

Grassroots Political Consciousness and the Telangana Aspiration: A Case Study of Participation in the Statehood Movement

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Abstract

This study investigates the emergence and evolution of political consciousness among rural populations in the context of the Telangana statehood movement. Drawing on primary data collected from 120 respondents across village panchayats, mandals, and districts in Telangana, the research examines patterns of awareness, participation, and the socio-political motivations that fueled the demand for a separate state. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining descriptive statistics with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions, the study reveals that regional disparities, emotional attachment to identity, and developmental aspirations were key drivers of mobilization. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) played a pivotal role in transforming grassroots sentiment into political strategy, leveraging symbolic acts such as mass resignations and electoral boycotts to sustain momentum. Equally significant was the role of civil society platforms like the Telangana Joint Action Committee (TJAC), which decentralized the movement and democratized participation through inclusive, non-violent resistance. The findings underscore the potency of grassroots political awakening in reshaping federal structures and demonstrate how sub-regional movements can effectively transition from protest to power. By highlighting the intersection of identity, political strategy, and public engagement, this study contributes to the broader discourse on regional movements, participatory democracy, and the politics of state reorganization in India.

Keywords: *Telangana movement; political consciousness; TRS; grassroots mobilization; regional identity; statehood; participatory democracy; rural political participation; TJAC*

1. Introduction

The Telangana statehood movement, one of the most enduring and significant regional agitations in post-independence India, was rooted in a deep sense of political exclusion, cultural marginalization, and perceived economic neglect. Over decades, the movement evolved into a powerful assertion of regional identity, shaped by mass mobilization, grassroots activism, and increasing political consciousness across diverse segments of society. From the early stirrings of discontent in the 1950s to the large-scale agitations of the 2000s, Telangana's path to statehood was characterized by a confluence of emotion, strategy, and civic participation (Haragopal & Sreeramulu, 2010; Kodandaram, 2012).

The rise in political consciousness among rural communities, students, and government employees played a central role in amplifying the statehood demand. Movements such as Sakala Janula Samme, hunger strikes, and road and rail blockades were not merely symbolic protests but manifestations of a collective political awakening (Reddy, 2014). These acts reflected a growing understanding of constitutional rights, governance deficits, and regional disparities particularly in access to education, employment, irrigation, and budgetary allocation (Sri Krishna Committee Report, 2010).

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The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and other regional platforms served as political vehicles that translated mass sentiment into organized action, while civil society organizations like the Telangana Joint Action Committee (TJAC) helped decentralize the movement, making it more participatory and inclusive (Srinivasulu, 2002). This political consciousness at the grassroots especially at the mandal and panchayat levels was crucial to the transformation of the agitation into a sustained and structured demand for self-rule. However, while extensive literature explores the Telangana movement from historical, political, and socio-economic perspectives, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how rural political consciousness shaped the demand for statehood through participatory frameworks at the mandal and panchayat levels.

This study investigates the patterns of awareness and participation in the Telangana statehood movement across rural Telangana, drawing insights from 120 respondents at the district, mandal, and village panchayat levels. By examining the factors influencing awareness, the nature of political involvement, and the motivational triggers that led to mobilization, the study provides a deeper understanding of how political consciousness shaped and sustained the aspiration for a separate Telangana state.

1.1 Telangana Movement and Its Importance

The Telangana movement holds a pivotal place in India's post-independence political landscape due to its transformative impact on regional politics, identity formation, and democratic mobilization. Unlike many other regional agitations, the Telangana struggle transcended caste, class, and professional lines—uniting farmers, students, teachers, employees, and cultural groups under a common cause. Its importance lies not only in achieving statehood in 2014 but also in highlighting systemic issues such as regional disparities in irrigation, education, employment, and governance (Haragopal, 2010; Sri Krishna Committee Report, 2010).

The movement redefined federalism by asserting sub-regional autonomy within the broader framework of the Indian Constitution. It underscored the democratic right of people to self-determination and challenged centralized development models that had historically overlooked backward regions. The significance of the movement is further reflected in its peaceful, mass-based approach, which combined civil disobedience with electoral strategies to achieve political goals (Kodandaram, 2012). Today, the Telangana movement stands as a case study in participatory democracy, grassroots activism, and the articulation of regional aspirations within a constitutional framework.

2. Objectives of the Study

This research aims to explore the depth of political awareness and participation among rural communities in the Telangana statehood movement, with a specific focus on how grassroots populations at the district, mandal, and village panchayat levels engaged with and responded to the call for regional autonomy. By analyzing data from 120 respondents across rural Telangana, the study seeks to understand the various socio-political factors that shaped individual and collective responses to the movement. It critically examines how political consciousness was cultivated through influences such as local leadership, media narratives, student activism, and regional disparities in development.

The objective is not only to assess the level of awareness but also to investigate the motivational dynamics that led to active participation, whether through symbolic protests, mass mobilizations, or alignment with political entities like the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS). Through this lens, the study contributes to understanding the evolving relationship between sub-regional identity, political sentiment, and democratic engagement. In doing so, it sheds light on how grassroots movements, fueled by political consciousness, can successfully challenge dominant state narratives and reshape federal discourse in India.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to examine grassroots awareness and participation in the Telangana statehood movement. A descriptive survey method was employed to collect primary data from a total of 120 respondents residing across various rural areas in the state of Telangana. The sample included individuals from district, mandal, and village panchayat levels, selected to ensure representation across multiple geographic and administrative divisions.

Respondents were selected using stratified random sampling to account for demographic diversity, ensuring balanced representation by age, gender, occupation, and socio-economic background. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed, consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions. These questions focused on themes such as political awareness, participation in protests, sources of information about the movement, and perceptions regarding the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) and its role.

In addition to survey responses, the study incorporated qualitative techniques such as focus group discussions and individual case narratives. Discussions were conducted with community members, student participants, and retired employees who had taken part in key events like the Sakala Janula Samme, Vanta Varpu, and rail/bus blockades. These qualitative tools enriched the analysis by providing nuanced perspectives on how sentiment and strategy were mobilized at the grassroots level.

Data collected from the field was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) were applied to identify participation patterns and interpret responses quantitatively. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data to capture recurring motivations, emotional triggers, and political influences.

This integrated methodological framework ensured a comprehensive understanding of political consciousness and participatory dynamics within the Telangana movement across rural communities.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Awareness of the Telangana Movement

This section evaluates the extent of public awareness regarding the Telangana movement among rural populations at the village panchayat, mandal, district, and state levels. Out of the total 120 respondents surveyed, a significant majority 105 individuals (87.5%) reported being aware of the Telangana movement. This finding indicates that the movement had deeply penetrated rural communities, likely due to its long-standing presence in the public discourse and regional identity politics.

On the other hand, 10 respondents (8.3%) stated that they were not aware of the movement, reflecting gaps in political outreach or informational dissemination in certain areas. Furthermore, 5 individuals (4.17%) chose not to express an opinion, highlighting a small but notable group with either limited interest or apprehension toward the subject.

These findings are consistent with the pattern of regional movements across India, where local engagement is often shaped by political mobilization, media narratives, and cultural affiliations (Srinivasulu, 2002; Haragopal, 2010).

4.2 Channels of Awareness

Respondents were asked how they first came to know about the Telangana movement. The results underscore the central role of political communication in awareness-building. Out of 120 participants:

48 individuals (40%) attributed their awareness to political leaders,

35 respondents (29.16%) cited news channels as their primary source,

22 participants (18.3%) reported learning through students or relatives, and

15 respondents (12.5%) indicated that their awareness was shaped by personal experiences or observations.

These results illustrate that political actors played a dominant role in communicating the cause of Telangana statehood, a feature typical of mass movements that rely on leadership charisma and direct community engagement (Kodandaram, 2012). Media particularly television also emerged as a crucial tool in mobilizing rural audiences, while the role of interpersonal networks (students and relatives) further contributed to the movement's reach.

4.3 Opinions on the Need for Telangana Statehood

Respondents were also asked about their views on the necessity of creating a separate Telangana state. A substantial majority 110 out of 120 (91.67%) expressed strong support for the formation of Telangana. Only 8 respondents (6.67%) opposed the idea, and 2 respondents (1.66%) chose not to comment.

These figures clearly demonstrate overwhelming public consensus in favor of bifurcation, driven by perceived historical neglect, socio-economic marginalization, and regional imbalance. This finding aligns with existing scholarly literature that highlights how identity-based movements often culminate in popular consensus when structural injustices remain unaddressed over time (Melkote & Revathi, 2011; Sri Krishna Committee, 2010).

4.4 Participation in the Movement

Active involvement in the Telangana movement was remarkably high among rural participants. As per the survey:

108 respondents (90%) confirmed their participation in the movement,

8 individuals (6.7%) reported non-participation, and

4 respondents (3.3%) remained non-committal.

These results highlight the movement's deeply rooted character within rural Telangana. The high rate of participation points to a politically conscious rural populace, one that transcended traditional barriers of caste, class, and literacy to assert their regional identity and demand statehood collectively.

This form of grassroots mobilization is indicative of democratic engagement and regional solidarity. Similar patterns have been observed in other regional movements across India, where local populations play a decisive role in shaping state-level political.

4.5 Modes of Participation in the Telangana Movement

To assess the nature of involvement among rural populations, respondents were asked how they engaged with the Telangana movement. Of the 120 participants surveyed across village panchayats, 58 individuals (48.3%) stated they had taken part in the Sakala Janula Samme (general strike), a defining moment of collective civil resistance that paralyzed several sectors across the state.

Another 28 respondents (23.4%) indicated participation in Vanta-Varpu (community cooking protests), a symbolic act of solidarity and defiance. 20 participants (16.6%) were involved in Rail and Bus Roko demonstrations, which sought to disrupt transportation networks to draw national attention. 14 respondents (11.7%) reported engaging in hunger strikes, highlighting the depth of their emotional and political commitment to the cause.

These findings reveal the diversity of grassroots political actions adopted during the movement and underscore the adaptability of protest methods that resonated with rural populations. The widespread participation across different protest forms illustrates the inclusive character of the Telangana movement, which managed to engage people through both symbolic and disruptive means (Haragopal, 2010).

4.6 Factors Influencing Participation in the Movement

To understand what inspired people to join the agitation, the study examined the motivating factors behind their involvement. Out of 120 respondents, 48 individuals (40%) were influenced by regional disparities, pointing to perceptions of economic and administrative neglect compared to Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. Thirty-five respondents (29.16%) were driven by emotional sentiment, a deep-rooted connection to the Telangana identity, and historical injustice. 22 participants (18.3%) cited developmental concerns, highlighting hopes for infrastructure, education, and employment improvements under a separate state. 15 respondents (12.5%) mentioned the promotion of regional language and culture as their primary motivation.

These insights reflect the multidimensional appeal of the Telangana movement. While emotional and identity-based triggers were significant, the aspiration for equitable growth and political representation emerged as core drivers of rural mobilization (Kodandaram, 2012; Melkote & Revathi, 2011).

4.7 Factors Influencing Support for the TRS

The study also investigated what led respondents to align with or support the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) during the movement. The survey revealed: 60 respondents (50%) were primarily influenced by the party's commitment to achieving separate statehood, 45 individuals (37.5%) credited the party's leadership and narrative, particularly the charisma and consistency of K. Chandrashekar Rao, 5 respondents (4.17%) cited personal motivation as their reason for involvement, 10 individuals (8.33%) acknowledged that a combination of the above factors inspired them.

This indicates that TRS's clear and focused agenda of statehood resonated strongly with rural voters, overshadowing traditional political affiliations. The party's ability to consolidate diverse motivations into a unified political platform played a pivotal role in its electoral and ideological success (Reddy, 2014; Srinivasulu, 2002).

4.8 Core Motivation for Separate Statehood

When respondents were asked to identify the single most compelling reason for their support of Telangana statehood, a notable 70 out of 120 participants (58.33%) emphasized the promise of regional development including improved governance, better infrastructure, and targeted welfare schemes.

20 respondents (16.67%) cited opposition to regional inequalities that disadvantaged Telangana under the unified Andhra Pradesh administration. 18 participants (15%) expressed a sentimental attachment to the movement, while 12 individuals (10%) pointed to the need to preserve regional language and cultural traditions.

The findings confirm that although emotional and cultural factors contributed to the movement, the overriding aspiration among rural populations was for structural transformation and socio-economic upliftment. This reflects broader patterns in regionalist politics in India, where identity struggles often intertwine with demands for development and administrative fairness (Haragopal & Sreeramulu, 2010; Sri Krishna Committee Report, 2010).

5. Conclusion

The Telangana statehood movement stands as a significant instance of regional political awakening driven by grassroots mobilization, cultural identity, and long-standing socio-economic grievances. This study has demonstrated that political consciousness among rural communities was neither incidental nor externally imposed, but rather evolved organically through sustained engagement with issues of regional disparity, cultural marginalization, and administrative neglect. The findings reveal that an overwhelming majority of respondents were not only aware of the movement but actively participated in it through various forms ranging from symbolic protests like Vanta Varpu to large-scale strikes such as the Sakala Janula Samme.

Crucially, the role of local leadership, youth activism, media, and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) was instrumental in translating regional sentiment into structured political action. The desire for self-rule, equitable development, and protection of linguistic and cultural identity emerged as dominant motivating factors. While the movement gained political momentum through electoral strategies, it remained deeply rooted in popular aspiration and participatory democracy.

The success of the movement and the eventual formation of Telangana as a separate state in 2014 underscore the transformative potential of decentralized, participatory political processes in India's federal framework. This case study illustrates how political consciousness, when nurtured at the grassroots, can challenge dominant narratives and realign the structure of governance. Going forward, the lessons from Telangana suggest that regional identity and developmental aspirations must be meaningfully addressed to ensure inclusive and sustainable democratic consolidation.

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

7. Funding Declaration

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