

10th Standard

Social Science-Civics

Federalism

Federalism is a system of government in which the power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of the country. This vertical division of power among different levels of governments is referred to as federalism. Federalism is one of the major forms of power-sharing in modern democracies.

Key features of federalism are:

1. Two or more levels of government.
2. Different levels of government govern the same citizens, where each level has its own jurisdiction in specific matters of legislation, taxation and administration.
3. Existence and authority of each level of government is constitutionally governed.
4. The fundamental provisions of the Constitution cannot be unilaterally changed. Such changes require the consent of both the levels of government.
5. Courts have the power to interpret the Constitution. The highest court acts as the umpire if any dispute arises between different levels of governments.
6. Sources of revenue for each level of government are specified to ensure its financial autonomy.

7. Federal system has dual objectives to safeguard and promote unity of the country, and to accommodate regional diversity.

Union Territories:

Some units of the Indian Union, which are too small to become an independent state and could not be merged with any of the existing states, are called Union Territories. They are also called 'Centrally Administered Territories'. For example, Chandigarh, Lakshadweep.

Coalition government:

A government formed by coming together of at least two political parties. Usually, partners in a coalition form a political alliance and adopt a common programme.

For example, National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the Left Front.

India a federal country:

The Constitution declares India as a Union of States. Although the word 'Federation' is not used, the Indian Union is based on the principles of federation. The Constitution originally provided for a two-tier system of government, the Union Government or the Central Government representing Union of India and the State Governments. A third-tier of federation was added in the form of Panchayats and Municipalities. As in any federation, these different tiers enjoy separate jurisdiction. The Constitution provides for a three-fold distribution of legislative powers between the Union Government and State Government.

It contains three lists:

- Union List (97 Subjects),
- State List (66 Subjects),
- Concurrent List (47 Subjects).

Since India is an example of 'holding together' federation where the Central Government is more powerful vis-a-vis the states; some states, for example, enjoy a special status like Jammu & Kashmir, which has its own Constitution.

'Coming together' federations:

This agreement induces independent states coming together on their own to form a bigger unit, so that by pooling sovereignty and retaining identity they can increase their security. Examples are: USA, Switzerland and Australia.

'Holding together' federations:

In this agreement, a large country decides to divide its power between the constituent States and the national government. The Central Governments tend to be more powerful vis-a-vis the states. Often different constituent units of the federation have unequal powers. Some units are granted special powers, for example, India, Spain, Belgium.

Sharing of power between the Union Government and State Governments:

The sharing of power between the Union Government and the State Governments is basic to the structure of the Constitution. The Parliament cannot, on its own, change this arrangement.

Any change has to be first passed by both the Houses of the Parliament with at least two-third majority. It has then to be ratified by the legislatures of at least half of the total states. In case of any dispute about the division of powers, the High Courts and the Supreme Court make a decision.

Reasons for success of federalism in India:

- Clearly laid out Constitutional Provisions providing a three-fold distribution of powers in the three lists—Union List, State List and Concurrent List—between the Union and State Governments,
- The nature of democratic politics in our country.
- The creation of linguistic states. Boundaries of several old states of India were changed in order to create new states. This was done to ensure that people who spoke the same language lived in the same state.
- Restricting of Centre-State relations.

Language policy of India:

Our Constitution did not give the status of national language to any one language. The formation of linguistic states united the country and made administration easier. The leaders of our country adopted a very cautious attitude in spreading the use of Hindi. Hindi was identified as official language. Besides Hindi, there are 21 other languages recognized as scheduled languages by the Constitution.

Major steps towards decentralization taken in 1992 are:

- Now it is constitutionally mandatory to hold regular elections to Local Government bodies.
- Seats are reserved in elected bodies for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes (OBCs).
- Atleast one-third of all positions are reserved for women.
- The State Election Commission was created to conduct Panchayat and Municipal elections.
- The State Governments are required to share some powers and revenue with Local Government bodies.

Structure of the new Panchayati Raj institutions: Rural Local

Government is known by the name of Panchayati Raj.

- Each village or group of villages has a Gram Panchayat. Panch, President or Sarpanch are directly elected by all the adult population of the village and is the decision-making body.
- The Panchayat works under the supervision of Gram Sabha, with all the voters as its members. The local structure goes up to the district level—a group of Gram Panchayats form a Panchayat Samiti or Block or Mandal. All the Panchayat Samitis or Mandals together constitute the Zilla Parishad which consists of elected members.
- Lok Sabha members, Local MLAs and officers are also members of the Zilla Parishad. Its Chairperson is the political head of the Parishad.

Urban areas local bodies:

Municipalities are set up in towns. Big cities are constituted into Municipal Corporations. Both are controlled by elected bodies consisting of people's representatives. Municipal chairperson is the political head of the Municipality. The head of Municipal Corporation is an officer called the Mayor.

