

## Politics of Regionalism and Regional Identity in Post- Independent India

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**Abstract:** The politics of regionalism and the assertion of regional identities have been integral to India's post-independence political landscape. Rooted in the country's vast cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, regionalism has manifested in both constructive and disruptive ways. This paper explores the historical evolution, causes, and political implications of regionalism in India since 1947. It analyzes key movements such as the linguistic reorganization of states, demands for statehood, and autonomy movements highlighting the role of regional parties, identity politics, and economic disparities in shaping regional consciousness. The study also examines how the Indian federal structure has adapted to accommodate regional aspirations while maintaining national unity. By critically assessing the interplay between regional identity and national integration, the paper aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities posed by regionalism in a pluralistic democracy like India.

**Keywords:** Regionalism; Re-Organisation; Ethnicity; Secession and Anti- Colonial Resistance

**Introduction:** The politics of regionalism and the assertion of regional identity have been enduring features of India's post-independence political landscape. Emerging from a diverse and pluralistic society, India's unity has often been tested by regional aspirations rooted in linguistic, cultural, historical, and economic differences. In the early decades after independence, regionalism manifested primarily through demands for linguistic states, beginning with the creation of Andhra Pradesh in 1953. Over time, regional identity politics evolved beyond language, encompassing issues like economic neglect, ethnic marginalization, and sub-national pride. Movements in Punjab, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and more recently in Telangana and Gorkhaland, illustrate how regional identity can drive both democratic mobilization and political contestation.

While regionalism has sometimes threatened national integration, it has also contributed to democratic deepening by giving voice to local concerns and enabling the rise of regional parties. These parties have played a crucial role in coalition politics since the 1990s, reshaping the balance of power between the Centre and the states. Thus, the politics of regionalism in India reflects a dynamic interplay between unity and diversity, central authority and regional autonomy, making it a vital area of study in understanding India's democratic and federal journey:

**1) Regionalism and Regional Identity:** Regionalism is the expression of a sense of common identity and purpose by the people within a specific geographical region united by its unique language, culture, etc.

Regional Identity is the basis for regionalism. It is based on commonly shared geographical area supported by common language, ethnicity, etc. But, in International relations regionalism means attempt by countries in geographical region to seek greater cooperation and support indifferent areas of state activity like: Military, Economic, Political and Socio-Cultural Interactions.

**2) Historical Perspective:** During India's anti- colonial resistance, the Indian National Congress had committed itself to a post-colonial political order of linguistically defined regions. In 1928, a committee headed by Motilal Nehru outlined a vision of a future polity organised into linguistic states.

After Independence there were 265 princely states, in that 13 princely states became part of Pakistan and 252 princely states remained with India. In 252 princely states three states objected to be unified with India. Those three states are: a) Hyderabad; b) Junagadh and c) Kashmir, among these three states Kashmir remained to be eternal problem.

In this background, congress party under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru was unwilling to divide states on linguistic lines as they feared threat to the unity of new nation. Even, Constituent Assembly felt that recognising diversified society like India, requires a federal structure. In that Federal Structure: a) Sovereign powers are shared between Centre and State; b) Citizens will have dual allegiance (Citizenship) to the national and regional political communities. But, in reality it provided for a quasi-federal state with more unitary features. Because, members of the constituent assembly also thought like Nehru (who was also a member) that true federal structure might increase regional identity and may lead to secession. So, article 3 of the constitution allows parliament to create new states and redraw state boundaries with a simple majority, barely consulting the relevant state. So, Nehru, congress party and constituent assembly inherently felt regionalism is a threat to national unity and integration.

### 3) Phases of Regionalism in India:

**A) During First Phase (1956-1966):** Aftermath of Independence many regions started demanding re-drawing of state boundaries on the basis of language. Initially this demand was rejected by Nehru. But, pushed by powerful political pressures from below, Nehru reversed his position on linguistic reorganisation, because of electoral considerations. Eg:

for the separate statehood for the Telugu speakers out of the Madras Presidency, Potti Sriramulu was the leader who went onto hunger strike and his death in 1952 led to the formation of the State Reorganisation Act, 1956. State Re-Organisation Committee was formed in the year 1953 and the committee submitted its report in 1955.

State Re-organisation commission headed by Faisal Ali considered regional demands for a separate statehood under following conditions:

- a) Stop short of secession
- b) Groups making demands had to be linguistically or culturally defined and not defined by religion.
- c) Demand should be backed by popular support.
- d) It should be acceptable to linguistic minorities, when it is matter of breaking up a multilingual state.

According to this Act, country was divided into 14 states and 6 union territories.

**B) In Second Phase (1970's and 1980's):** This Re-Organisation was based largely on the concerns of national security and unity. During 1970's and 1980's owing to the intensification of tribal insurgency for separation and statehood. The Union government passed the North –Eastern States Reorganisation Act, 1971. It upgraded the Union territories of Manipur and Tripura and Sub State of Meghalaya to full statehood and Mizoram and Arunchal Pradesh (then tribal districts) to Union territories which became states in 1986.

Goa based on Konkani language (8<sup>th</sup> Schedule), which became state in 1987 was the sole exception. Goa was annexed by India on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1961 and it was made a Union territory including other two Portuguese enclaves namely Daman and Diu and Goa was organised into a single district in 1965.

**C) Third Phase (During 2000):** This Re-Organisation was based on regional backwardness (economic perspective). Decade 2000, witnessed a vigorous movements for the creation of separate states due to a raising sense of regional deprivation. This resulted in the creation of three new States- Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh; Jharkhand out of Bihar and Uttarakhand out of Uttar Pradesh. In 2014, State of Telangana was created out of Andrapradesh (This is also known as Sun Regionalism).

**D) Fourth Phase (2019):** More recently the state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two union territories – a) Jammu and Kashmir and b) Ladakh, through Jammu and Kashmir reorganisation act, 2019 by bringing an amendment to Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution.

### Present Regional Movements in India:

**a) Secessionism:** This form of regionalism involves militant and fundamentalist groups advocating a separation from India on the basis of ethnicity, religion or any other factor. Eg: a) Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) demands for the reunification and complete independence for Jammu and Kashmir. Likewise, other groups like The Resistance Front (TRF) etc.

**b) Khalistan Movement:** The Khalistan Movement seeks the creation of an independent Sikh State, separate from India. Its origins trace back to the time of India and Pakistan's independence in 1947. When negotiations leading to the partition of Punjab region fuelled the idea. In 1969, Jagjit Singh Chohan moved to the United Kingdom to start his campaign for the creation of Khalistan. This led to violent protests in Punjab and these protests were suppressed by the Government of India using force in early 1990's. But, it is re-surfacing in foreign countries like Canada, USA, UK, Australia, etc, by groups like Khalistan Tiger Force, Babar Khalsa International, etc.

**c) North-Eastern States:** Isac Muia's National Socialist Council of Nagaland demands for a separate country for Nagas called Nagalim.

**2) Separation:** Assam's Bodoland, Gorkha land in West Bengal and Bundelkhand state (covering parts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh) for promoting development of the region.

**3) Demand for full statehood and Autonomy:** Union territories like Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir are demanding for a full statehood. Whereas, many regional parties in Tamilnadu, Andrapradesh, Punjab, Assam, Ladakh, etc are demanding for a more political, economic and administrative autonomy from the central government.

### 4) The Politics of Regionalism and Regional Identity:

**a) Creation of New States:** Through State Re-Organisation Act of 1956 and 1971 new states were created to satisfy the demands of the local people.

**b) Political Negotiation:** Isac Muia's Nationalist Council of Nagaland demanding for a separate Nagaland, demand for Bodoland and Gorkha land are dealt with negotiation keeping in mind the national integration of India.

**c) Suppression:** Khalistan Movement was suppressed with police action in early 1990s. Demand for Jammu and Kashmir separate nation was dealt by Jammu and Kashmir Re-Organisation Act of 2019.

**In Conclusion,** Regionalism and regional identity has passed mainly four stages and it was based on language, religion, ethnicity, economic backwardness, etc. Moreover, regional parties could not only form governments at the state level but also participated in the national governments (coalition) demanding for more resources for the native states. This growth of regional parties was possible only because of regionalism and regional identity. So, we see the ascendancy of regional parties in national politics after 1990's, this was the result of the first and second state re-organisation commission's re-drawing of the state boundaries.



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