

## Regionalism In Sri Lanka: A Study Of Changing Dimensions

Surendra Singh<sup>1</sup>

One of the crucial challenges facing almost all the countries in the South Asian Region relates to the issue of regionalism. The South Asian countries are plural societies with numerous religions, ethnicities, languages and regions. Theoretically speaking, regionalism could be seen as an universal phenomenon in so far as it is micro-view of nationalism, though it tends to assume a decisive role in the operational sphere of multi-ethnic, plural societies, especially in developing areas. National resurgence in developing politics inequitably paved the way for regional autonomy and socio-cultural renaissance. In post-independence phase, the new nations of developing areas have to struggle very hard for evolving a viable and integrated system, preventing fissiparous and secessionist tendencies. Trends of regionalism are identifiable in both international relations and in the domestic politics of a given nation state. The paper mainly focuses upon different dimensions of regionalism in the domestic political sphere. Three major types of regionalism could be seen in various developing nations: intra-state, inter-state and supra-state regionalism. The issue of regionalism is mainly ignited by independent historical heritage, geographical isolation, racial, ethnic, religious loyalties, psychological, socio-cultural, politico-economic factors. Regionalism has both positive and negative implications within a federal democratic setup.

Regionalism has been one of the severest problems that the tiny island of Sri Lanka has been facing since its independence. At stake is the integrity and unity of the nation. The problem is made complex as it is not just any territorial group which is seeking regional autonomy for administrative purposes. Rather it is the ethnicity, language and religion which tend to coincide with the territorial concentration of population and there by reinforce each other and heighten the sense of and an urge for distinctive identity.

Sri Lanka's political life has been closely bound up with ethnic, religious, linguistic, communal and other traditional social differentiation. These traditional groupings formed the basis of politically most significant loyalties, interests and demands. The Sinhala and the Lanka's Tamil communities could associate these loyalties with past kingdoms and with specific territories. Because of the force of historical traditions, ethnicity, linguistic, communal traditions there emerged within Sri Lanka forms of identity among the majority Sinhalese and the minority Sri Lanka Tamil communities. This paper is an attempt to examine the growth and nature of regionalism in Sri Lanka politics against the above background.

Key Words: Regionalism; Sri Lanka; Dimensions; Communities; Ethnicity

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<sup>1</sup> 81/207, Udai Marg, Pratap Nagar, Sanganer, Jaipur, Rajasthan (INDIA)