Heidelberg Papers

in South Asian

and Comparative Politics

Federalism and Regionalism in India

Institutional Strategies and Political Accommodation of Identity

by

Harihar Bhattacharyya

South Asia Institute

Department of Political Science

University of Heidelberg

Federalism and Regionalism in India
Institutional Strategies and Political Accommodation of Identity

HARIHAR BHATTACHARYYA

University of Burdwan, India[1]

> *There is no single pure model of federation that is applicable everywhere. Rather the basic notion of involving the combination of shared rule for some purposes and self-rule for others within a single political system so that neither is subordinate to the other has been applied in different ways to fit different circumstances.[2]*

Regionalism has remained perhaps the most potent force in Indian politics ever since independence (1947), if not before. It has remained the main basis of many regional political parties which have been governing many states since the late 1960s. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which ruled at the federal level from 1999 to 2004, was but a medley of various region-based parties. Interestingly enough, regionalism has also remained the main basis of the communist movements in India which have grown in close identification with the regions, and are sustained therein (Franda 1971; Sen Gupta 1972; Nossiter 1982; and 1988; Singh 1993; Bhattacharyya 1998 & 1999). In the post-independence period, region is said to have often vied with the nation (Mitra 1997; Mitra and Singh 1999:155-79).

---

[1] Harihar Bhattacharyya is Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Burdwan, West Bengal, India (e-mail: <harihar59@yahoo.co.uk>). An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Seminar on "Federalism and Regionalism", held in Puebla, Mexico on November 12-14, 2003, hosted by the Government of Puebla and organized by the Institute of Legal Studies, National University of Mexico.

[2] Ronald L. Watts (1996: 1).

The post-independence resurgence of regionalism in many parts of India baffled the observers of Indian politics, and offered as the basis of prediction of the country's 'imminent balkanization' (Harrison 1960). The 'crisis thesis' which was implicit in Harrison has been the theme of many subsequent accounts of Indian politics (Kohli 1990; Basu and Kohli ed 1998). The basic question that I seek to raise in this paper relates to the role played by Indian federalism in ensuring India's unity, stability and survival as a polity in the face of persistent regionalism, often verging on separation, rooted in manifold and complex social and cultural diversity, and mass poverty, illiteracy, extreme regional unevenness in development, and widespread inequality. The question has assumed special significance in the aftermath of the disintegration of the multi-ethnic and multi-national Soviet Union, and the split up of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. India's record of relative unity and integrity stands in sharp contrast to many post-colonial federations, which have failed, or broken down. In the age of what Eric Hobsbawm has called 'nation-splitting' (Hobsbawm 1991), India's relative unity and integrity, and survival as a state is remarkable indeed.

To be sure, regionalism is rooted in India's manifold diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, communities, religions and so on, and encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers, and fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation. For many centuries, India remained the land of many lands, regions, cultures and traditions. The country of more than a billion people inhabiting some 3, 287, 263sq km., India's broad regions, socio-culturally speaking, are distinct from one another. For instance, southern India (the home of Dravidian cultures), which is itself a region of many regions, is evidently different from the north, the west, the central and the north-east. Even the east of India is different from the North-East of India comprising today seven constituent units of Indian federation with the largest concentration of tribal peoples. The British colonial division of the Indian territory broadly between the directly-ruled provinces, and some 560 (indirectly-ruled) autocratic princely kingdoms of many sizes, religions, tribes, and languages added complexity to regionalism in India. Even after various phases of territorial reorganization since 1950, most regions of India contain many sub-regions marked by some social and cultural identity symbols. In India, regionalism, or the acute sense of loyalty to the particular region manifested itself variously (Ram 1968; Rao 1975; Chandra, Mathur and Pandey eds 1976; Reddy and Sharma 1979; Mishra 1984; Wallace 1985; Das Gupta 1988; Sarkar 1991; Mukherjee 1992). It has often expressed itself in antagonistic terms to that of the nation, fuelled as it is by the sense of enduring deprivation due to long-term neglect in development, and resource redistribution. Regionalism has often expressed itself in terms, which are opposed to national unity and integrity, and challenging to the legitimacy of the state. While the rulers have most often liked to see in regionalism "a very serious threat to the development, progress and unity of the country" (Gandhi 1969: 85), some scholars have expressed similar views by seeing regionalism as "anti-system, anti-federal" and so on (Reddy 1979). But positively oriented scholar have seen values in regionalism in the context of building the nation, or national cohesion provided the political system is accommodative of

timely meeting the demands of the regions (Mukherjee 1992: 12). The literature on regionalism, its meaning, forms, causes and consequences in India etc are already vast, and there is perhaps little to add to clarifying the meaning of regionalism in India, or its forms and content. The basic point that I would highlight in this respect is that internal self-determination of community, whether linguistic, tribal, religious, regional, or their combinations, has remained the predominant form in which regionalism in India has sought to express itself, historically as well as contemporaneously. Most often, self-determination has been couched in terms of statehood or state autonomy.

ARGUMENT

As a study of the interaction between federalism and regionalism in India, this paper seeks to focus on Indian federalism as a method of accommodation of regionalism in India. Federalism is seen here as a political equilibrium, which results from the appropriate balance between shared rule and self-rule. In the post-Second World War period, many post-colonial countries adopted federalism as a method of governance in multi-ethnic contexts, but in majority of cases, the experiments failed resulting in territorial disintegration in some (Watts 1968; Bhattacharyya 2001; O'Leary 2001). The reason why they failed was not because federalism was adopted as a recipe, but the way federalism was perceived and applied. As Watts has rightly pointed out above, there is no pure model of federation that can be applied everywhere. The need for federalism is enhanced in countries with ethnically distinct regions where the territorial accommodation of distinct groups of people is of paramount importance. For those countries, a combination of shared rule (for general purposes of unity) and some kind of self-rule (for regional/local purposes of diversity) is a must if unity and integrity are to be maintained.

   This paper thus seeks to advance the following four ideas as a conceptual preface to the discussion. First, there is no necessary conflict between federalism and regionalism. The relations between the two may be conflicting as well as collaborating depending on the manner of accommodation, if any, which is undertaken in a federal system. Federalism and regionalism may be complementing each other in the practical political processes. The need for balance is of utmost importance if unity of the country is not to be risked.

   Second, federation rather than a nation-state, ideal-typically, is better able to accommodate ethnically distinct regions because while the nation-state demands uniformity, federalism is based on the recognition of differences. This assumes special significance when the top-down approach to federation-building is followed.

   Third, a two-tier federation may not be sufficient to accommodate regionalism of many forms and levels. A tier below the 'states', or 'provinces' with appropriate constitutional guarantee may be necessary for regional accommodation.

Four, regionalization may itself be a technique for ethno-regional accommodation provided both the constitutional input and a sufficient ethno-regional pressures from below are available. Following this technique, the spill-over effects of regional discontent are minimized.

ROOTS OF REGIONALISM IN INDIA: INDIA'S MANIFOLD DIVERSITY

Regionalism in India has been rooted in India's manifold diversity. India, demographically speaking, is the second largest country (its population over a billion now) after China, and socially and culturally the most diverse in the world. India's one billion plus people live today in 28 States (federal units) (doubled since the inauguration of the Constitution in 1950) and 7 Union Territories (centrally ruled). Formed over many thousand years as a country of immigrants who brought their own cultures and traditions, India's diversity is proverbial. Although predominantly inhabited by the 'Hindus' (over 80 per cent) who are, however, regionally specific, plural in beliefs and practices, and divided by castes, and languages, India contains large proportions of Muslims (about 13%) spread over the country with more than a million in as many as 13 states (out of 28), Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian, Jains and so on (Table.1).

Table 1: Religious Composition of Indian Population (2001)

Religion	*Population*	*% to total population*
Hindus	*827,578,868*	*80.5%*
Muslims	*138,188,240*	*13.4%*
Christians	*24,080,016*	*2.3%*
Sikhs	*19,215,730*	*1.9%*
Buddhists	*7,955,207*	*0.8%*
Jains	*4,225,053*	*0.4%*
Other religions	*6,639,626*	*0.6%*
Religion not stated	*n.a.*	*0.1%*
Total	*1,028,610,328*	*100%*

Source: Census Reports of India, 2001.

Three features stand out from Table 1 above regarding regional concentration of religious groups in India. First, there is only one Muslim majority state in India, viz., Jammu & Kashmir. This was due, not to any reorganization of territory, but to the fact that the Kashmiri Muslims have been living in Kashmir for centuries. Second, there are three Christian majority states in India, all in the North-East, viz.,

Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram. These states, again, were created since the 1960s, by carving out of Assam, not on the basis of religion, but as a method of recognizing tribal ethnicity. Third, Sikhs are concentrated in Punjab where they form a majority. Punjab was created in 1966 as a result of reorganization of Indian territories on ethno-religious basis.

India's linguistic diversity is proverbial. By one estimate, there were some 1,632 languages spoken in India (Basu 1997: 187). So far, eighteen languages have been 'officially recognized' and placed under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution as a symbolic recognition of identity (Table. 2). Today, the speakers of such 18 language constitute about 91 per cent of the population. Many of India's languages are very ancient with strong literary traditions. Some of the so-called regional languages, most notably Tamil (a south Indian language), are, in fact, older than Hindi, spoken by the largest (but not the majority) number of Indians. During the period of British colonial rule, language and region did not always coincide. Thus, the provinces created by the British in India were not linguistically homogenous. Many of the provinces as well as the princely autocracies were bilingual, or even trilingual. In the wake of India's national liberation movements, many of the region-based linguistic groups became self-conscious, and demanded self-determination. (Bhattacharyya 1989; Chatterjee 1986 and 1993) Linguistic Provinces Commission (popularly known as the Dar Commission) formed on 17 June 1948 to advise the Constituent Assembly (1946-49) correctly sensed the situation: "Indian nationalism is deeply wedded to its regional languages; Indian patriotism is aggressively attached to its provincial frontiers"(Bhattacharyya 2001: 100). In the post-independence period, it is language, not religion, which, when coupled with regional and tribal identity, has provided the most powerful instrument for political recognition as an ethno-national identity.

Table 2: India's Official Languages (1991)

Language	Number of Speakers
Assamese	13,079,696
Bengali	69,595,738
Gujarati	40,673,814
Hindi	337,272,114
Kannada	32,753,676
Kashmiri	56,693
Konkani	1,760,607
Malayalam	30,337,176
Manipuri	1,270,216
Marathi	62,481,681
Nepali	2,076,645
Oriya	28,061,313
Punjabi	32,753,676
Sanskrit	49,736
Sindhi	2,122,848
Tamil	53,006,368
Telugu	66,017,615
Urdu	43,406,932

Source: Census Report of India, 1991. Excludes figures from Jammu & Kashmir

Except Sindhi, Urdu and Sanskrit, all the languages listed above are strongly regionally rooted, and states or sub-states have been created with autonomous powers in order to accommodate, politically, linguistic identity. That does not mean, however, that all the linguistic communities have got statehood, or political association in India. Beyond such 'official languages' there are some 96 languages (Census Report of India, 1991), which are 'non-scheduled' languages (with, or without scripts) with significant number of speakers regionally rooted as well as spread throughout India. Also, even after successive waves of reorganization of federal territory since the 1950s, there are numerically significant minority languages in State and Union Territory (Census Report of India, 1991). Thus, the issue of regionalism, whether based on languages, tribal ethnicity, or a combination of region, tribal ethnicity, and/or language, remains open. For instance, in the creation of the last three states in 2000, namely, Uttaranchal, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand, language did not play the predominant role (Bhattacharyya 2001). A complex of tribal ethnicity, language, regional deprivation and ecology provided the basis of intense regionalism, and its resolution in statehood (Bhattacharyya 2001). The Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council (TTADC) in Tripura, in

India's North-East, formed in 1983, under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution with autonomous powers covering some two-thirds areas of the state predominantly inhabited by the aboriginal peoples (minorities in the state), provides a successful example of accommodation of regionalism, which is protective of endangered tribal identity (Bhattacharyya 2003). The other successful case is the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in the northern most district of West Bengal. In the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam, in India's North-East, to be created under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the Bodos, the minority in Assam, will not, however, be in majority in the Bodoland, but this is going to be an attempt to protect their identity in the regions in which they live.

CONSTITUTIONAL INPUT

The Constitution of India (1950) has remained a resource as well as an instrument for various regional movements for self-determination to fight for the appropriate political institution within which to secure ethno-regional identity. The section that follows discusses both the non-territorial and territorial measures available within the Constitution of India which have strengthened rather than weakened the hands of regionalism without, however, hampering the cause of national unity.

NON-TERRITORIAL MEASURE:
OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF LANGUAGES

The non-territorial measures of accommodating ethno-regional identity in India consist of the following. First, the right to language forms part of the fundamental 'cultural and educational rights of minorities' (Art. 30 of the Indian Constitution) which stipulates that the minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. The state shall not impose upon it any culture other than the community's own culture.

Second, there is provision (under Articles 345 & 347) for 'officially recognizing' languages by placing a particular language under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. So far eighteen languages have been 'officially' recognized in India (Table. 2). This method seeks to accommodate linguistic group(s) in three ways. First, it satisfies the need for identity (linguistic) for the aggrieved community. Second, it entitles the linguistic community to demand to read, among others, all official communication and documents in their language. Third, such languages as 'officially' recognized and placed under the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, become the third language in India's so-called 'three-language formula' i.e., Hindi (national language), English (link language), and the 8th Schedule language, as mentioned above. In actual political process, the demand for the official recognition of languages has most often been intertwined with the movements for political recognition of identity.

Third, there is an individual dimension to it. Although 'Hindi' in *Devnagari* script is the 'official language of the Union' (Art. 343), any petitioner (Art.350) in submitting any representation for the redress of any grievance to any officer of the Union or a State, is authorized to use any languages used in the Union, or in the State. That is, any officer cannot reject such representation on the ground that it is not written in Hindi. It is further stipulated that every state and the local authorities within a state have to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children of the minority groups. No less than the President of India has been authorized by the Constitution (Art. 350 A) to issue such directive to the states to such effects.

Two remaining issues regarding the identity implications of languages must also be pointed out. In India, there are both stateless linguistic minorities which speak a language, which is not 'officially' recognized, and which do not have a state. Second, there are states, most notably in India's Northeast where the local language/dialects spoken by overwhelming number of the people are not yet 'officially' recognized. This is, for instance, the case in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland where the state level official languages are not those spoken by the majority of the people in the states.

The above non-territorial measures for the recognition and protection of linguistic identity have served, however, to encourage the movement for territorial/regional recognition of ethnic identity, particularly when the linguistic or other ethnic groups inhabit a particular region, and are predominant. It can also work the other way round: achievement of statehood as a regional recognition of identity gives a fillip to increased self-awareness for a distinct linguistic identity. There are also odd examples. In Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland, India's three Christian-majority states in the North-East, the languages used for official purposes are Hindi, and English (link language), and not the languages spoken by the people in those states. This is because distinct Naga, Khasi and Mizo languages are yet to be developed which is intelligible to various tribes. In Manipur, another state in the North-east, the scenario is the same as above except that there is a Manipuri language which is placed under the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

TERRITORIAL MEASURES FOR ACCOMMODATING REGIONALISM

Article 1 (1) of the Indian Constitution calls India "a Union of States", not a federation. Except the Preamble (1976), the term 'federation' has nowhere been used in the Constitution. The main reason why the term 'federation' was not used was that the term 'federation' in the 1940s in India was suspect, a recipe for disintegration. Elsewhere I have discussed the issue (Bhattacharyya: 2001) in detail. Although India is a "Union of States", the number of States constituting the "Union" is not specified. Had it been so, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to accommodate the growing ethno-regional identity aspirations. The

political map of India, at independence, was far from complete. A lot of territorial adjustment and re-adjustment was to be done to right-size the state keeping in mind the country's manifold diversity, and multiple identities. The number of States in India has thus remained changing. One way of creating a new State has been by up-gradation of centrally-ruled Union Territories which today are 7 in number. Up-gradation of Union Territories to statehood has remained one method for fulfilling the identity aspirations of ethnically significant people living within the given territory. Statehood means relatively more autonomous powers, and freedom of action within the federation than a Union Territory status affords.

Measures for Statehood

The constitutional provisions for the creation of new states in India are rather flexible. The Indian federation, constitutionally speaking, is an indestructible union of destructible states. The Indian Constitution (Articles 3-4) empowers the Union Parliament (Lok Sabha (popularly elected Lower House, and Rajya Sabha, the Council of States) to reorganize the states for territorial adjustment. It is provided that Parliament may by law:

(1) form a new state by separation of territory from any state, or by uniting two or more states, or parts of states, or by uniting any territory to a part of any state;
(2) increase the area of any state;
(3) diminish the area of any state;
(4) alter the boundaries of any state; and
(5) alter the name of any state etc.

The legislative requirement on the part of Parliament to do so is by a simple majority, and by the ordinary legislative process. However, the Presidential recommendation for introducing such a Bill is required, and the President is required, before he recommends, to refer the Bill to the Legislature of the state to be affected by the proposed changes within a specified period of time. The President is not, however, bound to accept the view of the state legislature. So far more than 20 Acts have been passed by the parliament to give effect to states reorganization. In the cases of the three new states, the constitutional procedures have been followed, and the Legislative Assemblies of the three affected states have debated the proposed changes and the Bill for years before agreeing to the proposed changes. Democratic method has informed the legislative process.

Measures for Aboriginal Self-Governance: the Sixth Schedule

The constitution of India contains a number of special provisions under the schedules five to seven for the self-governance of various tribal groups living in various parts of India. These measures are designed to accommodate sub-regionalism within a broader region, whether based on tribal identity, or linguistic

identity. However, the provisions under the fifth and the seventh schedules are not as empowering (the tribal) as those in the sixth schedule. The Sixth Schedule has the constitutional sanctity, (and hence more federalizing) than the fifth and the seventh schedules. The salient aspects of the Sixth Schedule relating to tribal self-governance may be identified as follows:

(1) The provisions of the Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1) deal with the tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. There are nine such areas falling under the 6th Schedule. These tribal areas are to be governed as *autonomous districts.*

(2) Although they are within the overall executive authority of the state concerned, but provision is made for the creation of *District Councils* for the exercise of certain legislative, executive, and judicial functions.

(3) Such Councils will consist of not more than thirty members of whom not more than four shall be nominated by the Governor of the state concerned, and the rest shall be elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

(4) The elected members of the Councils shall hold office for a term of five years from the date appointed for the first meeting of the Council after the general elections to the Councils, unless the District Council is dissolved sooner by the Governor, and the nominated member shall hold office at the pleasure of the Governor.

(5) The Council has legislative power in certain fields such as the management of a forest, inheritance of property, marriage, and social custom. The laws made by the Council have to be approved by the Governor.

(6) The Council has judicial powers, civil and criminal, subject to the jurisdiction of the High Court. The Governor may also confer upon the Council the power to try certain suits or offences.

(7) It has also the power to assess and collect land revenue, and to impose certain taxes.

(8) The Council may establish, construct, or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, ferries, fisheries, roads, road transport and water ways, and also with the prior approval of the Governor, prescribe the language and the manner in which primary education shall be imparted in the primary schools in the district. The other areas to which the powers of the Council extend are: agriculture, animal husbandry, community projects, co-operative societies, social welfare, village planning and so on.

(9) The Acts of State legislature shall not extend to matters on which the Councils have the power to legislate unless the relevant Council so directs by public notification. On other matters, the President of India, and the Governor of a State will decide the extent of application of an Act of Parliament, or an Act of a State Legislature respectively to an autonomous district.

On the face of it, Articles 3-4 appear to be un-federal, if not anti-federal, since the flexible provisions for state creation affect the autonomy and integrity of the states.

This may not actually be the case if one considers the way federation in India was created, or is still being created. To begin with, one needs to look at the mode of federation-making in India. The federation-making in India has been carried out from above so that that the states are the effects of the federation rather than the other way round. It was not the states, or their representatives who sat at the Constituent Assembly to make the federation. Unlike the US and Switzerland, there were no pre-existing sovereign states in India who would create a federation as a compact. As we will see later, the territorial scenario in India at independence was more complex than it appears to be. The eleven provinces directly under the British as well as the 500-odd princely autocracies (indirectly under the British), after the Partition of India, were ethno-linguistically heterogenous, and there was, in most, much mutual hatred, animosity and conflicts. The various constitutional measures, as we have described above, were so designed as to accommodate ethno-regional identities, and to resolve conflicts.

The autonomy provisions for self-governance of aboriginal peoples in India (numbering about 100 million today) were designed and served to accommodate sub-regional aspirations of the relatively underdeveloped people. Thus the regional or district councils for the tribal people have often been the stepping stone for demanding greater regional identity in the form of states under the Indian constitution.

Both types of constitutional measures for regional accommodation of identity, as above, are designed for self-rule. There are clear constitutional distribution of powers and authority under three Lists between the federal and the State governments. The powers and functions of the tribal regional or district councils have also been clearly demarcated and protected in the Constitution.

INDIAN NATIONALISM AND REGIONALISM

The above flexible constitutional provisions regarding statehood, or sub-statehood must be understood in the appropriate historical backdrop. Historians of modern India have established how the growth in Indian nationalism against British colonialism since the nineteenth century also gave birth to intense awakening among various region-based linguistic nationalities for identity and self-determination, often in opposition to the pan-Indian nationalism (Desai 1944; Sarkar 1983; Bhargava et al eds: 1999; Banerjee 1992; and Das Gupta 2001). The specific contours some of such regional nationalism have also been identified in cases studies (Bhattacharyya 1989; Chatterjee 1986; Majumdar and Singh 1997). The mainstream Indian nationalism had continuously to grapple with regional nationalism. Given the heavy weight of regional identities of the people of India, the Indian National Congress (INC) could have hardly remained immune from it. It gradually became, in fact, an inter-regional coalition of forces. McLane (1977) (Das Gupta 2001: 51) argued that the INC had been so, since its formation in 1885, in order to generate a composite nationhood in India. The regional identities within the INC itself became, however, more intense. An historical research showed that

more than a decade after 1885, the most important leaders of the INC on a visit to UK on a political mission chose to identify themselves in a public statement as leaders of their respective regional associations based in different parts of India (Majumdar and Majumdar 1967: 44-45). As early as 1908, the INC recognised Bihar as a separate Congress Circle for congruence between linguistic and political boundaries, on the basis of a demand made by some Mahesh Narayan Singh in 1894 (Banerjee 1992: 42). Some historical researches have established that the colonial administration's attempt to see India of the future as a 'Union of autonomous provinces' was a powerful impetus behind the growth in language consciousness among the composite province like the Madras Presidency (Subrahmanyam 1984:117). The formation of the Andhra Congress Committee in 1913 was a testimony to the growing demands of the Telegu speaking areas of the (Tamil-dominated) Madras Presidency to establish Telegu power over Telegu issue in the Presidency. Though till then contrary to its official policies, the Indian National Congress (INC), the main party of India's independence, approved the Andhra Congress Committee in 1917, and at its Nagpur Congress in 1920 officially committed itself to a federal India based on the linguistically reorganized states. The INC even reconstituted itself in some federal form since the 1920s by re-creating its various provincial committees on the basis of linguistic divisions of the country in order to give political expression to the growing region-based nationhood in India, and increasingly committed itself to a federal India.

POST-INDEPENDENCE ACCOMMODATION OF REGIONAL IDENTITY

Three clear patterns can be identified in the post-independence (1947) phases of accommodation of regional identity through statehood. First, in the 1950s and 1960s, intense (ethnic) mass mobilisation, often taking on a violent character, was the main force behind the state's response with an institutional package for statehood. Andhra Pradesh in India's south showed the way. The fast unto death in 1952 of the legendary (Telugu) Gandhian leader Potti Sriramulu for a state for the Telegu-speakers out of the composite Madras Presidency moved an otherwise reluctant Jawaharlal Nehru, a top nationalist leader, and the first prime minister of India, to concede to the demand for a separate state of Andhra Pradesh. The Union government also instituted the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) in 1953 for redrawing the political map of India, and passed the famous States Reorganization Act, 1956 on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission. Interestingly enough, the SRC's report (1955) was sympathetic to the regional cause:

> It is obviously an advantage that constituent units of a federation should have a minimum measure of internal cohesion. Likewise, a regional consciousness, not merely in the sense of a negative awareness of absence of repression or exploitation but also in the

sense of scope for positive expression of the collective personality of a people inhabiting a state or a region may be conducive to the contentment and well-being of the community. Common language may not only promote the growth of such regional consciousness but also make for administrative convenience (as quoted in: Majumdar and Singh 1997: 104).

Thus, on the basis, primarily, of language, major reorganisation of India's territory was undertaken in the 1950 and 1960s. 27 states of categories A, B, and C in the original Constitution of India (1950) were reduced to 15 with equal status and powers. The 7th Amendment to the Constitution (1956) incorporated them into the Constitution. The state of Nagaland in India's North-east, created in 1963, was perhaps the sole exception to the pattern in the 1950s and 1960s. It was created, after protracted struggle of the Naga tribes against the Indian state for a sovereign land independent from India, in recognition of their tribal identity. In the case of Punjab (1966), a combination of language and religion (Sikh) provided the basis of statehood.

Second, in the 1970s and 1980s, the main focus of reorganisation was India's North-east. The basis of reorganisation was tribal insurgency for separation and statehood. The main institutional response of the Union government was the North-eastern States Reorganisation Act, 1971 which upgraded the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura, and the Sub-State of Meghalaya to full statehood, and Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (then Tribal Districts) to Union Territories. The latter became states in 1986. Goa (based on Kokani language (8th Schedule)), which became a state in 1987, was the sole exception. Since India's North-east has remained a perennial base for various kinds of movements for separation and political extremism, bipartite, or tripartite ethnic peace accords (Datta 1995) have been signed by the Government of India, affected State Government, and the ethnic leaders for a negotiated settlement. Such ethnic peace accords have been the bases for subsequent legislation at Union and State legislatures for instituting a new state, or a sub-state. Region-based tribal ethnicity, not language, was the principle of according statehood, or sub-statehood in the North-east. Interestingly enough, given the predominance of Christianity (the Baptist Mission) in some regions of the North-east, there was a movement for using religion as a basis of demanding statehood in the late 1960s. But, realising that religion was not going to be recognised as a basis, they quickly shifted to tribal loyalty (Weiner and Kazenstein 1981).

Third, the movements for the three new states (created in 2000)—Chhatisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar and Uttaranchal out of Uttar Pradesh--- were long-drawn but became vigorous in the 1990s. But, as I have shown elsewhere in detail (Bhattacharyya 2001), the main basis was complex: a combination of tribal ethnicity, language, regional deprivation, and ecology. Language, however, played no important role in the creation of these states. The legislative processes, rather than any Commission, or ethnic peace accords, prescribed in the Constitution were followed in creating these states in 2000.

FEDERAL DEBATE IN INDIA: CENTRE VS. STATE, OR NATION VS. REGION

Elsewhere, I have discussed the various aspects of the ongoing debates on Indian federalism (Bhattacharyya 2001). In this section, I will provide a brief outline of the debate in order to drive home the issue of regionalism as it figured in the ongoing discussions of federalism in India. Since the coming into force of the Indian constitution on 26 January 1950 after some two centuries of British colonial rule, the nature of federalism that this constitution instituted has been subject to ongoing academic and political debates. Rather than treating it as a dead issue, every generation of scholars, both Indian and foreign, have thought and rethought about the nature, and implications of Indian federalism. Politicians, political parties, and mass media have also more or less regularly commented upon the nature and functioning of federalism in India.

Federalism in India is both a colonial and a nationalist legacy in the institutional sense of the term. The British unitary (nation-state) model of governance proved relatively ineffective for a vast and diverse country like India. The relative failure of their model of governance led them to introduce, by degrees, since the 1920s, doses of devolution and federalism in India in which the Government of India Act 1935 was the major institutional step (Aiyer 1965: 16; Morris-Jones 1987: 15-48). Modelled after the Canadian federation (British Canadian Act 1867), this Act, Morris-Jones believes, pointed the pattern of governance in India 'firmly in the direction of federalism' (Morris-Jones 1987: 19). Nonetheless, the system of governance remained till the days of India's independence heavily centralised. This was recognised by Morris-Jones himself: "The form of political structure handed over at independence was, for a country of India's size and diversity, remarkably centre-directed" (Morris-Jones 1987: 121).

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (1946-49)

Indian federation was not the compact of pre-existing sovereign states. The states in India, on the contrary, have remained the effects, rather than the cause of, Indian federation. The mode of making the federation followed was top-down rather than bottom-up. The Constituent Assembly (CA), which wrote the federal constitution of India, was composed of members (elected by the people on the basis of limited franchise) who were not the states' representatives. The CA debates (CAD), thus, did not show the deep-seated conflicts of interests, which were revealed in Philadelphia in 1787. On the contrary, there was a virtual absence of conflict between the centralists and the provincialists (read 'regionalist'), as one would expect in such a debate on federalism. Interestingly enough, the provincialists demanded increase revenue for provinces, but were agreed that the union government should collect the money and then distribute it among the units. "This," said Granville Austin, "could hardly be called a traditional defence of

provincial autonomy" (Austin 1966: 187; Austin 1999). There were debates on the nomenclature of the federation. While the "Union of States" was finally decided, this decision was preceded by debates on preference for the indigenous terms for 'States' like 'pradesh' (CAD, Vol. 2: 397-413). Interestingly, in the course of the above debates, some members made references to the 'new basis in the near future' for reconstitution of the states (CAD, Vol. 2: 406). Written in the backdrop of the great communal riots of 1946 in India, and the Partition of India through a major separatism that gave rise to Pakistan in 1947, the states' rights issue was secondary to the CA, and the allegiance to provincial governments was muted (Morris-Jones 1957: 17). Nonetheless, state or provincial autonomy was not sacrificed in the emerging political model. While introducing the Draft Constitution, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and the architect of the country's constitution, described the constitution "federal inasmuch as its establishes what may be called a dual polity (which)….will consist of the Union at the centre and the States at the periphery each endowed with sovereign powers to be exercised in the field assigned to them by the Constitution" (Austin 1966: 188). He also made it clear that unlike the American constitution, the Indian Constitution avoided the "tight mold of federation" but instead was one, which could be "both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of time and circumstances" (Austin 1966:188). For the sake of unity at that crucial historical juncture of India, the need for a strong central government was beyond dispute. The Indian nationalists always sought to blend federalism with centralism. As Nehru wrote in 1936: "It is likely that free India may be a Federation, though in any event there must be a great deal of unitary control" (Austin: 1966: 198). The other ardent nationalists sitting in the CA also advocated unitary principle and a strong central government for holding the vast, diverse country together. Realistically, the founding fathers of the constitution were guided pragmatically not to adhere to any theory or dogma for a vast and diverse country with its peculiar problems like India. They were also aware that federalism was "not a definite concept", and lacked a "stable meaning" (Austin 1966: 187) As a result, the CA followed what Austin called "pick and choose" method to see what features of the existing federations suited the genius of the nation best. It meant modifications of the established ideas about the construction of federal governments and their relations with the constituent units. The result was "a new kind of federation to meet India's peculiar needs" (Austin 1966: 187).

POST-1950 DEBATE

Immediately after its inauguration in 1950, Indian federalism began to receive diverse, often contrasting and contradictory assessments at the hand of academic observers, Indian and western. The earlier accounts of Indian federalism showed a lot of intellectual reservations about the subject. The centralised character of the Indian federation vis-à-vis the states' rights has baffled and preoccupied most of the observers. K. C. Wheare (1951/1953/1963) made one of the first authoritative

comments on Indian federalism and described the Indian constitution as "a system of government which was quasi-federal...a unitary state with subsidiary federal features rather than a federal state with subsidiary unitary features" (Wheare 1951:28). But in the subsequent fourth edition of his work in 1963 he was still doubtful of the federal nature of the Indian constitution, and described it as 'quasi-federal' but added that it was not meant to be a criticism of the constitution or the government since "A quasi-federal system may well be most appropriate for India". (Wheare 1963: 28) Ivor Jennings (1953) accepted India to be a" federation with strong centralising tendencies" (Jennings 1953: 1). The states' rights issue, as we have seen above, was hardly debated in the CA. But it was taken up already in the early 1950s by observers as a critical area of judging the federal character of the Indian polity. Thus K. V. Rao (1953) in a paper on "Centre-State Relations in Theory and Practice" took an extreme view to show how the centre was usurping the rights of the states (Rao 1953). In his subsequent work too he maintained strong reservations about Indian federalism: "We can now sum up our impressions about Indian federalism. There are federal features, but they are not strong enough to make India a federation on par with any known federation so far" (Rao 1966: 328).

At the other end of the intellectual spectrum, there were scholars like Paul Appleby (1953), N. Srinivasan (1954) and Charles Alexandrowich (1957) who were inclined to take a more positive view of Indian federalism. In view of the fact that the federal legislation get implemented only at the state level and by the states, and from the administrative point of view which makes the centre dependent on the states, (in a situation in which the central government meant "all staff and no line"), Appleby was doubtless about the federal character of the Indian polity (Appleby 1953; Kothari 1970: 118; Watts 1970: 138-42). Both Srinivasan and Alexandrowich considered the federal character of the Indian constitution as indisputable on the ground that the Indian federalism was a case *sui generis* (Srinivasan 1954; Alexandrovich 1957).

Against the backdrop of the first major and successful federal territorial reorganisation of India in the late 1950s (mostly on a linguistic basis), on the one hand, and the first major Congress's electoral defeat (since independence) in India's fourth general elections in 1967, which returned regionally oriented non-Congress governments to majority of India's states, on the other hand, the Indian federalism began to receive serious academic attention from the 1960s onwards (Bhattacharyya 2001: 1-53) Indian politics witnessed from the mid-sixties onwards a growing assertion of state and regional identities formulated often in demands for more autonomy for states, and a restructuring of 'centre-state' relations. The India-Pakistan war of 1962, the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of India's post-colonial state, in 1964, and the growing organisational weaknesses in the INC which split in 1969 added to the challenges to Indian democracy and federalism. Morris-Jones, who saw federalism as a matter of process and degree, considered it fair to say that India's constitution was federal with important unitary features (Morris-Jones 1987: 19) although he was alert that India called itself not a federation but a 'union', and that the fact that other observers termed it 'quasi-federal' (Morris-Jones 1987: 121). But on the whole, he did not fail to identify the

critical aspects of Indian federalism, and the forces which made it to work. The political character of Indian federalism attracted most of his attention. He identified the 'hard competitive bargaining' as 'the character of Indian federalism throughout' (Morris-Jones 1987: 132). He also pointed out that it was the 'informal power structures of Congress' that had been serving as the lubricant to the practical mechanisms of federalism in India, (Morris-Jones 1987: 121, 153) a view which has been shared by many observers of Indian politics ever since (Watts 1966; Kothari 1970; Rudolph and Rudolph: 1987). He also took note of the changes in Indian federalism since 1947 when it was 'remarkably centre-directed' to the sixties when there took place the 'tendency for the balance of power to move against the Centre and in favour of the States' (Morris-Jones 1987: 121, 249). However, such tendencies and changes were enough basis for taking India into the federal club: "India must, however, be put alongside other federal states; it must also be properly put in relation to its own past. Now this entails seeing that neither the period of alien rule nor the first years after independence can be at all reasonably taken as the norm...This means first that India must be judged as a federal state."3 Marcus Franda also believed in the federal character of the Indian polity, and argues that on the whole the Centre had been respectful of states' rights (Franda 1968).

Granville Austin's *The Indian Constitution Cornerstone of a Nation* (1966) offered the most authoritative and exhaustive account of Indian federalism from constitutional-legal point of view. Rejecting such appellations as 'statutory decentralisation' or 'quasi-federal' as interesting but 'not particularly illuminating', he pointed out the pragmatic character of Indian federalism which, to him, was a 'new kind of federalism to meet India's peculiar needs', and which is what he calls 'a co-operative federalism' that 'produces a strong central government yet not necessarily resulting in weak provincial governments.[Austin 1966: 186-87, 186-243; Austin 1999)

---

[3] The innovative capacity of Indian federalism impressed Morris-Jones evident in the creation of more states,and sub-state within states (e.g., Meghalaya within Assam in 1970). He was very appreciative of such measures: "The device is ingenius - the area has its own assembly and ministers and responsibility for most of the subjects dealt with by state, but Assam still retains law and order and police functions and the Governor, High Court and public service commission are common.With regional restiveness evident in some other states - Saurastra in Gujarat, Telengana in Andhra - it may be a model whose imitation, while further complicating governmental process, will ease certain troublesome tensions". (p. 124). There were, however, Indian scholars like S. A. H. Haqqi (1964) who still stuck to the old appellation of India as 'not a federation but a unitary state with subsdiary federal features' which Carl J. Friedrich (1968) criticised as 'too narrow a conception of federalism'. See for more details, Friedrich C. J. Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice, Pall Mall Press, London, 1968, p. 135, chap. 18 of "India: Federalism and Cultural Diversification". In this chapter, he had no hesitation in accepting India as a federation. He said: '... India is clearly undergoing a federalising process in the course of which federal diversity is increasing', a statement which was contrary to many dangerous predictions made about India's disintegration found in such works as Harrison S. India: The Most Dangerous Decades (1960). K. Santhanam Union State Relations in India (1960) too took a negative view of the functioning of Indian federalism.

In the sixties, the most thorough political scientific account of Indian federalism was offered by Watts (Watts 1966). Going beyond the many reservations of observers since the inauguration of the republic, Watts concluded: "India may, therefore, be best described as a predominantly federal system with some unitary features" (Watts 1966: 356). The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution were very much pragmatically determined in devising the model for India because for a vast, diverse country with many special problems and peculiarities, no single theory or model borrowed from abroad was useful. Also, the Indian federal model was made to be flexible in order to adapt to changing circumstances. Watts quoted approvingly Dr B R Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution who said: "The Draft Constitution can be both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of the time and circumstances. In normal times, it is framed to work as a federal system."(Watts 1966: 356). This has equipped the federal polity with the mechanisms, and the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. The Indian federalism's success as an institutional solution to intra-societal conflicts and tensions in a diverse society has also been noted by Bombwall (Bombwall 1967; ed. 1978). Echoing perhaps Watts, Carl Friedrich also recognised the growing strength of Indian federalism, and its capacity to increasingly differentiate itself. He said: "India is clearly undergoing a federalizing process in the course of which federal diversity is increasing. It is, [....], a recurrent feature of this process that in the course of democratizing of a society, regional and linguistic-cultural communities become more articulate and demand recognition in the form of a set of political institutions, including safeguards for the identity of the particular community" (Friedrich 1968: 135-36) .

At the time of the Partition of India in 1947, signalling the failure of the last colonial attempt at federalism in India between the Hindus and the Muslims, followed by the great communal violence in 1946, coupled with the special problems of integrating some 561 princely autocracies with the Indian Union, a federation with a strong centre seemed to be a foregone conclusion. But to Rajni Kothari (1970) this went against two decentralising traditions of India. First, it went against the strong tradition of a decentralised polity and the great roles that local politicians and notables played in giving the nationalist movement its nation-wide character (Kothari 1970:91) Second, it also went against Gandhian ideal of villages as the foundation of the Indian nation (Kothari 1970: 91). Given the above, federalism that came out, argued Kothari, was 'an ambivalent federalism which gave the Centre much scope and initiative, a major share in resources and all residual functions, but simultaneously gave the states considerable powers and scope for manoeuvre' (Kothari 1970: 91-92).

CRISIS IN FEDERALISM

The period between the late 1960s and the late 1970s was the most difficult one for Indian democracy and federalism. It was when Indian federalism faced so far with a crisis threatening its very existence. This was the most critical phase in the life of

the republic since independence in 1947. But this crisis in Indian federalism was not its own making. It was caused by factors and forces, which were external, emanating from the socio-economic and political realities of India. More importantly, it was caused by a series of political factors. Beginning with the Congress electoral defeat in the fourth general elections (1967), the famous split in the INC (1969), the most determining force in the Indian polity, the famous Opposition movement especially by Jay Prakash Narayan in the early 1970s in Bihar, the left extremist movements in West Bengal, and its violent state repression in the early seventies, the period was closed with the imposition of a nation-wide authoritarian Emergency rule for 18 months (1975-77) which suspended both democracy and federalism. This was the period which witnessed extreme concentration and centralisation of powers in the Centre, to be more precise, in the personal leadership of Mrs Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India. The crippling effects of this regime on India's political institutions have been documented in many accounts of Indian politics written ever since (Kothari 1996; 1988; 1989; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Mitra 1978; Hasan et. al. eds 1989; Bhattacharyya 1994). It was when through centralisation and concentration of power, the Indian polity grossly deviated from federalism. As Kothari wrote: "The political constitutional sphere has itself become prone to the same tendencies of centralisation, domination and inequity" leading to "institutional disorder" (Kothari: 1970 351). Morris-Jones characterised the 1960s as the period of what he called "diminishing institutionalisation" (Morris-Jones 1987: 294). With the end of the Emergency and the restoration of democracy in 1977, federalism in India was given a new lease of life, legitimacy and capacity. This has been reflected in the scholarly reflections on Indian federalism in the 1980s and the 1990s.

POST-EMERGENCY (1977) PERIOD

The lingering doubts about the existence of a strong centre in Indian federation have remained in minds of scholars who have written or commented upon Indian federalism. (Kurian and Varughese 1981; Bose ed 1987). And yet, Indian federalism has also been receiving some positive appraisal of its critical role in India's unity since the 1980s from some scholars. In the new chapter that was added to the 1987 reprint of his famous book, Morris-Jones was sceptical about the management capacity of the Centre to effectively hold the system although he still found enough evidences, which made the system to move on (Morris-Jones 1987: 259-72). Bombwall viewing it from an ethno-nationalist standpoint was confident about the "requisite institutional and processual flexibility and resilience" of Indian federalism "to accommodate ethnic and regional discord while at the same time, defining the parameters within which such discord will be tolerated." (Bombwall 1985: 191). Rudolph and Rudolph noted the how both the growing centralisation and concentration of powers, on the one hand, and the growing strength of regionalism, on the other hand, had put the federal system under severe strain (Rudolph and Rudolph: 98-99). But they admitted that India's cultural

heterogeneity has been expressed in the 'federal organisation of power'.4 Amal Ray (Bose ed. 1987) also acknowledged the federalist implication of the Janata experiment (1977-80). The Janata government, itself an agglomeration of many regionally based groups and parties, was conducive to the status of regional government, and therefore there took place a balanced operation of the India's federal system during the Janata phase (Ray 1987: 157).

DEBATE SINCE THE 1980S

The most distinctive aspects of the debates on Indian federalism since the 1980s are that apart from the persistent issue of states' rights, regional and local identities, and decentralisation have continuously been the focussed. The official commissions set up for the purpose, whether at the federal or state levels, have also recommended further state autonomy and decentralisation:

> Decentralisation of real power to these local institutions would thus help defuse the threat of centrifugal forces, increase popular involvement all along the line, broaden the base of our democratic polity, promote efficiency and improve the health and stability of inter-governmental relations (Khan ed 1997: 212).

Further state autonomy and decentralisation and the question of regional and local identities are the themes of many publications (Khan ed. 1992; 1997; Mitra and Lewis eds. 1996; Vijapur ed. 1998; Sathyamurthy ed. 1985; Bhattacharyya 2000 & 2001; Pal 1984). Kurian and Varughese (1981) prefaced the discussion on centre-state relations with the suggestion that 'the framework has yet to be devised for combining local initiative with national aspirations, and important federal features with certain unitary characteristics to ensure all-India perspective of development'. The Marxist leader E. M. S. Nambudripad found in regionalism the assertion of rights of the federating units, and strongly advocated for expanding states'rights (Numbudripad: 1981:65-66). The greater powers to the states was also the central theme in the famous *West Bengal Government Memorandum on Centre-State Relations* of December 1, 1977 submitted to the Union government in which it was asserted: "We are definitely for strong states, but on no account do we want a weak centre. The concept of strong states is not necessarily in contradiction to that of a strong centre, once their respective spheres of authority are clearly marked out" (Kurian and Varughese eds. 1981: 204-14).

To take a step further down state autonomy, local self-government as another tier of Indian federalism has also been emphasised increasingly in this period. Maheswari strongly argued in favour of making local government as an essential

---

[4] They also noted that under the Janata government (1977-80), the federal system and local and village administration were rejuvenated (p. 163). In the period since the Emergency, federalism has remained a top agenda for most political parties in India, and received continuous judicial support.

element of federalism in view of the 'step motherly treatment of local government at the hands of the state governments' (Bose ed. 1987:30). He made a strong plea: 'Federalism must be made to be a three-tier system' (Bose ed. 1987: 30). Khan also advocated simultaneously the need for urban and rural grassroots democracy as a devolutionary measure as well as space for the regions and sub-regional identities in his proposal for a new federal balance, and identity in India (Khan: 1992: 15). He described Indian federalism as a 'bouquet' that exhibits different flowers, each with its individuality yet tied together as a single whole (Khan 1992 :13). He wrote:

> The process of infrastructuring of the Indian federation is not yet over. Therefore, political demands of viable regions for new administrative arrangements are not necessarily antithetical to the territorial integrity of the country. For, every urge for autonomy is not divisive, but most probably a complementary force; it would not lead to balkanisation but to the restructuring of nation identity (Khan 1992: 16).

Nirmal Mukarji, former Cabinet Secretary, Government of India and former Governor of Punjab, emphasised the need for a more federal India for linking decentralisation with sub-nationalism. He said:

> The starting point for fresh thinking in regard to devolution has to be the recognition of sub-nationalism as a growing reality. The federal centre would, as a first inference, have to be viewed as the focal point at which various sub-national identities converge rather than as a source from which power is imposed upon them. Devolutionary measures would, as a consequence, need to be worked out in a spirit of partnership between the federal and sub-national levels rather than unilaterally by a dominant centre (Grover and Arora eds. 1994: 399).

Paul Brass (Brass 1990/1992: 66) has pointed out that often the advocates of regional autonomy see with suspicion that moves initiated by the centre for decentralisation of Indian politics to the local level since this might undermine regional autonomy. In his earlier work on Indian federalism and decentralisation he argued that on a long-term basis India had not been a case of continuous centralisation. As he said: "Insofar as long-term tendencies or underlying persistent patterns can be discerned across institutions and policy areas in India, the directions or the underlying patterns are towards pluralism, regionalism, and decentralisation." (Brass 1989: 225).

He also added that the tendencies towards pluralism were clearer than those towards regionalism and decentralisation made so possible by the high degree of interdependence of the centre and the states. The central government, for Brass, has pursued persistently policies of pluralism in relation the rights of linguistic and religious minorities in India in the face of the assimilationist and discriminatory policies of several states in relation to their minorities (Brass: 1989:228). But

nonetheless the dilemma of building a stable power by the centre has been immense since power in India is inherently regional and local in character (Brass 1989: 227).5

Rajni Kothari, India's leading political scientist, gave full recognition to the growing federal political reality in India:

> Never before has the Indian polity been more multi-centric than now. With so many states being run by various opposition parties and with each of them becoming more assertive vis-a-vis the centre than was earlier the case, with the wide spread of regionalism and the upsurge in so many places of regional identities (Seminar, 357, 1989: 13).

He has identified three major forms of the movements, which demand further federalizing of the Indian polity. First, there is the gradual return to the tradition of voluntarism, which as a characteristic of Indian society for a long time has been resurfacing again. Second, there is the demand for decentralization of power and resources, not just to the state level, but to the levels below. This is related to the growing consensus that a centralised state apparatus is unable to deliver goods and services efficiently in a vast and diverse country as India. Third, there is the upsurge of ethnic identities, which are demanding more autonomous spaces for themselves, with some of them demanding statehood within the federal set-up. Welcoming those developments for a more federal democratic India, Kothari has perceived the issue of federalism in India within a broader democratic canvass. As he says, "The battle for federalism in India is fundamentally a battle for greater democracy in which the people come into their own through social identities, organisational forms and institutional frameworks with which they feel comfortable and through which they can find their potency and self-respect" (Kothari 1989: 14). This is a novel democratic point in understanding federalism. The federal debate in India has usually been reduced to the problem of 'centre-state relations' i.e., strong central authority versus states' rights. Kothari finds this rather artificial which does not reflect the people or the great diversity of Indian society and culture. He rightly pointed out that the exponents of states' rights are as much to blame as the central authority for the plight of the people.

IMPACT OF REGIONAL ACCOMMODATION OF IDENTITY

To be sure, the manner of redistribution of financial resources among the states by the national level institutions such as the Planning Commission and the Union Finance Commission, are diversity-sensitive, and designed to redress regional

---

[5] Brass has made an interesting argument about the effects of President's Rule in the States in India. Going against all the existing accounts, he said although the increased frequency of President's rule (Art. 356 of the Indian Constitution), particularly since the sixties, have resulted in the reduction in state autonomy, this reduction has not meant effective central control over state politics or effective centralisation of power. On the contrary, he said, that effective control has declined (p. 247).

imbalances in development (Bhattacharyya 2000: 247-305). But such measures are complementary to the more important method of statehood, which allows greater scope for autonomous action. The various federal institutional measures allowing for the exercise of internal self- determination of collective identity whether linguistic, or tribal, in India since the 1950s, has served to contain much of secessionism, and political separatism, and thus to strengthen national unity, and cohesion. Statehood for regional autonomy, whether linguistically based (e.g., in the 1950s and 1960s), or otherwise (e.g., tribal identity, ecology and so on since the 1970s) in India has served to transform yesterday's ethnic rebels into tomorrow's responsible rulers. Das Gupta has shown that after gaining autonomy, the 'linguistically reorganized regions quickly settled down to work out a constructive partnership with the national leadership, the national economic planning and the national administrative system' (Das Gupta 1988: 151). Das Gupta has also noted remarkable economic performance of the newly created states (in the 1950s and 1960s): of the 6 such states (Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab), 4 (Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Maharashtra) achieved the highest per capital income in the country (Das Gupta 1988: 152). These four states remained consistently at the top until the 1980s; Andhra Pradesh ranked 9 of 15 states in 1950-51 (in terms of development), but raised itself up to 7 in 1971-72 and retained it until 1981-82. In terms of annual growth rate as well as the successes at poverty alleviation, these states' record was above the national average (Das Gupta 1988: 152-53). This is a powerful example of how a recognized and secure identity rather than causing secessionism can be a factor for economic development.

What has been the political impact of regional accommodation of identity? Has it meant only the regionalisation of politics? Is the national identity a lost terrain? The available researches do not suggest so. The presence of the region on the national scene is seen by many as positive, as part of the process of community formation and empowerment. (Mitra and Singh 1999: 156). Mitra and Singh's survey of partisan voting in the 1996 (Lok Sabha) general elections showed that while there had been a "higher awareness of the regional level of government", voters still retained a "a great deal of trust" in all three layers of government (35.2% in Central Government; 37.2% in State Government; and 39% in Local Government) (Mitra and Singh 1999: 161). This is a further proof that the regional identities in India have not always defined themselves in opposition to and at the expense of, the national identity. D. L. Sheth, a leading Indian political scientist, has noticed a democratic effect of such process in that India's representative democracy has moved closed to the people who feel more involved and show greater concern for institutions of local and regional governance (Mitra and Singh 1999: 156). In my study of sub-state level regional accommodation of identity in Tripura in India's North-east, I have shown how the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council (TTADC), formed in 1985, has served to protect an otherwise endangered tribal identity in the state by providing a democratic platform for former separatists to become a party of governance, and thereby reduced significantly the bases of political extremism in the state (Bhattacharyya 2003: 11-12). For a long time since independence, Indians' ability to govern themselves has

been the subject of wild speculation among observers of Indian politics. The rise of vigorous regionalism in various parts of the country since the 1950s for recognition and identity led the scholars to predict the country's imminent 'balkanization' and collapse (Harrison 1960). To talk of regionalism, then, was to talk of 'balkanization'. After some fifty years of increasing federal differentiation in matters of identity, such fears and anxiety seem to have gone. The following editorial of the *New York Times* (October 8, 1999) (after the general elections in 1999) stands in sharp contrast to all the prevailing misconceptions about Indians' ability to govern the world's most diverse country of more than one billion people:

> As 360 million Indians voted over the last month, the world's largest and most fractious democracy once again set a stirring example for all nations… India's rich diversity sometimes looks like an obstacle to unity. But the latest election has proved that a commitment to resolving differences peacefully and democratically can transform diversity into a source of strength (Kohli ed. 2001: 1).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to highlight two issues. First, India's federal reconciliation of regional identity with autonomy has a democratic aspect. It operates at two levels. Any political demand for statehood, or sub-statehood, to begin with, must, first, demonstrate identifiable popular support born of mass mobilization, before such demands are conceded to. Secondly, the political institutions achieved (whether a state government, or a regional or tribal council) must be elected by universal adult suffrage in every five years, as it is the normal political practice for such representative institutions throughout India. Democracy rather than ethnicity is thus the legitimacy basis of such political institutions. Das Gupta (Kohli 2001: 49) has termed this "democratic responsiveness to cultural differences" in India.

Second, going beyond the above, I have argued elsewhere (Bhattacharyya: 2003) that Indian federalism has provided the institutional terrain within which various 'ethnic nations' in India (e.g., Tamil, Telegu, Bengali, Sikh, Gujarati, Manipuri, or Assamese) have taken shape, defined themselves, and are able to protect and to celebrate their identity. The underlying principle in various regional accommodations of identity in India has remained internal self-determination. As we have emphasized in the paper, internal self-determination has remained the predominant form in which regionalism, and even sub-regionalism, has sought to express itself. The regional and sub-regional accommodation of identity in India has served to weaken the bases of political secessionism and separatism while not defeating the principle of (internal) self-determination (of nations). Long time ago, Joan V. Bondurant (1958) expressed her apprehension about the future unity of India as follows: "But if religious, communal, cultural and linguistic differences threaten the unity of India, they present, as well, a challenge to the political Union.

For 'unity in diversity' is at once a threat and a promise" (Bondurant 1958: 1). Our study strongly suggests that while religio-communal differences in India are still a matter of some serious concern, the threat from the country's cultural and linguistic differences has most effectively been met in ways in which diversity has been transformed into a strength.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aiyer, S P, "The Federal Idea in India" in Aiyer S P and Mehta U eds. *Essays on Indian Federalism* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1965)

Alexandrowich, C, *Constitutional Developments in India* (Bombay: OUP, 1957)

Appleby, P, *Public Administration in India* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1953)

Austin, G, *The Indian Constitution: The Cornerstone of a Nation* (Delhi: OUP, 1966)

Austin G, *Working of a Democratic Constitution* (Delhi: OUP, 1999)

Banerjee, A " Federalism and Nationalism" in Mukarji, N and Arora, B eds. *Federalism in India Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Vikash Publishig House, 1992)

Basu A and Kohi A eds. *Community Conflicts and the State in India* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998)

Basu, D D *Introduction to the Constitution of India* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1997)

Bhargava, R et al eds. *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy* (Delhi: OUP, 1999)

Bhattacharyya, H, "The Emergence of Tripuri Nationalism, 1948-50", *South Asia Research*, Vol. 2, Nos 1 &2, 1989 (May)

Bhattacharyya, H, *Micro-Foundations of Bengal Communism* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1998)

Bhattacharyya, H, *Communism in Tripura* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1999)

Bhattacharyya, H, "Federalism, Decentralization and State-Building in India: Aspects of Centre-State Fiscal relations", pp.247-305 in Bird, R and Stauffer T eds. *Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations in Fragmented Societies* (Fribourg: Institute of Federalism, 2000)

Bhattacharyya H, *India s a Multicultural Federation: Asian Values Democracy and Decentralisation (In Comparison with Swiss Federalism*) (Fribourg: Institute of Federalism, 2001)

Bhattacharyya, H, "India Creates Three New States", *Federations,* Vol.1, No.3, 2001

Bhattacharyya, H, "Indian Federalism and Tribal Self-Rule", *Federations*, Vol. 3, No.3, 2003

Bombwall, K R. *The Foundations of Indian Federalism* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967)

Bombwall, K R, ed. *National Power and State Autonomy* (Meerut: Meenakshi Publications, 1978)

Bombwall, K R, "Ethnonationalism" in Khan, I ed. *Fresh Perspectives on India and Pakistan* (Oxford: Bougainvillea Books, 1985)

Bondurant, Joan V. *Regionalism Versus Provincialism: A Study in the Problems of National Unity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1958)

 Bose T C ed. *Indian Federalism* (Calcutta: K P Bagchi and Co, 1987)

Brass, P R "Pluralism, Regionalism and Decentralizing Tendencies in Contemporary Indian Politics" in Wilson A J and Dalton, D eds. *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration* (London: Hirst and Co, 1989)

Chandra, S, Mathur , P C and Pande, K D eds. *Regionalism and National Integration* (Jaipur: Aalekh, 1976)

Chatterjee, P, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986)

Chatterjee, P, *Nation and its fragments* (Princeton: PUP, 1993)

Das Gupta, J, "Ethnicity, Democracy and development in India: Assam in a General Perspective" in Kohli A ed. *India's Democracy* (Princeton: PUP, 1988)

Das Gupta, J, " India's Federal Design and Multicultural National Construction" in Kohli, A ed *The Successes of India's Democracy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001)

Desai, A R, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Poplar Prokashan, 1944)

Franda, M, *West Bengal and the Federalising Process* in India (Princeton: PUP, 1968)

Franda, M , *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (Cam., Mass., : MIT Press, 1971)

Friedrich, C, *Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice* (London: Pall Mall, 1968)

Harrison, S, *India: the Most Dangerous Decades* (Madras: OUP, 1960)

Hasan, J et al eds. *The State, Political Process, and Identity* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989)

Hobsbawm, E, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991)

Grover V and Arora, R eds. *Development of Politics and Government in India* (Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1994), Vol.10

Jennings, I, *Some Characteristics of the Indian Constitution* (Madras: OUP, 1953)

Khan, R, *Federal India: Design for Change* (New Delhi: Vikash Publications, 1992)

Khan, R ed. *Rethinking Indian Federalism* (Simla: Institute of Advanced Studies, 1997)

Kothari, R, *Politics in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970)

Kothari, R, *State against Democracy* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988)

Kotahri, R, " The Problem", *Seminar*, No. 357, 1989

Kothari, R, "Issues in Decentralised Governance" in Aziz, A and Arnold, D eds. *Decentralised Governance in Asian Countries* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996)

Kohli, A, *Democracy and Discontent India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)

Kohli, A ed. *The Successes of India's Democracy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001)

Kurian, K M and Varughese P N eds. *Centre-State Relations in India* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1981)

Majumdar A and Singh, B, *Regionalism in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1997)

Majumdar B B and Majumdar B P, *Congress and Congress Nationalism in Pre-Gandhian Era, 1885-1917* (Calcutta: Firma K L M, 1967)

McLane, J R *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton: PUP, 1977)

Mishra, R N. *Regionalism and State Politics in India* (New Delhi: Asish Publishing House, 1994)

Mitra S K, *Governmental Instability in the Indian States* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1978)

Mitra, S K "Nation and Region in India Politics", *Asien, Afrika Lateinamerika*, 1997 25: 499-519

Mitra S K and A Lewis eds. *Sub-national Movements in South Asia* (New Delhi: Segments, 1998)

Mitra, S K and Singh, V B *Democracy and Social Change in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), chapter 5: "The Dialectics of Nation and Region in Indian Politics", pp 155-79

Morris-Jones, W H, *Parliament in India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1957)

Morris-Jones W H, *The Government and Politics of India* (Hamshire, UK: The Eothen Press, 1987, 3rd edn)

Mukherjee, B. *Regionalism in Indian Perspective* (Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Co, 1992)

Nambudripad, E M S, " National Political Background of Indian Federalism" in Kurian and Varughese eds. (1981) Op cit.

Nossiter, T J, *Communism in Kerala* (Delhi: OUP, 1982)

Nossiter T J, *Marxist State Governments in India* (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1988)

Ram, M. *Hindi Against India* (New Delhi: Rachna, 1968)

Rao, G R S, *Regionalism in India* (New Delhi: S Chand and Co, 1975).

Rao, K V, *Parliamentary Democracy in India* (Calcutta: World Press Pvt Ltd, 1961)

Reddy, R G and Sharma, B A, *Regionalism in India: A Study of Telengana* (New Delhi: Concept, 1979)

Rudolph L and Rudolph, S, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987)

Sarkar, A, *Regionalism, State and the Emerging Political Patterns of India* (Calcutta: Firma K L M, 1991)

Sen Gupta B, *Communism in Indian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972)

Singh, G, *Communism in Punjab* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1993)

Sakar, S, *Modern India* (19885-1947) (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983)

Vijapur A P ed. *Dimensions of Federal Nation-Building* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1998)

Wallace, P ed. *Region and Nation in India* (Delhi: OUP, 1985)

Watts, R L, *New Federations Experiments in the Commonwealth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

Wheare, K C, *Federal Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951/1963)

Weiner M and Katzenstein M, *India's Preferential Policies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981)