

RISE AND GROWTH OF REGIONALISM IN INDIA

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Literally, in the contemporary world, specific ethnic, linguistic and religious groups are seeking specific regional identities. "As a homogeneous area with physical characteristic, distinct from the rest of the country"¹ it's a definition of "region", by the 'International Encyclopedia of social sciences'. Obviously, regionalism refers to an amalgamation of states into geographical, cultural, economic or administrative regions and to resemble in politics and policies among such states. Regionalism involves the politicization of regional concerns and the articulation of regional commitments². Exactly, recent system i.e. regionalism cannot be viewed as a threat to our federal system but as a reaction against over centralization and demand for a more balanced development of various states. Regionalism comprises many kinds of socio-cultural, economic and political variables. India has witnessed the rise of regionalism in some parts of the country in a way that it has assumed the shape of infra-nationalism that sometimes touches the verge of secessionism. The case of the north-eastern region of the country can be cited in this connection.

Regionalism, in the views of eminent political scientists and scholars are as follows: According to Prof. M. P. Singh, "regionalism has a political dimension that involves a consciousness of kind, a collective identity and a defence of territorial interests." Januzzi argues that "regional identities are shaped not only by shared language, culture and political consciousness, but also by economic variables."³ The distinguished politician like Indira Gandhi described regionalism as "a very serious threat to the development, progress and

unity of the country." And finally, in the view of scholar Shabana P. Mallick, Regionalism in Indian politics "has generally been regarded as something that is anti-system, anti-federal and against the basic interests of a well intergraded and well developed polity."⁴ Salient objectives of regionalism discussed by A.K. Chatterjee⁵ are as follows:

- Revival of regional cultures and rebuilding of such sub-cultural regions having distinctive identities within a nation
- Administrative and political devolution;
- Devising principles to solve centre-state confrontations and confrontations between two or more sub-cultural regions; and
- To maintain economic and political equilibrium between the centre and the states, nation and sub-cultural regions.

The regional, sub-regional movements based on language, religion, ethnicity and culture combine popular grievances from below with elements of manipulation from the above. The leadership of such regional movements seeks to institutionalize its political authority. These movements are expressed as secessionist, communal, often nativist and parochial. These are the several models available to understand the regional movements based on language, ethnicity and nativist demands.

REGIONALISM IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Regionalism plays a dominant role in contemporary politics, whether it is national or international and there is no exception in the case of India. Regionalism is rooted in India's cultural and linguistic diversity. Apart from Communalism and casteism, Indian politics is also ridden by regionalism, as people living in a particular region develop an identity affiliation with the region. In the view of S. Mallick, this sense of identity within a region develops regional consciousness and tends to demand administrative decentralization and autonomy. Again she argues that the regionalism in the Indian context has both negative and positive dimension. Speaking in positive terms, it represents the demand of the people living in a particular area and seeks to increase political participation through regional mobilization. Negatively speaking, regionalism reflects the psyche of the people, which are often misled by the political-bureaucratic elites. In this context regionalism is treated as a threat to national integration as it sometimes even calls for secessionism. Dr. Manju Subhash has discussed the following causes of regionalism in India:⁶

- Uneven development,
- Fear of losing cultural identity,
- Political dimension and
- The personal and selfish motive of politician.

Precisely, Indian problems are both to uplift the backward areas and to check the unplanned growth of metropolitan centre. Forces interacting between the two are to be regulated by judicious regional-oriented policy measures and consequently, regional concepts are bound to be followed and the national planning is to be fitted in the framework of regional planning. In India, regionalism may manifest in the form of a movement for special privileges for 'the sons of the soil' against outsiders.⁷ For example Bombay, a city known for the wide variety of its linguistic, religious and cultural communities, a political party called the Shiva Sena has demanded

that the jobs in the city not be given to migrant from other Indian states. Particularly, this principle has also sought by the Assamies and other north-eastern states. Regional divergence was widening by the controversy over the centre-state relations.

It seems to be very clear that there was a time when Indian people fought for their country. In the next phase people fought for their party, but in the current phase of Indian politics the predominant mood is to fight for individual's interest. Such regional movements seem to have been very powerful when economic issues are fused with cultural grievances. Undoubtedly, regional politics in India is a complex amalgam of various variables-geographical, historical, cultural, economic, linguistic, and communal and psychic⁸. India, the vast and various labyrinths of religious, racial, tribal and caste allegiances is developing a many-sided political form. Meanwhile, the politics suitable for the tribal dissidence of the Naga are not generalizable to the cast-based disaffection of present land lords in Andhra.

The central government's stance towards Orissa princes cannot be taken towards Gujrati industrialists⁹. The problem of Hindu fundamentalism in Uttar Pradesh, the heartland of Indian/Indic culture, takes a rather different from in Dravidian Mysore. In this scenario, the rise of regionalism and divisive forces is no more a phenomenon confined to the North-East or North-west. It has spread in every direction. The reality is that – as the regional interest has become more powerful than the regional outlook, sub-regional feelings have become even powerful than a regional outlook. The uneven economic development has led to increased inter-state and intra-state disparity resulting in the qualitative transformation of Indian politics. The direction and process of transformation depend upon the ability of the regional movements and parties. Recently, regional movements are growing and have come to power in some states.

Here, it is necessary to discuss, the scenario of Northeastern states. In Assam, all Assam Students Union has always asserted on the concept of 'sons of the soil' and is apprehensive of the exposure of the

limited employment potential of Assam to outsiders. The recent violence unleashed on Bihar labour force in Assam was a striking example of such politics. According to Akhtar Majeed, in India “nativism and the concept of ‘sons of soil’, raises the certain basic question about the relationship between the claims of an ethnic group of equality. This concept implies that the people belonging to a particular territory have a social and the first, if not the exclusive, claim to all the welfare facilities within that territory, having a sort of ownership by a specific group of the territory it occupies. It means that the indigenous population has a first claim on everything and the newcomers are entitled to benefits only after these have been adequately distributed to the indigenous population.”¹⁰

At the beginning of 2006 the leader of Telangana Rastra Samati (TRS) Shree K. Chandrashekhar Rao was on hunger strike for separate Telangana State. Even the parliamentarians of this region have done unconstitutional activities in the monsoon session of parliament (2006). Undoubtedly, the origin of Telangana movement (1948) lies mainly to economic non-development of this region but gradually, the elite of this region purely politicized it on the eve of 2014. Ultimately they got their own state “Telangana” on 2 June 2014 for the rapid development of the entire region and Kalvakuntla Chandrashekhar Rao was elected as the first chief minister of the newly state because their party Telangana Rashtra Samiti had secured majority during the election. The economic disparities have closely linked to the threats posed by the migrants to the cultural and social status of the local middle classes. In India different regions have developed identities of their own through customs, traditional ways and mannerisms, values and various institutional complexes which make the migrants easily distinguishable from them and hence former could be easily made a scapegoat for the failure of the latter.

Thus, we can say that the anti-migration factor is also directly or indirectly responsible for the growth of regionalism in India. It may be summarized as¹¹

- A locale, which has large number of middle class migrants those are culturally distinct from the indigenous population;
- An indigenous middle class, which is growing rapidly through expanded education opportunities;
- A very competitive labour market where the indigenous middle class is at disadvantage in gaining jobs vis-à-vis migrant from outside the territory;
- An indigenous population which itself is non-mobile and there are few opportunities outside the state to seek employment;
- An indigenous working class which is mobilised by the politics of cultural nationalism.

In India, linguistic and communal conflicts have often played a powerful role in arousing regional feelings. According to eminent political scientist Morris-Jones –“language is perhaps the most important mark of group identification”¹². Communal conflicts often give rise to separatism as witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. The Hurriyat, JKLF and Akali Dal have linked religious demands with political demands. However, it must be noted that religion does not have any importance unless it will combine with linguistic homogeneity, religious orthodoxy and economic deprivation. Another issue concerning regionalism are –historical trends and geographical boundaries. It also develops the sense of regional identity. In fact, the consciousness of a common history and sharing of common territorial boundaries develops regional awareness. The territorial symbolism in India gets buttressed by cultural heritage and historical myths as in the case of DMK in Tamil Nadu and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. In India, there are various depressed pockets inhabited by ethnic groups, who in turn may raise demand and thus lead to ethnic-based regionalism. For example the demand of tribals of Chota Nagpur and the Creation of Jharkhand state was a manifestation of such ethnicity.¹³

Today, Indian politics is regionalized or regionalism gives rise to acute political controversies as both assist and aggravates each other. There are various political parties such as the National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir, Akali Dal in Punjab, Mizo National Front of Mizoram, Assam Gana Parishad of Assam, Naga National Council of Nagaland, DMK and AIADMK of Tamil Nadu, Telegu Desam Party of Andhra Pradesh, JMM of Jharkhand, more or less Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and R.J.D., JD (U), L.J.P. in Bihar are the regional parties. It is a hidden fact that there are some other political parties, which are undoubtedly national in appeal but regional in characters, such as CPI (M), which dominate only in WB, Tripura and Kerala. Even national political parties such as Congress and BJP finds difficult to survive in certain states without raising regional issues.

There are so many unsolved issues in Indian politics today, which are responsible for the growth of inter-state regionalism. Issues are as following: The disputes of distribution of 'Cauvery' water between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and 'Narmada' water between Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat and Rajasthan, the issues of construction of Sutlej-Yamuna link canal between Punjab and Haryana, and some territorial issues like disputes of Chandigarh between Haryana and Punjab, and of 'Belgaon' between Maharastra and Karnataka – these are examples of such inter-state regionalism.

In Rajni Kothari's view, in India "the growing assertion of the diversity of plural sign impulses of growing differentiation within societies, of the strong upsurge of identities and their search for autonomy and self-determination, honour and dignity. The stream of social justice and ethnicity are producing a major challenge to both the centralized

state and the globalizing impact from beyond the nation state. These types of struggles is a growing politicization of human consciousness and identities as they grow into one common vision of democratic restructuring of the social and political order through federal and confederal institutions that can reach out to a large span of social span ranging from the local and the ethnic to the sub-continental and inter regional levels"¹⁴. Such regional conflicts seek to create ecological consciousness and thus stop the massive destruction of natural resources and forced displacement of millions of people.

We have to think broadly in respect of regionalism. Regionalism is not a threat to the unity of the country, as it expresses a psyche of relative deprivation in the economic field and connotes a desire for an equal share in development and progress. As Rasheeduddin Khan has aptly observed, "Every urge for autonomy is not divisive, but most probably a complementary force; it would not lead to balkanization but the restructuring of national identity; it is not fissiparous but a normal centrifugal tendency in a federation; it should not be taken as a call for disintegration of the national sovereignty but its re-integration".¹⁵

Undoubtedly, our country 'India' is a plural society. So it implies the theory like "unity in diversity" for national integration. Thus, we need to accept pluralism as a symbol of country's richness, honour and dignity. It is inevitable to accommodate both nationalistic as well as sub-nationalistic urges for greater productivity and development of the country at all. Ultimately, I have to say that if we want to protect our federal parliamentary democracy, do not avoid the regional progress and development.

¹ International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences

² Harry H. Hillar, Canadian Society- A Macro Analysis, 1991, pp. 9.

³ Paul Wallance (ed.) Region and Nation in India, New Delhi: Oxford and IBH for American Institute of Indian Studies, 1985, pp. 14.

⁴ Review of Politics vol. XIII No. 1 & 2, Jan. – Jun., Jul. – Dec., 2005

⁵ Chaterjee A. K., "Sociological context of Regionalism in India", Alakh, Jaipur 1976, pp. 31-32

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- ⁶ Indian Federalism in the New Millennium (ed. Singh & Dua), Manohar Pub., New Delhi, 2003, pp. 378.
- ⁷ Indian Political System, (M. P. Singh ed.), Manak Publication, New Delhi, Third Revised Edition, 2005, pp. 381
- ⁸ Review of Politics Vol. VIII No. 1 & 2, Jan. – Jun. and Jul. – Dec., 2005
- ⁹ Indian Political System, (2005), pp. 375.
- ¹⁰ Majeed Akhtar: Regionalism; the Develop. Tension in India, Cosmos, N.D., pp. 8.
- ¹¹ Landowski Susan: Migration and Ethnicity in Urban India, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p. 2004.
- ¹² Morris-Jones W. H., Language and Religion within the Indian Union, 1967, pp. 51
- ¹³ Review of Politics, Vol. XIII No. 1 & 2 Jan. – Dec., 2005
- ¹⁴ Kothari Rajni: Foreword in Sajal Basu's Regional Movement: Politics of Language, Ethnicity: Identity, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 8.
- ¹⁵ Khan Rasheed-ud-din; The Regional Dimension, Seminar, 164, April, 1973, pp. 35