



## FEDERAL STATE AND SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND RUSSIA

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### **Abstract**

*Weak democratic institutions, identity/ethnic movements, historical memories, human rights violations, unequal development and non-adherence to federal principles have contributed to the rise of secessionism in both India and Russia. Both Indian and Russian federations have asymmetric arrangements but political responses to secessionist crises like use of coercion or empowering some regional elites at the cost of others have often obliterated these special arrangements leading to further alienation of people and weakening of institutions. This study has analysed the federal responses of India and Russia towards the secessionist movements of Kashmir and Nagaland; Chechnya and Tatarstan. This kind of comparison has fulfilled the theoretical requirement of assessing counterfactuals. It has tested the existing theories on federalism and secessionism and on the basis of present study; it has generated new theoretical understanding on this issue. This study has critically examined various forms of federal state responses to the secessionist movements in terms of military responses, financial responses, constitutional provisions, role of national political parties and regional political parties and various institutional mechanisms, which are dealing with the secessionist problem in India and Russia. This study has also explored the various options for resolving secessionist problems: partition/independence, autonomy, military solution, democratic federalism, assimilation, and power - sharing/bargaining and blocking external interferences. Out of all models, democratic federalism is the most viable option to resolve secessionist conflicts in India and Russia. Finally, this study has analyzed the convergence and divergence in federal responses of India and Russia towards secessionist problems.*

### **Introduction**

Federal institutions are important as long as they are viewed in a dynamic or in a procedural perspective. They help to accommodate the various demands of ethnic territories and prevent or manage secessionist problems. It is crucial to take into account the issue of the asymmetric nature of federalism. A federal system is also expected to limit the ability of ethnic majority of regions to impose its will on the ethnic minorities. Sometimes, federalism can perpetuate and intensify the very secessionist problem it is designed to manage (Obydenkova 2005; Chandhoke 2006). According to this argument, the secessionist problems get institutionalized in the design of federal system itself. Thus, federalism empowers regional elites to sustain and exacerbate the secessionist problem. Years of federal experience has shown that federalism provides the best possible government for a nation of ethnic and regional diversity. The general idea is that a centralized federal government protects both national and regional interests in the most responsive form of administration of state marked with ethnic and territorial diversity. This study explores the inter connection between secessionism, democratization and the role of federal institutions in mitigating the secessionist problem (Hassan 2007, Chandhoke 2015). The main question is whether federal arrangements capable of articulating states with complex territorial, ethnic diversity and secessionism exist. This is currently one of the most important challenges of federalism. Thus, the analytical task becomes even more challenging if one has to consider a state that is in the process of transition from an authoritarian or totalitarian regime to a democracy. The relationship between secessionism and federalism resembles the chicken - egg dilemma (Obydenkova 2005, Chandhoke 2015).

### **Indian Federal State Response towards Secessionist Movements of Jammu & Kashmir and Nagaland Secessionist Movement of Kashmir**

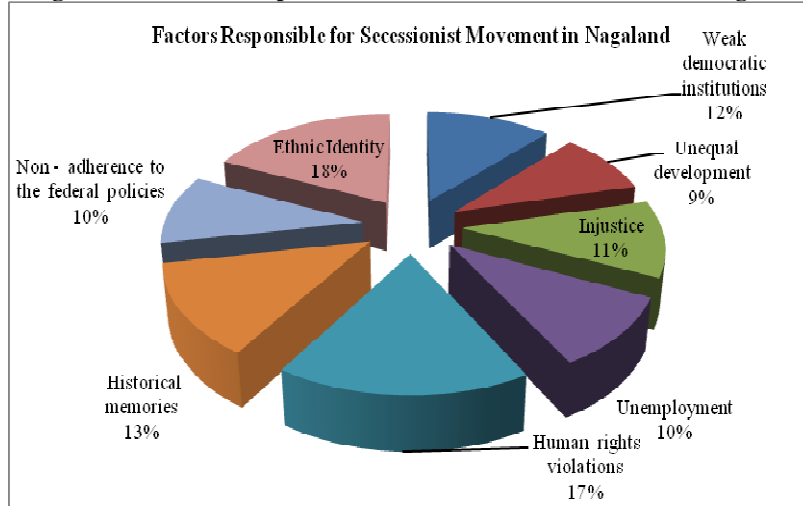
South Asia is a region troubled by numerous problems: immense social deprivation and deep inequities on the one hand, and fragile democratic traditions and a tendency towards authoritarianism on the other. The problem is compounded by tension between neighboring states, and religious and linguistic tensions within states, all of which has resulted in polarized and somewhat intolerant civil societies and repressive states. Above all, armed struggle waged by groups in pursuit of a state of their own overshadows prospects of reconciliation of these deep-rooted tensions (Chandhoke 2009; Jalal 2012). There are two reasons for the emergence of secessionist movements in India. First, the Indian state's irresolvable stand on sovereignty has constrained the concerned communities. Secondly, secessionist conflicts do not occur in vacuum, they usually relate to the policies that states have implemented to deal with the ethnic diversity over time. In the case of India, the reorganization of provinces on the basis of linguistic majority, a state- centered policy on governance, and the meddling in regional politics by various governments at the centre for narrow political objectives has precipitated the demand for autonomy (Sumantra 2003, Behera 2008).

India, being a liberal multicultural state sensitive to public opinion, conceived its own strategy to counter secessionist movements. In sum, India has adopted five broad modus operandi to counter or curb all manners of secessionist threat. They



are: first, constitutionally guaranteed affirmative action; second, negotiation; third, economic incentive; fourth, use of force to break opposition; and fifth, through a moral stance (Chandhoke 2003; Mishra 2012;). It claims that minorities are better protected and their rights could remain inviolable only in a multinational state. This is primarily based on the argument that the moment a minority community succeeds in seceding from the mother country it immediately retorts to a terror campaign against its own minorities (Mishra 2012).

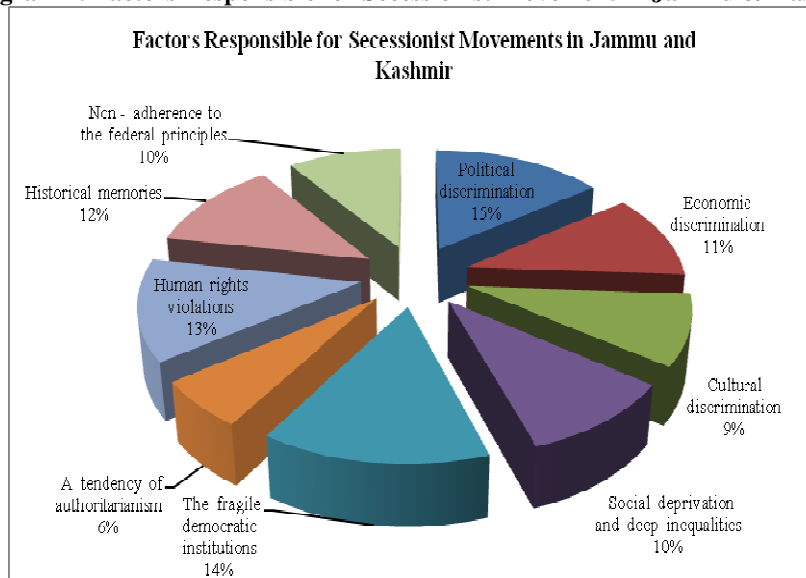
**Diagram 1: Factors Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Nagaland**



Source: Based on data collected during field trip to Nagaland (2012)

Although federal in structure, over-centralization of power is one of the key factors responsible for fuelling secessionist movements in India. Being aware of the situation, the Indian state has actively bargained with regional parties and supported their representation in the region. In this formulation, the state enjoys authority without being dragged in to the quagmire of regional politics (Behera 2014). This technique was followed in Kashmir and throughout Nagaland. As a strategy, this has significant advantages during crisis situations. However, as soon as the affected communities or people realize that they are being manipulated in absentia or the state is enjoying without responsibility they are most likely to revolt against such political tricks. In India, the federal government uses its economic bargaining power to buy off or starve off opposition. Whenever there was a murmur of protest in Kashmir, New Delhi provided various specially created economic packages to drown the voice of dissent (Behera 2013). In Nagaland, however, New Delhi follows an entirely different policy.

**Diagram 2: Factors Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Jammu & Kashmir**



Source: Based on data collected during Field Trip to Jammu & Kashmir (2012)



The region was kept underdeveloped and New Delhi thought that they could kill off all manner of secessionist aspirations. Although there has been no reversal of this policy, the central government provides occasional sops to the region to show its concern and involvement (Bhaumik 2013).

Fortunately, in recent months, ideas about alternative institutional arrangements have become a part of Indian discussions of the Naga conflict (Barua 2003). Indian journalist and policy thinker B. G. Varghese (2014) has suggested a nonterritorial approach that would 'strengthen the Naga way of life' and would not affect the integrity of other states. He recommends the formation of a Naga Regional Council that would give Nagas outside Nagaland a say in Naga cultural matters. Noted anthropologist B. K. Roy Burman has suggested an institution modeled on the Saami Council where the Saami people living in Sweden, Finland, and Norway are represented. To be sure, both Burman's and Varghese's concepts are rather preliminary at this stage, and they seem to address exclusively cultural issues (Baruah 2014, Hazarika 2015). Given the history of the past five decades, it would be too much to expect the Naga conflict to end suddenly on a whimper of some vague promise of cultural autonomy. A proposal that might have the power to capture the Naga imagination at the moment might take the Burmese government into confidence and bring the Nagas of Burma into the picture as well. This can be the first step toward a comprehensive dialogue that includes Nagas as well as the other stakeholders, to consider an arrangement that crosses both transnational and interstate borders and recognizes Naga identity, alongside both the sovereignty of India and Burma and the territorial integrity of states like Manipur and Assam. The concept can combine the Saami Council with the indigenous people's institutions of Canada, which exercise increasing powers alongside the provinces of Canada ( Taylor 2009, Baruah 2015). Without such a significant shifting of gears, it is unlikely that the current six-year-old Naga peace process can overcome the formidable obstacles it currently faces to end one of world's most protracted and tragic armed conflicts (Hazarika 2014). Government of India has signed Peace Deal with National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) on August 03, 2015. Peace, security and economic transformation of North-East have been one of highest priorities of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (India Today, August03, 2015).

#### Secessionist Conflicts: Implications for Human Rights

Neera Chandhoke (2006) argues that secessionist conflicts have to be forestalled, simply because they have inflicted incalculable harm on the human condition – Grave and massive violations of human rights, Dislocations, Homelessness, desecration, ethnic cleansing and Genocide. Basically, three solutions are on offer to resolve the problem: institutionalization of democracy; Federalism or decentralization of power and resources; and Minority rights.

**Table 1: Comparative Analysis: Models to resolve secessionist conflicts in India**

The following table will explain the various models to resolve the secessionist conflicts. My survey threw the following results.

Table : 3 Opinion of people on how to resolve secessionist conflicts in India										
Country : INDIA										
	Nagaland					Jammu & Kashmir				
	Strongly Agree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	%	Strongly Agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	(%)
<b>Assimilation and accommodation</b>	71	21	6	2	100	60	25	9	6	100
<b>Negotiations</b>	76	11	10	3	100	74	16	7	3	100
<b>Power sharing</b>	67	13	15	5	100	51	24	15	10	100
<b>Autonomy</b>	68	12	12	8	100	61	11	18	10	100
<b>Democratic federalism</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Complete Independence</b>	77	12	7	4	100	73	10	8	9	100
<b>Sovereignty</b>	63	17	16	4	100	70	12	8	10	100
<b>Military solution</b>	73	15	9	3	100	71	12	10	7	100
<b>Blocking external interferences</b>	60	20	10	10	100	69	16	12	3	100

Source: Based on data collected during Field trip to Nagaland (2012) and structured interview in the case of Jammu & Kashmir. Figures are in percentage terms.



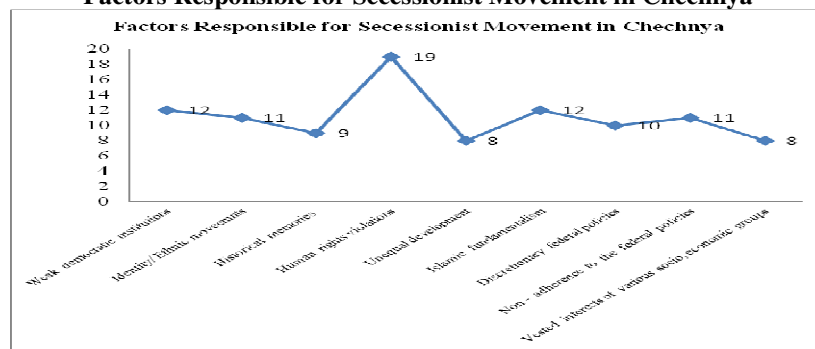
The above comparative chart illustrates that 82% of the respondents are of the opinion that democratic federalism is the most viable to resolve the secessionist conflict in Nagaland. 75% of the respondents strongly agree that democratic federalism is the most viable option to resolve the secessionist conflict in Jammu & Kashmir.

According to my survey, out of all models, democratic federalism is the most viable option to resolve secessionist conflicts in Jammu & Kashmir and Nagaland. The Federal redistribution of territory and power can ease up Secessionist conflicts only when the federal units represent ethnic boundaries. All major secessionist conflicts demand the secession of States, while the maximum democratic federalism can provide is autonomy.

**Russian Federal State and Secessionist Movements: A Comparative Study of Chechnya and Tatarstan**  
**Factors Responsible for Secessionist Movement of Chechnya**

Weak Democratic institutions, identity/ethnic movements, historical memories, human rights violations, unequal development, Islamic fundamentalism, discretionary federal policies, non- adherence to federal policies, vested interests of various socio- economic groups are responsible for secessionist movement in Chechnya (Kumar 2014). My survey on this issue reflected a similar trend.

**Diagram 3: Opinion of People on which Factors are Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Chechnya**  
**Factors Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Chechnya**

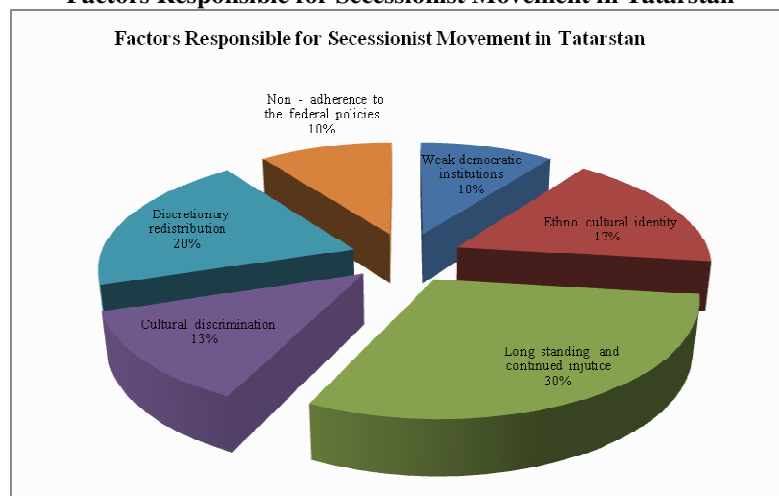


Source: Based on data collected during field trip to Moscow (2012)

**Factors Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Tatarstan**

Long Standing and continued injustice, discretionary redistribution, ethnic - cultural identity, cultural discrimination, weak democratic institutions, identity/ethnic movements are responsible for secessionist movement in Tatarstan. Details can be seen in the following table

**Diagram 4: Opinion of Russian Citizens on which Factors are Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Tatarstan**  
**Factors Responsible for Secessionist Movement in Tatarstan**



Source: Based on data collected during field trip to Moscow (2012)



The above diagram illustrates that in the case of Chechnya, 74% of the respondents are of the view that Russia's discretionary federal policies are responsible for secessionist movement in Chechnya. 68% of the respondents strongly agree that Russia's discretionary federal policies are responsible for the secessionist movement in Tatarstan.

The secessionist movement of Tatarstan can be explained from the standpoint of both the choice/permissive theory and the remedial/just cause theory. The yardsticks for this analysis were the degree to which Tatar national identity tends towards secession and is opposed to that of the Russian majority, as well as the presence or absence of long-standing and continued injustice, cultural discrimination and discriminatory redistribution. Also touched upon were the criteria of geopolitical, demographic, and economic viability (Zverev 2003; Arutyunov 1997). The following table depicts that secessionist movements are there in both Chechnya and Tatarstan. My survey threw the following results.

### Comparative Analysis: Models to resolve Secessionist Conflicts in Russia

The following table will explain the various models to resolve the secessionist conflicts. My survey threw the following results.

Table 2: Opinion of People on How to Resolve Secessionist Conflicts in Russia										
Russia										
Chechnya						Tatarstan				
	Strongly Agree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	(%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Somewhat Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	(%)
Negotiations	72	9	16	3	100	69	12	13	6	100
Assimilation	76	8	11	5	100	66	23	8	3	100
Power sharing	74	12	10	4	100	71	14	9	6	100
Autonomy	79	11	6	4	100	69	18	8	5	100
Democratic federalism	81	11	5	3	100	79	10	7	4	100
Complete Independence	74	8	10	8	100	73	7	14	6	100
Sovereignty	73	9	13	5	100	69	12	13	6	100
Military solution	77	9	8	6	100	73	12	8	7	100
Blocking external interferences	62	22	7	9	100	55	26	13	6	100

Source: Based on data collected during field trip to Moscow (2012). Figures are in percentage terms

The above table illustrates that 81% of the respondents are of the opinion that democratic federalism is the most viable to resolve the secessionist conflict in Chechnya. 79% of the respondents strongly agree that democratic federalism is the most viable option to resolve the secessionist conflict in Tatarstan. According to my survey, Out of all models, democratic federalism is the most viable option to resolve secessionist conflicts in Russia.

### Comparative Study of Indian and Russian Federal States responses towards Secessionist Movements

The federal and pluralistic perspective regarding the solution of Chechnya, Tatarstan; Kashmir, Nagaland can be seen in a framework in which a federal state strives to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty (Zimnitskaya 2012). Russia and India have been witnessing existential strains from within. In both these states, the federal arrangements have come under pressure. In India, the secessionist movements in Kashmir and Nagaland have been constantly threatening its unity and integrity. Even if the challenge to India's unity is muted, the quasi - federal arrangements in India certainly warrant critical



attention. For instance, a number of ethnic groups in Nagaland have been agitating to form separate states within the Indian union. Similarly, Russia has had to continuously encounter the secessionist problem in Chechnya and Tatarstan. In fact, the heterogeneous populations of Russia and India would always clamor for more pluralistic federal arrangements that would give diverse regions and population groups' autonomy of self-expression under a reconstituted state.(Yevsyukova 2012, Hughes 2014, Sasse 2014).

Russia and India, after having exhausted all means, now largely rely on force to counter secessionism. But this is an outdated and flawed technique. First, no state in modern times has succeeded in buying legitimacy through the use of force. Second, at a time when the idea of universal human rights and rules of international law are becoming more extensive than ever before, we cannot discount the emergence of a general global agreement that will put an end to a state's right to use force against a section of its restive citizenry or territory (Chandhoke 2014; Tasioulas 2012, World Human Rights Watch Report 2014, Hughes 2014). In such a scenario, Russia and India would have two alternatives: to allow a greater degree of autonomy to its outlying regions and communities or face disintegration. There are four possible outcomes of secessions/ secessionist attempts: two, with the success of the secession, meaning the creation of a new state; and two, in which the secession fails to create a new state. The changing attitude of the international community toward secessionism as a right to self-determination has severe implications for existing state sovereignty (Chandhoke 2006, Behera 2008, Mishra 2012). Finally, multinational states confront the difficult choice of limiting their sovereignty or face disintegration. Post-Soviet federal development in Russia, the war in Chechnya apart, is confirmation of the view that where there is territorialization and politicization of ethnicity, a strong presidency can promote stability by imposing institutional mechanisms to accommodate and manage ethnic and regional challenges. In the absence of strong presidentialism, federal power-sharing would have been blocked by an ethnocracy based on an ethnic-Russian dominated parliament (Hughes 2012, Sasse 2012). This type of Parliamentarism would have made little difference to the pattern of conflict with Chechnya. It is doubtful whether any alternative institutional arrangement to asymmetric federalism would work as well in managing Russia's ethnically and territorially divided society.

A comparison between the secessionist attempts in Russia and India will demonstrate the potential success of secessionist movements and the occurrence of political violence in both the countries. The structural elements in these movements are quite similar except for the use of violence and the response of the central government. Secessionist movements in democratic settings fail for the most part due to lack of popular support, such as failed referenda. In contrast, in post-communist settings, secessionist movements fail not due to lack of popular support but due to state repression.(Fearson 2004; Englebort 2006; Bunce 2007, Hughes 2012, Sasse 2014). This can mean both the use of force and violence and even the threat of force. In addition, the occurrence of political violence is qualitatively different in democratic settings than in post-communist settings because in the former the secessionist movements generally initiate violence and the state responds to restore and maintain order. However, in post-communist settings violence may occur in this way but also the state may step in and repress the movement before the movement initiates violence. In the case of Russia and India, secessionism can be related to economic development. J&K is facing acute unemployment problem owing to lack of industries and entrepreneurship (Behera 2008). This can be attributed to unabated violence. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of the new Russia coincide with the rise of demands for independence(Jewett 1994).Russia could tackle the problem in other republics but the Chechen situation spiraled out of control and Russia had to make armed intervention twice in the region. Secessionist movements in Chechnya and Tatarstan; in Kashmir and Nagaland, were a challenge to the respective country's federal and pluralistic character and submission to secessionist demands would threaten this character by having its domino effect and other violent repercussions. This was, undoubtedly, the common perception( Hughes 2014, Sasse 2014). In the cultural sense, globalization with its unification of basic social practices, norms and rules is also a challenge to ethnic and religious identities, which always claim their own exclusive rights and specific needs. This is a general predicament that many other multiethnic countries have already experienced in the past. Now, it is Russia and India's turn to rediscover and respond adequately to these challenges (Jarlosav Tir 2005, Hughes 2012).

The success and failure of refederalization as a management strategy for secession potential in Russia also critically depended upon the rise of a strong presidency. Yeltsin and Putin pursued similarly ambivalent policies; preferring negotiation and accommodation with Tatarstan and other republics, and reserving a coercive strategy for Chechnya (Hughes 20014). The failure of refederalization in Chechnya was largely an actor problem, which was exacerbated by a lack of institutional mechanisms for managing the secessionist conflict and embittered by historical enmities. Consequently the benefits and limitations of the interaction of presidentialism and federalism during Russia's transition - what in essence was a kind of executive federalism-are evident in the contrast between the two most important cases of success and failure in the management of the secession potential, Chechnya and Tatarstan( Hughes 2015, Sasse 2015).





## Conclusion

This study has explored various options for resolving secessionist problems: partition/independence, autonomy, military solution, assimilation, democratic federalism, and power - sharing/bargaining and blocking external interferences. Finally, this study has found that democratic federalism is the most viable option to resolve secessionist conflicts in both Russia and India. The international community might have condemned the excessive use of force and violation of human rights. They may promote dialogue and peaceful negotiations, but they refrain from encouraging secessionist movements and are not ready to accept the unilateral secession of a territory from an existing state with recognized international boundaries.

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