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REGIONALISM AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN INDIA



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ABSTRACT

In the post-independence period, it has often been conflicting as well as collaborating force, largely depending on the manner of accommodation. Regionalism in India is deeply rooted in its manifold diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, religions, communities, etc. It originates from the feeling of regional concentration, which is often fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation. The country of more than a billion people of different castes, creeds, 555 customs and cultures, India's broad regions are distinct from one another. For instance, southern India, the home of Dravidian cultures, itself a region of many regions is very different from the north. To say, every region is quite different from one another, will not be an exaggeration. In Indian context, regionalism refers to assertion of distinct ethnic, linguistic or economic interests by various groups within the nation. Since the roots of regionalism lie in linguistic, ethnic, economic and cultural identities of the people living in specific geographical area, political scholars have treated various forms of regionalism which include economic regionalism, linguistic regionalism, political regionalism and even sub-regional movements in the general frame of regionalism. In other words, it is the manifestation of those neglected Socio-political elements which fail to find expression in the mainstream polity and culture. These feelings of frustration and anger resulting from exclusion and neglect find expression in regionalism. Prejudices and biases have a lasting impact on the mind of the people. They themselves do not play a part in the political process, but as a psychic factor they do influence their party organisations and their political behaviour. Seen in this perspective, regionalism in India, as elsewhere, is basically a psychic phenomenon. It has its root in the minds of the people.

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Regionalism in Indian Politics becomes a striking feature of the Indian political party system. The rise of regional political parties have played significant role in the regional, state and even national politics of our democratic country. After the first general election of 1952 the Election Commission had declared 19 political parties as regional parties. In fact, the regional political parties have become a part and parcel of Indian political system.

A regional political party confines its activities within the boundary of a often represents the interest of a particular regional group, language group, ethnic group or cultural group. While forming their policies, these regional political parties have often shown ideological integrity. They are generally not interested in taking parts in national politics. Rather sometimes they show militant attitude towards the national politics or to the Central Government. While showing this militant attitude they often get themselves engaged in unscrupulous political activities. Yet while they themselves come into power in their respective regions or states they perform political activities with tremendous responsibility. The most noteworthy examples of these regional political parties are the

D.M.K. and A.D.M.K of Tamil Nadu,
the Telegu Desham of Andhra Pradesh,
the National Conference Party of Jammu and Kashmir.
the Akali Dal (party) of Punjab
the Trinamul Congress of West Bengal,
the CPIM of West Bengal,
the Assam Gana Parishad of Assam,
the Gorkha League of Darjeeling in West Bengal etc

It is also striking that, now-a-days, both in their political activities and range of their success, many a national political parties have taken the character of the regional parties. They also share their regional parties especially in the affairs and problems having all Indian importance. Even the Indian National Congress Party itself has more or less, taken the character of regional political party.

India & regionalism

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.

Any attempt to counter regionalism in the erroneous e erroneous belief that is not conducive to national interests, would be ill-conceived. Enforced uniformity in a huge country like India would be sheer-foolly Regional parties do not hinder national unity and integrity as long as they do not exceed their area of activity

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 are 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 (Telugu Desam) 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 (1) 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 nor 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. There are some uniting factors which need to be further promoted. The emergence of a national market, the spread of communications, the influence of all India institutions, the widening transport facilities, the vast network of the electronic media, the establishment of a common structure of formal education almost throughout the country (four states have yet to switch over to 10 plus 2 plus 3) These factors helps to counter regional tendencies.

Factors contributing Regionalism

There are various reasons for its emergence of Regionalism in Indian Politics such as Firstly, the administrative policies and decisions as well as the developmental plans taken at the national level may not satisfy all people of the country and these people, who remain dissatisfied, may feel that their interest are not properly safeguarded. In such a context they form the regional parties to solve their own problems. That was how the regional parties like D.M.K, A.D.M.K. the National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir etc. were formed.

➤ Secondly, India is still not free from ethnic, racial and religious orthodoxy. Sometimes the Regionalism in Indian Politics emerges on these ethnic, racial or religious grounds. That was how the Hindu Mahashava, Ramrajya Parishad, Siromani Akali Dal, the Muslim League or even the Tele Desham party was formed.

Thirdly, sometimes the Regionalism in Indian Politics are formed on language issues as well. The D.M.K, A.D.M.K. parties of Tamil Nadu, the Telengana Praja Samiti of Andhra Pradesh or the Gorkha League of West Bengal etc. was formed on the basis of this language issue.

Fourthly, sometimes the regional political parties are formed on the initiative of one or a few political leaders. However, these types of regional parties usually do not last long. They generally extinguish when the leader himself dies.

Fifthly, sometimes the Regionalism in Indian Politics are formed to safeguard the minority interests. The Muslim League, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the TYC etc. belong to this category of the regional political parties

Sixthly, sometimes the internal conflicts of the big national parties may pave the ground for the rise of the regional political parties. That was how the Congress party was divided into several small parties like Congress for democracy, Congress (1) etc.

Seventhly, sometimes a leader of a big national party, if ousted from his other original party, forms a regional party to express his or her grievances. That was how Sri Ajoy Mukherjee formed the Bangla Congress or Sm. Mamata Banerjee formed the Trinamul Congress in Bengal.

Eighthly, the regional political parties formulate their policies and programmes on the basis of the regional demands, grievances and interests of the people. Naturally they pin with them the confidence and loyalty of the people. The National parties try to utilize this confidence and loyalty of the people for their own sinister interest. Thus they form Coalitions and Fronts and the Leftist and right political parties appear as strange bed fellows. This has made the regional parties gain a lot of importance and confidence.

Ninthly, during the pre-independence days people fought for the country's freedom and a unique sense of oneness, a sense of nationalism had flared up in them which had strengthened the solidarity and integrity of the nation. But after independence that burning sense of nationalism has evaporated and a narrow sense to regional interest has developed. This has also paved the grounds for the emergence of regional political parties.

➤ Lastly, the general decadence of values, too much centralization of power, dictatorial role of the leaders, negligence to the regional leadership etc. in the national parties have not only

weakened their status but also facilitated the rise of numbers of regional political parties both big and small, in India.

Question arises should the emergence of the regionalism in Indian Politics be welcomed?

Critics are not unanimous in this regard. Those who favour the growth of regionalism in Indian Politics argue that in view of the success of Indian federalism, decentralization of power, greater autonomy of the component states, the emergence of regional political parties ought to be welcomed. Others hold the view that the emergence of too many regional parties will jeopardize, in the long run, the very integrity of the nation as a whole. Moreover they argue that the Regional political parties are generally guided by narrow commercial interest. Every component states have their own social economic and political problems and the regional parties always try to highlight the interest of its own region and respective state.

- 1 If the regional party comes in power in a province it tries to gain the maximum benefits neglecting the interest of others. This will give birth to very much ill feeling among others.
2. As the regional parties always try to find out the defects of the parties to power they cause problems and try to topple down the ruling party so much so that the developmental works in general are always jeopardized
3. In order to achieve their objectives sometimes the parties take the violent form and policies which often disturb peace and security and impede smooth functioning of the administration. This creates serious problems of the law and order situation.
4. It has also been found that very often the Regional parties fail to keep their separate identity and eventually tag themselves with big parties for sake of power. Thus the very ethics of democracy is disturbed

Issue of Regionalism

Regionalism is the attachment towards one's own region or state instead of to the entire country. The people in India differ greatly from one another in respect of language and social habits. India is divided among states mainly on the basis of language. The Government of India, shortly after independence began reforming the provinces on the linguistic basis. It was expected

that this would make each region or state a compact homogeneous whole, facilitate administration, and help its rapid progress, thus benefiting the country as a whole.

But the linguistic division of the country has already given rise to feelings that threaten the very unity of the motherland. Though the States of India are united under a common banner and common central government, we think of ourselves as natives of Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odisha, etc. first and Indian afterwards. At times, the feeling regionalism in India gets so strong that people of one state often starts treating the people of other states as foreigners. The Constitution of India lays down that every Indian shall enjoy equal rights in every part of the country. Indeed the evil of Regionalism has already become so serious that fears have arisen in many quarters about the unity of the country.

People need to understand that India is a union of states. Our pride is in Unity in diversity. The problem of Regionalism is an evil. We should be tolerant and respect the people as human brother.

Regionalism and National Integration

Regionalism is a major challenge to the National Integration of our country. Disintegration is a malady and it is the result of a great hiatus between needs and resources, claims and realities, profession and practice. And it is because of this hiatus that when national unity is vital, the regional separatism flourished all over India.

Conclusion

The tendency of people to feel more affinity to their territory, language, culture and social habits is called regionalism. The people living in a state have a negative feeling for more people of the other state. They given more importance to their own territorial region in comparison to other parts of the nation. We mean these feelings when we talk about regionalism. This tendency grows feelings of doing more and receiving more of the interest and development of own region. So, the feeling which accepts that the benefit of own state are supreme and the benefits of the other states of the same country can be ignored is called regionalism. Though it helps in development and growth of a region by its people but on the other hand, it also creates feelings of ignorance or neglecting towards other regions. It can heart all over development of country

like India. As far as the question of the regionalism's effect on Indian polity is concerned at the time of the independence congress was the sole national party which has the faith of most of the people from all over India. Gradually the feeling or regionalism was originated in South India. Protest against Hindi begun on large scale in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka etc. They were inclined to be concerned only about their own states benefits. On these linguistic feelings many regional-parties come on the regional political arena and fueled the feeling of regionalism further. These same feeling influenced the North Indian states also to have their own regional parties and gradually the regional parties in UP, Bihar, Rajasthan and M.P are became a power to reckon with When the people are educated enough to get over the influences of impostors, when the economic disparities between classes of people are eliminated, the gulf separating the people would be bridged automatically. The forces of discord and disintegration thrive in economic deprivations and social injustice, and in their absence they die a natural death.

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