

Subnationalism and a plural democracy

What is the issue?

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- India is witnessing a rise in nationalism and subnationalism parallelly, as political ideas.
- At this juncture, it is essential to look at the various implications of this in a democratic India.

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What is subnationalism?

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- It is the idea of asserting the interest of one's own state/region/province, as separate from the interest of the nation and the common interest of all other states/regions/provinces.
- Ex: The recent demands from Karnataka for a separate State flag and widespread protest against the imposition of Hindi.
- This is not a new idea as many instances in the past and some provisions of the constitution did inherently promote this idea - These include:

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1. Demands for language-based provinces during the freedom movement.
2. States Reorganisation Act, 1956 providing for linguistic States.
3. The Official Languages Act, 1963 preventing the transition of India's official language from English to Hindi.
4. Presence of certain group-based fundamental rights such as in Articles 29 and 30.

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5. Special provisions for certain States and sub-State regions.
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 6. Special institutional measures for the administration of areas of high Scheduled Tribe populations as provided in the 5th and 6th Schedules.
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How does this promote a plural democracy?

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- Subnationalism can be seen as a counter-narrative to the idea of aggressive nationalism that restricts any alternative ideas of self-identification.
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 - However, as long as it is not secessionist, subnationalism can be seen as a **constitutive element of democracy**.
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 - It works towards fostering a shared political community accommodating the **multiple aspirations** of a diverse population.
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 - It is in fact the idea of subnationalism that has sustained India as a nation state for 70 years, respecting “**multiple but complementary**” **socio-cultural identities**.
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 - It gives scope for expressing the **linguistic and cultural rights** in a plural society with a federal Constitution.
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 - Subnationalism promotes the idea of an Indian national identity that is not homogeneous and thus ensures a true **plural Indian democracy**.
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Source: The Hindu

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