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# **REGIONALISM-PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES IN INDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Regionalism is less about feeling like an individual and more about a "politics of pressure" and negotiating tactic. It is common to observe that residents of a certain region incite their fellow citizens' feelings for the purpose of achieving their particular demands and take up a confrontationist stance towards both the centre and other states. Once their particular demands are met and their strong regional emotions subside, they become more subdued. While nationalism and regionalism are sometimes seen as mutually exclusive, this isn't always the case. It is necessary to strike a balance between regional and national interests; when this balance is struck, regionalism takes on a positive role and supports the nation's unity and integrity. However, regionalism turns harmful and we should be cautious when it takes the shape of separatist. The issue of regionalism is not limited to Indian politics; rather, it is a global phenomena that is having an impact on politics in many forms throughout the world. Its foundation and nature, however, varied throughout the world. Regionalism was intentionally fostered by many, leading to the outcome that the people of each region thought more in terms of their region than of India as a whole. Even before India gained its freedom, regionalism was used as a tool by the imperialists to support their strategy of keeping India divided. Since independence, this issue has taken a significant turn in India, presenting a severe threat to the nation's unity and integrity. Every precaution was taken in the constitution to guarantee that the notion of regionalism was eradicated at its source. However, as time has gone on, it has become increasingly evident that regional sentiments are strong in India, and local authorities there heavily take advantage of these sentiments in order to uphold or even strengthen their position of power. In this sense, regionalism is becoming more and more ingrained, making it harder and harder to eradicate.

**Keywords:** Regionalism, Reorganisation and Creation, Categorical Division, Consolidation

## I.INTRODUCTION

### **The Concept of Regionalism in India**

Strong ties to one's home region are known as regionalism. For instance, rather than identifying as "Indians," people in India identify more as citizens of their respective states, such as Tamilians, Bengalis, Biharis, etc. It is possible to reduce regionalism to a smaller scale, such as a hamlet. For many generations, Indian communities have maintained their unique identity. A villager's identity is more closely associated with their village than with their region, state, or nation.

An ideology and political movement known as regionalism aims to further the interests of specific regions. As a process, it functions both domestically and internationally, or at the international level. There are benefits and drawbacks to both forms of regionalism in terms of society, politics, diplomacy, economy, security, culture, development, and negotiations. Internationally, regionalism refers to a collection of nations, such as those in Southeast Asia or Western Europe, that are connected by geography, history, or economic characteristics. It can also apply to transnational collaboration aimed at achieving a common objective or solving a shared problem. When used in this context, regionalism refers to initiatives taken to strengthen the connections between the economic characteristics of the nations. The term's second meaning is to regionalism at the national level, denoting a process wherein authority shifts from the central government to regional governments as sub-state actors gain greater influence. These are the geographical areas of the nation that are unique in terms of their cultures, languages, and other sociocultural elements. We will now go into great length regarding nation-level regionalism in relation to India.<sup>1</sup>

### **Background of Regionalism in India:**

The phenomenon of regionalism in the political system of India is not new. Since 1947, if not before, regionalism has remained, arguably, the most powerful force in Indian politics. India's vast diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, groups, faiths, and other identity markers forms the basis of regionalism, which is also fueled by a sense of deprivation in particular regions and

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<sup>1</sup> [www.civildaily.com/regionalism/last](http://www.civildaily.com/regionalism/last) visited on 28-10-2023

promoted by the concentration of these identity markers in particular regions. India continued to be the home of numerous nations, regions, civilizations, and customs for many years. The fundamental idea that this illustrates is that, both historically and currently, the primary way that regionalism in India has attempted to manifest itself is through the internal self-determination of communities, regardless of their linguistic, tribal, religious, regional, or combinations of these characteristics. In order to preserve their hold over India during the national movement, British imperialists used it during the pre-independence era by purposefully encouraging people in different regions to think in terms of their region rather than the country as a whole.

In his book *Language Conflict and National Development*, Jyotirindra Das Gupta explores this issue in further detail and suggests that regionalism be understood in the context of its social, political, ethnic, and linguistic contexts. However, he emphasises that the most crucial component of regionalism, particularly in developing nations, is the issue of linguistic conflict. Additionally, he contends that "the transformation of traditional societies into modern political communities" was typically accompanied by language modernization "both in Europe and elsewhere." But in the sense that "in such societies, administration, religious affairs, literary activity, and ordinary communication tend to be carried on in different languages," traditional cultures seem to exhibit extremes of linguistic diversity.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in a traditional society, the general populace speaks a range of regional dialects, but governmental and religious matters may be conducted in a foreign language. In support of John Gumperz's theory, he notes that poor literacy and the significant time and effort required for language acquisition tended to favour power polarisation among a relatively tiny elite.<sup>3</sup> Thus, internal language variety represented extremes of political and social stratification.

## II. CULTIVATION OF REGIONALISM

### **Pre-Independent India:**

The foundation of the British Empire was laid by the three cities of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. The presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras were gradually expanded to include the newly acquired regions of east, west, and south India. As a result, three original British Indian provinces were created. During the initial stage of the establishment of their empire, the British created larger states.

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<sup>2</sup> Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*. (New Delhi: Ramesh Jain Manohar Publications, 1953), 335.

<sup>3</sup> Dalip Singh, *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*. (New Delhi: Macmillan India, Ltd., 1981), 2

The division of larger states into smaller ones marked the beginning of the second stage in the creation of the British Indian provinces. The first state of its kind was Assam. The development of imperial interests and effective administration was the only motivation behind the British people's geographical reorganisation and creation of new States. The British State saw welfare and development as low priorities. The "Divide and rule" policy was always given the proper weight and consideration. There were three different types of provinces in British India: chief commissioner's provinces, lieutenant governor's provinces, and governor's provinces.

India was not unifiedly ruled by the British during their rule, and the following regions can be distinguished:

1. Areas under effective British control,
2. Partially administered areas,
3. Un-administered areas and.
4. The areas controlled by the native princes

Regarding the rulers of North-East India, the following comment holds true for the vast majority of cases as well: "The British were extremely cautious in their dealings with the rulers of this region, not knowing their strengths and weaknesses." Gradually, their circumspect approach gave way to an uncommon firmness. After being treated equally at first, the Kings and Chiefs were progressively demoted to the position of Sanad and Kabuliat holders. The Kings' sovereignty was gradually superseded by British paramountcy. This progressively occurred as the British consolidated their control over various regions of the nation and became aware of the underlying weaknesses of the local politics, ruling class, and society.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Categorical Division of Post Independent India:**

On January 26, 1950, India, or Bharat, was proclaimed to be a Union of States and a Sovereign Democratic Republic. By then, the Princely States' merger was virtually finished. At the time, there were the following State classifications in the nation:

Category A: The states that make up the United Provinces (U.P.) are Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Madhya Pradesh (Central Provinces and Berar), Madras, Orissa, Punjab (East Punjab), and West Bengal. The Governors continued to lead these States, just as they had in the British era. They were permitted to have Ministerial Councils and elected Legislative Assemblies.

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<sup>4</sup> Kumar B. B., The Trend of British Annexation of North-East India

Category B: Hyderabad, J&K, Madhya Bharat, Mysore, PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union), Rajasthan, Saurashtra, Travancore-Cochin, and Vindhya Pradesh were among the former Princely States/State Unions that fell under this category. The Raj Pramukh of the State was the Maharaja of the State. It was known as Sadar-e-Riyasat in J&K. In the State Union case, one of the Maharajas served as the Raj Pramukh.

Category C: included the provinces of the Chief Commissioner: Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Kutch, Manipur, Tripura, and Cooch Behar; Ajmer, Bhopal, Bilaspur, and Coorg. This encompassed Delhi, Coorg, and Ajmer-Merwara, the three former Chief Commissioner's Provinces.

Category D: Islands of Andaman & Nicobar. Based on historical evidence, the national movement led to the country's liberation, and the regional forces proved to be extremely important in the fight against the antiimperialist forces. It frequently battles the oppressive powers of huge, chauvinistic nations.

Following independence, the leaders made an effort to foster a sense of unity among the populace. The goal of single citizenship for everybody was intended by the constitution's framers. However, given the complexity of India and the breadth and diversity of its languages and cultures, a strong sense of love and allegiance to one's region began to emerge, making regionalism unavoidable.

### **India after Independence:**

India was divided into Princely States, British Indian regions, and Portuguese and French colonial regions before to its independence. The Government of India Act of 1935 called for the creation of an All-India Federation with provinces and princely states serving as its units; however, the proposed federation was never implemented because of specific circumstances. Later, in 1946, a Cabinet delegation visited India and declared that princely states were no longer subject to the supreme authority of the British government and may choose to remain free or make an agreement with the new government.

On July 5, 1947, the British Parliament approved the Mountbatten Plan-based Indian Independence Act. A few Princely States had aspirations of independence and freedom. One of the main issues facing India after independence was this. The issue is occasionally denoted as

either national integration or the political community's integration of Indians.<sup>5</sup>

### **Consolidation of India**

The State People's movement saw a resurgence in 1946–1947, calling for political rights and elective representation in the Constituent Assembly. Announcing that the States refusing to join the Constituent Assembly will be viewed as hostile, Nehru presided over the meetings of the All India State People's Conference. The new States Department was headed by Vallabh Bhai Patel in July 1947, with V P Menon serving as secretary.

### **Stage 1 of consolidation**

Patel was well aware of the threat to Indian unity that the state rulers' potential stubbornness posed. In dealing with princely realms, he adopted the following strategy: In three areas that impacted the nation's interests as a whole—foreign policy, defence, and communications—he pleaded with the princes whose lands were part of India to join the Indian Union. In addition, he threatened that the government would impose harsher sentences after August 15 and that he would be powerless to quell the agitated citizens of the states.

As a result, every state—aside from Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagarh—signed a "instrument of accession" with the Indian government, recognising the central government's control over communication, defence, and foreign policy. As a result of these initiatives, 562 of the 565 states with ties to India signed the instrument of accession between June and August 15, 1947. The Prince consented as they were receiving just pay although knowing they were not the true rulers—rather, they were ruled by British supremacy. Prince, for example, received a beautiful privy purse, the value of which was determined by the money received by each state.

1. The internal political system remained unchanged.
2. The desire of the people in these states was to join India.

## **III. INTEGRATION OF JUNAGARH**

Western India's Kathiawar area was home to Junagarh. Muhammad Mahabat Khanji III, a Muslim nawab, was in charge of Junagadh despite the fact that more than 70% of its people were Hindu. The Nawab of the state declared its accession to Pakistan on August 15, 1947, even

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<sup>5</sup> [www.clearias.com/post-independence-consolidation-and-reorganization-within-the-country/last](http://www.clearias.com/post-independence-consolidation-and-reorganization-within-the-country/last) visited on 28-10-2023

though the majority-Hindu populace of the state wanted to join India, despite the fact that the state's boundaries did not yet touch Pakistan. A popular movement was launched, the Nawab was forced to escape, and a provisional administration was put in place. Shah Nawaz Bhutto, the Dewan of Junagadh, then made the decision to ask the Indian government to step in. The state held a plebiscite in February 1948, and the results were strongly in support of joining India.

#### IV. INTEGRATION OF KASHMIR

Its borders were shared by Pakistan and India. Maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu monarch, governed over a predominantly Muslim populace in this instance. The king was not eager to become a part of Pakistan or India. On the other hand, Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference, as well as other popular political groups, desired India's inclusion. In keeping with their general strategy, the Indian political elites did little to secure Kashmir's accession and instead preferred let the people of Kashmir determine whether to associate their destiny with Pakistan or India. But unlike Hyderabad and Junagadh, Pakistan declined to recognise the plebiscite principle in this instance.

As winter arrived on October 22, a number of Pathan tribesmen broke into Kashmir and advanced quickly on Srinagar, the region's capital, under the cover of unofficial leadership by Pakistani army commanders. The Maharaja made a military aid request to India on October 24. Even at this late date, Nehru was opposed to accession without first finding out what the people's will was. The Maharaja consented to recognise Abdullah as the head of state's administration along with his accession to India on October 26.

India, in keeping with its democratic commitment, declared that it would hold a referendum on the accession decision after peace and law and order had been restored in the Valley, despite the fact that both the Maharaja and the National Conference supported solid and permanent accession. Indian leaders moved quickly after the accession, sending troops by air to Srinagar. The invaders were eventually driven out of the valley when Srinagar was taken.

To establish lasting peace, The Indian government approached the UNSC<sup>6</sup> against the aggression undertaken by Pakistan in Kashmir. On December 31, 1948, both India and Pakistan accepted a

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<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the [six principal organs](#) of the [United Nations](#) (UN)

ceasefire that is still in place as a result of a UNSC resolution. Following Pakistan's withdrawal of its soldiers from the portion of Kashmir under its control, the UN adopted a resolution in 1951 calling for a referendum to be held under UN supervision. Because Pakistan has failed to remove its troops from what is known as Azad Kashmir, the resolution has remained unfulfilled. Since then, India has viewed Kashmir's accession as final and unchangeable and as an essential component of its territory.

## **V. THE DARJEELING AREA:**

Based on the significance and character of the locations, the British had separated the seized territory in the hill region into a number of categories, such as regulated and non-controlled areas. This distinction was eliminated by the Council Act of 1861. In order to preserve the indigenous system of the simple inhabitants, Darjeeling District was designated as a "Non-Regulated Area" prior to 1861 and between 1870 and 1874. This meant that statutes and regulations of the British Raj did not automatically apply in the district in line with the rest of the country, unless specifically expanded. Between 1862 and 1870, it was regarded as a "Regulated Area."

The phrase "Non-Regulated Area" was renamed "Scheduled District" in 1874 to keep the territory beyond the scope of national general law, and it was renamed "Backward Tracts"<sup>7</sup> in 1919. The designation "Partially Excluded Area" was used to the situation from 1935 until India gained its independence. But since 1912, Bengal had maintained overall control over the district.

## **VI. THE HYDERABAD AREA:**

The Nizam of Hyderabad desired to maintain his independence under the special rights accorded to princely states after India gained its independence from the British Empire in 1947. He did not want to join the Indian Union. He also requested a passageway from India, a tunnel. Across the state, there had been uprisings against the Nizam's authority and his Razakar force.

On September 17, 1948, the Indian Army carried out an operation known as "Operation Polo," which the administration referred to as "Police action," leading to the annexation of Hyderabad State. Telugu-speaking people were dispersed across roughly 22 districts in independent India:

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<sup>7</sup> Art 52 A (2) Government of India Act 1919

nine in the erstwhile Nizam's dominions of the princely state of Hyderabad, twelve in the Madras Presidency (Northern Circars), and one in Yanam, which was ruled by the French.

Thus, it is clear that the historical setting of the Telengana and Gorkhaland movements is formed by British colonial control before to independence. The Weberian idea of a uniform-rational legal state was reflected in the theory of territory that underpinned the 1950 Constitution. The organisation only met administrative efficacy requirements; neither historical nor cultural requirements were met.

However, in the 1950s, regionalist organisations forced a gradual division of India's territory based on particularist criteria: language. On the other hand, the British administrative division accurately demonstrates the Weberian legal rational state. As previously discussed, none of the regional units under the province division model had any cultural or ethnic requirements, such as language, religion, caste, or tribe. The British provinces had a diverse population. Additionally, the state was partitioned using the same non-ethnic justification.<sup>8</sup>

Early on, there was concern that the country's unity and integration would be threatened by the demand for a linguistic state. However, it was eventually acknowledged that adjusting regional claims would lessen such demands, emphasise diversity, and change the character and course of democratic politics and leadership so that it was accessible to a wider range of people than just the small English-speaking elite.

We are fairly aware that language is one of the relevant markers of group identification. India, with its astounding 4,635 communities and 325 languages spoken by a population of over a billion people, has been the birthplace of rich and diverse social movements representing protest, dissent, reform, or reassertion. It is frequently referred to as the "Babel of languages" due to its multilingual nature. Both positively and negatively, linguistic uniformity fosters regionalism: in the former case, it fosters unity, and in the latter one, it fosters emotional frenzy.<sup>9</sup>

A regional consciousness, not only in the sense of negative awareness of absence of repression or exploitation but also in the lense of scope of positive expression of collective personality of a people inhabiting a state or region (emphasis added), may be conducive to the contentment and

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<sup>8</sup> *Religious traditions in modern South Asia* JS Hirst, J Zavos - 2013

<sup>9</sup> Constitutional Nation Building: Half a Century of India's Success [Akhtar Majeed](#) (1984)

wellbeing of the community, according to the Report State Reorganisation Commission of 1955, which also played a significant role in the creation of language dedication and the growth of regional sentiments. Not only could a common language facilitate administrative convenience, but it could also foster the development of such a regional awareness. In a democratic country like India, the populace has a right to demand and the governments have an obligation to make sure that the government is run in a language that the populace can comprehend.<sup>10</sup>

## **VII. REGIONALISM AS A SUB STATE MOVEMENT:**

Conversely, regionalism in its positive definition suggests a concept of exploring the self-identity of the people living in that specific place. In a different context, it is more of a distinct need to safeguard the economic, linguistic, and racial interests of a group of people who belong to a country. More specifically, regionalism is a sub-nationality's campaign against the dominant nationality. A movement is unquestionably regionalist if it is characterised by a specific racial, linguistic, or religious group that has settled in a particular area of the nation and uses necessary political measures to force the authorities to grant their demands. This movement often stands for either separation or sovereignty of a special constitutional, administrative, economic, or political status for themselves at the expense of the rights and interests of other communities.

Therefore, regionalism is another term for a particular and constrictive political movement that lacks wide liberal and democratic components. In some instances, however, as in the situations of Telengan and Gorkhaland, regionalism also had the explicit goal of achieving separate statehood.

The "diverse trend detrimental to national unity" is another term used to describe the regional movement. It's commonly understood to be synonymous with provincialism, which encourages secession, localism, and isolationism. However, regionalism isn't usually associated with narrow-minded anti-national groups. Based on historical evidence, the national movement led to the regional forces' highly exalted position in the country's liberation from the anti-imperialist forces. It frequently battles the oppressive powers of huge, chauvinistic nations. Thus, regionalism is a movement against economic, political, and social injustices as well as against the hegemonic groups that control the majority of the nation's population. It is significant to

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<sup>10</sup> State reorganization Commission Report, 1955.

remember that regionalism in India today carries a number of meanings, including "localism," "provincialism," "son of the soil theory," "disintegration of Indian States," fights for separate statehood or provincial autonomy, and struggles for power, particularly economic power. Whatever its meaning, regionalism has evolved into a separatist movement that takes many diverse shapes throughout India. Geographical regionalism, linguistic regionalism, cultural regionalism, ethnic regionalism, and other forms of regionalism are currently on the rise in India.

It is clear from this situation that accepting a specific definition of regionalism is exceedingly challenging. Nevertheless, it may be further stated that India is still in the process of forming new states, as seen by the fact that there are currently 29 States and 7 Union territories, compared to fewer following independence. Regionalism is a major factor that has accelerated the process of State creation in India and is one of the main drivers of this development in Indian society.

## **VIII. THE ISSUE OF ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE:**

More conceptual understanding—such as that of ethnicity—is required in order to comprehend both trends. In general, a group of individuals who lack a country yet share a common culture and way of life are referred to be "ethnic." Numerous characteristics, such as religion, caste, geography, descent, race, language, colour, culture, and so forth, define an ethnic group. An ethnic group's goals are centred on gaining advantages for itself.

Language plays a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of ethnic identity. The ethnicity has a more striking relationship to language than other social factors such as gender, age, or social class. The construction of race and ethnicity varies greatly across communities, as well as across and within individuals. Researchers generally agree that both race and ethnicity are socially constructed categories. Sociolinguistic research on ethnically diverse linguistic communities has identified a number of linguistic resources available to speakers for use in constructing ethnic identities, including the following: a heritage language, specific sociolinguistic features, code-switching, suprasegmental features, discourse features and language use, and using a borrowed variety. Researchers across a variety of disciplines have established that the construction of an identity involves the integration and coordination of a variety of social factors in a way that is more complex than a simple additive model would predict.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-handbook-of-sociolinguistics/language-and->

Different ethnic groups can be distinguished based on which linked identification source is prioritised for defining group membership: group, the subsequent categories of ethnic groupings are discernible:

- i) Ethno-racial emphasizing shared physical appearance based on genetic origins;
- ii) Ethno-religious emphasizing shared affiliation with a particular religion, denomination and/or sect;
- iii) Ethno-linguistic emphasizing shared language, dialect and/or script;
- iv) Ethno-national emphasizing a shared polity and/or sense of national identity;
- v) Ethno-regional emphasizing a distinct local sense of belonging stemming from relative geographic isolation.

India is home to several ethnic and tribal communities. Ascriptive identities such as caste, language, religion, geography, etc. are associated with ethnicity. Conflict arises when there is unequal power distribution between two ethnic groups. The ethnic group is limited in territory and socially active. It is a pool of symbols that represent distinctiveness and has a population that is numerically sufficient. It has a reference group that is used to aggregate feelings of relative deprivation. After being excluded from the developmental process or perhaps becoming a victim of uneven development, ethnicity gives rise to ethnic movements. In Indian politics, ethnicity is not just a result of popular unrest but also a product of entrenched political interests. Ethnic groups who utilise their ethnicity to seek changes to their economic standing, status, or other aspects of their lives are frequently involved in interest group politics.

According to Lake and Rothschild, (1996) ethnic conflict is a sign of a weak state or a state embroiled in ancient loyalties.<sup>12</sup> Here, states operate biasedly in support of a specific ethnic group or area, and actions like special treatment exacerbate ethnic tensions. Consequently, the efficacy of governance in challenging or complex political contexts hinges on its capacity to tackle societal problems and human necessities.

According to T.K. Ompan, there are two reasons why the demand for a separate state in India is still present. First, the Indian state is designed to be a multilayered organisation, with practically any authority granted to the lower three levels—provincial, autonomous regions, union/federal,

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ethnicity/61E592C820248EF08082276E387BD39F last visited on 28-10-2023

<sup>12</sup><https://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/irobi-ethnic> last seen 28-10-2023

zila parishad panchayat. As a result, regional linguistic communities begin to seek a provincial state, disregarding factors like population, size, and financial sustainability. Second, through their vivisection and allegiance to the state dominated by major linguistic communities, the cultural specificity of subaltern communities is not only neglected but actively worked to demolish, leading to the marginalisation and alienation of the former. He also makes the point that the inability of the Indian governments to effectively connect culture and governance sets a significant social agenda. Furthermore, the deprivation of the majority of speech communities has been addressed by the recognition of language as the foundation for political and administrative units. (Oommen, 2004)<sup>13</sup> The construction of such a state and its sustainability necessitate the insight analysis with reference to three problems of economic viability, social inclusion, and social cohesion. The desire for separate states for Gorkhaland and Telengana has long existed.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, we conclude that while there will never be a complete solution to the regionalism problem, its effects can be reduced. The development of appropriate awareness among the populace and the focus on the balanced growth of the populace are necessary for the accomplishment of this goal. In addition, India's political climate needs to be cleaned up since dishonest politics are the source of many of the problems that result from regionalism.

Promoting one's regional identity over one's national identification is the ideology of regionalism. If taken improperly, it can have both negative and positive consequences. India is a country where regionalism is generally seen negatively since it threatens the unity of the country. India has seen an increase in regionalism for a number of reasons, including topography, historical influences, language, and political considerations. Calls for autonomy, state conflicts, and secessionism are only a few of the numerous manifestations of regionalism. To seize power, politicians have attempted to instill a sense of nationalism. This problem needs to be properly tackled for the sake of national identity and unity. The idea of "Unity in Diversity" needs to be upheld if the Indian nation-state is to continue to remain varied. Diverse people's many objectives must be taken into consideration.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream> last seen 28-10-2023