



REGIONALISM IN INDIA: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT :

A region is a nucleus of social aggregation for a variety of purposes. It has always been regarded a unit having concern for homogeneity and identity. Prima facie, region appears to be an aerial (i.e. concerned with area) concept and, logically speaking, the task of elaborating and illuminating its nuances falls in the disciplinary boundaries of Geography. A region is a nucleus of social aggregation for a variety of purposes. It has always been regarded as a unit having concern for its homogeneity and identity. However, regionalism or regional consciousness develops from a sense of identity with geographical area corresponding to region in the sense of cohesive area homogeneous in certain selected defining criteria. In India, regionalism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in terms of its components - at once geographical, historico-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychic. This paper focuses on the study of regionalism in India.

KEYWORDS : Culture, Regionalism, Regional Consciousness, Social Aggregation.

INTRODUCTION

A region becomes significant in a nation when it becomes a unit dominated by a widely prevalent sentiment of “togetherness”, a sense of particularistic separate identity. When the particularistic attitude of the region claims recognised of its cultural identity it is better understood as “regionalization” or regional movement. Region may be said to connote an area, at least sufficiently large in size, which is differentiated and/or distinguishable from others by variety of factors (or at least a combination of some of them) such as language, culture, religion or caste/creed, socio-economic life, political background, historical background, geographical continuity and, certainly, group consciousness and of being neglected, deprived and/or discriminated ‘by the majority’ and/or those in authority”.

Hence regionalism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon a feeling or sentiment backed by objective factors like language, culture, economic development etc. It is a manifestation of emotional, psychological and sub-national socio-cultural forces confined to a particular region within a larger political set-up. It has often been described as a psychic-phenomenon where a particular part faces the psyche of relative deprivation. It is also regarded as a quest for self- identity and self-fulfillment on the part of an area.

However, regionalism or regional consciousness develops from a sense of identity with geographical area corresponding to a region in the sense of cohesive area homogeneous in certain selected defining criteria, In its wide ramifications regionalism may be noticed in a number of countries. France, which is regarded as the classic land of political unity and administrative centralisation has experienced prolonged regionalistic movement in the past. The movement aimed at



arresting the forces, which were at work to make all of France virtually a suburb of Paris. In the year 1860 regionalism found expression in the "Nancy Programme" which demanded that communal matters should be regulated by the commune, regional affairs by the region and matters of national concern by the nation. Demands were generally made for decentralisation of powers and balanced economic growth. The movement further involved revival of local dialects, collection of folk songs and publication of many independent local newspapers and periodicals. Thus by 1900 A.D, the movement grew as a serious challenge to the political and administrative set up of France.

Regionalism is also not altogether unknown in the United States of America, the fourth largest State in the world. The vastness of its size and multiplicity of cultural groups have engendered regional cleavages on many occasions. The civil war between the Northern and Southern states, the latter comprising the area of the old confederacy that fought and was defeated in the civil war, furnishes one of the most remarkable inter-regional cleavages in the history of the USA But it is not the only instance. There have been threats from New England in 1814 for breaking away from the union.

REGIONALISM IN INDIA

So far, India is concerned, regionalism has assumed different forms in different parts of the country after independence. Regionalism as a countrywide phenomenon often tended to take the form of well organised agitations and campaigns. It assumed mainly four forms, viz., demand of people of certain areas for secession from the Indian Union, the demand of people of certain areas for separate statehood, demand of certain union territories for full- fledged statehood, and the demand of certain people for favourable settlement in inter- state disputes.

Regional consciousness and the development of a regional identity has continued to grow after Independence, various factors have contributed to this. It is not postulated here that regionalism is an "independent" force in India; rather it both contributes to, and is the result of other changes happening simultaneously.' Iqbal Narain has described three forms of regionalism in India, namely, supra regionalism. The first one is an expression of group identity of several states which join hands to take common stand on an issue of mutual interest vis.-a-vis another group of states or even the union. In the second case regionalism has been coextensive with state boundaries. In both these two cases regionalism has appeared as a movement against the union. But intra state regionalism is directed against the state governments rather than the Union of India and such regional demands are like the creation of new and separate political and administrative units within the existing state structure and of some regions with the state for equitable and fair treatment.' These forms of regionalism have produced a number of demands on the national polity, such as to give identity to particular language, religion and ethnic factors of the region, more regional autonomy and power, constitutional status of the region, separate statehood within the nation. To achieve these regional demands sometimes recourse has been taken to put forth the claims in the forum of state legislatures and Parliament or to make agitations and, in the worst cases, to indulge in terrorist violence.

The process of regionalization, as is understood today, began in the British period. India was divided into provinces and princely states. After the division of Bengal in 1905, the importance of language as a binding force was recognized. The Congress strongly opposed the partition of Bengal and the province was ultimately re-united in 1911. Though, the problem of 'Regional Identity ' was first witnessed in the presidency of Madras because it was a composite state, consisting of Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Malayalam and Oriya speaking people. The dispatch of Government of India dated August 25. 1911, visualized India as union of autonomous provinces. The contents of this dispatch were not known immediately. When they came to be know gave a great impetus to the consolidation of ideas on linguistic provinces. People living in the composite provinces became particularly language conscious. They thought that unless the provincial boundaries were re- drawn and provinces organised on linguistic basis, it would not be possible for many people to profit to any appreciable extent by provincial autonomy.

It is a fact that the administrative divisions of India under the British rule particularly before and after 1905 were entirely based on military and administrative conveniences. The report of Indian

constitutional reforms clearly admits the “artificial and often inconvenient character” of the then administrative units. They then represented an administrative system which disregarded to a large extent the natural boundaries of the various regional communities speaking different languages and following different cultural traditions,” However, the famous Montague- Chelmsford Report of 1918 came out and paid some attention to the question of provincial boundaries. The relevant para 246 of the report said.” We are impressed with the artificial and often inconvenient character of existing administrative units. The British statesman also admitted that in India there were “only a number of administrative areas” which had “grown up almost haphazard as the result of conquest and suppression of former rulers or administrative convenience. It has rightly been said that the provinces based on the principle of administrative convenience “disregarded to a large extent the natural boundaries of various regional communities speaking different languages and following different cultural traditions”.

In course of the freedom struggle it was the Indian National Congress, which supported the idea of constituting political units on rational linguistic basis thus recognizing the importance of language as a binding force. This policy of the Congress led to formation of Andhra and Sind as separate “Congress Provinces” in 1917. It was the Annual Session of the Congress at Nagpur that the principle of linguistic provinces was finally accepted in 1920 and the country was divided into twenty-one Congress Provinces. The concept of “Swaraj as expounded by CR. Das and Bhagwan Das envisaged the formation of provinces on linguistic basis and the division of large province into smaller units. The Congress then held the view that the maintenance of non-linguistic administrative divisions by the British Government was arbitrary and a part of the policy of “divide and rule” and it was argued by some of the prominent Congress leaders that “Language in this country stood for and represented culture, race, history, individuality and finally a sub- nation.”.

In Independent India, the first phase was the merger of 562 princely states in the union of India in 1948. A trend was thus set up towards formation of bigger states. The units were re- grouped and the union of India was divided into three categories of states such as part A, B, C and D.²⁷ However this arrangement could neither represent the federal spirit nor satisfy the people of the respective regions. The Constituent Assembly appointed a Commission known as the Dar Commission in 1948 to have a fresh look at the linguistic question. The Commission rejected the re- grouping of provinces on the basis of regional languages and favoured the principles of “administrative conveniences” specially with reference to Madras, Mumbai, Central Provinces etc. It was feared that linguistic re-organisation may give rise to “a sub-national basis and militate against the working of India into one nation”. It was feared that linguistic re-organisation may give rise to “a sub-national bias and militate against the working of India into one nation.”³⁰ The Linguistic Provinces Committee popularly known as the J.V.P (Jawaharlal, Vallabh Bhai, Partabhi Sitarainavya) Committee appointed by the Congress Party in December 1948 at its Jaipur Session, also rejected the demand of linguistic provinces but it held that an experiment might be made in this field with the creation of Andhra Pradesh on linguistic basis. The Constitution, of course, left scope for further re-organisation. The creation of Andhra Pradesh in October 1953 unleashed a series of demands for re-organisation of the states. The third stage in the process of re-organisation of states was reached with the appointment of States Re-organisation Commission (SRC) in 1953, which submitted its report in 1955. The Constitution was amended in 1956 to implement the Commission’s recommendation with certain modifications. The new structure came into force from November 1, 1956. The distinction between Part A, B, C and D states was abolished, the number of states was reduced from 27 to 14 and 7 Union Territories were created. Thus, the spirit of “bigger” states with common language and cultural identity found favour in the new set up.

CONCLUSION

In fact, the dimensions of regionalism, which have appeared on the Indian political scene, suggest that the state formation in India has been governed by the knee-jerk acceptance “or rejection — of emotional outburst. Primordial loyalties have given way, at least partly, to rational calculations of development. So, when the emotional outburst, primordial loyalties and competitive regionalism will take

India into their grip, a separate statehood will be a reality. But how long this could happen, time alone can say at.

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