

# Regionalism in India and Movements

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## **Abstract:**

India has been witnessing the onset of the democratic processes that have resulted in the reconfiguration of its politics and economics. Among these processes, most significant has been the assertion of identity politics. There have been struggles around the assertiveness and conflicting claims of the identity groups and of struggles amongst them, often fought out on the lines of region, religion, language (even dialect), caste, and community. These struggles have found expressions in the changed mode of electoral representation that has brought the local/regional into focus with the hitherto politically dormant groups and regions finding voices. A more genuinely representative democracy has led to the sharpening of the line of distinction between or among the identity groups and regions.

**Keywords:** Regionalism, Movement, Culture, Identity

To some Scholars regionalism in Indian politics in generally has been regarded as something that is anti-system, anti-federal and against basic interest of a well-integrated polity ( **G Ram Reddy and B A V Sharma, 1979**). It has often expressed itself in antagonistic terms to that of the nation, fuelled as it is by the sense of continuing deprivation due to long- term neglect in development and resource allocation. Regionalism has often articulated itself in terms, which are opposed to national unity and integrity, and challenging to the legitimacy of the state. The literature on regionalism, its meaning, forms, causes and consequences in India is so extensive and vast that there is little scope or perhaps not much to add to elucidate the meaning of regionalism in India, or its forms and content. The meaning of the word 'regionalism' is very ambiguous in nature, there are scholars who regard regionalism as a threat to national integration and on the other hand, there are scholars who view that regionalism inculcates a strong feeling of loyalty and togetherness in the people which is highly impactful in generating political participation through regional mobilization. It often involves ethnic groups whose aims include independence from a national state and the development of their own political power. In Indian context, regionalism refers to assertion of distinct ethnic, linguistic or economic interests by various groups within the nation. Since regionalism is rooted in linguistic, ethnic, economic and cultural identities of the people living in specific geographical area, political scholars have treated various forms of regionalism as economic regionalism, linguistic regionalism, political regionalism and even sub-regional movements in the general frame of regionalism.

Structures are not decisive in determining the outcome of a movement and one has to acknowledge the role of agencies also. From the same instance one can highlight the role of Sri Potti the veteran Andhra leader who demanded creation of Andhra state and died following fast unto death. Eventually the shape of the Andhra state was not an outcome of either Tamil Nadu's history or the history of Hyderabad but also of the political leadership of the Congress which settled for an Andhra Pradesh state having

connected certain territories from Hyderabad, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In case of Gorkhaland agitation the territory under reference comprises the whole tract between the Meachi river and the Tista the hilly region of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, bordering Sikkim and China and the whole tract of Doars bordering Bhutan and Bangladesh. Before partition of Bengal Presidency within India. The whole tract was part of the Bengal Presidency. A creation of the British colonial rule out of territories rested from Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. This shows that the political movements arising in this region would have to deal with history in a very selective way because before the British period the control regime were multiple, unclear and subsequently the demographic composition became mixed due to several practical reasons. In this sense probably both Telengana and Gorkhaland movement can have different prospects or outcome. Both operate within a historical context shaped by British colonial rule before independence and by the structure of parliamentary democracies after independence. However in case of Telangana movement several conditions are present which were absent in case of the Gorkhaland movement. First Telangana region had a long continued cultural tradition relating to established structures of Princely states, large concentration of linguistic communities and historically evolved cities like Chennai and Hyderabad. All these are not present in case of the proposed area under the Gorkhaland. Before British rule these areas were wild tracts with no established control regime which the British developed out of primarily strategic reasons as the area has been contiguous to several international neighbours. If Chennai was retained within Tamil Nadu for investment and development concerns despite demand for its inclusion in Andhra there is no such city under the proposed territory of Gorkhaland compared to the status of Chennai. The hilly region of Darjeeling are resource starved, over populated and depend on the only city of Siliguri which again cannot be said to have under the control of any particular ethnic community. We feel that one cannot therefore expect the same outcome as like that of the Telangana movement.

### **Regionalism in India:**

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 (Weiner, 1968). 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.

**Regionalism as a sub state movement:**

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 Gorkhaland and Telangana .

In order to understand both the movements on more aspect needs to be conceptually understood i.e. ethnicity. The term 'ethnic' in general words can be understood as a group of people who share a common culture and life style but without any homeland. An ethnic group is characterized by a multiplicity of attributes like religion, caste, region, descent, race, language, colour, culture and so on. The focus of interests of an ethnic group is to get some benefits for itself. The group often uses ethnic criterion like religion, language or caste to mobilize itself to give identity to itself which separates it from other group or groups. Thus delineation of boundary of an ethnic group of community is an important aspect of ethnicity. The nature of identity shifts along with shifts along with changing circumstances and calls for change in boundary or a change in identification. There are different approaches to understanding ethnicity have been used by different social scientists when trying to understand the nature of ethnicity as a factor in human life and society. Examples of such approaches are: primordialism, essentialism, perennialism, constructivism, modernism and instrumentalism.

India is a land of various ethnic and tribal groups. Ethnicity relates to ascriptive 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 /whom 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.

G.Ram Reddy and BAV Sharma (1979) in *Regionalism in India: A Study of Telengana* the author brings upon the long deep – rooted problems of the Telengana region since its admission. The book is divided into two parts. The first part begins with analysis of regionalism in the framework of national and state politics, Telengana grievances and their eruption into a mass agitation are analyzed next along with the roles played by the political parties in relation to the separatist movement and also that of the press and public meetings in political communication. The second part analyses the data based on survey research. Keeping regionalism in focus the book deals with the mass agitation regarding the Centre's role in dealing with the Telangana problem and the list of lessons learnt from the separatist movement.

Regionalism in Indian politics is regarded as something that is anti-system anti federal and against basic interest of a well integrated and well developed polity.

Khosla Ritu, Exploring the Demand for Telengana State: Is the demand Valid? (2011) This article brings into account the facts and information which are very necessary in order to understand the demand for Telengana state on the ground of its validation. Giving a brief historical sketch the focus shifts to developmental issues which happen to be the core reason of the demand. The author has also provided relevant information about the allocation of Development Grants. Region wise sectoral contribution to Gross District Domestic Product and concludes that if developments the main reason for emergence of demand for Telengana state then why the region of Rayalaseema has not come up with a similar demand? The fact that is reflected by the article is that the demand for separate state should be based on concrete ground.

A Case for Gorkhaland, the Socio Economic Perspective by Udaya Mani Pradhan. The author in this article stresses on the identity question of the Indian Gorkhas which according to him is the main reason behind the demand for Gorkhaland. He also points out that the path of self-reliance is self-government which can only be attained by the formation of a separate state called Gorkhaland. The author also talks about the socio economic viability issue of the state and also stresses that the resources present in the state can make Gorkhaland into a model state for the country. He also talks about socio economic issues like education, tea and tourism and his views are not different from any other Gorkhaland supporters in the content because each and every other Gorkhaland supporter are of the opinion that once Gorkhaland is achieved it can be easily transformed into dreamland for Gorkhs. This article can be regarded as a write up by a Gorkhaland supporter which ends up in giving the same structure of the movement like any other protagonist but which in reality stands on very different ground.

Nation Civil Society and Social Movements Essays in Political Sociology by T K Oommen Sage Publication Pvt.Ltd.2004. This book is a collection of twelve essays on three interrelated themes of Nation, Civil Society and Social Movements organized in three parts each having four chapters. Chapter (1-4) discusses some aspects of nation and nationalism. Chapter (5-8) deals with different dimensions of Civil Society and the last four chapters (9-12) analyze social movement from different vantage points. The author seeks to explain the gap between the theoretical assumption behind the construction of nation state and the empirical reality. Particularly in the case of India and Pakistan also Srilanka the author argues that project homogenization is not yet successful and also not likely to succeed in future, therefore individual equality along with group identity will have to co-exist. It is in this context that one should recognize the salience of collective rights within south Asian states as an antidote to collective alienation and to deligitimise secessionist movements. In chapter three the author argued that religion cannot be basis of nation formation in democratic state for which he had provided several empirical facts and theoretical assumption. The fear of balkanization is based in India through partition of the Indian subcontinents based on religious ground. The demand for linguistic state by the dissatisfied linguistic community led the linguistic reorganization of India. In fact the demand for new states still continues. The author gives two reasons behind the continuing demand for new state. First, even though the Indian state is conceived as a multi layered entity- a union/federal, provincial, autonomous regions, zila parishad panchayat hardly any authority is conceded to the lower three levels. This prompts a demand for

provincial state by regional linguistic communities, ignoring their population, size and financial viability. Second, the cultural specificity of subaltern communities is not only ignored but sought to be destroyed through their vivisection and attachment to the state dominated by major linguistic communities **which results in the former's marginalization and alienation.**

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