

# Autonomy Movements: Essay on Centre-State Relations for UPSC Polity

One manifestation of the fight back on the part of the states has taken the shape of the movements talked off as the state autonomy movements. It is more than the fight for financial resources, which has been a constant refrain on the part of the states. This is so because the division of powers between the centre and states is such that balance of powers tends to be against the states.

## **Brief account of Centre-State Relations**

Before we delve into the problem of state autonomy movements, it is crucial to understand the nature of relations that the state governments share with the central government.

The Constitution of India divides all powers (legislative, executive, financial) between the Centre and the states, thus laying emphasis on its federal structure. However, there is no division of judicial power as the Constitution has established an integrated judicial system to enforce both the state and central laws.

Though the Centre and the states are supreme in their respective fields, the maximum harmony and coordination between them is essential for the effective operation of the federal system. Hence, the Constitution contains provisions to regulate the various dimensions of the Centre-State relationship.

## **Problems with Autonomy Movements**

The problems regarding Autonomy movements are just as numerous and varied as the number of movements in existence, so let us elucidate with an example. All the powers to impose taxes on constantly expanding incomes, like excise and custom duties or the income tax, also known as the elastic sources of income are with the centre. Whereas sources of income which are static, also referred to as inelastic, with the exception of sales tax, rests the states. As such the states become resource starved and dependent on the centre for whatever they would like to undertake, thus further exacerbating their dependence.

Apart from the struggle for financial resources, state autonomy movements have also political dimensions to them, which gives them a distinct character. This dimension involves issues such as the question of the exercise of powers by the centre under Article 356, to dismiss the state government, appoint and remove governors, standing of the states within the federal structure, and many other factors. In all of these the centre exercises discretionary powers and the states are required to comply with the directives that come as a result of exercising such powers,

whether they like it or not. The movements for state autonomy have been centered around these issues. The scope of the state autonomy movements can best be captured in what is contained in the document called the Sarkaria Commission Report.

One way of understanding both the process of centralisation of political power and the manifestation of the counter-tendency in the shape of the demands for 'State autonomy' is to look at it, at one level, through the consolidation and differentiation of the ruling classes like the capitalists and the landlords and how they seek to manage their contradictions and, at another level, to relate it to the growing democratic aspirations and concrete struggles of the common people, the working class, the farmers etc. All these forces are represented in the various political parties and their subsequent alliances and combinations. For the proper understanding of these demands for state autonomy it is also essential to grasp the underlying forces that provide the push towards the centralization of political power.

The contradictory consequence of the working of the economy for the states and the centre and the kind of reactions it evokes is of importance. One very important consequence flows from the development of capitalism. The development of capitalism necessitates, as one of its conditions, the formation of larger markets for commodity production. This condition and the requirements of the capital, which is growing bigger all the time, demand centralization of decision-making. The centralization of state power is in part a reflection of this inner logic inherent in a capitalist system, which lays emphasis on a greater autonomy from a centralised authority .

The consequent erosion of the rights of the states or denial of autonomy to them is not simply a matter of will of this or that leader or this or that party in a simple sense; there are deeper forces working. This is a trend discernible all over the world. The history of the evolution of the federation in the USA or Canada clearly shows this. Another example would be the Chechen conflict in Russia, where a demand for autonomy was gradually replaced with a call for complete independence, in no-small part of the high-handedness of the Central Moscow government. Hence the issue of state autonomy and state rights is more than a question of simple choice between federal and unitary preferences on only a constitutional level, in spite of the fact that the constitutional division of power is very important.

## **Relevant Questions about Centre-State relations.**

### **Can the Central government make laws on state lists?**

The Parliament can make laws on a matter in state list, if the Rajya Sabha decides that it is necessary in the name of national interest that Parliament should make laws on that matter. This resolution must be supported by two-thirds of the members of Rajya Sabha, present and voting. The resolution remains in force only for one year.

### **What is Article 11 in Indian Constitution?**

Article 11 of the Constitution states that the parliament has the right to regulate the right of citizenship by law. Nothing in the foregoing provisions of this Part shall derogate from the power of Parliament to make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters relating to citizenship.

**What is the relation between central and state government?**

Central government legislate on union list subjects whereas state government legislate on state list subjects. On concurrent list subjects both can legislate but in case of conflict it is the centre government law which is going to prevail ultimately.