

The Rising Tide of Regionalism

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The Rising Tide of Regionalism: Supreme Court's Cautionary Stand

Context:

The **Supreme Court of India** recently observed that **promoting regionalism for electoral gain is as dangerous as communalism**. It cautioned political parties against inciting regional divisions, which can endanger **national unity and constitutional values**. This statement comes at a time when regional identity politics is increasingly being used for **vote-bank mobilisation**, raising concerns about **fragmentation of Indian federalism**.

What is Regionalism?

- **Regionalism** is a political ideology that emphasizes the interests of a specific geographic region over the nation as a whole.
 - It becomes **problematic** when it fuels **identity-based mobilisation** or promotes **exclusionary politics**.
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Forms of Regionalism:

- **Demand for Autonomy:**
 - Seen in movements like **Gorkhaland** and **Bodoland**.
- **Sub-Regional Identity Politics:**
 - Example: "**Sons of the soil**" campaigns in **Maharashtra** targeting outsiders.

- **Development-Based Regionalism:**

- Backward region demands in **Vidarbha** and **Telangana**.

- **Linguistic Regionalism:**

- **Anti-Hindi agitations** in **Tamil Nadu** are prominent examples.

- **Employment-Based Regionalism:**

- **Haryana's law** reserving **75% private sector jobs** for locals.
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Causes for the Rise of Regionalism:

- **Uneven Development:**

- Skewed economic progress causes regional resentment.
- *Example: **Bihar-Jharkhand** disparities led to statehood demands.*

- **Cultural Assertion:**

- Communities fear **cultural dilution** due to migration or central dominance.
- *Example: **Marathi-North Indian tensions** in Mumbai.*

- **Electoral Mobilisation:**

- Political parties exploit regional identity for votes.
- *Example: Early campaigns of **Shiv Sena**, **AIMIM** targeting regional bases.*

- **Linguistic Politics:**

- Language is used to assert identity or exclusion.

- Example: **Dravidian movement** rooted in Tamil pride.

- **Neglected Grievances:**

- Persistent local issues ignored by the state/centre cause alienation.
 - Example: **Jammu & Kashmir** before abrogation of **Article 370**.
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Issues Associated with Regionalism:

- **Threat to National Unity:**

- Encourages fragmentation of national identity.

- **Discrimination & Violence:**

- Migrants face **violence and hostility**.
- Example: Attacks on **Bihari workers** in **Assam** and **Gujarat**.

- **Violation of Constitutional Rights:**

- **Article 19** ensures freedom of movement, residence, and employment across India, which regionalism may infringe.

- **Obstruction to National Policies:**

- Regional opposition can delay or derail national projects.

- **Populism Over Governance:**

- Identity politics shifts focus from development to **vote-centric populism**.
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Way Forward:

- **Promote Constitutional Awareness:**

- Educate citizens on **fundamental duties** and **Article 19 protections**.

- **Address Regional Disparities:**

- Ensure **equitable development** across states and regions through balanced fiscal allocation.

- **Strengthen Integration Schemes:**

- Expand programs like **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat**, youth exchanges, and cultural collaborations.

- **Political Accountability:**

- Election Commission should monitor **manifestos and speeches** for divisive content.

- **Judicial Oversight:**

- Courts should continue to act against **unconstitutional political behavior** and uphold secular federalism.

- **Foster Plural Nationalism:**

- Accept regional identities as part of the **Indian mosaic**, not as opposition to national identity.

Conclusion:

Regional identities are **an integral part of India's federal structure**, but they must operate within the **framework of unity and constitutionalism**. The Supreme Court's timely warning highlights the need for **responsible politics** that unites rather than divides. **True federalism** lies in **cooperative nationalism**, where **diversity strengthens national unity** instead of weakening it.