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REGIONALISM AND REGIONAL PARTIES

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, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir etc.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- analyse the factors responsible for the growth of regionalism;
- determine the factors instrumental for the growth of regional parties;
- create awareness about the role of regional parties;
- distinguish a regional party from a national party.

20.1 What is Regionalism

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 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.



Notes



Intext Questions 20.1

Fill in the blanks:

1. In the positive sense Regionalism is people's love for their _____ and _____.
2. Regional party means a party who operates will in a limited _____ area.
3. In India we have _____ number of regional parties

20.2 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 and A.P.

20.3 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 reorganisation 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 organisations.

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 organisation, 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.

**Notes****Intext Questions 20.2**

True or False

1. Regionalism has often led to the demand by states to greater autonomy from the center. (True/False)
2. Disputes regarding sharing water, primacy or language of majority have also given rise to feelings of regionalism. (True/False)

20.4 Causes for 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.



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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 have 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.

20.5 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.



Intext Questions 20.3

Fill in the blanks :

1. _____ is not a new phenomenon in the Indian Political System.
2. Indian National Congress enjoyed monopoly of power between_____.
3. The close link between the _____ and _____ leadership encouraged the growth of regionalism.
4. Continuous neglect of a region by the ruling parties is a _____ of regionalism.



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20.6 Measures for Correcting Regional Imbalances

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.



Intext Questions 20.4

Multiple Choice Questions

1. A party which generally operates within a limited geographical area is called:-
 - (a) Political Party
 - (b) National Party
 - (c) Regional Party
 - (d) All the above
2. Factors which have contributed to the growth of regional parties are:-
 - (a) Social
 - (b) Ethnic
 - (c) Cultural and geographical
 - (d) All the above



What You Have Learnt

Regionalism means strong attachment to a particular region or a state as against the country as a whole. This feeling arises either due to the continuous neglect of a particular area or because the people of a particular region become politically aware and seek to fight perceived discrimination. Regionalism is a problem because it threatens the unity and integrity of the country.

The two prominent manifestations of regionalism are:

- (a) agitation for separate statehood. Examples, demand for Telengana, Bodo-land (Assam), Gorkha land etc., and
- (b) Secession from the Indian Union, for example – demand for Khalistan, demand for Nagaland, etc.



Terminal Exercises

1. Explain the meaning of regionalism? Why is it dangerous?
2. Discuss the different forms of regionalism?
3. Discuss the role of regional parties?



Answers to Intext Questions

20.1

- (1) Region, Culture, Language
- (2) Geographical
- (3) Larger

20.2

- (1) True
- (2) True

20.3

- (1) Regionalism
- (2) 1947–1967
- (3) Central, Regional
- (4) Cause

20.4

- (1) c
- (2) d

Hints for Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to section 20.1
2. Refer to section 20.2
3. Refer to section 20.5



Notes