



Regionalism in India: Its different dimensions, meaning and suggestive measures

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Abstract

India is a large country having continental dimensions and comprising no fewer than 28 States and 7 Union Territories. It is a multi-racial, multi-lingual nation. There are scores of regional languages, various strains of culture and different loyalties, single as well as multiple. Amidst the amazing diversities, it is natural that regional feelings, regional parties, regional institutions and similar other organizations meant for voicing the aspirations of local people and providing forums for them, should emerge. Indeed, with the passage of years, the multi-faceted aspirations, which together may be described as regionalism, have gained strength. It is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the fillip given to regionalism by the emergence of the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh in 1982 has a historical continuity. The growth of this trend can be traced back to the fast unto death by Potti Srivamulu over the demand for the creation of Andhra Pradesh which set in motion the reorganization of State along linguistic lines in 1956. In principle, regionalism need not be regarded as an unhealthy or anti-national phenomenon—unless it takes a militant, aggressive turn and encourages the growth of secessionist tendencies, (as it did in Punjab during the past five years or so). National unity is not impaired if the people of a region have a genuine pride in their language and culture. But regionalism develops into a serious threat to national unity if politicians do not go beyond their regional loyalty and claim to stand only for their regional interests if regionalism is to be regarded as an unhealthy phenomenon, decentralization too would be objectionable, which of course it is not. So there is nothing basically contradictory between nationalism and regionalism. Nor does the growth of regional values and consolidation of regional forces as such pose a challenge to the central administration of the country.

Keywords: Regionalism in India, Telegu Desam Party (TDP), multi-racial, multi-lingual nation

Introduction

The second meaning of the term is regionalism at national level refers to a process in which sub-state actors become increasingly powerful, power devolves from central level to regional governments. These are the regions within country, distinguished in culture, language and other socio-cultural factors. Now, we will discuss in detail about regionalism within nation in INDIA only and then next we will discuss about regionalism at international level. Roots of regionalism is in India's manifold diversity of languages, cultures, ethnic groups, communities, religions and so on, and encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers, and fueled by a sense of regional deprivation. For many centuries, India remained the land of many lands, regions, cultures and traditions. To understand regionalism, we need to know various dimensions of the region. Region as a geographical unit, is delimited form each other. Region as a social system, reflects the relation between different human beings and groups. Regions are an organised cooperation in cultural, economic, political or military fields. Region acts as a subject with distinct identity, language, culture and tradition. Regionalism is an ideology and political movement that seeks to advance the causes of regions. As a process it plays role within the nation as well as outside the nation i.e. at international level. At the international level, regionalism refers to transnational cooperation to meet a common goal or to resolve a shared problem or it refers to a group of countries such as-Western Europe, or Southeast Asia, linked by geography, history or economic features.

For instance, southern India (the home of Dravidian cultures), which is itself a region of many regions, is evidently different

from the north, the west, the central and the north-east. Even the east of India is different from the North-East of India comprising today seven constituent units of Indian federation with the largest concentration of tribal people.

Definition

1. Marshall E. Dimcock considers regionalism as a clustering of environmental, economic, social and governmental factors to such an extent that a distinct consciousness of separate identity within the whole, a need for autonomous planning, a manifestation of cultural peculiarities and a desire for administrative freedom are recognized and actually put into effect.
2. According to W. P. Scott, regionalism is an approach to the study of behaviour that emphasizes the geographical region as the unit of analysis, stressing the relationship between human beings and their immediate physical environment. Economic, social, cultural and political organizations are analyzed in terms of their relationships and functions within the geographic region.

Causes of regionalism in India

- i) **Geographical factor:** The territorial orientation based on geographical boundaries relate to the inhabitants of a particular region which are symbolic, at least in the Indian context. This is more so because of the linguistic distribution along geographical boundaries. The topographic and climatic variations along with differences in the settlement pattern induce in people the concept of regionalism.

- ii) **Historical and cultural factors:** In the Indian scenario, the historical and cultural factors assume greater significance. The historical and cultural components interpret regionalism by way of cultural heritage, folklore, myths, symbolism and historical traditions. People of a particular cultural group also derive inspirations from the noble deeds and glorious achievements of the local heroes. Nevertheless, there are sudden political and economic realities which can be covered under the gamut of historical and cultural factors.
- iii) **Caste and religion:** When caste is combined with language conflicts or religious fundamentalism, it breeds regional feeling. It leads to dogmatism, orthodoxy and obscurantism.
- iv) **Economic factors:** Uneven development in many parts of the country may be construed as the prime reason of regionalism and separatism. There are certain regions in the country where industries and factories have been concentrated, educational and health facilities are adequately provided, communication network has been developed, rapid agricultural development has been made possible. But there are also certain areas where the worth of independence is yet to be realized in terms of socioeconomic development. Indeed, the British administration may be held responsible for causing such wide regional variations due to their suitability for the purpose of administration, trade and commerce. But in the post-independence era, efforts should have been made for regional balance in matters of industrial, agricultural and above all, economic development. This disparity has caused the feeling of relative deprivation among the inhabitants of economically neglected regions. It has manifested itself in the demand for separate states such as Bodoland, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and so on.
- v) **Politico-administrative factors:** Political parties, especially the regional political parties as well as local leaders, exploit the regional sentiments, regional deprivation and convert them to solidify their factional support bases. They give place to the regional problems in their election manifesto and promise for political and regional development.

Characteristics of regionalism

- i) Regionalism is conditioned by economic, social, political and cultural disparities.
- ii) Regionalism at times is a psychic phenomenon.
- iii) Regionalism is built around as an expression of group identity as well as loyalty to the region.
- iv) Regionalism presupposes the concept of development of one's own region without taking into consideration the interest of other regions.
- v) Regionalism prohibits people from other regions to be benefited by a particular region.

Types of regionalism

- i) **Supra-state regionalism:** is an expression of group identity of several states. In this type of regionalism, the group of states joins hands to take common stand on the issue of mutual interest vis-à-vis another group of states or at times against the union. The group identity thus forged is negative in character and based on specific

issue/s. It is not an instance of permanent merger of state identities in the collective identity. Even at times of inter-group rivalries, tensions and conflicts may tend to persist, simultaneously along with their cooperation. Northeastern states in India may be said to have possessed the supra-state regionalism.

- ii) **Inter-state regionalism:** is coterminous with provincial territories and involves juxtaposing of the identities of one or more states against another. It is also issue-specific. Disputes between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the distribution of Kaveri water may be construed as inter-state regionalism.
- iii) **Intra-state regionalism:** indicates that wherein a part of the state strives for self-identity and self-development and therefore, it is taken in a positive sense. In negative terms, it militates against the collective interest of the state as well as the nation. As for instance there is often a feeling of coastal region and western region in Odisha, coastal region and Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh, and so on.

Reasons for regional disparity still in India

Low rate of economic growth

The economic growth of India has been fluctuating since independence. But with respect to High population growth, the economic growth has been not enough to catch the development with full speed. In the last decade, the economic growth were progressive, but now they are reeling under the influence of world economic crisis and other bottlenecks at domestic level.

Socio-economic and political organisation of states

The states have been unable to do the adequate land reforms and the feudal mentality still persists. Bhoojan and Gramdaan movements, after independence, were not enthusiastically carried and even land under land Banks were not efficiently distributed. The political activities in the backward states were limited to vote bank politics and scams.

Lower level of infrastructural facilities in backward states

The level of infrastructural development, such as- power distribution, irrigation facilities, roads, modern markets for agricultural produce has been at back stage. All these are state list subjects.

Low level of social expenditure by states on education, health and sanitation

These subjects are core for human resource development. The states which have invested heavily on these subjects, fall under the developed and advanced states, for example Tamil Nadu, where health care services in Primary health centre is benchmark for other states.

Political and administration failure

This is source of tension and gives birth to sub-regional movements for separate states. Jarkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttrakhand and recently Telangana are result of these failure only. Many such demands are in pipeline such as- Vidarbha, Saurashtra, Darjeeling and Bodoland, etc. These failures also weakens the confidence of private players and do not attract investors in the states.

Clashes in India having colours of regionalism

Linguistic Reorganization of States

It was the demand of Potti Sriramulu, a freedom fighter and a devoted follower of Mahatma Gandhi, that led to the creation of Andhra Pradesh state and linguistic recognition of the states in India. To achieve this end, he died in 1952 after not eating for 52 days in support of a Telugu-speaking state. Sriramulu's death forced Jawahar Lal Nehru to agree to the various demands from other parts of the country with similar demands. Consequently, in 1954, a States Reorganisation Committee was formed with Fazal Ali as its head, which recommended the formation of 16 new states and 3 Union Territories based on the language.

Demand for Dravida Nadu

Going back to the journey of Regionalism in India, it is well noticeable that it emerged with Dravidian Movement, which started in Tamil Nadu in 1925. This movement, also known as 'Self-Respect Movement' initially focused on empowering Dalits, non-Brahmins, and poor people. Later it stood against imposition of Hindi as sole official language on non-Hindi speaking areas. But it was the demand of carving out their own Dravidastan or Dravida Nadu, which made it a secessionist movement. As early as 1960s the DMK and the Nan Tamil organized a joint campaign throughout Madras state demanding its secession from India and making it an independent sovereign state of Tamiland. DMK proposed that the states of Madras, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Mysore should secede from the Indian union and form an independent "Republic of Dravida Nadu".

Telangana Movement

In the years after the formation of Andhra Pradesh state, people of Telangana expressed dissatisfaction over how the agreements and guarantees were implemented. Discontent with the 1956 Gentleman's agreement intensified in January 1969, when the guarantees that had been agreed on were supposed to lapse. Student agitation for the continuation of the agreement began at Osmania University in Hyderabad and spread to other parts of the region. Government employees and opposition members of the state legislative assembly threatened "direct action" in support of the students. This movement since then finally resulted last year one separate state of Telangana. It should be noted that roots of disparity in two regions was in colonial rule. Andhra was under direct rule of crown while Telangana was ruled by Nizam of Hyderabad, who was not so efficient ruler. So over time Andhra got more developed in comparison to Telangana.

Shiv Sena against Kannadigas

In 1966, Shiv Sena, in Maharashtra, launched its agitation against Kannadigas in the name of Marathi pride. The first targets of its agitation were South Indians who were the workers of Udupi hotels in Mumbai. This agitation was labelled to be a retaliation of the lathi-charge on Marathi speaking people in the border areas.

Bodoland Demand within Assam

The Bodo agitation is led by the Assam Bodo Students Union which is demanding a separate state and has resorted to wide scale violence and series of crippling bandhs to pursue their demand. One of the basic reason Assam agitations is because

of the expansion of education, particularly higher education, but not industrialization and other job creating institutions is increasing the army of educated youths in the backward regions. These frustrated young men are allured by the movements against the inflow of people from other countries and states. On the other hand these unemployed youths are also attracted by the caste, communal and other sectional agitations fighting for the protection of rights on sectarian lines.

Khalistan Movement

It was during the era of 1980s that Khalistan movement with its aim to create a Sikh homeland, often called Khalistan, cropped up in the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. In fact this demand has also the colours of communalism, as there demand is only for Sikhs.

Attacks on Bihar Labourers by the ULFA

ULFA continues to attempt ambushes and sporadic attacks on government security forces. In 2003, the ULFA was accused of killing labourers from Bihar in response to molestation and raping of many Assamese girls in a train in Bihar. This incident sparked off anti-Bihar sentiment in Assam, which withered away after some months though. On August 15, 2004, an explosion occurred in Assam in which 10-15 people died, including some school children. This explosion was reportedly carried out by ULFA. The ULFA has obliquely accepted responsibility for the blast. This appears to be the first instance of ULFA admitting to public killings with an incendiary device. In January 2007, the ULFA once again struck in Assam killing approximately 62 Hindi speaking migrant workers mostly from Bihar. On March 15, 2007, ULFA triggered a blast in Guwahati, injuring six persons as it celebrated its 'army day'.

The MNS Targeting North Indians

It was in 2008 that Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) workers began their violent agitation against North Indians. Bhojpuri films were not allowed to run on theatres in Maharashtra. The targets were vendors and shopkeepers from North India in various parts of Maharashtra.

Inter-State Disputes

Another form of regionalism in India has found expression in the form of interstate disputes. There are disputes boundary disputes for example between Karnataka and Maharashtra on Belgaum where Marathi speaking population is surrounded by Kannada speaking people, between Kerala and Karnataka on Kasargod, between Assam and Nagaland on Rengma reserved forests. There is a dispute over Chandigarh in Punjab and Haryana.

The first important dispute regarding the use of water source was over the use of water resources of three rivers mainly Narmada, Krishna and Cauvery in which states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra were involved. Disputes also arose between use of Cauvery waters among the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Another dispute arose among the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh over the use and distribution of waters of the Krishna River. Disputes between Punjab, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh over the use of waters of

Ravi River. The Electricity sharing issue between Punjab and Delhi is another example of this.

Creation of new States in 2000

In 2000, the Government of India, pursuant to legislation passed by Parliament during the summer, created three new states, Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal, and Jharkhand, reconstituting Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, respectively. Both the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress party supported the formation of the states. The basis for creating the new states is socio-political and not linguistic.

Impact of Regionalism in India

Positive

Scholars believe that regionalism plays important role in building of the nation, if the demands of the regions are accommodated by the political system of the country. Regional recognition in terms of state hood or state autonomy gives self-determination to the people of that particular region and they feel empowered and happy. Internal self-determination of community, whether linguistic, tribal, religious, regional, or their combinations, has remained the predominant form in which regionalism in India has sought to express itself, historically as well as at present time.

Negative

Regionalism is often seen as a serious threat to the development, progress and unity of the nation. It gives internal security challenges by the insurgent groups, who propagate the feelings of regionalism against the mainstream politico-administrative setup of the country.

Regionalism definitely impacts politics as days of collation government and alliances are taking place. Regional demands become national demands, policies are launched to satisfy regional demands and generally those are extended to all pockets of country, hence national policies are now dominated by regional demands. E.g. MSP given to sugarcane, it was helpful for farmers in Maharashtra but it was implemented across all states resulting agitations of farmers belonging to UP, Punjab and Haryana. Meanwhile it sowed seed of defection among ministers and targeting to corresponding minister.

Nationalism and Regionalism

Historians of modern India have highlighted, how the growth in Indian nationalism against British colonialism since the nineteenth century also gave birth to intense awakening among various region-based linguistic nationalities for identity and self-determination, often in opposition to the pan-Indian nationalism. To mobilise people from all over India, leaders of mainstream nationalism has to recognise and mobilise the local leaders, they had to reach out to the people in local languages. The mass mobilisation was only possible, when people became aware about their regional needs and its importance.

The mainstream Indian nationalism had continuously to grapple with regional nationalism. Under the heavy weight of regional identities of the people of India, the Indian National Congress (INC) could have hardly remained immune from it. It gradually became, in fact, an inter-regional coalition of forces. And for that reason only and to further strengthen the feeling of nationalism, INC used to have their annual meetings

in different regions of India, raising the consciousness of people against the colonial exploitation.

Federalism and Regionalism

The role played by Indian federalism in ensuring India's unity, stability and survival as a polity in the face of persistent regionalism, often verging on separation, rooted in manifold and complex social and cultural diversity, and mass poverty, illiteracy, extreme regional unevenness in development, and widespread inequality. The question has assumed special significance in the aftermath of the disintegration of the multi-ethnic and multinational Soviet Union, and the split up of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The need for federalism is enhanced in countries with ethnically distinct regions where the territorial accommodation of distinct groups of people is of paramount importance. For those countries, a combination of shared rule (for general purposes of unity) and some kind of self-rule (for regional/local purposes of diversity) is a must if unity and integrity are to be maintained.

Indian federalism is seen as a method of accommodation of regionalism in India. Federalism is seen here as a political equilibrium, which results from the appropriate balance between shared rule and self-rule. In the post Second World War period, many post-colonial countries adopted federalism as a method of governance in multi-ethnic contexts.

India's rich diversity sometimes looks like an obstacle to unity. But the latest election has proved that a commitment to resolving differences peacefully and democratically can transform diversity into a source of strength.

Suggestive Measures

- i) Doing away with regional imbalance
- ii) Check on regional political parties
- iii) Top priority to the economic development of deprived zones
- iv) Restructuring of the society
- v) Acculturation
- vi) Developed means of transport and communication
- vii) Proper education
- viii) Appeal through mass media
- ix) Create enough employment opportunity
- x) Provide Special Packages to backward states
- xi) Special category status to Bifurcated State in India
- xii) Improve National Integration

Conclusion

Several regional political parties have merged in recent years and have gained strength for obvious reasons. The handful of national parties cannot, by the very nature of things, adequately represent and pursue regional causes. Most of the national parties have even failed to live up to the people's expectations. That explains why more State-based parties have been formed in various regions and is quite successful in their aims. Regional parties are not a new phenomenon. Several parties have been existing in the country for the last many decades. They have held power, or are still holding power, in many states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Pondicherry, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and other States in the North-Eastern region. But never before were regional parties dubbed as anti-national or regarded as a threat to the nation's unity. People repose confidence in regional parties

because they believe that they alone can safeguard the interests of the State concerned and can fight for the legitimate rights and powers of the States without being hamstring by their association with a national party. Regional parties naturally concentrate on safeguarding and promoting regional interests. But they do not sacrifice the larger interests of the country. It is also significant that in the Lok Sabha a regional party now forms the largest opposition group.

Among the causes of the growth of regionalism is prolonged maladministration and neglect of an area or State by the Central, Government. There has been a creeping disillusionment against Central rule. Regional symbols, regional culture, history and in many cases a common language, all promote regionalism. The Centre's indifference to the development of certain regions has created imbalances. Some areas particularly in the North, are well developed, with adequate infrastructure while others are way behind. This explains why there is Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Jharkhand Movement in Bihar.

There is much concern among leaders of the Congress (I) about the growth of regionalism in the country. It is looked upon with suspicion and is even regarded as a challenge to democracy and national integration. But this concern is largely unwarranted; Regionalism will come into conflict with nationalism only when it becomes aggressive and when members of the various regional parties tend to forget that they are Indians first and last, citizens of the same country.

Non-regional conflicts are however a cause for concern. There are constitutional means to deal with regional conflicts, while the communal and caste conflicts have often to be settled in the streets. Inter-regional or centre-region disputes have never created a serious explosion whereas communal clashes frequently cause havoc.

Unfortunately, there are important differences among the regional parties themselves in the country. The differences of approach and policy have hindered the formation of an effective, durable and viable combination of regional parties so as to facilitate the emergence of a national alternative to the ruling party at the centre. The growth of regional parties in itself is not incompatible with the process of nation-building.

In a democracy, ideological options are open in the sense that any individual or group can adopt any ideology, provided, of course, it is within the legal framework. Political parties have the freedom to compete for power and pursue their respective ideologies. Since ideologies are no respecters of geographical boundaries, they also check the exclusiveness of regional identities. In fact, it has been the decline of the party system in recent years that has inflated the role of regionalism in the country.

As for the cures, three suggestions may be made. First, there should be a greater spirit of accommodation on the part of the Central authorities. This implies a reversal of the process of concentration of power which has admittedly been much in evidence in the country, causing resentment among the opposition-governed State. Power and authority must be shared on an equitable basis between the Centre and the constituent units, of the Indian Federation. Harmonious, balanced growth should be the administrations aim, not suppression of local desires and demands. Of course, firmness is necessary when regionalism, assumes militant forms, as it has done in Punjab in the form of operation Blue Star and Operation Thunder, where in recent years certain groups of

misguided youth started running a parallel government and creating chaos. Regionalism must not be allowed to become a shield for militancy, extremism, establishing a reign of terror and carrying on other anti-national activities.

The regional parties patriotism should not be suspected, regionalism does not weaken India. The majority groups should not become arrogant or obsessed with power. They should be generous towards the minorities, religious, cultural and linguistic Suppression of regional aspirations is not the right remedy.

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