

Federalism, Part - I

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The Concept

Meaning

- Vertical power sharing formula- political, administrative and financial powers of a state are distributed between units such as Centre, regional and local units. Usually power distribution is done by Constitution so that units remain autonomous
- While in a unitary model there is power concentration or sometimes power delegation, in a federal model there is effective power decentralization.

Preconditions For Federalism

- Large geographical size of a country, e.g. US, Canada, Australia, India
- Large population, e.g. India, US, Brazil
- Diversity in population, e.g. US, India

The Concept (contd.)

Features of Federalism

- Written Constitution mentioning federalism (e.g. US, mention of Union of States in Indian Constitution)
- Power distribution between units done by written Constitution (usually in the form of lists- 2 lists in US, 3 lists in India; residual powers with states in US and with Centre in India; 3 units in India- Centre, states, and local self government in villages and urban areas with 73rd and 74th Amendments)
- Apex court to settle federal disputes between the units (e.g. Federal Court in US, Supreme Court in India)
- Bicameral legislature- two houses one of which has representatives of the states (e.g. Senate in US, Rajya Sabha in India)

Assessment of Federalism

Advantages

- Ideal system for countries with vast size and population-ensures efficient governance and administration
- Strong check on despotism- vertical balance of power prevents concentration and misuse of power by any one unit
- Enables people's participation as people have easy access to government
- Ensures self-government and good government as it takes government closer to people and makes it accountable

Disadvantages

- Danger of secession and national disintegration- states might demand independence
- Factionalism and disputes due to disagreements between units
- Weak government and delay as government has to take into confidence different units while taking decisions
- Complexity- different autonomous units may have different opinions, voices, etc causing complexity and confusion