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Q12

What is the basis of regionalism? Is it that unequal distribution of benefits of development on regional basis eventually promotes regionalism? Substantiate your answer.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS I · 12 marks · Social Empowerment, Communalism and Secularism
Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism.

Core demand of the question

- Explain the basis of regionalism in India
- Then judge whether unequal regional development is what finally promotes it, with examples

Revision summary

Regionalism is a claim for power or resources in the name of a language, culture, or territory.

Language reorganisation, tribe, and distance from the capital are independent bases.

Skewed irrigation, industry, and jobs have clearly fuelled Telangana, Vidarbha, and mineral hinterland demands.

Prosperous regions can also turn regional to protect migrants or the tax base.

Unequal development promotes regionalism but does not exhaust its causes.

Introduction

Regionalism is the political claim that a language, culture, or territory deserves more power, resources, or even a separate state. In India it rests on several bases at once. Unequal fruits of development often sharpen it, but they are not the only root.

Body**What regionalism rests on**

- Language and script are the oldest modern bases, from the Andhra movement and the **States Reorganisation Commission (1955)** to later hill and tribal identity claims.
- Shared history, caste clusters, and cultural memory, as in Tamil or Maratha pride, give a people a name before any budget figure is cited.
- **Geography and administrative distance matter:** a hill, a plateau, or a river basin that is ruled from a far capital feels like a region even when income is not the first slogan.
- Ethnic and tribal identity, as among Gorkhas, Nagas, Bodos, and some Jharkhand groups, mixes land, custom, and fear of demographic change.
- Political entrepreneurs and parties convert these feelings into a demand for a state, an autonomous council, or a larger share of river water and jobs.

Unequal development as a promoter

- Yes, in many cases the sense that roads, industry, irrigation, and government jobs stayed in one belt while another remained a hinterland is what turned identity into a durable movement.

- Telangana's long complaint against coastal Andhra over irrigation, employment, and Hyderabad's gains is a clear development-plus-identity case that ended in a new state in 2014.
- Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh, and parts of north Karnataka use drought, farmer distress, and thin industry as the regional argument.
- Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh were demanded as mineral-rich interiors that did not see matching human development under Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.
- Gorkhaland and some hill demands mix culture with the charge that plains-centred states neglect Darjeeling or the western Himalaya in schools and jobs.
- Green Revolution Punjab-Haryana versus rain-fed eastern and central India shows that national growth can itself create regional jealousy if public investment is spatially biased.

Why development is not the whole basis

- Linguistic states after 1956 reduced some unrest even where income gaps remained, which shows that recognition of language can calm regionalism without equal GDSP.
- Some rich regions also show regionalism, as when a prosperous belt wants to keep its tax base or opposes migrants, which is identity and resource-protection, not only poverty.
- **Sons-of-the-soil** politics in Mumbai or Assam is as much about culture and demography as about factory jobs.
- Centre-state **finance** fights and **Article 3** politics can manufacture a regional story even when the data gap is modest.

A balanced substantiation

- **Unequal regional benefits are a powerful fuel:** they give a grievance that can be counted in canals, colleges, and per capita income.
- The spark is still often language, tribe, or historical region; development failure makes that spark a fire.
- The Indian answer has been federal redesign, **Finance Commission** transfers, and special category or backward-region grants, not a denial of the feeling.

Way forward for the answer

- List language, culture, geography, and ethnicity first, then show with Telangana, Vidarbha, and mineral hinterlands that skewed development promotes regionalism without being its only cause.

Flow diagram

Language culture ethnicity geography -> Regionalism
 Unequal canals jobs industry -> Regionalism
 Regionalism -> Statehood autonomy resource share
 Federal redesign Finance Commission -> Containment not erasure

Conclusion

Regionalism in India is based on language, culture, territory, and ethnicity. Unequal distribution of development benefits on a regional map does promote it, as Telangana and several hinterland movements show, but identity and political organisation can sustain regionalism even where the income gap is not the whole story.

Facts & figures

States Reorganisation Commission, 1955

Body whose work led to linguistic states in 1956, the main constitutional reply to language-based regionalism.

Telangana, 2014

New state whose movement mixed cultural identity with complaints about irrigation, jobs, and Hyderabad-centred growth.

Article 3

Power of Parliament to form new states and alter boundaries, the legal path many regional movements seek.

Finance Commission

Constitutional body that transfers resources among states and can ease, but not erase, regional fiscal jealousy.

Sons-of-the-soil

Politics that claims local jobs and land for natives, seen in several cities and states beyond poor hinterlands.

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