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Analyzing the Role of Regional Political Parties in Enhancing Indian Federalism

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Abstract: *This study analyses the tactic used by regional parties to endorse India's federal system. Evaluating India's status as a federal democracy, encompassing its fundamental components, structure, and operation, is crucial to grasping the dynamic nature of existing Indian politics. Political parties profoundly shape and have an impact on the structure and functioning of India's federal system due to the fact that it is a parliamentary federation. The Indian Constitution provides a system of government that efficiently indicates federal concepts, but the fact that it doesn't use the word "federal" directly. The Constitution grants the central authority an abundance of power under the existing Federalists framework. The writers of the constitution have cooperative federalism as the ultimate goal. The concentration of power at the national level has been recognized to be frequently facilitated by national parties, nevertheless. The focus of Indian politics has begun to shift in favor of the states attributed in large part to regional parties. They have also played significant roles in determining national policy, boosting India's federal system of government. In this article, the function of regional political parties in India's federal system is examined.*

Key Words: : Federal system, federal democracy, encompassing, fundamental components, structure, operation.

This study focuses on the vital part that political parties perform in multiple facets of political life, such as political mobilization, administration, the development and execution of economic and social policies, addressing racial conflicts, and dealing with separatist movements¹. Political parties have an essential function in Indian politics. Political parties do, in fact, play a significant role since they act as the vital link between the people and the government as well as between the government and society. In bridging the gap between social structures and policymakers, they are crucial. The purpose of this article was to emphasize the effects of the political system in general and regional parties specifically on how Indian federalism operates. Regional parties are primarily concerned with safeguarding the rights and objectives of just one nation or region. They are frequently seen as a reaction to perceived disinterest or marginalization by parties at the national level. Regional parties are usually better suited to address and promote state-specific issues, such as infrastructure development, agricultural policies, and water resources, which might overlook the proper attention from national parties. At the national level, coalition governments are now prevalent in India.² Regional parties are frequently having a major impact on how these coalitions evolve. They can give national parties the assistance they need to win a majority in the Lok Sabha.

Nature of Indian Federalism- India is among the largest democracies globally, and it operates with a federal political system. The roots of its federal structure can be traced back to India's historical context, its colonial past, the legacy of the national movement, and the impact of constitutional developments and the roles played by political parties. While India is often categorized as a federation, the character and operation of Indian federalism have been the subject of extensive discussion and debate.

Various federal theorists with different perspectives have offered diverse definitions of Indian federalism. Most renowned thinker K.C. Wheare mentioned India as "quasi-federal," "a unitary state with subsidiary federal features rather than a federal state with subsidiary unitary features". Different academics hold various theories about how Indian federalism operates, and many of them who hold a constitutional standpoint refused to acknowledge India as a federation. In this regard, Granville Austin said in *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (1966) that "India faced a unique set of issues that had never before confronted other federations. Due to federalism's ambiguous nature and lack of a clear definition, these problems could not be resolved by the use of theory."³

Indian federalism combines elements of federalism and unitary federalism in order to simultaneously reflect the nation's variety and ensure that there is an intricate balance of power between the federal government and the state governments.⁴ It is a dynamic structure that has evolved over time and is still up for discussion and debate within Indian politics. India's variety of languages and cultures has an impact on federalism as well. In order to accommodate for this diversity, certain measures in the Constitution are inserted, such as the recognition of regional languages.

Strengthening Regional Parties- The demand for a genuinely decentralized federal system has been a consistent request from the states since the late 1960s. The transformation of the party system and the increasing significance of regional parties have significantly decentralized the functioning of Indian democracy. By the mid-1970s, sub-regional cultures began

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to gain prominence at the state level. The Congress party found it challenging to address the diverse needs of all the states and their local concerns, as various localized issues had started to emerge. For the common people, their local leaders were more accessible and focused on local matters compared to national leaders. As a result of this, regional and local leaders were motivated to take initiative and champion their local concerns, actively participating in regional politics with the aim of fostering a more direct link between the state and its citizens for the betterment of the people.

Surendra Mohan, in his article *The Pivotal Role of Regional Politics*, highlights that the Central leadership has overlooked the importance of preserving unique cultural identities and addressing ongoing economic disparities in various regions. Consequently, regional leaders have begun to assert their presence and interests.⁵

Based on William H. Riker's notion of determining federalism with a party system aimed at the power balance between national and state parties, this subsection will discuss the political aspect of Indian federalism. State-based political parties have become a major force in both state and federal elections since the wave of "Dalitization Mandalization Hinduization" that began in 1989. No national party was able to secure an absolute single party majority to form the government at the centre because to the fragmented multi-party system.⁶

The primary cause of the surge in regional parties can be attributed to excessive centralization by national leaders and the government. Regional parties have gained strength in several states such as Meghalaya, Assam, Mizoram, Sikkim, Maharashtra Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh Orissa, and others within the Union. A notable characteristic of these parties is their strong emphasis on cultural and regional identities, linguistic opposition, particularly in non-Hindi states, a commitment to greater regional autonomy, and a focus on state-specific or region-specific issues.

Regional Parties Advocating for Increased State Autonomy- India, being a vast country comprising 29 states, is marked by numerous regions that are delineated not only by linguistic differences but also by socio-economic development, ethnicity, religion, and various other factors. Consequently, over time, we have witnessed the emergence of multiple identities in our country, including distinct political identities deeply rooted in socio-cultural factors.⁷ These political identities have significantly influenced our past and present politics and are likely to continue shaping our political landscape in the future. It is imperative to delve into a more detailed examination of regionalism, its origins in India, the historical forces that contributed to it, and the reasons for its enduring strength in our nation. This persistence is particularly noteworthy given that more than 75 years have passed since India gained independence, and we have witnessed significant political developments during this period.

The regional parties brought up the idea of autonomy and pressed for greater authority and financial support. The DMK party in Tamil Nadu formed a powerful campaign for autonomy by blending Tamil language and cultural nationalism.⁸ The DMK led a campaign for Tamil Nadu to be an independent, sovereign state in the beginning of the 1960s. Later, the demand evolved to include Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka in a distinct Dravidnad. The Centre considered it to be a grave threat to the integrity of the country. The 16th Constitutional Amendment was brought about by the union government as a reaction to the country's rising separatist sensations in the 1960s. The Anti-secession Bill, which eventually became an Act, was created to resist separatist and secessionist movements that would safeguard India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A three-person committee chaired by P.V. Rajamannar was constituted by the DMK-led government of Tamil Nadu in 1969 to look at ties between the center and the states to make recommendations for constitutional reforms that would provide more state autonomy.⁹ The committee comprised P. Chandra Reddy and Lakshmana Swamy Mudaliar. The Rajamannar Committee recommended a number of modifications, including the omission of Article 356 and the disbanding of the Planning Commission (NITI Aayog), the transfer of some topics from the Union and Concurrent lists to the State list, and the appointment of a high-power committee to manage the new allocation of the topics among the three lists.

The Shiromani Akali Dal, also known as Akali Dal, is a Punjabi regional party in India with a substantial Sikh supporter base. A prominent Sikh leader named Master Tara Singh was vital in setting up the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhndak Committee.¹⁰ The Akali Dal previously supported an independent Sikh state during his leadership beginning in the early 1960s. Later, under Sant Fateh Singh's direction, a number of initiatives were started to create Punjab Suba, a distinct state in India for Punjabi speakers. He started a hunger strike to compel the Central Government to act in accordance with this demand, which was ultimately granted. Not all Sikhs, however, found this development to be satisfying. The Shiromani Akali Dal adopted a resolution at the 1968 Batala congress arguing for further state autonomy. At a subsequent gathering held in



Anandpur Sahib in October 1973, another key resolution known as the Anandpur Sahib resolution was ratified. This resolution urged that the Central Government's authority be restricted to areas like defense, foreign policy, communications, and money, and that the states be granted control over all other domains. Leader of the Akali Dal, Gurnam Singh, put out this resolution. Later, when he was appointed Chief Minister of Punjab, he called for Karunanidhi, the leader of the DMK, to Ludhiana to talk over state autonomy.

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) defeated the Congress Party in the 1983 elections after three decades of uninterrupted Congress Party hegemony in Andhra Pradesh politics. In a short period of time, the TDP managed to topple the Congress' rule in Andhra Pradesh.¹¹ The Telugu Desam Party emerged on March 29, 1982, by well-known actor N.T. Rama Rao. He portrayed Hindu mythological figures such as Lord Srirama, Krishna, Karna, etc., as well as ethical figures who stood up for the outcasts in society. By giving States additional power, the TDP highlighted the necessity of more financial decentralization and State autonomy. Additionally, it called for elimination of the Governor position. In May 1983, N.T. Rama Rao, the head of the TDP, sponsored a gathering of opposition parties in Vijayawada. Following the meeting, the proposal for a review of Union-State ties was made during the conclave of southern chief ministers in Bangalore, which Ramakrishna Hegde convened. Opposition leaders released a joint statement supporting the call.

The rise of influential regional parties such as the CPM in Kerala, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, TMC, DMK, AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab, National Conference in Jammu & Kashmir, Assam Gana Parishad in Assam, RJD in Bihar, Biju Janata Dal in Odisha, Janata Dal in Karnataka, BSP and SP in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, and numerous other regional parties in various states gradually replaced the Congress party in state politics. This transformation underscores the fact that the Congress party had lost its national character.

Negotiations between Regional Parties and the Federal Government- India's political system relies extensively on negotiations between regional parties and the national government. These discussions frequently centre on a range of topics, including choice of policies, distribution of funds, governance, and creation of coalition governments¹². Indian federalism has experienced a radical transformation as a result of the growing role of regional parties. Once the Union exercised authority over those nations, those states began to push themselves against the power of the Union Government. They started to bargain on their behalf with the Union administration. For instance, the Congress and the BJP, the two national parties of India, alternately formed coalitions with the two Dravidian state parties, DMK and AIADMK, and when they did so, they demanded a price in the shape of projects or greater grants for the State. A while ago, Tamil Nadu didn't have any ministers in the Union Cabinet, but they have recently joined the Union Ministry and been granted the desired positions. The DMK was able to secure confirmation from the Congress-led Union Government in the most recent coalition that Tamil will be treated as a national language.

Between 1996 and 2014, the major objectives that state-based parties had been making since the late 1960s were met, and it may have even made possible the start of a fresh era of federalism. Raising state-specific issues within this period was no longer frowned upon or deemed anti-national, and it gave national-level decision-making a fresh perspective. Additionally, the centre could no longer subjugate the states because the power that the basis of the supporting groups was in the states rather than the parliamentary party. Second, the centre began to view states as partners rather than as an afterthought. Last but not least, throughout this time there was a drop in the use of Art. 356 and a reduction in central intervention.

Ensuring political stability, guaranteeing equitable development among states, and respecting India's federalist principles all depend on effective negotiations between regional parties and the federal government. Compromise, achieving consensus, and a readiness to take into account the specific demands and aspirations of various national communities are frequently necessary throughout these conversations.

Outcomes of the Study- The growth of regional political parties and the prevalence of coalition politics, both on the national and state fronts, have contributed to the formation of an inclusive political culture. This culture has had an undeniable impact on the evolution of the federal system in India. However, it's essential to acknowledge that the actions of regional political parties were not always justifiable, even though their influence on the federal process was evident. Therefore, it's crucial to analyze the political drawbacks associated with the development of coalition politics within the context of Indian Federalism. One of the primary political costs was the instability witnessed during the transitional phase, where coalition governments often failed to sustain themselves as initially intended.

Early in 1989, minority coalition administrations, especially those of the United Front and National Front alliances, began expanding in India. Unfortunately, these coalitions had difficulty being effective and stable due to ideological differences,



interpersonal disputes, internal factionalism, and situations of members switching allegiances. Even though these fronts fell short of the potential of an assertive third front in Indian politics, their brief existence marked an important moment in the country's post-independence political evolution. The National Development Council and the Inter-State Council, which were initially founded to defend India's federal system, were among the most significant national bodies that underwent considerable revitalization and restructuring as a result of these ephemeral coalitions.

Additionally, the prevailing era of coalition politics was marked by a lack of decisive actions due to challenges in reaching a consensus among the coalition partners. Conversely, there were instances where the dominant alliance partner or partners sometimes disregarded the sentiments or demands of other coalition partners.

CONCLUSION- Thus, from this analysis of the the role of regional political parties in Indian Federalism, it may be concluded that today regional parties plays a significant and inevitable role in Indian politics and it is reflecting the Indian democracy as well as the federal character of the nation. In contrast to historical political norms, contemporary Indian politics have undergone a profound federalization, largely driven by regional parties.

The authority of the Prime Minister is no longer as unassailable as it once was during the era of one-party dominance. Similarly, the President and Governors no longer merely rubber-stamp the directives of the ruling party; instead, they are keenly aware of their constitutional roles. The emergence and influence of regional parties have significantly reshaped the landscape of Indian federalism.

Since the 1990s, there has been a notable shift in the center of political gravity in India, with states taking on a more central role in Indian politics. Regional parties have not only played substantial roles at the national level but have also become key players in coalition governments. This transformation in Indian political parties reflects a marked shift in the politics of federalism, transitioning from a dominant federalism model to one characterized by cooperative federalism.

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