UNIT 2 REGIONS AND REGIONALISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we learnt about the extensive debates on nation, nationalism and citizenship and its relation with women. In this unit, we will learn about the formation of regions, regionalism and the linkages to women.

When we think of a region, we imagine a space with a common language, particular people and their attachment to that space. The culture of a region distinguishes it from other forms of spatial and political forms. In this unit, we will learn about the debate on region, regionalism and its relationship to women. Region is always interpreted on the basis of geography, culture and so on. It is also linked to state, political parties, leaders and other institutions. It is asserted that the people who are the citizens of a nation-state demand recognition for the separate region due to marginalization, feeling of alienation from the larger spectrum of the state, lack of access to resources, absence of dignity and so on. However, women who also contribute to the making of a region are often left behind. This unit will explore the life and world of those women who participate in the process of making regional entities.
2.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- Learn about the concept of region and regionalism;
- Get an overview of the historical lineages on region and regionalism;
- Understand the linkages between gender relations and regionalism; and
- Assess the impact of region and regionalism on gender.

2.3 CONCEPTUALIZING REGIONS AND REGIONALISM

The category of region is interpreted on different grounds. It may be primarily a geographical location, or a historically determined spatial construction. The salient features of a region reflect persistence, language, regeneration, re-assertion and so on. Therefore, it is theorized as a culturally driven construct. It is asserted that region has linkages with the labour of the community, the oral and verbal mosaic related to culture, and so on. People are the citizens of a region and it functions with implications of political entity such as state, political parties, citizenship and so on. On the other hand, regionalism means to situate the approach and sentiments towards the particular region. It is argued that regionalism can be a form of resistance against the imposition of a particular cultural ideology that is linked to the integration of a nation. Regionalism is found to have connections with the cultural patterns that exist as a part of the dominant culture. Sometimes, it becomes a threat to the nation state by regional groups who struggle for their particular sectional interests. In this unit, we will learn about region and regionalism and its relation with state, gender and communities.

2.4 HISTORICAL LINEAGE

Pre-independent India was a land with fragmented regions that possessed autonomy in different degree. British colonizers re-structured those regions for colonial exploitation. At the same time, privileged sections of the population responded to British colonialism in two ways. On the one hand, they adopted colonial modernity for their upward mobility. On the other hand, they questioned the colonial onslaught on their region. Thus, the notion of region in India during the period of colonialism and post-independent state is a skewed one. Regional culture persisted in a dynamic fashion even after the formation of India. In other words, various strata of people in India associated themselves with their regional cultures. At the same time, they are governed by the nation at large. Thus, the regional cultures shape the consciousness of plural and unequal masses that are scattered throughout the country.
Regional modernity structured the regional cultures in different ways. In other words, missionaries and the British rulers engaged with the regional knowledge systems in a creative manner. They constructed schools and provided social mobility to the women and other marginalized sections. They codified the regional and vernacular knowledge for purpose of governance. This helped the codification of the vernacular cultures. The interests related to the ‘civilizing mission of the orient’ are political in nature. According to G. Aloysius (2007) India was ‘colonized by caste’ before the entry of British colonizers. However, post-colonial formation of an independent Indian state re-configured new class and caste structures under the form of new sovereignty. In the next section let us look at the current trends on region and regionalism.

2.5 CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON REGION AND REGIONALISM

The existence of relative deprivation is one of the most important aspects in constructing the argument for regionalism. For instance, if the people from any particular region feel that they are more deprived than others in terms of distribution of resources, infrastructures and so on, then it may create regional affiliation. For example, Gorkha Nationalist Liberation Forum (GNLF) started its movement in the Darjeeling. In the view of GNLF, Darjeeling was the most underdeveloped region in comparison to the southern part of West Bengal. This sort of sentiment to have a separate region is often manipulated by the community leaders within the region, political leaders and political parties according to their vested interests and ideological inclinations.

The second significant factor for the emergence of regionalism is the issue of language and culture. Every individual’s identity is based on the categories of language and culture which, once politicized, play an important role in the formation of region.

According to Edward Sapir, language plays a vital role in the creation and determination of a region. Thus, the idea of region has to be explored in the context of language debates. Language is defined as the “human and non-instinctive modes of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by a system of voluntarily produced symbols” (Sapir, 1921:4). Consequently, the need for a region is linked to a population who converse in a particular language. Simultaneously, this premise of a particular language excludes those communities that do not deploy that language for communication (Aloysius, 2007:11-13). After independence, the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru established the State Reorganization Committee which was amended in 1956. Paul Brass argues that it was done according to the traditional
linguistic regions. For instance, current states of Gujarat and Maharashtra were formed after the bifurcation of Bombay in 1960 (Brass, 1999:169).

State formation on the basis of language gives rise to some conflicts. For instance, the Tamil revolt against the Hindi belt shows the conflict related to languages. It is argued that language determines the assertions and struggle related to knowledge.

2.5.1 Ruling Class Interests in Region

It is observed that the dominant class and caste determine the social spaces of the fragmented population of a particular region. In other words, the higher classes and castes in a particular region subordinate the lower castes/classes by imposing their pressure on the lower classes/caste. Thus, there is a form of surveillance and domination on the basis of division and hierarchy. This power relationship creates different social and material interests in that region.

The divisive character of a region as determined by caste/class creates chaos in that region. Therefore, it is argued that the concept of region challenges the nation-state and provides support to divisive aspirations.

India emerged as an independent nation state and later regionalism became part of the different states in India. It is linked to the politics of ethnocentrism. For instance, natives of a particular region foreground their ontological and epistemological priorities over a particular region. Natives presume that they possess the authenticity over the issues and construction of subject related to that region. They imagine a sort of body politics that includes themselves and exclude the ‘other’ as outsiders. It is a process of “othering” for outsiders. At the same time, it is the return to ‘self’ for the natives. We can analyze the tangible and intangible forms of regionalism through the behavioural cum social aspects of the diverse sections of people from the different parts of India. For instance, Tamils claim that they faced major oppression from Maharashtrians. On the other hand, certain right wing leaders from Maharashtra believe in construction of Marathi Manoos, which is meant to imply those persons who are natives of Maharashtra, thus excluding persons from other states such as Bihar, Tamil Nadu and other parts of India from ‘belonging’ to the State of Maharashtra.

Now, that we have learnt about the interests of a ruling class in a region, let us look more specifically at the example of two particular regions - Jharkhand and Telangana.
2.5.2 Formation of Jharkhand

The demand for the separate state of Jharkhand shows the vicissitudes of the politics of regionalism in India. It was demanded by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. The struggle for the separate state of Jharkhand took almost fifteen years. All the political parties have played an active role in it. This particular area is rich in minerals such as iron ore, coal, copper ore, mica, bauxite, graphite, limestone, and uranium. Jharkhand state was formed on 15th November, 2000 which is the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, a tribal hero revered in this area. Earlier it consisted of eighteen districts of Bihar and currently has twenty four districts.

Some of the tribal dominated districts of Jharkhand are Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh and so on. It is believed that the people from Jharkhand took inspiration from Birsa Munda based on his strong identity as a Jharkhandi. They also claimed that they are socially disadvantaged groups who were denied access to resources. The reason was that the political leaders in Bihar allocated the resources to particular areas, alienating the other areas within Bihar. The rationale for creating this state is also based on the uniqueness of its tribal cultural heritage.

However, the distribution of resources and the politics of development remain significant in the socio-economic structures in Jharkhand due to the continuing construction as relatively deprived and backward. Hence, we can understand that whenever any state formulation happens with the people’s struggle, it has certain aspirations and demands, which may or may not be incorporated in or accommodated by, the formation of the state.

2.5.3 Separate Telangana Movement

The separate Telangana movement started in 1969, based on the viewpoints of the State Reorganization Commission, which drew boundaries based on linguistic background. Interestingly, Telangana region is a part of Andhra Pradesh having a common language. The people of Telangana have a concern that the region has an underdeveloped economy as compared to other parts of Andhra Pradesh.

In 1969, the government was perceived as failing to fulfill its promises to the student groups of Telangana. Telangana is the largest of the three regions of Andhra Pradesh. It is argued that while deciding policies for distribution of water, budget allocations, and jobs, the political parties and leaders neglected the region of Telangana. The allocation of the budget for other regions of Andhra was always higher than for Telangana. Over more than fifty years, not much change has happened in this region. Therefore, it is argued that a separate Telangana state may be the solution to sort out the issues and development of Telangana region.
Students groups in Osmania University in Hyderabad began the agitation for a separate region. The Telangana Congress party leader Chenna Reddy established the Telangana Praja Samithi which was a political party. In the May 1971 parliamentary elections, Samithi won 10 seats out of the 14 in the parliament. Over a period of time these issues of separate state were co-opted by the politician from TPS and some of the leaders from the other parties also took up this question of a separate state. In 1972, the Jai Andhra movement was initiated.

The movement demanded that those who stayed for more than 15 years in Hyderabad, under regimes of Mulki, should be considered eligible to apply for government posts. In this case in 1972 the Supreme Court upheld the Mulki rules. Thus, the Jai Andhra movement again demanded a separate state. Moreover, political stability was brought by Government of India with a Six-Point Formula. It was agreed upon by the two regions’ leaders to stop such an agitation in future.

In 1997, the Bharatiya Janata Party passed a resolution seeking a separate Telangana. It was the same party which has created the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand in 2000. Failure to create a separate Telangana state continued because of lack of consensus with the Telugu Desam Party. It leads to formation of the new party called Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001, whose leader was Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao, with the agenda to have a separate Telangana.

However, Congress party and TRS declared an electoral alliance during 2004 Assembly and parliament elections. They reached a consensus on separate electorates. TRS included the demand for Telangana state within the common minimum programme during the coalition government of Congress.

The state chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy argued that the state should be united. This particular opinion emerged in April, 2006. TRS realised this statement was a deviation from their objective. Thus, they withdrew their support from the coalition government in September, 2006. TRS was successful in maintaining their popular support. They won the election to the Karimnagar Parliamentary constituency in December, 2006.

Conflicts related to Telangana became more active in the circles of TRS and Congress in 2008. Most of the TRS legislators deployed resignation as a part of their resistance. They resigned in the first week of March 2008. It was their tactic to pressurize Congress. They include 4 MPs, 16 MLAs and 3 MLCs from TRS. The election for these seats were again held on 29, May 2008. But, the referendum of TRS during by-election on Telangana was dismissed by the Congress and TDP. They argued that this was not a referendum and that they were not against Telangana. But, TRS secured only 7 out of 16 MLA seats. They secured 2 out of 4 seats for MPs.
The struggle for Telangana created repercussions in other parties as well. For instance, Tulla Devender Goud, a politbureau member and Deputy Leader of the Telugu Desam Party argued that he would be committed to the cause of Telangana. He resigned from the party in June, 2008. Leaders like Peddi Reddy and Goud formed a new party called New Telangana Praja Party in July 2008. Paradoxically, TDP also declared its support for Telangana on 9th October 2008. Most of the parties responded to the cause of Telangana Party during 2009 general elections. Parties such as BJP asserted that they would be instrumental in the creation of two states such as Telangana and Gorkhaland as a condition for their victory in the election. Congress Party agreed to the cause of Telangana but the Muslims showed opposition against it. Minority parties were anxious whether the new state will affect the demands of minorities and potential of Urdu language. TRS declared its alliance with TDP to oppose the anti-Telangana position of Congress. The Union Minister of Home Affairs P.Chidambaram in 2009 argued that Indian government would begin working on a separate Telangana state and Srikrishna Committee on Telangana submitted a report to Home Ministry of India on 30th December 2010.

Thus, the separate Telangana movement is the ongoing process of the people who are residing in the Telangana region, but, the political parties are trying to politicize the issue of separate Telangana region for their political bargaining. In the next section, we will learn about the linkages between women and regionalism.

### 2.6 EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN WOMEN AND REGIONALISM

The issues of region and regionalism have wider linkages with gender and particularly, women. But, the role of women in relationship to region and regionalism remains invisible. In fact women’s participation is seldom recognized by institutions such as state, political parties and so on due to patriarchal modes of operation in several forms. For instance, the formations of separate states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattishgarh and Jharkhand have had various political wings of women. In the recent Telangana movement in which women are protesting against the Central government for a separate Telangana from Andhra Pradesh, the participation of women is often ignored.

In this section, we will broadly deal with role played by the women in Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha so that you get a better grasp of the role played by women in the context of region and regionalism. The movement began under the banner of Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS) which was a trade union of manual mine workers. However, this movement was conceived during the emergency period in 1977.
Trade unions emerged in Bengal Nagpur Cotton Mills at Rajnandgaon. There were other upsurges of trade unions during the same period i.e. 1984-1987. A family from Rajnandgaon owned the mill and they deployed Goondas to regulate the labourers. Goondas were even part of the core management activities related to the mills, as well as part of the newly introduced scheme for workers. Unrest of workers emerged in the form of the central trade union for Dalli Rajhara mine workers. Thus, they approached this union, known as ‘Lal Hara’ (Red Green), which comes under Rajnandgaon Mazdoor Sangh. After the foundation of Bhilai Steel Plant, Durg and Raipur were transformed into an industrial hub. Industrial units at Jamul(Bhilai), Urala and Siltara(Raipur), Sarkanda(Bilaspur), Tedesara (Rajnandgaon) which was part of Raipur Industrial Development (RIDA) were already appropriated into this region. Consequentially, it became part of M.P.Industrial Development Corporation or Audyogik Kendra Vikas Nigam(AKVN). This particular region witnessed the formation of different industry. This growth was related to the incentives that were provided to Raipur Industrial Development Area. It is argued that the major part of industrialization happened in privatized fields except public sector Bhilai Steel Plant. It is contended that a parallel trend was the exploitation of workers through the violation of constitutional and statutory rights. Industrialization accelerated the profit and pauperized the workers and resources. More workers got affiliated to the Lal Hara trade union and it resulted in increase in its membership. Workers who suffered from the inhuman policies and activities of the industries found the aforementioned union as a platform to raise their voices. The Lal Hara trade union has different off shoots such as Pragatisheel Engineering Shramik Sangh(PESS), Chattisgarh Mill Mazdoor Sangh and Chattisgarh Shramik Sangh. Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha was an organization related to rural assertions in its earlier phase. Later, it merged with diverse unions under Red Green Platform. Industrialists and repressive state apparatus declared their solidarity to crush the assertions of workers. Leader of the movement Shankar Guha Niyogi, was assassinated during this period. Police killed 16 protesting workers in the year 1992. Some of the leaders were subjected to physical attack. (Section 2.6 is adaptation from the course BWEE-004,Unit - 9, The Chhattishgarh Struggle, written by Dr. Ilina Sen)

**Mahila Mukti Morcha**

Women’s engagement has always been the main aspect of Chhattishgarh Mine Shramik Sangh. In the Dalli Rajhara, where the CMSS has its origin, women formed half the workforce. CMSS participated in the united struggle, the first strike of which was held in 1977.

Women lived under gruesome conditions in Dalli Rajhara. Women faced sexual harassment from the lumpen elements of that area. Majority of women who were sexual harassment belonged to the working class. However,
women resisted such forms of exploitation. Women who were part of CMSS pursued legal action against CISF jawans who raped a tribal girl. It is argued that Mahila Mukti Morcha emerged during this period (1980-81). It addressed the problems which women faced such as wife-beating, problems related to marriage, sexual harassment of women and so on. These political activities were instrumental in creating political consciousness among women. Thus, women achieved a separate platform to raise different forms of marginalities faced by them. Hence their engagement with Mahila Mukti Morcha created competencies for articulation and leadership for women.

Mahila Mukti Morcha operated in the informal living places of the contractual workers and unorganized workers at Dalli Rajhara. Women started anti-liquor agitation. They picketed liquor shops and identified drunken revelers from their area. Women also demanded their rights from the administration. They demanded separate toilets for women. They also urged the authorities to take action against the recalcitrant men who harass women in the cinema halls. Activists of Mahila Mukti Morcha created consciousness among women at large. Thus, they mobilized many women and empowered them. Women started participating in demonstrations due to constant efforts of those activists. They conducted elections, public programmes which attracted most of the women. Large membership was a salient feature of the Mahila Mukti Morcha. They also engaged in conceptual and praxis oriented debates with the other activists who visited them. (The section 2.6.1 is the adaptation from the course BWEE-004,Unit -9, The Chhattishgarh Struggle, written by Dr. Ilina Sen).

2.7 IMPACT OF REGION ON WOMEN

The social development of a particular region affects the gender relations of that region. For instance, women are socially mobile in places such as Kerala. Development in Kerala is linked to the history of the social movements. In other words, the movements that collectively resisted oppression based on caste, gender and class contributed to the upward social mobility of women in Kerala.

On the other hand, states such as Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh are backward in terms of development. This is reflected in the gender indices of these states. Women still undergo different forms of oppression.

‘Secession’ also determines the status of women. For instance, the claims for a separate Kashmir are raised by different political groups, and by Kashmiri militants. Muslim women from Kashmir who demand a separate Kashmir are mobilized by the sub-regionalist/extremist politics which acts as a threat to the Indian nation. Women in Kashmir are caught in the internal patriarchy of their community, bound by religion and external
military apparatus. Women have raised their voice against the military apparatus as well as the impact of militancy on their lives. For instance, the rape of women that took place at Shopian shows the brutal oppression which is determined by patriarchal military apparatus, and against which many women have spoken up.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

We can sum up this unit with an understanding about how the formation of region occurs, from the ideas related to identity and shifts in the political processes. Such a process leads to a feeling of collective consciousness, togetherness and so on. The ethnic identity, language and culture also play a vital role in this process of emergence of regions and regionalism. However, it is often observed that women are also contributing equally to the phenomenon of the emergence of a separate state. Simultaneously, they are always marginalized due to the persisting ideology of patriarchy.

2.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Describe the concepts of region and regionalism.

2) Explain the historical lineages of region and how you can relate it to women and regionalism.

3) Critically analyse the relationship between region, regionalism and women.

2.10 GLOSSARY

Post-Colonialism: Post colonialism refers to range of global cultural developments which occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War. There are historical and theoretical dimensions to this term. On one hand, post colonialism means the cultural, economic, and the social events which have determined the decline of ‘European imperialism’. On the other hand, postcolonial theories also deal with questions such as cultural identity, gender, nationality, race and ethnicity, language and power subjectivities in the aftermath of that imperialism. (For detailed discussion of this term, you may find it helpful to read unit, block of MWG-001).
**Sovereignty**

It refers to the right to possess and regulate the particular region of the world. It also means autonomous system of governing by a country.

**Ontology**

It refers to the relationship between being and understanding. This term originated from a Greek word that refers ‘to being’. It is argued that it is a way of understanding the world. It determines the terms related to existence and dependency.

**Epistemology**

It stands for the philosophical understanding of knowledge. It explores our knowledge and manners of our knowing.

### 2.11 REFERENCES


2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

