

Demand for New and Smaller States in India: A Critical Observation

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Is the demand for new and smaller states in India at present a result of the new economic reforms and the market-oriented political economy of development in the era of globalization and liberalization? How can we account for it within the larger context of the policies, programmes and the power of cultural pluralism and political centralism followed by the Indian State in the past two decades? How does this demand affect the federal institutions and their governance in the country?

To analyse the nature of particular demand as well as its articulation in particular framework it is important to enquire into the reasons behind the absence of similar demand and similar framework in the past. How much the new conditions shaped the articulatory framework itself? To what extent new frameworks are genuine? If genuine, what would be its liberative actuality once it gets adorned with all facilities to realize its potentiality? Besides this, one has to distinguish between the hegemonic and authentic demand. Former, if actualized, would become a further liability for humanity. Besides this I would consider the necessity for disequilibrium in social and other framework for sustenance of system.

This essay is divided into three sections. First section deals with the demands of new and smaller states in India due to the compulsions of economic liberalization and globalization. It examines the methodological limitations of this argument, even if, the demands itself seems correct. Second section focuses on the centrifugal forces of available mechanisms, institutional or non-institutional, which led to the articulation of demand for new and smaller states in India. Third section speculates the probable impacts of such demands on the existing federal framework. Doing this, this section also tries to present an analytical framework under which authenticity of demands could be calculated as well as articulated to check on the transmission-loss of genuine concerns.

I

Many commentators (Kumar, 2000; Sarangi and Pai, 2011; Kumar, 2009) have argued that the demand for new and smaller states in India is a result of the new economic reforms and the market oriented political economy of development in the era of globalization and liberalization. The general argument goes like this: market oriented growth, which got its legal strength since 1990s, have produced many inner contradictions in the name of growth. It has caused uneven inter-region development, but, the major issue which has caused the demand of new states is the uneven intra-region development. Uneven intra-region development has not happened due to ignorance rather it is a hegemonic project of the one at the expense of many others. Within the present boundary of many states the hegemonic logic of economic growth has tried to siphon off the resources of one region for the benefits of other already dominant region. It has been sustained because of close nexus between corporate and dominant 'clasts' (caste as well as class). This marginalization is not going to stop unless the neglected region is not separated from the political clutch of the dominant region. Therefore, consequentially, it is imperative to have a separate state for continuously neglected region.

For me there is a contradiction in this demand framework. The above argumentative demand sees the failure on the part of policy-framers and their implementers. It presumes the growth-oriented logic of liberalization. It assumes that if the romance of capital-intensive growth would have had come along with the effective distributive framework the present situation could have been avoided. It further assumes that if neglected region is given the political mandate to regulate their affairs by themselves it would open the doors for their self-fulfilment. It is imperative, at this juncture, to ask the questions: Is the uneven intra-region development solely product of failure of policy-framing and policy-implementation? If not, then, how much capital itself is accountable for the same? Can capital flourish without producing the socio-eco-political contradictions in the society? Won't the capital-oriented growth further create the uneven inter-region developmental pattern in the newly created state? I think it is correct

to argue that liberalization has generated the uneven intra-region development. But to project this argument for the demand of new states is itself contradictory unless a project of development, different from the premises, are not articulated.

To situate the new cause/agent in the same contradictory conditions, against which we are suggestive to avoid, is to re-incarnate the same contradictions. There are two approaches to speculate about the actions/products. One, keep the same agent/cause and place them in the differential conditions to know the best efficient and liberative actions/products. Two, keep the conditions same and place the differential causes/agents to speculate the best possible causes under the same conditions. Demand of new and smaller states in the name of economic marginalization is based on the latter approach where the causes are differential and conditions are same. But at the same time it is imperative to speculate the nature of conditions in which causes are going to be placed. Numerous researches on the liberalization and globalization have asserted the marginalized role of the instruments of the same. We know the nature of conditions, here liberalization and globalization, which is contradictory, hegemonic, marginalizational and oppressive. Therefore, it is unwise to speculate the potentiality of differential causes/agents under the conditions which is based on the contradictory logic. In short, then, it is unwise to argue for the new state under the same contradictory conditions. At this juncture the best possible step would be to speculate about the potential of cause/agents under differential conditions. Saying this, though, I accept the empirical existence of uneven intra-region development, but, I am interested in the simultaneous examination of differential conditions to argue for the best suitable conditions for any new causes/agents.

II

The demands of new states on the grounds of language, ethnicity and cultural factors were integral part of the pre-independence nationalist discourse. After the independence, the euphoria of freedom struggle and 'Nehruvian-consensus' turned this demands silent. Rather, contrarily, integration of many princely states took a grand momentum. Some areas, e.g. Kashmir and North Eastern states gained some autonomy but unfortunately it had pragmatic presumption. Since late 1980s, Indian political spectrum saw different momentum in which it was not that the same game started producing different results rather the rule of game itself had changed. This was visible through recurrent assertion of language of rights, self-respect and non-discrimination by the marginalized groups. Indian social-political spectrum soon changed into the pour of political activism which questioned the dominant language of epistemology. In short, this disjuncture was visible through the political consciousness of marginalized (which includes caste, class, gender as well as region). The newly aroused consciousness further intensified with the centralized tendencies of state machineries. This led to the birth of what Sunil Khilnani (1998) has called 'Layered-Indianness' in which language, caste, class, region became the base to intensify the identity based politics. The germination of the 'layered-Indianness', according to Khilnani, is due to: the maturing and deeper penetration of the democratic processes in India, people's responsiveness to it, bottom-up agenda setting and also Indian state's failure to respond appropriately to the breadth of the change. Resultantly, the Indian political system is going through the phase in which regional/local issues take precedence over national issues (Khilnani, 1998).

Balveer Arora (2015) argued for 'multi-level federalism' and concluded that despite many limitations Indian federalism has established a good precedent by giving more autonomy to Kashmir, North-Eastern regions and many tribal as well as hilly regions. He argues for broadening the scope of this initiative. Louise Tillin (2011) does not agree with Balveer Arora as far as the intentions behind assertion of autonomy of Kashmir were concerned. Tillin continues, intentions behind autonomy of Kashmir, contrarily to North-Eastern states, were pragmatic. It was not in the imagined framework of cultural recognition; rather, pragmatic assumptions were articulated for autonomy of Kashmir. It has serious repercussions for the emotional and cultural growth of Kashmir region.

September 1961 National Integration Conference¹, under the chairmanship of then Prime Minister J.L. Nehru, tried to sketch a detailed analysis of the causes and combating methodology for the evils of communalism, linguism, casteism and regionalism. The conference accepted these evils as a threat to the unity and integrity of India. One of the important outcomes of the conference was a consensus to establish National Integration Council (NIC).

¹http://www.nfch.nic.in/sites/default/files/WORD_FILE/NIC.pdf

However, the frequency of meeting of the NIC is far from satisfactory. Till now, only sixteen meetings have been conducted by the NIC in fifty-six years. This poses the question marks on the priority of government. It is the important platform which should be the site of frequent deliberations for all competent stakeholders. But the failure of government to resort over deliberative platform has produced the resentment amongst the masses which has caused the sectarian demands. These sectarian demands have created the space for competitive negotiation between groups rather than deliberation between them. It must be noted that deliberation is much wider frameworks for the engagement rather than the negotiation. This politicization of social sphere has turned unfortunately in which the centrifugal tendencies of identity imagination is narrowing the sphere of rational deliberation.

The government of India too instituted several commissions to look into the mode of functioning of the constitutionally mandated federal system in the changing social, economic and political context. The government of India instituted Sarkaria Commission², under the chairmanship of Justice R.S. Sarkaria in 1980s. Though most of the recommendations of the Sarkaria commission were not accepted by the Government of India, the report is still a guiding framework to ease and harmonise centre-state relations in India. The report tried to synchronise regional aspirations with the national political consciousness. The Punchi Commission³ submitted its report to the Government of India in March 2010 and emphasised on the need to have 'cooperative federalism' for the sustenance of unity and integrity of India as well as its long term social and economic development. The terms of reference of the Punchi commission was to enquire whether sectarian identities pose threat to the national unity and integrity. Additionally, the commission also looked into what are the steps to be taken to keep national vision paramount over local interest. However, the commission did not have explicit mandate, neither had it looked into, the probability of constructing emotional integrity of India through national integration.

At the functional ground Indian state's imagination of nation under the framework of fusion and uniformity have produced a strong centrifugal thrust which is visible through the recurrent demands of new and smaller states. Failure of Indian state to reconcile the unity with diversity is producing several sectarian demands. It is therefore imperative to have a holistic look at the methodology and frameworks in which political system of India is currently embedded and what form of political system we want in future as a political collective.

III

In this section, I will be throwing light on how the demand of new and smaller states affects the federal institutions and their governance in India. India has federal arrangement of governance. For the framers of constitution national integration became prime important which led to what Ivor Jennings has told 'a federation with strong centralizing tendencies' (Sharma, 1953). The logic behind this political integration was that political integration of India would necessitate the emotional integration of its subjects. Almost 70 years have already passed but the supposed inner momentum of emotional integration is still far from its actual thrust. This has led to the birth of several competing entities which have furthered the unstructured identity politics in India. Identity political spectrum has given enough thrust to populist policies in India. The thick shadow of populism has virtually closed the supply-demand gate of political system.

I would like to see calculable impact of demands from below on the established federal principles. Principles are not prior to collective self-respect. Principles are supportive to the actualization of basic social good of human society; hence, it should be flexible, mobile and mutually arrived at. Viewing this, both established principles and demand from below must have centripetal as well as centrifugal tendencies. Both should complementarily shape each other. Therefore, demand from below is much to be cherished if the particular demand is available for interaction with the available principles to get a set of intersection of interacting sets. But if the demand from below is under the populist framework it gains its centrifugal strength on the expense of centripetal tendencies which leads to the formation of uneven set of intersection. In this case, the resultant intersected set is formed, not out of deliberation rather, under myopic make-shift arrangement. This, then, cause the fractured traditions which likely becomes the

²<http://interstatecouncil.nic.in/report-of-the-sarkaria-commission/>

³<http://interstatecouncil.nic.in/report-of-the-commission-on-centre-state-relations/>

precedent for repeated myopic vision. Therefore, it is imperative to calculate the authenticity of the demand before placing it under deliberative instruments.

Here, an important question comes in my mind. What is authentic? How can we say something is authentic or unauthentic? Authenticity is the essence which affirms the genuineness of particular experiences, absence of, which would leave certain void in the mind and heart of social being. If your authenticity is under attack you would find hard to cope up. This concept leads to something called multiculturalism which argues for simultaneous importance and, hence, existence of differential cultures as the social beings is culturally situated. But, multiculturalism also accepts the foundational importance of cultural traditions, and, in doing so it neglects the deconstruction of existing dominant cultural epistemologies. Unless we place existing cultural traditions or so called authenticity under different conditions how would we know the true nature of that authenticity? Same is true for demands of new states under the logic of attack on their cultural authenticity. The burden of proof is on those who argue for the saviour of authenticity of theirs 'authentic'. Once the authenticity of demand is proved under the intersectional framework it should be allowed to articulate through available channels. This sequential trajectory of articulation would avoid the transmission loss of genuine concern. This will also help the existing principles to deliberate about the possible mutations of theirs with filtered demands. This would not cause the loss of integrationist notion of Indian federal framework, but rather, would give a genuine thrust to mutate itself under egalitarian imagination.

Besides this the dire need is to re-look to our constitution to find out the available space for assimilation without uniformity. Experience shows that the various provisions of constitution have been used, multiple times, to broaden the scope of rights, dignity, equality, liberty as well as justice. At this time it is necessary to re-look at the same platform, with appropriate alteration, to ensure the best possible delivery of justice. Rule of law should be the proper mechanism to deliver the appropriate entities to subjects and same is true for the feedback. Unless the rule of law is respected the demand-supply model of political system would cease.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the already available platform like- Inter-State Council. Besides this many informal platform could avail the proper facilities for broad deliberation. This would be an effective tool to mitigate the centrifugal thrust of sectarian demands. Identity based politics fails to adopt the framework of precision, rather, sticks to the parameters of accuracy. One obvious problems of this is that identity based movements fail to put their demands under deliberative framework, and hence consequentially, articulate the half-truth demands. It also fails to reach what John Rawls has called 'Reflective-Equilibrium' (Rawls, 1971). Unless imagined notion of truth is not assessed with the all available grounds it falls short of its emancipatory potential. The underlying notion of Rawls' Reflective-Equilibrium, if applied to the theory of federalism, is that one must continuously keep their imbibed beliefs to check with other's believes. Continuous revising and refining of beliefs is very important to arrive at a coherent set of larger belief in a human society embedded with identity and sectarian belief-systems.

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