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REGIONAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD

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Regionalism : An Advanced Concept

Environment without man loses its value, and human action without reference to his environment remains largely unexplained; region is, therefore, a geographical as well as a sociological (cultural) concept.

It expresses itself by its intrinsic wholeness and socio-cultural unity ; and the unifying factor that makes mere space into a region may be geographic structure or a social emergent. Thus region is a collective and cumulative work of art in which nature provides the basic material and (conceptually and concretely) man designs the structure. Region as a geographical unit may be defined by working upwards from the smallest unit of human habitation, in terms of functions, activities and interests; or by working downwards essentially in terms of land mass, climate and physical interactions. These specific units form complexes having differential patterns based on geographic structure. And when man is added to this scene the differences in area become multifarious and subtle, since in the transformation of the original landscape into humanly modified patterns of communal living (*i.e.*, when region is considered in terms of human communities implying a system of interrelations), customs, laws, manners and values, etc., become fresh elements of differentiation marking one region from another.

The most outstanding feature of a region is that unity and diversity, or balance and variety, go together, the former not abolishing differences and the latter not undermining the dynamic unity. In conceiving a region it is necessary to take an area large enough to include an adequate range of interest, and small enough to keep these interests in focus, and to make them a subject of direct collective concern. Conceptually recognizing region as the basic configuration of human activities, as a permanent sphere of cultural influence, as a centre of economic activities and a unit of planning, makes regionalism an advanced concept. With reference to our agrarian economy which has been characterized so far by village self-sufficiency the idea of regionalism (*i.e.*, from village self-sufficiency to regional self-sufficiency) seems to be a considerably forward step in human dispensations. Besides, regionalism (specially the implications of unity and homogeneity) recognizes the presence of other regions or units, and (the implication of balance or dynamic equilibrium) inter-regional relationships within a larger resource complex. Regionalism, therefore, is a step in the growth of nationalism; it is not a reactionary idea; and it does not go counter to the ideas of emotional integration, or national unity, or nationalism.

Impracticability of Regional Approach in Planning

Region as defined above implies a set of complexes, as a geographical concept it implies specific geographic character, and as a sociological concept a system of interrelationships. One of its basic qualities is the absence of definite physical

boundaries (except in the case of isolated islands, oases and mountain areas). While translating the regional concept into a concrete and objective reality practical difficulties arise, since purely physical characteristics grade into each other within intermediate zones that belong partly to one and partly to other area; and human inter-relationships that overflow become shadowy at margins. Therefore, at the operational plane all boundaries, or regional demarcations, become arbitrary in some degree or another, or in some sense or another. And it is generally found that inside a country administrative units, which are facts in history and politics, usually cut across geographically and socially homogeneous areas, with the result that they rarely coincide with regional units. Regionalism, therefore, remains as an ideal, and a broad guiding factor essentially at the plane of imagination, and thus in the conceptual frame of economic planning at the most.

Our existing State boundaries on a broad basis, and the district boundaries on a restricted basis, which are the two most important administrative units, do not satisfy the regional criteria. (Our agricultural regions and sub-regions are different area units.) And the programme of our economic planning is being carried on, by and large, on the State basis, *i.e.*, the units of planning are administrative rather than regional. Some specific programmes either centrally sponsored, or involving more than one State, and being carried on by newly created administrative organizations, are merely exceptions, and do not characterize the pattern of our national economic planning. Besides, the idea of 'regional balance' incorporated in our planning process, and the specific measures adopted and envisaged to fulfil that objective, relate to some of our comparatively poorer, under-developed, backward and problem areas in some of our States (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Assam, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, etc.). That too does not impart a regional approach either in spirit or in content to our national planning activity.

Regional Self-Sufficiency in Food and Crop Diversity

In the process of economic planning the development of different regions or sectors and that of the national economy as a whole have to be viewed as parts of a single process. Within the agricultural sector a balance has to be maintained between the growth of its different components such as crop production, animal husbandry and dairying, forestry and fishery, etc. And in respect of demand the requirements of consumption (food, feed and seeds taken in their broad senses) have to be reconciled with those of the industrial raw materials and exports.

The idea of self-sufficiency, in its broad sense, implies meeting fully all these requirements within the particular area unit. In its narrow sense it may refer to the cereal needs for its human population at its growing rate. Even in its restricted sense, under the system of small scale individual family farming, it implies a diversified cropping pattern. Since other demands (which grow with the process of development) cannot be eliminated self-sufficiency in food normally implies a greater diversity in the individual producer's cropping patterns. The evolution of our agriculture shows that under a closed system of village self-sufficiency our agriculture developed the subsistence character. Consequently (and partly because of safeguarding against the possible crop failures) the production patterns of individual producers are highly diversified. And, strange though it may appear,

the degree of crop diversity is greater in comparatively more prosperous agricultural areas and farmers in our country at present. Besides, agricultural improvements in the form of enhanced input factors (irrigation, fertilizers, improved seeds and better cultural practices, etc.) are said to be largely devoted to comparatively more remunerative commercial crops. Under such circumstances a policy of regional self-sufficiency in food (coupled with the crash programme of enhancing subsidiary foods) is likely to freeze and perpetuate, and in some cases even enhance, crop diversity of individual producers.

Diversity of Cropping Patterns and Waste of Agricultural Productivity

The following evidence (Tables I to III) was revealed by one of our empirical studies¹ examining the ecological distribution of crops in relation to efficiency of land use, with a view to ascertain whether the existing cropping patterns involve a misuse of our cultivated area, and if so, to measure the extent of wastage of agricultural productivity because of the maladjustment in crop ecology.

TABLE I—CORRELATION BETWEEN THE EXTENT OF CULTIVATION AND CROP YIELDS

Paddy	..	..	..	..	— .059
Wheat	..	..	..	..	— .093
Bajra	..	..	..	..	— .154
Jwar	..	..	..	..	— .061
Maize	..	..	..	..	— .606
Gram	..	..	..	..	— .273
Barley	..	..	..	..	+ .390
Sugarcane	..	..	..	..	+ .697

TABLE II—PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CULTIVATED AREA

Well adjusted	..	..	..	12.8
Sufficiently adjusted	..	..	..	28.8
Tolerably adjusted	..	..	..	28.8
Maladjusted	..	..	..	18.1
Highly maladjusted	..	..	..	11.5
Total	..	..	..	100.0

1. For details reference may be made to D. S. Chauhan, "Land Utilization and Cropping Patterns," *Agra University Journal of Research (Letters)*, Vol. XI, Part I, January, 1961, pp. 85-134.

TABLE III—PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL AREA UNDER EACH CROP

Crop			Adjusted	Maladjusted
Paddy	..	..	56.6	43.5
Wheat	..	..	68.7	31.3
Bajra	..	..	72.8	27.2
Jwar	..	..	75.3	24.7
Maize	..	..	70.4	29.6
Gram	..	..	79.5	20.5
Barley	..	..	67.5	32.5
Sugarcane	..	..	98.6	1.4
All Crops	..		70.4	29.6

The ecological distribution of crops shows maladjustment to a very great extent and considerable misuse of our cultivated area which involves considerable wastage of agricultural productivity. Roughly 30 per cent of the cultivated area is being used for growing unsuitable crops ; though the extent of maladjustment was found to be different in different crops, about one-third area under different crops is in such localities and regions which are not suitable for their cultivation. The situation revealed by the present study in Uttar Pradesh seems to be broadly correct for the country as a whole. The greater the degree of subsistence agriculture the greater the crop diversity, the greater the crop diversity the greater the extent of maladjustment in ecological crop distribution, and the greater the wastage of agricultural productivity.

Regional Self-Sufficiency in Food—A Reactionary Approach in Agricultural Planning

The present discussion implies two considerations: the locational structure of agriculture across the national spectrum, and the cropping patterns of individual units of farm production. They are inter-related issues, since the former is achieved through the latter.

Under our prevailing planning effort regions, for all practical purposes, come to mean the States (which are administrative area units). Since States are sufficiently big area units with considerable agricultural resource diversity, the degree of subsistence character of individual farms and the multiplicity of their cropping patterns may be theoretically imagined to get minimized under a programme of State self-sufficiency in food, but it is a doubtful expectation, since the implementation of the plan design to achieve this objective would involve both crop multiplicity and considerable extent of food crops under a system of production consisting of a large number of small units whose built-in character cannot be changed soon through democratic methods. Really speaking in the process of formulation of State plans, which are intended to be developed on the basis of local plans (village, block and district plans), a policy of regional (State) self-sufficiency in food (or that of any small area units, so to say) will involve considerable diversity in the cropping patterns of individual producers, which will not only perpetuate the existing misuse of the cultivated area and the subsistence

character of agriculture by strengthening its roots in the farmers' new scale of values, but will, in some cases, enhance it, and thus resulting in a perpetual wastage of agricultural productivity. And for the country it is highly erosive. In view of the operational goals and the programme designing to which our agricultural development strategy is essentially addressed (the maximization of the aggregate physical agricultural production by making the optimum use of resources), and operating as we do, and are likely to do for considerable time in future, under a situation of critical land scarcity, correction of maladjustment in the ecological distribution of crops assumes a special significance and urgency, not only for checking the current enormous wastage of agricultural productivity, but also (because of being of the structural nature), for avoiding the wasteful use of investment in agriculture in future. The federal character of our Constitution assures a prominent place to the States in our national planning effort. Recently this focus on States as a cultural entity has been strengthened by the adjustment of State boundaries on linguistic basis. And the functional splintering inherent in our administrative system lends support to the idea of State as the planning unit. But the food situation has little to do with the formal structure of the Constitution. The real question is of the final shape of geographical sectoring of the nation's economy. Theoretically speaking, the *developing economy's basic spatial choice implies a geographical continuum. Therefore, dichotomizing the development issue along State lines involves polarization in thinking which is not correct in principle* Since the pulls exerted by the country's natural agricultural resource endowment upon the location of agricultural productive activity provides the basic rationale for development effort, the geographical co-ordinates of the distribution of agricultural productive activity across the national spectrum should not be ignored, otherwise the social costs implicit in this will be tremendous. Under such circumstances, therefore, for attaining the goal of national self-sufficiency the policy of regional self-sufficiency in food seems to be reactionary and archaic.

It may eliminate the pressure of demand piled up by the deficit States on the Centre, and might eliminate some of the existing difficulties of distribution of food supplies, and thus may have an air of *ad hoc* coping up with some immediate (mostly administrative) difficulties, or of political dynamism by relieving the Centre of some of its strains. But normatively it is highly misleading even after making due allowance for the understandable impatience to do away with our food imports. As a matter of fact it goes counter to the ideal of a socialistic pattern of society. It is likely to perpetuate an inefficient use of the cultivated land and of other resources and regional differences, since *locational patterns tend to be self-reinforcing*. It virtually amounts to deliberately creating an imbalance in agricultural land use and restricting the allocative and energizing influence of the market. (The latter cannot be eliminated in our planning exercise through a system of controls on prices and trade in agricultural commodities.) And thus the long-term economic disadvantages and social costs (in terms of economic feasibility, *i.e.*, the loss of production potential and restricting the growth rate in the agrarian sector) are likely to far outweigh the alleged immediate gains as well as the predictable pay-offs. As a matter of fact there is no question of choice between the two alternatives; the immediate and the distant objectives are to be taken as parts of a single process, since our planning is dedicated to the goal of self-generating and self-supporting economic growth by mid-seventies.