

2 Federalism

What is Federalism?

Federalism is a system of government in which the power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of the country.

Features of Federalism

- There are two or more levels of government.
- Different tiers of government govern the same citizens, but each government have power independent of the other.
- The fundamental provisions of the constitution cannot be changed by one level of government.
- The judiciary prevents conflict between centre and regional government in the exercise of their powers.
- Sources of revenue for each level of government are clearly specified to ensure its financial autonomy.

Kinds of Federations

- 'Coming together' Federations: The independent States coming together on their own to form a bigger unit.
- 'Holding together' Federations: A large country decides to divide its power between the constituent States and the national government.

What makes India a federal country?

- The Constitution originally provided for a two-tier system of government - Central Government, representing the Union of India and the State governments.
- Later, the third tier of federalism was added in the form of Panchayats and Municipalities.

The Constitution divides powers between the Union Government and the State Governments within three lists:

- Union List includes subjects of national importance.
- State List contains subjects of State and local importance.
- Concurrent List includes subjects of common interest to both the Union Government as well as the State Governments, such as education, forest, trade unions, marriage, adoption and succession.
- Residuary subjects: Those subjects which are not mentioned in any of the three lists or any other matter that arise with passage of time.

Features of Indian Federation

- All states of India do not have equal powers.
- The Parliament cannot on its own change power sharing. These changes need the approval of both the Houses of Parliament with at least two-thirds majority.
- The judiciary oversee the implementation of constitutional provisions and procedures.

How is federalism practised?

Linguistic states

In 1947, the boundaries of several old States of India were changed in order to create new States:

- On the basis of language.
- On the basis of culture.

Language policy

- Our Constitution has not made any language the national language of India.
- Hindi was identified as the official language.
- Besides Hindi, there are 21 other languages recognised as Scheduled Languages by the Constitution.
- States too have their own official languages.

- English along with Hindi used for official purposes.

Centre-State relations

- The sharing of powers between Centre and States by the constitution has also strengthened federalism in India.
- After 1990, many regional political parties rise in many States of the country which started an era of 'coalition governments' at the Centre which make it difficult for the Central Government to dismiss state governments in non-democratic manner.

Decentralisation in India

- When power is taken away from Central and State governments and given to local government, it is called decentralisation.

- Before 1992, the local bodies were directly under the state governments.
 - Regular elections were not held.
 - The local bodies did not have any resources or powers of their own.

- After 1992, the Constitution was amended to make the third-tier of democracy more powerful and effective. The steps taken are:
 - Mandatory to hold regular elections to local government bodies.
 - Seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.
 - At least one-third of all positions are reserved for women.
 - An independent institution called the State Election Commission has been created in each State.
 - The State governments are required to share some powers and revenue with local government bodies.

Rural Local Government

- Popularly known by the name panchayati raj.

- Gram Panchayat: It is the decision-making body for the entire village.
- Panchayat Samiti: A few gram panchayats are grouped together to form what is usually called a panchayat samiti or block or mandal.
- Zilla Parishad: All the panchayat samitis or mandals in a district together form the zilla parishad.

Urban Local Government

- In larger urban areas, there are corporations and in smaller urban areas, there are municipal corporations.