



Mains Practice Question

Q. To some extent regionalism is important for maintaining 'unity in diversity' in India. Critically analyse. (250 words)

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Approach

- Define regionalism and concept of unity in diversity
- Discuss the causes of regionalism in India
- Give positive and negative impacts of regionalism

Answer

- **Unity in Diversity:** India is a land of diversity; however, there are bonds of unity underlying all this diversity. These are geo-political unity, the institution of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, and tradition of interdependence.
- **Regionalism:** Regionalism is an ideology and political movement that seeks to advance the causes of regions. Regionalism at national level refers to a process in which sub-state actors become increasingly powerful; power devolves from central level to regional governments.
- Roots of regionalism is in India's diversity of languages, cultures, ethnic groups, communities, religions and so on, and encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers, and fueled by a sense of regional deprivation.

Causes of Regionalism

- **Language:** the demand of linguistic states has fuelled regionalism which led to formation of new states like Andhra Pradesh, Punjab etc.
- **Religion:** It is also one of the major factors of the regionalism. For example: The demand of three autonomous states in Jammu & Kashmir is based on religion. The bases for their demands are- Kashmir for Muslim dominated, Jammu for Hindu dominated and Ladakh for Buddhism dominated region.
- **Regional Culture/ Ethnic:** the North-east states were created on the basis of cultural aspect. Besides the economic issues, the regional culture played significant role in the formation of Jharkhand as a state
- **Economic Backwardness:** The uneven pattern of socioeconomic development has created regional disparities. The categorization and sub-categorization of the states on the basis of socioeconomic development and use of resources have generated resentment, leading to regionalism. For example: split of Telangana from Andhra, demand for separate statehood for Vidarbha, Saurashtra etc.
- **Rise of Political Parties:** coalition politics and rise regional political parties has led to gaining of regionalism as political tool to garner votes, thereby deepening the fault lines.
- **Son of the soil doctrine** according to which, a state specifically belongs to the native group only, who are the sons of the soil or local residents. the doctrine gains currency due to competition for job and resources between migrant and local educated middle class youth. For ex: Maharashtra for Marathas, Gujrat for gujratis etc.

Negative Impacts:

- Regionalism is a **threat to the development and unity** of the nation as it creates internal security challenges by the insurgent groups (Khalistan movement in Punjab), who propagate the feelings of regionalism against the mainstream politico-administrative setup of the country.
- Regional demands **undermine national demands** as Developmental plans are implemented unevenly focusing on regions to which important leaders belong, hence unrest is generated among rest of the regions.
- Regionalism creates hurdle in the **international diplomacy**, for example in case of Mamata Banerjee not agreeing to Land Boundary agreement and Teesta River Water sharing, when the leaders at centre level were ready to do it.
- Restricts freedom of movement and profession, defeating **Article 19** of the constitution, as non natives are exploited and mistreated leading to vulnerability of the migrant population. For ex: recent Gujarat migrant crisis.
- It goes **against ethos, culture and constitutional ideals** of India which a syncretic, democratic, federal polity.

Positive Impacts:

- Regional aspirations have a positive impact on balanced regional development as concerns are voiced and heard by central authority which then tries to minimize the disparities.
- It helps in the development of spirit of competitive federalism, thereby lifting the underdeveloped regions on par with national growth.
- Regionalism helps in promoting the democratic culture of society by discussion, debate and action on regional issues.
- It provides an outlet to the diverse discourse and concerns of society and their timely redressal, which helps in releasing tension/ stress that may arise in a diverse society thereby acting as a safety valve.

Way Forward:

- 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.
- 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.
- However, regionalism used to serve vested interests and threaten the syncretic fabric of Indian society, in the name of voicing regional concerns, needs to be checked, as it undermines the unity and strength of nation in the longer run, defying the constitutional and national spirit of 'unity in diversity'.