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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. “Regionalism is a threat to maintaining ‘unity in diversity’ in India.” Critically analyse the given statement. (250 words)

01 Nov, 2021 GS Paper 1 Indian Society.

Approach

- Define regionalism and the concept of unity in diversity.
- Discuss the causes of regionalism in India.
- Give positive and negative impacts of regionalism.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

- **Unity in Diversity:** India is a land of diversity; however, there are bonds of unity underlying all this diversity. These are geo-political unity, the institution of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, and tradition of interdependence.
- **Regionalism:** Regionalism is an ideology and political movement that seeks to advance the causes of regions. Regionalism at national level refers to a process in which sub-state actors become increasingly powerful; power devolves from central level to regional governments.

Roots of regionalism is in India’s diversity of languages, cultures, ethnic groups, communities, religions and so on, and encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers, and fueled by a sense of regional deprivation.

Body

Causes of Regionalism

- **Language:** The demand of linguistic states has fuelled regionalism which led to formation of new states like Andhra Pradesh, Punjab etc.
- **Religion:** It is also one of the major factors of regionalism. Example:
The demand of three autonomous states in Jammu & Kashmir is based on religion. The bases for their demands are- Kashmir for Muslim dominated, Jammu for Hindu dominated and Ladakh for Buddhism dominated region.
- **Regional Culture/Ethnic:** The North-east states were created on the basis of cultural aspects. Besides the economic issues, the regional culture played significant role in the formation of Jharkhand as a state
- **Economic Backwardness:** The uneven pattern of socioeconomic development has created regional disparities. The categorization and sub-categorization of the states on the basis of socioeconomic development and use of resources have generated resentment, leading to regionalism. Example:
Split of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh, demand for separate statehood for Vidarbha, Saurashtra etc.
- **Rise of Political Parties:** Coalition politics and rise of regional political parties has led to gaining of regionalism as a political tool to garner votes, thereby deepening the fault lines.

- **Son of the Soil Doctrine:** According to this, a state specifically belongs to the native group only, who are the sons of the soil or local residents. The doctrine gains currency due to competition for jobs and resources between migrant and local educated middle class youth. Example:

Maharashtra for Marathas, Gujrat for Gujaratis etc.

Negative Impacts

- **Rise of Insurgency:** Regionalism is a threat to the development and unity of the nation as it creates internal security challenges by the insurgent groups (Khalistan movement in Punjab), who propagate the feelings of regionalism against the mainstream politico-administrative setup of the country.
- **Asymmetrical Development:** Regional demands undermine national demands as Developmental plans are implemented unevenly focusing on regions to which important leaders belong, hence unrest is generated among the rest of the regions.
- **Challenge to Foreign Policy:** Regionalism creates hurdles in international diplomacy, for example in case of Mamata Banerjee not agreeing to Land Boundary agreement and Teesta River Water sharing, when the leaders at centre level were ready to do it.
- **Restricting Fundamental Rights:** Restricts freedom of movement and profession, defeating Article 19 of the constitution, as non natives are exploited and mistreated leading to vulnerability of the migrant population. For ex: recent Gujarat migrant crisis.
- **Against Constitutional Ethos:** It goes against ethos, culture and constitutional ideals of India which are syncretic, democratic, federal polity.

Positive Impacts

- **Symmetrical Development:** Regional aspirations have a positive impact on balanced regional development as concerns are voiced and heard by central authority which then tries to minimize the disparities.
- **Competitive Federalism:** It helps in the development of a spirit of competitive federalism, thereby lifting the underdeveloped regions on par with national growth.
- **Promotes Democratic Ethos:** Regionalism helps in promoting the democratic culture of society by discussion, debate and action on regional issues.
- **Safety Valve:** It provides an outlet to the diverse discourse and concerns of society and their timely redressal, which helps in releasing tension/ stress that may arise in a diverse society thereby acting as a safety valve.

Conclusion

Thus, regionalism is a natural phenomenon in a federal polity like India where diversities are territorially grouped, largely on political, ethnic, cultural and linguistic basis. The federal system of polity has indeed made regionalism feasible and vice-versa.

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