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**Nature of Regional Movements in India****Dr. Megha R Devle**Assistant Professor,  
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Birla College, Kalyan**The present paper makes an attempt to study the nature of regional movements in the Indian context.****Manifestations of Various Regional Movements in India and their Nature**

At present India is witnessing various regional upsurges and therefore, there are various manifestations of regional movements. From Gujrat to Arunachal Pradesh and from Jammu-Kashmir to KanyaKumari, each and every state is now facing the problem of regionalism, either as a direct threat or as an indirect threat. In Jammu and Kashmir, though National Conference Government, assumed power but the All Party Huriat Conference and other extremist groups have been demanding self-rule and self-government in Kashmir. The situation in the North-Eastern States is so explosive that any kind of turmoil may emerge at any moment. The Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Garos and other tribal people living in these regions, are demanding separate states on the basis of their distinct identity. In Assam, the All Assam Student Union (AASU), All Assam Sangram Parisad (AAGSP), Assam Gana Parisad (AGP), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), etc. all of them are demanding either self-rule or autonomy or special privileges for their upliftment. Sometimes these forces become so volatile that there happens a colossal loss of lives and government property. In West Bengal, the Greater Cooch Behar Movements are so prominent that there is every possibility to disrupt the peace and tranquility of the state at any moment. At times some regional organisations make a link with the ULFA in Assam and started various disruptive and sabotage to disturb the normal life of the state. Their demands are also self-rule, separate state, economic development, linguistic status, inclusion of their region in the Sixth Schedule etc.

All regional movements in India are mainly concerned with the demands of self autonomy, more economic powers, economic dependency, and special provisions for economic upliftment, reservation policy and inclusion of the state in the Sixth Schedule etc. From this point of view, it may be estimated that

this regional movements are mono-cultural, mono-racial, mono-ethnic movements depending on the intensity.

By way of conclusion, it may be stated that regionalism in India, is a colonial legacy of the British imperialist rulers who did not consider it necessary to uproot the problem as it was favoring them to continue their rule in this country for a longer period. The British imperialist rulers rather instigated the problem of regionalism in such a way that one region could become antagonistic against the other regional groups. They did not think it necessary to give emphasis on the parallel economic growth of the country.

After Independence, these regional imbalances throughout India, were visualized in such a way that the successive governments were unable to cope with the problem of regionalism and sub-regionalism. Thus the manifestation of various regional movements in this country is mainly due to the uneven economic growth and development. This unbalanced economic growth inspired the people of a deprived region to assemble themselves on racial, linguistic, territorial, cultural lines. As a result the spurt of regional movements began gaining momentum day by day. It has assumed different forms in the manner to create states within the Union because of various reasons. The dynamic approach to regionalism views regions as not just different territories with different names and characteristics but as units that must be understood in relation to one another within a country. Moreover, there is a need to understand more clearly how power is distributed throughout that society. Regional characteristics can serve merely as benign descriptors unless people within a region can be identified to form a group in order to understand the process of transformation of regional characteristics into a more political form of regional awareness and consciousness which is the essence of regionalism and sub-regionalism. There are various causes for the growth of regionalism and sub-regionalism in India, for instance uneven

development, fear of losing cultural identity, politics of the region, domination as well as personal and selfish motives of the political elites. Moreover, the Indian society had adopted capitalist path of development. This path was preferred by the Indian bourgeoisie which acquired control over the State. However, it aggravated development of capitalist relations. The uneven development of capitalism has further led to regional concentration of industrial development. The unmitigated sharpening of contradictions of capitalist economy in turn led to the growth of monopolies, concentration of wealth in fewer hands and a slow pace of development on one side and an increase in wage, erosion, unemployment, poverty and crime on the other. Thus it further led to the widening of gap between expectation and achievement for a large mass of population. Moreover, regional inequalities within states in terms of income and consumption have been widening. Inter-state as well as intra-state disparities have grown faster in the post reforms period. Thus it is referred as the secession of the rich, however, even the rich states, attracting huge private investments and registering impressive growth, have started resenting the continued dependence of relatively under developed states on the central revenues transferred to them. While relatively developed states complain of reverse discrimination, the peripheral regions of the some of these states complain of being victim of internal colonialism. Thereby giving rise to sub-regionalism. Thus the above factors have to be recognized as assertion of regional identity and its assimilation into a larger national identity which has been essentially political coalitional processes (Subhash, 2005, p 380). The rise of regionalism has been attributed to the rise of regional elites. Emergence of a more genuinely representative democracy has led to the sharpening to the line of distinction between or among identity groups and region. This can be attributed to the Indian party system. Thus the all India party system has collapsed. All India parties with an all Indian perspective have been reduced to regional levels. Politically the central government has ceased to be pre-eminent *vis-à-vis* state government. The constitutional arrangements make the central government pre-eminent, but the swift changes in the fortunes of political parties have robbed the centre of its leadership role.

Moreover, the rich strata in every state has emerged politically powerful whether it is the rich peasant class or its allies, the local level industrialists. Because of their power and inter relatedness with other elites, the economic elites are able to lobby for central and regional policies that support its benefit from the regionalization of Indian society as

agents for the central elite. The regional elites attempt to marshal the powers of the region through the political apparatus of the region. Within a national state, regional units struggle against each other for development and it is the economic and political elite in each region that are frequently at the centre of the heightened competition and struggle between regions. Regionalism has become equated with provincialism because the local economic and political elite use the province to challenge federal control and to promote local development. Thus rising regional aspirations are a political and economic reality in India.

Components of Regionalism and Sub-regionalism

Regionalism, as defined by the National Resource Committee of United States of America,

*“is a clustering of environmental economic, social and Governmental factors to such an extent that a distinct consciousness of a separate identity within the whole, a need for autonomous planning, a manifestation of cultural peculiarities and a desire for administrative freedom are theoretically recognized and actually put into effect” (National Resource Committee, 1983).*

The above fact reflects that regionalism is a multidimensional phenomenon that finds its expression, in terms of its components, at once geographical, historico-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychological.

Geographic Component

The geographic factor is a basic component in the process of delineating a region. A piece of land or an area demarcated with specific boundaries becomes a matter of pride for the people who live there for years together in all situations of joy and sorrow. They relate their quest of a regional identity and also differentiate at least in degree if not in kind the phenomenon of minority nationalist movement from regionalism. Their constant living and association with a piece of land develops unbreakable emotional ties symbolized as motherland cherish pride and patriotism among them. Nationalism (broad regionalism) cannot flourish in mid-air and needs a territory. Firm ground is provided by one's own native place, district and province. Most of the noted nationalists of Indian and foreign lands won recognition by beginning their career as local patriots. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, for instance, cherished his attachment to Poona where he lived and laboured.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was only a Kashmiri only by descent and was not born in that state. However, he developed an extra-ordinary attachment to his ancestral home. Territorial loyalties are so strong and deep that they often transcend the other loyalties like caste religion and race. An individual's attachment to the land is directly related to his bread, butter and prosperity. The natural resources provided by the land are utilized for the production of goods needed by him. The natural resources rainfall, climate and other geographical elements determine the pattern of his life. The geographical factors form the natural basis for the region and provide unity as well as distinctiveness. For instance, Maharashtra is formed out of the upper basins of Krishna and Godavari Rivers and is more or less conterminous with the Deccan Trap or the Deccan Caves. Andhra Pradesh can be distinguished from Maharashtra by certain natural features that characterize the lower basins of Krishna and Godavari rivers and lies at the edge of the Deccan Lavas.

The geographical factor seem to be much active in India, particularly after Independence, when the British paramountcy over the princely states was over and they were merged with the neighboring states. The merger of relatively small territorial entities into new and bigger entities led to the divided loyalties of its residents especially of the political elites and civil servants of the former princely states. These old loyalties are very well reflected in the electoral behavior of the people. The experiences continue to receive overwhelming support in elections in their former princely territories. The people of the old princely states still cling to symbolic memories of their past.

#### Historical Component

The historical component occupies a very significant place in the shaping of the regional identities. There are sacred myths and symbols held by significant groups within the area regarding the relationship of the people to their 'past'. No individual can get rid of the historical antecedents and ignore the memories of past. No state can ignore the history of a particular region when dealing with the regional movement and agitations in terms of containing, accommodating or rejecting the regional demands. The Labor Government in Britain in its white paper on the devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales published in 1975 emphasized this approach of differentiated treatment for its regions of Scotland and Wales. Thus historical aspect is an universal phenomenon.

However, the historical legacies in India have largely influenced the creation and strengthening of the regional identities and movements. Regionalism and sub-regionalism in India has its roots in the history. Many of the regional and sub-regional conflicts and tensions, which characterize the contemporary Indian polity have their origins in history and have acquired new configurations in consonance with changed political and historical process. They are just manifestations of residual nationalism or a reassertion of attitudinal sub-cultures. It was through the rationalistic movements that certain regions were incorporated and integrated into the nationalist movement. These movements had their goal to attain local autonomy. But during the national movement they resulted into political mobilisation and a support to the freedom struggle. These movements certainly performed an integrative function and helped the national movement in many respects. But this integrative function was by no means perfect as the regional feelings were only relegated to the background. As a result as soon as the Independence was achieved these regional feelings came up forcefully. The regional elites who had once performed significant role in the national movement, turned the supporters of division of country on the linguistic basis.

Thus the localization of the Indian history has been a factor of regionalism. In the freedom struggle, in order to provide a strong base of resistance against foreign domination and to integrate the diversified society of India into a single social and political unit attempts were made to revive the great traditions through reinterpretation of national history. Simultaneously, regional histories were also revived with the glorification of regional historical figures and regional kings. For instance, Shivaji in Maharashtra, Rana Pratap in Rajasthan, Krishnadevaraya in Andhra Pradesh etc., After the achievement of Independence the consciousness of local heroes and regional glories remained constant. Thus whenever popular discontent grew in the states, it was around these figures that it articulated and organized by local leaders to mobilize the masses. Thus it remained the psychological factor in the regional consciousness. The demand for separate linguistic states arose against, this background of regional histories.

#### Cultural Component

Though, the geographical factor of a region is important, it is only a beginning point. As the regionalism is the outcome of an interplay between physical and non-physical components. Thus there are a large number of non physical components

involved in it besides geography. Culture occupies a very significant place among these non-physical components of any nation. A group of people constantly living in an area develop a specific life style which includes the form of villages types of cottages, staple diet, ploughs, bullock carts, attire, jewellery etc. These aspects of the life style are considerably determined by the geographical factor and form a significant part of the culture which further determines the way of thinking, gods, goddesses, religious sects, rituals, festivals, customs, traditions nature of family, community structure, settlement patterns etc. Myths and symbols are developed and regarded meticulously. These cultural traits not only determine the way of living but also ways of thinking and vernacular dialect. The people tied together by the common cultural bonds develop unity and love for each other and form a sort of self identity and consciousness. Sacred myths, common heroes and local events are a matters of pride. They remain always prepared to protect their culture from any outside attack or domination. Thus the cultural unity and distinctiveness from other cultural groups develop an interaction with the piece of land where they live and form a cultural reason. These cultural traditions are kept alive by transferring them to future generations . That is why even after a passage of time the local cultures in India are found to be alive.

In a country like India, having a society with different ways of life, faith, rituals, dialects and so on. There exists different regional cultures and strong regional loyalties. For instance, the claim of Bengali as a region is mainly based on language. The god-goddesses, rituals and festivals in Bengal are different from the rest of Indians. It is the female deities such as Durga, Kali, Sitla who dominate their rituals. Durga Puja is a unique feature of Bengali culture. Thus because of regional variances in terms of cultural components and ethos, that various foreign scholars have mentioned about the cultural difference in India in terms of different civilized nations, of which these nations differ from each other in manners and languages

#### Linguistic Component

The linguistic component is another non-physical factor that constitutes the bedrock of the phenomenon of regionalism. It is both unifying as well as divisive force. As a uniting force the language creates unity and homogeneity by means of cohesive communication and expresses shared life through structures and value patterns. The common linguistic ties unites the people emotionally

and makes them work to improve their common destiny. In view of the role of language as an unifying force. The Indian Constitution has empowered the Indian President to accord official recognition to a language if a substantial portion of population so desires (Kashyap,2001, pp 166-8) The social unity attained through language very often forms the basis of national movement. Language as an integrative force goes beyond and cuts across other divisive parochial loyalties. In an ethnically plural society; political integration, is the process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a sense of territorial nationality over shadowing or eliminating subordinate parochial loyalties. The linguistic reorganization of the states in India is an attempt to achieve national integration through territorial nationality combined with language. This was in view of providing constructive basis for regionalism and attaining unity in diversity through local culture, local participation and local leadership. This consideration was entirely in consonance with the principles of popular democracy and decentralization. Before the linguistic re-organization of states, most of the British Provinces were artificial creations and so did not evoke regional loyalties of their residents.

The linguistic component has also a negative dimension in that it divides people through emotional frenzy. That is why the Congress inspite of its commitment to reorganize the states on linguistic criteria, was initially reluctant to implement this proposal and tried to postpone it. However, under the tremendous pressure of the people, the Government of India had to take up the issue. It is interesting to note that the Linguistic Province Commission ( S K Dar Commission ) in its report submitted in December, 1948 also favoured that the re-organization of the states on administrative convenience rather than linguistic considerations. The JVP committee comprising of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramaiyya also did not fully endorse the linguistic re-organization of the states and considered it to be a threat to the national unity.

The Linguistic Province Commission had commented that the demand of linguistic states had become "*a passion*" and had "*ceased to be a matter of reason*". Some of the noted political analysts and leaders like V. V. Giri M. C. Mahajan , H. V. R. Alyengar and S. Nijalingappa have endorsed the opinion that the linguistic states had weakened Indian unity and argued for the abolition of such states. It is also held the view that with the growth of urbanization and the internal migrations, the

concept of homogeneous linguistic states had become wholly outdated. Moreover, the theory of sons of the soil is very dangerous. Every Indian is a son of the soil. Cities like Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Hyderabad and modern industrial town like Jamshedpur, Ranchi, Bhopal, Bhillai and many cities have mixed population. If we apply the linguistic principle in these cities it will become an instrument of reckless discrimination. Thus it can be concluded that the linguistic factor is unifying force only if it operates within reasonably defined limits but when it is stretched beyond that, it gets converted into narrow linguism and becomes a source of disintegration.

#### Economic Component

Economic interests play a crucial role in both the processes of integration and disintegration depending upon the nature and levels of economic development of different parts of a state. In an underdeveloped area with a predominance of agricultural sector and traditional occupation, the mobility of people is restricted. In view of the need for big markets, large labour force and raw material, industrialization, results in interdependence and breaking down of regional barriers. The regional economic disparities form the crux of the problem of regionalism.

Issues like uneven spread of resources, lack of infrastructural facilities, insufficient private and public investment, low level of aspirations, low savings and high spending, caste barriers etc, are some of the reasons where certain regions lag behind in economic development. In a liberal political economy those areas which are already advanced undergo faster pace of development while those which are backward continue to lag behind. This leads for a vicious circle of cumulative advancement and cumulative backwardness. In fact development is a normative phenomenon which aims at creating conditions for the realization of potentials of human development. It is a dynamic process and aims at providing people with sufficient grounds for betterment of quality of life. It is a collective way of doing things with the object of qualitative and quantities improvement. In view of the guardian-cum promotional role of the state it is argued that it should adopt a more positive approach and change its investment priorities in favour of backward regions. When fruits of development are grabbed by the relatively advanced parts of a state. People in the backward regions start questioning the legitimacy of the political arrangement. A feeling of injustice and deprivation ultimately culminates into growing restlessness and anger among the people of

economically backward and neglected area. In this context the Estimate Committee in its report on Development of Backward Areas, has warned

*“the lack of improvement in the conditions of people living in backward areas tend to create social tensions”*

The issue of regional imbalance leads to the development of psyche of neglect and injustice charged with emotion and acrimony. Nothing makes a docile and passive community more aggressive than the feeling of relative economic deprivation, discrimination and neglect. Agitations are launched on real or imaginary grievances regarding backwardness. Thus, “regionalism is the outcome of some real or perceived sense of internal colonialism, the result of under development or asymmetrical development. It is the response of unequal sharing of benefits of developmental activity. It is a protest against the stabilization and monopolization of advantages through policies aiming at institutionalization of existing stratification system. Such regionalism, in the “uneven-development syndromes” may emerge because of a number of factors. It may be the result of exploitation and power in equality between elites and peripheral groups in a nation. It may also result from a process of cumulative de-equalization. In which any nascent in-equality is intensified over time through cumulative causation channels.

Disparities in the development of different regions exist in almost all the countries of the world. It is increasingly recognized that these must be narrowed down. The objective of Indian economic planning and development has been accepted as not only growth but with social justice, leading to a qualitative change in its composition in favour of the weaker sections of the society and the backward or less developed regions. In spite of the sixty years of planned economic development and efforts at removing the regional imbalances, there exist a wide gap in the inter regional development. A very large number of people believe that the area they live in is economically backward. Many of them feel that their area has been neglected in the process of planning. There is a strong feeling of injustice among the people of the backward areas regarding the unfair and unequal distribution of developmental benefits. This discontent is initially articulated in demands for distributive justice. However they may take the shape of political protest movements and agitations demanding financial autonomy to the states and reducing the centre's domination in later stages. In some parts these agitations have become a matter of interstate controversies. The tensions between the migrants and

sons of soil have created a serious challenge to the national integration of the country.

#### Other Components

Besides the above mentioned components of regionalism there are various other factors that tend to divide the society and strengthen sub-regionalism. Religion influences the process of integration or disintegration and affects the institutional framework of the states in the east as well as the west. Even in Europe and America, where secularism has been accepted as an operative principal and where it is strengthened by progress in the field of science and technology, religion continues to be more than a matter of personal and social significance. Marxists also agree that the rejection of religion as an opium of the people amounts to ignoring facts. According to Gramsci; religion, state and party are the three indissoluble elements and in the real process of historic-political development there is a necessary passage from one to the other.

In Indian context, it has been observed that when religion coincide with the regional identity, threatens national unity. The very demand of Pakistan was based on the above combination. Jinnah's statement at the Round Table Conference in 1930 is sufficiently illustrative. He observed

*"I see no ray of hope if the Muslims were everywhere in minority ; but luckily there are Muslim majorities in certain provinces .... That gives us our safeguard"* Even the famous Lahore resolution of Muslim League was based on this fact. It reads, *"the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in majority ....should be grouped to constitute independent states in which constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign"*

Even today when religion is coupled with region as in Jammu and Kashmir and Laccadive Islands., where the Muslims are in preponderance or in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, where Christianity is the dominant religion or in Punjab where the Sikh is dominant, it creates militant type of regionalism which is of aggressive nature with separatist orientation.

Political parties also contribute to the forces of regionalism. They take up parochial issues and also render passive or active support to such demands. They provide channels through which territorial identities find expression and aspirations and demands of regional communities are articulated. Even a well organized party such as the Congress could not survive in certain states without

championing regional issues. Factionalism and loose discipline in the party ranks help the regionally ambitious leaders to come up. Regional strains and the need to win elections do not allow the parties to rise above disintegrative forces. In fact, political parties are supposed to be the legitimate agents of management of conflict, aggregation of interests, sub-ordination of sub-nationalities and sub-cultures under a singular national culture. In a plural society the national parties ought to be cementing force counteracting the forces of regionalism. Their capacity to manage the conflicts. However, the recent emergence of regional political parties is a result of the failure of national political parties to accommodate or reconcile regional demands. Hence, regional parties emerged out of regional grievances openly advocating regional interests have given a boost to provincialism and localism.

The regional political elites also play a very crucial role in the development of regionalism. In order to legitimize their power and acquire domination they use the regional consciousness and ideology as an instrument. They emphasize the socio-cultural differences between the different groups. The distinction between 'we' and 'they' between 'outsiders' and 'sons of the soil' is brought to the surface by them, transforming the latent emotions lying behind such phenomena into a regional or sub-regional ideology to serve certain political ends. Regionalism can be viewed as a conflict between the national elites and regional elites. A regional movement which is the manifestation of regional ideology is an attempt by regional elites to acquire larger support so that they could increase their competitive strength vis-à-vis the national elites. Whatever be the nature of the regional or sub-regional movement, there is no doubt that they are usually triggered off intentionally by regional and sub-regional elites. The violent eruption of these movements are usually exhibitions of strength by these leaders staking their claims for a share in power. In the name of distributive justice regional and sub-regional demands are generated and assume the form of a movement. The linguistic re-organization of states in India has in fact helped to strengthen the hands of regional elites and thereby foster regionalism and sub-regionalism. The regional elites have increased their strength and consolidated their position in the field of decision making and power politics at the provincial level. This has resulted in a shift in country's political life from all India to regional orientation facilitating the trend towards regionalization of Indian politics.

#### Types of Regionalism and Sub-regionalism

Like the components, the types of regionalism and sub regionalism also seem to overlap. Though regionalism and sub regionalism is not always coterminous with present day state boundaries, a state can still be treated as a unit for evolving types of regionalism and sub regionalism. Therefore, on this basis following types of regionalism and sub regionalism can be identified.

First there is supra-state regionalism which is built around and is 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 latter. The group identity thus forged is usually negative in character; it is usually against some other group identity. It is also issue-specific in the sense that it is confined to certain matter on which the group would like to take a common and joint stand. It is not at all a case of a total and permanent merger of state identities in the group postures. South Vs. North in India on such issues as language or the location of steel plants illustrate the point. Secondly, there is phenomenon of inter-state regionalism which is coterminous with state boundaries and involves juxtaposing of one or more state identities against another on specific issues which threaten their interest. River water disputes in general and the Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute in particular can be cited as example. Thirdly, there is the phenomenon of inter-state regionalism, which embodies the quest of a 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. This type of regionalism is most rampant, typified by a Vidarbha in Maharashtra a Saurashtra in Gujarat, a Telengana in Andhra Pradesh, an East U P in Uttar Pradesh and an East-Rajasthan in Rajasthan.

#### Conclusion

Thus from the above analysis it can be concluded that Regionalism and sub- regionalism in India, is a complex amalgam of geographical, historico-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychic factors. It is difficult to indicate which component has ascendancy, however, it cannot be ignored that the economic factor has an edge over the others in the ultimate analysis. It is also interesting to note that regionalism and sub- regionalism in India seems to manifest itself in overlapping circles in terms of its major types which, as such, are not immune fusing into each other and also being diffused, if an overarching national loyalty structure emerges to transcend them. The basic issue is not of regionalism or sub-

regionalism vs. nationalism but one of right ordering of loyalty between the regional and the national identities. This is the crux of the problem of management of regionalism in India, to the resolution of which the political elite, administrators and educationists have to join hands and work. The goal is plausible and yet it cannot be denied that the country has to go a long way even to approximate it. Thus it throws open the pertinent issue of obsession with the politics of survival which seem to exhaust the political elite, administrators and educationists in the country permit them to address themselves to the basic issue. It throws open a prominent debate of how to resolve the issue of regionalism and sub- regionalism in sharing the fruits of development to all regions and sub-regions of India.

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