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.
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- 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.
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- Ex: The recent demands from Karnataka for a separate State flag and widespread protest against the imposition of Hindi.
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- 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.
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2. States Reorganisation Act, 1956 providing for linguistic States.
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3. The Official Languages Act, 1963 preventing the transition of India’s official language from English to Hindi.
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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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