

Akhtar Majeed (ed.)

Regionalism: Development Tensions in India.

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The present problems in the Punjab give added importance to the subject of this volume whose publication seems to be very timely indeed. Unfortunately the two papers by Bhawani Singh and Pradeep Kumar which deal with the Punjab were produced several years ago and thus do not shed much light on the present situation. In fact, Bhawani Singh in writing about the Sikhs in Punjab refers to the politics of accommodation and Pradeep Kumar who analyses Akali Politics highlights in his paper the pragmatic approach to politics of the former Chief-Minister Prakash Singh Badal. Developmental tensions which are supposed to be a main theme of this book are only mentioned in passing in these papers on the Punjab. The problems of frustrated educated young men who do not get the jobs which they think they deserve and who support terrorist movements if they are convinced that they are fighting for a good cause are neglected in these papers. But these problems are surely at the back of the present upheaval in the Punjab. In the other contributions to this volume this element of developmental tension is discussed more in detail. Particularly the comprehensive final paper by the editor on "Sons-of-the-Soil Agitations" in which he deals with the Madras anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, with the Shiv Sena in Bombay, with the Telengana separatist movement in Andhra, and the anti-migrant agitation in Assam gives many insights into the sociology of frustrated middle-class protest which finds expression in an emphasis on in-group solidarity against domination by outsiders. The phenomenon of relative deprivation, i.e. a perspective of declining opportunities in the face of rising competition plays a key role in all these case studies. Frequently such perceptions of social decline are projected by politicians who wish to use the respective protest potential as bargaining counter for their own advancement. Many papers in this volume provide excellent examples of this phenomenon. The contribution by Aruna Mudholkar and Rajendra Vora on "Regionalism in Maharashtra" is particularly interesting in this context. While the various case studies presented in this volume are interesting and informative the more ambitious attempts at arriving at a general theory of regionalism are less successful. Javeed Alam tries to provide such a general framework in his contribution in "Class, Political and National Dimensions of the State Autonomy Movements in India". He emphasizes the link between capitalism and centralization in

India and argues that there is a conflict of interest between the big bourgeoisie which operates on an all-India level and the lesser bourgeoisie whose operations are limited to the regional level. Although this may explain one element of regionalism it does not sufficiently explain some of the most virulent forms of regional protest which is often directed against competitors of the very same middle-class which are believed to have gained a headstart or are resented as indecently hard-working migrants who are a threat to the sons of the soil. Iqbal Narain who contributes "A Conceptual Analysis in the Indian Context" is more cautious than Javeed Alam and lists a number of components of regionalism which include the geographic, linguistic and historical elements. But he also believes that the economic component is the crux of regionalism. Having stated this he does not go beyond a few remarks on regional backwardness, distributive justice etc. and does not deal with the social background and the peculiar forms of articulations of economic protest. In fact, the economic reasons for the respective protest are often hidden behind a veil of emotional loyalties. Such loyalties can also be much more easily manipulated and whereas the economic problems may be open to rational debate such loyalties once they are conjured up cannot be easily subjected to rational analysis. This is, of course, the crucial problem which all contributors to this volume had to face. It is to be hoped that their studies will lead to further endeavours in this field.

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