



Regionalization of Politics: A Conceptual Dimension

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Abstract

Regionalization of politics in India is a continuous process. It is a product of historical genesis. Emerging in an embryonic state before the colonial era, it attained a concrete shape during the British regime. After independence it has been nurtured within the frame work of structural arrangements and operational mechanisms of the newly framed constitution. It has further been accentuated by several extra constitutional developments both national as well as international. It has been deep rooted in India because of its cultural diversities. Regionalism as a concept cannot be separated from regionalization. It is a potent weapon which fosters regionalization. Regionalism has both positive as well as negative aspects. In its positive aspect regionalism leads to development of a strong bond of unity among the people rooted in a region. Healthy and strong regions contribute to making of a strong nation. Regionalism becomes charged with negative potential when it breeds separatist tendency which in extreme stage develops to secession, self-determination and independent nationalism. This type of regionalism poses a threat to the national integrity and throws a viable challenge to the stability and existence of the nation which has not yet completed its course of development. This research paper aims to explain what are regions, regionalism and regionalization of politics. What are conceptual dimensions of regionalization of Politics in India? The main objective of the paper understands the support bases of regionalization of politics in India.

Introduction

Regionalization of politics in India is a continuous process. It is a product of historical genesis. Emerging in an embryonic state before the colonial era, it attained a concrete shape during the British regime. After independence it has been nurtured within the frame work of structural arrangements and operational mechanisms of the newly framed constitution. It has further been accentuated by several extra constitutional developments both national as well as international. It has been deep rooted in India because of its cultural diversities. India, demographically speaking, is the second largest country (its population a billion over now) after China. India's one billion plus people live today in 29 states and 7 Union Territories.

Regionalism as a concept cannot be separated from regionalization. It is a potent weapon which fosters regionalization. Regionalism has both positive as well as negative aspects. In its positive aspect regionalism leads to development of a strong bond of unity among the people rooted in a region. Healthy and strong regions contribute to making of a strong nation. Regionalism becomes charged with negative potential when it breeds separatist tendency which in extreme stage develops to secession, self-determination and independent nationalism. This type of regionalism poses a threat to the national integrity and throws a viable challenge to the stability and existence of the nation which has not yet completed its course of development. This research paper focuses on conceptual dimensions of regionalization of Politics in India. The main research questions and objective of the study are:

Research Questions

1. What are regions, regionalism and regionalization?
2. What is Regionalization of Politics?
3. What are the factors, which contributed the genesis and growth of the regionalization of politics in India? How are they inter-related?

Objective of the Research Paper

The main objective of the paper is to understand the support bases of regionalization of politics in India.

Region, Regionalism and Regionalization of Politics

Region

The word region has significantly different meanings in different contexts. Various scholars have defined region in various ways. K C Markandan (1990) said that Political boundaries are not always necessary for a region. It can also be an integrated area of socio-cultural life, exhibiting a balance between various parts.¹ James W. Fesler (1960) Region is “An area with common characteristics that set it apart from other areas. It may be part of a city, country, state, province, nation of the world.”² According to International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences region is a homogeneous area with physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of the neighboring areas. Another view states that a region would mean a zone whose area or jurisdiction could be more than a particular state’s jurisdiction.

However a region is made up of different places that are linked and function as a unit. A functional region is an area organized to function politically, socially, and economically as a single unit. Functional regions are centered on a focal point that connects other areas by various systems, such as transportation, communication, or economic activities. Cities can be considered functional regions because highways, railroads, subways, and buses move people from the suburbs to the central areas of the city.

On another level, a region can be a perceptual unit. A perceptual region is based on the shared feelings and attitudes of the people who live in the area. Perceptual regions reflect the cultural identity of the people in the region. The boundaries of perceptual regions are not always distinct, as they may be perceived differently from person to person. Perceptual regions are also called vernacular regions

Further, region can also be a formal unit. Formal region is an area inhabited by people who have one or more characteristics in common. Shared characteristics may be a common language, economic activities, such as a particular crop production, or physical characteristics, such as the climate of an area. Some formal regions have distinct boundaries which make them easy to identify, such as countries or states.³

Robert B. Vance (1968) gives us various types of regions based on his views on social sciences. These are :

- Ethnic or Cultural regions possessing a common racial,cultural or linguistic heritage.
- Industrial or Urban Regions
- Tropical or climatic Regions
- Economically Specialized Regions
- Administrative Regions
- Supernational political Regions⁴

Thus region may be seen as an area especially part of a country or world having definable characteristics but not always fixed boundaries. It can be identified on its numerous characteristics like geographical,formal, perceptual, physical, social, economical and administrative. A political region is a region accepted to be in the jurisdiction of a particular government entity. The particular government entity varies as each organizes its operations by further divisions (subdivisions of the state) to further its tasks and satisfy its responsibilities. On the large scale, a political division is typically a sovereign state.

Regionalism

The term regionalism represents the regional idea in action as ideology, as a social movement, or as the theoretical base for regional planning. Thus regionalism in the context of politics represents an idea of love for a particular region in action in preference to the country as a whole and ideology of separate political culture, customs and thus having a sense of political identity distinct from the rest of the country and desiring for regional planning in social and economic spheres.

According to Dictionary of Social Sciences, regionalism means a movement which may be defined as cultural and political movements, seeking to protect and foster an indigenous culture and to promote autonomous political institutions in a particular region and an administrative and political movement, aiming the creation of a democratized and integrative government structure at an intermediate level between state and traditional organs of local government.⁵

K C Pandey(1991), “*Regionalism as a multi-dimensional composite phenomenon as well as a built-in process within nationalism.*”⁶Regionalism as a dynamic and multi-dimensional concept is also generated from a variety of other factors such geographical isolation, independent historical heritage, ethnic or religious etc. Regionalism is an outcome of some real or perceived sense of internal colonialism, the result of mal-development or asymmetrical development. Regionalism is the response of sharing of the benefits of developmental activity. It is a protest against the stabilization and monopolization of advantages through policies aiming at institutionalization of

existing system. Such regionalism, in the mal development syndrome may emerge because of a number of factors. It may be the result of exploitation and power inequality between elite and peripheral groups in a nation.

At the core of regionalism is as profound sense of identity, which is as real, and as dear, to a people than their feeling of identity with a state or a nation or a religious group or a linguistic group. These are cultural realities and one cannot just wish them away.

According to Webster's Dictionary, Regionalism is nothing more than a consciousness of a locality to a distinct sub national and super nation areas usually characterized by a common culture, background or interests, or development of a political or social system based on one or more such areas. Regionalism, generally speaking, is regarded as a "divisive trend detrimental to national unity. In popular parlance it is supposed to be a synonym of provincialism which breeds localism, isolationism and separatism."⁷

The concept of regionalism is both functional and dysfunctional. In its functional aspect, it means a quest for self-identity and self-realization on the part of particular region vis-à-vis overall national development. In its dysfunctional aspect, it involves a risk of political overtone which leads a nation towards disintegration. Regionalism in India is a political force generated and sustained by variety of subjective and objective bases. Regionalism is a multidimensional phenomenon, In terms of its components-at once geographical, Historical-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychic.

In the political field, regionalism in the negative connotation is viewed as a threat to national integration and coherence. But in positive sense, it is regarded as an emergence of self-identity and a sense of fulfillment on the part of the people of an area.

Rasheeduddin Khan (1971) gives ten grounds of determining sub regions in India.

- Language dialect
- Socio-composition (communities/castes)
- Ethnic Groups
- Demographic features
- Area (Geographic) contiguity
- Cultural pattern
- economy and economic life

- Historical antecedents
- Political background
- Psychological makeup and felt consciousness of group identity.⁸

According to IqbalNarain (1998) there are three major types of regionalism:

- Supra-state regionalism
- Inter-state regionalism
- Intra-state regionalism

The supra state regionalism covers an expression of group identity of several states which join hands to take common stand on an issue of mutual interest vis-à-vis another group of states or even the union more the former than the later. South versus North in India on such issues as language or the location of plants, industries etc., illustrates the point.

Inter-state regionalism refers to the boundaries of a region that are conterminous with that of a state, and puts one or more states against another on specific issues creating tensions between them. River water disputes in general and border/boundary disputes in particular can be cited as an example.

Intra-state regionalism embodies the quest of part within a state for self-identity and self-development in positive terms and negatively speaking reflects a psyche of deprivation and/or exploitation of a part in relation to other parts of the same state e.g., Telangana in Andhra Pradesh, and east UP in Uttar Pradesh.⁹

According to JaveedAlam(1948) in terms of goal, there are three types of regionalism in India:

Demand for more autonomy and power.

Demand for separate statehood.

Demand for secession from the Indian union.¹⁰

Thus, regionalism helps to encourage political participation through regional mobilization: It can be used both positively and negatively leading to productive as well as disruptive activities.

Regionalization of Politics

Regionalization of politics is a process and not an event. It is not to be taken as something that has suddenly dropped from the heavens. It has followed a definite historical course before it has taken its present form. Regionalism as a concept cannot be separated from regionalization. It is a potent weapon which fosters regionalization. On one hand, regionalization is the process of dividing a country into smaller jurisdictions and transforming power from central government to the region, while regionalism is a doctrine, a theoretical concept, or a system that refers to the customs traditions, history and even behavior peculiar to a specific area.

Approaches of Regionalization of Politics in India

Bharati Mukherjee has explained three approaches of regionalization of politics:

Core Periphery Approach

Nativist Approach /Sons-of-the-soil Theory

Marxist Approach¹¹

Elaborating these approaches Mukherjee brings to focus certain interesting but generally overlooked facts. Her **core periphery approach** considers that almost all societies in the modern world are plural in nature and contain several sub-systems which are positively distinct from one another in the terms of cultural, ethnic, demographic and other reasons. At the time of nation-building, some of them may be in advantageous position due to historical or circumstantial reasons, which help them to acquire political and economic power. This newly acquired political and economic power is further used by them to retain and strengthen their superior position over the less fortunate neighbors. Eventually these powerful sub-systems turn into core communities with others at the periphery who are to depend largely on the sweet will of the former to get their legitimate share in the national resources and a position in the state-building process. This leads to the growth of diverse attitudinal sub-cultures which stand directly facing the culture of core-community. It is in this competition and conflict that the scholars often find the seed which in most cases germinate into regional movements.

So far as India is concerned the genesis of such competitive attitudinal sub-culture having the potential to burst into regional tensions could be traced back into the colonial regime. The uneven

diffusion of administrative infrastructures means of communication and educational benefits during the British rule affected the growth and development pattern of different regions differently. Perhaps, it was part of the calculated policy of the colonial masters to leave different parts of the same regions at different level of development so that one's discontent and frustration might help them to use one against the other simply as pawns in its colonial game. Nonetheless, as a result of this policy, some of the communities acquired more advantage over others and turned into core-communities, while apathy and jealousy against them characterized peripheral sub-cultures. History, language, ethnicity, religion, economic advancement and administrative coherence became the basis of identity or difference.

This colonial legacy was forwarded when the Constitutional process started. It recognized territorial identity of regions but refused adequate recognition to a variety of rudimentary factors firmly embedded in Indian social culture. This arrangement sharpened the traditional grudges and rivalries among the different sub-systems leading to regionalization.

Due to ever-expanding modernization, increasing regional mobilization has led to an articulation of political participation which very legitimately raises the demand to treat all units as equally coherent. Such a trend emphasizes that politically and economically the peripheral system like the core ones process equal right to manage their own internal affairs and reflect their aspirations at the national level, the peripheral communities believe that they have been exploited by the core communities for a fairly long period and ethno-cultural differences are responsible for such exploitation. They are no longer ready to accept the hubris attitude of the core-system. Such an attitude often urges them to throw a separatist challenge to the core-communities which so long enjoyed the prerogatives to determine their political and economic destiny. The obvious outcome is amenable for regionalist tensions. Most of the sub-regional movements which India is experiencing today real or evolve around the conviction of the peripheral group of being exploited by the core communities.

These thinkers conclude that an apprehension, perceived, of "Internal colonialism" by the core-communities over the peripheral is the genetic factor of regionalization of Indian politics.¹² These pulls and pressures between the core and the periphery while the peripheral regions within a federal unit try to forge a separate identity as a new state, they do not aspire to go out of the union. The Jharkhand movement, the Bodo movement, the Gorkhland movement, the Punjabi suba movement etc. all illustrate this point. To put it in a different way this type of regionalism which is based upon core-periphery equation does not go beyond claiming larger resource-sharing and

higher status-position within the broad national context. Regionalism, according to the scholars of this school, can politically be understood as “a search for an intermediate control system between the Centre and the periphery for competitive advantage in the national arena”¹³

Myron Weiner developed the much renowned ‘**Sons-of-the-soil**’ theory. The assertors of this approach argue that the plural social structure of India is traditionally embedded on multiplicity of cultural differentials in terms of language, religion, caste, and ethnicity. Such culturally different groups used to occupy some specific space with primary claim of the indigenous population over locally available resources. These different identity groups used to live side by side in adjoining areas without major in-migration or out-migration since pre-capitalist days. But with the emergence of capitalist economy and consequent expansion of labor market, horizontal social mobility appeared as an inescapable phenomenon cutting across culturally compact territory fear of losing or degrading their own cultural homogeneity and integrity which they now become alert to safeguard. The net result was intense conflict between the sons –of-the-soil and migrants from neighboring areas who belonged to different cultural stocks.

On the arisen of new constitutionreorganized states, on the linguistic lines, within the first decade of transfer of power, encourage the local groups to be vocal against the outsider. However to accept such cultural difference as the only determinant of native-migrant conflict thereby leading to regionalist attitude may be the most common explanation, but in Indian context such an explanation is inadequate and leads to oversimplification of the issue of native-migrant conflict.

It goes beyond doubt that linguistic, religious ethnic factors are often used as the basis for identity or difference between in-groups and out-groups. But it is also true that religion, language, caste or ethnicity per se cannot lead to regionalism. To produce regional tension, the component cultural factor has to act in conjunction with one another, and everywhere they are to be associated with some form of dominance. The anti-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu is generally taken as a prototype of caste-based regionalism, but it could not consolidate itself prior to its being characterized as an explosion against the prolonged exploitation by the dominant Brahmins. The Akali-sikh regionalism which feeds upon religious emotionalism possesses a linguistic overtone also. But in the ultimate analysis; it has gathered its momentum from the fear-psychosis of the Punjabi-speaking Sikhs that they might get outpaced by the dominant Hindi speaking Hindus. To the Shiv Sena movement, language has offered a convenient mask to cover the deep-rooted panic of the Maharashtrians that they might be economically dominated by the Non-Maharashtrians, particularly by the south Indians.¹⁴

Our common experiences that two culturally different ethnic groups clash in one region, but not in another. Anti-Bengali agitations in Assam have not been responded to by anti-Assamese tension in West Bengal. The anti-Sikh massacre following Indira Gandhi's assassination in almost all parts of Northern India did not touch West Bengal although there is a large congregation of the Punjabi-Sikh in west Bengal, particularly Calcutta, and several Bengalis had fallen victims to Sikh militancy in Punjab, Haryana and particularly in Delhi.

Cultural differences as such, therefore, are not sufficient causes of nativist hostility against the migrants; their role in such hostilities, however, cannot be denied. As a matter of fact, nativist movement through accentuating cultural identity magnifies cultural differences and thereby converts them into cultural conflicts. "Cultural Conflicts", as Myron Weiner observes, "should be viewed as the effects not the determinants of nativism."¹⁵ Ethno-cultural differences may serve as the determinants of aggressive nativism bearing the potentiality to forsake regionalist tendency in Indian political process, when they are accompanied by some fear, real or perceived, that the sons-of-the-soil would be left cut in the completion with the locale if a particular territory has a special collective territorial right and is vested with some sort of ownership over the territory.

The migrants believed that should not have an equal claim to the services and benefits available within that area. With such a premeditated idea, the local view with displeasure the flow of migrants from adjacent areas who in most cases are more enterprising, more skilled and better equipped. As the indigenous people themselves, in most cases, are comparatively non-mobile in seeking out new opportunities outside their own territory, the fear of shrinking economic, education and other benefits in the face of limited resources makes the sons-of-the-soil hostile to the migrants.

The political implication of such hostilities is serious. The nativists often create pressures, stresses and strains on the national and state authorities to mobilize their decision-making process. Thus they expect that policies will be framed in such a way as to secure legal protection of their 'lawful' rights and restrain the flows of the migrants. But we have also to note that Article 19(1)(d) and (e) in the Indian Constitution guarantees unfettered fundamental right to all its citizens to move freely throughout the territory of India and to reside and settle in any part thereof. This Provision restrains the political authorities from direct imposition of complete ban on internal migration. Functioning of our polity, however, reveals that on many occasions the Centre and state governments for their narrow political interest, particularly for winning local electoral support, have bowed to local demands and permitted preferential treatment to the locale by imposing various restrictions, both economic and cultural on the migrants. This surrendering tendency of the central ruling to the local

pressure has been best exposed through the overnight Assam Accord. Measures taken by the central government in the wake of the Telengana movement, Punjabi-Suba movement, Assamese anti-Bengali movement, Mizo movement are but few more illustrations. Thus nativism based on ethno-cultural differential between the sons-of-the-soil and the migrants become aggressive. It then demands stabilization and monopolization of the available advantages in favor of the locals and thereby aims at the institutionalization of existing stratification. In this way, nativism pushes Indian politics towards regionalism.

Marxist approach is based upon the economic factors. Marxist thinkers link up the question of regionalism with slack growth of capitalist development of Indian economy and corresponding centralization of political power leading to an internal contradiction within the same ruling class. Marxist scholars argue that the Indian state is the product of a passive revolution which is generally regarded as a 'revolution without a revolution'. In India transfer of power did not take place through an overall mass movement. It was a largely a shifting of administrative authority from one class of bourgeoisie (foreign bourgeoisie) to another class (national bourgeoisie) since the working class or working peasantry had no role in the state apparatus.

From the beginning, Indian capitalism suffers from some latent weaknesses. In the western European countries, nation precedes the states. As a result nationalism, modernity, secularism, democracy, responsibility of cultural leadership by the ruling elite, mass political participation, minority rights, all appeared as practicable socio-political institution won by a successful national movement. But in Indian case, as the national question is historically entwined with the colonial question, like all Third World Countries, the state precedes institution of Western World, appear simply as "ideals intelligible to and pursued by the modern elite which inherited power from the British", ¹⁶but had no relevance to the large masses who were kept out of the purview of political power sharing. As a result the emergent capitalist class consisting of modernized ruling elite suffers from relative's weakness in the context of social relation to and political insulation from the vast rural masses and betrays lack of internal cohesion where elite groups have structurally different support bases.¹⁷ Because of such inherent weakness, the new capitalist class cannot enter into effective interaction with different parts of the society and therefore fails to project itself as capable of giving necessary leadership in the capitalist transformation of the society.

That responsibility is now left to the state bureaucratic agency which had already been a part of the colonial state-apparatus. Act of building capitalism under the slogan of national unity instead of involving the forces below as it was in the Western liberal democracies, is now being super

imposed from the top. Duress and domination have now become the slogan for accomplishing the desired social change in the capitalistic line. Thus from the very beginning, the emergent state character becomes qualified with an element of force and subjugation necessary to suppress the seeds of popular reaction. This has been evident in several instances where state projection has been forced upon locale and they have in many cases lost their livelihood home and land. Examples are Koel-Karo Dam in Bihar, Missile-launching site in Baliapal, Orissa, development of Delhi city during emergence etc.

Moreover, in the absence of any successful bourgeois revolution, the old feudal structure has not been completely demolished; relics of pre-capitalist feudal order exist in Indian panorama side by side with the capitalist structures. Being unable to destroy old structure of dominance the new capitalist order prefer to enter into some, sort of compromise and sharing of power and privileges with the traditional classes. In the age of 'imperialist stranglehold' on the third world economies, capitalism in India feels compelled to collaborate with the pre-capitalist forces for its own survival. Such was the fear of Antonio Gramsci also. At the same time, because of inherent weakness of being imposed from above, the bourgeois (liberal) ideology in general and the bourgeois national ideology in particular cannot build up national unity on its own term. It has to feed upon semi-feudal agriculture and therefore cannot dissolve the peasant community. It cannot also fuse different ethno-cultural-linguistic communities into one caldron. So it has to constitute a convenient bloc with pre-capitalist classes, like landlords, and use pre-modern conservative ideologies based upon religion, caste and ethnicity to prop itself politically. By doing all these, it has resisted any radical modernization in the existing production system. Such marriage of convenience between capitalist and pre-capitalist forces explains the venomous existence of communalism, casteism, linguistic emotionalism and ethno-nationalism as motive-force behind quite a few sub-national agitations.¹⁸

The development of capitalism requires expanding market-formation and accumulation of big capital which in term demand growing centralization. Growth of monopoly-capitalism required concentration of political power as a pre-condition. In a crisis-ridden capitalist economy, like that of India, where coercion and domination are twin techniques to impose national unity from above, such concentration of state power for the ruling elite is of more relevance for the repression of mass-movement that demand democratic decentralization. The almost continuous one-party rule for the first three decades, both at the Centre and in almost all the states, acted as a strong centripetal force and accentuated the process of political centralization which started during the colonial regime.¹⁹

Introduction of the concept of ‘cabinet dictatorship’ within the framework of Parliamentary Democracy which visibly establishes partly-dictatorship and concentration of power by the ruling party under the caption of ‘executive’, has lent a cloak to the ruling bourgeoisie to legitimize and institutionalize the process of concentration of power. For all these reasons, in spite of a high centralization of power, congress hegemony has to face challenges from different sectors and varying regions at different points of time. Conflict arose over attempts of the all- India ruling-class to subordinate state-capitalist mechanisms. Many of the state levels business-class demanded some reorientation of the national economic policy and the state sector of the national economy, restraining over-centralization and thereby curbing the predominating position of the upper monopolistic class and big-bourgeoisie at the Centre. So the locally placed non big bourgeoisies demanded such policies which would ensure more power and autonomy for themselves as opposed to the all-India class.

It was also quite logical that for their growth, consolidation and survival, the local non-big bourgeoisies needed the positive support of the locally placed ruling class-groups and power-blocs who were already dissident with the Centre for its region-wise discriminatory policies. They also needed support from the masses who were also discontented in the face of gradually deepening economic crisis. To win over support both of the ruling classes as well as of the common people of a region, non-economic factors of pre-capitalist origin were and are used by the local bourgeoisie as mobilizing forces to crystallize popular feelings of socio-cultural oppression by the Centre, such a configuration objectively sets the stage for regional movements demanding more of autonomy, political as well as economic. In fact, a retarded crisis-ridden capitalism in a plural societal context is characterized by an overall tendency to generate an attitude of differentiation rather than maturation, and therefore, it generally produces politically a divisive force where instinct of political survival on the part of regional socio-political accumulation takes precedence over national unity which serves as the prime mover towards regionalization of political processes. India is no exception to this general rule.

Conclusion

In nutshell, in India different variables have contributed to the emergence of regionalism. Nonetheless, as this regionalism is neither dimensional nor monotypic, various other factors may have some role in tingling Indian politics with regionalist color. Regionalism in India is a historical phenomenon which is taking shape following the laws of historical development. It is a continuous process. Regionalization of politics in India is a being-becoming continuum, not a finished product.

So no one can pronounce the last word about its future shape or its causation. With some major qualitative change in the national or international parameters, the process may be conditioned by some other new variables. But one point is clear; India's approach of development and exposure to modernity has given birth to certain problems of modernization in a traditional society. These problems have made different traditional linguistic, religious and ethnic groups rooted in particular regions, aware of themselves, of their culture and group-identity. Such growth of awareness of the traditional group has led to reinterpretation and rejuvenation of their cultural identity in a modern political arrangement. This has invented a new approach and a wider perception with help a group to transcend the border of a community and integrate into a full-growth nationality which has the potentiality of positive contribution to the consolidation of the nation. This spirit of transition is reflected in the growing trend of regionalization of the political life-process in India. As such, regionalization of Indian politics reflects maturity of our federal polity and its units.

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