Regionalist Movements in the Post-Independence Period

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ABSTRACT: This paper introduces certain key aspects of the major regionalist movements in post-Independence India, perhaps strikes a dissonant note in relation to the rest of this dissertation, and might be read as a loosely strung but necessary intermezzo. Rather than impose a false coherence on historically discontinuous material, we have chosen to retain the sense of prickliness and jaggedness characteristic of the available (textual) archives that document the histories of the regionalist struggles against the Indian State. Presenting this information, not all of which can be presumed to be widely familiar, is however a necessary prelude for emphasizing (1) the importance and magnitude of the "regional problem" in post-Independence India, and (2) the complex political backdrop against/towards which any re-concept utilization of the regional question must find its theoretical mornings.

KEY WORDS: Regionalist Moments, Indian State, Post-Independence, Period.

I. INTRODUCTION

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 [1]. In the Indian context generally, the term 'regionalism' has been used in the negative sense.

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 [2]. 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 [3]. This resulted in formation of the States Reorganization Committee (headed by Faisal Ali) which recommended reorganization of Indian states on linguistic lines, thus reinforcing the regionalist tendencies.

With the enactment of the States Reorganization 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 Reorganization 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 [4]. 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.

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.

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 [5]. 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.

II. 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 Telgu 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.

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.

III. Dravida Nadu / Dravidasthan

The Dravida Nadu movement is perhaps the only major "regionalist" movement that the government of India has managed to diffuse fairly successfully, without recourse to military suppression. I I Between 1940 and 1963, however, it was a massive separatist demand which was tied up with questions of caste, language, and modernization. The Justice Party of Madras won, from 1920 onwards, the assembly elections which were held on a limited franchise (the lower castes and (untouchables were not allowed to vote), chiefly because the non-Brahmin business- or land-owning castes favoring it were six times more numerous than the Brahmins.
In 1936, it lost to the Congress but when the Congress ministry, predominantly consisting of Brahmins, prescribed Hindi as a compulsory language in schools, the Justice Party and "Perivar" E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker's Self-Respect Movement took to the streets, opposing what they described as the alienating domination of Brahmins, Hindi (a language that would equip Tamilians to read the Sanskritic religious texts), and north India. In 1938, the Justice Party elected Naicker to the post of party president.

In 1939, he organized a "Dravida Nadu Conference for the Advocacy of a Separate and Independent Dravidasthan," and the demand for a separate state was repeated the following year in response to the Muslim League's Lahore Declaration (demanding Pakistan). Under Naicker's leadership, the party too became increasingly militant and, in 1940, adopted a demand for a separate Dravida Nadu; within four years, as an indication of how serious it was about this demand, the party even changed its name to Dravida Kazhagam (OK) and stepped up its demand for a free state.

When India became independent in 1947, Naicker instructed his party members to boycott the celebrations, saying that "independence" did not signify any change in the condition of the Dravidian people who would continue to suffer the ill-effects and oppression of "Hindi imperialism." He felt that (Independence Day as well as the Republic day marked the continued enslavement of the south. However, some prominent members of the party disagreed with Naicker on this issue and left the party to form another party.

IV. Conclusion
To sum up, regional movements are indicative of the identity movements of people in a particular region or state, which seek special privileges, protection and concessions from the state. There are both imaginary and real reasons for the rise and growth of these movements. Ever since India became independent, regional movements have taken in different parts of the country on one or the other basis – territorial, ethnicity or economic backwardness of the agitating areas. The response of the state to regional movements has not been uniform. Depending on the situation the state has been indifferent, accommodative or coercive to such movements. Since regional movements are related to the socio-cultural and political processes, these are an ongoing phenomenon in a democratic country like India.

References


