
UNIT 21 REGIONAL IMBALANCES

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21.1 INTRODUCTION

Regional identity, sometimes running parallel but often in competition with, if not in opposition to the national identity has been a perennial feature of the Indian democratic politics. The nature of this regional identity needs to be analysed in terms of the social and cultural forces that have been at work. Though the term region is a contextual one, regionalism has acquired through successive phases, as would be discussed below, a distinct connotation in an academic analysis of the Indian politics. The term is now used to indicate an agglomeration of all those forces that are generally considered to be centrifugal, polarised to centralism and nationalism.,

The origin of regionalism in India can be historically traced to many of the factors like **cultural** heritage, geographical isolation, ethnic loyalties etc. For a political theorist, however, it is more to be viewed as the complex of political, economic **and** ethnic **phenomena**. It is an expression of heightened political consciousness, expanding participation and increasing competition for scarce resources. Economic grievances that may be real or perceived have often been articulated in the form of resistance to the economic policies of the centre promoting **deprivation** of one region at the cost of favouring another region. The grievances related to this process of 'internal colonialism' are often fused with the **feeling** of cultural anxiety, over language status and ethnic **balance**. It is this **fusion** that constitutes the core of an individual's identity and when politicised, takes a potentially virulent form providing regionalism its potency.

It follows that **the** general factors behind the growth of regionalism are the cultural, ethnic **and** linguistic diversity of India. It is in the recognition of these diversities that federalism as an institutional mechanism has been treated as the cornerstone of India's democratic system that has enabled the **regional** social groups-ethnic, linguistic, tribal and cultural- to obtain a share of resources and satisfy their demands for recognition. Indeed the **frequency** with which identity based politics has asserted itself at the regional level has invested Indian federalism with a substance not found in many putatively federal political systems, and has provided an important **decentralising** tendency that has run like a thread through politics since independence.

However there have been, as we shall describe later, features of Indian federal system that have engendered regional conflict. A significant aspect of the issue of regionalism has been the dialectic of centralisation and decentralisation between the centre and the states, the appropriate pattern of devolution of power. Then the unevenness of economic development has negated the promise of balanced regional growth inherent in the agenda of nation-building and national integration. The introduction of the new economic policies in 1991 has further widened the gulf between the rich and the poor regions as the latter have failed to attract the private investment- both domestic and foreign. Besides these, other factors like the increasing electoral strength of the regional proprietary classes and also the federalisation of political party system in the coalition politics that has emerged in the aftermath of the Congress as the dominant party can be counted as the factors leading to the growth of regionalisation of Indian democratic politics.

21.2 CONCEPTUALISING REGION AND REGIONALISM: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

How do we understand the concept of regionalism? Regionalism is a complex socio-political phenomenon and as such scholars, while analysing various dimensions of the phenomenon, have developed different conceptual frameworks in order to understand it.

Before engaging the discussion on regionalism as a concept at the theoretical level, it is pertinent to understand the term region. The concept of region, in essence, lies at the very core of any conceptualisation of regionalism in the sense that this concept provides the existential basis for the emergence of the phenomenon of regional loyalty that eventually gets articulated in the political form of regionalism. Though territoriality provides the basis for partial understanding of regionalism, the social scientists have been more concerned with the non-geographical factors, as, for them, region has always been more an analytical category than a geographical entity.

As for the social-cultural aspects of region it is considered as a nucleus of social aggregation for differing purposes. In this view, a particular territory is set apart acquiring distinctiveness, over a period of time, when different variables operate in different degrees. These variables include the factors of geography, topography, religion, language, customs, social, economic and political stages of development, common historical tradition and experiences etc. Broadly speaking, the social scientists have identified four types of regions in India: historic region based on common sacred symbols and myths related to past; linguistic region-based on common language; cultural region-based on cultural homogeneity and lastly the structural region-distinguished on the basis of certain structural principles like caste ranking and community status.

It follows that even if a region is a territorial concept, its attributes are not exclusively territorial and that regionalism emerges primarily because of the differing perceptions of the regions by respective political leadership and the popular masses.

Now let us concretise the concept of regionalism in the case of India. In a general theoretical sense, regionalism has been analysed by broadly classifying it into the following manner: as a manifestation of centre-state relations; as an outcome of internal colonialism; as a

subsidiary process of political integration; in terms of the conflicts involving the political elite; as a product of the imperatives of the electoral politics; in contrast with the sub-regionalism; and finally in the context of increasing competitiveness among the regions in a liberalising economy.

The above brings us to some of the representative views on regionalism by the noted theorists of Indian variants of regionalism.

Rasheeduddin Khan argues that regionalism is most fundamental to the concept of the Indian federalism. While terming India as a multi-regional federation, Khan argues that the concepts of nationality and ethnicity are not adequate to explain its socio-cultural diversities. The regions in India have distinct social, cultural, historical, linguistic, economic and political connotations and the term regional identity is to be considered as a comprehensive expression of the plurality of Indian society.

However, as A K Baruah argues, the factors like ethnicity and nationality cannot be discounted, The regional movements in Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Gorkha Land have seen a distinct role of ethnicity. Then most of the ethnic groups in the North-Eastern states of India and in Kashmir [the Kashmir Muslims] would like to perceive themselves as distinct nationalities that invariably brings them in a sort of confrontation with the Indian state as the assertion of their identity is perceived as inimical to the idea of the Indian nation.

D.C. Burman views regionalism in India both as a doctrine that implies decentralisation of administration on a regional basis within a nation, a social-cultural counter movement against the imposition of a monolithic national unity, a political counter-movement aiming to achieve greater autonomy of sub-cultural region. In this context it would be pertinent to note that regionalism is a complex phenomenon and to reduce it to either as a movement for autonomy vis-a-vis centre or as a reaction against federal administrative imbalances is tantamount to oversimplification.

Paul R Brass argues that territoriality provides us only a partial understanding of the phenomenon of regionalism and hence it is imperative to explore other dimensions of the phenomenon. While taking a legal approach for the analysis of regionalism he seeks to demarcate the issues falling under the regional and national jurisdiction. In this context one can argue that there cannot be a total segregation of the issues. That the assumption of mutually exclusive national and regional domain can be best illustrated by the fact that a regional problem like the sharing of river waters of Kaveri [between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu] and Sutlej-Yamuna link canal [between Punjab and Haryana] receives national concern. Moreover such an approach does not enable us to analyse the nature of the forces responsible for the regional conflicts. Brass states that the societal forces that valourise India towards pluralism, regionalism and decentralisation are inherently stronger than those favouring homogeneity, nationalisation and centralisation. It follows that the process of consolidating power in India is inherently tenuous and that power begins to disintegrate immediately at the maximal point of concentration. At that point, Brass contends, regional political forces and decentralising tendencies inevitably reassert themselves unless the national leadership chooses to bring about a more definitive consolidation by taking recourse to the unitary provisions in the Indian Constitution. It is obvious that Brass seems to indicate

a kind of vicious circle in the sense that only a strong central authority can keep the centrifugal forces under control, but at the same time he argues that regional forces become active as a reaction against excessive centralisation.

It follows from the above that an attempt to view regionalism merely in terms of federalism or as a legal concept is theoretically inadequate to comprehend the phenomenon in its entirety. Another perspective on the nature of regionalism emerges from the writings of Duncan B Forrester who has drawn a distinction between regionalism and sub regionalism primarily in terms of the territorial and demographic size of the two. Such an argument is hardly to be accepted, as the size of a region need not be the criterion for regionalism and regional movements. Moreover the demands and grievances of regional and sub-regional entities are not always distinguishable, even if it is assumed that the former covers a broader area than the latter. Conceptualising sub-regionalism in the concrete context of Telangana, Forrester argues that historical and economic factors produce sub-regional identities and encourage the growth of compelling political sub-cultures that not only do not correspond, but also are in conflict with the larger unities of language, culture and caste represented by the linguistic state.

A study of regionalism in India would do well to take into account the formulations of Iqbal Narain. He has given the broadest possible definition of regionalism that covers geographical, historical-cultural, economic, political-administrative and psychic factors. However, his definition is too broad to capture the essence of regionalism. It may mean almost anything to anybody. As a matter of fact, the multiplicity of factors that Iqbal Narain seeks to associate with the phenomenon of regionalism may even apply to nationalism or any other societal phenomenon.

It would be pertinent here to refer to the nativist movement that signifies the conflict between the migrants and the sons of the soil. Myron Wiener holds nativism as a form of ethnic identity that seeks to exclude those who are not members of the local or indigenous ethnic group from residing and working in a territory because they are not natives. Wiener points towards the development of either a regional or national identity as a precondition to the development of nativism. He has identified five factors causing the nativist movements in India. These are: presence of migrants from outside the cultural region; cultural differences between the migrants and the local community; immobility of the local population in comparison to other groups in the population; a high level of unemployment among the indigenous middle class and a substantial portion of middle class jobs held by culturally alien migrants and a rapid growth of educational opportunities for the lower middle classes.

How can we compare the nativist and regional movements? The similarity between nativist and regional movements lies in the fact that both have a territorial basis. The dissimilarity lies in the following manner: first, unlike the nativist movement, the regional movement does not necessarily presuppose the presence of migrants from outside the region in question or exploitation of natives by the migrants. Hence the nativist movement is not always characterised by the ethnic selectivity.

As for the view of Lewis P Fickett that the political parties play the role of catalysts of regional consciousness, one may point out that political parties are not always indispensable to the politics of regionalism. The movements of various kinds are often found to be capable

of articulating the regional aspirations on behalf of the people of any region while pursuing the non-political party movements i.e. All Assam Students Union [AASU], Telangana movement, Uttarakhand movement, Chhattisgarh movement etc. In a related perspective it has been argued that all regional demands originate in the form of political elite conflicts.

Michael Hechter has contributed to the study of regionalism by articulating the internal colonial model to analyse the nature of regionalism in India. He states that regionalism is the outcome of real or perceived sense of exploitation by the core communities of the peripheral communities.

To sum up it may be argued that the regionalism in India has been an organised effort on the part of the regional leadership not necessarily related to a political party in articulating the regional grievances and aspirations within the formal and informal democratic forums and using its hegemony for the popular mobilisation. It is on the basis of the assertion of the regional identity by the community that the regional elite negotiates with the centre for better deal.

21.3 REGIONALISM IN COLONIAL INDIA: HISTORICAL GENESIS

Regionalism in India can be historically linked to the growth of Indian nationalism and the nationalist movement. Pertinently both nationalism and regionalism have had their origin in the national movement politics. Thus the pan-Indian national identity did not substitute the sub-national regional identities but grew along with them. Regional identities in most cases post-dated the emergence of the national identity and, as we would discuss, have been crucially linked to the problems emanating from the nation-state's attempt to promote national integration and homogeneity. The nationalist leadership expressed its discontent against the British colonial domination and highlighted the unity of Indian people in their struggle against it. This is how the two major concepts of Indian nationalism- *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*-evolved in the course of Congress led anti-colonial movement.

With the advent of modernity and nationalism, a process of bourgeois class formation took place transcending the barriers of caste, religion and tribe. Through the alchemy of this intermingling process, however limited under the colonial constraints, there appeared simultaneously two streams of national consciousness- one, pan- Indian and the other, regional. The former was professedly based on observed pan-Indian homogeneity of culture such as a common all- Indian tradition and history, economic life and psychological makeup and the accepted unifying role of Sanskrit, Persian, English and Hindustani by turn. The regional consciousness was built upon and promoted by the national movement professedly based on the relevant region's distinctive homogeneity and demands for substantial or exclusive control over its resources and market facilities. It was helped by the fact that the British colonialism drew state boundaries on the basis of administrative convenience and they did not coincide with the distribution of the major linguistic groups. Congress' regional policy regarding the linguistic divisions of the states wherever possible was originally articulated in the early 1931 in the form of its declaration of rights and subsequently reiterated in its 1945-46 manifesto.

It follows that the Indian nationalism comprised of both pan- Indian as well as the regional feeling. Today it is widely recognised that India is a n-ulti-national state. During the anti-colonial struggle Indian nationalism was predominant and sub-national regionalism was subdued. However, even then, leadership had been making limited use of nationalism to mobilise the masses i.e. the revival of Ganpati festival and the cult of Shivaji by Tilak in Maharashtra. Overall, however, during the colonial period regional forces were largely dormant as they were not well organised and inoreover at that time the overarching goal of **the** Congress led anti-colonial movement was to attain freedom from the British domination. The exceptions were the Dravida and the Akali moveinents.

21.4 THE BASIS OF REGIONALISM: THE 1950s - 1960s

In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation regional problems emerged primarily in the form of the regional pressures and the movements whose area of operation coincided with the federal territorial division of the union into different states. In this regard we can also refer to the centre-state and inter-state conflicts, that is, those regional tensions or movements that were led or directed by the state governments.

Federalism, as a formal institution, was enshrined in the Indian Constitution by the Constituent Assembly as recognition of the regional heterogeneity of India. As for its adherence to the concept of 'co-operative federalism' regarding the allocation of Constitutional power between the central governments and the states making them interdependent, it was due to an urgent need felt among the members of the Constituent Assembly to assuage communal sectarianism, to deal effectively with acute food crisis, to integrate the princely states in India, and to undertake the task of initiating and implementing the policies for industrial and agricultural development. It would, however, be pertinent to note that there were some members though in minority who did advocate greater decentralisation in the Indian federal system. Of those belonging to congress among them were clearly inspired by Gandhian notion of panchayat or village based-federation as envisaged in his 1946 memorandum to the Constitution Committee of the Congress.

However, the powerful all India presence of Congress as the dominant party and the absence of strong regional or provincially-based political parties especially after the departure of Muslim League can be termed as the most plausible explanation as to why the Constituent Assembly finally adopted a Constitution which in the famous words of Ambedkar could be 'both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of time and circumstances'.

Needless to add, the balance of power in India's federal system leaned towards the centre in three important aspects: limited fiscal autonomy of the states, the ultimate Constitutional paramountcy of the centre, and the balance of administrative capacities. The presence of Congress as the dominant party both at the centre and the state and the overarching agenda of nation- building also promoted the centralised tendencies in the union putting a question mark over the capacity of the federal polity to provide fair deal to all the regions. Though we must concede that unlike the recent decades, the Congress party had a much decentralised and democratic federal organisation in the 1950's and 1960's.

The first significant political expression of regionalism **was** in the form of the demands for the reorganisation of the states in the early 1950's on linguistic basis so that the major

linguistic groups could be consolidated into states of their own. Political parties/ groups representing these groups called for the redrawing of the state boundaries. The then federal government resisted these movements as the Congress party leaders at the national level argued that these 'fissiparous' movements might lead to the Balkanisation of the union. The attempt on the part of the nationalist leadership to impose Hindi as the national language also evoked anti-Hindi Dravida movement in the South India.

This linguistic regionalism primarily emerged as a result of the alleged unequal distribution of scarce resources among the different social-cultural sub-regions. In such movements economic factor played a crucial role as in a resource scarce state like India, the demand for distributive justice gained ground in face of the ever-rising expectation with the widening of the democratic base. However due to an overemphasis on homogeneity and unity and integrity in the model of cooperative federalism, as discussed above, the demands based on regionalism and autonomy of the states were not considered as legitimate. In the aftermath of partition all centrifugal forces were often dubbed as secessionist in nature. Congress had favoured the linguistic reorganisation of the states in the pre-independence period, as was evidenced in the form of the Nagpur session in 1920, was now not supportive of the idea in the post-partition India due to its fear of the Balkanisation of India. It was no surprise then that the dominant opinion in the Constituent Assembly was in favour of the strong centre but there were Gandhians who supported the idea of the greater decentralisation of power drawing inspiration from the Gandhi's notion of Hind Swaraj. In this context one can mention the names of Naziruddin Ahmed, HN Kunzru, H V Kamath, Shibban Lal Saksena, R K Choudhari, VS Sarwate, Kulandhar Chaliha and B Das- many of them non-Gandhians whose position can be described as regionalist in nature.

This explains as to why both the linguistic provinces commissions headed by SK Dar and subsequently the JVP committee [comprising of JawaharLal Nehru, Sardar Patel and P Sitaramayya], constituted in June and December 1948 respectively to look into the demand for the reorganisation of the states rejected the demand for linguistic reorganisation of the states on the basis that it would pose a danger for the national unity. They thought that the bigger states would counterbalance the fissiparous tendencies of linguistic, ethnic and cultural regionalism that these leaders apprehended could degenerate into regional chauvinism, detrimental to national integration. Moreover it was thought that under the planned economy it would be easier to formulate and implement the development policies. That explains as to why the Congress leaders like JL Nehru and GB Pant criticised K M Panikkar for suggesting a division of Uttar Pradesh.

However, in the case of the linguistic regional movements it must be conceded that the Congress leadership at the centre soon realised that the creation of linguistic states was less dangerous than the outright rejection of the demand. Thus, on the basis of the recommendation of the states reorganisation commission comprising of Fazal Ali, HN Kunzru and KM Panikkar, the linguistic division took place vide states reorganisation Act, 1956.

Significantly other considerations besides linguistic homogeneity also played role in the reorganisation of the states. For instance, in the case of Punjab and Maharashtra the newly emergent middle caste rich farmers supported the demand whereas in the case of the Northeast i.e. Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh ethnic and

economic factors played a major role. Then religion was a major factor in the case of creation of Punjab and Haryana. Division within the Hindi speaking north Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan took place along the issues of history, politics and problems of integrating the former princely states. Some other cultural–linguistic regions got separate statehood as a result of the elevation from centrally administered units to full-fledged states i.e. Goa and Himachal Pradesh.

Brass has argued that in the above form of states' reorganisation the centre observed certain unwritten rules. First, the demand was not to be secessionist or communal in nature. Second, such a demand was to be popular at the grassroots level without inviting the hostility of a sizable section of the population from that region itself.

As it has turned out besides the linguistic reorganisation of the states and the three-language formula- adopted vide official language Act, 1963 on the basis of the recommendation of the official language commission headed by BG Kher submitted in 1957- has also proven to be a stabilising factor. Under the formula the states have in their educational institutions English, the regional mother tongue and a third language not of that region. It has proven to be a non-coercive way of promoting Hindi in a union in which according to the 1961 census of the Central Institute of Indian languages 197 languages [not dialects] were spoken. As per 1971 census there were 22 languages spoken by more than 1.5 million people. Over the years the regional languages have grown in their respective states, without undermining the influence of English that remains the real link language of politics and trade and commerce in the union.

On the ethnic and cultural basis, James Manor identifies four distinct types of regional identities having a territorial basis: (a) the regional identities based on commonality of religion i.e. the Muslims in the Kashmir valley in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Sikhs in the case of Punjab (b) the identities primarily based on language like in the case of the Telugus of Andhra Pradesh, the Tamils of Tamil Nadu (c) the identities based on the tribal origin like in the case of the Adivasis who have undergone the process of acculturation in the states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh (d) the tribal identities among the groups residing in the Himalayan and the North-Eastern states who are racially distinct from the peoples of the plains i.e. Nagas, Bodos and the Meities.

All these above forms of ethnicity have given rise to the regional or sub-regional movements either demanding autonomy in the form of separate statehood or secession in different parts of India at different periods in the last fifty-six years of independence.

It follows that an all-encompassing secular national identity claiming precedence over a narrower, ascriptive and region specific linguistic and cultural-ethnic identities have been replaced by the increasing assertion of the latter in the form of either separate statehood or autonomy. Significantly despite sharing a number of common features such as history, language, culture, and territorial ancestry all these region specific ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities are not necessarily potential national identities. Moreover they also differ in terms of the nature of demands they make on the political process in the sense that larger ones might be inclined to seek statehood, whereas smaller ones might seek autonomy and adequate representation within an existing state. Making a further distinction between latent and conscious identities, Amit Prakash in his significant study of Jharkhand movement

argues that any ethnic, cultural and linguistic regional group that is not self-conscious of its identity remains primarily a sociological descriptive category and cannot be termed as a politically relevant identity group.

Thus regionalism is a natural phenomenon in a federal polity like India where diversities are territorially grouped, largely on political, ethnic, cultural and linguistic basis. The federal system of polity has indeed made regionalism feasible and vice-versa. In the words of Rasheedudin Khan: 'the cultural distinctness of regions in India tends to counteract the tendency of centralization and thus constitutes a centrifugal force in the federal political system. Expressing the diversities of the various units in a grouped fashion, it prevents concentration of power in the central government. Regionalism, therefore, has been considered to be basic to the very concept of federalism.'

21.5 RECENT GROWTH OF REGIONALISM: FACTOR OF ECONOMIC IMBALANCE

As has been evident from the above discussion it was the language, ethnicity, culture and religion that became the basis of the formation of regional identity in the first years of independence. These earlier forms of regionalism found expression in the demands for Samyukta Maharashtra, Vishal Andhra or Maha Gujarat in the fifties. As discussed above, the reorganisation of the states vide the 1956 States Reorganisation Act was meant to concede such demands.

From a class perspective, the regionalisation of Indian polity in the sixties and seventies can be attributed to the rise of the rich landed peasantry in league with the regional parties in the aftermath of the green revolution. The widening of the electoral democracy in terms of increased participation of the mostly rural peripheral social groups led by the numerically strong middle caste dominant peasantry further consolidated the power basis of this class. Both the agrarian bourgeoisie as well as the urban petty bourgeoisie were obviously to benefit from the federal devolution of powers in the financial and administrative matters.

Besides accentuating the centre-state conflicts, the emergence of this new class force also led to the growth in the inter-regional tensions, as the peripheral sub-regions felt neglected both economically as well as politically. This explains partially the construction of regional identity increasingly either on the basis of the perception of economic discrimination or the urge for speedier economic development like in the case of Kutch, Saurashtra, Marathwada, Vidarbha, Telangana and Jharkhand. The mobilisation of the different sub-national identity groups drawing on their linguistic, cultural and tribal commonality was correlated with the grievance against lack of underdevelopment. Moreover, the significance of the nationalist developmental agenda in the first years of Indian independence which had a statist slant also explains as to why these regional groups modified their original ethnicist basis of articulation of demands to include the need for special development measures i.e. Jharkhand.

Thus development boards had to be constituted for Kutch, Saurashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha to address the grievances of these regions that saw their regions being treated as

internal colonies in their own states in order to benefit the politically more dominant regions in the fifties and sixties itself.

However, the dominant linguistic elite that was able then to / ~ ~ - o the smaller, less developed sub-regions into larger linguistic regions was very soon not able to do the same in the name of linguistic or cultural cohesion as a result of the lopsided economic development of the sub-regions. The feeling of being treated as peripheries with the dominant sub-regions forming the core ones was accentuated by the fact that most of these sub-regions were rich in terms of minerals and natural resources i.e. Jharkhand. Moreover the fact that some of these big states came to be known for non-performance in the economic field like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh led the distinct sub-regions of these states to think in terms of smaller states being capable of speedier economic growth on lines of Kerala, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. The regional movements in the recent times for the separate statehood for Gorkhaland, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh can be referred in this context. Then we can also refer to the assertion of the different dialect communities in the bigger states of the Hindi heartland of India i.e. Bundelkhand, Purvanchal and Harit Pradesh in Uttar Pradesh and Mithilanchal in Bihar.

It follows that the very process of the above formation of the political identity in these regions with their unique ethnic-cultural connotations can be correlated with the process of the implementation of the public policies that were supposedly aimed at bringing about regional balance. The failure of the 'rationalist-integrationist bureaucratic' model of administration, adopted in Nehruvian India, in responding adequately to the political demands from the newly articulated political identities premised on cultural factors and the perpetration of uneven and unequal development accorded legitimacy to the 'development-deficit' definition of the ethnic autonomist movements like in Jharkhand. Consequently, the historically marginal regional groups have been mobilised to articulate themselves as self-conscious ethnic identities in order to augment their political resources and influence the policy process in their own favour. The recent granting of the district council or the autonomous region status to some of these sub-regions like in Gorkhaland, Bodoland, Ladakh has hardly satisfied the developmental aspirations of the local people.

21.6 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REGIONALISM: INDIA IN TRANSITION

Among the political factors responsible for the upsurge in the growth of regionalism in the recent decades has been the factor of the decline of the Indian National Congress as the dominant party with its proven electoral ability to create a social coalition of different communities and regions. The steady organisational and ideological decline of the Congress as well as its increasing dependence on the politics of populism and radical rhetoric devoid of the programmatic efforts in the sixties and the seventies saw the loss of its capacity in accommodating all sorts of interests. The over centralisation of the political power at the centre and attempt to undermine the regional non-Congress parties of significance led to the strengthening of the forces of regionalism in the states like Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab.

Moreover the Green Revolution in the late sixties saw the emergence of the regional rural-elite led regional parties whose influence on the state level politics became much visible after the 1977 elections. The coalitions have since become the endemic feature of the Indian electoral politics both at the federal as well as at the state level leading to the federalisation of Indian party politics. This can be attributed to the gradual decline of Congress as the natural party of governance and inability of any other national party to occupy the vacant space. The bifurcation of the assembly and the parliamentary elections since early seventies has also enabled the regional elite to emerge politically powerful.

For the first four decades of Indian independence, the state governments relied overwhelmingly upon the centre to set the overall strategy for development and to determine the flow of resources by sector and by location. The centre justified the concentration of political and economic power on the ground that it would promote equity among regions and ensure that the least developed regions would not be left behind. Moreover it was also argued that the central allocation of resources would maintain a balance of power among the regions besides providing legitimacy to the federal government.

However from a situation in which year-to-year increases in the central financial grants exceeded inflation, the states in the aftermath of the introduction of new economic policy have had to cope with the central funding level that have not even kept pace with the rate of inflation. Since most of the allocation of the funds are tied to specific programmes over which the receiving states have virtually no control and which in any case have led to the rise of demands that far outstrip the funds made available, the notion of grants has become more illusory than real.

Most importantly for our purpose since richer states are more equipped than the poorer ones to regain a part of lost revenue by adapting to other aspects of the federal government's liberalisation policies, this divides the regional political elite from different states. The resultant competitiveness and the jealousies between the political elite of different states partly explain those cases where political resistance to the economic reform measures has been attenuated, or overcome completely by the centre.

While effecting a series of incremental fiscal reforms the emphasis since 1991 has been on increasing Foreign Direct Investment [FDI] as well as Portfolio Equity Investment [PEI] by resorting to the neo-liberal policies of privatisation, deregulation and decontrol. In the process as the different states vie against each other for FDI and PEI the original model of co-operative federalism based on the idea of the inter-governmental cooperation has increasingly given way to inter-jurisdictional competition. While the states or more correctly some sub-regions within these states with developed infrastructures and better governance have become magnets for all forms of investment the underdeveloped regions have lost out as not only they do not attract any investment but also suffer due to dwindling central grants. In this changed fiscal environment the existing inter-governmental institutions like Planning Commission, National Development Council have not been able to adapt to the emerging inter-jurisdictional competition among the states. What is needed is to constitute inter-jurisdictional institutions to attract foreign investment into a number of regions including the poorer ones by promoting certain sectors like telecommunications, oil production and consumer non-durable. Moreover the states should be given more financial power to collect the corporate, land usage and sales taxes to enable them to grow on their own to achieve 'the optimal level' of centralisation and decentralisation.

21.7 SUMMARY

In the aftermath of independence regionalism, which is the form of sub-nationalism initially, manifested itself in the movements for the reorganisation of the states on the linguistic basis. Later it manifested itself in the form of anti-Hindi movement. Besides as uneven development occurred in the country, that was hardly surprising given the distorted nature of the capitalist development, breaks began to appear within the coalition of the dominant proprietary classes. The clash between the national and regional proprietary classes in the aftermath of the Green Revolution began to take concrete shape in the form of the latter demanding for more economic and political autonomy. The assertion of cultural, political and economic aspirations of the different nationalities emerged as a reaction to the over-centralisation of the polity. The assertion of cultural, political, economic aspirations of the different nationalities received an impetus at the political level with the growing regionalisation and ruralisation of the ever-widening Indian democracy.

The new economic reforms have seen the federal government withdrawing from its role of regulation of the political economy of development. Under the structural adjustment programme at the behest of the WTO regime, the centre has been unable to give liberal grants to the different regions especially the poorer ones. Thus the regions have been competing against each other for domestic and foreign direct investment. The regions with the developed infrastructure have been able to attract far greater investment than the regions with poor infrastructure. This has further widened the gap between the rich and the poor regions raising the prospect of the regional tensions.

To conclude, regionalism is not secessionist but may become so if it is not handled properly. Thus regional imbalance has to be addressed properly and cannot be left to the market forces that are exclusionary in nature and therefore detrimental to the interest of the peripheral regions.

On a positive note the existence of so many different forms of identities in India has been a positive factor in the sense that it has prevented regional conflicts from being concentrated along one particular fault line, as has been the case with the federal democracies of Canada and Australia.

21.8 EXERCISES

- 1) What do you understand by the concepts of region and regionalism?
- 2) Analyse the differing theoretical perspectives on the nature of regionalism in India?
- 3) Why was the ruling Congress apprehensive about the regional demands for the reorganisation of states on the cultural and linguistic basis?
- 4) Identify the basis of the formation of the regional identities in the first years of Indian independence.
- 5) Analyse regionalisation of Indian politics and its implication for new economic policies.