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Federalism In India

Md. Abul Ali

Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
F.A. Ahmed College, Garoimari

Hazrat Ali

Assistant Professor
Department of Arabic
F.A. Ahmed College, Garoimari

Introduction

Federalism is a system of government in which power is constitutionally divided between a central authority and regional or state governments. India, with its vast cultural, linguistic, and geographical diversity, adopted federalism as a way to maintain unity while accommodating regional differences.

The Indian Constitution, which came into effect on January 26, 1950, establishes India as a federal state with a strong central government. It carefully balances the powers between the Union government and the states through a clear division of responsibilities. This division ensures that local governments have the authority to address regional needs, while the central government maintains the integrity and unity of the nation.

Indian federalism is unique because it combines features of both federal and unitary systems. Although power is shared, the Constitution grants the central government greater authority during emergencies and in matters of national importance, making it a “quasi-federal” system.

Overall, federalism in India serves as a crucial framework to govern a diverse and populous country, promoting cooperation and unity while respecting the autonomy of individual states.

Objectives

1. **To Accommodate Diversity:** India is a land of diverse languages, cultures, religions, and traditions. Federalism aims to provide a political framework that respects and accommodates this diversity by allowing states to govern according to their local needs.
2. **To Ensure Unity and Integrity:** Despite diversity, federalism in India seeks to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of the country by creating a strong central government capable of managing national issues.
3. **To Distribute Power:** Federalism divides power between the central government and state governments to prevent concentration of authority in one body, promoting checks and balances.
4. **To Promote Local Self-Government:** It empowers states to make decisions on matters closely related to their people, encouraging democratic decentralization and better governance at the regional level.
5. **To Resolve Conflicts:** By clearly demarcating the powers and responsibilities of the Union and states, federalism helps reduce conflicts and disputes between different levels of government.
6. **To Foster Cooperation:** Federalism encourages cooperation and coordination between the Union and the states for the smooth functioning of the country.
7. **To Facilitate Economic and Social Development:** Different states have different developmental needs; federalism allows each state to focus on its priorities and resources for balanced regional development.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study on Federalism in India involves a combination of **qualitative** and **descriptive research methods** aimed at understanding the constitutional framework, practical functioning, and challenges of federalism in the Indian context.

1. **Research Design:** The study follows a **descriptive research design**, analyzing existing literature, legal documents, and historical records related to federalism in India.
2. **Data Collection:**
 - **Secondary Data:** The primary sources of information include the Constitution of India, scholarly articles, government reports, books by constitutional experts, and reliable online resources.
 - **Case Studies:** Specific instances such as the use of Article 356, creation of new states, and inter-state disputes have been examined to illustrate the dynamics of Indian federalism.

What is Federalism?

Federalism is a system of government in which power is divided and shared between a central (national) government and regional governments (such as states or provinces). In a federal system, both levels of government have their own areas of authority and can make laws independently on certain subjects.

Unlike a unitary system where all power is concentrated in the central government, federalism allows regions to govern themselves on local matters while still being part of a larger political entity. This division helps accommodate diversity, promotes local autonomy, and prevents the concentration of power in one authority.

Federalism aims to balance the need for a strong national government with the desire for regional self-governance, enabling different parts of a country to coexist peacefully and efficiently.

How Federalism Formed is ?

Federalism usually forms through a constitutional arrangement where political power is divided between a central authority and regional units. It is often established to manage diversity and ensure governance at multiple levels. The formation of federalism involves the following key elements:

1. **Constitutional Division of Powers:** Federalism is formed when a country's constitution clearly defines and distributes powers between the central government and regional governments (states or provinces). Each level has sovereignty in its own domain.
2. **Agreement Among Political Units:** Federalism often arises from a voluntary agreement or pact between previously independent or semi-independent regions that decide to unite under a common government while retaining some self-rule.
3. **Recognition of Diversity:** Federalism forms when there is significant diversity in language, culture, ethnicity, or geography within a country, making it necessary to provide local autonomy to different groups.
4. **Creation of Institutions:** The federal system is supported by institutions like a bicameral legislature (one house representing the states), an independent judiciary to settle disputes between levels of government, and constitutional provisions for cooperation.

Formation of Federalism in India

- India adopted federalism through its **Constitution**, which came into effect in 1950.
- The Constitution was drafted to balance the need for a **strong central government** with the autonomy of **states** to manage local affairs.
- The framers of the Constitution recognized India's vast diversity—cultural, linguistic, religious—and designed a federal system to accommodate it.
- The **Seventh Schedule** divides legislative powers between the Union and states, while the **Supreme Court** acts as the final interpreter of federal disputes.
- India's federalism is often called **quasi-federal** because, although it has federal features, the central government has more powers, especially during emergencies.

Common and Essential Features of Federalism

Federalism as a system of government generally shares some core characteristics, which make it distinct from other forms of government like unitary or confederal systems. These essential features include:

1. **Division of Powers:** Power is constitutionally divided between at least two levels of government — the central (federal) government and regional (state or provincial) governments. Each level has its own jurisdiction in specific areas.
2. **Written Constitution:** Federal systems are usually established by a written constitution that clearly defines the powers and responsibilities of each level of government, protecting the autonomy of regional governments.
3. **Supremacy of the Constitution:** The constitution is the supreme law and acts as the legal foundation for the division of powers. Neither the central nor state governments can unilaterally alter this division.
4. **Independent Judiciary:** There is an independent judiciary (usually a supreme court) that interprets the constitution and resolves disputes between the central and regional governments.
5. **Bicameral Legislature:** Most federal systems have a bicameral legislature where one house represents the population (usually elected directly) and the other represents the states or regions to protect their interests.
6. **Autonomy of Governments:** Both levels of government have autonomy and operate independently within their spheres of influence without interference from each other.
7. **Rigidity of the Constitution:** Federal constitutions are generally rigid and cannot be easily amended, especially regarding the division of powers, ensuring stability and preventing unilateral changes.
8. **Financial Autonomy:** Each level of government has its own sources of revenue and financial powers to carry out its functions effectively.

Additional Features (Common but Not Always Present):

- **Direct Relationship with Citizens:** Both central and state governments have a direct relationship with the citizens through elections and governance.
- **Dual Citizenship:** In many federal countries, citizens have dual citizenship — both of the country and their respective states (though India does not have dual citizenship).

Federal Features of Indian Federalism

Although India is often described as a “quasi-federal” country, it possesses many classic federal features:

1. **Written Constitution:** India has a detailed and rigid written Constitution that clearly defines the powers of the Union and the States.
2. **Division of Powers:** The Constitution divides legislative powers between the Union and the States through three lists in the Seventh Schedule — Union List, State List, and Concurrent List.
3. **Bicameral Legislature:** India's Parliament consists of two houses — the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). The Rajya Sabha represents the states at the federal level.
4. **Independent Judiciary:** The Supreme Court of India is the guardian of the Constitution and settles disputes between the Union and the States.
5. **Dual Government System:** India has a federal system where both the Union government and the state governments function independently in their respective domains.
6. **Supremacy of the Constitution:** The Constitution is the supreme law and both the Union and State governments derive their powers from it.
7. **Financial Autonomy:** Both the Union and the States have their own sources of revenue and financial powers.
8. **Bicameralism in State Legislatures:** Some states also have a bicameral legislature, reflecting the federal nature of governance.
9. **Election of Representatives:** Both the Union and State governments are elected directly by the people, establishing a direct relationship with the citizens.

Unitary Features of Indian Federalism

Though India has many federal characteristics, it also has important unitary features that make its federalism unique and often described as **quasi-federal**:

1. **Strong Central Government:** The Union government has overriding powers over the states, especially during emergencies or national crises.
2. **Single Constitution:** India has one Constitution that governs both the Centre and the States. Unlike some federations where states may have their own constitutions, Indian states do not.
3. **Power to Amend the Constitution:** The Parliament of India (Union government) has the power to amend the Constitution, including provisions related to the distribution of powers, often without requiring state consent.
4. **Emergency Provisions:** Under Articles 352, 356, and 360, the Centre can impose **President's Rule** in any state, suspending the state government and assuming direct control.
5. **All-India Services:** Services like the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) are controlled by the Centre but serve both the Union and States, ensuring administrative unity.
6. **Financial Dependence of States:** Many states depend heavily on financial grants and resources from the Centre, giving the Union considerable influence over state governments.
7. **Single Citizenship:** India provides for single citizenship, unlike many federal countries where citizens have dual citizenship (national + state).
8. **Integrated Judiciary:** There is a single integrated judicial system with the Supreme Court at the top, overseeing both Union and State matters.

Whether India is India Federal or Unitarian?

India's system of government is **neither purely federal nor purely unitary**; rather, it is a **quasi-federal** system that combines elements of both federalism and unitarism. This unique blend is designed to accommodate India's vast diversity while maintaining national unity.

Why India is Considered Federal:

- It has a **written Constitution** that clearly divides powers between the Union and the States.
- There is a **division of legislative powers** through the Union List, State List, and Concurrent List.
- Both the Union and States have their **own governments**, elected separately.
- The **Supreme Court** resolves disputes between the Centre and States.
- States have **financial powers** and autonomy within their domains.

Why India is Considered Unitary:

- The Constitution is **supreme** and can be amended by the Union Parliament alone.
- The Centre has the power to **dismiss state governments** and impose President's Rule under Article 356.
- There is a **single citizenship** for all Indians.
- The Union controls the **All-India Services** that work in both Union and States.
- The Centre has **financial dominance** over the States, with states relying on grants.
- During emergencies, the federal structure shifts toward a **unitary form**.

Conclusion

Federalism in India is a unique and dynamic system that balances the need for unity with the demand for diversity and regional autonomy. Rooted in a strong written Constitution, it provides a framework where powers are divided between the central government and the states, allowing both to function independently in their respective spheres. While India exhibits many classic features of federalism, it also incorporates significant unitary elements to maintain national integrity and effective governance.

This "quasi-federal" model has helped India manage its vast cultural, linguistic, and geographical diversity, fostering cooperation among its states while ensuring the country remains united. Despite challenges such as financial dependence of states on the Centre and occasional central intervention, Indian federalism remains a resilient and adaptable system, essential for the nation's democratic governance and development.

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