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Study of Regionalism and Linguistic Diversity in India

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Abstract

Regionalism in India is the Expression of the neglected socio-political elements which not succeed to find expression in the mainstream polity and culture. These feelings of frustration and annoyance resulting from exclusion and neglect find demonstration in regionalism. Narrow-mindedness and biases have a lasting impact on the mind of the people. They themselves do not play a part in the political process, but as a psychic factor they do influence their party organizations and their political behaviour. Seen in this perspective, regionalism in India, as elsewhere, is which can also be described as a psychic phenomenon. It has its root in the minds of the people. The language problem or the problem of the medium of instruction in the educational institutions of India has got a long and deep rooted history which dates back to British rule. India is a country where people of different communities reside with different specific languages of their own. At present India is divided into 28 states and 8 union territories. Each union territory and each state has its own state and regional language, like Assam has Assamese, Bengal has Bengali, Orissa has Oriya and soon.

Keywords: Regionalism, Linguistic

Introduction

The regional movement is also considered as the 'diverse trend detrimental to national unity'. In popular parlance, it is supposed to be a synonym of provincialism, which breeds localism, isolationism and separatism. But regionalism is not always regarded as parochial anti-national movements. Historically it is found that the regional forces played a very glorified role against the anti-imperialist forces to liberate the country on basis of national movement. It often fights against the oppressed forces of chauvinist big nations. Regionalism is thus a movement against social, political and economic deprivations and it is also a movement against the hegemonic groups who are dominant in the mainstream of the country as a whole. In India, the states share a common legal, constitutional and administrative structure but their international functioning has no match with each other and vary considerably. It was in the early 1950s, mass agitation occurred throughout the country with a demand to reorganize the states on linguistic lines. As the linguistic movement swept the country, there was increasing concern about the powerful sense of regional attachment and what then appeared to be a low level of national identification. Scholarly and journalistic attention was then given to development within the states, but the focus was on the relationship of one linguistic group to another, the attitudes that existed in each multilingual state towards linguistic reorganization and the relationship between the state and the central government. With the reorganization of the Indian States in 1956 along linguistic lines there was considerable apprehension that the states would be concerned primarily with their own development, that national authority would be eroded and that only a slender thread Nehru's leadership would bind the Union.

The intention expression by the scholars that the Indian states would stay united under Nehruvian rule did not last long and it was after Nehru's death that the national authority over states started to weaken and the states started to operate in an open atmosphere which resulted in the unique development process within the states. What came out was the growth of regional sentiments which had aggravated the growth of regionalism. Regionalism in India has found expression in different ways, where boundaries cannot be considered sacrosanct, states can be taken as vital components for evolving different forms of regionalism. Supra-state regionalism or secession from the Indian Union; this kind of regionalism can be classified as the most dangerous form of regionalism as it is based on the policy of division from the Indian Union.

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The Kashmir issue is the classic example of this form of regionalism which is based on the demand for a separate state outside India and the Kashmiri militants persistently committing bloodshed in pursuit of their desire to divide away. Intra-state regionalism or disputes between states; regionalism can be looked as an inter-state competition under the federal structure of India, which could be seen in regard to inter-state river water dispute. Inter-state regionalism or demands of certain areas for separate state, this type of regionalism is noticeable with demands for parts within the state for fulfillment of self identity and gaining more autonomy.

Hence it became a critical problem to introduce a uniform policy regarding the teaching of language and medium of instructions throughout the country. Even the situation took a different turn and more particularly in Assam, after reorganization of the states in India in 1956 on linguistic basis. Assam being a state of heterogeneous population has faced a crucial problem which is different than any other states of India or any other countries in the world in respect of the problem of medium of instruction in the educational institutions of the state and on the background of this issue many odd problems have passed through the state.

In the educational institutions of the state, it is only the language that decides the standard and norms of that society and its culture. Language is like a reflected glass of a nation. So it is the vital question for the educationists, psychologists and administrators to decide which language should be made the medium of instruction at various stages of education and as to why? All the languages mother tongue has received greatest importance because it directs highest influence upon the nature and nurture of the individual. The regional language is next in importance as it is spoken by the people in the whole region. The national language has its utility in social, commercial, administrative and political fields. Besides the National language every society or the country has owned the cultural language which could tell us the cultural heritage of the past and therefore, it is equally important to maintain cultural unity and cultural progress of the country.

Regionalism as a sub state movement:

On the contrary, in its positive sense, regionalism implies an idea of searching the self identity of the people of that particular area. In other sense it is rather a separate demand for protecting and preserving racial, linguistic and economic interest of a group of people belonging to a nation. To be precise, Regionalism is in fact, is a movement of a Sub-nationality against a prevailing nationality. It is often distinguished by a particular racial, linguistic or religious group settled in a particular part of the country which demands either separation or sovereignty of special constitutional, administrative, economic or political status for themselves to the exclusion of the rights and interest of other communities and takes recourse to necessary political measures with a view to coercing the authorities to accede to their demands, then that movement is certainly a regionalist movement. Hence, regionalism is the other name of distinctive and restrictive political movement having no broad based liberal and democratic elements but in some cases it also had a clear objective of attaining separate statehood, as in the case of Gorkhal and Telangana.

It is important to note that regionalism in India, in its present form, has various connotations like 'provincialism',

'localism', 'son of the soil theory', 'disintegration of Indian States', struggle for separate statehood or provincial autonomy, struggle for more power, especially economic power etc. whatever may be the connotations, the concept of regionalism has now become a separatist movement in different parts of India in various forms. India is now infected with regional upsurge of different kinds like geographical regionalism, linguistic regionalism, cultural regionalism, ethnic regionalism and so on.

In this scenario, it can be stated that it is very difficult to provide an acceptance to a particular definition of regionalism. However it can further be added that the process of state formation in India is going on which can be claimed by the fact that after independence, there were not as many States and union territories but at present there are 28 States and 8 Union territories. One of the most significant factors contributing to the process of State construction in India is regionalism and has further quicken the growth of this process in the Indian society.

Regionalism as a phenomenon in the Indian political system is not new. Regionalism has remained perhaps the most potent force in Indian politics ever since 1947, if not before. Regionalism is rooted in India's manifold diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, communities, religions and so on, and encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers, and fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation. For many centuries, India remained the land of many lands, regions, cultures and traditions. The basic point that highlights in this respect is that internal self-determination of community, whether linguistic, tribal, religious, regional, or their combinations, has remained the principal form in which regionalism in India has sought to express itself, historically as well as contemporaneously. In the pre-independence period it was applied by the British imperialist, as they intentionally encouraged the people of various regions to think in terms of their region rather than the nation as a whole, with an aim to maintain their hold over India during the national movement.

Conclusion

From present paper we observed that India is a land of various ethnic and tribal groups. Ethnicity relates to inscriptive identities like caste, language, religion, region etc. Inequality in terms of sharing power between two ethnic groups' results into conflict. The ethnicity is socially mobilized and territorially confined. It has numerically sufficient population and is a pool of symbols depicting distinctiveness. It has a reference group in relation to which a sense of relative deprivation is aggregated. Ethnicity causes ethnic movements after being left out of the developmental process or even being a victim of uneven development. Ethnicity is manifested in Indian politics not merely due to grass root discontent but is also a creation of vested political interest. Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, in their economic well being etc are engaged very often in a form of interest group politics. all the major languages in India belong to the Indo-European and Dravidian family. Only some other languages belong to two other families. The languages that are spoken in North-India belong to the Indo-European family while those of south India belong to Dravidian family. The Austro-Asiatic family are tribal people like Khasls and Mundas. The Tibeto-Burmese family is mainly a language family of the

Mongoloid tribesmen of East and North-East India. Thus language has played a dominant role in moulding the cultural identities of various groups of people in India.

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