

Ethnic and Regional Movements

P.G Semester II, CC-9,

Anuradha Jaiswal

After India gained independence, regionalism has assumed different forms in different parts of India. Apart from the linguistic factor, the economic development of various parts of the country has also been a crucial factor in the growth of regionalism in India. In many states, though the development effort has increased in every successive plan period but its benefits have percolated more to the already developed areas resulting in the failure of planned economic development thus creating economic imbalances between states and regions of the country. However local patriotism and loyalty to a locality or region or state and its language and culture do not constitute regionalism, nor are they disruptive of the nation. They are quite consistent with national patriotism and loyalty to the nation.

The main factors in the growth of regionalism are:-

- i) fear of being assimilated into the dominant culture and, hence, to preserve one's language and culture by demanding an autonomous state,
- ii) the skewed economic development of India where certain groups feel that they have been left behind despite being rich in resources in their regions and
- iii) nativistic tendencies –sons of the soil" concept in which regional identity becomes the source of ethnic strife. Examples include the

erstwhile Jharkhand movement in the state of Bihar and Telangana movement in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the attack on South Indians in Mumbai in 1960s and the simmering movement in the north-eastern state of Assam to expel the immigrants. Examples of Regional Movements are like, Bundelkhand, Vidarbhas Khand, Boroland, Karbianglong, Garoland, etc. All these regional movements are demanding separate states on the basis of their language, race, culture, economic development etc.

From the very beginning, the national government felt a responsibility to counter this imbalance in regional development. The 1956 policy of Industrial Policy resolution of the Government of India, asserted that 'only by securing a balanced and coordinated development of the industrial and agricultural economy in each region can the entire country attain higher standards of living. Similarly recognizing the importance of regional balance in economic development as a positive factor in promoting national integration. Planning was also seen as powerful instrument that could be used to remove regional inequality. For this purpose, the Planning Commission allocated greater plan assistance to the backward states.

Language has always formed the basis of asserting ethnic identity in India. This was well evident during the Dravida Kazhagam (Dravidian Organization) movement in the state of Tamil Nadu in South India in 1940s and 1950s when violent protest broke out against the adoption of Hindi as the national language by the government of India. The movement gave the call for the secession of Tamil Nadu from the union of India on the basis of identity cantered on Tamil language. Because of intense linguistic feelings, many states were carved out based on languages by the State Reorganization Act of

1956. Recently, linguistic identity was again on display in the state of Maharashtra in Central India, where in the name of Marathi pride, there were concerted attacks on the helpless and poor Hindi-speaking North Indian immigrants from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Since the fifties, an ugly form of regionalism has been widely prevalent in the form of 'the sons of the soil doctrine'. Underlying it is the view that a state specifically belongs to the main linguistic group inhabiting it or that the state constitutes the exclusive 'homeland' of its main language speakers who are the 'sons of soil' or local residents. All others, who live there, or are settled there and whose mother tongue is not the state's main language, are declared to be outsiders. These outsiders might have lived in the state for a long time, or have migrated there more recently, but they are not to be regarded sons of soil. Unequal development of economic opportunities in different parts of the country, especially the cities, occurred in surge of economic progress after 1952. Demand or preference for the local people or 'sons of the soil' over the outsiders in the newly created employment and educational opportunities was the outcome. In the struggle for the appropriation of economic resources and economic opportunities often recourse was taken to communalism, casteism and nepotism. Likewise language loyalty and regionalism was used to systematically exclude the 'outsiders' from the economic life of a state or city.

The problem was aggravated in a number of cities or regions because the speakers of the state language were in a minority or had or have a majority. In Bombay in 1961, the Marathi-speakers constituted 42.8 percent of the population. In Bangalore, the Kannada speakers were less than 25 percent. In Calcutta the Bengalis formed,

bare majority. In the urban areas of Assam, barely 33 percent were Assamese. After 1951, the rate of migration into the cities accelerated. Conflict between migrants and non-migrants (and linguistic minorities and majorities) was not inherent and inevitable.

The sons of the soil movements have mainly arisen, and have been more virulent, when there is actual or potential competition for industrial and middle class jobs, because the migrants and the local, educated middle class youth. The friction has been more intense in states and cities where 'outsiders' had greater access to higher education and occupied more middle class positions in government service, professions and industry and shop keeping. Active in these movements have also been members of the lower- middle class or workers, as well as rich and middle peasants whose position is unthreatened, but who increasingly aspire to middle class status and position for their children.

There has been large scale migration of labours from Bihar and U.P to Punjab and Haryana or Bombay city, or of workers from Bihar and Orissa to the tea plantations in Assam and Bengal or of Orissa building workers to Gujarat and domestic workers all over India. Article 15 prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or residence. Article 16 prohibits discrimination in the employment or appointments to any office under the state on grounds of 'descent, place of birth or residence' Under political pressure and taking advantage of the ambiguity in the constitution, many states, in fact reserve jobs or give preference for employment in state and local governments and for admission into educational institutions to local residents. These militant anti-migrant and sons of soil movements were mainly centred in the

urban areas of Assam, Telangana in Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Orissa. Extremes can be seen in the voices of Shiv Sena. Taking advantage of the ambiguity in the constitution, many states, in fact reserve jobs or give preference for employment in state and local governments and for admission into educational institutions to local residents. These militant anti-migrant and sons of soil movements were mainly centred in the urban areas of Assam, Telangana in Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Orissa. Extremes can be seen in the voices of Shiv Sena.

Tribal Movements: This is not unique to post-independent India. The British period was full of incidents when tribes rose in revolt against the officials, the landlords and the money-lenders when they were forcibly evicted from their traditional land. Even in independent India, the tribes constitute the most neglected lot. Their lack of development and displacement from forests and traditional lands has caused huge disaffection among them. This has led to the resurgence of tribal identity movements in different parts of the country. An important dimension of this is what is called the 'ethno-ecological' movement in which the tribes are not only fighting against their displacement but also against the ecological destruction of their natural habitats. The growing menace of Maoist violence in India (also called naxalism) in the tribal dominated regions of the country, where the tribes are engaged in armed rebellion against the state, is a direct consequence of their oppression, displacement, poverty and anger against their cultural erosion under the onslaught of the dominant mainstream culture.

However Federalism, does not mean a weak national government rather a national government that rides a non-

dominating national government, which observes the federal features of the polity. The linguistic reorganization of the states, the integration of the tribals and regional inequality and regionalism, it is to be observed that the prophets of 'gloom and doom' have been disproved. Linguistic states have strengthened not weakened Indian unity, even while permitting full cultural autonomy to different linguistic areas.

References

1. Ram Chandra Guha, *India after Gandhi*.
2. Shailendra Nath Sen, *An Advanced History of Modern India*.
3. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After*.
4. Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, *India After Independence*.
5. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern Times*.