

CHAPTER - 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The concern of this intellectual venture has been to understand the politico administrative situations arising out in Darjeeling as a result of the functioning and working of the dynamics of the District administration together with the DGHC. The study tries to understand the deep rooted political synthesis and its effect on the administrations of Darjeeling. The implication being to probe beyond easy generalizations and pre occupied notions and instead understand the problem locally and on its own terms. The period between 1982 to 1988 saw the people of Darjeeling in agitation for the formation of a separate state. The agitation came to an end with the signing of an agreement between the GNLF, the State Government (West Bengal) and the Central Government (Government of India) in 1988. This agreement led to the creation of an autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) for the social, economic, educational and cultural advancement of the hill people. The jurisdiction of the District administration covers an area of 3149 square kilometers and the jurisdiction of the Hill Council covers an area 2476 square kilometers. For administrative purposes the district is divided into four subdivisions out of which Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong is situated in the hills and Siliguri is

situated in the plains. The jurisdiction of the district administration covers all the subdivisions whereas DGHC covers only the three (revenue) hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong and 13 mouzas of Siliguri (revenue) subdivision.

The territorial areas of Darjeeling were acquired by the British from Sikkim.(1) In Anglo- Nepal war of 1817 the east India Company wrested away the territory of Darjeeling from Nepal and restored to Sikkim. As a mark of respect, the raja of Sikkim gifted the territory (including hills and Tarai plains) to East India Company in 1835, Municipal institution in Darjeeling was first developed with the establishment of Darjeeling municipally in 1857. Thus Darjeeling underwent a municipal civic formation since the mid 19th century. Prior to the passage of Councils Acts, 1861 Darjeeling remained under non regulation scheme. The Act. No. XV of 1874 declared Darjeeling as a scheduled District granting a special status along with other four district of Bengal. (2)The district was kept outside the ambit of general laws in operation throughout the rest of India. The government of India act of 1991 had replaced the term Scheduled District by a new terminology "Back ward Tract". By way of these new arrangements the Governor of Bengal was vested with the responsibility of administrating Darjeeling and to determine whether any law the provincial legislature would be given effect in the district.(3)

The Government of India Act 1935 brought in its wake significant changes in the administrative system and substituted the 'backward tract' by excluded and partially excluded areas with the intend to provide a special status for certain considerations,

- a) Presentation of indigenous system of land tenures,
- b) Necessary of entrusting undivided responsibility of the District Officers,
- c) Formulation of simple laws in inconformity with native institutions and simplicity of local people.

With the draw of independence Darjeeling underwent politico administrative metamorphosis. Shedding off its' status of partially excluded area, Darjeeling become district of the state of W.B. since the district had always been / kept under the overall jurisdiction of Bengal since 1912.

Darjeeling, the northern most tip of West Bengal, has undergone various stages of political development right from the past through the British rule unto the present day.(4) Politico administrative development with regard to Darjeeling therefore becomes a major aspect of study in the process of democratization and rapid socio-economic transformation, in the contemporary political atmosphere. The study of development in

Darjeeling does not only include economic development but also social – political developments,, political awareness political consciousness and active participation of the people from all ethnic communities via Nepalese, Bhutias, Lepchas, and the other minor communities.(5)

Darjeeling is no doubt a district but it has within itself a cartload of contradictions. As pointed out earlier, there are three main ethnic races namely Nepalese, Bhutias and Lepchas, besides them we also find the Tibetans and various other people from the plains. The Marwari community is a distinct community by themselves. In this study an attempt will therefore be made to study the origin, cultural patterns, practices, habits of the various ethnic communities with a focus on the peculiarities of the contemporary political development and the role of the communities in the politico administrative aspects of Darjeeling.(6) Politics of contemporary Darjeeling indeed requires a careful analysis. Hence location of power changes in Political institutes to Governmental organization and administration, caste Politics, electoral politics and political consciousness of the people as a result of interplay of political forces within and outside Darjeeling becomes a part of the present study.

The study also offers an insight to analyze the various Political processes, administration pattern of government and governance, politics of defection, vocal sentiment reservation and regionalism. Further the role

of the GNL, sons of the soil policy, district state district centre relation would be a special focus of the whole study.

1.2 History of Darjeeling

The name 'Darjeeling' came from the Tibetan words, 'dorje' meaning thunderbolt (originally, the scepter of Indra) and 'ling' a place or land, hence 'the land of the thunderbolt'. (1) A land-mark year in the History of Darjeeling was 1835, but it would be appropriate to trace its History before that. Prior to its acquisition by the East India Co. in 1835, Darjeeling formed a part of Sikkim and for a brief period of Nepal. However neither the history of Sikkim, nor the history of Nepal furnish any account of its early history. (2)

Previously Darjeeling formed a part of dominions of the Raja of Sikkim, who had been engaged in an unsuccessful warfare against the Gorkhas. From 1780 the Gorkhas constantly made inroads into Sikkim and by the beginning of 19th Century, they had overrun Sikkim as far eastward as the Teesta and had conquered and annexed the Terai. E.C. Dozey in his 'Darjeeling Past and Present' writes, 'Prior to the year 1816, the whole of the territory known as British Sikkim belonged to Nepal, which won it by conquest'. (3)

In the meantime, the British were engaged in preventing the Gorkhas from overrunning the whole of the northern frontier. The Anglo-Nepal war broke out in 1814. Defeat of the Gorkhalis led to the Treaty of Sugauli, 1815 in which, 'Nepal had to cede all those territories the Gorkhas had annexed from the Raja of Sikkim to the East India Company.(4)

'In 1817, in the Treaty of Titalia', the East India Co. reinstated the Raja of Sikkim (who was driven out), restored all the tracts of land between the Mechi and the Teesta to the Raja and guaranteed his sovereignty.

With the intervention of the British, the Gorkhas were prevented from turning the whole of Sikkim into a province of Nepal and Sikkim (including the present District of Darjeeling) was retained as a buffer state between Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.(5)

Ten years later dispute once again arose between Sikkim and Nepal, which according to the Treaty of Titalia, were referred to the Governor General. Accordingly in 1828 Captain Lloyd was deputed to settle the dispute. Along with Mr. J.W.Grant, the Commercial Resident at Malda, he came to the Hills and was attracted by the position of Darjeeling.(6)

From a Report dated 18th June 1829, in which he claims to have been the only European, who visited the place. We learn that Lloyd visited 'the old Gorkha Station called Darjeeling', for six days in Feb. 1829 and 'was immediately struck with it being well adapted for the purpose of a sanatorium' (he was apprehensive of the winters suggested Ging).

Lord Bentinck promptly deputed Capt. Herbert to examine and map the tract of land along with Grant with special reference to its strategic and communication benefits. Their Reports proved the feasibility of establishing a sanatorium in Darjeeling.(7) General Lloyd was accordingly deputed to start negotiations with the Raja of Sikkim for the transfer of Darjeeling in return for an equivalent in money or land. The negotiations ended in the execution by the Raja of Sikkim of a Deed of Grant on the 1st of Feb. 1835.

DEED - 'The Governor General, having expressed his desire for possession of the Hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, the Sikkim puttee Raja, out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Co. that is, all the land South of the Great

Rangeet River, East of the Balason, Kahail and Little Rangeet rivers and West of the Rungno and Mahanadi Rivers'.

Thus, Darjeeling was gifted to the Britishers. This was an unconditional cessation of what was then a worthless uninhabited mountain. The land gifted to East India Co. in 1835 did not comprise the whole present Darjeeling. It was narrow enclave of 138 square miles, about 30 miles long and 6 miles wide. It was entirely surrounded by the Raja's dominions - entry and exit being restricted to a narrow path, which included the sites of Darjeeling and Kurseong towns and touched the plains near Pankhabari.(8)

Nepal and Bhutan, alarmed at British presence in the Himalaya accused Sikkim of selling out to the foreigners. Tibet, instigated by China, did not look favourably to British presence in the Sikkim Himalayas.

Having acquired the Hill Territory of Darjeeling, Gen. Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to explore the tract, to ascertain the nature of the climate and to investigate the capabilities of the place. (9)They spent the winter of 1836 and a part of 1837 here and on the basis of their report it was decided to adopt Darjeeling as a sanatorium.

By 1840 a road was built from Pankhabari and staging bungalows built at Pankbabari and Mahaldiram. A hotel was started at Kurseong and one at Darjeeling. In Darjeeling itself about 30 private houses were erected.

In spite of all these, most of the tract that now comprise Darjeeling consisted of uninhabited impenetrable virgin forests. So the major problem faced by the administration was total native settlers.(10)

In 1839, Dr. Campbell, the Br. Resident in Nepal was transferred to Darjeeling as Superintendent. He devoted himself to the task of developing the station, attracting immigrants to cultivate the mountain slopes and stimulating trade and commerce. (11).Every encouragement was given to the settlers, who received grants of forest land and the success with which life met can be gauged by the fact that the population rose from not more than 100 in 1839 to about 10,000 in 1849, chiefly by immigrants from the neighbouring states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, where Rajas were despotic and where slavery was prevalent. No one has cared to examine the source from where this figure has been derived. When Dr. Campbell made this remark, he was talking of the area around Observatory Hill or Mahakal, which contained

about 20 hills because the area had been deserted by a large number of Lepchas who had migrated to Nepal.

In the meantime, British and Sikkim relations soured. The Raja of Sikkim was a mere cipher in the hands of the powerful Pagla Dewan (PM). The increasing importance of Darjeeling under free institutions was a constant source of jealousy and annoyance to the Diwan. According to Sir Joseph Hooker 'every obstacle was thrown in the way of a good understanding between Sikkim and the British Government'.(12) When in 1849 the Pagla Dewan arrested Campbell and Hooker, the British sent a fugitive expedition against Sikkim in 1850. An annual grant of Rs. 6,000 was stopped and the British annexed 640 square miles of additional territory from Sikkim. It comprised the entire 'Sikkim Morung or Terai' i.e. the Siliguri sub-division and in the hills ' the whole southern part of Sikkim, between the Great Rangeet and the plains of India, and from Nepal on the west to the Bhutan frontier and the Teesta river on the east'(13)

In 1861 (1st Feb.) Col. Gowler and Ashley Eden marched from Darjeeling and reached the Sikkimese capital of Tumlong. The Diwan fled and the old Raja abdicated in favour of his son. On March 28th 1861, Ashley Eden signed a treaty with the new Raja. This treaty was of great

advantage to Darjeeling as it ended the annoyances caused to its inhabitants and secured full freedom for commerce.(14) A road from Darjeeling to Teesta was constructed. Sikkim undertook to complete the remaining part.

In the meantime trouble arose with the adjoining state of Bhutan. The Bhutanese were constantly raiding and plundering the areas of Darjeeling. There was also rumors of a planned attack on Darjeeling. In 1863, Ashley Eden was deputed to negotiate with Bhutan. The British envoy was openly insulted and returned to Darjeeling. (15)In the winter of 1864, a military force was dispatched to Bhutan and the whole of Bhutan Duars was captured. In Nov. 1864, the treaty of Sinchula was executed in which the Bhutan Duars with the passes leading into the hills and Kalimpong were ceded to the British. The Darjeeling district can be said to have assumed its present shape and size in 1866 is 1234 sq. miles.

In fact, the year 1866 marks an epoch in the History of Darjeeling, peace was established on all fronts, hence began the march to progress and civilization.

Darjeeling is the Queen of Hills. Among the spectacular snow covered mountains at an altitude of 2134 m the Darjeeling hill station was founded by the British in 1835 with a military cantonment and a health sanitarium. Tea plantation had started around 1850s and the British also introduced various flowers and fruits to the area. It had grown in stature which is incomparable in the world and the grand name of Darjeeling tea is now well established all over the world. The word Darjeeling comes from the Tibetan words "Dorje" meaning the thunderbolt of Indra, the king of Gods and "Ling" meaning a place or land. Thus "Dorje-Long" means the land of thunderbolts. So goes the history.

So far as the old records are concerned, Tibetan monks from 1757 to 1763 completed building a Buddhist Monastery on the flat land atop the observatory Hill as a branch of the Pemiongchi Monastery in Sikkim. (16)The chief abbot of this newly built monastery was named after Rinzing Dorji Legden La, (Nicholas & Deki Rhodes: A Man of the Frontier, S.W. Laden La 1876-1936, His Life & Times in Darjeeling & Tibet, 2006) so the Tibetans called it "Dorji-Ling (Ling-house or abode or monastery) meaning "the place where Dorji lives".

The observatory Hill was the highest point on the Darjeeling Ridge and attracted an awful thunder & lightning during the monsoon storms so



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the name Dorji-Thunderbolt & Ling-house or abode or the place of the thunderbolt became the meaning of the name Darjeeling.

As records show that Darjeeling was under the domain of Raja of Sikkim, a petty ruler who had been struggling against the growing power of Gurkhas of Nepal. They intruded Sikkim in the year 1780 after over running the hills & valleys of Nepal.(17)

Finally, they annexed the eastern part of Sikkim near river Tista, Tarai belt lying near river Mechi, which is now covered with valuable tea-garden areas of the Darjeeling planters. However, the extension of Darjeeling was included only in the beginning of 19th century by the East India Company.(18)

In the year 1814 the war broke out between the Nepalese & the British army & they again reinstated the raja of Sikkim who had been driven out of his throne through the treaty of Titalyain 1817.

By virtue of this Treaty the Raja's sovereignty was guaranteed by the Company & the area from river Mechi to river Tista covering an area of 4,000 sq. miles was restored under him thus, the intervention of the British was successful in preventing the Gurkhas from intruding Sikkim, & the hill areas of west & southern part of river Tista. Thus, Sikkim, & the present

district of Darjeeling was retained as a buffer state between Nepal & Bhutan.(19)

As per record, the people of Darjeeling hills came into contact with the British and with Bengal subsequently through the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-1816 and through the signing of Treaty of Titaliya with Sikkim in the year of 1817.

Until the end of the year 1816, the hills of Darjeeling and Tarai areas up to Phansedewa & Naxalbari was under the kingdom of Sikkim, & no king and no Nawab of Bengal ever ruled and exercised any kind of power over the Darjeeling Hills and surrounding plain areas in history. (20) Infact, Darjeeling by default through the lapse of British paramountcy became the part of Bengal only after the independence of India from British Raj in the year 1947.

The East India Company assumed the paramount power in Sikkim through the treaty and any disputes between Sikkim and Nepal and any other neighboring countries would be referred to British Government. But ten years after the treaty was signed the dispute broke out between Sikkim & Nepal frontier. (21)The first British General, Captain Lloyd visited Darjeeling for six days and through his report in 18th June, 1829, "the old Gorkha station was called Dorjeling"and "was immediately struck with its

being well adapted for the purpose of the sanitarium". Governor General, Lord William Bentinck sent Captain Herbert, then Deputy Surveyor-General, to examine the country with Mr. Grant. Soon after their visit the Court of Directors of the Company decided to make Darjeeling a valuable depot for the temporary reception of European recruits and a permanent cantonment for a European regiment in the area.(22)

By 1840 a road had been constructed by the Company from Pankhabari & the Company made their bungalow there & in Mahaldiram; a hotel was started in Kurseong & in Darjeeling & some 30 private houses & more houses were constructed in Lebong.

Geographical location:

So far as the geographical location is concerned, Darjeeling district lies between 26 degrees 31 minutes & 27 degree 13 minutes north latitude, & between 87 degrees 59 minutes & 88 degrees 53 minutes east longitude. It has total area of 1,164 sq. miles. the main town & the administrative head-quarters of this district is situated in the lower Himalayas of 27 degree 3 minutes & 88 degree 16 minutes east longitude. It is a frontier district which runs between Nepal, Bhutan & the plain areas of west Bengal in the south & Sikkim on its north. It ranges at an altitude of 300 to 12,000 feet above sea-level.

Darjeeling is situated in the northern hill districts of west Bengal which is subdivided in two parts, Terai and hill areas. (23)The Hilly region of Darjeeling comprises three subdivisions, Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong and the Terai consists of Siliguri subdivision.

Kalimpong, a small town which in Lepcha language means 'Ridges where we play' is a hill station & sub – division of Darjeeling district. It covers an area of 1056.5 sq kms (approx.) & the main town spreads over an area of 4 to 5 kms (app) is situated at an altitude of 1250mts. Kalimpong Till 1864, was under the domain of Bhutan, but after the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1864-65, the Siniolchu treaty was signed after which kalimpong was taken over by the East India Company. (24)Earlier kalimpong was the 'Gateway to Tibet' but with the Chinese aggression in Tibet in 1962 the trades through the Jelep La pass ceased. Eventually, kalimpong's economy depends on Flower Nurseries private schools, schools started by Christian Missionaries since from British Raj.

Kurseong is situated at an altitude of 1458 mts (4860ft.), Kurseong is 51 km from Siliguri and 30 km from Darjeeling. The word Kurseong means (the place of White Orchid. Because of its lower elevation, Kurseong enjoys milder and very healthy climate throughout the year.)

It is the beauty, peace, serenity and the pleasant climate that attracted many great persons to visit this place. Infact, some of the famous poems and songs of great poet Rabindranath Tagore were composed in Kurseong. Abanindranath, the magic painter, Tagore and great composer Atul Prasad Sen got inspiration for some of their famous works in the beautiful Kurseong. The great disciple of Swami Vivekananda Sister Nivedita, made Kurseong her home. Mark Twain spent some time in Kurseong in 1885, Fazlul Haque the Prime Minister of undivided Bengal also stayed here. Netaji Subash Chandra Bose was interned by the colonial government for a couple of months in 1936 in a house at Giddapahar near Kurseong.(25)

1.3 Regionalism as a Concept

The word Regionalism is a comprehensive term having various connotations. There is enormous ambiguity among different scholars in this field to define the term regionalism in a specific and accurate way. Some scholars referred it as the tendency to assign to the region a greater value in comparison with the nation - a tendency that is concretely expressed in cultural, linguistic, economic, political and administrative terms¹. Hence, it is a sense of identity that develops within a region, which leads to regional consciousness among the people living in that particular

region. Regionalism is accompanied with various issues like provincial autonomy, administrative decentralization, a kind of local ownership, and local patriotism. It is originated against the problem of excessive centralization of power. Therefore, in this sense, regionalism is a special kind of obligation to a specific geographical area in which the inhabitants of that particular area possess a special type of identity. Iqbal Narain in his Book "Regionalism: A Conceptual Analysis in the Indian Context" stated that in the Indian context regionalism is an ambiguous concept. It has two different connotations, one is negative and other is positive. In negative sense, regionalism is a concept developed among the inhabitants who considered themselves as the deprived sections of the country in relation to the whole country. These deprivations generally arise out of the negligence of the government officials those who are responsible for implementing the national developmental policy. On the contrary, in its positive sense, regionalism implies an idea of searching the self-identity of the people of that particular area. In other sense, it is rather a separate demand for protecting and preserving racial, linguistic and economic interest of a group of people belonging to a nation. In fact, regionalism originates among the group of people of a particular area owing to their separate racial, linguistic, economic and cultural consciousness. In this context, the scholars in this field have also given emphasis on studying the

different aspects of regionalism like linguistic regionalism, economic regionalism, and political regionalism. According to Webster's Dictionary, "Regionalism is nothing more than a consciousness of and loyalty to a distinct sub-national or supra-national area, usually characterized by a common culture, background or interest"².

Therefore, Regionalism, stands for self-determination on the basis of race, language, kinship and religion. It is a kind of nationalism blended with parochialism. The regionalist groups often try to establish hegemony over a particular geographical area or territory in order to protect their common interests and thereby want to establish a sovereign state or demanding a separate statehood. It is often found that regionalist groups are generally united on ethnic lines. But regionalism is not regarded as ethnicity because ethnic group generally belongs to a particular race or group. In this context, the Gorkha Land Movement in Darjeeling district of West Bengal is basically an ethnic movement. On the contrary, the Jharkhand movement is purely a regional movement. Because Jharkhand movement is organized by the various ethnic groups for separate statehood. But the Gorkhaland movement is organized by a particular community or more clearly the Nepalese community living in Darjeeling. In this sense, the ethnic movement and the regional movement are not synonymous in character in the true sense of the term.

To be precise, Regionalism, in fact, is a parochial ethno-centrism. It is rather a movement of a Sub-nationality against a dominant nationality. It is often characterized by a particular racial, linguistic or religious group settled in a particular part of the country which demands either separation or sovereignty of special constitutional, administrative, economic or political status for themselves to the exclusion of the rights and interest of other communities and takes recourse to necessary political measures with a view to coercing the authorities to accede to their demands, then that movement is certainly a regionalist movement. Hence, regionalism is the other name of particularistic and exclusivist political movement having no broad based liberal and democratic elements. The Regional movement is also considered as the 'divisive trend detrimental to national unity'. In popular parlance, it is supposed to be a synonym of provincialism, which breeds localism, isolationism and separatism³.

It should be stated that regionalism is not always regarded as parochial anti-national movements. Historically it is found that the Regional forces played a very glorified role against the anti-imperialist forces to liberate the country on the basis of nationalist movement. It often fights against the oppressed forces of the chauvinist big nations. These types of anti-imperialist movements helped to develop and inculcate the democratic values among the nationalist forces of a nation.

In fact, the regional forces under imperialist rule acted as a cementing bond against the nation building. But after independence, these regional forces no longer remained united and tried to weaken the national unity by adopting parochial regional interest which has now become a major obstacle to the very basis of the Indian nation. It is because after independence, the regional forces become conscious of their social, political, economic interests and at the same time, these forces also become aware of their racial, linguistic and religious interests. This consciousness among a particular group leads to unite themselves against the dominant sections of the society. Regionalism is thus a movement against social, political and economic deprivations and it is also a movement against the hegemonic groups who are dominant in the mainstream of the country as a whole.

It is pertinent to note that sometimes regionalism may also be regarded as the movement arising out of the identity crisis. In a multinational country, various nationalist groups interacting with each other to cope with the changing socio-political and economic situations. The dominant groups can easily adopt themselves with the changing environment of the society. But the minor groups have often suffered from a fear-psychosis. The fear psychosis is nothing but a possibility of intermingling with other dominant groups. So there arises a kind of

identity crisis among the minority sub-national groups. They began to protect and preserve their own language, culture, heritage, race, religion on the basis of their own way and understanding. This particular group specifies a particular area as their own and demanding autonomy for that purpose. So identity crisis may often lead to the creation of regional movements and the sentiment of regionalism in a country or at a particular region.

It is important to note that regionalism in India, in its present form, has various connotations like 'provincialism', 'localism', 'son of the soil theory', 'disintegration of Indian states', struggle for separate statehood or provincial autonomy, struggle for more power, especially economic power etc. whatever may be the connotations, the concept of regionalism has now become a separatists movement in different parts of India in various forms. The whole India is now infected with regional upsurge of different kinds like geographical regionalism, linguistic regionalism, cultural regionalism, ethnic regionalism and so on.

It must be said that it is really difficult to provide an accepted definition of regionalism. However, some kind of separatist movements or upsurges in respect of geography, language, religion, culture, and ethnicity may be termed as regionalism. Sometimes regionalism is defined as a

demand for a separate state. Though such type of regionalism is often described as parochialism which is leading to the idea of national disintegration. As a result of such provincialism, the present state formation process is going on. No one can deny the fact that after independence, there were only 15 States and 11 Union Territories but at present, there are 28 States and 6 Union Territories. Therefore, the process of state formation of Indian states is going on. In this process of state formation, various factors are responsible. Among them, regionalism is also considered as one of the vital factors in this process. Of the society.

It is seen that from the very inception, it has been found that India is a country of many languages, religion, ethnicity, culture and geographical variations. That is why India is called as the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. The multi-culturalism is the very basis of the Indian nation. India maintains its national unity in diversity. The diverse character of Indian nationality is often disturbed by various types of local sentiments arising out of diverse kinds of national deprivations. These deprivations are mainly economic under development, unemployment problems of local youth, uneven regional development, exploitation of State by the Centre, over taxation of the state etc. These deprivations among the local people gradually lead to a separatist sentiment, which is ultimately manifested as regional

movement. It is therefore clear that the regional movement in India is not simply arising because of regional imbalances; it is rather arising out of various reasons. Some scholars, however, have opined that the roots of present day regionalism in India in different forms are mainly due to the British rulers who occupied and ruled over the Country for more than 200 years. The imperialist ruler had united India under one administrative system to achieve their colonial purpose.

As it is seen that the present state of regionalism in India is rather a threat to the national unity. India is now infected with regional upsurge in its various manifestations. In the North-Eastern part of the country, there are Mizo and Naga militants who are demanding separate state on regional lines. NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) and NAGALIM etc. are also demanding separate state for Nagas. In Assam, there are various separatists groups now operating for separate statehood like AASU, AAGSP, and AGP etc. In Lower Assam, the ULFA militants are demanding sovereign state of Assam. Bodo Land is also demanded by the Boros. In West Bengal the GNLFF, the KPP, the Greater Cooch Behar etc. are also striving for separate statehood on the basis of language, economic deprivations etc. In Bihar, the Jharkhand State has already created on regional sentiments. In Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir etc. all states in the Indian Union are now

facing the problem of regionalism either from linguistic lines or from economic developmental prospects. In Gujarat and Maharashtra there is also regional movement in respect of the regional demands. Therefore, a kind of separatist movement is now common in all states in India.

An attempt has been made in to identify the root of regional movements in India with the help of the following points:

- (I) Regionalism - A Conceptual framework,
- (II) Concept of Regionalism in Pre-colonial India mainly under The Mughals,
- (III) Regionalism and the British Colonial Rule,
- (IV) Post-colonial state of Regionalism – A Legacy,
- (V) Manifestations of various Regional movements in India and their nature:

Regionalism in Pre-Colonial India

As we know that the Concept of regionalism is not new in India. From the very inception of the Indian society, it is found that the problem of regionalism was imbedded in the ancient and middle ages of our country. The contemporary rulers of this country became eminent on the basis of separate socio-cultural identity. The 'Puranas' are considered as

the important source of ancient Indian history. In these 'puranas' it is stated that there were different 'Janapadas' in ancient India. The geographical description of Indian Territory has been found in the 'Bayu Puranas'. In 'Bayu Puranas' it is described that ancient India was geographically divided into several large regions having 165 'Janapadas'. These 'Janapadas' were composed of different race, language, culture and heritage. Each 'Janapada' had separate geographical identity and specific boundary. Each 'Janapada' had distinct character of racial origin and socio-political, economic and linguistic differences. Historically, it is also found that there were constant struggles and battles among these 'Janapadas' for supremacy. As a result, a large number of 'Janapadas' gradually became 16 'Mahajanapadas' mainly in North India having different race, language, cultures and heritage. These 16 'Mahajanapadas' later on came under the direct rule of Kosala, Avanti, Vatsa and Magadha during the 6th century B.C. After a ceaseless struggle for supremacy among these four 'Mahajanapadas', Magadha gradually rose to power in North India under the dynasties of Harsyanka, Shaisunag and Nanda and Magadha emerged as a unitedly big empire in North India. But Chandragupta Mourya brought this empire of North India under the direct control of his kingdom with the help of Kautilya by overthrowing Dhanananda and became the first historic ruler in ancient India. After the Nanda dynasty, Mourya dynasty came to

power and the unification of different 'Mahajanapadas' tuned into a single country under the reign of Chandragupta Mourya.

Naturally, the diversity in language, race, and religion was common in Indian society from the very beginning. So the regionalism and the regional movements had its origin in the ancient Indian society. During the Mughal period, the Indian society was divided into several 'Suba' or Pradesh on the basis of similar language and socio-cultural affinities. This administrative structure on the basis of socio-cultural similarity have been discussed in detail by Abul Fajal in his 'Ayan-I-Akbari' and 'Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri'. From this standpoint, it is said that during the Mughal period, the regional division of India had been done on the basis of judging the socio-cultural togetherness among the people of that region. As a result, the instances of regional upsurge were not so prominent in the Mughal rule. Nevertheless, the regional movements had occurred even in the reign of Mughal rulers. It must be said that these regional movements had different character. Often, these movements were limited to a specific regional area and having racial and religious character. Apart from two or three instances, there was no such great regional upsurge during the Mughal period. Though there were the instances of religious turmoil in Mughal India between the Muslims and the Hindus. However, those types of turmoil may often be termed as the religious regionalism. But after the

downfall of the Mughal Empire, Indian Territory was captured by the imperialist British Rulers who ruled this country for more than 200 years to achieve their imperialist goal. During the British period, the Indian Territory was again reorganized by them on different administrative lines for a better administration.

The idea of Regionalism and the British Rule

There is no denying the fact that the British came to India basically as an imperialist ruler. Their ultimate purpose was to rule the country in order to achieve their commercial or business purpose. They, after occupying the whole territory of India, started to re-structure the country on the basis of administrative advantage. They did not consider the basic needs and aspirations of the Indian people. They adopted various policies to disintegrate India from within. They could understand that the Hindus and the Muslims are the two dominant religious groups in India. These two groups were to be separated on religious line otherwise their unity would be a threat to the British imperialism. That is why; they adopted the policy of 'divide and rule'. The colonial rulers adopted their own system of education, national market, development of transport and communication, trade and commerce without considering the needs and aspiration of the native Indians. As a result, there arose different types of

dissatisfaction among the Indians against the British rule. These 'awakened nationalities', wrote A.R.Desai, 'have also been developing their own languages, building up their own literatures, starting their own universities, creating their own national theatres and reviving their own cultures. Andhras, Maharashtrians, Karanatakis and some other nationalities have also established their own chamber of commerce⁴.

Although British rule in India became able to unify the heterogeneous society into a single political entity but in fact, the diverse cultural set up could not be mingled together during the British regime. The Britishers adopted a strong administrative set up in order to rule the country. As a matter of fact, the Indian unity has apparently become successful under the British rule. In this context, **Boris I Kluyev** rightly pointed out that "British imperialism forcibly united India within its colonial empire and internally divided and separated it so deeply and so skillfully as no other forces in the history of the sub-continent could have done"⁵. Therefore, the British imperialist rulers followed such a policy of administrative divisions of the country as to endanger conflict between people of different nationalities, the Assamese against the Bengalis, the Tamils against the Telegus, and the Bengalis against the Oriyas etc.⁶. 'Thus the strained national relations exist in the country today', writes Khuyev, 'are, to a great extent, the result of the 'accumulation' by the population

of national sentiments and contradictions created during the British rule in India⁷.

Since the British people exhibited the colonial character, the British were simply plundering the national wealth for the sake of the economic development of Great Britain. This plundering of wealth leads to uneven economic development in the Country. The British were mainly concerned about the development of the metropolises. As a result, the large sections of the Indian nationals became deprived and having no other alternative, they started to ventilate their anger and anguish against the British rule. The first of its type was the Espy Mutiny in 1857. Though it was a mutiny led by the Sepoys in the British army but it was rather a tip of an iceberg. The Indian society provided a moral booster to this Espy Mutiny. It was rather an organized effort to overthrow the British rule from India. That is why; some historians called it "the first struggle for national independence". Though the mutiny failed due to the unorganized effort of the sepoys but the British had taught a great lesson from that mutiny. The British tried to disintegrate the mutiny form within. So they tried to confine the Espy Mutiny to a specific geographical area simply because of the fear that the whole nation might be engulfed with the revolt. For these reasons, some historians describe the 1857 Espy Mutiny as the Pan-Indian

movement though it was manifested through the Sepoys in the British military segment.

After the Sepoy Mutiny, the British rule in India got a drastic change. The company's rule came to an end and Victorian regime started in India with the help of a Governor General. But the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 haunted the British rulers for the last 100 years. They started to identify the causes and consequences of the mutiny. From this mutiny, they taught a lesson, which made them to change the previous policy of ruling the country simply on imperialist line. They started to study the Indian society very intricately so that the total fabric of the society could be known to them. On the basis of that study, they initiated a social engineering in order to control the regional moments in different parts of the country. They described the regionalism and regional movements as religions fanaticism and always tried to confine the movement within specific areas so that they can easily control the movements within a short span of time.

On the basis of the social engineering, the British initiated a drastic change in the armed forces. They started to create caste-based army instead of race-based army. Before mutiny, it was found that indigenous army constituted the 80% of Hindus, Brahmins and Rajputs and 15% of

Musalmans. But after the mutiny, the British Government created the army regiment on the basis of caste and a clear cut distinction was made between each and every regiment. In case of social fabric, they used the terms like loyal Talukdars, faithful Gorkhas, and valiant Shiks etc. As a result, a new fillip was initiated by the British to instigate the regional movements in India.

It should be stated that the British could understand very well that Indian unity was a direct threat to their imperialist rule in India. That is why; they started ethnographic study since 1960 to study the Indian society and regional disparities. From this ethnographic study, they collected and gathered very important information about the Indian caste system. The ethnographic study helped them to know what regional group is hostile to another. In this way, they started to play a vicious game of instigating one regional group against the other. They also started census in order to have detailed information about the demographic elements of the country. With the help of this **census** report, they tried to find out the upward and downward social mobility among different caste groups. Such academic exercise made them able to continue the imperialist rule in this country in a stable manner. The purpose of all these exercises are nothing but to maneuver the imperialist rule in this country. They followed the binary contradictions between nationalism and imperialism. In order to

overcome such binary contradictions, they adopted the policy of coalition strategy within the multi-class coalitions. Therefore, during the British imperialist rule in this country, the British rulers undertook no favourable attitude so that India could become a uniform nation on the basis of race, language, caste, creed, culture and heritage. The ultimate purpose of the imperialist ruler was to divide the Indian society in such a way that could help the British to continue the exploitation of Indian mass in a longer period. No comprehensive and cohesive policy was found to be adopted by the British ruler to develop the Indian people socially, politically and economically. As a result, after the post colonial period various manifestations of regional movements had been visualized at the national level as well as at the state level. Now India is a country of many regional movements either on race, language, ethnicity, cultural and economic under developments etc.

The state of Post-Colonial Regionalism

From the foregoing discussion, it may easily be said that the post colonial state of regionalism is basically a colonial legacy because the process of regional disparities was consciously manipulated by the British imperialist rulers to divide the country inherently from within. After independence, the regional sentiment as it was created by British rose its

ugly heads over the secular forces of the Indian nation. First of this kind of movement was the demand for the reorganization of the Indian states on linguistic basis. There created "we" feeling among the Indian nation on the basis of linguistic affinity, which was invariably opposing the concept of "them". As a result, the seeds of dissension, detachment, alienation and separation among different linguistic communities arose at the national level. Not only that the language factor was intermingled with other factors like social, political, economic, religious and caste interests. So it created an enormous scope of regional movement and regional elements among the Indian nationalities. It is also a fact that in India there are 1652 spoken language out of which 24 have been given constitutional status and the other languages have potentiality of creating regional sentiments among the Indian nationalities.

However, after the attainment of independence, attempts have been made on the part of the Indian people to create linguistic provinces. The demand to set up linguistic provinces began in the first part of the 19th century. It had played a positive role during the British imperialist rule but it had become rather a disturbing one in the post colonial period. The demand for forming one language one state was no longer considered as the acceptable phenomenon for the unity of the country. In order to solve the problem of linguistic province, a commission was set up with justice

Dar as the chairman to examine the issue. The commission suggested, "the formation of provinces exclusively, or even mainly, on linguistic considerations is not in the larger interest of the Indian nations, and should not be taken in hand".⁸ The three member committee did not thought it important so far as the national unity was concerned. But the constant demand for reorganization of state on linguistic basis by Andhra Pradesh made the Government to form another committee which was known as the Linguistic Reorganization Committee in the year of 1953.

It should be pointed out that the Linguistic Reorganization Committee also accepted the linguistic principle and on the basis of the recommendation of the committee, the Indian federation was reorganized on a linguistic basis. However, the creation of linguistic states strengthened the hands of the regional bourgeoisie. They now began to establish close ties with the dominant linguistic, communal and caste groups in order to strengthen and consolidate their position in the field of decision-making and power politics at the provincial level. This resulted in a shift in the Country's political life from an all India to a regional orientation facilitating the growth of regionalization of Indian politics⁹.

Moreover, the establishment of a strong union with subsidiary federal features was also greatly responsible for the regional movements in the country. In the Constituent Assembly it was decided that in order to have strong union, it is necessary to centralize power at the hands of the center. That is why, though India is a federal country in structural sense but the word federation is nowhere written in the constitution. Instead it is stated that 'India, that is, Bharat shall be a union of states'. So India is not a federal state but a union of all states. The framers of the Constitution tried to make a strong union considering the possibility of disintegrating the country in different regions. It is also a fact that 70% of the taxes collected go to the hands of central Government and only 30% remains at the states. But the tragedy is that the states bear the 60% of the total expenditure in the country. It makes the states to be dependent on the Center in economic sphere. From this point of view, it is stated that the states are now going to be crippled with the economic burden on the one hand and the weakness of the states in the economic field has very ample scope to meet the needs and aspirations of the people. As a result, there has been an enormous scope of uneven economic development in the country, which ultimately leads to various types of regionalism or regional movements responsible to disintegrate the country in its national sphere as a whole.

However, the regional movements erupted in India in those states which had long -standing grievances related to unbalanced growth. Colonial economic development was greatly responsible for this because during the colonial period, the development was chiefly concentrated to the presidency towns and the rest of the country was suffering from utter poverty and less development owing to colonial policy of the British regime. The uneven development of capitalism had led to regional concentration of industrial development. The Hazare report on industrial planning and licensing policy, 1967, pointed out that most of the Marwari, Gujrati and Parsi investment was concentrated in the three states of Maharashtra, West Bengal and Madras¹⁰.

Apart from these, the role of the Finance Commission and Planning Commission is not worth mentioning so far as the uniform economic development throughout the country is concerned. The Finance Commission was appointed to reduce the regional economic inequalities considering the fund allocations to the states. The Planning Commission, enjoys more power than the Finance Commission, do not recommend the resource transfer from the Center to the States, which are striving for economic development. Moreover, the capitalist growth of development leads to the uneven economic growth among the states simply instigating the regional disparities in India.

Nature of Regional movements in India

It is evident that at present, India is pregnant with various regional upsurges and therefore, there are various manifestations of regional movements. From Gujrat to Arunachal Pradesh and from Jammu-Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, each and every state is now facing the problem of regionalism either as a direct threat or as an indirect threat. In Jammu and Kashmir, though National Conference Govt. assumed power but the All Party Huriat Conference and other extremist groups have been demanding self-rule and self-government in Kashmir. So, in Kashmir the regional movement is in a very ugly state of affairs.

The situation in the North-Eastern States is so explosive that any kind of turmoil may emerge at any moment. The Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Garos and other tribal people living in these regions, are demanding separate states on the basis of their distinct identity. In Assam, the All Assam Students Union (AASU), All Assam Sangram Parisad (AAGSP), Assam Gana Parisad, (AGP), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), etc., all of them are demanding either self-rule or autonomy or special privileges for their upliftment. Sometime these forces become so volatile that there happens a colossal loss of lives and government property.

In West Bengal, the GNLFF, the KPP, the Greater Cooch Behar Movements are so prominent that there is every possibility to disrupt the peace and tranquility of the state at any moment. The KLO has made a link with the ULFA in Assam and started various disruptive and sabotage to disturb the normal life of the state. Their demands are also self-rule, separate state, economic development, linguistic status, inclusion of their region in the Sixth Schedule etc.

Not only that there are various other examples of Regional Movements like Uttarkhand, Bundelkhand, Jharkhand, Vidarbhas Khand, Boroland, Karbianglong, Garoland, Bhilland etc. All these regional movements are demanding separate states on the basis of their language, race, culture, economic development, etc. Tamil Nadu, Andhrapradesh, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab are also facing the problems of regional movements on the same lines. So it has been found that the regional problems are now a major problem of India. In fact, there is also no other alternative to solve the problem simply on administrative lines. Some experts have opined that these regional movements are nothing but the formation of states on racial, linguistic and cultural lines. It is also true that the nation-building process is still going on in India. In this nation-building process, the states are still reorganizing themselves in their own ways. Probably, the way is the one language one state syndrome.

However, it is also true that during the present state of reorganization of state or state formation process the unity and integrity of the country has the possibility to be disturbed but peculiarly it is also found that these regions, though demanded for self rule and autonomy, but they are not demanding to disintegrate themselves from the Indian union. Except some two or three cases, all regional movements in India are mainly concerned with the demands of self rule, autonomy, more economic powers, economic dependency, and special provisions for economic upliftment, reservation policy, and inclusion of the state in the Sixth Schedule etc. From this point of view, it may be estimated that this regional movements is rather a mono-cultural, mono-racial, mono-ethnic movements. So the multi-cultural essence of the country is going to be gradually tarnishing its image due to intolerance among the Indian people. The unity in diversity is also very much endangered by such regional upsurge. But the essence of the country's unity and integrity should be maintained only through the principle of multi-culturalism. But development of mono-culturalism, mono-lingualism, will definitely disturb the national sentiment of the country and it will pave the way for the foreign forces to disintegrate India from its territorial background.

It may be stated that regionalism in India, is a Colonial legacy of the British imperialist rulers who did not consider it necessary to uproot the

problem as it was favouring them to continue their rule in this country for a longer period. The British imperialist rulers rather instigated the problem of regionalism in such a way that one region could become antagonistic against the other regional groups. They did not think it necessary to give emphasis on the parallel economic growth of the country. They are mainly concerned with the economic growth of the presidential towns and exploited the country to furnish the economic development of Great Britain. Dadabhai Naoroji's 'Un-British Rule in India' and R. C. Dutt's 'Economic History of Bengal' exposed the economic character of British rule in India.

Dadabhai Naoroji's famous 'drain theory' described the British colonial administration as the great drain through which resources of India are transferred to Britain. Later, Jawaharlal Nehru in his 'Discovery of India' also stated that it was India which financed the Industrial Revolution in England. It was possible to provide capital necessary for industrial revolution by extracting surplus from India by economic administration and military means. G. Myrdal also admits that unfavourable conditions and under development in India, at present, is a result of onslaught of modernization from outside which integrated Indian economy into world capitalist economy¹¹. So the ultimate purpose of the British imperialist

rulers was to plunder the national wealth which leads to many problems among the masses of India.

After Independence, these regional imbalances through out India, was visualized in such a way that the present government is now unable to cope with the problem of regionalism. The manifestation of various Regional Movements in this country is mainly due to the uneven economic growth and development. This unbalanced economic growth inspired the people of a deprived region to assemble themselves on racial, linguistic, territorial, cultural lines. Apart from these, the Constitution makers did not pay due attention to consider the demands of the regional values and aspirations of the people for the sake of creating a strong central Government. As a result, the spurt of Regional Movement is gaining momentum day by day.

Moreover, the rise of the regional elite on the national scene aspiring for regional development, also leads to the development of regional movements. These regional elites, after being exploited for many years, find it important to form regional political parties to achieve the regional demands and aspirations of the people. The problem of regionalism in India is rather manifested in the later part of the 70s and 80s after the collapse of the one party dominance of the Congress and the

adoption of Coalition politics of many regional parties at the centre and some of the states in India. At present, the coalition politics is the only way to run the Central as well as State Governments. The rise of the Coalition Politics is definitely an indication of the dominant character of the regional political parties in different states of India.

On the other hand, the Capitalist way of development is another reason of regional imbalances leading to regional movements. The Indian Capitalists or ruling elites did not consider the national sentiments among the Indian people rather they concentrated chiefly on selected areas which also lead to uneven regional growth and imbalances suitable for regional movements in India.

Moreover, the role of the Finance Commission and Planning Commission is never worth mentioning viewing the fact that these two Commissions are not playing the positive role to reduce the regional disparities. The recommendation of the two Commissions are not favourable for States who are striving for economic development, rather their intentions were to strengthen the Central Government and the conditions of weak states remain same as before in spite of the liberal fund allocation policy adopted by the Central Government. So regionalism and regional upsurge is inherent in the Indian polity.

The word "Politics" has attracted attention of many theoreticians and other common people of different walks of life. Broadly speaking the term "Politics" denotes the existence of two other concepts like people and society. Politics can operate properly if there is a proper harmony among these three factors. It is true that with the changes in society, attitudes, values, norms or beliefs of individuals may undergo changes. It may also vary from society to society depending upon their location or value preference. But whatever may be the nature of variation the relations among the three are determined and controlled by the harmonious interactions. All actors within this pattern pay attention to the potentialities of these elements.

To be precise, Politics can be said a mechanism of achieving power, controlling it and manipulating the social relations in which they are expressed. Some of the forces may operate on the surface while others may not be visited. But whatever may be its nature, politics from the operational point of view should be looked upon as a process which influences the interaction of different factors in the society at large.

If we make a closer analysis of the nature of this problem will establish the fact that there has been a shift of emphasis in analyzing the nature of Indian Politics which again is the result of “a growing skepticism of the cultural assumptions on which the earlier models of development, economic growth and modernization were based.”¹ It has been very correctly observed that the debate is no longer narrowly political but ‘affects broader issues of identity and high politics of the state’.² In place of an emphasis on economic development or developmental paradigm, there has been a definite tilt towards ethnic or regional appeal, thereby changing the entire perception of politics or political exercise in the society in general.

A closer look to the concept of politics in India, it may be said that these changes are quite obvious and clear-cut. The first two decades after independence had witnessed a clear bias towards developmental and modernization process.

This was mainly due to the very nature of the infant state and the task the State had to accomplish. It is interesting to note that the scholars particularly

Indian Scholars, who were engaged in analyzing the role of the Indian State in the developmental affairs at the initial stage expressed hopes about

the role of the state in this process. But subsequent developments – both political and social (including economic) have established the fact that the desired objectives could not be achieved through the State itself. Moreover, in difficult situations, the Indian State began to assume a character which was not expected at all.

Attempt has been made to find out roots of the problems associated with regionalism. On a very careful examination, it appears that, on a social plane, there are many contradictions and these contradictions were responsible for creating cracks in the body politic. This phenomenon has further been aggravated by sharp disparities in the development process since independence. It may not be out of place here when one mentions that “Independent India, with its five year plans, its industrialization, its practice of democracy, has invested in change. There always was a contradiction between the archaism of national pride and the promise of the new: and the contradiction has at last cracked the civilization open. The turbulence in India this time has not come from foreign invasion or conquest; it has been generated from within. The crisis in India is not only political or economic.

” It is an all pervasive problem of the entire society. Due to this reason the basic problem of regionalism should be traced in the broader perspective society, economy and polity. It will be too simplistic to say that regionalism or

for that matter, regional demands are the results of mal-development on the economic front. It may be one of the causes, but cannot be treated as the only cause. There are other issues involved in it and these are so mutually independent and overlapping in nature that no clear cut compartmentalization is possible.

In fact, such an attempt might prove to be futile as there is no clear cut conclusion in this regard. It can be said that this is the crux of the entire problem – the problem of situating the issue of regionalism in the proper perspective. In Indian case, it appears that no straight Jacket formula can be applied or even if, applied, it would not be possible to arrive at any meaningful conclusion or any perfect decision in this regard.

In this connection we can make a brief reference to the western perceptions of Indian Politics may be mentioned. At least three problems arise out of the so-called 'western' perception of Indian Politics. In the first place, the very term 'Western' gives rise to a number of problems because even the Western

Scholars are not of the same opinion regarding the use of the term. Secondly, the nature of discourses in the western world is so varied and diverse that a simple categorization of them becomes almost difficult. Most of the scholars have tried to explain a particular issue from his or her own

perception, ideological preference or attitude towards the issue. The third and the most important problem arise out of the fast changing scenario and essential dynamism of the political problem. In other words, any discussion on the nature of political process should not only be culture-specific but also time-specific. In this context, a comparison between the working of the western democracies and the Indian democracy in general terms would be misleading because of historical, contextual, political or economic variations among different democratic systems of the world. In the Indian context, 'the contradictions between democracy and secularism on the one hand, and mass participation and order on the other, did not reveal themselves during the early years of independence.⁴ This was due to two factors namely the leadership of Nehru and others and the presence of the Indian National Congress as 'an intermediary that transposed itself between a traditional society and the modern State.'⁵

As a result, these contradictions within the Political Process since independence have passed serious threats before the Indian Polity in so far as its modernization and developmental effort were concerned. This problem has been conceptualized as a 'Stalemated modernisation' by Myron Weiner. In his own words:

“Since 1966, in all fields other than agriculture, India’s attempts to modernize had been stalemated. Even the dramatic strides that India made in the late 1960s in agriculture had been halted... Through 1974 and early 1975, there were reports from all over India reflecting the disarray in the economy. Six and a half million tribals in Bihar were said to be near starvation in late 1974.... Political and Social tensions were mounting.... Among both Indian and Western observers there was (end continued to be) a sense of foreboding : India could either move in the direction of a major political transformation....or alternatively, slide steadily into greater corruption, disorder and some form of ‘war lordism’, decentralized units of authority that resist central control”.⁶

It would be pertinent to point out that the contradiction became acute during 1970s and more precisely, during the days of political turmoil that led to the declaration of Emergency. In the opinion of some observers, though short-lived, the Emergency could provide some kind of ‘enduring’ character to some of its ‘draconian’ measures⁷. But the contradictions persisted even after the return of Mrs.Indira Gandhi in 1980. The politics of the 1980s can be said to have been dominated by religion, communal and caste- conflict and attempts to regional groups to establish their authority within their specified areas. It was in fact a battle for its mission to establish the control mechanism. It is known to all that contemporary Indian politics has been witnessing a

number of social and political movements, some of them demanding greater autonomy, while some other demanding greater assertion of regional or local identity. As a result of this social demand, the political system has been faced with serious problem – the problem of the survival of the system itself. The system is infested with multi various social, political and other problems.

It may be said that there are many forces and compulsions behind the assertion of regional identity which often lead to regionalization of politics. Although most of the issues centre round the political dimension, its manifestations are different and this difference varies with varying degrees depending on local issues which are in some places peculiar in character.

For this reason it is very difficult to formulate a uniform pattern behind the assertion of regional identity. The problem gets all the more complicated with the inclusion of other related issues like ethnicity and religious exclusiveness. At certain points the manifestations of these two factors become so hazy – that a clearline of demarcation between these two become next to impossible. It may be said that it is important in a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society like India. It is perhaps because of this that the post-independent political scenario in India has become so complex and delicate. Scholars are offering various explanations behind this complex nature of the Indian political process. Of course, none of them are conclusive

in this regard. It is pertinent at this point to note that regionalism, or for that matter regional tendencies may arise out of many factors.

Generally speaking, a society of India's magnitude has been divided into a number of castes, sub-castes, sects and sub-sects. Geographically stated there is heavy concentration of some ethnic or religious or linguistic groups in some parts of the country while in other parts there are cases of least concentration. This wide variation in the distribution of population has been one of the causes of social tension within the fabric of the Indian polity at large.

This aspect can be analysed as follows:

- (a) Linguistic Regionalism
- (b) Demand for Creation of New States
- (c) Demand for State Autonomy
- (d) Demand for Intra-Regional Autonomy within the States
- (e) Secessionist Movement and
- (f) Sons of the Soil Theory.

If we make a perfect analysis of the Indian political scenario in the proper perspective, it will reveal a trend of regional demand which appears along the line of linguistic demand. Demand for recognition arises from a

feeling of one language being dominated by the language of a dominant group. a situation may emerge where a case of secession may take place. Whether it is morally acceptable or physically practicable depends to a large extent, on a number of objective conditions.

These conditions may be of the following nature:

- (a) The group which wants to secede is not sufficiently large to assume the basic responsibilities of an independent state
- (b) It is not prepared to permit sub-groups within itself to secede although such secession is morally and practically possible
- (c) It wants to exploit or oppress a sub-group within itself which cannot secede in turn because of territorial dispersal or other reasons
- (d) It occupies an area not on the borders of the existing state so that secession would create an enclave
- (e) It occupies an area which culturally, economically or militarily essential to the existing state. It occupies an area which has a disproportionately
- (f) high share of the economic resources of the existing
- (g) state.

The problem has been sought to be analysed from another perspective also. It is a common belief among the people of the Third World countries that

there has been a total failure of the conventional models of development and many negative consequences have occurred as a result of these failures. This has created a 'negative' feeling among those people living at the peripheries which in turn, have given birth to regional demands. These demands get channelised through concerted social movements for greater autonomy and greater share in the development process. In this framework, a total integration is sought between democracy and development – a positive synthesis of ideas with praxis thereby, putting right weight ages to culture, values democracy and participation. The variety and richness of the cultural and socio-political context in which these movements and demands are emerging need to be analysed in depth. Although some form of generalization and possible but these vary at great length with the variation of the objective conditions. In order to understand the nature and impact of these movements, these are to be placed in the right perspective – perspective of regional disparities and diversities. Two factors demand closer scrutiny: first, the nature and extent of social change and its impact on the popular mind; second, the objective framework, the goal, the target group and the results achieved – all need to be analysed in the overall social, economic, political, intellectual and other imperative conditions.

Closely following this, comes another important issue – the problem of growth and human development. At least three aspects of the development process need to be looked into:

- (a) redistribution of social Justice,
- (b) widening the base of popular participation, and
- c) a continuous process of development activities more or less on equal basis.

In other words, for an all-round development, human resources along with other locally available resources should be extensively exploited. Recent studies on this phenomenon have shown that absence of proper attention to and simultaneous utilization of these forces may lead to uneven development and dissatisfaction which, in turn, may give birth to regional demands for greater social Justice, economic development and popular participation.¹⁶

This discussion leads one to examine the nature and extent of people's response since regional demands or for that matter regionalism may be looked upon as something like a concerted move towards a rejection of situation, either created or emerged out of mal-development. It is seen that people of late, are not prepared to accept exploitative or repressive political systems. It is equally true that in more of the cases, people are not willing to capture state power but they want to have greater 'say in the use of state-

power. Regional demands or for that matter regionalism as expressed through concerted people's movements may arise spontaneously or be initiated and multiplied by sensitive external or local agents for change.¹⁷ In states where there are wide contradictions crises in legitimacy and roots of instability, regional demands find it easy to get crystallized and articulated.¹⁸ The weak state-power may be the cause¹² as well as the result of regional disparities which ultimately serve as the basis of regionalism.¹⁹ It has been very correctly observed: "A well-articulated and coherent people-oriented strategy, even if pluralistic and rudimentary in theory, would be a progressive response to the new compulsions for social change and the crisis" that affect the very foundation of the political order.²⁰ Such a strategy should, it is observed recognize the contradictions and diversities of local regions while divising a long-term process of social change.² In recent years, it has been observed that lack of adequate attention to local needs has given birth to a number of local demands, often regard as the seed-bed of regionalism. In many cases, the manifestation of people's dissatisfaction has taken the shape of people's movements. These are generally led by charismatic leader, often take the form of protest movements, demanding greater power and autonomy for the region under question. Very often, these issue though the basic fabric of the cultural aspect of the society. It has been seen that in a number of cases a movement based on cultural considerations at the initial phase often turns

into an economic or political movement at a particular region. These issues are so much overlapping in nature that it becomes difficult to separate them in very clear terms. The task becomes more complex "because of both historical contradictions that have existed in these societies and the distortions in the mode of production, community spirit and consensus-making that set in as colonialism, modernization, industrialization, westernization and other external interventions and penetrations occurred."

²² Here comes another dimension of the problem: the problem of understanding people's responses in the over-all context of state-actions. In the event of failure to measure this, there might be a total "social collapse" very often preceded by sharp contradictions and bloody conflicts. In such cases minor adjustments or alternations at the structural or functional level of the political system may be insufficient and inadequate to solve the problem. In fact, the entire problem is to be viewed from a broader perspective, taking all related issues into consideration. A single protest movement may be insufficient to reverse the complex process of the past. There should be attempts to attain both qualitative and quantitative changes along the desired lines. At this point, the emerging theories of social change, may it be revolutionary radical, reformist or evolutionary should be applied after proper assessment of the situation and the nature of the demands of the particular region.

The need is to identify, analyse and establish linkage between macro-political movements and the micro-development experiments based on a coherent theoretical framework. The answers to this problem may be of two types: First, instead of specialized, single issue-oriented approach should be given up and instead, a broad-based comprehensive approach may be adopted at the initial phase; second, it is necessary to identify the emerging ideological elements in the context of general regional demands.²³ This brings to the fore the very crucial issue of the changing nature of the state. With the expansion of new horizons, newer and newer dimensions of state-activities have been taken over by the state. The multiple dimensions of state activity vis-à-vis its relationship with the civil-society have highlighted a number of inter-related issues and demanded greater coordination among them. In some cases, conflicts do take place between the old social order and the new political initiatives, even at the micro level of regional dimension.

There is a general feeling that most of the regional movements are anti-system movements. But this may not turn out to be in all cases. There may be regional movements which may have their direct impact on the day-to-day functioning of the system, instead of total replacement of the system as such.

These regional movements are organized and directed to challenge the general functioning of the state apparatus.

Side by side, there may be other types of regional movements which are launched with the primary aim of overthrowing the present system by establishing a new political order. In fact, these may even challenge the very 'centre of state power.

That is why, it is generally believed that in any discussion of regional movements in India, the role and position of the state would definitely draw on the attention of the researcher. The very nature of the state reveals a good number of features which are mostly found in liberal (bourgeois) state. There is a strong belief that India since independence has been following what is known as the capitalist path of development. The explanation from the point of view historical perspective also demands through investigation. Immediately, after independence, the native bourgeoisie has been forced to come "to terms with pre-capitalist social and political forces in order to establish its domination."²⁴

An interesting point deserves special mentioning in the study of regional demands in India. Because of its long association with the British imperialist power and its role as a subsidiary agency of the British bourgeoisie in the pre-independent period, the Indian bourgeoisie could gather the first

hand experience about the role it would be expected to play in the independent political scenario. They experienced the same kind of 'participatory role' and gathered the capability of manipulating the situation in crisis. In spite of this, "the path of capitalist development pursued since independence, the inherent compromising and anti-people class policies of the bourgeois, the attempts by the Congress Party at centralization and perpetration of its rule by all undemocratic means, has, from the very beginning brought stresses and strains on the unity and integrity of the country."²⁵

This is perhaps for this reason that observers of Indian politics differ sharply in their explanations of the Phenomenon. There is a strong belief that most of the stresses arising out of regionalism are very much 'internal' in nature. Of course, it does not rule out the possibility of the existence and operation of external factors altogether. Here lies the difference between the courses of politics in India and those found in other newly liberated states of Asia and Africa. This peculiar combination of forces, mostly internal, has forced the political system to strike, what is known as "equilibrium of compromises"- Compromises among a number of set of contending forces, rural-urban, ruling elite and the mass, nationalism and sub-nationalism, secular demands and communal preferences and the like. The foregoing discussion conclusively proves that in India regionalism and for that matter

regional demands are multifaceted affair. The course of developmental processes the nature of politics, the role of the state and the imperative need for stability without destroying the regional diversities – all these have made the phenomenon a complex and delicate one.

1.4 IMPACT OF REGIONALISM

Regionalism as a phenomenon has been playing a crucial role in the contemporary political process of India. This has influenced the concepts like federalism, autonomy and decentralization. Theoretically speaking, it is generally believed that regionalism or regional sentiments strengthen the scope of regional politics, thereby widening the scope of state politics. It is not always correct to say that regionalism and regional politics tend to sustain each other.

There may be cases of supra-state regionalism wherein the concept of regionalism crosses the boundary of the state. The best example of such a case is the reorganization of the state on linguistic basis. Only after the reorganization, some form of demands for further separation of state generated.

It may also be seen that in a particular sub-state region a sentiment is generated for the purpose of further split into some small regions. This split identity may help in making a strong case for a proposed state. The

case for Jharkhand state is a good example for such a split-identity. In fact it becomes difficult to make a broad theorization for such a case.

Moreover, there may be case when regionalism mixes with state boundaries, thereby creating a sense of state-patriotism. This may be seen when linguistic sub-nationality asserts itself or where there is some kind of a feeling generated out of specific history. In this category, there may be cases where a feeling is created by the domination of a linguistically strong group of people over a small group. The case of Assam may be cited in this respect. A strong feeling is there that Assamese identity is under threat from the linguistically dominant group of the neighbouring state.

This sentiment creates a situation where there may be agitation for mobilization for linguistic state. In fact this may, in the long run, call for a total revision of centre-state relations. Not only that, contemporary India has witnessed a new trend in this regard. There are cases of articulations of grievances on communal lines, or on caste basis or on ethnic grounds. The case of Jammu and Kashmir is an example where regionalism took the course of communal lines. The incidents in Andhra Pradesh or Maharashtra offer examples of caste basis of regionalism. That regionalism can take the form of ethnic movement may be found in the nature and course of agitations in the entire North-East.

The uneven development across the land has given birth to a concept known as “internal colony”. Movements in these regions are often directed against a section of population within that region who are politically and economically dominant. Even on some sentimental issues such as “self-respect” may create sense of regionalism or regional feelings. The creation of the Telegu Desam by N.T.Rama Rao was based on this sentiment of self respect. The same feeling may be found in some regions of Orissa.

Thus one may conclude that the roots of regionalism in the Indian context are many and varied. The arguments for regionalism are based on either perception or reality. Even the idea of relative deprivation has been helpful in some cases. In some cases it is the result of a combination of two or more factors. It is interesting to note that some years back Lok Dal in Haryana called for a separate state on the basis of what they called “Nyaya Yudha”. In a similar way the Akalis in Punjab fought what they called “Dharma Yudha”. In fact, some justifications were provided by the agitators for establishing their call for a separate region with separate identity supported by a separate politico-economic foundation.

In the opinion of Paul R.Brass, the style of functioning of the Congress Party during the 1980s was heavily determined by and depended

on local leaders in matters of distribution of party tickets.¹ This was clearly evident in the distribution of Party tickets in Uttar Pradesh. It is interesting to note that there was a tendency in the Congress Policy to make a national issue out of local issues like atrocities on Harijans in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This has resulted in a process where the Central leadership tries to establish direct contact with the local leaders, sometimes neglecting the role of the state leadership in the process of negotiation. This has, in the long run, helped in a greater way in the formation and emergence of regional parties. It may not be out of place here, to mention that Chief Minister T. Anjish's removal from the Andhra Pradesh by Mrs. Gandhi helped in a way to form the N.T.R.'s Telegu Desam Party.

The role of National issues in the General Elections needs to be analysed in greater details. It is generally admitted that in a General Election, national issues determine the nature and course of the electoral politics. Slogans like 'Garibi Hatao' or 'Freedom and Civil liberties' influence the electoral politics of 1971 and 1977 respectively. Even issues like Ram Janmabhumi and Babri Masjid also influence the electoral process. Current issues on scams have already influenced the nature of political process in the country.

Side by side the regional parties also capitalise certain issues of national character which have their profound impact on state politics. It may be pointed out that 1988 Tamil Nadu election was found on the issue of Hindi vs. Non-Hindi in the state. The same may be found in Andhra Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. In Punjab Akalis and in Assam the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) mainly works on regional lines with some regional issues. At some points these two trends – national and regional most on certain national problems.

There is a section of opinion that the study of regionalism is helpful in understanding the nature of state politics. But that may not be true in all cases. So far as Indian Politics is concerned, sometimes the national and sometimes the very local issues play significant role. But in Indian case there is another dimension which should not be overlooked or ignored. This is the 'zonal' aspect of political process which comes very close to the nature of state politics. Each zone has specific problems of its own. Although there are wide variations in the policy formulation and policy implementation of the states in the South zone or in the North East, but there is a uniformity of goals among the states in these zones. One may also add the role of the Hindi Zone and the dominating role it played during the first three decades of national politics. In this connection, it may

be pointed out that more than 40% of the total population lives in this Hindi heart land. The issue here is mostly linguistic in nature.

Apart from the linguistic issue there are other issue like cultural domination, identity crisis, relative deprivation and the like play important role in creating a sense of regionalism in the country.

It has been suggested that any study of regionalism should be based along the following points ²:

- (a) The phenomenon of regionalism does not necessarily help the process of consolidation of politics at the state level unless coinciding with state boundaries and accompanied by some strong perception of ethnic injustice;
- (b) The regional parties do not necessarily lose or gain with the weakening or strengthening of the Congress Party and the raising of national or regional issues in Indian politics;
- (c) A middle tier of "Zonal" politics will facilitate the study of state politics by making it more rational and comprehensive

The nature of politics that is created because of interactions between regionalism and the course of political developments in India is characterized by extreme complexity. The experience after independence during the last five decades has shown that the process of nation-building

continues to face challenges from the manifestations of regionalism. In fact, Indian state is caught between the two opposite forces of integration and disintegration. All those concerned with policy framing, integration has become the most important factor challenging the process of development. This has been summed up by Rajni Kothari when he observes that integration demands “the crystallization and consolidation of a political Centre, its outward expansion, its institutionalization, and its assimilation of diverse identities and structures into a national political community....”³

Although the term regionalism is of comparatively recent origin, it has penetrated deeply into the political process of contemporary India. In this connection, it has been very correctly observed “ “whatever the context of parameter, ‘region’ may be said to connote an area, at least sufficiently large in size, which is differentiated and/or distinguishable from others by a variety of factors (or at least a combination of them) such as language, culture, religion or caste/creed, socio-economic life, political background, historical background, geographical continuity, and, certainly, group consciousness and of being neglected, deprived and/or discriminated by the ‘majority’ and/or those in authority.”⁴ In a general way regionalism may be regarded as a counter movement to any excessive form of centralization. Although there is a disagreement about the actual

criteria for determining a region in India, it has been observed that on the basis of at least ten criteria, a region can be recognized. In the opinion of Rasheeduddin Khan, "maximum homogeneity within and maximum identity without where homogeneities are to be established on ten counts : (1) language dialect, (2) social composition (communities/Jatis), (3) ethnic regions, (4) demographic features, (5) area (geographic contiguity), (6) cultural pattern, (7) economy and economic life, (8) historical antecedents, (9) political backgrounds, (10) Psychological make up and felt consciousness of group identity. The main concern in this exercise is to eliminate factors contributing to heterogeneity and to coalesce factors promoting homogeneity."⁵

In India post independent political process has witnessed three important forms of regionalism, mainly supra-state regionalism, inter-state regionalism and intra-state regionalism.⁶ As has been noticed earlier that supra-state regionalism is an expression of group identity of several states which form a group on the basis of some common issues of mutual interest. The language issue which has divided the entire nation into south and north is the best example. The case of intra-state regionalism may arise over the question of self-identity or self-development resulting from such issues like deprivation or exploitation. Although the constitution of India has given adequate safeguard against discrimination on the basis of

language and culture, the evils of regionalism resulting from such sentiments could not be avoided.

Demands for safe-guarding regional interests have exerted tremendous impact on the federal governance of India. The roots for such a change can be traced in the results of the Fourth General Elections in 1967 which brought about a new power configuration at the state level for the first time. It may be recalled that after the 1967 elections, out of the Seventeen States, non-Congress governments were installed in eight states. Not only that in all these eight states, the parties which came to power had a regional base. Naturally these regional parties stood for regional interests. A series of steps taken either by the Committees set up for restructuring the centre-state relations or by memorandums submitted by different state governments were directed at some acceptable solutions of regional problems.

Regionalism, thus viewed, has resulted in inter-state rivalry and competition under the federal structure. With regard to the inter-state river dispute, the issues of regionalism came to the forefront. In a direct or an indirect way, "each state government ships up regionalism as such sentiment strengthens its bargaining position with the centre and its local political influence." ⁷ Side by side militant movements of the "Sons of the

Soil” against outsiders have emerged in some states, notably in Maharashtra and Assam. The Post-1972 regional movements in these areas are primarily directed against the migrants from the Indian States and outside. These have given regionalism a new meaning and shape. The Sons of the Soil movement, “becomes politically disintegrative in so far as it fosters local at the expense of nation-wide loyalties, undermines national cohesiveness by erecting internal social and economic barriers, and ultimately, produces a cycle of retaliatory exclusions that may fragment the nation-state.”⁸

The sources and causes of regionalism can be found in the concept itself. In a vast country like India with cultural and linguistic diversities, regional demands seem to be a natural outcome. Over emphasis on regional exclusiveness has provided supporting ground for regional parties and regional leaders. Historically speaking India inherited a shattered economy as a legacy of the British Colonial rule. Uneven economic development has created imbalances between states, regions and sub-regions. The big state can surface social, economic and political tensions in a number of ways. But the cases of the small states are totally different. A small agitation even in a smaller part can create serious problem for the governance of the state. Whatever may be the nature of the manifestation, it is generally agreed that economic backwardness of

underdeveloped regions may act as an immediate cause for regionalism. Thus from the economic angle, "regionalism as the outcome of some real or perceived sense of internal colonialism, the result of mal-development of asymmetrical development. Regionalism is the response of unequal sharing of benefits of developmental activity."⁹

So far as the political process in India is concerned the Congress Party with its monolithic character played a very important role during the formative period after independence. At the same time, the frequent changes of leadership in the Congress – ruled states created a sense of frustration among the party leaders at the state level. It had its impact on the general feeling of the people in those states. A sense of anti-centre feeling was generated, out of which a feeling for the region grew. So in an indirect way any change in the Congress leadership at the state level acted as a cause for generating regional feeling. It has been pointed out that the party in power at the centre should not follow a biased course or policy while giving attention to the particular problem confronting a state or a region. This is in fact a pre-condition for the successful working of a federal government. Inadequate attention to the regional problems may allow the regional parties to come forward with their regional demands. Here comes the role of the political elites or the governing elites. This class because of their very nature seeks to hold power and exercise it for their own benefit

without paying least attention to the regional demands or to the protection of regional interests.

Any study of regionalism in the Indian context calls for a study of the implications of political development in India. The concept, political development can be understood with reference to three dominant features of the concept. These are (a) an attitude towards equality; (b) the capacity of a political system; and (c) differentiation and specialization of structures. The Indian model of nation-building seeks to attain unit, democracy, development, Justice, and autonomy. But regionalism in its extreme form appears to be disintegrative in nature. At the same time it should be noted that regionalism is the product of the pluralistic and diversified society. Historically speaking, political federation has been practiced in India since 1935 and theoretically speaking, federation is a compromise between nationalism and regionalism. It has been observed that "political monolithism is against the genius of Indian polity: therefore, a large degree of regional autonomy may be the minimum price required for the integrity of India."¹⁰ Compared to many developing nations, India has achieved a certain level of national integration which acts as a binding force in India.

Not only that India's political structure allows democratic participation of the people in the governance of the country. Being an open society, India permits free expression of popular will in the formation of the government. From that perspective regionalism can act positively for the fulfillment of the aspiration of the people of a particular part of the country. Seen in this perspective regionalism cannot go against the federal structure of the country.

But the experience in India on this issue has been otherwise. The net result of uneven development has created a situation of wider dimension which is generally called "a maldevelopment syndrome."¹¹

Closely following this comes the question of capacity of the political system in executing effectively the public policies. The issue of performance or non-performance is directly related to the problem of equitable distribution of goods and services to the common people. That the Indian nation suffers from "distribution crisis" is evident from the nature and extent of regional imbalances that exists even today. This has, in a greater way effected the attainment of justice and equality. In other words, regional demands and movements can be explained in terms of certain actions for implementation of distributive justice among the people and regions which remain neglected and exploited. The attempts to solve

this problem by creating smaller states have proved counter productive in many cases. Thus it is seen, regionalism in India is a multi-faceted problem. It is connected with many other aspects which are not only political but also social, economic and cultural in nature. This has led Kothari to remark "it is necessary that those in command of the framework – the 'class' – act with commitment to the people and to the binding nexus that can hold them together. This is the test of the present and the emerging generations of the Indian leadership. In the final analysis it is also the test of the Indian people." ¹²

Any discussion regarding regionalism or regional movements leads to one central point; the conflict between autonomy and concentration of power. In other words it may be called a conflict between two opposite forces of centralization and decentralization. The working of India's democracy over the last four decades indicates that the civil liberties of the people get endangered when there is excessive concentration of state power. The brief spell of national emergency during Mrs. Gandhi's regime is a good pointer in this regard. In fact, the issue of emergency should not be viewed in isolation – rather it was the result of many factors, the constitutional factor being the immediate one.

There is a section of opinion that the autonomy at the state level may destroy the very foundation of the federal system in India. It is true that because of a number of constitutional provisions, the central government has become more powerful. But at the same time there are other areas where the constitution seeks to maintain a balance between these two sets of governments. In most of the cases, this dimension of achieving a balance has been neglected.

Going beyond the formal constitutional-legal aspect of the issue, a look into the social formation in India will be of much help in understanding the complex phenomenon of centralization vs. autonomy. It may be pointed out that in India the ruling class occupies the major portion of social relations. This may be the reason for India to follow a capitalist path of development. The specific features of this development are the development and consolidation of this class with the attempts at resolving internal differentiation and conflicts among themselves. This is perhaps one of the ways of explaining the process of centralization of political power. This is also the source of different types of demands for state autonomy. It has been very correctly observed: "most of the demands for state autonomy can, in fact be traced back to either the contradictions among the ruling classes or the efforts of the working class

and the peasantry to fight for and realize a democratic economy and a democratic polity.”¹³

This is why the issue of state autonomy and state rights is “more than a question of simple choice between federal and unitary preferences on a mere constitutional level.”¹⁴ It has been generally observed that the tendency towards centralization and concentration of power has been universal in any constitutional practice of a liberal democracy.

In India the situation has been different so far as the process of political centralization is concerned. One of the reasons for such a tendency has been almost uninterrupted Congress rule for more than 30 years at the centre and the states. Even when Congress was in power, there had been internal conflict within the party for greater autonomy for the local (regional) leadership for more power and effective share in the decision making process. It may not be out of place here to mention that, “the political dominance of the Congress and its hegemony over state power not only helped it to contain by repression or manipulations the recurrent political crisis but also aggravated, by the very logic of the situation, the tendency towards the centralization and concentration of political power.”¹⁵ The roots of the imposition of emergency can be traced in the process of centralization of power just mentioned.

Within this contextual setting, the regional movements for greater autonomy can be situated and analysed. In fact any serious study of this phenomenon demands an analysis of the class character of these movements. Ultimately, it is the class factor and class bases which shape and determine the nature and course of such movements. This is true about the Akali movement or the Assam movement or any other movements of this nature. At the same time given the vast and complex nature of Indian society, the regional autonomy movements, although local in character, have their far-reaching implications in national politics. The situation becomes more complicated because of other social factors namely the nature of primordial loyalties and shifting emphasis on the nature of demands.

Historically, in a complex situation like that of India, "an alliance of the ruling classes can function effectively only under the leadership of a certain class."¹⁶ As is found everywhere, there is always a tendency among the ruling class to form alliance with the monopolist forces in order to extract maximum benefit from the society. India is no exception. There has always been a kind of understanding between the ruling elite and the big bourgeoisie in India. This can be seen in the way the ruling parties get influenced by the impact of the big industrial houses. The powers that are

vested in executive or the legislature, in most cases, are used to protect the interests of the dominant class.

This brings to the fore the problem of governance with a view of setting internal conflicts or contradictions among different sections of the society. In such a situation the ruling class faces the problems of internal management of their relations and growth and consolidations of their power. This can be explained with reference to the developments which have taken place in India since the Fourth General Elections in 1967. In fact 1967 elections may be termed as a water-shed in the political history of contemporary India.

The year 1967 may be regarded as the beginning of an era when regional political parties began to dominate the regional level politics. The culmination of this process may be seen in 1977 when, for the first time, a non-Congress government was installed at the centre. In other words, a process started wherein signs of Congress decline became visible. A look at the nature of the electoral politics will reveal the fact that in some states regional-based parties gained at the cost of the Congress party. This is evident from the party positions in different states, as for example Akalis in Punjab, Bharatiya Kranti Dal in Uttar Pradesh, the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the like. It is interesting to note that the support bases of these parties

differed fundamentally from one state to another, depending upon the nature of the configuration of the social forces. It may not be out of place here to mention that the growth and consolidation of regional parties have been generally conditioned by the interests of the locally placed ruling class groups. This wide variation may be due to the differential distribution of investment in different parts of the country. In other words in situations of economic crisis, the inability of the state becomes prominent when it fails to satisfy the desire of the economically dominant class. A peculiar situation is created when both the rich and the poor sections of the society feel this satisfied and this dissatisfaction, in the long run, leads to a situation of agitation. But the goals of these two classes are not the same – one tries to perpetuate the system, while, other ones to have greater share in the distribution, possession and governance of the country.

As a result of these changes, the decline of the Congress party brought with it some necessary socio-political conditions for the emergence and consolidation of regional parties. The period between 1967 and 1969 may be cited as an example. Not only that the 1977-79 period also witnessed the same nature of development. In fact, the process which started in 1967 found its maturity in 1977 and even in 1996-97. It is not important to judge the process in terms of duration or period of time. What are important are the changing dimensions of the nature of

the political process. Another point which deserves equal attention is the nature of changes of the social bases of political parties. Other factor which is to be noted in this connection was the split within the Congress which took place in 1969. From this period upto the year of emergency, the conflict between centralization of power and decentralization of power became sharp. Even the coalition government formed in 1977 with Morarji Desai failed to unite all the different and opposing socio-political forces. The net result was the fragmentation of the power structure both at the central and at the local level.

During the Janata rule, there emerged two main national level parties – the Congress and the Janata which represented the interests of the two broad segments of the ruling classes. At the same time there were three regional parties namely, AIA DAK (also DMK) in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab and National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir which represented interests of local nature. Not only that the left democratic forces were represented by the two communist parties – the CIP (M) and the CPI at the national and local levels. Besides these, the ultra left ideology was represented by the CPI (M-L). In addition to this there were a number of small parties, representing both the left and the right which were essentially regional/local in character.

The nature and composition of the Janata Party at the centre had some peculiarities. It was the outcome of a broad-based consensus among a number of political parties which were basically anti-Congress in nature. Not only this, many of the leaders of the Janata Party were previously members of the ruling class. So it is held that the Janata Party was an alliance of some opposition groups of the former ruling class. In fact, it was the result of a set of peculiar social, economic and political circumstances which brought them together. It is interesting to note that most of these parties in certain regions represented the interests of feudal landlords. It is equally interesting to note that the Congress (O) represented like the Congress (R) the entire ruling class. This wide range of interest has become the central theme of many researches in subsequent period. At the same time these became the sources of conflicts among different social segments which ultimately led to intra-party and inter-party factional conflicts.

This unusual division of society in two different sections brought about a number of changes in the formation of social and political groups. Moreover, there was no common compromise formula for this formation. The result was inevitable. This may be the reason for the early breakdown of the Janata regime. It also made the federal process more fluid and open to bargaining among the different political parties. It has been very

correctly observed that “the absence of internal cohesion as well as intra-party consensus on vital issues or on modalities of handling ‘crisis’ situations made it difficult for it to impose its will or to effectively protect or guide the ruling classes.”¹⁷

It should be pointed out that the nature of fragmentation at the party level did not make any substantial division of the masses on purely ideological grounds. Ideologically there were two main divisions of the masses – one representing the interests of the ruling classes on the national level as represented by the All India political parties; while on the other there was section of people who supported ruling class at the regional level. This brought about a substantial change in the support base of the ruling party. It was seen that there started a kind of atomised and relatively small areas of support base both at the central and local levels. In fact, such situations provided conditions for assertion of mass movements, working class movements and peasant movements. These, in turn, gave birth to a number of autonomy movements in different parts of the country. These changes had their impact on the nature and character of the Indian state. The nature of internal contradictions began to be the sole determining factor in making the state more authoritarian and despotic in dealing with autonomy movements. In fact, the roots of the imposition of emergency during Mrs. Gandhi’s regime can be found in it.

This has led Prof.A.R.Desai to refer to what he called “expanding state lawlessness.” This also brought to the fore the basic question about the very nature of the state itself. It also raised the question regarding the role of ruling class in using the state machinery for its own benefit. On these two questions scholars are divided. While there is a section of opinion that the roots of the Indian state can be found in the very nature of the capitalist development. Others are of the view that in a developing state like India which had remained a colony of the imperialist power, such a state cannot go beyond these contradictory trends.

It may be noted that behind all the regional/autonomy movements there may be two types of causes both related to the economic factor – economic crisis and the resultant economic discontent among the masses. This further strengthens the basis of parties at the local or regional levels which support these types of regional or autonomy movements. In such a case, a peculiar situation emerges a class between the so-called regional movements and the authority of the centralized state becomes almost inevitable. In other words, from a broaden perspective, a clash begins between two opposite forces of national (Central) and the regional (local) nature.

This assumes greater significance in case of India where there is a necessity of understanding the subtle relationship between regional movements and the main stream national question. This becomes more complicated in the context of multi-linguistic, multi-religious, multi-ethnic situation of India. Even some one would raise questions relating to the basic 'unity' of the Indian nation. Historically speaking, regional demands or autonomy movements, so far hidden, came to the surface immediately after independence. Initially, these movements were not so organized but later on, with the passage of time and the forces of circumstances, they got further compounded. The Indian state, being in its infancy, was confronted with a paradoxical situation: how to satisfy these regional demands while at the same time, preparing the ground for a strong state.

Thus, viewed, it may be said that the situation in India is quite different in all its aspects – social, political and economic. The causes behind regional demands and the state-response should be placed in a proper perspective. One cannot be understood without a proper reference to the other. This has to be situated in the context of changing socio-economic and political process. In a word, an integrated approach is necessary to comprehend this very complicated problem which, if not handled properly, might shaken the very foundation of the political system.

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