

## REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS



### Political Science

**KEYWORDS:** Regional Imbalance, Political Parties, Federalism, Regionalism, Backwardness and Democracy.

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### ABSTRACT

As the 21st century unfolds, political parties play a key role in the Indian political system and Indian democracy is very much alive. One of the notable features of the Indian Party System is the presence of a large number of regional parties. By regional party we mean a party which generally operates within a limited geographical area and its activities are confined only to a single or handful of states. Further as compared to the broad ranging diverse interests of national parties, the regional parties represent the interest of a particular area. In simple words, regional parties differ from All India parties both in terms of their outlook as well as the interests they pursue. Their activities are focused on specific issues concerning the region and they operate within the limited area. They merely seek to capture power at the state or regional level and do not aspire to control the national government. It is noteworthy that in India, the number of regional parties is much larger than the national parties and some of the States are being ruled by the regional parties, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir etc. The continental size of the country, the diversified character of Indian society, the adoption of universal adult franchise, the peculiar type of political process, and other factors have given rise to a large number of political parties. India, acclaimed as the largest democracy of the world is also a nation with a very large number of regional parties with huge memberships. At present about 180 million of India's population are governed by regional parties.

### Introduction:

Ever since the independence many regional political parties have emerged in India and gained significant influence in some regions. Some political observers have hailed the resurgence of regionalism on the ground that the more regional parties come to power; the less will be the imbalance between the centre and states. It is claimed that regional parties would be better able to understand regional hopes and aspirations. India is a multi-lingual and a multicultural nation. The linguistic and cultural diversities give rise to separatist tendencies. The people living in a particular linguistic region tend to identify and attach themselves with that region. Political parties also try to exploit the ethnic and cultural factors. In a different sense, uneven development of regions also brings a sense of discrimination and alienation leading to the formation of regional parties. Regional parties were generally formed due to factionalism in the congress or other parties and were dissolved when accommodated in the power circles or absorbed by the parent organizations. Some of them had no particular ideology except to gain power. Most of such parties were headed by disgruntled leaders of the major parties without any cadres of proper organization. Since the first general elections in 1951-1952 the Indian political system has experienced the emergence of several regional and sub-regional political parties. In a majority of cases these parties have come into existence because of the excessive centralism and monopolistic politics of the congress. Particularly after the fourth general elections in 1967, the emergence of regional political parties to power and the crucial role played by these parties in some of the state is noteworthy.

### Regionalism:

Regionalism is a feeling or an ideology among a section of people residing in a particular geographical space characterized by unique language, culture etc. and the feeling that they are the sons of the soil and every opportunity that exists in their land must be accorded to them first and not to the outsiders. It is a sort of Parochialism. In most of the cases it is raised for expedient political gains. The term Regionalism has two connotations. In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region is preference to the country or the state. In the positive sense it is a political attribute associated with people's love for their region, culture, language, etc. with a view to maintain their independent identity. While positive regionalism is a welcome thing in so far as maintaining as it encourages the people to develop a sense of brotherhood and commonness on the basis of common language, religion or historical background. The negative sense regionalism 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. The feeling of regionalism may arise either due to the continuous neglect of a particular area or region by the ruling authorities or it may spring up as a result of increasing

political awareness of backward people that have been discriminated against. Quite often some political leaders encourage the feeling of regionalism to maintain their hold over a particular area or group of people.

### Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse the factors responsible for the growth of regionalism.
2. To determine the factors instrumental for the growth of regional parties;
3. To create awareness about the role of regional parties.

### Different forms of Regionalism:

Regionalism in India has assumed various forms like:

**A. Demand for State Autonomy:** Regionalism has often led to the demand by states for greater autonomy from the center. Increasing interference by the Centre in the affairs of the states has led to regional feelings. Demand for autonomy has also been raised by regions within some states of the Indian federation.

**B. Secession from the Union:** This is a dangerous form of regionalism. It emerges when states demand separation from the Centre and try to establish an independent identity of their own. Disputes between states over the sharing of river water, primacy given by the states to the language of majority and to people of their own states in job opportunities have also given rise to feelings of regionalism. Migration of people from backward state to a developed state for employment opportunities have often resulted in a hostile attitude against the migrants for example, problems going on in Karnataka, A.P, and Telangana.

### Development of Regionalism in India:

Regionalism is not a new phenomenon in the Indian political system. In the pre-independence days it was promoted by the British imperialists and they deliberately encouraged the people of various regions to think in terms of their region rather than the nation as a whole, with a view to maintain their hold over India during the national movement. After Independence the leaders tried to foster a feeling among the people that they belonged to one single nation. The framers of the constitution sought to achieve this by introducing single citizenship for all. With the same objective a unified judiciary, all Indian services, and a strong Central government was provided. But in view of the vastness of the country and cultures regionalism soon made its appearance in India. The first manifestation of regionalism was the demand for reorganization of states on linguistic basis, but the most effective play of regionalism was the victory of the DMK against Congress in Tamil Nadu in 1960s. Initially the central leadership felt that regionalism was a peripheral political factor confined to Tamil Nadu and hence did not pose any threat to national

unity. However, that assessment was ill-founded. Soon in Punjab the Akali movement gained momentum, while in Jammu and Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah revived the National Conference. During these initial years all the Indian political parties continued to adjust with these regional forces on the plea that they would ultimately succeed in making inroads into the bases of the regional parties and absorb them in their organizations. The Indian National Congress which enjoyed monopoly of power between 1947–1967 and followed a policy of blowing hot and cold toward the regional forces, also contributed to the growth of regionalism in India. It accommodated the regional forces when it was convenient and raised a hue and cry against them when it was pitted against them. The local Congress leaders also encouraged the growth of regionalism and strengthened their hold on local party organization, with a view to increase their bargaining power with the central leaders. In fact a close link developed between central and regional leadership.

This close link between the central and regional leadership greatly encouraged the growth of regionalism.

### Causes of Growth of Regionalism:

In India a number of factors have constituted to the growth of regionalism.

1. Regionalism made its appearance as a reaction against the efforts of the national government to impose a particular ideology, language or cultural pattern on all people and groups. Thus the States of South have resisted imposition of Hindi as official language because they feared this would lead to dominance of the North. Similarly, in Assam anti-foreigner movement was launched by the Assamese to preserve their own culture.
2. Continuous neglect of an area or region by the ruling parties and concentration of administrative and political power has given rise to demand for decentralization of authority and bifurcate of unilingual states. On occasions sons of soil theory has been put forth to promote the interests of neglected groups or areas of the state.
3. The desire of the various units of the Indian federal system to maintain their sub cultural regions and greater degree of self-government has promoted regionalism and given rise to demand for greater autonomy.
4. The desire of regional elites to capture power has also led to rise of regionalism. It is well known that political parties like DMK, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Telugu Desam Asom Gana Parishad etc., have encouraged regionalism to capture power.
5. The interaction between the forces of modernisation and mass participation has also largely contributed to the growth of regionalism in India. As the country is still away from realising the goal of a nation state, the various groups have failed to identify their group interests with national interests, hence the feeling of regionalism has persisted.
6. The growing awareness among the people of backward areas that they are being discriminated against has also promoted feeling of regionalism. The local political leaders have fully exploited this factor and tried to feed the people with the idea that the Central Government was deliberately trying to maintain regional imbalances by neglecting social and economic development of certain areas.

### Role of the Regional Parties:

Though the regional parties operate within very limited area and pursue only limited objective, they have played significant role both in the State as well as national politics. The regional political parties formed governments in several states and tried to give concrete shape to their policies and programmes. Some of the important

regional parties which formed governments in various states include DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu; National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Asom Gana Parishad in Assam; Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party in Goa; Mizo National Front in Mizoram; Sikkim Sangram Parishad in Sikkim; All Party Hill Leaders Conference in Meghalaya and Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) in Haryana. Some of the regional parties were also partners in the coalition governments formed in several States after the fourth general elections of 1967. At the Centre also, of late the Regional Parties have been able to play critical role in helping formation of Congress government. DMK, a regional party, supported Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government after split in the party in 1969 and enabled her to carry on government despite loss of majority in the Parliament. Telugu Desam was the pillar of strength for the United Front and later the National Democratic Alliance. The representatives of the regional parties focus the attention of the Parliament on issues in their region and try to influence the policies of the Government to promote their own interests.

But probably the greatest service rendered by the regional political parties is that they have focused the attention of the people in remote areas on various political and economic issues and contributed to their political awakening. Above all, the regional parties have been able to impress on the national political parties that they cannot put up with their attitude of indifference towards regional problems and have compelled them to take keen interest in the resolution of their problems. In short it can be said that the regional political parties have not only profoundly influenced the regional politics but also left tremendous impact on the national politics. Regionalism has been an important aspect of Indian politics. Sometimes, it has posed threat to the unity of the country. Hence it is necessary to take steps to reduce such tendencies. Some such measures can be-

- a) To promote even development of the hitherto neglected areas so that they feel a part of the national mainstream.
- b) The central government must not interfere in the affairs of the State unless it is unavoidable for national interest.
- c) Problems of people must be solved in a peaceful and constitutional manner. Politicians must not be allowed to misuse the issue of regional demands.
- d) Except for issues of national importance, the states should be given freedom to run their own affairs.
- e) Changes are necessary in the Central-State relations in favour of the states, and for introducing a system of national education that would help people to overcome regional feelings and develop an attachment towards the nation.

### Conclusion:

Emergence and growing number and popularity of regional political parties have helped in a new thinking which admits a positive role that regional parties can play in the process of nation building. Participation of regional political parties in national politics has been a new factor of Indian politics and federalism. It can be concluded that the role of regional political parties in the Indian political system has been enormous. On the one hand they have helped in the development of participatory political culture and provided a check against the overshadowing tendencies of the Central government; on the other they are also a source of strength for the development of the federal process in India.

The regional parties are more concerned with the interests of certain groups than with the general welfare of the nation. They are limited in their aggregative potential by being identifies with the interests of a particular ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. The growing presence and salience of regional parties is, undoubtedly, the most outstanding aspect of political development in India over the past few years. They have catalyzed a realignment of political process and their impact on the structure and process of politics has been multi directional and far reaching. The changing political landscape has brought into focus the new emerging role of regional parties. Mr P.Chidambaram recently highlighted this fact before a distinguished

group of international business leaders by observing that the regional parties are “close to the people and impatient to develop India”. Not only this, the chief ministers, who represent the regional parties and aspirations are “actively involved in deciding national affairs”<sup>13</sup>. Regional parties can be said to have made politics more competitive and popular participation in the political process more extensive at the grassroots.

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