

Gist of EPW September Week 5, 2020

The Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) is an important source of study material for [IAS](#), especially for the current affairs segment. In this section, we give you the gist of the EPW magazine every week. The important topics covered in the weekly are analysed and explained in a simple language, all from a [UPSC](#) perspective.

Symbiotic Federalism

Context:

In the current ruling dispensation, it is opined that the one-party led rule at the Centre has undermined the philosophy of federalism enshrined in the Indian Constitution and as visualized by the makers of the Constitution. The article analyses various aspects of federalism as it is at present, while advocating symbiotic federalism as the way forward.

- With a single party gaining a full majority at the Centre, there has been a re-emergence of one party-led rule at the Centre. This has impacted federalism as enshrined in the Constitution.
- In recent times, the ruling party at the Centre has intervened to ensure that either there is the same party rule in states or the state governments follow the Centre's directions.
- By conforming to the rules of the central government, some states have also passively contributed to the dilution of federalism.

Relationship between the Centre and opposition-ruled States:

- The principle of federalism expects that the central government should consistently adopt a fair approach towards all the state governments without any discrimination.
- The federal principle not only requires a fair distribution of resources by the central government but also tolerance and patience with respect to the states ruled by the opposition.
- But this is not the approach of the central government in relation to the state governments that are ruled by the opposition.
- While some pieces of evidence of this impatience can be seen in the attempts to unsettle, the others point to a subversion of lawfully elected governments in certain states.

The case of Maharashtra:

- Among the bigger states, only West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra have the opposition-led governments. The contentious and rigid strategies of the central government while dealing with states have been evident.
- Maharashtra has been facing continuous unjustified central interventions. There have been instances wherein intense efforts have been put in by the Centre to destabilize the Maharashtra Government.
- It is not very surprising that the ruling party at the centre is trying to weaken the opposition-led state governments led by leaders having a popular mass base.
- There have also been instances of installing weak chief ministers in some states in order to weaken federalism by the ruling central government.

The case of Symmetrical Federalism:

- Symmetrical federalism is the cooperation of central and state governments with the objective of fulfilling the aspirations of the people. It does not mean achieving symmetry in a political and linguistic sense.

- Political symmetry implies the establishment of one ruling party across the country through fair and foul means.
- In a narrow political sense, symmetrical federalism can also lead to a top-down and authoritative approach, with the central government installing state governments of their own party identity.
 - This violates the principle of fairness and also the principle of associative federalism.
 - In such circumstances, the centre dominates the state so much so that the state governments don't dare to disagree with the centre in order to uphold the interests of their states.
 - The relationship thus turns into a patron-client relationship undermining the dignity of states.
- This makes it necessary to look beyond the symmetric and asymmetric aspects of federalism.

Moving towards Symbiotic Federalism:

- The centre-state relationship can only be reconfigured through symbiotic federalism without any politically planted hierarchies.
- It should be realized by the central government that associating successfully with the state governments, regardless of party affiliation, would enhance its reputation as a fair and committed government, upholding [constitutional morality](#).
- Symbiotic federalism does not only mean mere coexistence between the centre and states, nor should it be placed within the boundaries of collaborative acts of sharing resources.
 - In such collaborative acts, the element that subtly dominates the seemingly collaborative process is not completely eliminated.

Conclusion:

- Considering the history of federalism that has not guaranteed the strengthening of federalism, the approach to federalism must evolve with caution.
- It must be ensured that federal democracy is not replaced by a central government that has the objective of becoming a national power that enjoys absolute sovereign authority.
- By adopting symbiotic federalism which emphasizes on the concept of centre and states growing together and not at the expense of each other, such a situation could be avoided.
- The central government must not suffocate the states ruled by the opposition. It has the responsibility of treating symbiotic federalism as an ideal.

