

Regionalism in India

(STUDY MATERIAL FOR LONG QUESTION AND SHORT NOTES)

What is Regionalism?

- Regionalism is the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose by people within a specific geographical region, united by its unique language, culture, language, etc.
- In a positive sense, it encourages people to develop a sense of brotherhood and oneness which seeks to protect the interests of a particular region and promotes the welfare and development of the state and its people.
- In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region which is a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country.
- In the Indian context generally, the term 'regionalism' has been used in the negative sense.
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History of Regional Movements in India

- The roots of regional consciousness in India can be found in the colonial policies.
- Differential attitudes and treatment by the British towards princely states and those of the presidencies developed regionalist tendencies among them.
- British exploitative economic policies completely neglected some regions, giving way to economic disparities and regional imbalances.
- On the other side, the Indian national movement furthered a pluralistic idea of India.
- The history of regional movements in India can be traced back to the 1940s Dravida Movement or the Non-Brahmin movement that started in the present day Tamil Nadu.
- Later, the movement was resulted into the demand of a separate and independent Tamil state.
- This, in turn, led to several other parties like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) springing up in the Andhra region, with the demands of separate statehood.
- The decades of 1950s and 1960s witnessed intense mass mobilisation, often taking on a violent character for the demands of statehood.
- In 1954, the revolt for the separate state of Andhra for Telugu - speaking people spearheaded by Potti Sri Ramulu and his eventual death triggered the wave of political regionalism in India with many princely states and other states making a demand for a separate state.

- This resulted in formation of the States Reorganisation Committee (headed by Faisal Ali) which recommended re-organisation of Indian states on linguistic lines, thus reinforcing the regionalist tendencies.
- With the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, linguistic states became a reality.
- During 1970s and 1980s, owing to the intensification of tribal insurgency for separation and statehood, the Union government passed the North-eastern States Reorganisation Act, 1971.
- It upgraded the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura, and the Sub-State of Meghalaya to full statehood, and Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (then Tribal Districts) to Union Territories which became states in 1986.
- The decade of 2000s, witnessed vigorous movements for the creation of separate states due to a rising sense of regional deprivation.
- It resulted in the formation of the three new states – Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar and Uttarakhand out of Uttar Pradesh.
- The latest addition to this is the state of Telangana created by the division of Andhra Pradesh in 2014.
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Types of Regional Movements

- **Secessionism** is a form of regionalism that involves militant and fundamentalist groups advocating a separation from India on the basis of ethnicity or any other factor.
- Isac Muivah's National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the Islamic fundamentalist groups in J&K, ULFA in Assam are examples of such an extreme dimension of regionalism.
- **Separatism** is a demand for separate statehood within the Indian Union.
- Many times, linguistic or ethnic minorities within the states come together and unite against the majority community in that state.
- This kind of sub-regionalism was validated by the State Reorganisation Act of 1956. The most recent examples include the formation of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana.
- Meanwhile, there have been many demands including the creation of Bodoland for the Bodo-speakers in Assam; Gorkhaland for ethnic Gorkha (Nepali) people in West Bengal; a Bundelkhand state (covering part of Madhya Pradesh and part of Uttar Pradesh) for promoting the development of the region.
- **Demand for Full Statehood**, the union territories have been forwarding such demands like the NCT of Delhi.
- Most of such demands have already been accepted. In 1971, Himachal Pradesh got the status of a full state and thereafter Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh (former NEFA) and Sikkim got full statehoods

- **The Demand for Autonomy**, since 1960's, with the emergence of regional parties, the demand for state autonomy has been gaining more and more strength due to the central political interferences.
- In Tamil Nadu the DMK, in Punjab the Akali Dal, in Andhra Pradesh the Telugu Desham, in Assam the Assam Gana Parishad, the National conference in J&K and in West Bengal the Forward Bloc have been continuously demanding a larger share of powers for the states.
- **Demand for Regional Autonomy within a State**, in some of the states, people belonging to various regions have been demanding recognition of their regional identities.
- The genesis of such demands lies in the regional imbalances resulting from inefficient planning for instance in J & K, the Ladakhis are demanding a regional status.

Reasons behind Growth of Regionalism in India

- Historical and geographical isolation
- Lop-sided development
- Continuous neglect of a region
- Insider-outsider complex that nurturers nativism and son-of-the-soil ideology
- Internal colonialism, i.e., despite being rich in natural resources some regions remain economically underdeveloped.
- The reasons being either ill-conceived top-down approach or survival of one region at the cost of the other region. Chhota Nagpur plateau is an example of this type of underdevelopment.
- Political vested interests can accentuate and exploit regional loyalties.
- Reaction to an imposed ideology that can make its appearance as a reaction against the perceived imposition of a particular ideology, language or cultural pattern on all people and groups.
- Linguistic aspirations that have remained a formidable basis of regionalism.
- Expression of ethnicity.
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Impact of Regionalism on Indian Polity

- Rise of regional parties.
- Re-focus on regional issues.
- Regionalist tendencies often stir inter-state hostility as its spillover effect.
- Regional movements often result in violent agitations, disturbs not only the law and order situation but also have negative implications on the economy of the state as well as the nation.

- Regionalism sometimes undercuts the national interest by being a hurdle in international diplomacy.
- For instance- the opposition of regional/state parties of Tamil against the stand of the central government had a direct implication on the relation of India with Sri Lanka.
- The disagreement of political leadership in West Bengal with the central government over the Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta River Water sharing treaty with Bangladesh resulted in increased tensions between the two nations.
- Regionalism can become a shield for militancy, extremism to create an internal security threat. Kashmir militancy is an example of this type of regionalism.

Regionalism vs. Nationalism

- Nationalism is a sense of belonging to one nation, a feeling one shares with all the citizens of the country regardless of their caste, creed, culture, religion or region.
- This association with a nation is the primary mode of identification for a person and every nation encourages its citizens to take pride in being its citizen.
- However, when people begin identifying more strongly with their region than with their nation, it is alleged that nationalism is undercut by a sense of regionalism.
- While a nation tries to establish harmony between all its citizens by uniting them through a constitution, national symbols, and songs, regionalism glorifies the heritage of only one particular region and of one culture.
- This leads to the formation of multiple communities within one nation and restricts the efforts of national integration.

Is regionalism a threat to national unity and integrity?

- Parochial regionalism poses a threat to the sovereignty of the nation.
- The anti-migrant or anti-Bihari stance of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) which opposes the employment and residence of non-Maharashtrian people in the state of Maharashtra is a prime example of negative regionalism.
- Regionalism beyond a point can lead to secessionism, such as strong regionalism in Punjab ultimately resulted in the growth of Khalistani terrorism.
- Regionalism often promotes Vote- Bank politics, thereby weakens the national integration.
- Regionalism can weaken the time tested fabric of 'Unity in Diversity', if promoted in an ultra manner.
- Positive regionalism promotes a sense of pride in connecting to one's roots and culture.
- It has been noticed that often regional movements have helped the art and culture of many neglected regions to flourish by increasing their exposure through local emphasis.

- Therefore, in principle, regionalism need not be regarded as an unhealthy or anti-national phenomenon, unless it takes a militant, aggressive turn to encourage the growth of secessionist tendencies.

Constitutional Safeguards Against Separatist Tendencies

- Indian Constitution provides various institutional arrangements to resolve such problem, including the threats posed by violent regionalism.
- The provisions of the fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian constitution have been applied by the government with intended objectives of constraining ethnic separatism and tribal alienation in different regions, particularly in the North-east.
- Also institutionally, the government has become more receptive to the creation of an autonomous regional council or district council for the people of ethnic enclaves.
- The state language policy has been fine tuned to accommodate the claims of various dialect or language groups. This has been done by:
 - By including the major languages in the eighth schedule, and
 - Granting official recognition to culturally significant languages of the state as the language of education and official transaction.
- All these policies have a significant impact on integrating the diverse regional communities within the mould and measures of Indian nationalism.

Way Forward

- Unity in Diversity ethos needs to be preserved for the pluralistic character of the Indian nation state.
- The accommodation of multiple aspirations of a diverse population is necessary.
- Formation of the NITI Aayog has been a positive step to enhance co-operative federalism by fostering the involvement of the State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.
- While a number of steps such as the launch of centrally sponsored schemes, incentives to private players for development in backward states have been taken by the government for inclusive development, there is a greater need for their effective implementation.
- There is a need to increase the level of social expenditure by the states on education, health, and sanitation which are the core for human resource development.
- Introducing a system of national education that would help people to overcome regional feelings and develop an attachment towards the nation can act as a long-term solution to the problem of sub-nationalism.
- While the National Integration Council was set up in 1961, there is a need to utilise its potential more effectively.

- Schemes like "Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat" have been launched by the GOI to celebrate unity in diversity culture of the nation and to strengthen sentiment for National Unity between the citizens of states, is a welcomed step.
- National unity is not impaired if the people of a region have genuine pride in their language and culture