



# **DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

**TOPIC**

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**INDIA & ITS QUASI-FEDERAL  
MODEL**

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## INDIA & ITS QUASI-FEDERAL MODEL

### Context

- As India approaches the **76th anniversary of the Constitution**, there is renewed reflection on its **core values and structural foundations**. The **Indian Federation** continues to exemplify the balance between **national unity and regional diversity**.

### Origins of the Indian Federation

- The **Constituent Assembly**, while framing the Constitution before the reorganisation of states, grappled with the challenge of ensuring **unity amidst diversity**.
- On **January 26, 1950**, India emerged as a **quasi-federal parliamentary republic**, harmonizing a **single constitution, single citizenship, an integrated judiciary, and All India Services**.
- These pillars became the instruments of what is now celebrated as India's enduring philosophy — '**Unity in Diversity**'.

### Rationale Behind the Federal/Quasi-Federal Model

- During the **Constituent Assembly Debates**, **Dr BR Ambedkar** and other framers offered insightful perspectives on the nature of Indian federalism.
  - Ambedkar on 'Union of States' (November 4, 1948)**: He clarified that India's federation was not born out of an agreement among sovereign states but as an '**indestructible union of destructible states**'.
    - No state possesses the right to secede, underscoring the permanence of the Union.
  - Ambedkar on Quasi-Federalism**: He emphasized that the **Draft Constitution struck a balance** — neither too weak to threaten national unity nor too strong to crush state autonomy.
  - B.G. Kher (November 18, 1949)**: He remarked that unlike federations formed out of fear or external threats, India's federation was the '**natural outcome of our struggle for freedom**'.

### Constitutional Design of Federalism

- Although the Constitution avoids the explicit term "federation," **Article 1** declares: '*India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States*'.
  - It signifies a **blend of federal and unitary features**. The **quasi-federal design** provides a strong Centre with substantial powers to preserve unity.
- Key features include:
  - Written and rigid Constitution**;
  - Dual polity** with clear **division of powers** (Union, State, and Concurrent Lists);
  - Bicameral legislature**;
  - Integrated judiciary**;
- Article 3** empowers Parliament to alter state boundaries without their consent, reinforcing central supremacy.
  - The **Union List** covers 97 subjects, while the **State List** has 61 — reflecting greater central control.
- Ambedkar further noted on **November 25, 1949** that the hallmark of federalism lies in the **partition of legislative and executive authority** between the Centre and states.
  - During **emergencies**, Parliament can legislate on state subjects, and international obligations further expand central powers.
  - In this context, the **Rajya Sabha (Council of States)** becomes crucial — representing regional aspirations while maintaining national checks and balances.
- Other Constitutional Provisions**:
  - Article 279A: Establishes the GST Council, a unique federal body for tax policy coordination.
  - Article 356: Allows President's Rule in states under certain conditions.

Federal Features	Unitary Features
Dual government structure (Centre & States)	Strong central control during emergencies
Division of powers via Union, State, Concurrent Lists	Single Constitution for all states
Independent judiciary	Appointment of Governors by the Centre
Bicameral legislature (Rajya Sabha represents states)	Parliament can legislate on state matters under certain conditions

### Present-Day Challenges to Federal Balance

- **Fiscal Centralisation:** The **Goods and Services Tax (GST)**, though unifying the national market, has **curtailed state fiscal autonomy** by absorbing key revenue sources like VAT. States report **revenue shortfalls (19–33%)**, and delays in **GST compensation** have deepened fiscal stress.
  - ♦ Parallel functionality can lead to friction, requiring mechanisms for negotiation and cooperation.
- **Administrative and Political Centralisation:** Instances like the **COVID-19 lockdowns under the Disaster Management Act** highlighted limited state consultation, revealing weaknesses in federal coordination during national crises.
- **Demands for Greater Autonomy:** Some states seek more fiscal and legislative independence, prompting debates on rebalancing federal relations.

### Resilience of India's Quasi-Federalism

- Despite these challenges, **India's federal system has shown resilience and adaptability**. It has supported:
  - ♦ The creation of a **single-market economy**;
  - ♦ **National health initiatives** like *Pulse Polio*;
  - ♦ Peaceful **inter-state dispute resolution** through **Articles 262 and 263**;
- Institutions such as the **GST Council**, **NITI Aayog**, **Inter-State Council**, and **Zonal Councils** embody the spirit of **cooperative federalism**, fostering dialogue and consensus.
- Moreover, the **73rd and 74th Amendments** decentralized governance to the grassroots, empowering **Panchayati Raj Institutions and municipalities** — a powerful expression of participatory democracy.

### Conclusion

- The **Indian federal framework**, founded on the principle of '**self-rule with shared rule**' remains a living testament to the country's unity amid extraordinary diversity. Its **quasi-federal design** — balancing central authority with regional autonomy — continues to adapt and evolve, ensuring that India's **democratic and plural ethos** remain intact.
- **India's model of cooperative and resilient federalism** stands as a beacon in a world where centrifugal and centripetal forces constantly test national integrity, proving that **unity and plurality can thrive together** in the world's largest democracy.

Source: IE

### Daily Mains Practice Question

**[Q] Examine how India's quasi-federal model of governance balances the need for national unity with regional autonomy. In what ways has this constitutional design contributed to India's political stability and democratic resilience?**

