

REGIONALISM IN MEGHALAYA

SUSMITA SEN GUPTA

About the book

Regionalism is a complex socio-political phenomenon which seems to have gained importance in recent times. This book seeks to explore and analyse a number of conceptual frameworks for its understanding. While regionalism has manifested itself as a violent demand for secession in certain parts of India, elsewhere it has been expressed in favour of demanding separate political and administrative units within the existing federal framework. In North East India, regional grievances against the centre coupled with homogeneous cultural processes among some specific communities have strengthened the urge for autonomy and independent living. This, in turn, has found expression through the formation of political parties for the articulation of regional aspirations. In Meghalaya, for example, a number of regional parties have been formed to ventilate regional grievances. In view of the steady growth of regional parties in Meghalaya, this book seeks to examine the nature of regionalism in Meghalaya as well as the reaction of some of the national parties towards regionalism. The book also makes an attempt to conceptualize nationalism and examine its compatibility, or lack of it, with regionalism.

About the Author

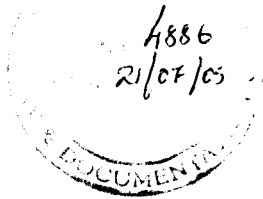
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CHAPTER I

CONCEPTUALIZING REGIONALISM

SECTION A

Regionalism is a complex socio-political phenomenon and as such, different conceptual frameworks have been developed by scholars for analyzing various dimensions of this phenomenon. In this book, we propose to explore these different forms of conceptualization on regionalism in order to adopt a relevant and suitable perspective for the work.

Before we embark on a discussion of regionalism as a theoretical concept, it is necessary to define the term 'region'. In fact, the concept of region lies at the very core of any conceptualization of regionalism in the sense that this concept provides the existential basis for the emergence of the phenomenon of regional loyalty which eventually finds expression in the political phenomenon of regionalism.¹ Although territoriality provides only a partial understanding of regionalism to a political scientist, yet we may begin with a discussion on territoriality because it provides the basis for establishing the connection between 'region' and 'regionalism'. We propose to look upon 'region' more as an analytical category rather than as a geographical entity. Available literature on the subject offers a set of definitions which emphasize the socio-cultural aspects of 'region'. According to one such view, a region is a nucleus of social aggregation for a variety of purposes.² From this point of view, a particular territory is set apart, over a period of time, when different variables operate in different degrees. These variables may be geography, topography, religion, language, usages and customs, socio-economic and political stages of development, common historical tradition and experiences, etc.³ While the first definition identifies the variables which distinguish a region from other regions, another definition characterizes a region by a widely shared sentiment of 'togetherness' in the people which may be derived from common prosperity, camaraderie developed in a common struggle and so

on.⁴ In this definition, the emphasis on 'togetherness' may be noted because it is this sense of commonness which gives a distinct identity to a particular region. According to a third point of view, a region is a "perceived segment of space differentiated from others on the basis of one or more defining characteristics".⁵ It is contended that such characteristics and regions (which) they define "may be natural, political, economic or cultural".⁶ This fourfold typology of regions into natural, political, economic and cultural shows that although region is a territorial concept, its attributes are not exclusively territorial and that regionalism emerges precisely because of the differences in the perceptions of regions by respective political actors.⁷ In fact, the word 'region' has different connotations in the context of different realms, viz., local, national and international arenas. In the international context, for example, South Asia comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc. is a region.⁸ From the national point of view (in India), North East India is treated as a region. In a still narrower sense, smaller geographical entities within the constituent States of India regard themselves as regions, e.g. Telengana, Vidarbha, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Jammu, Ladakh and so on.⁹ Thus, the concept 'region' may figure in the consciousness of people residing in smaller and smaller territories *ad infinitum*. Actually, the issues raised by the leaders representing a particular territory or group of people will determine the size and the shape of the region. The term depends on the varying perceptions of the elite who represents the region. It is on account of this that an absolute definition of 'region' is not easy to arrive at. And yet, it is these geopolitical entities called regions which are central to the analysis of regionalism.

This brings us to an enquiry of the nature of regionalism itself. A study of regional movements in different parts of the contemporary world shows the primacy of the ethnic factor. Europe, for instance, provides a glaring example of the importance of ethnicity. For the past two hundred years, European ethnic groups have moved increasingly towards greater political self-determination, leading to the acceptance and promotion of the principle that any ethnic group is entitled to have its own state and that each state has to be based on one such ethnic group or nation.¹⁰ However, multi-State nations and multinational States are exceptions to this rule. In the case of multi-state nations, a smaller part of an ethnic nation may inhabit the territory of another state, thus forming a minority in that state and preparing the ground for minority nationalist movements which are embraced by regional movements.¹¹ The presence of distinct ethnic groups like Serbs, Croats and Muslims in erstwhile Yugoslavia paved the way for separatist movements which were followed by a prolonged civil war. In the United States, too, which is a multi-ethnic federation, ethnic conflicts have assumed preponderance over regional conflicts. Such conflicts have been

the offshoot of immigration and have manifested themselves in the form of 'nativism'. From the time the Anglo-Americans conquered Indian tribes and became consolidated as the "native" or host group in America, some Indian groups have shown a tendency towards the acceptance of cultural pluralism. However, as McLemore argues, an increased resistance to this movement by the dominant group could easily halt it and strengthen the Indians' demands for autonomy.¹²

Africa, on the other hand, presents a different picture. The entire continent once happened to be the colonies of different European powers. While most of the colonies attained independence, racialism continued to haunt South Africa so much so that apartheid became the major determinant of ethnic relations among Afrikaners and the so-called coloured people. The struggle launched by the African National Congress was aimed at the end of apartheid and establishment of majority rule. It appears, therefore, that opposition to racialism became an important component of nativist assertion in South Africa.¹³ In the African context, the Akans of Ashanti and the affiliated Brong-A-Faho peoples in Ghana may be cited as an example of a regional group.¹⁴ It may, however, be noted that some literature on Africa uses the term 'region' to signify a single African state or a cluster of such states, instead of treating distinct territories of a state as region.¹⁵ Hence, it seems that regionalism, as we understand it in the present context, will not apply to Africa, in the strict sense of the term. However, ethnic conflicts in African states have become a characteristic feature of post-colonial Africa and have manifested themselves in specific regional contexts. Ethnic clashes in Somalia are a case in point. But some observers of the African political scene argue that parties to the Somali conflict are not regional, ethnic, religious or linguistic groups – as in Ethiopia, Sudan and Djibouti – but clans and sub-clans of what was previously acclaimed as one of the very few 'nation states' in Africa.¹⁶

Coming back to the conceptual analysis of regionalism, the perspectives we propose to analyse may be broadly classified into seven categories. These are: (1) Regionalism viewed as a manifestation of Centre-State relations; (2) Regionalism in contrast with sub-regionalism; (3) Regionalism as the outcome of internal colonialism; (4) Regionalism as a subsidiary process of political integration; (5) Regionalism as a positive and negative phenomenon; (6) Regionalism with political parties as major actors and (7) Regionalism viewed in terms of elite conflicts. In the following paragraphs, we shall deal with each perspective in some details.

To some, regionalism is a manifest aspect of Centre-State relations. According to Rasheeduddin Khan, for example, nothing is more basic to the very concept of federalism than regionalism.¹⁷ He also tries to explain regionalism in terms of culture when he argues that regions in India have

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defined and distinct socio-cultural, historical, linguistic, economic and political connotations. To him, India essentially is a multi-regional federation. He urges that the multi-regional character of India's federation should be recognized as the central pattern of our federal nation-building and underlines the importance of regions in the federalizing process in India. He argues that the concepts of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' are not adequate to explain the socio-cultural diversities in India and prefers the term 'regional identity' as a comprehensive expression designed to account for the plurality of Indian society.¹⁸ However, this position needs to be critically analysed, particularly in view of what other scholars have to say about the role of ethnicity. While discussing regionalism in India, some scholars have laid emphasis on its ethnic dimension also. For example, B. Pakem, observes that "Ethnic politics is the major concern of any regional party in Meghalaya."¹⁹ In the subsequent chapters, it may be seen that every regional party in Meghalaya seeks to remind the people of their distinct ethnic identity. Ethnic identity also played an important role in Dravidian, Jharkhand and Gorkhaland movements. Similarly, 'nationality' has its own importance in the Indian context. Most of the ethnic groups in North East India would like to perceive themselves as 'nationalities' which brings them to a sort of confrontation with the Centre because assertion of their identity is misconstrued as a threat to the Indian 'nation state'.²⁰ Another author who dwells much on the federal content of regionalism is Paul R. Brass, who speaks of conflicts between the Centre and the States as the source of regionalism. He says,

By regionalism, in the political sense, I mean patterns of politics in the states that are best explained primarily in terms of conflicts and issues that arise within the states rather than in the national political arena and that deviate in easily discernible ways, such as in political party formations and voting patterns, from national trends.²¹

This definition of Brass seems to treat regionalism as a legal concept and seeks to demarcate the issues pertaining to the regional jurisdiction from those falling under the national jurisdiction. As we have noted already, territoriality provides us only a partial understanding of the phenomenon of regionalism²² and hence it is necessary to explore other dimensions of the phenomenon. Moreover, there cannot be a total segregation of the issues falling under national and regional jurisdictions. Very often, such issues may overlap. A regional problem like the sharing of river waters or terrorism in a particular region will certainly become a cause for national concern. Similarly, a national problem like the fall in foreign exchange reserves will have its reverberation in all regions. Hence, the very assumption about the existence of mutually exclusive national and

regional domains seems to be unsound. Another difficulty with this definition is that it does not examine why regional conflicts come to the surface at all and what are the forces that sustain regional consciousness. Brass argues that forces and tendencies moving India towards pluralism, regionalism and decentralization are inherently stronger than those favouring homogeneity, nationalization and centralization.²³ He considers this phenomenon as natural because of the essential plurality of the Indian society. Brass also contends that the process of consolidating power in India is inherently tenuous and that power begins to disintegrate immediately at the maximal point of concentration. At that point, he argues, regional political forces and decentralizing tendencies inevitably reassert themselves unless the national leadership chooses to attempt a more definitive consolidation by bringing into play the full range of unitary powers provided in the Constitution of India. However, he also argues that pluralist, regionalist and decentralizing tendencies will reassert themselves against any centralizing, authoritarian regime.²⁴ Here, Brass seems to talk of a vicious circle in the sense that only a strong central authority can keep decentralizing or centrifugal tendencies under control, but at the same time, regional forces become active as a reaction against excessive centralization. Thus, in his view, the forces of decentralization ultimately prevail over those of centralization. However, Brass' generalization may not hold good in all cases. In the erstwhile Soviet Union, for example, the aspirations of small nationalities were effectively subdued by all Union laws for several decades. The nationalist upsurge in Ukraine and the Baltic Republics paving the way for similar outbursts in other republics and culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union itself might not have occurred unless the forces of freedom were unleashed by glasnost and perestroika.²⁵ But at the same time, it is also necessary to remember that the very introduction of glasnost and perestroika reflects an awareness on the part of the Soviet authorities of the need for liberalization to pave the way for ventilation of accumulated discontent which might have posed a threat in the future.

It will be evident from the above discussion that an attempt to view regionalism in terms of federalism or as a legal concept (which distinguishes itself by its concern for issues originating within the States) is inadequate to grasp the phenomenon in its entirety. This brings us to another perspective which has been developed by Duncan B. Forrester. Forrester draws a distinction between regionalism and subregionalism on the ground that "subregion" is a smaller area within a region or "nation" and argues that the phenomenon of sub-regionalism should not be explained in the same terms as the phenomenon of regionalism.²⁶ It appears that Forrester takes the size of an area as the most important criteria to distinguish between 'region' and 'subregion'. But if this logic is

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followed, it will be difficult to define a 'region' which may be termed as a 'subregion' when viewed from the standpoint of a larger geographical entity. It may also be argued that the demands and grievances of regional and sub-regional entities are not always distinguishable, even if it is assumed that the former covers a broader area than the latter. Forrester identifies sub-regionalism as a "by product of modernization" in so far as it is the result of economic imbalances between historically defined subregions.²⁷ He calls Telengana a typical sub-region within Andhra Pradesh and takes Telengana as a test case to justify his conclusion. According to him, historical and economic factors produce sub-regional problems and encourage the growth of compelling political subcultures which not only do not correspond, but conflict with the larger unities of language, culture and caste represented by the linguistic state.²⁸ However, the growth of linguistic regionalism as well as regional aspirations of different cultural entities and caste conglomerations in India negate this view. Language, in particular, has been the critical factor in the reorganization of States, which became a force to reckon with in the context of regionalism and therefore, the phrase 'linguistic regionalism' gained currency in the political literature.

Having set aside two analytical perspectives on regionalism, we propose to explore other alternative conceptual frameworks. It may be noted in this connection that there are certain related concepts which may add to our understanding of regionalism as a concept. For example, a study of the contemporary political situation reveals that regional movements also embrace minority nationalist movements. However, the two are not exactly identical. Firstly, minority nationalism presupposes the existence of national minorities who perceive a threat from the majority community and aspire for political autonomy. Regionalism, on the other hand, may not necessarily entail the existence of minorities asserting themselves as nationalities or their exploitation at the hands of the majority. But minority nationalist movements may also take the shape of regional movements. Secondly, as Iqbal Narain has rightly pointed out that regionalism has a concrete geographical basis whereas minority nationalist movements usually have a 'diffused' geographical underpinning.²⁹ Academic writings on the subject of minority nationalism seem to be dominated by two different viewpoints. One school has tended to describe local loyalties by such implicitly derogatory terms as tribalism, communalism and primordial loyalties.³⁰ At the other extreme, some writers sympathetic to minorities seem to believe that nation-building entails loss to the minority communities, involving the destruction of their distinctive cultures as well as their political and economic domination by the elites of the majority community.³¹ Both these views tend to look upon minority nationalism and nation-building as contradictory to each other. We propose to examine in

Chapter III whether there is any conflict between regionalism and nation-building.

The differences between minority nationalism and regionalism bring us to Iqbal Narain's conceptualization of regionalism. He is of the firm belief that the plethora of theories³² about minority nationalist movements do not always seem to capture the reality about the phenomenon of regionalism in India. He feels that these theories, when applied to the Indian reality, may lead to misleading comparisons and generate fears that may not necessarily come true.³³ However, Iqbal Narain does not cite any evidence to prove this point. It may be noted that ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities in various parts of India have not only been in the forefront of articulating regional demands and grievances, but have also sought to nurture nationalist aspirations. Regional autonomy demands articulated by the Sikhs in Punjab,³⁴ who happen to be a religious minority in India or nationalist aspirations emanating from the ethnic minorities of North East India³⁵ show that minority nationalism has become a fact of Indian political life. Iqbal Narain goes on to add that regionalism has both positive and negative dimensions. Positively, it embodies a quest for self-fulfilment on the part of the people of an area. In negative terms, regionalism reflects a psyche of relative deprivation on the part of the people of an area, not always viable in terms of rational economic analysis.³⁶ It may be argued, however, that regionalism in the sense of relative deprivation may have a negative fall-out for the establishment because it critically highlights the negative role of the establishment as an exploiter. But from the point of view of the people of the region, regionalism is perfectly legitimate and a positive instrument for articulating their grievances. Moreover, Iqbal Narain has not substantiated his claim that regionalism as a psyche of relative deprivation cannot always stand the test of rational economic analysis. After taking a componential look at regionalism in India, Iqbal Narain concludes that it is a complex amalgam of geographical, historic-cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychic factors, although the economic factor may have an edge over the others in the ultimate analysis.³⁷ But this definition seems to be too broad to capture the essence of regionalism. It may mean almost anything to anybody. As a matter of fact, the multiplicity of factors which Iqbal Narain seeks to associate with the phenomenon of regionalism may apply even to nationalism or any other phenomenon. Our endeavour is to arrive at the general attributes of regionalism, but the present definition cannot provide any such generalization because of its diffused focus. Regarding Iqbal Narain's emphasis on the economic dimensions of regionalism, it may be noted that status-quoist forces often accuse the regional pressures emanating from economic compulsions as separatist. However, Iqbal Narain retorts that these moves are mere bargaining

counters rather than secessionist moves.³⁸ Once again, Iqbal Narain makes a sweeping statement without elaborating his position with suitable illustrations. In this context, two significant questions can be asked, viz., do regional movements get transformed into secessionist movements and if they do, at what point? We propose to deal with these questions as we proceed to arrive at a definition of regionalism later in this chapter.

It is pertinent here to refer to the 'nativist movement' which again is a manifestation of the economic factor. In essence, this movement signifies the conflict between the migrants and the 'sons of the soil'.³⁹ Myron Weiner has identified five conditions for nativist movements in India, viz., presence of migrants from outside the cultural region, cultural differences between the migrants and the local community, immobility of the local population in comparison to other groups in the population, a high level of unemployment among the indigenous middle class and a substantial portion of middle class jobs held by culturally alien migrants and a rapid growth of educational opportunities for the lower middle classes. Myron Weiner also points out that development of either a regional or national identity is a precondition to the development of nativism. Nativism, according to Weiner, is that form of ethnic identity that seeks to exclude those who are not members of the local or indigenous ethnic group from residing and working in a territory because they are not natives. He, therefore, considers ethnic selectivity as the characteristic feature of nativism.⁴⁰ The similarity between nativist and regional movements lies in the fact that both have a territorial basis. However, there are certain fundamental differences between the two types of movement. First, unlike the nativist movement, the regional movement does not necessarily presuppose the presence of migrants from outside the region in question or exploitation of natives by migrants. Hence, this movement is not always marked by ethnic selectivity. Regional movement, in fact, springs from some commonality of grievances among the people of the region. We shall see in Section - B of this chapter that regionalism in Punjab and Jharkhand sprang from certain grievances which were shared by the people of the region as a whole. Secondly, nativist movement is always motivated by a deep sense of economic discontent. Regionalism may not necessarily be rooted in economic factors alone. It may be noted that the situation in Assam and other North Eastern States seems to fulfill most of the above noted conditions of the nativist movement. But regional conflicts in the North East have not remained confined to the level of natives vs. migrants only and has assumed wider dimensions to include elite conflicts at various levels as will be evident in our analysis of M. L. Sharma's paradigm.

Having shown the inadequacy of all the perspectives discussed so far, we may now proceed to examine another conceptual framework which is attributed to Kousar J. Azam. Azam believes that in a vast and diversified

polity like India, regionalism could be accepted as a legitimate phenomenon and the tendency to view it as a negative polarization to national polity blurs its total dimensions.⁴¹ Azam refers to B. Subba Rao's formulation which shows how horizontal mobility in India led to centralized empires while vertical mobility led to regional political entities.⁴² According to Azam, the convergence and confluence of these two trends have decided India's political destiny and therefore, defines regionalism as a subsidiary process of political integration in India. She looks upon regionalism as a manifestation of those residual elements which do not find expression in the national polity and national culture and being excluded from the centrality of the new polity, express themselves in political discontent and political exclusionism.⁴³ But the problem with Azam's definition is that it reflects an entirely negative perspective on regionalism. Regionalism, after all, is a positive instrument of protest as far as the people of the region are concerned. Hence, to look at regionalism as an expression of elements excluded in the national scheme of things is to forfeit an opportunity to explore the phenomenon in its totality. Moreover, the question arises – why are certain elements excluded from the national polity and national culture? Azam seems to have attempted an answer to this question when she says that national parties due to their ideological commitment at the national level fail to come down to the sub-group level even through their local bodies because any such attempt would not only result in an ideological shift, but would also pose serious organizational problems for them. This, in her view, tends to separate the regional elite from the national elite.⁴⁴ However, Azam does not spell out in clear terms that the difference between the regional elite and the national elite lies in their distinct social bases. The national elite tries to acquire a somewhat popular support-base by using an unifying ideology to bring together the totality of the population around the theme of national unity. In the process, it goes to the extent of considering social, ethnic and religious divisions as anti-national. With a view to reducing and absorbing such cleavages, the national elite assigns an active and important role to the State (at the national level).⁴⁵ The regional elite, on the other hand, tends to be more firmly entrenched at the grass-roots level by virtue of its aversion for the centralized state and its championing of small, but region-specific interests⁴⁶ as opposed to larger national interests. Apart from the leaders of national parties, the national elite comprises owners of big industrial houses, top bureaucrats, technocrats, executives of big business houses, companies and so on. The regional elite, on the other hand, comes from owners of smaller business houses, petty landlords, emerging educated intelligentsia of the region etc. Such differences in the social bases of the regional and the national elite coupled with contradictions in their ideological positions may account for their separate existence and provide

the rationale for the emergence of national and regional parties as mouth pieces of their respective constituencies.

This brings us to another important perspective which emphasizes the importance of political parties as catalysts of regional consciousness. In other words, regionalism can be viewed as a product of regional forces organized in the form of political parties. The theme that the stability of representative regimes depends largely upon the congruence or non-congruence of party political, social or ethnic cleavages, has its origins in the writings of A. Lawrence Lowell and Arthur Bentley. This theory has been systematically expanded in recent times by S. M. Lipset, David Truman and Gabriel Almond which tends to see political parties as reflections of societal cleavages.⁴⁷ It is, nowadays, one of the favourite arguments of authoritarian political leaders that regimes of competitive political parties are dangerous threats to national unity and national integration in multi-ethnic societies because the parties tend to reflect ethnic differences.⁴⁸ It is true that political demands can be articulated by a group even before a group acquires cohesion. But the achievement and maintenance of group rights is possible only through political activity and political mobilization.⁴⁹ It is in this context that the role of political parties as organized bodies assumes importance.

In India, the politics of regionalism with political parties as major actors is not a new phenomenon, given the tremendous heterogeneity of Indian society. In an issue of the journal *Seminar*, devoted to the problem of Indian nationalism, the fundamental problem facing India was well summarized. "India is not a single nation-state. It is a continent of many communities united through shared experiences but powerfully motivated by parochial and regional considerations."⁵⁰ The politics of regionalism seems to be a manifestation of this reality. Since Independence, many states and regional parties have sprouted in India. In fact, as Lewis P. Fickett Jr. comments, "one of the most significant developments in Indian politics since the 1967 General Election has been the emergence and success of several regional parties."⁵¹ Today, regional political parties continue to play significant roles in the Indian political system. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna DMK in Tamil Nadu, the Akali Dal and its various factions in Punjab, the Shiv Sena of Maharashtra, the Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference in Meghalaya, etc. are some of the most prominent regional parties that have sprung up in India in the post-independence period. Fickett suggests that the major regional parties may play prominent roles in a unique heterogeneous political system which would include several different types of political parties – regional as well as national. In such a system, regional parties may conceivably prove to be

more responsive and realistic political mechanisms for India than either a conventional two or multi-party system could provide. Such parties by cooperating constructively with national parties at the centre, could provide the necessary stability at that level for dealing with national problems. In his opinion, the politics of regionalism may well constitute a necessary and salutary phase of political development for a society as diverse as that of India.⁵² Indeed, regional parties are playing a significant role on the national scene in India today. The inclusion of Telegu Desam, Asom Gana Parishad and DMK as partners of the National Front Government at the Centre bears testimony to this fact. Similarly, the United Front Government of 1996 also comprised various regional parties like DMK, Tamil Maanila Congress, Telegu Desam, AGP and so on. However, an important question emerges from the above discussion. Do regional parties lead to the emergence of regionalism or vice-versa? But before we answer this question, we propose to take up another perspective which has been developed by M. L. Sharma. According to him, regionalism is not something irrational or impulsive, but is a cover or a plank through which the elites compete and fight for power. Irrespective of the perspective on or dimensionalities of regionalism, he argues, it may commonly be understood as a form of elite conflict at certain levels.⁵³ Sharma cites a few concrete instances in course of his discussion of the autonomy movements in North East India to show that regional issues come to be articulated only in the wake of emerging conflicts between the political elites at various levels because of clash of interests and distrust.⁵⁴ It may be noted, however, that in the context of Meghalaya, the difference between elites at various levels is often blurred because of the frequent circulation of political leaders from the national to the regional parties and vice-versa. Moreover, the national elite appears to be conspicuous by its absence in Meghalaya and one comes across the regional elite only. Even leaders of the state units of national parties have a distinctly regional outlook according to their own admission.⁵⁵ Although M. L. Sharma's model lacks general applicability, it is reminiscent of Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" by which he understood the ideological predominance of the dominant classes over the subordinate classes in a civil society.⁵⁶ When M. L. Sharma points out that a group of elite uses emotive issues to generate mass pressures, his argument seems to conform to the Gramscian conception of hegemony. He even regrets that there is hardly any worthwhile study which examines regionalism from that point of view.⁵⁷ Although Sharma admits the role played by issues of economic backwardness, fears of exploitation or socio-cultural differences in the fanning of regional consciousness, to him, these factors only provide fuel to the fire, while the ignition comes from the political actors,⁵⁸ implying the hegemonic role played by the elite. However, Sharma's admission that

all regional demands emanate from elite conflict cannot be substantiated. In reality, it is the emergence of an educated elite,⁵⁹ and not conflicts between elites which may account for the growth of regionalism in the North East in general and in Meghalaya in particular.

Having thus discussed different perspectives on regionalism as available in the existing literature on the subject and keeping in mind the inadequacy of most of these conceptual frameworks to explain regionalism, it is possible to observe that the perception of the elite is perhaps the most significant factor to the understanding of regionalism. The nature of regionalism, in a particular context, seems, therefore, to be determined by issues raised and articulated by the regional elite as well as by the interests perceived by that elite to be of importance for the region it seeks to represent. The Dravidian movement in the South, for instance, had a clear caste dimension because it originated as a protest against the socio-cultural domination of Aryan Brahmins over Dravidians.⁶⁰ The regional elite who eventually formed the DMK chose to highlight the domination of Brahmins and accordingly, regionalism in Tamil Nadu centred around this particular issue. In Punjab, on the other hand, the regional elite, viz., the Akali leaders for reasons discussed in Section B of this chapter gave a communal dimension to regionalism in Punjab by stirring the communal sentiments of the Sikhs which in turn has reinforced Hindu communalism.⁶¹ Again, most of the regional outfits in the North East have sought to preserve the ethnic identity of the indigenous people and thus ethnicity is a major component of regionalism in this part of India.⁶² The perceptions of the elite being different in each regional context, the concept of regionalism will naturally undergo modifications as we seek to examine its nature in different contexts. Hence, it is not easy to arrive at an absolute and comprehensive definition of regionalism. But before we seek to formulate a tentative definition, we propose to discuss a very important perspective on regionalism which comes closer to the definition we are trying to arrive at. This perspective has been developed by Michael Hechter and has come to be known as the 'Internal Colonial Model'. According to Hechter, regionalism is the outcome of real or perceived sense of 'Internal Colonialism'.⁶³ Hechter suggests that this model of social development was first enunciated in Lenin's analysis of the development of Russian capitalism and some years later, in Gramsci's discussion of the Italian South.⁶⁴ More recently, the concept has been used by Latin American Sociologists.⁶⁵ But Hechter is the first scholar to have conducted a full length historical study to test the validity of the theory. As Anthony Birch points out, the theory in essence implies that the relationships between members of the core communities and peripheral communities in a state are characterized by exploitation. The core community, having acquired an advantage over the outlying communities in the period of

state-building or in the early period of modernization uses its political and economic power to maintain its superior position. The cultural and (in some states) ethnic differences between the communities do not disappear and in certain circumstances, they may form the basis of demonstrations and separatist agitations by members of the peripheral communities.⁶⁶

The two basic propositions of Hechter's model can be summarized as follows:

1. The dominant community defines and regulates influential roles and positions in the state in such a way as to exclude members of the peripheral communities.
2. The economic development of the peripheral regions is controlled so as to make them *highly specialized in their products, and thus more vulnerable to fluctuations in world markets than the core region is.*⁶⁷

However, the reasons for the growth of regional movements cannot be reduced simply to economic variables. Relative poverty is not necessarily the motivation for regionalism in all cases. Many regional movements have actually derived some of their strength from the relative prosperity of the regions of their origin. But this does not contradict Hechter's position because Hechter seems to believe that even a prosperous region may perceive itself to be the victim of internal colonialism. In this context, it is relevant to refer to the concept of relative deprivation. Basically, relative deprivation means the tension that is generated due to the discrepancy between a man's expectations and his actual achievements.⁶⁸ This implies that even an apparently prosperous region may develop a psyche of relative deprivation, if its achievements do not match its aspirations. The roots of regional discontent in Punjab seem to lie in this deprivation psyche, although Punjab is one among the more prosperous states of India.⁶⁹

We take the 'internal colonial model' as the basis of our definition because we assume that a *perceived sense of exploitation at the hands of central authorities* is an important motivating factor for the growth of regional sentiments. We tentatively define regionalism on the following lines.

Regionalism signifies an organized effort of a community/people, led by its dominant section, residing in a specific region of a country with large-scale diversity, to articulate its interests in terms of assertion of its linguistic, cultural and such other identity and often bargain with the Central political authorities/leadership for a better deal than what the existing scheme of things could have offered. Such organized efforts are often seen to assume ideological dispositions.

We consider regionalism as an organized effort in recognition of the role of the regional elite in shaping regional demands through proper channels and using its hegemony for mass mobilization. It may be noted that regionalism today is often associated with the aspirations of ethnic or linguistic communities. Thus, regional movements like in the North East, Jharkhand movement, Gorkhaland agitation etc. centre around ethnic identity⁷⁰ whereas demands for Maharashtra, Punjabi Suba and a separate state of Andhra reflected the assertion of linguistic identity.⁷¹ Instead of embarking on an open confrontationist line, the regional elite prefers to adopt a bargaining stance vis-à-vis the national elite. Herein lies the dividing line between a regional movement and a secessionist movement. Secession implies the act of separation from an existing State by some section of the inhabitants of that state, based on an identifiable territory which they occupy, in an attempt to set up their own autonomous state, or perhaps to join with some neighbouring state.⁷² Secessionism as a movement implies an attempt at acquiring a separate and independent political entity from an existing political arrangement either in reality or at least in the own perception of the secessionist group. Leadership of a Secessionist movement does not hesitate to wage an open struggle against the central authority simply because its aspirations transcend the prevailing State parameters. It appears from a study of secessionist movements that many secessionist groups claim themselves as nationalities and therefore seek to withdraw from the state in which they constitute only marginalized groups.⁷³ However, there may be other factors motivating secessionism. In erstwhile East Pakistan, for example, cultural marginalization of Bengalis by Punjabis and Sindhis of West Pakistan led the former to launch a liberation struggle against the domination of the latter which eventually paved the way for the creation of Bangladesh. Economic exploitation by West Pakistan was another important determinant of the secessionist syndrome in East Pakistan. A colonized country may also resort to secessionism often called national liberation movement, in order to liberate itself from the excesses of a colonial regime. Independence movements launched by colonies of Asia, Africa and Latin America are cases in point. Support-base of a Secessionist movement may consist of receptive members of the society like students and unemployed youth, particularly in the absence of any other powerful political formation or social force. Exploited sections of working classes whose hopes are kindled at the possibility of the formation of a new political community, progressive sections of the society who are thoroughly disenchanted with their membership of a state which is non-responsive to their interests and sentiments may also join the bandwagon. In contrast with the secessionist movement, a regional movement is confined within the constitutional and

territorial limits of the State in which it originates. As Myron Weiner points out,

When the ethnic group identifies itself with a given territory within the country, we generally speak of regionalism, when it seeks statehood outside, we describe the movement as Secessionist.⁷⁴

The strategy of the regional elite is to pressurize the national elite for releasing a larger share of the benefits that accrue at the national level. Regional groups may consider themselves as distinct nationalities, but unlike most secessionist groups, the former do not necessarily envisage the creation of a separate independent state for fulfillment of their political aspirations.⁷⁵ As far as the support-structure of a regional movement is concerned, the elite spearheading the movement is capable of winning support for their cause not only from the economically underprivileged sections of the ethnic or linguistic group in question, who expect their emancipation in a new regional set up, but also from the most politically active members of the group in question as well as the regional bourgeoisie whose aspirations are sought to be fulfilled in the new order. In this connection, it is necessary to look into the forces which provide leadership to a regional movement and those which lead a secessionist movement. The former is led by the regional elite whose aspirations are comparatively limited because of their conviction in the capability of the central authorities to cope with the problems of the region within the present political entity with additional devolution of power often referred to as autonomy. The secessionist movement, on the other hand, is led by radicals who have lost faith in the prevailing political arrangement and are desperate to break away in search of an alternative arrangement. It may even be argued that the distinction between regional and secessionist movements is similar to the differences that exist between a reformist and a revolutionary movement. The regional movement is more or less reformist in the sense that it is aimed at bringing about certain reforms in the existing political set up. A secessionist movement, on the other hand, is revolutionary because it is not content with a few changes in the existing set up, but seeks to replace the old order by a new social and political order.

In the light of the above discussion, we now propose to attempt an answer to the question we raised earlier in the Chapter, viz., whether regionalism leads to regional parties or vice-versa. One of our findings in this chapter has been that the concept of regionalism varies with the varying perceptions of the regional elite. It is true that the subjective conditions which prevail in each regional situation do generate some nascent consciousness in the minds of the people of the region about their problems as also about the need to seek a redressal of their grievances. But

regional consciousness may often manifest and express itself in an organized manner through some movement launched by the regional elite or issues raised by them. In course of time, such movement may transform itself into a political party to provide an ideological orientation to the demands articulated by the regional movement. Viewed in this perspective, role of political parties seems to be crucial to the understanding of regionalism. But, on the other hand, regional parties are not indispensable to the politics of regionalism because movements of various kinds are often found to be quite capable of articulating regional sentiments on behalf of the people of the region.⁷⁶ It may be argued, however, that movements which articulate regional sentiments require some kind of political organization which is not necessarily a political party, but functions like a political party and eventually takes the shape of a political party when the movement gathers momentum.

SECTION – B

It appears from a study of the available literature that 'regionalism' has entered the political vocabulary in a big way and has also acquired a lot of flexibility meaning different things to different people. In India, for instance, while the Congress (I) leader, Rajiv Gandhi, regarded regionalism as an anti-national exercise,⁷⁷ V. P. Singh, the National Front leader, seemed to have perceived regionalism as a less dangerous exercise as is evident from the association of three regional parties with his National Front Government.⁷⁸ It may appear that in establishing rapport with the regional parties, the Janata Dal leader was guided more by opportunism in the sense of securing easy bases in the states through regional parties, but the decision might have had some ideological content too. The regional parties, on the other hand, had their own compulsions to align with the National Front. For instance, as Udayan Misra points out, growing rift with the AASU and the rise of the militant ULFA propelled the Asom Gana Parishad toward closer links with the National Front.⁷⁹ However, we have shown in Chapter III that when one takes into account the fact that the Congress itself has been aligning with regional parties like the AIADMK, National Conference, Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad, etc. one realizes that the attitude of national parties towards regional parties is governed basically by electoral considerations.

It may be noted that regional parties in different parts of India lay emphasis on different aspects of regionalism. The following discussion will illustrate the flexibility of regionalism as a concept as it manifests itself through a diversity of socio-economic variables such as language, ethnicity, economic disparity and so on.

The demand for Maharashtra was sustained by the desire of the Marathi speaking elite to carve out an area of influence for themselves which, eventually resulted in the bifurcation of the Bombay State.⁸⁰ But prior to this development, the Mahavidarbha Samiti (Greater Vidarbha Committee) was formed in 1940 and its demand was to carve out a unilingual Marathi speaking province from Central Province's Vidarbha division and Nagpur division. Demand for a separate Vidarbha state actually stemmed from the backwardness of the region.⁸¹ In course of time, however, the Vidarbha movement turned into a movement demanding more autonomy and greater share in development and political power. The demand for statehood was raised from time to time to suit the interests of the political elites, both national and regional. For example, within a few months after the declaration of emergency, Mrs. Gandhi supported the idea of a separate Vidarbha Marathwada state, presumably to weaken the leadership from Western Maharashtra.⁸² The regional elite from Vidarbha too, reiterated their demands whenever they faced a challenge from the dominant regional elite of Western Maharashtra. However, the most vigorous form of regionalism in Maharashtra is associated with the Shiv Sena movement which while speaking of 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians' and asserting the doctrine of 'Sons of the Soil' in terms of demanding preferential treatment to the Marathi youth in the field of employment propagated a Hindu chauvinist philosophy.⁸³ Although Shiv Sena originated as a voluntary organization, in due course, it became an important political force with a pronounced political ideology. It came to be perceived as a Marathi and Hindu organization. Its leadership comprised a large element of Brahmins and Kayasthas and⁸⁴ many of its leaders had once been in Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS). Sena, however, remained mainly a local organization of Bombay until 1995 when it won the State Assembly elections in alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Some of the steps announced by this government were – detection of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, changing the nomenclature of Bombay into Mumbai, plan for a Greater Bombay, plan to scrap the State Minorities Commission and so on. In fact, the entire Shiv Sena – BJP coalition and the Shiv Sena, in particular, found themselves in the midst of a controversy as far as its stand on the minorities was concerned. Thus, regionalism of the Shiv Sena has acquired a dual communal dimension in the sense that it is not only directed against linguistic minority communities, but also against religious minorities and its stand towards the latter has certainly overshadowed its role as the champion of the sons of the soil alone.

The same trend is reflected in the Dravidian movement also. The Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu highlighted the economic oppression of the non-Brahminic classes at the hands of the North Indian Aryan Brahmins. The Dravidian

movement generated among the Tamil people an awareness of being a nationality. Hindi was considered to be the tool of the subjugation of the South and it became the symbol of Southern apprehensions against the North.⁸⁵ The Dravida Kazhagam even envisaged the creation of an independent Dravidian Republic called Dravidistan. The DMK retained the basic ideology of D.K. regarding secession from India, but the caste issue became non-significant with the opening of its doors to Brahmins.⁸⁶ However, there was a setback to its regional politics when the Sixteenth Amendment to the Indian Constitution (1963) forced the D.M.K. to drop its demand for secession. There was also a split in the D.M.K. when differences between M. Karunanidhi and M. G. Ramachandran led to the formation of Anna D.M.K. in 1972. On the whole, there is no doubt about the fact that the Dravidian movement has lost much of its earlier momentum. Its focus has shifted from secession to the maintenance of a separate Tamil identity and restructuring of present Centre-State relations. Actually, the Tamil middle classes suffered from a fear psychosis in the face of a proposed imposition of Hindi and⁸⁷ gave vent to such feelings by resorting to secessionist slogans. Although the slogans died down, the sentiment persisted and sustained the anti-Hindi agitation of the late 1960s which in turn gave an added momentum to regional movements elsewhere in the country.

Demands for secession could be heard not only from Tamils under the banner of the Dravidian movement, but the Sikhs of Punjab also demanded, during the freedom struggle, an independent state of Khalistan which was not conceded. Origin of Sikhism was in a way a religious manifestation of the emerging Punjabi nationalism seeking to assert its autonomy from the Central authority of the Mughals. As Balraj Puri points out, religious and regional sentiments of the Sikhs are mixed and are interchangeable.⁸⁸ However, regional identity of the Sikhs gradually receded into the background because no regional forum could substitute the mobilizational power of the Gurudwaras. Moreover, the Centre's refusal to concede a Punjabi speaking state till ten years after the rest of the country had been reorganized on linguistic basis, also added a religious fervour to a regional demand. Puri goes on to add that the Akali Dal, main champion of the Punjabi identity, remained an exclusively Sikh party (membership has been opened to non-Sikhs very recently) and thus divided this identity on communal lines.⁸⁹ Regionalism in Punjab is, in fact, a multi-dimensional phenomenon. As Pramod Kumar and his co-authors have noted that while economic factors provide necessary conditions for the existence of the current crisis in Punjab, factors such as electoral competition, religious fundamentalism, language controversies etc. provide ground for its persistence.⁹⁰ Rejecting the view that the problem is the handiwork of extremists, they argue that the actions of anti-social elements

or extremists are manifestations of their social placement in society.⁹¹ They have also questioned the notion that the social, cultural, economic and political interests of the Hindus and the Sikhs are conflicting. They believe that a person may be discriminated against as workers, peasants, unemployed youth etc., but not on the basis of religious identity.⁹² To emphasize this point, they have quoted W. C. Smith who says, "communalism has been a religious issue only for those groups for whom it was also and already a political and economic issue."⁹³ Pramod Kumar and his fellow authors have also refuted the proposition that the Punjab problem is the product of uneven and lopsided development and argue that even if the problem of uneven development is solved, it will not rule out the possibility of the existence and persistence of communalism unless a frontal attack is launched against communal ideology.⁹⁴ Without underplaying the role of communal ideology in the politics of regionalism in Punjab, we may argue that the Punjab crisis originated from a psyche of relative deprivation of the Punjabi regional bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the national bourgeoisie, in the wake of the Green Revolution. What frustrated the Sikhs most was the fact that their share in political power did not increase in proportion to the economic development of the State. According to Puri, this led to a search for new institutional and constitutional arrangements that would ensure preservation of Sikh identity and Punjabi identity and also maximize their share in political power.⁹⁵ The problem was aggravated because the Hindus and the Sikhs failed to evolve a mechanism for an equitable share of power. The Hindus did not assert their regional identity. On the contrary, the Sikhs perceived the Hindus as agents of the central authority and thereafter, an essentially intraregional problem got transformed into a Sikh versus Nation or Sikh versus Centre problem.⁹⁶ Under the prevailing circumstances, the militant's dream of Khalistan seemed to catch the popular imagination which made it all the more imperative to check the process of communal polarisation in the State. In spite of the revival of the political process in Punjab with the installation of a Congress government, the situation continued to be volatile and threatened to escalate at any moment. In this context, it is necessary to draw a distinction between the autonomy demands put forward by the Akalis and the demand for Khalistan raised by the militants. While the Akali demand is basically regional, the demand for Khalistan is secessionist in nature and does not come within the purview of the present discussion.

As compared to the turmoil in Punjab which is sustained by forces of communalism, the roots of the Kashmir crisis will have to be sought elsewhere. It appears that the aspirations of various militant outfits in Kashmir have assumed secessionist overtones. Demands for autonomy raised by Jammu and Ladakh, the two distinct regions of the State, apart

from Kashmir valley are, of course, regional in character. But such demands could not gather much momentum. Nothing concrete was done to uphold the regional autonomy of Jammu and Ladakh in spite of the repeated promises of successive governments in the state. The credibility of the National Conference, the once-dominant regional party of Jammu and Kashmir, is now at stake and it is perceived more as an agent of the Central Government. As a result of the marginalization of the National Conference, politics of regionalism in the State has been completely diluted and has given way to a sentiment of withdrawal from India.⁹⁷ Return of the National Conference to power in the Assembly Elections of 1996 was significant and performance of this Government in Jammu and Kashmir captured the attention of political analysts because the legitimate regional aspirations of Kashmiris are closely associated with the National Conference. However, there seemed to have been a dilution of regional politics in Kashmir in view of the National Conference's decision to be a partner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at the Centre. The National Conference eventually withdrew from the coalition government, but its politics of expediency has no doubt tarnished the party's credibility as a champion of regional interests.

While aspirations of the Kashmiri militant outfits have assumed separatist overtones, the demand for Jharkhand, on the other hand, is basically a demand for reorganization of boundaries within the federal structure of the Indian Union. In our discussion on secessionism, we have observed that one of the important motivating factors for such a movement lies in a group's consciousness of being a nationality itself. This, in turn, leads the group to assert its right to self-determination and establish a new political entity to fulfill its aspirations. The Jharkhand movement, on the other hand, did not aim at projecting the Jharkhand tribals as a separate nationality nor did the movement question the incorporation of Jharkhand areas into the Indian Union. Thus, the basic premise underlying the Jharkhand movement was not an urge for separatism, but a concern for socio-economic liberation of the Jharkhand tribals who perceive their cultural, linguistic and traditional identity to be at stake. It was, in fact, a protest movement against the destruction of forests which was the only source of livelihood for the people and against the construction of big dams and industries and indiscriminate exploitation of mineral resources resulting in mass displacement and mounting unemployment. The tribals were being haunted by a fear of being swamped by outsiders in their own homeland of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Parganas. Among the outsiders, Ramdayal Munda identified the neo-aliens who poured into the tribal region after independence and now control business and industries.⁹⁸ The Committee on Jharkhand matters (CJM) had suggested two alternative measures for the solution of the Jharkhand problem, viz. the creation of a

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Union Territory out of the 13 South Bihar districts or the creation of an autonomous region within the State of Bihar. It had, however, ruled out the creation of a separate state.⁹⁹ The CJM identified the problem as regional and not ethnic although it recognized that there are similarities in the ethnicity and cultures of the tribals living in the 22 districts of the proposed state which should be recognized and developed as a distinct cultural area, irrespective of political and administrative boundaries. Raju Ramachandran, therefore, argues that once the entire tribal belt in the four states involved are conceded to have common cultural features, there is no justification for rejecting the demand for a separate state comprising these areas.¹⁰⁰ In the context of the above discussion, however, a question may be raised regarding the ethnic affinity of tribals in the Jharkhand area. It may be noted that after the demise of Jaipal Singh, its founder, the Jharkhand party got fragmented on ethnic lines – Santhals, Oraons and Mundas.¹⁰¹ The rift has further widened with the creation of a number of outfits such as Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Soren and Mardi factions), All Jharkhand Student's Union (AJSU), Jharkhand People's Party (JPP), Jharkhand Party of N.E. Horo and so on. It appears, therefore, that the creation of a common cultural area for all the tribals of Jharkhand may not solve the problem once and for all because the ethnic differences are likely to resurface, thereby rendering any such arrangement redundant. The Jharkhand movement, in fact, is something more than a demand for a better economic deal. It highlighted the suppression of ethnic and cultural identity of tribal populations due to superimposition of a pattern of development which hampered their traditional life styles. Hence, solution to the Jharkhand problem may be sought in a framework where due regard is paid to tribal sensitivities, their ethnic differences and their distinct ways of living. It seems that only a meaningful tripartite dialogue among the Jharkhand leaders, the Centre and the state governments of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal may help defuse the crisis in the tribal region.¹⁰²

In contrast with the situations discussed so far, the Assam situation falls in a different category altogether in that it represents a crisis caused by the presence of a large number of illegal migrants. The crisis in Assam, according to one point of view, is simply a reflection of the larger crisis facing the Indian state where the consensus that dictated the coming together of various nationalities is breaking down.¹⁰³ The Assam movement has been interpreted differently by different sets of scholars. If one scholar depicts the movement as 'Little nationalism turned Chauvinist',¹⁰⁴ another scholar calls it as 'cudgel of Chauvinism'.¹⁰⁵ A second set of scholars belonging mostly to the affected community treat north-eastern territories as 'oppressed community' or as 'Colonial Hinterland'.¹⁰⁶ A. K. Baruah notes with serious concern that there is a

tendency among some 'nationalist intellectuals' to project the Assam movement as the creation of a band of religious-linguistic chauvinist manipulators, who mislead the simple, peace-loving masses including the students. A subtle attempt at this direction is the communication of Mr. B. Chakravarti on the Assam movement.¹⁰⁷ By refuting Chakravarti's view, Baruah argues that the Assam movement is not against any religious or linguistic community. He points out that the movement in Assam is the result of genuine fears of the Assamese that they may lose their national identity.¹⁰⁸ The agitation leaders highlighted the threat to the Assamese nationality and the need for Assamese tribals and non-tribals to come under a common regional banner. Issues like demand for more powers for the states within the federal structure of India, the assertion of the right of the states to mobilize resources and plan their development on their own, the promise of retaining 80% of the administrative posts for the State cadre etc. raised in the AGP manifesto are some of the major regional interests sought to be protected by the party.¹⁰⁹ The All Assam Students' Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, the two main organizations spearheading the Assam movement, have been neither against all outsiders, nor secessionist in nature.¹¹⁰ Another factor which leads to frustration among the Assamese today is the tremendous pressure on land. Moreover, Baruah has shown in a paper that there is a clear case of discrimination against Assamese job-seekers in both the public and private sectors in Assam.¹¹¹ It is these grievances which seem to have motivated the agitation in Assam. It appears that regional sentiments in Assam spring from a sense of internal colonialism and are sustained by a perceived threat to Assamese culture and identity as a result of large-scale immigration from across the borders. Viewed from this angle, regionalism in Assam is also a manifestation of nativism because it reflects a conflict between sons of the soil and migrants.

No discussion of the Assam situation can be fruitful without reference to the movement launched by United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). It is believed that one of the factors leading to the formation of ULFA has been the disintegration of the AGP and the political void that resulted therefrom.¹¹² The demands raised by ULFA appear to be aimed at securing the liberation of Assam from India and are, therefore, secessionist in nature. Hence, the ULFA movement does not fall within the scope of the present discussion.

The above discussion represents an attempt to view regionalism in its multifarious dimensions. But, before we conclude, we propose to examine another movement, viz., the Dalit movement and see whether it may be termed as a regional movement. The present century, particularly the decades after independence, have witnessed the rise of a new consciousness among Dalits led by illustrious leaders like B. R. Ambedkar.

Over the decades, the Dalit movement has gathered momentum. The Dalit writers in Maharashtra had initiated a dialogue among the oppressed which was creating an awareness of their plight, problems and common cause. The Dalit literary movement had a profound impact on the ideology of the Backward Classes movement which unfolded itself in the Hindi belt. It also paved the road for the radical Dalit Panthers' movement of the seventies,¹¹³ which entered the political arena of Maharashtra first and spread to the other states later. The Dalit Panthers' opposition to the Hindu chauvinistic Shiv Sena and their militant stand on Scheduled Caste issues helped the Dalits to become more assertive.¹¹⁴ The above mentioned developments reveal the growing potential of the Dalits, but ironically, their coming together with the other backwards was viewed by the upper caste layer of the society with anxiety and indignation. The very emergence of the Dalit educated nucleus was perceived as a breach of the Hindu tradition of banning education and intellectual activity to the untouchables. These perceptions were reflected in the process of a changing realignment of forces illustrated in the division of society into pro and anti-reservationists.¹¹⁵ To answer the challenge posed by anti-reservationists, the middle class from the Dalits came forward and formed a number of Backward Classes' Organizations. One such organization was launched by Kanshi Ram, a Chamar Sikh from Roper, Punjab which was called the "Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samity" (DS₄ founded in 1981). The process of consolidation of Dalits under the leadership of Kanshi Ram culminated in the formation of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in April 1984. The party was registered by the Election Commission in 1985 after it won recognition in a number of States – Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.¹¹⁶ To the extent that the Dalit movement has become a force to reckon with in the Hindi belt of Northern India, it has assumed the character of a regional movement. In the Hindi belt, both anti-Congressism and anti-Brahmanism are being applied by the Bahujan Samaj Party to attract not only the Scheduled Castes and the religious minorities, but also the newly articulated backward castes, who are interested in the making of the Mandal Commission recommendations into a law. In future, the electoral behaviour of the backward is expected to have the most durable effect in the Hindi belt and the Punjab, where the share of those sections in the whole population is enormous.¹¹⁷ It appears, therefore, that although the Dalit movement had its origin in Maharashtra, it flourished most in the Hindi belt not only because of the presence of a substantial Dalit population, but also because of an articulate leadership. In fact, the Dalit movement became such a major force that its mouthpiece viz., Bahujan Samaj Party tasted power for the first time as a coalition partner of the Mulayam Singh Government (Samajwadi Party) in Uttar Pradesh. Finally, the BSP succeeded in sabotaging the coalition Govern-

ment and forming its own Government with external support from the BJP. It is not within the scope of this book to examine in detail the implications of an alliance between the BSP and the BJP, but it is obvious that the compulsions of power have led the BSP to compromise its ideological stand towards a supposedly upper caste Hindu chauvinistic party. The inner contradictions of such an alliance led to its eventual collapse, but it appears that the BSP can successfully emerge as a regional alternative in the Hindi belt and can pose a challenge to the dominant national parties on the basis of the support it enjoys not only from the Dalits, but also from other minorities.

To sum up, regionalism has become an integral part of the Indian ethos and will continue to grow as more and more ethnic and linguistic groups become conscious of their distinct identity and seek recognition as regional groups to preserve the same. Emergence of an educated elite and a regional bourgeoisie is an important pre-requisite for the articulation of regional demands. Such forces may consider themselves as nationalities, but do not necessarily aspire for an independent nation-state for themselves. Rather, they clamour for more autonomy within the existing set-up and desist from raising secessionist demands. Regionalism thus distinguishes itself from secessionism.

In the next chapter, we propose to examine the factors leading to the emergence of regionalism in Meghalaya, the State on which the present work has been based.

NOTES

1. For a discussion on territoriality as an unit of analysis of regionalism, See David B. Knight, "Identity and Territory: Geographical Perspectives on Nationalism and Regionalism" in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 72(4), 1982, pp. 514-531.
2. See Akhtar Majeed, 'Maldevelopment and Regional Conflict: A General Framework' in Akhtar Majeed (ed), *Regionalism: Developmental Tensions in India*, (New Delhi, 1984), p. 3.
3. Loc.cit.
4. Shriram Maheshwari, 'Regionalism in India: Political and Administrative Response', *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, October-December, 1973, p. 442.
5. Joseph Schwartzberg, 'Prolegomone to the Study of South Asian Regions and Regionalism'. In Robert I. Crane (ed.), *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study* (Duke

University Program in Comparative Studies in Southern Asia Monograph Number Five, 1967), pp. 89-111.

6. Loc.cit.
7. For details, see P. C. Mathur, 'Regionalism in India: An Essay in Dimensionalization of State Politics in India', in Ramakant (Ed.), *Regionalism in South Asia* (Jaipur, 1983), p. 6.
8. For use of the word 'region' in the context of South Asia, See Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and others, *The Regional Imperative: U. S. Foreign Policy Towards South Asian States* (New Delhi, 1980).
9. For use of the word 'region' in the case of Telengana, See G.R.S. Rao, *Regionalism in India: A Case Study of Telengana Issues* (New Delhi, 1975).
10. Jaroslav Krejci and Vitezslav Velimsky, *Ethnic and Political Nations in Europe* (London, 1981), p. 61.
11. For details, See *Ibid.*, pp. 77-85. It may be noted for instance, that there is a Swedish minority in Finland, a Hungarian one in Romania, erstwhile Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the USSR and so on.
12. See S. Dale McLemore, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America* (Boston, 1991), pp. 84 and 478.
13. For discussion, See Hendrik W. Van der Merwe and David Welsh, "Identity, Ethnicity and Nationalism as Political Forces in South Africa: The Case of Afrikaners and Coloured People" in Jacques Dofw and Akinsola Akiwowo (eds), *National and Ethnic Movements* (California, 1980), pp. 263-273.
14. See Colin Legum, J. William Zartman, Steven Langdon and Lynn K. Mytelka, *Africa in the 1980s – A Continent in Crisis* (New York, 1979), pp. 27-28. It may be noted that Colin Legum uses the term *Subnational* groups to signify regional group.
15. See, for example, Anirudha Gupta, *Government and Politics in Africa* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 3-7. The author speaks of the *West African Region*, the *Central and Southern Region* comprising the Congo basin, Gaban Katanga, the Copperbelt of Zambia and Southern Rhodesia and East Africa.
16. See Martin Doornbos and John Markakis, "Society and State in Crisis: What went Wrong in Somalia," in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 59, 1994.
17. Rasheeduddin Khan, *Federal India – A Design for Change* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 44.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.30-32
19. B. Pakem, "Indian Nationalism and the Regional Political Parties of Meghalaya", a paper presented to a Seminar on Regionalism and Nationalism in North East India (Dibrugarh, Dibrugarh University, 29-30 November, 1982).
20. For discussion, See A. K. Baruah, *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics* (Guwahati, 1991), p. 2.
21. See footnotes in Paul R. Brass, 'Pluralism, Regionalism and Decentralizing tendencies in Contemporary Politics' in Wilson and

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- Dalton (eds), *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration* (New Delhi, 1982), p. 260.
22. For discussion on this issue, See P. C. Mathur, *op.cit.*, p. 6.
 23. Paul R. Brass, *op.cit.*, p. 260.
 24. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.
 25. For discussion on this issue, See Martha Brill Olcott, "The Soviet (Dis) Union" in *Foreign Policy*, No. 82, Spring 1991, pp. 118-121.
 26. Duncan B. Forrester, "Subregionalism in India", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1, Spring, 1970, p. 5.
 27. *Loc. cit.*
 28. *Loc. cit.*
 29. See Iqbal Narain, "A Conceptual Analysis in the Indian Context" in Akhtar Majeed (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 21
 30. For use of the term 'tribalism', See Kousar J. Azam, *Political Aspects of National Integration* (Meerut, 1981), pp. 167-168.
 31. See Birch, *op.cit.*, p. 334. A similar sentiment has been expressed in A. K. Baruah, *Social Tensions in Assam, op.cit.*, p. 2.
 32. For more important theoretical literature on the subject, See Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, 1953), Ernest Q. Campbell (ed.) *Racial Tensions and National Identity* (Nashville, 1972), Walker Connor, "Self-Determination: The New Phase" in *World Politics*, October 1967, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying" in *World Politics*, April 1972, and Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (London, 1975).
 33. See Iqbal Narain, *op.cit.*, p. 21.
 34. For a discussion on the situation in Punjab, See Pramod Kumar etc. *Op.cit.*
 35. For details on nationalist movements in North East India, See M. Horam, *Naga Insurgency* (New Delhi, 1990); Samir Kumar Das, *ULFA – A Political analysis* (Delhi, 1994) etc.
 36. Iqbal Narain, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 38. *Loc. cit.*
 39. See Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (New Jersey, 1978).
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 275-285 and 296.
 41. Kousar J. Azam, *op.cit.*, p. 83.
 42. See B. Subba Rao, "Regions and Regionalism in India", *The Economic Weekly*, 10, No. 38, 20th September 1958, pp. 1215-20.
 43. Azam, *op.cit.*, p. 83.
 44. *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241.
 45. For an analysis of the social base of political parties for the purpose of classification, see Daniel-Louis Seiler, *Partis et Familles Politiques* (Paris, 1980) as cited by Balveer Arora, "Centralist and Regionalist Parties in India's Federal Polity" in Zoya Hasan, S. N. Jha and Rasheeduddin Khan (eds.), *The State, Political Processes and Identity – Reflections on Modern India* (New Delhi, 1989), p. 192. In Chapters

III and IV, we shall see that, such an attempt by the national elite leads to forced integration and suppression of the aspirations of smaller nationalities in a multi-ethnic society.

46. The Assamese middle class, for instance, articulated such interests. See Introduction by P. S. Datta in P. S. Datta (ed.), *Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam* (New Delhi, 1990), pp. 15-20.
47. See S. M. Lipset and Bendix Reinhard (eds.), *Class, Status and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1966). Also Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman (eds.), *Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, no details).
48. Contemporary Literature on the relationship between political parties and social and ethnic cleavages reinforce such a view. See, for example, Rupert Emerson, "Parties and National Integration in Africa" in La Palombara and Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton, 1966), p. 296.
49. For discussion, See Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 44-45.
50. *Seminar*, 132, August 1970, p. 11.
51. Lewis P. Fickett Jr., "The Politics of Regionalism in India". in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2, Summer, 1971, p. 193.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
53. See M. L. Sharma, "Elite Conflicts, Regionalism and Compatibility Crisis: A Study of the Autonomy Movements in North East India" in Ramakant (ed.) *op.cit.*, p. 50.
54. For a discussion on instances of elite conflict, See, *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
55. See Appendix I, abstracts of discussion with Shri D. D. Lapang in Shillong on 3rd January 1991.
56. See A. Gramsci (ed.), *Prison Notebooks*, Hoare and G. Nowel Smith (London, 1971). Also see, G.A. Williams, "Gramsci's Concept of Egemonia" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 587.
57. See M. L. Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 51.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
59. For discussion on this issue, see A. K. Baruah, "Middle Class Hegemony and the National Question in Assam" in Milton Sangma (ed.), *Essays on North East India* (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 246-247.
60. P.D. Devanandan, *The Dravida Kazhagam: A Revolt Against Brahmin* (Bangalore, 1960), p. 9. Also S. N. Balasundaram, "The Dravidian (Non-Brahmin) Movement in Madras" in Iqbal Narain (ed.), *State Politics in India*, p. 171.
61. For a discussion on the communal dimension of the Punjab problem, See Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1984).
62. See B. Pakem, *op.cit.*
63. See Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism etc.*, *op.cit.*
64. As cited by Anthony H. Birch, "Minority Nationalist Movements and Theories of Political Integration" in *World Politics*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, April, 1978, p. 326.

65. See Pablo Gonzales-Casanova, "Internal Colonialism and National Development" and Rodolpho Stavenhagen, "Classes, Colonialism and Acculturation", both in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 1(1965), no details.
66. See Anthony H. Birch, *op.cit.*, p. 326.
67. See Hechter, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-10 and 38-40.
68. See Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?* (New Jersey, 1972), pp. 23-58.
69. For a discussion of this perspective on Punjab, See Pramod Kumar, Manmohan Sharma, Atul Sood and Ashwini Handa, *Punjab Crisis: Context and Trends* (Chandigarh, 1984), pp. 26-29.
70. For instance, Khasis, Garos, Jaintias, Nagas, Mizos and other hill tribes of North East, Santhals, Oraons and Mundas of Jharkhand, Nepalis of the hill districts of West Bengal and others resort to regional politics in their anxiety to protect their ethnic identity.
71. Growing regional consciousness of Marathi, Punjabi and Telegu speaking people paved the way for the creation of Maharashtra, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh on linguistic basis.
72. For details, see Geoffrey K. Roberts, *A Dictionary of Political Analysis* (London, 1971), p. 195.
73. See, for instance, M. Horam, *Naga Insurgency*, *op.cit.*, p. 49. For discussion on Secessionism, See Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1990) and Paul Brass, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Politics of India Since Independence*, Vol. IV-1 (Cambridge, 1988).
74. See Myron Weiner, *op.cit.*, p. 296.
75. Although the Assamese elite view themselves as a nationality, Asom Gana Parishad, the regional party did not clamour for a sovereign, independent state of Assam.
76. Regional Movements launched by All Assam Students' Union (AASU), All Party Hill Leaders' Conference as well as Telengana movement, Uttara Khand movement etc. illustrate the existence of regional consciousness in the absence of regional political parties.
77. See B.A.V. Sharma, "Congress and the Federal Balance" in Ram Joshi and R. K. Hebsur (eds.), *Congress in Indian Politics – A Centenary Perspective* (Bombay, 1987), p. 117.
78. Asom Gana Parishad, Telegu Desam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam were the constituents of the National Front.
79. Udayan Misra, "Twilight of Asom Gana Parishad", *EPW*, Vol. XXV, No. 5, Feb. 3, 1990.
80. For details, See Aruna Mudholkar and Rajendra Vora, "Regionalism in Maharashtra" in Akhtar Majeed (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 94-97.
81. Y. B. Chavan, who hailed from Vidarbha, was aware of this fact and sought to fulfill the aspirations of the regional elite by offering them significant positions in the Cabinet during his Chief Ministership. See Jayant Lele, "Chavan and the Political Integration of Maharashtra" in N. R. Inamdar et al. (eds.), *Contemporary India* (Poona, 1982), pp. 29-54.

82. Jagan Phadnis, *Satteche Mohra* (Marathi), (Bombay, 1977), p. 156, as quoted by Aruna Mudholkar etc., op.cit., p. 103.
83. For details, See Mary F. Katzenstein, "Origins of Nativism: The Emergence of Shiv Sena in Bombay" in Donald B. Rosenthal (ed.), *The City in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1976), pp. 44-58.
84. Amrita Abraham, "Maharashtra: Gendarme of bourgeoisie", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XIV, No. 15, April 14, 1979, pp. 685-686.
85. For discussion on this issue, See Robert L. Hardgrave, "The Riots in Tamil Nadu", *Asian Survey*, August 1965, p. 402, and Duncan B. Forrester, "The Madras Anti-Hindi Agitation 1965", *Pacific Affairs*, Spring, 1966, p. 23.
86. Sneh Prabha Rastogi, "Emergence and Rise of the DMK" in Subhash C. Kashyap (ed.), *Indian Political Parties*, (Delhi, 1971), p. 159.
87. For details, see Mohan Ram, *Hindi Against India* (New Delhi, 1968), p. 112.
88. Balraj Puri, "Punjab Accord And After: Opportunity to Go Into Roots of Problem" in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict in South Asia* (Delhi, 1987), p. 102.
89. Loc.cit., Also see Randhir Singh, "Marxists and the Sikh Extremist Movement in Punjab" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXII, No. 34, August 22, 1987, p. 1440.
90. Pramod Kumar, Manmohan Sharma, Atul Sood, Ashwini Handa, op.cit., p. 17. For discussion on the factors mentioned, See pp. 26, 38-48 and 63-72.
91. Authors subscribing to this viewpoint are numerous. For instance, O.P. Sebharwal highlights the need to deal with terrorist gangs ruthlessly as one of the components of the Punjab situation.
92. Pramod-Kumar etc., op.cit., p. 19.
93. W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (New Delhi, 1979), p. 218.
94. Pramod Kumar etc., op.cit., p. 21.
95. Balraj Puri, op.cit., p. 103.
96. Ibid., p. 108.
97. Such a sentiment has been expressed in Gul Mohd. Wani, *Kashmir Politics: Problems and Prospects* (New Delhi, 1993) pp. 165-171. Also see Edward W. Desmond, "At War With Itself", *Time*, December 24, 1990, p. 9.
98. Ramdayal Munda as quoted in Ramesh Upadhyaya, "Jharkhand: On the Boil" in *Frontline* (June 10-23, 1989), pp. 25-27.
99. CJM recommendations as cited by Raju Ramachandran "Demand for Tribal States: The Problem is Ethnic not Regional" in V. Grover and R. Arora (eds.), op.cit., p. 705.
100. Ibid., pp. 705-706.
101. Ramesh Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 26.
102. After several decades of relentless struggle, the demand for Jharkhand was finally conceded by the BJP led coalition government at the Centre. Incidentally, creation of separate states of Jharkhand (originally conceived as Vananchal by BJP), Uttaranchal and Chattisgarh was an important pre-election commitment made by the

BJP. However, the proposal for a Jharkhand State met with strong resistance from the Rashtriya Janata Dal led by Laloo Prasad Yadav in the initial stages, primarily because of a reluctance to part with major chunks of mineral rich territory from Bihar. In fact, the RJD leader had been demanding heavy compensation for the loss of territory. Eventually, Jharkhand was created as a separate state, but the boundaries of the State fell far short of what was originally demanded by the regional leadership because of outright rejection by the State Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal to transfer territories dominated by tribals to the proposed State of Jharkhand.

103. "Assam-Survival Strategies" (editorial) in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 21, 1990, Vol. XXV, No. 29, p. 1566.
104. Amalendu Guha, "Little Nationalism Turned Chauvinist: Assam's Anti-Foreigner Upsurge", *EPW* Special Number Vol. XV (41, 42 and 43), October 1980, pp. 1699-1720.
105. Hiren Gohain, *EPW*, Vol. XV(8), February 23, 1981. Incidentally, since then, Gohain appears to have revised his views on the Assam situation. See his comment on Guha's article, *EPW*, XVI(8), February 3, 1981.
106. For relevant references, see Susanta Krishna Dass, "Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam 1891-1981", *EPW* XV(19), May 10, 1980. Also see Tilotama Misra, "Assam: Colonial Hinterland", *EPW*, XV(32), August 9, 1980, pp. 1357-67.
107. B. Chakravarti, "Assam Movement – Background of History" in *Man and Development*, Vol. V, No. 2, June 1982, pp. 118-125.
108. See A. K. Baruah, "Assam Movement: Distortions in Analysis" in *Man and Development*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1983, pp. 162-163.
109. See Manorama Sharma and Apurba Baruah, "Promises to Keep: An Analysis of the AGP Manifesto" in *North East Quarterly*, January-March, 1987, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 34.
110. See *Save Assam Today To Save India Tomorrow* (Gauhati, 1980), leaflet published by the AASU. Also see Apurba Baruah, "Indian Nationalism and the Assamese National Question", *North East Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (August, 1982), pp. 14-32. Here, Baruah shows that the movement had not been directed against the non-Assamese.
111. Apurba Baruah, "Assamese Middle Classes and the Xenophobic Tendencies in Assamese Society", *Frontier*, Vol. 14, No. 11, pp. 3-6.
112. Samir Kumar Das, *ULFA – A Political Analysis*, op.cit., p. 37.
113. See A. R. Kamal, *Essays on Social Change in India* (Pune, 1983), pp. 77 & 95.
114. Lata Marugkar, "Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal", Ph. D. Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Bombay, 1987.
115. Yevgenia Yurlova, "Political Emergence of the Scheduled Caste Ethnocommunity", in V. Grover and R. Arora (eds.), op.cit., p. 495.
116. *Mainstream* (New Delhi, December 9, 1989), p. 5.

117. In 1981, the SCs constituted 15.8 per cent of the population of India. Almost half of the total number of SCs live in the five States of the Hindi belt – 23.5 million in U.P., 10 million in Bihar, 7.3 million in Madhya Pradesh, 5.8 million in Rajasthan and 2.5 million in Haryana. In Punjab, this figure is equal to 4.5 million or 26.9 per cent of the State's population. See Sacchidananda, *Congress and the Harijans, A/CC-I* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 6.