REDRAWING THE MAP

> Some want to revive the tradition of Shivaji and to hoist the Bhagwa Jhanda in Samyukta Maharashtra; others wish to extend the economic empire of the Bombay and Ahmedabad millionaires all over Maha-Gujarat.Provincial prejudices, rivalries and jealousies are being revived on all sides and everyone seems anxious to separate from, rather than unite with, the others. The Assamese want this bit of land cut off from Bengal, the Bengalis want a slice of Bihar, the Telugus are discontented in Orissa, the Tamilian minority wants to cut itself off from Travancore . . .
>
> K. A. ABBAS, left-wing writer, January 1951

I

THE LEADING INDIAN NATIONALISTS had long been sensible of the power of the mother tongue to rouse and move. This was a land of many languages, each with its distinct script, grammar, vocabulary and literary traditions. Rather than deny this diversity, the Congress sought to give space to it. As early as 1917 the party had committed itself to the creation of linguistic provinces in a free India. A separate Andhra circle was formed in that year, a separate Sindh circle the following year. After the Nagpur Congress of 1920, the principle was extended and formalized with the creation of provincial Congress committees (PCCs) by linguistic zones: the Karnataka Pradesh PCC, the Orissa PCC, the Maharashtra PCC, etc. Notably these did not follow, and were often at odds with, the administrative divisions of British India.

The linguistic reorganization of the Congress was encouraged and supported by Mahatma Gandhi. When Independence finally came Gandhi thought that the states of the new nation should be defined on the basis of language. Shortly afterwards, on 10 October 1947, he wrote to a colleague: 'I do believe that we should hurry up with the reorganization of linguistic provinces' . . . There may be an illusion for the time being that different languages stand for different cultures, but there is also the possibility[that with the creation] of linguistic provinces it may disappear. I shall write something [about it] if I get the time' . . . I am not unaware that a class of people have been saying that linguistic provinces are wrong. In my opinion, this class delights in creating obstacles.[1]

Jawaharlal Nehru was also appreciative of the linguistic diversity of India. In an essay of 1937, he wrote that 'a living language is a throbbing, vital thing, ever changing, ever growing and mirroring the people who speak and write it'. And 'our great provincial languages are no dialects or vernaculars, as the ignorant sometimes call them. They are ancient languages with a rich inheritance, each spoken by many millions of people, each tied up inextricably with the life and culture and ideas of the masses as well as the upper classes. It is axiomatic that the masses can only grow educationally and culturally through the medium of their own language.'[2]

That was Nehru's view in 1937, but by 1947 he was having other thoughts. The country had just been divided on the basis of religion: would not dividing it further on the basis of language merely encourage the break-up of the Union? Why not keep intact the existing administrative units, such as

Madras, which had within it communities of Tamil, Mala-yalam, Telugu, Kannada, Urdu and Konkani speakers, and Bombay, whose peoples spoke Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu, Sindhi, Gondi and other tongues? Would not such multilingual and multicultural states provide an exemplary training in harmonious living? In any case, should not the new nation unite on the secular ideals of peace, stability and economic development, rather than revive primordial identities of caste and language?

Nehru gave voice to these reservations in a speech to the Constituent Assembly three months after Independence. While the Congress had once promised linguistic provinces, he said, the country now faced 'a very critical situation resulting from partition'. Now 'disruptionist tendencies had come to the fore'; to check them, one had to underline 'the security and stability of India . . . The first essential therefore is for India as a whole to be strong and firmly established, confident in her capacity to meet all possible dangers and face and meet all problems. If India lives, all parts of India also live and prosper. If India is enfeebled, all her component elements grow weak.'[3]

The creation of linguistic provinces, then, had to be deferred until such time as India was strong and sure of herself. Nehru seems to have persuaded even Gandhi of this, for in November 1947 the Mahatma was writing that 'the reluctance to enforce linguistic redistribution is perhaps justifiable in the present depressing atmosphere. The exclusive spirit is ever uppermost. No one thinks of the whole of India.' Gandhi now thought that the reorganization of provinces should be postponed until a calmer time, when communal strife had died out and been replaced by 'a healthy atmosphere, promoting concord in the place of discord, peace in the place of strife, progress in the place of retrogression and life in the place of death.'[4]

As ever, Gandhi extolled the need to take 'one step at a time'. But the principle itself he would not surrender. In a prayer meeting held on 25 January 1948 Gandhi returned to the subject of linguistic states. 'The Congress had decided some twenty years ago', he recalled, 'that there should be as many provinces in the country as there are major languages.' Now it was in power, and in a position to execute that promise. Gandhi thought that if new provinces were formed on the basis of language, and if

> they are all placed under the authority of Delhi there is no harm at all. But it will be very bad if they all want to be free and refuse to accept central authority. It should not be that Bombay then will have nothing to do with Maharashtra and Maharashtra with Karnataka and Karnataka with Andhra. Let all live as brothers. Moreover if linguistic provinces are formed it will also give a fillip to the regional languages. It would be absurd to make Hindusthani the medium of instruction in all the regions and it is still more absurd to use English for this purpose.[5]

Within a week Gandhi was dead. And the men in power had other, and more urgent, matters to attend to. Millions of refugees from East and West Pakistan had to be found homes and gainful employment. An undeclared war was taking place in Kashmir. A new constitution had to be decided upon. Elections had to be scheduled, economic policies framed and executed. For now, and perhaps indefinitely, the creation of new provinces had to wait.

Nehru's reluctance to superimpose divisions of language on the recent division by religion had the support of both Vallabhbhai Patel and C. Rajagopalachari. The latter insisted that 'further fissiparous forces' had to be checked forthwith.[6] And Patel worked hard within the Constituent Assembly to reverse the official Congress position. Under his direction, the Assembly appointed a committee of jurists and civil servants to report on the question. This recognized the force of popular sentiment – the 'strong appeal' that the demand for linguistic sentiments made on 'many of our

countrymen' – but concluded that in the prevailing unsettled conditions 'the first and last need of India at the present moment is that it should be made a nation . . . Everything which helps the growth of nationalism has to go forward and everything which throws obstacles in its way has to be rejected or should stand over. We have applied this test to linguistic provinces also, and judged by this test, in our opinion [they] cannot be supported.'[7]

This verdict caused dismay among large sections of the Assembly. For most Congress members who spoke Marathi insisted on a separate Maharashtra state. Party members who claimed Gujarati as a mother tongue likewise wanted a province of their own. Similar were the aspirations of Congress members who spoke Telugu, Kannada, Malaya-lam or Oriya. To calm the clamour, a fresh committee was appointed. Both Nehru and Patel served on it; the third member was the party historian and former Congress President, Pattabhi Sitaramayya.

This committee, known as the 'JVP Committee' after the initials of its members, revoked the seal of approval that the Congress had once put on the principle of linguistic provinces. It argued that 'language was not only a binding force but also a separating one'. Now, when the 'primary consideration must be the security, unity and economic prosperity of India', 'every separatist and disruptive tendency should be rigorously discouraged'.

II

To quote one authority, Robert King, the JVP Committee report was a 'cold-water therapy'. It 'slowed things for a while'.[8] But the fires soon started up again. In 1948 and 1949 there was a renewal of movements aimed at linguistic autonomy. There was the campaign for Samyukta (Greater) Karnataka, aiming to unite Kannada speakers spread across the states of Madras, Mysore, Bombay and Hyderabad. Complementing this was the struggle for Samyukta Maharashtra, which sought to bring together Marathi speakers in a single political unit. The Malayalis wanted a state of their own, based on the merger of the princely states of Cochin and Travancore with Malabar. There was also a Mahagujarat movement.

In a class of its own was the struggle for a Sikh state in the Punjab. This brought together claims of language as well as religion. The Sikhs had been perhaps the main sufferers of Partition. They had lost their most productive lands to Pakistan. Now, in what remained of India, they had to share space and influence with the Hindus.

Circa 1950 the Hindus comprised roughly 62 per cent of the population of the Indian Punjab, with Sikhs being about 35 per cent. However, these figures marked a major regional divide. The eastern half of the province was a chiefly Hindi-speaking region, with Hindus comprising about 88 per cent of the population. The western half was a Punjabi-speaking region, with Sikhs constituting a little over half the population.

The division by religion did not perfectly map division by language. Where all Sikhs had Punjabi as their first language, so did many Hindus. However, the Hindus were prone to view Punjabi as merely a local dialect of Hindi, whereas the Sikhs insisted it was not just a language in its own right, but also a holy one. The Sikhs wrote and read Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script, whose alphabet they believed to have come from the mouth of the Guru.[9]

Since the 1920s the interests of the politically conscious Sikhs had been represented by the Akali Dal. This was both a religious body and a political party. It controlled the Sikh shrines, or *gurdwaras*, but also contested elections. The long-time leader of the Akali Dal was a man named

Master Tara Singh, an important, intriguing figure, who (like so many such figures in Indian history) has yet to find his biographer.

Tara Singh was born in June 1885, as a Hindu. This fact should not unduly surprise us since the first-generation convert is often the most effective – not to say fundamentalist – of religious leaders. He studied at the Khalsa College in Amritsar, excelling in studies and also on the football field, where his steadfastness as a defender earned him the sobriquet 'Patthar', the rock. Rather than join the colonial government, he became headmaster of a Sikh school in Lyallpur, acquiring the title of 'Master'.[10]

In the 1920s Tara Singh joined the movement to rid the Sikh shrines of the decadent priests who then ran them. In 1931 he became the head of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, a post with vast authority and influence, not least over money. For the next thirty years he was the most resolute and persistent defender of the Sikh community, or *panth*. He was successfully able to project himself as 'the only consistent and long-suffering upholder of the Panth as a separate political entity, as the one Sikh leader who relentlessly pursued the goal of political power territorially organized for the Sikh community, and as a selfless leader without personal ambition'.[11]

Before 1947 Tara Singh insisted that the Sikh *panth* was in danger from the Muslims and the Muslim League. After 1947 he said it was in danger from the Hindus and the Congress. His rhetoric became more robust in the run-up to the general election of 1951–2. He inveighed against Hindu domination, and proclaimed that 'for the sake of religion, for the sake of culture, for the sake of the Panth, and to keep high the flag of the Guru, the Sikhs have girded their loins to achieve independence'.[12]

Tara Singh was arrested several times between 1948 and 1952, for defying bans on public gatherings and for what were seen as 'inflammatory' speeches. Hundreds of his supporters went to jail with him. He had strong support among the Sikh peasantry, particularly among the upper-caste Jats. Tara Singh's use of the term 'independence' was deliberately ambiguous. The Jat peasants wanted a Sikh province within India, not a sovereign nation. They wanted to get rid of the Hindu-dominated eastern Punjab, leaving a state where they would be in a comfortable majority. But by hinting at secession Tara Singh put pressure on the government, and simultaneously convinced his flock of his own commitment to the cause.

Not all Sikhs were behind Tara Singh, however. The low-caste Sikhs, who feared the Jats, were opposed to the Akali Dal. Some Jats had joined the Congress. And in a tendentious move, many Punjabi-speaking Hindus returned Hindi as their mother tongue in the 1951 census.

But the biggest blow to Tara Singh was the general election itself. In the Punjab Assembly, which had 126 seats, the Akalis won a mere 14.

III

Without question the most vigorous movement for linguistic autonomy was that of the Telugu speakers of the Andhra country. Telugu was spoken by more people in India than any other language besides Hindi. It had a rich literary history, and was associated with such symbols of Andhra glory as the Vijayanagara Empire. While India was still under British rule, the Andhra Mahasabha had worked hard to cultivate a sense of identity among the Telugu-speaking peoples of the Madras presidency whom, they argued, had been discriminated against by the Tamils. The Mahasabha was also active in the princely state of Hyderabad.

After Independence the speakers of Telugu asked the Congress to implement its old resolutions in favour of linguistic states. The methods they used to advance their case were various: petitions, representations, street marches and fasts. In a major blow to the Congress, the former Madras Chief Minister T. Prakasam resigned from the party in 1950 on the issue of statehood. Cutting across party lines, the Telugu-speaking legislators in the Madras Assembly urged the immediate creation of a state to be named Andhra Pradesh. In the monsoon of 1951 a Congress-politician-turned-swami named Sitaram went on hunger strike in support. After five weeks the fast was given up, in response to an appeal by the respected Gandhian leader Vinoba Bhave.[13]

The case for Andhra was now put to the test of universal adult suffrage. During his campaign tour in the Telugu-speaking districts, Jawaharlal Nehru was met at several places by protesters waving black flags and shouting 'We want Andhra'.[14] The official party paper wrote in dismay that 'the Congress President witnessed demonstrations by protagonists of an Andhra State, with slogans, placards and posters. At some place she smiled at them, at others he was enraged by their behaviour.'[15] The signs were ominous, and indeed despite its successes elsewhere the Congress did very poorly here. Of the 145 seats from the region in the Madras Legislative Assembly, the party won a mere 43. The bulk of the other seats were won by parties supporting the Andhra movement. These included the communists, who returned an impressive 41 members.

The election results encouraged the revival of the Andhra movement. Towards the end of February 1952 Swami Sitaram began a march through the Telugu-speaking districts, drumming up support for the struggle. He said the creation of the state 'could not wait any longer'. Andhras 'were ready to pay the price to achieve the same'. The swami urged all Telugu-speaking members of the Madras Assembly to boycott its proceedings till such time as the state of their dreams had been carved out.[16]

The agitating Andhras had two pet hates: the prime minister and the chief minister of Madras, C. Rajagopalachari. Both had gone on record as saying that they did not think that the creation of Andhra was a good idea. Both were clear that even if, against their will, the state came into being, the city of Madras would not be part of it. This enraged the Andhras, who had a strong demographic and economic presence in the city, and who believed that they had as good a claim on it as the Tamils.[17]

On 22 May Nehru told Parliament how 'for some years now our foremost efforts have been directed to the consolidation of India. Personally, I would look upon anything that did not help this process of consolidation as undesirable. Even though the formation of linguistic provinces may be desirable in some cases, this would obviously be the wrong time. When the right time comes, let us have them by all means.'

As K. V. Narayana Rao has written, 'this attitude of Nehru appeared too vague and evasive to the Andhras. Nobody knew what the right time was and when it would come.' Impatient for an answer, the Andhras intensified their protest. On 19 October 1952 a man named Potti Sriramulu began a fast-unto-death in Madras. He had the blessings of Swami Sitaram, and of thousands of other Telugu speakers besides.[18]

Born in Madras in 1901, Sriramulu had studied sanitary engineering before taking a job in the railways. In 1928 he suffered a double tragedy when his wife died along with their newly born child. Two years later he resigned his post to join the salt *satyagraha*. Later he spent some time at Gandhi's Sabarmati ashram. Later still he spent eighteen months in jail as part of the individual *satyagraha* campaign of 1940–1.

A hagiographic study published in 1985 by the Committee for History of Andhra Movement claimed that Potti Sriramulu's stay at Mahatma Gandhi's ashram 'was epoch-making. For here was a

seeker full of love and humility, all service and all sacrifice for his fellow-humanity; and here also was a guru, the world-teacher, equally full of affection, truth, *ahimsa* and kinship with *daridra narayana* or the suffering poor. While at Sabarmati, [Sriramulu] . . . did histasks with cheer and devotion, and won the affection of the intimates and the approbation of the Kulapati [Gandhi].'[19]

Gandhi did regard Sriramulu with affection but also, it must be said, with a certain exasperation. On 25 November 1946 the disciple had begun a fast-unto-death to demand the opening of all temples in Madras province to Untouchables. Other Congress representatives, their minds more focused on the impending freedom of India, urged him to desist. When he refused they approached Gandhi, who persuaded him to abandon the fast. The Mahatma then wrote to T. Prakasam that he was 'glad that the fast of Sreeramulu ended in the happy manner you describe. He had sent me a telegram immediately he broke his fast. I know he is a solid worker, though a little eccentric.'[20]

That fast of 1946 Potti Sriramulu had called off at Gandhi's insistence; but in 1952 the Mahatma was dead. In any case, Andhra meant more to Sriramulu than the Untouchables once had. This fast he would carry out till the end, or until the government of India relented.

On 3 December Nehru wrote to Rajagopalachari: 'Some kind of fast is going on for the Andhra Province and I get frantic telegrams. I am totally unmoved by this and I propose to ignore it completely. By this time Sriramulu had not eaten for six weeks. As his ordeal went on, support for the cause grew. *Hartals* (strikes) were called in many towns. The sociologist André Béteille, travelling to Madras from Calcutta at this time, recalls having his train stopped at Vizag by an angry mob shouting slogans against Rajaji and Nehru.[21]

Nehru was now forced to recognize the force of popular sentiment. On 12 December he wrote again to Rajaji, suggesting that the time had come to accept the Andhra demand. 'Otherwise complete frustration will grow among the Andhras, and we will not be able to catch up with it. Two days later Rajaji cabled the prime minister in desperation: 'We might prevent more mischief if you summon repeat summon Swami Sitaram to Delhi. He is now in Madras hanging round the fasting gentleman, Sriramulu. The entire mischief starts from this focus, as the Andhra boys are highly emotional and prone to rowdyism. If you invite Sitaram for a talk, the atmosphere may change and probably the mischief may dwindle away.'[22]

By now it was too late. On 15 December, fifty-eight days into his fast, Potti Sriramulu died. Now all hell broke loose. 'The news of the passing away of Sriramulu engulfed entire Andhra in chaos.' Government offices were attacked; trains were halted and defaced. The damage to state property ran into millions of rupees. Several protesters were killed in police firings.[23] Nehru had once claimed that 'facts, not fasts' would decide the issue. Now, faced with the prospect of widespread and possibly uncontrollable protest, the prime minister gave in. Two days after Sriramulu's death, he made a statement saying that a state of Andhra would come into being.

Over the course of the next few months the Telugu districts of Madras province were identified for separation. The division of the province, wrote the chief minister, was 'accompanied by a lot of bad language, bad behaviour and distrust and anger'.[24] Suppressing his feelings, Rajagopalachari attended the inauguration of the new state of Andhra at Kurnool on 1October 1953. Also in attendance, and as the chief guest no less, was that other erstwhile enemy of the Andhras, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

IV

The formation of Andhra Pradesh grated with the prime minister of the day. 'You will observe', wrote Jawaharlal Nehru grimly to a colleague, 'that we have disturbed the hornet's nest and I believe most of us are likely to be badly stung.'[25]

As Nehru had feared, the creation of Andhra led to the intensification of similar demands by other linguistic groups. Somewhat against its will, the government of India appointed a States Reorganization Commission (SRC) to 'make recommendations in regard to the broad principles which should govern the solution of this [linguistic] problem'. Through 1954 and 1955 members of the Commission travelled across India. They visited 104 towns and cities, interviewed more than 9,000 people and received as many as 152,250 written submissions.

One of the longer and more interesting submissions was from the Bombay Citizens Committee. This was headed by a leading cotton magnate, Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas, and had within its ranks other prominent industrialists such as J. R. D. Tata. On its masthead were many of the city's most successful lawyers, scholars and doctors.

The Bombay Citizens Committee had a one-point agenda – to keep the city out of the state of Maharashtra. To make the case they printed an impressive 200-page book replete with charts, maps and tables. The first chapter was historical, showing how the city was settled by successive waves of settlers from different linguistic communities. It claimed that there had been little Maharashtrian immigration before the end of the nineteenth century and that Marathi speakers comprised only 43 per cent of the city's current population. The second chapter spoke of Bombay's importance in the economic life of India. It was the premier centre of industry and finance, and of foreign trade. It was India's window to the world: more planes flew in and out of it than all the other Indian cities combined. The third and fourth chapters were sociological, demonstrating the multilingual and multicultural character of the city. To quote a European observer, it was 'perhaps the most motley assemblage in any quarter of this orb'; to quote another, it was 'a true centre of the diverse varieties and types of mankind, far surpassing the mixed nationalities of Cairo and Constantinople'. The fifth chapter was geographical, an argument for Bombay's physical isolation, with the sea and the mountains separating it from the Marathi-speaking heartland.

The first settlers were Europeans; the chief merchants and capitalists Gujaratis and Parsis; the chief philanthropists Parsis. The city was built by non-Maharashtrians. Even among the working class, Marathi speakers were often outnumbered by north Indians and Christians. For the Bombay Citizens Committee, it was clear that 'on the grounds of geography, history, language and population or the system of law, Bombay and North Konkan cannot be considered as a part of the Mahratta region as claimed by the protagonists of Samyukta Maharashtra'.[26]

Behind the veneer of cosmopolitanism there was one language group that dominated the 'save Bombay' movement: the Gujaratis. If Bombay became the capital of a greater Maharashtra state, the politicians and ministers would be mostly Marathi speakers. The prospect was not entirely pleasing to the Gujarati-speaking bourgeoisie, whether Hindu or Parsi. It was they who staffed, financed, and basically ran the Bombay Citizens Committee.[27]

Nehru himself was somewhat sympathetic towards the idea of keeping Bombay out of the control of a single language group. So was the Marathi-speaking M. S. Golwalkar, this a rare meeting of minds between the prime minister and the RSS supremo. Both thought that the creation of linguistic states would 'lead to bitterness and give rise to fissiparous tendencies endangering the unity of the country'.[28] In May 1954 Golwalkar spoke in Bombay at the invitation of the Anti-Provincial Conference, which saw linguistic demands as a manifestation of 'the menace of provincialism and sectionalism'. 'Multiplicity breeds strife', thundered Golwalkar: 'One nation and one culture are my

principles.' To see oneself as Tamil or Maharashtrian or Bengali was to 'sap the vitality of the nation'. He wished them all to use the label' 'Hindu', which is where he departed from Nehru, who of course wished them all to be 'Indian'.[29]

But just as some in the Congress Party did not see eye-to-eye with Nehru on this question, there were RSS cadres who departed from their leader. From as early as 1946 there was a Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad in operation. Within its ranks were Maharashtrians of all political persuasions, left and right, secular and communal, Brahmin, Maratha and Harijan. The Parishad sought a state that would unite Marathi speakers dispersed across many different political units. In their minds, however, there was no doubt that such a state could have only one capital: Bombay.

The president of the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad was the veteran Congress man Shankarrao Deo, while its secretary and chief theoretician was the celebrated Cambridge-educated economist D. R. Gadgil. In Gadgil's opinion, while Bombay could still be the major port and economic centre of Maharashtra, there must be a 'compulsory decentralization' of the city's industries. Another ideologue, G. V. Deshmukh, was more blunt. Unless Bombay city became part of their state, he said, Maharashtrians would have to remain content with 'playing the part of secondary brokers to brokers, secondary agents to agents, assistant professors to professors, clerks to managers [and] hired labourers to shopkeepers'.[30]

To answer the Citizens Committee of the Gujaratis, the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad prepared an impressive 200-page document of its own. The first part mounted a theoretical defence of the principle of linguistic states. These, it argued, would deepen federalism by bringing together speakers of the same language in one consolidated, cohesive unit. Thus, 'a linguistic province with its administration in the language of the common people, would make it possible for the people to feel and understand the working of democracy and the need to participate in it'.

Coming specifically to their own state, the document claimed that 'society all over the Marathi country is remarkably homogeneous'. There was the same configuration of castes, the same deities and saints, the same folklore and legends. That the Marathi speakers were presently spread out over three political units – Hyderabad, Bombay state, and the Central Provinces – was an accident of history that needed urgently to be undone.

A new and unified state of Maharashtra had to be created, argued the Parishad, with Bombay as its capital. For the land on which this island city stood had long been inhabited by speakers of the Marathi language. While the sea lay to Bombay's west, the territory to its north, south and east was dominated by Marathi speakers. The city itself was the main centre of the Marathi press, of publications in the Marathi language and of Marathi culture. Economically, Bombay depended heavily on its Marathi hinterland, from where it drew much of its labour and all its water and power. Its ways of communication all lay through Maharashtra. In sum, it was 'unthinkable to form a State of Maharashtra which has not Bombay as its capital and it would render impossible the working of a State of Maharashtra, if any attempt was made to separate the city of Bombay from it'. To the argument that the city did not have a Marathi-speaking majority, the Parishad answered that there were more people speaking this language than any other. In any case, it was in the nature of great port cities to be multilingual. In Burma's capital, only 32 per cent of the population spoke the national language, but 'nobody yet dared to suggest that Rangoon should be considered as non-Burmese territory'.[31]

Bombay was surrounded by Marathi-speaking districts; it must be the capital of a new state of Maharashtra. So argued the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad. But the Citizens Committee claimed that Bombay had been nurtured mostly by non-Maharashtrians, and must therefore be constituted as a

separate city-state. Could the two sides ever agree? In June 1954 Shankarrao Deo visited Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdasto discuss a compromise. Deo said that there was no negotiation possible on their core demand – Bombay as capital of Maharashtra – but said that they could work together to retain 'the same autonomous character of the metropolitan city, ensuring its cosmopolitan life; its trade, commerce and industry, etc.'. Sir Purushottamdas, for his part, was willing to give up the city-state idea in favour of a composite bilingual province of Marathi and Gujarati speakers.[32]

The meeting was civil, but inconclusive. The matter of Bombay was referred to the States Reorganization Commission, the hottest of the many hot potatoes it became their misfortune to handle.

V

The members of the StatesReorganization Commission were ajurist, S. Fazl Ali, a historian and civil servant, K. M. Pannikar, and a social worker, H. N. Kunzru. Notably, none had any formal ties, past or present, with the Congress. After eighteen months of intensive work, the trio submitted their report in October 1955. The report first carefully outlined the arguments for and against linguistic states. It urged a 'balanced approach' which recognized 'linguistic homogeneity as an important factor conducive to administrative convenience and efficiency' yet not 'as an exclusive and binding principle, over-riding all other considerations'. Among these other considerations were, of course, the unity and security of India asawhole.[33]

Next, in nineteen chapters, the report outlined their specific proposals for reorganization. With respect to the southern states, it seemed easy enough to redistribute areas according to the major language zones: Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam. Districts and *taluks* (sub-districts) were reallocated with regard to which linguistic group was in a majority. Four compact states would replace the melange of territories deriving from the British period.

With regard to north India, the SRC likewise sought to divide the huge Hindi-speaking belt into four states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In the east, the existing provinces would stay as they were, with minor adjustments. The Commission rejected the demand for tribal states to be carved out of Bihar and Assam.

The SRC did not agree to the creation of a Sikh state. And it refused to allocate Madras city to Andhra. However, its most contentious recommendation was not to permit the creation of a united Maharashtra. As a sop, the Commission proposed a separate state of Vidarbha, comprising the Marathi-speaking districts of the interior. But Bombay state would stay as it was, a bilingual province of Gujarati and Marathi speakers. They respected the arguments of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, said the Commission, but they could 'not lightly brush aside the fears of the other communities'.

VI

The SRC's recommendation that Bombay be the capital of a bilingual state was discussed in Parliamenton15November 1955. The ambitious Bombay MP S. K. Patil thought the Commission should have gone further. He thought the government should create a city-state of Bombay; no doubt hoping that it might come to be managed by himself. The prospective city-state, he argued, had a

'cosmopolitan population in every respect'; it had been 'built upon the labour of everybody'. If left to govern itself, Bombay would 'be a miniature India run on international standards' . . . [A] melting pot which will evolve a glorious new civilisation . . . And it is an extraordinary coincidence that the population of the city should be exactly one per cent of the population of the whole country. This one per cent drawn from all parts of the country will set the pace for other states in the practice of secularism and mutual understanding.'

Patil, like the SRC itself, asked the Maharashtrians to give up their claim on Bombay in the spirit of compromise. But it soon became clear that he did not speak for his fellow Maharashtrians. Speaking immediately after Patil in the Lok Sabha was the Congress MP from the city of Puné, N.V. Gadgil. Gadgil insisted that while he was in favour of compromise, 'there is a limit. That limit is, nobody can compromise one's self-respect, no woman can compromise her chastity and no country its freedom'. Everywhere the principle of language had been recognized, except in this one case. The report of the Commission had caused great pain throughout the Marathi-speaking world. The reports of protest meetings should make it clear 'that anything short of Samyukta Maharashtra with the city of Bombay as capital will not be acceptable'. If these sentiments went unheeded, warned Gadgil, then the future of Bombay would be decided on the streets of Bombay.

The SRC urged the Maharashtrians to accept the loss of Bombay in the name of national unity. Gadgil protested against this attempt at blackmail. The last 150 years, he said, had seen Maharashtrians contributing selflessly to the growth of national feeling. Marathi speakers founded the first Indian schools and universities, and helped found the Indian National Congress. The Mahrattas were 'the pioneers of violent action' against the British. Later, in the early twentieth century, when the Congress Party languished, 'who was it that brought in new life? Who propounded the new tenets and new philosophy? It was Lokmanya Tilak. In the Home Rule movement he led and in the 1920 movement we were behind none and ahead of many provinces . . . I will merely quote the certificate given to us by no less a person than Mahatma Gandhi that Maharashtra is the beehive of [national] workers. Even now, in independent India, it was a Maharashtrian, Vinoba Bhave, who was 'carrying the flag of Gandhian philosophy and spreading his message from place to place'.

In the matter of Bombay, the Maharashtrians were being lectured on the need to 'work for the unity and safety and good of the country'. But,said the Puné MP bitterly, all these years 'we have done nothing else'. Gadgil's was a moving peroration – and the last line was the best: 'To ask us to serve the nation is to ask *chandan* [sandalwood] to be fragrant.'[34]

The matter now shifted, as Gadgil had warned, from the chamber to the streets. These, as one Bombay weekly warned, were 'literally seething with an unrest that may possibly erupt into something terrifyingly coercive, making ordered life impossible for some time to come'.[35] The discontent was being stoked by politicians of both left and right. The prominent communist S. A. Dange had thrown his weight behind Samyukta Maharashtra; so had the leading low-caste politician B. R. Ambedkar. With them were the Jana Sangh, and the Socialist Party, who were perhaps the most active of all. Many dissident Congress Party members had also joined, making this a comprehensively representative coalition of angry and disillusioned Maharashtrians.

This capacious inclusiveness was reflected in an amended name: the Samyukta Maharashtra Parishad had become the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti.[36] 'Parishad' is best translated as 'organization', thus implying the central role of office-bearers; 'samiti' as 'society', this connoting a more co-operative and participatory endeavour.

Fearing trouble, in the early hours of 16 January the Bombay police swooped down on the leaders and activists of the newly constituted All-Party Action Committee for Samyukta Maharashtra.

They made nearly 400 arrests in all. This prompted a call for a general strike on the 18th. That day shops and factories were closed, and buses and trains didn't run. Processions were made through the streets, burning effigies of Nehru and of the Gujarati-speaking chief minister of Bombay state, Morarji Desai. When a European journalist stopped to take a photograph of Nehru's portrait smashed and trampled at the roadside, 'tremendous cheers rose from the balconies and the roofs. "Take it, take it and show the world what we think of Nehru," they shouted.'[37]

Two days earlier, on the afternoon of the 16th, the first clashes between police and protesters had been reported. Mobs went on the rampage, looting shops and offices. For nearly a week the city was brought to a complete standstill and 15,000 policemen were called out to battle the rioters. When the smoke lifted, there were more than a dozen people dead, and property worth billions of rupees destroyed. It had been the worst riot in living memory.[38]

Jawaharlal Nehru was deeply shaken by the events in Bombay. The linguistic question, he wrote to a colleague, 'is more serious than even the situation created by the Partition and we have to give a positive lead'.[39] Meeting in Amritsar in the third week of January, the All-India Congress Committee deplored the violence by which 'Bombay and India were disgraced and dishonoured'. Under Nehru's direction, the party urged its members to discourage forces of 'disruption, separatism and provincialism', and instead work for 'the integration of all parts of this great country'. The Congress chief ministers of Bihar and West Bengal issued a joint statement proposing that their two states be merged into one. This union, they hoped, would quell 'separatist tendencies', aid economic progress and, above all, be 'a significant example of that positive approach to the problem of Indian unity' that the party bosses had called for.[40]

Among Nehru's allies were the home minister, G. B. Pant, and his fellow-in-effigy Morarji Desai. The intention of the protesters, said Desai, was to 'overturn Government practically and to take possession of the City by force. It was also their purpose in overawing the non-Maharashtrian elements in the City into submission and into agreeing that Bombay City should go to Maharashtra.'

This interpretation was vigorously contested by N. V. Gadgil. He believed the administration had overreacted. Gadgil wrote to both Nehru and Pant of how the firing and *lathi*-charges by the police had been 'on ascale which will make even the ex-British officials in England blush'. Back in 1919 the British had termed a peaceful meeting in Amritsar's Jallianawala Bagh a 'rebellion against the government', to justify the slaughter by General Dyer. In the same way, Morarji Desai had now exaggerated the protests in Bombay to 'justify police atrocities'. When 'the choice was between Morarji and Maharashtra', wrote Gadgil bitterly, Delhi had chosen Morarji on the grounds that 'one who shoots is a good administrator'. But the costs to the party were huge. For 'in Bombay indiscriminate firing by the police and other atrocities have resulted in complete alienation of Maharashtrian people from the Congress and the Government of India'.[41]

Meanwhile, the resentment smouldered on. The slogan on (almost) every Maharashtrian's lips was 'Lathi goli khayenge, phir bhi Bambai layenge' (We will face sticks and bullets, but get our Bombay in the end).[42] On 26 January, Republic Day, black flags were flown in several working-class districts of Bombay. When Jawaharlal Nehru planned a visit to the city in February, the Samyukta Maharashtra people organized a petition signed by 100,000 children, to be presented to the prime minister with the slogan 'Chacha Nehru, Mumbai dya' (Uncle Nehru, hand over Bombay). Nehru came, but amid tight security; he did not meet the press, let alone the children.[43]

In June 1956 the annual session of the Congress was to be held in Bombay. Nehru was met with black flags at the airport and all along the route. The atmosphere outside the meeting hall was tense. On the second day of the Congress a crowd threw stones at the members. Several were hurt,

prompting a volley of tear-gas shells by the police.

Nehru's problems were compounded by the now open disaffection among the Maharashtrian section of the Congress Party. The Union's finance minister C. D. Deshmukh, MP for the coastal district of Kulaba, resigned in protest against the city not being allotted to Maharashtra. Other resignations followed.

Through the summer of 1956 both sides waited anxiously for the centre's decision on Bombay. While the Cabinet had accepted the other recommendations of the SRC, it was rumoured that both Nehru and the home minister, Pant, were inclined to make Bombay city a separate union territory. In the prevailing climate this was deemed unfeasible. On 1 November the new states based on language came into being. Joining them was a bilingual state of Bombay. The only concession to the protesters was the replacement of Morarji Desai as chief minister by the 41-year-old Maratha Y. B. Chavan.[44]

VII

The creation of linguistic states was, among other things, a victory of the popular will. Jawaharlal Nehru did not want it, but Potti Sriramulu did. Sriramulu's fast lasted fifty-eight days, during the first fifty-five of which the prime minister ignored it completely. In this time, according to one journalist, he criss-crossed India, delivering 132 speeches on all topics other than language.[45] But once Nehru conceded Andhra, and set up the States Reorganization Commission, it was inevitable that the country as a whole would be reorganized on the basis of language.

The movements for linguistic states revealed an extraordinary depth of popular feeling. For Kannadigas and for Andhras, for Oriyas as for Maharashtrians, language proved a more powerful marker of identity than caste or religion. This was manifest in their struggles, and in their behaviour when the struggle was won.

One sign of this was official patronage of the arts. Thus great effort, and cash, went into funding books, plays and films written or performed in the official language of the state. Much rubbish was funded as a result, but also much work of worth. In particular, the regional literatures have flourished since linguistic reorganization.

Another manifestation was architecture. To build a new capital, or at least a new legislative assembly, became a *sine qua non* of the new states. In Orissa, for example, two architects were commissioned to design and plan a wide range of government buildings. These, the architects were told, had to 'represent Orissan culture and workmanship'. The final product made abundant use of indigenous motifs: columns, arches, and sculpted images of gods. The architecture of new Bhubaneshwar, writes its historian, 'is an architecture which has risen from the native soil, sacred and pure'.[46]

Amore spectacular exhibition of provincial pride was the new assembly-cum-secretariat of the state of Mysore. This was built opposite the Bangalore High Court, a fine columned building in red which remains perhaps the city's prettiest structure. However, the Mysore chief minister, Kengal Hanumanthaiya, saw the High Court as a colonial excrescence. He first sought permission to demolish it; when this was denied, he resolved that the new Vidhan Souda would dwarf and tame it. It had to convey an 'idea of power and dignity, the style being Indian, particularly of Mysore and not purely Western'.

The end product drew eclectically from the architecture of the great kingdoms of the Carnatic plateau. Hanumanthaiya gave very specific instructions to the builders, asking them to copy pillars

from a particular room in the Mysore palace, doors from a particular old temple he named. The building as it came up was, as it were, a mighty mishmash. Yet it has served its central purpose, which was to stand, 'measure for measure, in triumph over the colonial Attara Kacheri [High Court]', thus to 'successfully function as a distilled essence of Kannada pride'.[47]

When it began, the movement for linguistic states generated deep apprehensions among the nationalist elite. They feared it would lead to the Balkanization of India, to the creation of many more Pakistans. 'Any attempt at redrawing the map of India on the linguistic basis', wrote the *Times of India* in early February 1952, 'would only give the long awaited opportunity to the reactionary forces to come into the open and assert themselves. That will lay an axe at the very root of India's integrity.[48]

In retrospect, however, linguistic reorganization seems rather to have consolidated the unity of India. True, the artefacts that have resulted, such as Bangalore's Vidhan Souda, are not to everybody's taste. And there have been some serious conflicts between states on the sharing of river waters. However, on the whole the creation of linguistic states has acted as a largely constructive channel for provincial pride. It has proved quite feasible to be peaceably Kannadiga – or Tamil, or Oriya – as well as contentedly Indian.

An early illustration of this was the assembly elections in Andhra in 1955. Three years earlier, the Congress had done disastrously in the region. They were suspect on account of their prevarication on the question of statehood. By contrast, the communists had successfully ridden the bandwagon on *vishal* (greater) Andhra. But in 1955, with Andhra Pradesh firmly established, the Congress won in a landslide. Their main rivals, the communists, were comprehensively routed. Now, wrote one relieved commentator, 'Andhra Desa will no longer be suspect as the potential Yenan of India'.[49]

The Andhras would not secede from India, but they did redefine what it means to be Indian. Or at least one Andhra did. Potti Sriramulu is a forgotten man today. This is a pity, for he had amore than minor impact on the history, as well as geography, of his country. For his fast and its aftermath were to spark off a wholesale redrawing of the map of India according to linguistic lines. If Jawaharlal Nehru was the Maker of Modern India, then perhaps Potti Sriramulu should be named its Mercator.