



Regionalism: A Conceptual Analysis in the Indian Context

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Abstract

The paper examines the concept of regionalism in India, its historical evolution, major determinants, and implications for national integration. It analyzes colonial influences, state reorganization, economic disparities, linguistic identities, regional political parties, and psychological factors contributing to regional consciousness. The study argues that while regional aspirations can strengthen democratic participation, excessive regionalism may challenge national unity and federal stability. It may be argued that like certain objective conditions such as compact geographical area, distinct history, common culture and a separate mother tongue largely helped to create a strong sense of regional identity among the people of a part region, notwithstanding the formation of an integrated and United States in independent India. In addition to this, their relatively backward socio-economic position in comparison to the people of other region created a sense of material deprivation between them. The relative material deprivation in socio-economic terms coupled with the disaffection resulting political disadvantage contributed immensely to the growth of regionalism.

It seems a matter of past when we Indians used to feel proud of unity in diversity our country. People of different states would cherish the cultural difference and felt amazed to see so many cultures in one India. With the current regional hatred, now one feels insecure and helpless. Regionalism is an issue that the India has faced even before the time of independence and will have to keep on facing. If the politics of India continues to be played out on regional, regional or even a cultural plank, the regional aspirations of many will continue to be encouraged, and more and more demand of separation fired either by a Xenophobic belief or otherwise will continue to be threaten the secular and Federal fabric of our constitution.

Keywords: Multy racial, centrifugal, Princely States, Reorganization of States, Unitarian Approach, Nativist Movement, Regional Imbalance.

1. Introduction

India is a large country having continental dimensions and comprising no fewer than 29 States and 7 Union Territories. It is a multi-racial, multi-lingual nation. In India regionalism is not a new phenomenon and in fact, the fillip given to it by the emergence of regional movements in different parts of the country has a historical continuity. Prior to independence, regionalism was used as a tool by the imperialists to promote their policy of keeping India divided.

Regionalism was deliberately encouraged by them with the result that people of each region thought more in terms of their region rather than of India was a whole. After independence regional feelings very much thrived in India. Not only this, but within the region itself, the feelings of sub-regionalism became a divisive force in Indian politics. The growth of this trend can be traced to the fast unto death by Potti Sriramulla, a Ghandhian Congressman over the demand for the creation of Andhra Pradesh, which set the motion the Reorganization of states along linguistic line in 1956^[1].

In the contemporary analysis of the e development of Indian political system, regionalism has acquired through phases a distinct connotation and is used to indicate an agglomeration of all those forces which are generally considered to be “centrifugal” polarized to centralism and nationalism^[2]. It is therefore not unusual to find analysis of economic regionalism, linguistic regionalism and religious-regionalism included in the general frame of regionalism. Thus, in the Indian context, regionalism is a nebulous concept. Indira Gandhi described regionalism “a very serious threat to the development, progress and unity of the country”^[3]. Prof. A.D. Pant explains regionalism through the concept of – “Mal-development syndrome”. Das Gupta identified it with a “Search for an intermediate control system between the centre and the periphery for competitive advantage in the national arena”.

Some writers feel that regionalism denotes a relational pattern based on the conflict between the core federal centre and the

peripheral units, and shall continue to impinge erratically on ethnic, linguistic and political alignments. The interplay of these variables gives rise to a kind of aggressive natives resting on native-migrant dichotomy, religious fundamentalism, linguistic chauvinism, cultural pluralism, geographical attachment, cast dominance, economic deprivation, political discrimination and areal exclusivism ^[4]. Regionalism in context of India is a vague concept and has both positive and negative dimension. Positively "It embodies a quest for fulfillment on the part of an area" ^[5]. Seen in this perspective it constitutes a true expression of freedom and democracy and therefore it is not to be suspected and considered as an alibi for the balkanization of the country. Negatively regionalism in Indian politics is regarded as a divisive force which acts contrary to national unity and integrity and challenges the legitimacy of the state ^[6]. Thus as per this the positive polarization blurs the negative aspects of regionalism.

2. Objectives of the Study

- i). To examine the concept and meaning of regionalism in India.
- ii). To identify the major factors responsible for regionalism.
- iii). To analyze the impact of regionalism on Indian politics and national integration.
- iv). To evaluate the positive and negative dimensions of regionalism.

3. Research Methodology

This study is conceptual and analytical in nature. It is based on secondary sources including books, journal articles, government reports, and scholarly publications.

Colonial reinterpretation of history; integration and unionization of princely states; linguistic reorganization of states; economic disparities; geographical attachment; language; regional political parties; and psychological factors.

4. Discussion

Regionalism has both constructive and disruptive dimensions. It promotes local aspirations and democratic representation, but may also generate separatist tendencies, linguistic chauvinism, and political fragmentation when exploited for narrow interests.

Strengthening Factors of Regionalism

The factors that have strengthened regionalism in India briefly discussed under the following headings.

- i). **Colonial Re-Interpretation of History:** Colonial masters, with their accent on divisive trends in India, interpreted history on religious and radical lines to perpetuate old dichotomies and glorify historical fallacies. India history as seen through the British eyes rested on a convenient tri partite division of history on manifestly religious and radical lines. It was divided into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. Since the periodization had distinct religious underpinnings, it was resented by Indian scholars and hence to placate and pacify them, re-interpretation on new lines was attempted. Historical periods were rechristened as ancient, medieval and modern periods but this semantic change was only superficial as periods under study remained steadfastly the same as earlier.

Thus, ancient history contained only the exploits of

Hindu rulers a medieval period began with the Muslim conquest of India. The modern period began with the advent of British in India. Thus, a change in nomenclature did not mean a change in the essence of the curriculum which continued to be based on the religious periodicity to foster division of Indians on religious lines by creating a false separatist historical consciousness among them.

- ii). **Unionization of States:** India before 1947 was divisible into two distinct territorial segments-the British India and the princely India. With the lapse of paramountcy India faced the problem of integrating these princely states into the India union to prevent country's balkanization. These states retained all the external trappings of sovereignty during the British period and were cut off from the national mainstream. With the declaration of independence, the princely states were placed in a very difficult situation. It was the creation of this political vacuum, and the vulnerability of the smaller states which quickened the process of territorial integration of these states with the Indian union. As a result the construction makers of India decided to categorize these states as Part B states of India in the new constitution. It was further decided that old British Indian provinces will be kept in part-A state's category and after ten year the distinction between Part A and B will disappear. Whereas the unionization was legally affected, this created its own problems and strains.⁸ the people of princely were amalgamated into several larger units, but their inhabitants continued to maintain their old sectarian loyalties to the states to which they once belonged. They have retained this split personality even after decades of their integration into the union of India.
- iii). **Reorganization of States:** Integration was at best a first step towards attaining the objective keeping the multinational territory of India united, and more progress in this respect was to be done by the rational re organization of states. This is because during the British days the formation of provinces was accomplished on considerations of administrative convenience are historical conquest and not on the principles of linguistic homogeneity, cultural harmony or ethnic aptitude of the people. Hence, the boundaries of the states were to be re-demarcated not only with a view to integrate them within the new national frame but also to ensure a harmonious ordering of democratic units with dynastic identities ^[9]. The first issue to which the then leaders addressed was that of linguistic states. In Andhra region of composite state of Madras, Potti Sriramula went on a determined fast for the bifurcation of Madras state and after 52 days of relentless fast died a martyr's death on Dec. 15, 1952. The tragedy was followed by wide spread riots and destruction and it hastened the formation of States Reorganization Commission within a week. Before the commission (SRC) could submit its report, a fully-fledged state of Andhra Pradesh was carved out of the territories of former Madras state on Oct. 1, 1953. The formation of Andhra Pradesh raised the hornet nest.¹⁰ it was to be the precursor of more such linguistic states to be formed and this was the job entrusted to the states reorganized commission which was formed on Dec. 29, 1953. The commission took due note regional and linguistic urges but failed to provide an answer to the

vexed question of regional reorganization on sound lines. With the result that its recommendations raised a chorus of protests from those who were dissatisfied with its recommendations and this led to a series of disturbances in various parts of the country.

It was thought that commission would give due recognition to linguistic aspirations but this was not to be as India's polyglot character impeded the task of arriving at an agreed solution that would satisfied all the Freeport, therefore gave rise to many regional and subregional movements in different parts of the country. Thus it can be said that the re organization of states hardly solved the problem of regional imbalance, and in fact it hastened the process of regionalization of India politics by intensifying the sub regional tendencies ^[11].

- iv). **Economic Component of Regionalism:** The crux of regionalism lies in economic under development of the different regions of the country. Nothing makes a docile and passive community more aggressive than the feeling relative economic deprivation, discrimination and neglect. The colonial rulers created provinces to sub serve their own economic ends and not for the economic benefit of natives with the result that what India inherited from the Britishers was not only areas with political disparity but also states suffering from grave economic in balance and unevenness. More ever the constitution makers adopted a Unitarian approach to the problem of economic development. The emphasis was on excessive decentralism. Several members took exception in the constituent assembly to the manner in which states were being reduced to the level of "beggars at the door of the centre" ^[12].

Thus, it is the economic imbalance which is the crucial factor of regional consciousness of India. As Kousar Azam states, "economic regionalism which could have helped integrate the various regions of the country, resulted only in further imbalance politically, it reduced planning into a process of power adjustment between the various states and added one more factor to the dynamics of group-conflict". ^[13]

Therefore, the desire to share economic cake encourages regional feelings and aspirations and ultimately provides the much needed fuel to regional movements. Further the economic imbalance is exploited by the regional leaders. Further the economic imbalance is exploited by the regional leaders who engineer regional movements, taking benefit of the economic grievances of their particular regions and demand distributive justice for their region. According the report of state reorganization commission, demands for the creation of new states were mainly based on allegedly unfair and unequal distribution of development benefits and expenditures in the multi lingual states. Telengana movement is the best example of this type of regionalism. Feelings of discontent in the backward and depressed regions of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, U.P. Orissa, M.P. and Rajasthan further support this argument ^[14].

There had been agitation for the location of steel plants, oil refineries and heavy industries, irrespective of the fact whether the state has the necessary paraphernalia to establish and manage them and the centre is accused of partisan attitude, the conflict between the migrant and the "Sons of the soil" also called "Nativist movement" is a

manifestation of the economic factor. The shiv Sena Movement to oust non Maharashtrians from Maharashtra is strongly motivated by economic compulsions the impact of the economic factor is that the backward regions of the country have developed separate consciousness from that of the Indian nation and are-demanding not only separate state hood but at certain times secession from the Indian union. The example of this is the "Khalistan Movement" in Punjab ^[15].

- v). **Geographical Propinquity:** Regional consciousness gets buttressed by geography also. People tend to relate their identity to a particular geographical area and take pride in their being sons of that particular soil. Phrases like "Amar Sonar Bengal" or "Deshan Bich Desh Punjab Da" (Punjab is the best among all countries) are reminiscent of peoples acute loyalties towards a geographical area. It will be worthwhile to recall in the specific Indian context that the integration of the princely states after independence resulted in the merger of relatively small territorial entities into new and bigger states. The new states which were thus brought into being came to develop split personalities, with the loyalties of their citizens and even the elite being torn between old territorial boundaries and new territorial structures. This loyalty and split personality played a very crucial role in the growth and development of regionalism in Indian politics.
- vi). **Language:** Language is one of the most important components of regionalism in India. The languages are not an artificial creation but a natural growth and formation of its inner springs of thoughts pure and undefiled. Each language has its own soul which gives it body and shape". It has the propensity of unity as well as causing disharmony, emotionally frenzy and destabilization of the political system. It is therefore most crucial variable which carries which it a power-keg of pent-up emotions, as it is a very distinctive mark of identity affiliation. Thus, intra-state regionalism surpasses the bond of common language where economic grievances of a sub region take precedence over language as is illustrated by the Telengana issue.
- vii). **Regionalization of Political Parties:** The growth and development of regionalism has got much needed support from the regional political parties, which have proved to be major force molding the nature and texture of state politics in India. In fact, with the emergence of regional political parties, the Indian politics has got regionalized. Acute political controversies at the state as well as central levels which have put heavy pressure on Indian polity are the direct outcome of the regionalization of political parties. Certain political parties are out and out regional in their outlook such as national conference of Kashmir Akalidal of Punjab, Mizo National front of Mizoram, Gana Prishat of Assam, Naga National Council of Nagaland, DMK and ADMK of Tamil Nadu and Telugu which are national in appellation but regional in character such as the CPI(M), which has acquired a distinct regional coloration in different states of India this regionalization of political parties has posed serious problems for the overall working of the Indian political system.
- Many times well established older political identities such as the congress failed to survive in certain states

without championing regional issues. For example, at an earlier date the congress in Punjab supported the demand for Chandigarh being given to Punjab where as in Haryana it took the opposite stand.

viii). Psychic Component: In the ultimate analysis of regionalism in Indian politics it can be said that it is psychic phenomenon for its roots are to be found in the minds of men. Every Indian carries a split personality-he is in part rationalistic and in part nationalistic. There is always a natural tendency towards the primacy of the rationalistic element over the nationalistic one. Despite the Unitarian approach of Indian constitution makers owing to which only one citizenship is granted to the Indians, people retain their state loyalties. The pan-Indian sentiment has not grown strong enough to subsume sectarian loyalties and people continue to remain emotionally committed to their states. People don't hesitate of their being kashmiri, Bihari, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi or Malayalam when asked to specify their identity. Thus, in this context that regionalism which in reality takes birth in the hearts and minds of people has proved to be the most disintegrating force in Indian politics because of the secessionist movements that it generates.

The resurgence of regionalism in various parts of the country has emerged as such a serious problem that it literally threatens to divide the country. The creation of new states like Jharkhand, Uttaranchal (Uttarakhand) and Chhattishgarh in recent times is in fact the expression of territorial. Again, the demand for Bodoland, Vidarbha, Gorkhaland, etc. cannot be traced in the earnest desire of the people to have their regional identity, which results from regional imbalances.

It is a powerful vehicle for the expression of regionalism and regional sentiments. The views expressed in them, are often quite contrary to those in the English media, i.e. national media. In an age of coalition governments, where regional forces in the country are strengthening vernacular press has become more vocal and articulates. Naturally, it has strengthening effect on regional sentiments.

5. Conclusion

Regionalism remains an important component of India's federal structure. Balanced regional development, cooperative federalism, inclusive governance, and national integration policies are essential to ensure that regional aspirations strengthen rather than weaken the nation.

Regionalism in India is only a short cut to attain the political ambitions by emotionally exploiting the sentiments of the people. The fear of Balkanization is void of any logic. India is bound by a common culture that has flourished on this land many thousand years ago. The states which fought for complete independence are now part of Indian Union and they have renounced for some extent violence; they include Mizoram, Nagaland, Kashmir, Bodoland, and Tamil Nadu. India is too big for these states to fight against and win. They are responsible for bringing this regionalism out in the open creating rifts in the minds of people. They started influencing the minds of people at an emotional level where it hurts the most. Their aim is to divide on the basis of region and religion.

The reason behind the people who are supporting the

regionalism is the problems they are facing in their everyday life by the majority people of the state. Exactly sixty years ago, India adopted a federal system of governance wherein the central government controls and coordinates the sufficiently empowered state governments. Since each state government represents the aspirations of the citizens of a certain region, regionalism indeed is at the heart of Indian constitution. There's nothing wrong in harboring regional aspirations. It can be helpful in create competitive environment amongst states. Instead, the petty politicians are misusing the son-of-soil slogan for furthering their own cause in the name of lending voice to regional discontent.

We have a democratic nation, which gives equal rights to all its citizens. When we do not have major issues, we start quarreling about petty issues. This is the root cause of regionalism or son of soil issue. We all are Indians. We never bother to think of the caste, creed, or language of an Indian, when we meet an Indian abroad. He is our brother even if he is from the other end of your nation. Each state is not leading an isolated life. South Indians reaches North India in search of job. The whole nation depends on the food grains from Punjab. What will be the future of our daily life when we stick on to Regionalism? Will each square kilometer provide food, job and industries required for every one living in that region? Life exists only through dependence on others. We can never live in compartments. Son of soil calls have to be stopped at any cost. The main reason why there are many states in India is for administration purpose and the Government made sure that it would be convenient for administration if they have various states according to the language spoke in the region. So we must make sure that the feeling of Indian is more powerful than these regional or caste feeling.

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