What changed significantly was the motivational frame. As reaction to KCR's fast, the Indian Home Minister Chidambaram publically announced that "[t]he process of forming the state of Telangana will be initiated" (Siasat 2009). Even though the Indian government backed out of this promise only two days later, Chidambaram's statement nevertheless was perceived as a signal that the government could be influenced in this regard and that Telangana might be created if enough pressure were exercised. The wish to get active and to coordinate existing protests more effectively lead to the creation of Telangana Joint Action Committees (T-JACs) in many places of the region in late 2009. These local initiatives formed a JAC at the state level soon after with many branches at the district, mandal⁵ and village levels,⁶ whereas the membership of organizations on each level can be quite

⁵ The name for a sub-district in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

⁶ Following the administrative divisions of India.

different. Under the umbrella of the JAC, various political parties — mainly TRS, BJP and CPI (ML) New Democracy — and several existing social movement organizations came together. Initially, Congress and TDP were also taking part in the JACs. After their elected Assembly members did not want to resign from their seats in protest, Congress left on its own initiative and the TDP was expelled. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was not part of the JAC but supported its activities (Kodandaram, Hyderabad, September 12, 2014). Several occupational groups like teachers, lawyers and electricity employees also formed their own JACs. On the village level the JAC was often comprised of a caste organization. Conflicts on the local level could be avoided by founding another JAC in the same place due to the grass roots nature of the non-party Telangana movement (Achyuta Suneetha, Hyderabad, August 20, 2014). In rural areas farmers, cattle rearers and washermen and women who had to deal with immediate livelihood problems attributed this to the unequal distribution of water which was caused by the domination from Seemandhra. Similarly, the urban middle class, who felt excluded in the access to university places and government jobs, saw separation as the only solution. All these different groups with their particular interests could connect those with the general idea of an independent Telangana through the main demands of "Nijlu, Nidhulu, Niyamakulu" (water, funds, jobs). Individual and local struggles to maintain one's livelihood or for better employment became synonymous with the general demand for "Telangana" (Kodandaram, Hyderabad September 12, 2014). As a consequence, the common cause "Telangana" could serve as a "master frame" (Benford and Snow 2000) that was used by a large variety of parties and social movements to describe and explain the overall political situation. Meeting the criteria of inclusiveness and flexibility postulated by Benford and Snow (2000), the vision of a new state could often successfully surpass the lines of caste, class and partially also religion. Bernstorff's (1973: 969) assessment of the first Telangana Movement can also be used to characterize the latest cycle of protest:

Whatever one may think about Telangana separatism, this regional movement helped for a short while to overcome caste conflict and focused loyalties across caste boundaries.

One reason why the idea of self-rule in Telangana could accommodate so many particularities was a partial decline of the Naxalite movement from the 1990s on (Kodandaram, September 12, 2014). Even though the Maoist guerrillas also championed the cause of Telangana, they sought to mobilize people using "class struggle" as the main frame (G. Krishna Reddy, September 10, 2014). The feeling of not being sufficiently represented in this framework led to disappointment of groups like *Adhivasis* — the indigenous population of India — and *Dalits* — formerly known as "Untouchables" — who formed their own identity based movements. In addition, people did not want to suffer the continuous violence that arose between the guerrilla fighters and police (Kodandaram, September 12, 2014).

The state level JAC was confronted with the task of coordinating successful agitations at the various levels and of including the various membership organizations. At the same time, it did not want to establish a formalized hierarchy and sought to integrate bottom-up decisions. Therefore, in many cases the state JAC decided which form of protest would be used, for example a *bandh* (general strike). The local organizational units could then decide to follow this call and could decide how to implement and organize the particular activity. Finances for the protests would also be raised locally in most cases (Kodandaram, September 12, 2014). In this way, the JAC could organize simultaneous agitations in various districts of the state and also several central mass agitations in Hyderabad such as the Million March on March 10, 2011. One of the largest efforts in mobilization was the Sakala Janula Samme — a general strike that was observed in the entire region and lasted for 42 days. Large parts of the employees in Telangana participated in the strike and as a result offices, schools and public transportation came to a standstill. The strike was also accompanied by a huge number of demonstrations as well as rasta and rail rokos (blocking of roads and railways). After the government of Andhra Pradesh promised to fulfill some demands of the agitating employees — removal of court cases against participants and the payment of one salary in advance — the strike was called off on October 24, 2011 (The Hindu 2011). The duration and high level of mobilization demonstrated the determination of the movement and also served as a threat showing that it could severely impact the economy and political stability in the future should it wish to do that. In an apparent move to accommodate the movement's demands, the Indian government finally advanced the creation of a new territorial unit and passed a corresponding bill in both parliaments which also had the support of the oppositional BJP. As a result, Telangana officially became India's 29th state on June 2, 2014. Before Telangana came into existence, Assembly elections were held on April 30, 2014. Even though the then ruling Congress implemented the creation of the state, the party was only moderately successful in the elections. Because voters saw it as one of the driving forces in the Telangana Movement, the TRS party, whose members had demonstrated in the streets for years, could secure the absolute majority of seats and now forms the regional government (The Times of India 2014). On the eve of the Assembly election there was a phase when the Telangana movement further institutionalized itself as several JAC leaders joined the TRS party (Tupaki 2014) and traded their roles as challengers of the political system for that of a representative of authority.

“Telangana”: What Does it Mean?

Even though the huge success of the TRS in the Assembly elections is proof of the strength of the collective identity in Telangana, there are also fissures in “Telangana” as a master frame where bridging frames cannot always be sustained. Some of these internal disputes already appeared during the phase of the agitations between 2009 and 2014, whereas new discrepancies have also arisen since the

realization of Telangana because it remains unclear whether regional independence can actually fulfill all the demands and aspirations that were voiced by the movement.

The agitations for Telangana after 2009 also saw a large participation of the Muslim community and different organizations like the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, the Muslim Forum for Telangana, the Telangana Muslim Writers' Forum and several others that were active for the cause of separation from Seemandhra. This integrative feature of the Telangana identity was undermined by the growing influence of the Hindu nationalist BJP. The Assembly by-election in the Mahbubnagar constituency in 2011 was most fraught with consequences. When a Hindu candidate from the BJP competed over the seat with a Muslim candidate from the TRS, the BJP tried to mobilize the voters along the line of religion. This was successful and the BJP candidate managed to win by a small margin (Gudavarthy 2014). That in turn caused fear in the Muslim community that a separate Telangana could be one dominated by Hindu nationalists who would exclude religious minorities. Therefore organizations like the Muslim Forum for Telangana refused to work with the TJAC, which had remained neutral in the by-elections, and stressed that only a secular Telangana would be acceptable (Kaneez Fathima and Lateef Mohammed Khan, Hyderabad, September 9, 2014).

Disappointment was also voiced by some Adivasi activists. As proscribed by the Andhra Pradesh reorganization Act, seven mandals, encompassing 211 villages, were merged with Seemandhra after the division of the state (The Hindu 2014a). The majority of the inhabitants of these villages, who are mostly Adivasi, wanted to be part of Telangana and feel betrayed by the new regional government, which reluctantly agreed to the terms of the division as dictated by the central government (The Hindu 2014b).

Striving for rapid development and turning the state into a prosperous “Bangaru Telangana” (Golden Telangana) is the vision and promise of the TRS government. Emulating the success of the “Asian Tiger,” Singapore, which is often presented as a role model, this is sought to be achieved by attracting foreign investors to push the process of industrialization (Telangana Talkies 2014).

While the necessity for an independent state was never questioned inside the movement, there are frame disputes over the political character of the new Telangana after the separation from Andhra. Several civil society groups stress that a mere “geographic Telangana” is not what they have been struggling for; instead, the new state must provide control over all its natural resources (TBRS n.d.). In their view it is necessary to go beyond the removal of inequalities between Telangana and Seemandhra. Many problems in Telangana are also linked to negative effects of economic globalization. One is granite mining, which is mostly conducted by international companies. When granite is harvested it leads to the destruction of the many hillocks in the region. As a result natural water bodies dry out, and areas for

farming, foresting and fishing are destroyed, stripping rural populations of their livelihood (TBRs n.d.). In a similar way, groups like the Telangana Praja Front, an umbrella organization of several left-leaning outfits, stress that territorial restructuring must be followed by the establishment of “democratic Telangana” on the basis of the Indian constitution. Only then will people have power over the local resources and will civil liberties and rights be guaranteed (anonymous TPF activist, Hyderabad September 10, 2014). According to Gaddar, a veteran of the movement and one of the most famous folk singers in the region, the establishment of “democratic Telangana” is a necessary step, but in itself not sufficient to solve the region’s manifold problems. Those can only be eliminated through a “Revolutionary Telangana,” which would be the implementation of a socialist revolution (Interview with Gaddar, Hyderabad, August 19, 2014).

Conclusion

In order to address whether and how the Telangana movement after 2009 did lead to a low level form of democratization, I want to discuss the following dimensions: the causes of the movement, internal democracy and access to the movement, the establishment of a vernacular public sphere as one aspect of democratic transformation and the possible influence on political decision-making processes in the region.

The feeling of being denied basic democratic rights as well as a lacking influence in the control over regional natural resources and tax revenues for several decades was what sparked the new Telangana movement in the first place. Achieving statehood for Telangana and establishing “self-rule” for the region’s 35 Million inhabitants was framed as being synonymous with the struggle for more democracy. Movements promoting democratic values are of course challenged with the task of realizing internal democracy in regards to the general access to the movement and the decision making processes in its own structures. Often they fail to actually implement criteria such as transparency, inclusiveness and equality (Della Porta 2009). As opposed to other cases, the new civil society in Telangana is not restricted to an educated middle class or to urban areas alone. Branches of the JAC or other social movement organizations are also active in rural areas and among less educated and illiterate people. In this regard the new Telangana movement is different from the one between 1969 and 1971 where mostly students and employees were the ones who actively participated (Bernstorff 1971: 279–280). Theories of participatory democracy stress that liberal democracy is extended when citizens are provided with courses of action beyond elections (Della Porta 2009: 265). For more than four years the Telangana movement provided ample opportunities for various sections of society to be active in the pursuit of their demands. The political pressure that was exerted was consequential as the Indian government fulfilled the wish for statehood. Civil society activism of the Telangana movement can also be seen as an

extension of democracy as there were no restrictions for general public access, whereas the field of institutional politics is mostly dominated by high caste men even after state creation. While only nine out of 119 members of Telangana’s Legislative Assembly are women, the various activist groups had a significant number of women in leading functions (Achyuta Suneetha, Hyderabad, August 20, 2014). Implementing diversity, equal participation and inclusiveness, another important aspect of participatory democracy (Della Porta 2009: 268), could be realized because the “master frame” of Telangana gave disadvantaged groups the possibility to articulate their specific interests.

Thus, Telangana was influential in the sense that it established “spaces for talking” (Della Porta 2009: 265) outside parliamentary institutions, which lead to a democratization of the public sphere (Gundimeda 2009). After the decline of the first Telangana movement in 1971, voices demanding justice for the region were still active but they had limited means to make themselves heard and were rarely featured in the regional news media. With the cultural movement in the 1990s and the organization of events in rural and urban areas, new spaces for political debate were provided. Especially from the early 2000s, new media, like cell phones and the internet, served as an important counter public sphere where alternative views and information could be presented. With the eruption of the mass protests in 2009 rallies in demand for Telangana would be conducted in the streets on a regular basis and the question whether Andhra Pradesh should be divided would be constantly debated in daily life as well as in the media. At the beginning of the agitations, the majority of the regional Telugu news media — mostly linked to high caste groups from Seemandra who vehemently oppose the bifurcation of the state — would present the movement in a rather unfavorable light. At that time the vernacular public sphere was not fully developed yet, as relevant parts of the population did often not have the adequate means to disseminate their views and make their voices heard. From 2011, however, a new daily Telugu newspaper and two new TV channels were launched, advocating an explicit pro-Telangana stand and using the Telangana dialect (Shaw 2014).⁷ Through this diversification and multiplication of publics (Neyazi et al. 2014: 12) a vernacular public arena could be fully established like in other parts of India. The creation of new vernacular publics is one major result of the protests of the new Telangana movement. Telangana’s civil society served as a discursive sphere from which the many problems relating to the regional inequalities in Andhra Pradesh could be perpetually articulated.

This serves as an important extension and deepening of democracy (Neyazi 2014) as new spaces outside the field of institutional politics were established from which it was possible to comment and critique the political process in the region. In addition the civil society was already able to exert real influence as the Indian government

7 The channel HMTV, which has a similar political orientation, was already founded in 2009 (Shaw 2014: 149).

granted the wish for statehood and in that the large majority of voters elected a regionalist party that promised to address Telangana's manifold problems.

The creation of Telangana, now ruled by the TRS party, will very likely make a change and accommodate many of the interests and concerns of the general population. Among the many plans of the new regional government is an attenuation of the water crisis by restoring 45,300 minor irrigation tanks (Mission Telangana 2014a), providing safe drinking water to all households, enhancing the salary of Telangana government employees and the celebration of *Bonalu* and *Bathukamma* as official festivals (Mission Telangana 2014b). Whether civil society will slowly dissolve or if it can continue to be an agent capable of influencing the political process remains to be seen.

After state creation and the end of mass mobilizations, many social movement organizations like the JACs are still active. However, they now struggle with the question of how to redefine their role under the new political circumstances. For Kodandaram, the JAC-convenor, the Telangana Movement has engendered certain democratic values through the active involvement of oppressed communities:

That democratic culture and that polity must also be preserved. [...] we've also realized that people must be taught what opportunities are available. So that they can negotiate with the government in a better way. So empowering people. [...] people are slowly realizing [the] time has come [to] chalk out our own political course of action independent of this government and political process. Of course this activity does not entail a confrontation with the government. We believe that this involves democratization of the civil society. Expansion of the civil society. And that is what we believe is the responsibility of the civil society (Interview September 12, 2014, Hyderabad).

Whether this will be successful or whether minor displeasures about the non-realization of the movement's demands, which were already voiced in the first months after separation, will trigger a new protest cycle is uncertain at present. In any case, the question whether Telangana's civil society might sustain or even deepen the possibilities of participatory decision-making can be answered by a general observation from Markoff:

Democratization does not bring societies to a terminal point of political development; it merely opens the way for further conflicts and new, but always provisional, resolutions (Markoff 1996: 118).

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