



Regionalism In India

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For Prelims: Meaning of Regionalism, State Reorganisation Act, Northeast Insurgency, Separatism, Secession, J&K Reorganisation Act, Bodoland, Regionalism v/s Nationalism

For Mains: Regional Movements in India, Causes and Impacts of Regionalism, Regionalism and Cultural Assertiveness

What is Regionalism?

- **Regionalism** is the **expression of a common sense of identity and purpose by people** within a specific geographical region, united by its unique language, culture etc.
 - In a **positive** sense, it **encourages people to develop a sense of brotherhood** and oneness which seeks to protect the interests of a particular region and promotes the welfare and development of the state and its people.
 - In the **negative** sense, it implies **excessive attachment to one's region** which is a **great threat to the unity and integrity of the country**.
- In the Indian context generally, the term 'regionalism' has been used in the negative sense.

What is the History of Regional Movements in India?

- **Origin in Colonial Era:**
 - The roots of regional consciousness in India can be found in colonial policies, **differential attitudes and treatment by the British** towards princely states and those of the presidencies developed regionalist tendencies among them.
 - British **exploitative economic policies** completely neglected some regions, giving way to **economic disparities and regional imbalances**.
- **Movements in Southern India:**
 - The history of regional movements in India can be traced back to the **1940s Dravida Movement** or the **Non-Brahmin movement** that **started in the present day Tamil Nadu**.
 - Later, the movement resulted in the **demand of a separate and independent Tamil state**.
 - This triggered the demand for a separate state in the **Andhra** region.
 - In the **1950s and 60s, India witnessed mass (and violent) mobilisation** for the demands of statehood.
 - **Potti Sri Ramulu** spearheaded the revolt for the **separate state of Andhra** in 1954. His eventual death triggered the wave of political regionalism in India.
- **Establishment of States Reorganisation Committee:**
 - Revolts for separate states all across India resulted in the formation of the **States Reorganisation Committee** (headed by **Faisal Ali**).
 - It **recommended reorganisation of Indian states on linguistic lines**, thus **reinforcing the regionalist tendencies**.

- With the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, linguistic states became a reality.
- **Insurgencies in North East India:**
 - During the 1970s and 80s, the tribal insurgencies for [separation and statehood in the northeastern region](#) of India intensified and the Union government passed the [North-eastern States Reorganisation Act, 1971](#).
 - It declared the UTs of Manipur and Tripura and the Sub-State of Meghalaya as states.
 - Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (then Tribal Districts) became Union Territories and were later declared as states in 1986.
- **Major Changes in the 21st Century:** The decade of 2000s, witnessed vigorous movements for the creation of separate states due to a rising sense of regional deprivation.
 - It resulted in the formation of the three new states - **Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar and Uttarakhand out of Uttar Pradesh.**
 - In 2014, the [state of Telangana](#) was created by the division of Andhra Pradesh.

Note

- More recently, although not on a linguistic basis, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was **bifurcated into two Union Territories - J&K and Ladakh** via the [Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019](#).
- At present, India has **28 states and 8 UTs**.

What Different Types of Regional Movements have Occurred in India?

- **Secessionism:** It is a form of regionalism that **involves militant and fundamentalist groups advocating a separation from India** on the basis of ethnicity or any other factor.
 - **Isac Muivah's National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM)**, the Islamic fundamentalist groups in J&K, **United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)** in Assam are examples of such an **extreme dimension of regionalism**.
- **Separatism:** It is a demand for **separate statehood within the Indian Union**.
 - Many times, linguistic or **ethnic minorities within the states come together and unite against the majority** community in that state.
 - Formation of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana are examples of Separatism.
 - Other similar demands that have been in news include -
 - **Creation of Bodoland** for the [Bodo-speakers in Assam](#)
 - **Gorkhaland** for ethnic Gorkha (Nepali) people in West Bengal
 - A **Bundelkhand state** (covering part of Madhya Pradesh and part of Uttar Pradesh) for promoting the development of the region.
- **Demand for Full Statehood:** The union territories have been forwarding such demands like the [NCT of Delhi](#).
 - Most of such demands have already been accepted. In 1971, [Himachal Pradesh got the status of a full state](#) and thereafter Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, [Arunachal Pradesh](#) and [Sikkim got full statehoods](#).
- **Demand for Autonomy:** Since the 1960's, with the emergence of regional parties, the demand for state autonomy has been gaining more and more strength due to the **central political interference**.
 - Several parties in states like Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal have been continuously demanding a **larger share of powers for the states**.
- **Demand for Regional Autonomy within a State:** In some of the states, people belonging to various regions have been **demanding recognition of their regional identities**.
 - The genesis of such demands lies in the **regional imbalances resulting from inefficient planning**.
 - For instance, in the erstwhile state of J&K, there were [demands by Ladakhis for a regional status](#).

What are the Causes of Growing Regionalism?

- **Historical and geographical isolation, insider-outsider complex** that nurtures nativism and son-of-the-soil ideology
- **Uneven development, continuous neglect** of a region and **internal colonialism, despite** being rich in natural resources some regions remain economically underdeveloped.
- **Ill-conceived top-down approach** for development or survival of one region at the cost of the other region.
- **Imposition of an ideology** that might be in conflict with the ideology that people of a particular have been possessing for a long time.
- **Linguistic aspirations** and **expression of ethnicity** have long remained a formidable basis of regionalism.

What can be the Impacts of Regionalism on Indian Polity?

- **Positive Impacts:**
 - Positive regionalism results in the **rise of regional parties** which is **advantageous from the perspective of democracy**.
 - The people of a region are more likely to put their faith in a person who is a native to their region or a party that is restricted to their region thus **preventing the monopolisation of one single political party**.
 - Also, the **son-of-the-soil is more likely to empathise with the native people** and address their concerns as his own.
 - Regionalism often **attracts the focus of policymakers on the underlying regional issues**. It helps resolve the issues too large for any one unit of government to tackle alone.
 - A **broader regional lens allows better planning** - better connected transit, more efficient infrastructure and better delivery of goods and services.
 - Positive regionalism **promotes a sense of pride in connecting to one's roots and culture**.
 - It has been noticed that often regional movements have **helped the art and culture of many neglected regions to flourish** by increasing their exposure through local emphasis.
- **Negative Impacts:**
 - Regional movements **often result in violent agitations, disturbs the law and order situation** and has **negative implications on the economy** of the state as well as the nation.
 - Regionalism can **become a shield for militancy and extremism** to create an internal security threat.
 - Regionalism sometimes undercuts the national interest by **being a hurdle in international diplomacy**.
 - The disagreement of political leadership in West Bengal with the central government over the **Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta River Water sharing treaty** with Bangladesh **resulted in increased tensions between the two nations**.
 - Parochial regionalism poses a threat to the sovereignty of the nation. **Regionalism beyond a point can lead to secessionism**, such as strong regionalism in Punjab ultimately resulted in the **growth of Khalistani terrorism**.
 - Regionalist tendencies often stir inter-state hostility as its spillover effect.
 - There have been instances of **anti-migrant feelings among the states that are more job-opportune** such as **Maharashtra**.
 - Employment and residence of non-Maharashtrian people in the state has often been opposed by the regional leaders of the state.
 - Regionalism often **promotes Vote- Bank politics**, thereby weakening national integration.
 - Regionalism **threatens the time-tested fabric of 'Unity in Diversity'**, if promoted in an ultra-manner.

How is Regionalism different from Nationalism?

Nationalism	Regionalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nationalism is a sense of belonging to one nation, a feeling one shares with all the citizens of the country regardless of their caste, creed, culture, religion or region. ▪ A nation tries to establish harmony between all its citizens by uniting them through a constitution, and national symbols. ▪ This association with a nation is the primary mode of identification for a person and every citizen takes pride in being its citizen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When people begin identifying more strongly with their region than with their nation, it is alleged that nationalism is undercut by a sense of regionalism. ▪ Regionalism glorifies the heritage of only one particular region and of one culture. ▪ This may lead to the formation of multiple communities within one nation.

Way Forward

- **Unity in Diversity ethos needs to be preserved** for the pluralistic character of the Indian nation state. The accommodation of multiple aspirations of a diverse population is necessary.
 - There is a need to **increase the level of social expenditure by the states on education, health, and sanitation** which are the core for human resource development.
- Formation of the **NITI Aayog has been a positive step to enhance cooperative federalism** by fostering the involvement of the State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.
 - While a number of steps such as the launch of centrally sponsored schemes, incentives to private players for development in backward states have been taken by the government for inclusive development, there is a **greater need for their effective implementation**.
- Introducing a **system of national education that would help people to overcome regional feelings and develop an attachment towards the nation** can act as a long-term solution to the problem of sub-nationalism.
 - National unity is not impaired if the people of a region have genuine pride in their language and culture.
 - Therefore, **in principle, regionalism need not be regarded as an unhealthy or anti-national phenomenon**, unless it takes a militant, aggressive turn to encourage the growth of secessionist tendencies.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains

- Q.** Do you agree that regionalism in India appears to be a consequence of rising cultural assertiveness? Argue. **(2020)**
- Q.** What is the basis of regionalism? Is it that unequal distribution of benefits of development on regional basis eventually promotes regionalism? Substantiate your answer. **(2020)**
- Q.** Growing feeling of regionalism is an important factor in the generation of demand for a separate state. Discuss. **(2013)**

