

Role of Political Parties in Balancing Federalism and Regionalism

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Federalism means “A proper respect for state functions, recognition of the fact that the entire country is made up of a Union of separate State governments, and a continuance of the belief that the National Government will fare best if the States and their institutions are left free to perform their separate functions in their separate ways”¹.

Federalism is a political concept in which a group of members are bound together by a covenant with a governing representative head. The term Federalism is also used to describe a system of the government in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and constituent political units. Federalism is a system in which the power to govern is shared between national and provincial or state governments, creating a system of governance which is called as Federation.

Federalism gives the central government its authority but it also gives the states a great deal of power. On many occasions, the Supreme Court has been called on to adjudicate what federalism means², but the Constitution puts a lot of faith in federalism what the Founding Fathers first constructed it.

It is a system of government in which a written constitution divides powers between a central government and regional or sub-divisional governments. Both types of government act directly upon the people through their officials and laws. Both types of government are supreme within their proper sphere of authority. Both have to consent to any changes to the constitution.

Federalism also is referred to as a political system that binds a group of states into a larger, non-centralized superior state while allowing them to maintain their own political identities.³

¹ *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37 (1971).

² The Supreme Court herein is the US Supreme Court that has ruled mostly in favour of the executive rather than the states.

³ *available at:*

In a federation the division of power between Federal and regional governments is usually outlined in the constitution. It is in this way that the right to self-government of the component states is usually constitutionally entrenched. Component states often also possess their own constitutions which they may amend as they see fit, although in the event of conflict the Federal constitution usually takes precedence.⁴

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.⁵

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.⁶ 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 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.⁷

http://books.google.co.in/books?id=V2d12iZkgOwC&pg=PA568&lpg=PA568&dq=Federalism+also+is+referred+to+as+a+political+system+that+binds+a+group+of+state+s+into+a+larger,+non-centralized+superior+state+while+allowing+them+to+maintain+their+own+political+identities&source=bl&ots=Mg8ErYSVOS&sig=8BBDZKNqcIcE-XOooVM5EiCTp30&hl=en&ei=YeKjTZOuLI7msQP77bX6DA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false, last visited on 24 January, 2011.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *available at:* www.essaydepot.com/doc/30842/Regionalism, last visited on 2nd February, 2011.

⁶ *available at:* www.nios.ac.in/srsec317newE/317EL20.pdf, last visited on 2nd February, 2011.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Regionalism and Politics

Years around independence, India can be taken as a society of statelessness. In the pre-independence days Congress provided the platform for the rallying cry of 'Swaraj' and made itself the recognized spokesman of the feeling of vague revolt and common identity.⁸ Its working for the independence provided a focus around which both elite and mass could unite. Here, elites were united by ties of friendship, frequently reinforced by common educational and agitational experiences and by dedication to the nationalist issue. Because of the lack of modern structures, there was no serious competition. Congress was well organized and led a responsive movement capable of disciplined action in response to directives from the top. Congress was able to ferret out and exploit feelings of dissatisfaction among the masses against the British for political ends.⁹ The mass movement became the frame work within which primordial differences among the population could be submerged in the search of common goal.

After independence it was felt by the top leaders of the Congress that there should be a new setup for the states and the people should have loyalty towards a stable governing regime and should not have divisive tendencies. Congress did this exercise skillfully. It silenced the little tradition of primordial loyalties by focussing attention upon the problems of and military alliances.¹⁰ At the same time Congress set for itself, the twin goal of national integration and socio-economic development. It felt that political identity in a nation State begs the idea that loyalty and commitment of the individual should be extended only to the territorially defined nation State.

Our government was extremely determinate in building the complex state instruments of adult franchise, parliamentary institutions, neutral bureaucracy, Rule of Law, quasi-Federalism, local institutions, planning capitalist path of development, public enterprises, secularism and socialistic pattern of society. Moreover, the government was always willing to trait, behind the events so as to equip itself to make authoritarian decisions, while subduing primordial forces.¹¹ At the same time we set for ourselves, the twin goal of national integration and socio-economic development.

In short we can say that the system was potent and practical enough to equip itself politico- economically and socio-politically to deal with the phenomenon of regionalism. But regional imbalances, economic and political in equality, Centre's indifference to a particular region are the various factors which has led to strong feeling of regionalism in India.

Regionalism in India is a countrywide phenomenon, often tends to take the form of well conceived and well organized agitations and campaigns. Political/ Regional movements take four forms¹²:

1. Demand of the people of certain area for separate state-hood.

⁸ available at: aei.pitt.edu/2643/01/002562_1.pdf, last visited on 2nd February, 2011.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ available at: dspace.vidyanidhi.org.in:8080/dspace/bitstream/.../VBU-1997-001-2.pdf, last visited on 8th February, 2011.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Id.*

2. Demand of the people of certain area for secession from the Indian Union.
3. Demand of the people of certain union territories for full Fledged statehood, and
4. The demand of certain people for favourable settlement in inter-state disputes.

Dravida Munetra Kazhagam and Dravida Kashagam of Tamil Nadu and Alkali Dal of Punjab, the Mizos of Assam, the Nages of Assam all had demanded secession from the Indian union at one period or another. The demand for the state of Andhra Pradesh triggered the like demands in the country.¹³ The demands for Gujrat, Punjab, Telengana, Vidhrah and others voiced the regional problem. In a similar fashion the union territories also demanded full-fledged state-hood. Himachal Pradesh and Tripura obtained statehood in this manner. Regionalism was intense on the question of boundary dispute of Maharashtra and Mysore, Punjab, Haryana and Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.¹⁴

Regionalists and nationalists find themselves in acute conflict in six major areas. They are¹⁵:

- Language policy
- Educational policy
- Resource allocation
- Mass media control
- Electoral competition
- Using the state machinery under its complete control.

On the question of the role of the regional parties, an assessment of present characteristic of those parties must, first be made. In the Indian context regional parties are those, which generally and exclusively operate within limited geographical area of a state, or which represented primordial loyalties.¹⁶ The regional parties stand in sharp contrast to the broad ranging diverse concerns of national parties in a country of vast diversity like India, where political fluidity continues indefinitely because of the transitions from the traditional caste politics to democratic mass politics. Primordial groups were the First ones to demand regional identity and personalities of their own. For instance, the Jharkhand party aims at establishing a Jharkhand state for a few millions primitive tribals, who live in the plateau of Chota Nagpur of Bihar, and some district of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and Bengal. The Akalidal, the political mouth piece of the Sikhs, is a regional party with a religious base, The Dravida Munetra Kazahagan stands for the welfare of the backward communities of Tamilnadu, Shivsena of Bombay under the leadership of Bal Thakery has assumed a

¹³ available at: dspace.vidyanidhi.org.in:8080/dspace/bitstream/.../VBU-1997-001-2.pdf, last visited on 2nd February, 2011.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Supra* 40.

¹⁶ available at: www.informaworld.com/index/782509425.pdf, last visited on 8th February, 2011.

militant posture against the non-Maharashtrian, Telugu Desam of Andhra and National conference of Jammu and Kashmir has fomented caste, communal, linguistic and regional feelings. The GNLF has demanded autonomy for Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Thus every conceivable category of primordial sentiments in India has found a regional party of its own.¹⁷

On the other hand, thrusting of a modern political consciousness upon the mass of a still largely not modernized population, has tended to lead to the stimulation of intense popular interest. The institutionalization of political participation has not progressed sufficiently to accommodate the rising demands of the masses by the political parties. Thus, the absence of a balance between the rate of growth of political participation and the rate of institutionalization of the people within the national political parties, had led to the emergence of several regional parties. Congress itself has been subject, to this test. Kerala Congress, Tamil Arasu Kazhagam, Bhartiya Krantidal, Jana Congress, Indian National Democratic Congress were the instances of this phenomenon. It has been not only the Congress, that gave rise to despair but several regional parties themselves, were responsible for this happening.¹⁸ There has been continuous breeding of regional parties by regional parties themselves. All India Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam, Republican Party of India (Kamble group), Jharkhand Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Jharkhand Peoples Party various factions in the Akalidal can be cited as example of this.

In a plural society and a federal polity like ours, some kind of regional commitment is but natural. When regionalism becomes a threat to national unity, and breeds communal disharmony, it deserves no sympathy. Regionalism as a factor of balkanization is a continuous threat for the people of India. The politics of fragmentation may not be that successful, but the country has to face its dangerous consequences like factionalism, class conflict and group rivalries.

The government of India needs to adopt a constructive approach to balance federalism and regionalism. Now in the coming days of internationalism, the people and the political parties of India need to join hands, so that they can play an important role in promoting unity and integrity of India.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

