



The Indian political system and the challenges of regionalism and national integration

Vijayakumar B

Assistant Professor, Department of Studies in Political Science, Vijayanagara Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Ballari, Karnataka, India

Abstract

A fifth of the world's population lives in the Indian subcontinent. While today the region's place in the global world order is widely recognized negatively due its multi diversified issues and ethnic problems. This paper offers an understanding of the part played by the nature of the political system its people in the making of the India popularize for its issues in communalism and integration. The rise of nationalism, the coming of independence and partition, the consolidation of new nation states despite regional wars and conflicts, and the emergence of India as the largest democracy in the world. This paper is a comprehensive and analytical opinion of the subcontinent's social and economic dimensions and its impact. The dynamic and complex relationships between changing forms of political power and religious identities, economic transformations and social and cultural.

The dictionary meaning of 'integrity' is the state of being whole and undivided, upholding territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Origin of this word from French *intégrité* or Latin *integritas*, meaning integral, and integrate. Indian nation is composed of the people by many religious and cultural beliefs but are unified by certain emotional forces. This is the process of national integration. The main objective of national integration is to encounter all fissiparous forces or tendencies, which is posing threat to the Indian nation. National integration is a complex concept. It has social, political, religious, regional and economic dimensions. The basic factors of national integration; Ideological unity and awareness about 'national objectives' should be created among the people who hold divergent views on political and religious and similar other fields.

Keywords: Indian politics, caste ridden politics. Social stratification, various castes, communalism in politics, political, religious, regional and economic dimensions

Introduction

It is well known to all, that the performance of a political system depends upon the nature and culture of a society. So far as Indian political culture is concerned, it is in the formative stage and still continues to evolve new features and tendencies. The nature of Indian politics becomes the causes of threat to national integration. National integration simply means political, social and cultural binding or in another word it means a feeling of oneness by the people of a country. The essential objective of this paper is to analyze how the nature of Indian politics become causes of serious concern and become obstruction to the national integration. Indian politics is caste ridden politics. Caste is a very old and prominent basis of social

stratification in India wherein some castes were given superior positions with social and economic privileges that were denied to the lower caste of people. In the Vedic period, Varna system became the basis of social stratification. However, with the passage of time the caste system came to the in heritage status, which is determined by birth and consequently it has become a divisive factor in Indian society. In the post independence period also these remain same although different measures have been taken to reduce the differences among the various castes, but the ultimate result is not so much positive. The caste has influenced the politics of India from top to bottom and thus given a distinct character to the Indian politics. Every political party gives an alert and panoramic view to the caste consideration in candidate selection, appointment of minister. However not only these but also it influence the bureaucracy also. More recently the reservation policy has given a new impetus to the role of caste in Indian politics.

Some experts hold the view point by saying that the role of caste is essential to give momentum to the political process. American political experts I. Rudolf and S.H. Rudolf in their book, *Modernity of Tradition* hold the view that caste politics in India has reduced the distinction among caste and has brought about political equality among the members of different castes.

It is worth to mention here that the former President of India K.R. Narayanan has rightly mentioned that, "What is obstructing the unity and emotional integration of India is not so much the large divisions into regions, languages and religions, but the atomization of our society into numerous castes, sub-castes and tribes".

Communalism in Indian Politics

Even before independence, the British had very intelligently used the policy of divide and rule for a long time and continued in power. However, in the post independence period it introduced the element of communalism in politics. Although the framers of the constitution provided a secular polity for India, yet the real secularism is still not visible at the societal level. Even in the post independence period, many political parties formed like (Akali Dal in Punjab for Sikhs) on the religious line. The recently formed AIUDF (All India United Democratic Front) in Assam also uses religion to get the support of religious minorities and get elected the candidates from only minority dominated areas. These, along with some other elements arose the feeling of communalism. In India maximum communal riots occurred due to narrow minded political leaders to fulfill their narrow gains. However, over the years, the nature of communalism has changed whereas before 1970s the communal riots

mainly confined between Hindus and Muslims. In the recent years the conflicts have been spread to the others like Hindus versus Sikhs, Hindu versus Tribal Groups too. Of late, the communalism has also been reinforced by religious fundamentalism. Communal riots emerged following the demolition of Babri Masjid, the riot in Bombay in 1993, killing more than five hundred people and Godhra incident of Gujarat in 2002, which resulted in the loss of more than five hundred people, had definitely endangered the national integration of the country.

These have witnessed by different elements of politics in India. Thus the Muslims have been treated as a „Vote Bank“ by different political parties in different times. Political parties have adopted the policy of appeasement towards Muslims and minority groups like Sikhs and Christians to seek their political support. Many Committees and Commissions like Raghuvir Dayal Commission (1967), Datta Commission (1970), Joseph Vithyasis Commission (1971) have blamed political parties for the accentuation of communalism in politics.

Regionalism

Regional diversity in India has assumed political significant in the form of regionalism. The North/South divide, the demand for greater autonomy, the son of the soil thesis, the interstate dispute over languages, river, water and territory, the secessionist movements like Khalistan and in North East India the issue of Naga movement, Assam movement etc. are some of the examples of regional uprising in the post independence India. These uprising emerge due to the uneven distribution of resources among the regions and various groups, which ultimately leads to the feeling of relative deprivation among the disadvantageous groups or regions and partly due to the growing political awareness among them. Bodo movement in Assam also can be cited as example of relative deprivation.

Thus, regionalism is the stark reality in Indian politics. Many regional movements have been launched to emphasize distinct and separate regional identity of people. Various movements are still active on the issues such as the:

1. Demand for separate states.
2. Interstate dispute among states.
3. Demand for autonomy by some regional communities.
4. Feeling of separateness between North India and South India.
5. Language controversy and politics of language.
6. Discriminatory attitude of the central government towards the state governments as claimed by the states.
7. Separateness tendency in the Indian Union.
8. Emergence of regional political parties and their preference for regional issues and identities.
9. Growing importance and powerful role of the regional leadership.
10. The role of neighboring countries in inciting regional feelings in certain parts of the country.

According to Morris Jones, regionalism and the question of language have been such a burning issues in Indian politics and these have been so closely related with the recent political happenings, that it appears that this is the whole problem of national unity. Thus, it is apparent that regionalism has posed a serious threat to the national unity and integrity. The need of the hour is to integrate these

regional forces and tendencies within the national mainstream so that the nation gains strength and prosperity.

Language

India is a land of many religions and regions, and also many languages and dialects. Besides traditional Indian languages, the Mughal developed Urdu language and during British period English was introduced and made the language of communication at higher level. So, in this period the development of native languages was hampered in higher education as well as administration. This was also the reason to consider the Indian native languages as inferior in comparison to English. Even in the post independence period English continued to get the prominent position, Hindi declared as the Official language or Rajbhasha and regional languages were kept confined to their respective states.

Eventually, the language policy of the central government is not appreciated by the supporters of regional languages. So it becomes a contradictory discourse for regional and central government. It has been observed that if, anti English agitations were launched in Hindi speaking areas, anti Hindi agitation were also launched by non Hindi speaking states in South India. It has been alleged sometimes that Hindi is being imposed forcefully in non Hindi speaking areas and it is being promoted in education and administration at the cost of other native languages. There were agitations and demands for declaring Urdu as the second language in certain states.

The reorganization of states on the basis of language started its discourse immediately after independence. The first Prime Minister of independence India Pt. J.N. Nehru appointed the State Re- organization Commission in August 1953 with the members like Justice Fazal Ali, K.M. Panikkar and Hridaynath Kunzru in the aftermath of the mass resistance for the demand of separation of Andhra from Madras Presidency for the Telugu speaking people. This led to the reorganization of states on the basis of language in 1956 and declared the formation of 14 states and 6 union territories on linguistic line. The North Eastern states also re organized through the North Eastern Reorganization Act 1971 and it came into effect from 1972 and the North East divided into seven states. The re organization of states, in 1956, on linguistic basis has given a stable ground for continuation of this controversy in future also. The politics of languages has raised unnecessary controversy in the country and hampered the process of national unity and integrity.

The political significance of SC/ ST and OBC finds its genesis in the provision of the Constitution itself, which provide some special facilities, particularly reservation in public services, to these classes of people. These are the main reason which makes them aware of the special position in the political system of India. It was in the V.P. Singh government implemented the recommendation of the Mandal Commission (1979) i.e., policy of reservation in favor of the Other Backward Classes and thus it has given a new momentum to the caste politics in India. More and more castes are agitating to get the category of OBC, like Koch Rajbangshi in Assam. Political parties have been playing the politics of reservation to seek the support of the classes. Agitation, rallies, violent demonstrations, padyatras, Gherao, Hartals etc. have been in the use as political tools to advance political interests and to

seek popular support. According to Rajni Kothari, these practices and activities are called Direct Action. Direct Actions refer to all those political actions which are non-constitutional.

India is replete with the examples of many national and regional agitations and movements. For example Total Revolution Movement of Jai Prakash Narayana, call for Bharat Bandh by different political parties, Ayodhya Mandir Andolan of 1992, Delhi Rally 1993, launched by the Bharatya Janata Party etc. These examples underscore the importance and influence of these democratic practices in Indian politics. So these agitation activities not only disrupt the law and order but also cause great inconvenience to the general public. The consequences are not confined within these but many innocent people lose their life and property in these agitations. In addition to the extra risk, the government has to spend huge amount of resources in terms of deployment of forces to control such violent movement and agitations. The result of these activities is national loss which hampers the national progress. In every democracy, peaceful demands for raising genuine demands are justified but violent agitations launched just to demonstrate the political clout or to capture political power, cannot be justified in a matured democracy. These negative and violent agitations would weaken both the nation and the democracy thus the national integration. Various tendencies like regionalism, linguism, communalism etc. have posed a serious threat to national unity and integrity. According to Rajni Kothari, the problem of national integration is the fundamental problem of political development. In the view of M.N. Srivastava, the secessionist tendencies are in existence today and these are likely to continue for many years in future.

The efforts of National Integration Council (NIC)

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru organized the National Integration Conference in September- October 1961 to find out ways and means to combat the evils of communalism, casteism, regionalism, linguism and so on and to devise definite conclusion for them. This conference decided to set up a National Integration Council to review all the matters pertaining to national integration and make recommendations. The National Integration Council was constituted accordingly and held its first meeting in 1962 with its objectives such as:

“The foundation of our national life is common citizenship, unity in diversity, freedom of religions, secularism, equity, justice-social –economic and political, and fraternity among all communities. The National Integration Council restates its faith in these values and dedicates itself to their achievement.

The council, however, notes with concern the increase the communal incidents in different parts of the country over the last few years. The council emphasizes that notwithstanding sporadic occurrences of communal other divisive conflicts, the vast majority of common men and women, irrespective of their religious affiliations, live in peace and harmony and have no interest in violence and disorders. The National Integration Council condemns tendencies that strike at the root of national solidarity and calls upon all political parties, voluntary organizations, other citizen groups, the press, leaders of opposition and indeed all men of good will to bring them to a halt by discouraging communal ill will and regional animosities and weaning the

misguided elements of society and from paths of violence, by active and energetic propagation of the principles, especially of tolerance and harmony for which this nation stand, by mobilizing constructive forces of the society in cause of the national unity and solidarity and giving them leadership encouragement and articulation and by devising suitable community activities and programmes for fostering fellow feeling, emphasizing the privileges of common citizenship and in general raising the quality of national life. The council wishes to emphasize that this task is not of government alone although governments have to play a major role in strengthening the forces of integration and implementing expeditiously and effectively the recommendations that this council makes. This task is the collective responsibility of all citizens, politicians, educationists, artists, writers, teachers, parents, students, intellectuals, businessmen and trade union leaders. The council most earnestly invites all Indians, regardless of their linguistic, religious, ethnic or cultural affiliations to join in this great and urgent task of promoting national unity and solidarity.

Conclusion

Although, the government of India is committed to protect the unity and integrity of the country by following the ideals and goals of the constitution yet the unhealthy practices of democracy and the above cited problems stand on the way to national integration. Not only these but the government of India has taken certain measures like the establishment of National Integration Council (1962), organizing national integration conferences and conferences of Chief Ministers of States from time to time etc. to achieve these objectives. But, the official and procedural efforts are not adequate and many times failed. As many of the problems of national integration are political problems and has cultural and psychological dimensions. The government should ensure that the operation of political practices and system are just and equal to all groups, regions and communities. The political leadership and Political parties should also rise above narrow interests to face the challenges of national unity and integrity.

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