Consolidation of India as a Nation(IV): Regionalism and Regional Inequality

In the 1950s, many saw regionalism as a major threat to Indian unity. But, in fact, regionalism at no stage was a major factor in Indian politics and administration; over time, it tended to become less and less important. What precisely is regionalism needs to be first understood for appreciating its role in Indian politics.

Local patriotism and loyalty to a locality or region or state and its language and culture do not constitute regionalism, nor are they disruptive of the nation. They are quite consistent with national patriotism and loyalty to the nation. To have pride in one's region or state is also not regionalism. A person can be conscious of his or her distinct regional identity—of being a Tamil or a Punjabi, a Bengali or a Gujarati—without being any the less proud of being an Indian, or being hostile to people from other regions. This was put very well by Gandhiji in 1909: 'As the basis of my pride as an Indian, I must have pride in myself as a Gujarati. Otherwise, we shall be left without any moorings.'[1]

The Indian national movement too functioned on this understanding. From the beginning it functioned as an all-India movement and not as a federation of regional national movements. It also did not counterpose the national identity to regional identities; it recognized both and did not see the two in conflict.

Aspiring to or making special efforts to develop one's state or region or to remove poverty and implement social justice there, is not to be branded as regionalism. In fact, a certain inter-regional rivalry around the achievement of such positive goals would be quite healthy—and in fact we have too little of it. Also, local patriotism can help people overcome divisive loyalties to caste or religious communities.

Defending the federal features of the constitution is also not to be seen as regionalism. The demand for a separate state within the Indian Union or for an autonomous region within an existing state, or for devolution of power below the state level, may be objected to on several practical grounds, but not as regionalist, unless it is put forward in a spirit of hostility to the rest of the population of a state. If the interests of one region or state are asserted against the country as a whole or against another region or state in a hostile manner and a conflict is promoted on the basis of such alleged interests it can be dubbed as regionalism.

In this sense, there has been very little inter-regional conflict in India since 1947, the major exception being the politics of the DMK in Tamil Nadu in the 1950s and early 1960s. The role of the DMK is discussed in Chapter 22, but it may be observed that the DMK has also increasingly given up its regionalist approach over the years. Some cite the example of Punjab in the 1980s, but, as we shall see in Chapter 24, Punjab's was a case of communalism and not regionalism.

Regionalism could have flourished in India if any region or state had felt that it was being culturally dominated or discriminated against. In 1960, Selig Harrison, US scholar and journalist, in his famous work, *India—The Most Dangerous Decades,* had seen a major threat to Indian unity because of conflict between the national government and the regions as the latter asserted their separate cultural identities. But, in fact, the Indian nation has proved to be quite successful in accommodating and even celebrating—in Nehru's words—India's cultural diversity. The different areas of India have had full cultural autonomy and been enabled to fully satisfy their legitimate aspirations. The linguistic reorganization of India and the resolution of the official language controversy have played a very important role in this respect, by eliminating a potent cause of the feeling of cultural loss or cultural domination and therefore of inter-regional conflict.

Many regional disputes, of course, do exist and they have the potential of fanning interstate hostility. There has been friction between different states over the sharing of river waters: for example, between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Karnataka and Andhra, and Punjab and Haryana and Rajasthan. Boundary disputes have arisen out of the formation of linguistic states as in the case of Belgaum and Chandigarh. Construction of irrigation and power dams has created such conflicts. But, while these disputes tend to persist for a long time and occasionally arouse passions, they have, as a whole, remained within narrow, and we might say acceptable, limits. The central government has often succeeded in playing the role of a mediator, though sometimes drawing the anger of the disputants on itself, but thus preventing sharper interregional conflicts.

Economic Imbalances and Regionalism

Economic inequality among different states and regions could be a potential source of trouble. However, despite breeding discontent and putting pressure on the political system, this problem has not so far given rise to regionalism or feeling of a region being discriminated against.

At independence, the leadership recognized that some regions were more backward than others. Only a few enclaves or areas around Calcutta, Bombay and Madras had undergone modern industrial development. For example, in 1948, Bombay and West Bengal accounted for more than 59 per cent of the total industrial capital of the country and more than 64 per cent of the national industrial output. Under colonialism, agriculture had also stagnated, but more in eastern India than in northern or southern India. Regional economic disparity was also reflected in per capita income. In 1949, while West Bengal, Punjab and Bombay had per capita incomes of Rs 353, 331 and 272 respectively, the per capita incomes of Bihar, Orissa and Rajasthan were Rs 200, 188 and 173 respectively.

From the beginning, the national government felt a responsibility to counter this imbalance in regional development. Thus, for example, the 1956 Industrial Policy Resolution of the Government of India asserted that 'only by securing a balanced and coordinated development of the industrial and agricultural economy in each region can the entire country attain higher standards of living'. Similarly, recognizing 'the importance of regional balance in economic development as a positive factor in promoting national integration', the National Integration Council of 1961 urged that 'a rapid development of the economically backward regions in any State should be given priority in national and State plans, at least to the extent that the minimum level of development is reached for all states within a stated period'.[2]

From the beginning, the central government adopted a whole range of policies to influence the rates of growth in poorer states and regions so as to reduce their economic distance from the richer states and regions. A major government instrument in bringing this about was the transfer of financial resources to the poorer states. Important in this respect was the role of the Finance Commission, provided for in the constitution and appointed periodically by the President. The Commission decides the principles on which disbursement of central taxes and other financial resources from the central government to the states occurs. Various Finance Commissions have tried not only to do justice among the states but also to reduce interstate disparity by giving preferential treatment to the poorer states, by allocating larger grants to them than their population would warrant and by transferring resources from the better-off states to them.

Planning was also seen as a powerful instrument that could be used to remove regional inequality. The Second Plan reflected this objective and it was reiterated in the succeeding Plans. The Third Plan explicitly stated that 'balanced development of different parts of the country, extension of the benefits of economic progress to the less developed regions and widespread diffusion of industry are among the major aims of planned development'.[3]

For this purpose, the Planning Commission allocated greater plan assistance to the backward states. This assistance is given in the form of both grants and loans on the basis of a formula which assigns an important place to the degree of backwardness of a state. Moreover, bias in favour of backward states in the devolution of resources from the Centre to the states, in the form of both financial and Plan transfers, has tended to increase with time.

Public investment by the central government in major industries such as steel, fertilizers, oil refining, petrochemicals, machine-making, heavy chemicals and in power and irrigation projects, roads, railways, post offices and other infrastructural facilities, has been a tool for the reduction of regional inequality. India has relied heavily on public investment since the beginning of the Second Plan in 1957 and an effort has been made to favour backward states in regard to this investment.

In the planning and location of the public sector enterprises balanced regional growth has been an important consideration, though this has entailed a certain economic cost to the enterprises concerned. Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have gained the most from such investment; Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and the north-eastern states have also benefited a great deal from the development of infrastructure, especially roads.

Government incentives have been provided to the private sector to invest in backward areas through subsidies, tax concessions, and concessional banking and institutional loans at subsidized rates. The system of licensing of private industrial enterprises, which prevailed from 1956 to 1991, was also used by the government to guide location of industries in backward areas.

Following nationalization of banks in 1969, the expansion of the network of their branches was used to favour backward areas. Banks and other public sector financial institutions were directed to promote investment in these areas. Also, various ministries have evolved schemes for development of backward areas. In particular, poverty eradication programmes, such as the Food for Work programme and the Integrated Rural Development Programme, adopted since the 1970s, and to some extent education, health and family planning programmes and the public distribution system have favoured poorer states.

One sector where the principle of the reduction of regional disparity has not been kept in view is that of investment in irrigation and subsidies to agricultural development. This has been especially so since the 1960s when the Green Revolution began and investment in rural infrastructure and technological innovation was concentrated in Punjab, Haryana and western U.P., namely, areas where irrigation was or could be made available readily. In particular, investment in and development of rain-fed dry land agriculture was neglected. The result was an increase in regional agricultural disparity. The spread of the Green Revolution technology during the 1970s to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, eastern U.P. and parts of Rajasthan, and during the 1980s to the eastern states of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Assam has redressed the regional imbalance to a certain extent.

Economic mobility of population through migration of unskilled labour from the backward regions and of skilled labour to them can also contribute to the lessening of regional disparity; and the Indian constitution guarantees this mobility. There has been a great deal of migration from one state to another. Some states— Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Kerala—have benefited from out-migration just as Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra have benefited rrom in-migration. Certain other states, like Punjab and Karnataka, have had the benefit of both out-migration and in-migration. Unfortunately, as we shall see in the next section, efforts have been made by some states to put checks on interstate migration.

It would be appropriate here to ask how far have the various efforts of the national government succeeded in reducing regional inequality. The picture that emerges is a mixed one. There has been a marginal improvement but regional inequality, especially in terms of per capita income, continues to remain a prominent feature of the Indian economy. Possibly, the situation would have been much worse but for the government's actions which has prevented the widening of the economic gap between states and regions. There are also other dimensions to be observed with regard to the impact of these policies.

For one, there has certainly been a decline in interstate industrial disparity, especially in the organized manufacturing sector. There is also less disparity in terms of social welfare as represented by life expectancy, infant mortality and literacy, though a few states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have moved far ahead. As we have seen above, the increased disparity in agriculture is also gradually getting redressed though the rain-fed dry areas are still lagging behind. While the percentage of people below the poverty line has steadily declined in all the states, it is in the advanced states that maximum progress has been made, so that the inter-regional disparity in the distribution of poverty has been growing. Overall, while there has been economic growth in all states, the rates of growth of different states have been highly differential, leading to interstate disparities remaining quite wide.

Some backward states have managed to pick themselves up, while others have failed to do so, with the result that there has been a change in the hierarchy of states in terms of development and per capita income. Thus, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa are still at the bottom. Kerala, Punjab and Gujarat continue to remain on the top. There has been an improvement in the position of the previously underdeveloped states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil

Nadu, while there has been deterioration in that of Assam, West Bengal, Maharashtra and U.P, with U.P. moving to the bottom level and West Bengal to the middle. Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan have stagnated, remaining just above the bottom level. On the whole, Haryana is an example of states which have improved their position and Bihar of one of those whose position has worsened.

Why then does regional inequality persist on such a wide scale? What are the constraints on its decline? Or why have Bihar and U.P. performed so poorly. It emerges that the constraint is not essentially of geography, that is, of inequality in size or natural resources. Bihar, U.P. and Orissa are, for example, very well endowed by nature; their people well known for their industriousness because of which they are welcomed in the rest of the country, and indeed overseas in the West Indies, Mauritius and Fiji to where some have migrated.

The major reason, at the all-India level, for the continuing regional disparity has been the low rate of economic growth. To make a dent on this requires a high rate of national growth so that large revenues can be raised and devoted to the development of the backward regions without adversely affecting national growth itself. The rate of growth of the Indian economy was around 3.5 per cent till the end of the 1970s and around 5 per cent in the 1980s. This was not high enough to have a significant impact on regional inequality despite policies consciously designed to favour backward regions being followed. It is only in the last few years that the rate of growth of the economy has touched 8 to 9 per cent, while population growth has also slowed down. A reduction in economic inequality may come about, provided the right type of regional developmental policies continue to be followed.

We, however, feel that the roots of some states' backwardness lie in their socio-economic and political organization itself. For example, the agrarian structure in Bihar and eastern U.P. is still quite regressive and in many parts of these states land reforms have been inadequately implemented. (This was also true of Orissa till recently.) The feudal mentality is still quite strong. Also, in Bihar and Orissa land consolidation has been tardy, though ongoing, which played an important role in the agricultural development of Punjab and Haryana.

The backward states have a lower level of infrastructural facilities, such as power, irrigation, roads, telephones, and modern markets for agricultural produce. These are essential for development and have to be developed by the states themselves being mostly State subjects.

States also have a low level of social expenditure on education and public health and sanitation, which are also state subjects. Besides, they suffer from a lack of financial resources to meet Plan expenditure. Increased central financial assistance is unable to offset this weakness. A vicious cycle is set up. A low level of economic development and production means less financial resources and limited expenditure on infrastructure, development planning and social services. And this low level of expenditure in turn leads to low levels of production and therefore of financial resources.

Political and administrative failure also bolsters backwardness. Bihar and U.P. are classic cases of states bedevilled by high levels of corruption, sheer bad administration, and deteriorating law and order. As a result, whatever central assistance is available is poorly utilized and often diverted to non-development heads of expenditure. Further, development of infrastructure, including roads and electricity, is neglected and the existing infrastructure is riddled with inefficiency and corruption. All this turns away the private sector, which is a major source of development in the advanced states. The role of greater administrative efficiency is also proved by the better rates of economic growth in the relatively better administered states of South and western India as compared to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

In passing, it may be mentioned that disparities in development also exist within each state. In many cases, this inequality has become a source of tension and given birth to sub-regional movements for separate states within the Indian Union, or greater autonomy for the sub-regions within the existing states, or at least special treatment and safeguards in matters of employment, education and allocation of financial resources. Examples of such sub-regional feelings are the movements in Telangana in Andhra Pradesh, Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Saurashtra in Gujarat, Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh, Darjeeling district or Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Bodoland in Assam, and the areas consisting of the old princely states of Orissa. It is because of these regional feelings that Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh were created out of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, though the tribal and linguistic factors were also important.

Undoubtedly, regional economic inequality is a potent time-bomb directed against national unity and political stability. So far, fortunately, it has been 'digested', absorbed and mitigated because it is not the result of domination and exploitation of backward states by the more advanced states or of discrimination against the former by the national government. It is noteworthy that the politically important Hindi-speaking states of the Indian heartland— Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, with nearly 37 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha—are economically backward. On the other hand, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Maharashtra, with only about 17 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha, are the high-income states. It is, therefore, impossible for anyone who talks of the Hindi-belt states' domination of the others to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, the backward Hindi-belt states wield so much political clout that it is impossible for them to accuse the central government or non-Hindi states of dominating or discriminating against them. It is interesting that so far accusations of central domination have come from the relatively developed states of Punjab and West Bengal—obviously for political and not economic reasons. However, one hears less and less about central domination in these states too.

In the all-India services too, like the IAS, the Hindi areas are not advantaged. It is Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal which have a higher representation than their population warrants.

Another reason for the lack of regionalism and feeling of discrimination among the poorer states has been the consciousness of their intelligentsia that their poverty and backwardness are basically the result of the actions of their own political and administrative classes. After all, feelings of deprivation and lack of progress are essentially articulated by the intelligentsia. At the same time, the vast majority of the people in the poorer states are blissfully unaware of their backwardness and poverty in comparison with other states. This leads both to absence of discontent with their position as also to a lack of effort to reach equality with the more advanced states. However, with the spread of education and the reach of the visual and print media, such as television and newspapers, this state of affairs is likely to change.

Nevertheless, as was fully realized by the founders of the Republic, it is necessary to first contain regional inequality within politically and economically reasonable and acceptable limits and then to gradually move towards its elimination, by raising the rates of growth of the poorer states by all available means including greater central assistance as also greater self-effort by them. This also, of course, means that, as Ajit Mozoomdar has argued, the national government needs to wield 'greater authority than in industrialised countries, to be able to devise and implement strategies of economic and social development, and to deal with the problems of regional disparities, which are more acute'. It also must have the authority 'to mediate and resolve conflicts between states over the appropriation of natural resources' and 'to effect significant resource transfers from richer to poorer states'.[4]

Sons of the Soil Doctrine

Since the 1950s, an ugly kind of regionalism has been widely prevalent in the form of the 'sons of the soil' doctrine. Underlying it is the view that a state specifically belongs to the main linguistic group inhabiting it or that the state constitutes the exclusive 'homeland' of its main language speakers who are the 'sons of the soil' or the 'local' residents. All others who live there or are settled there and whose mother tongue is not the state's main language, are declared to be 'outsiders'. These 'outsiders' might have lived in the state for a long time, or have migrated there more recently, but they are not to be regarded as the 'sons of the soil'. This doctrine is particularly popular in cities, especially in some of them.

Unequal development of economic opportunities in different parts of the country, especially the cities, occurred in the surge of economic progress after 1952. Demand or preference for the 'local' people or 'sons of the soil' over 'outsiders' in the newly created employment and educational opportunities was the outcome. In the struggle for the appropriation of economic resources and economic opportunities, recourse was often taken to communalism, casteism and nepotism. Likewise, language loyalty and regionalism was used to systematically exclude the 'outsiders' from the economic life of a state or city.

The problem was aggravated in a number of cities or regions because the speakers of the state language were in a minority or had a bare majority. For example, in Bombay, in 1961, the Marathi speakers constituted 42.8 per cent of the population. In Bangalore, the Kannada speakers were less than 25 per cent. In Calcutta, the Bengalis formed a bare majority. In the urban areas of Assam, barely 33 per cent were Assamese. After 1951 the rate of migration into the cities accelerated.

The important questions that arise are, why did the 'sons of the soil' movements develop in some states and cities and not in others, why were they directed against some migrants and linguistic minority groups and not others, why were some types of jobs targeted and not others, why technical and professional education as against the so-called arts education? Conflict between migrants and non-migrants (and linguistic minorities and majorities) was not inherent and inevitable. In general, the two have lived harmoniously in most of the states. Clearly, there were specific conditions that precipitated the conflict.

The 'sons of the soil' movements have mainly arisen, and have been more virulent, when there is actual or potential competition for industrial and middle-class jobs, between the migrants and the local, educated, middle-class youth. The friction has been more intense in states and cities where 'outsiders' had greater access to higher education and occupied more middle-class positions in government service, professions and industry and were engaged in small businesses, such as small-scale industry and shopkeeping. Active in these movements have also been members of the lower-middle class or workers, as well as rich and middle peasants whose position is unthreatened, but who increasingly aspire to middle-class status and position for their children. All these social groups also aspire to give their children higher education, especially technical education, such as engineering, medicine and commerce.

The economy's failure to create enough employment opportunities for the recently educated created an acute scarcity of jobs, and led to intense competition for the available jobs during the 1960s and 1970s. The major middle-class job opportunities that opened up after 1952 were in government service and the public sector enterprises. Popular mobilization and the democratic political process could therefore be used by the majority linguistic group to put pressure on the government to appropriate employment and educational avenues and opportunities. Some groups could then take advantage of the 'sons of the soil' sentiment for gaining political power. This was not of course inevitable. The Communist Party refused to use anti-migrant sentiments in Calcutta because of its ideological commitment, one reason why the city has not witnessed any major 'sons of the soil' movement. Similarly, though Congress may have taken an opportunist and compromising stand when faced with major 'sons of the soil' movements, it has not initiated or actively supported them.

'Outsiders' have been often far more numerous in rural areas as agricultural labourers or as workers in low-paid traditional industries, such as jute or cotton textiles, than in the cities. Here, however, the 'sons of the soil' sentiment was absent, nor hostility towards the 'outsiders' manifested because no middle-class jobs were involved. The 'locals' also did not compete with the 'outsiders' for these jobs. Consequently, there has been little conflict with the 'locals' when there has been large-scale migration of labourers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Punjab and Haryana or Bombay city, or of workers from Bihar to the jute and other mills of Calcutta, or of workers from Bihar and Orissa to the tea plantations in Assam and Bengal, or of Oriya building workers to Gujarat, and domestic workers all over India. Such migrations have not posed a threat to the local middle classes; and in the last case— that of the domestic workers—the middle classes have been the chief beneficiaries as also promotees of the migration. However, more recently, because of the higher salaries and education and skill involved, competition between migrants and the 'locals' has tended to develop for employment in the technologically advanced industries.

Another factor that has influenced the emergence or non-emergence of anti-migrant movements in an area or region has been the existence or non-existence of a tradition of migration. When people of a state, especially the middle classes, have themselves migrated, there has been little opposition to immigration. This has been the case with West Bengal, Kerala, Punjab, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; On the other hand, 'sons of the soil' movements have flourished in Maharashtra, Assam and the Telangana area of Andhra Pradesh, the people of which have not had a tradition of migration.

The Indian constitution is to some extent ambiguous on the question of the rights of the migrants. Article 15 prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 16 prohibits discrimination in the employment or appointments to any office under the state on grounds of 'descent, place of birth or residence'. However, parliament, though not any state legislature, can pass a law laying down the requirement of residence within a state for appointments under that state. Under political pressure and taking advantage of the ambiguity in the constitution, many states in fact reserve jobs, or give preference for employment in state and local governments and for admission into educational institutions to local residents. The period of residence is fixed or prescribed in such cases. Also, while the constitution permits reservation or preference in state jobs only on grounds of residence and not language, some state governments have gone further and limited the preference to those local residents whose mother tongue is the state language. They have thus discriminated against long-term migrants, their descendants, and even the residents who can speak the state language but whose mother tongue is a minority language in the state. This has, of course, been in clear violation of the constitution. Many state governments have also given directions to private employers to give preference to local persons for employment in their enterprises.

The main argument put forward for reservation in employment and education for the local persons has been that in the states concerned they are socially, economically and educationally backward and are not able to compete with the more advanced migrant communities. Also, in technical colleges and universities, the more backward local students would be overwhelmed by the more advanced students from other states. It is because of this, in the post-Nehru era, even the central government has tended to support preference for residents of a state in employment in central public sector enterprises below the level of a certain technical expertise and in colleges and universities. Reservations on grounds of residence have also been approved by the courts. However, as brought out earlier, reservations for the tribal people are in a separate category.

While reservation of jobs in state administrations and seats in institutions of higher education for the backward local residents was undesirable from the point of view of national integration, some justification could be found for it. However, there was none for the anti-migrant movements of the 1960s which tried to restrict the flow of migrants from other states and which openly proclaimed antagonism and generated hostility against them. These militant anti-migrant and 'sons of the soil' movements were mainly centred in the urban areas of Assam, Telangana in Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Orissa.

The worst case was that of the movement led by the Shiv Sena which appealed to extreme regional chauvinism and assumed fascist proportions. Founded in 1966, under the leadership of Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena demanded that preference in jobs and small businesses should be given to Maharashtrians, who were defined as those whose mother tongue was Marathi. Raising the slogan of 'Maharashtra for the Maharashtrians', the Shiv Sena organized a militant, and often violent movement against South Indians, especially Tamils, who were declared to have a disproportionate share of office jobs such as clerks and typists in private firms and small businesses such as tea shops and eating places. In 1969, the Sena gave Bombay city a taste of fascist violence when it organized arson and terror against South Indians, looted and destroyed their tea-stalls and eating places, overturned cars of Tamils and tore off Tamil signs from shops. The Shiv Sena could not, however, sustain its hate-South Indian campaign or become a major political force outside Bombay city or get the support of any all-India political party. It, therefore, soon shifted its ideological base to Hindu communalism. Gaining a wider political constituency, it was then able to ally itself with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The 'sons of the soil' movements in Assam and Telangana, which also assumed serious proportions and were quite complex, had some additional and distinctive features. Both these movements will therefore be discussed in the chapters on state politics.

While protective and preferential regulations have been widespread since the late 1960s, antagonism, hostility and violence against migrants have abated in recent years. The problem posed by the 'sons of the soil' doctrine is still a somewhat minor one and there is no ground for pessimism on that score. Even at its height, only a few cities and states were affected in a virulent form, and at no stage did it threaten the unity of the country or the process of nation-in-the-making. Besides, its effects on the Indian economy have been negligible: migration within the country has not been checked; interstate mobility is in fact growing. But the problem is likely to linger till economic development is able to deal effectively with unemployment, especially among the middle classes, and regional inequality.

Looking back at the divisive issues of the post-independence period, the linguistic reorganization of the states, the integration of the tribals, and regional inequality and regionalism, it is to be observed that the prophets of gloom and doom have been disproved. Linguistic states have strengthened not weakened Indian unity, even while permitting full cultural autonomy to different linguistic areas. Hindi and English are growing as all-India languages. Regional movements like the DMK have been doused after 1967 and are content to rename Madras state as Tamil Nadu and Madras city as Chennai. Tribals feel secure in the Indian Union regarding their cultural and economic autonomy, and have also gained greater strength themselves, as also political support in the country over time. The process of nation-in-the-making is being pushed forward. A national identity, that of being Indian, has come to be accepted by all on the subcontinent, and the fact of Indian unity is irreversible.

This should not suggest that all problems related to these issues have been resolved for all time. Further social and economic development, spread of education, deepening of democracy and politicization, as has been seen elsewhere, could create new sources of tension and conflict leading to disrupture tendencies. Optimism is to be tempered with a continuing concern for threats to Indian unity. Yet, India's past experience in overcoming disruptive forces may be instructive for the future. The role and legacy of the freedom struggle, the quality and wisdom of the leaders, the leadership's correct understanding of India's diversity, the leadership's rejection of secessionist demands, while respecting those within the constitutional framework, the democratic political structure, and the acceptance of the need for a strong national government within a federal structure have all contributed to promote Indian unity. Here, it must be added that a strong state should not be mistaken for an authoritarian one. A strong national government does not entail weak state governments or a national government that rides roughshod over the federal provisions of the constitution. Federalism does not mean a weak national government, rather a non-dominating national government which observes the federal features of the polity. A strong but democratic nation state is a necessity for a developing country with strong federal features. What it does with its strength depends on the political nature of the government and the ruling party of the day.