

# Regional identity and being part of the mainstream

The country should be moving toward cooperative federalism, and not coercive federalism



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I started my political-administrative career as Chairman of a Kannada watchdog committee after being elected, in 1983, from Chamundeshwari constituency. Fighting for the regional identity of Karnataka has always been a part of my political and personal agenda. **The question of regional identity, in the realm of nationalism, has become prominent since 2014. A myopic view of “nationalism” by certain sections needs to be countered effectively to protect our dignity and identity. Modern India is conceptualised on the idea of unity in diversity, and all our actions should be sensitive to protecting this beautiful idea.**

It is unfortunate that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has derived its political ideology from Veer Savarkar's Hindutva instead of the supreme Constitution of India. Its politics focuses on centralisation, with special attention to undermining the interests of non-Hindi States. The BJP government is intruding into the economic, political, cultural and educational autonomy of States. Modern India has evolved to be more than just the Union of States. **We should be moving toward cooperative federalism and not coercive federalism. The policies of the BJP government are inconsistent with the vision of the Constitution drafting committee with respect to Centre-**

State relations.

## Revenue deficit State

Karnataka is one of the States most harassed by the central government of the day. Karnataka has seen a drain of wealth due to the inconsistent policies of the BJP. From being a revenue surplus State, it is now a revenue deficit State. Karnataka's share of tax devolution has been reduced from 4.72% in the Fourteenth Finance Commission to 3.64% in the Fifteenth Finance Commission due to a skewed preference to the 2011 population. Unfortunately, States such as Karnataka which gave special attention to population control, were and have been penalised severely. Special grants of ₹5,495 crore which were recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission for 2020-21 were denied by the Union Finance Minister. In 2019-20, Karnataka got just ₹30,919 crore as its share of central taxes instead of ₹48,768 crore as recommended by the Fourteenth Finance Commission. In 2020-21, it got just ₹20,053 crore as share of central taxes instead of ₹31,180 crore as recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission. Karnataka contributes more than ₹2.2-lakh crore to central taxes but in return receives less than ₹30,000 crore. If the States get 41% share of the central taxes, Karnataka should have ideally got at least ₹70,000 crore - ₹80,000 crore on a pro rata basis for its contribution.

**It is a known fact that the South has been subsidising the north. Six States south of the Vindhyas contribute more taxes and get less. For example, for every one rupee**



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**of tax contributed by Uttar Pradesh, that State receives more than ₹1.79.** For every one rupee of tax contributed by Karnataka, the State receives less than ₹0.47. Karnataka has also been hit by a denial of Goods and Services Tax compensation cess as promised by the central government through the Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Act, 2017. Having presented 13 Budgets, my heart is saddened to see Karnataka deviating from the provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act - thanks to the step motherly treatment by the Narendra Modi-led BJP government.

## Specific issues

The problems are more than just the finances of State governments. Many issues of federalism are affecting the identity, social structure and political economy of our State. **Our government had requested the central government to include the Karnataka flag in the schedule of the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950, based on the recommendations of the committee for the Karnataka flag. It is unfortunate that the central govern-**

**ment is still procrastinating over the recommendation without granting formal inclusion.** Is the desire of the people of Karnataka to have a flag for their State, to give primacy to the Kannada language and to have greater say in the running of their own lives inconsistent with the objective of building a strong nation?

It is no more a secret that a conspiracy is being hatched by the leaders of certain regions to systematically prevent the selection of non-Hindi candidates to government posts and professional courses. A recent example of this can be seen in the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection notification where the examinations were notified to be conducted only in English and Hindi, thereby depriving lakhs of non-Hindi medium candidates an opportunity to apply. About 407 vacant posts in the notification were to be filled in banks located in Karnataka - this means 407 Kannada medium candidates will lose the chance to work in Karnataka.

## Centralisation of education

**The National Education Policy is another tool of the BJP to proliferate Hindi in non-Hindi States and to take away the rights of the States by promoting centralisation with respect to education. The policy negates the spirit of the Constitution and is inconsistent with Article 246 of Indian Constitution. Under the new three-language formula, it is consequential for the students from the south Indian States to choose Hindi as the third language. Schools will not have enough resources to arrange for faculty to teach more subjects**

for third languages, which means Hindi will be the only choice.

It is important to recollect that in 1947, India was a young nation and we needed to be cautious of any divisive or secessionist tendencies. India, therefore, became a Union of States with a strong Centre. When Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel went about integrating the princely States into the Union, a strong Centre did make sense.

## A perspective

Today, over 70 years down the line, we have done admirably well as a nation. The Constitution of India has stood the test of time. We have also learnt useful lessons from turmoil in Tamil Nadu over Hindi language imposition and demands of autonomy from certain States such as Punjab and Assam. From a Union of states, we are evolving into a federation of States.

Therefore, I do not think the demands for greater federal autonomy and recognition of regional identity are inconsistent with our nation. Karnataka prides itself in its Kannada identity. The oldest written document (in stone) in Kannada found at Halmidi, Hassan district, dates back to the Second century AD. The oldest Kannada Kingdom under the Kadamabas of Banavasi ruled the State during the Fourth century AD. We have been using a red and yellow flag for decades. Yet, Karnataka, as our Poet Laureate Kuvempu said, is the daughter of Bharata, the Indian nation - *Jaya Bharatha Jananiya Tanujathe*.

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