Polity & Governance · GS - II

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Cooperative federalism, regional diversity, cultural autonomy, asymmetric federalism, Articles 371A–371J, Fifth and Sixth Schedules, linguistic reorganisation, Inter-State Council, GST Council, dispute resolution

Model Answer

India’s federal framework has substantially accommodated its extraordinary regional, linguistic, tribal and cultural diversity while maintaining national unity. Federalism in India combines constitutional power-sharing with mechanisms for differentiated autonomy.

The linguistic reorganisation of states, creation of autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule and special provisions under Articles 371A–371J demonstrate constitutional accommodation. Asymmetric federalism allows different states to enjoy different degrees of autonomy according to their historical, cultural and geographical circumstances. The Supreme Court has recognised Articles 371A–371J as examples of such asymmetric federalism.

This framework has enabled distinctive customary laws and cultural practices, protected tribal institutions and provided political space to regional aspirations. Institutions such as the Finance Commission, GST Council and Inter-State Council further facilitate Union-State cooperation.

However, challenges remain. Centralising tendencies, disputes over finances and natural resources, boundary disagreements, gubernatorial controversies and inadequate consultation can strain federal relations. Inter-State disputes may also become prolonged because existing mechanisms often depend upon political consensus or lengthy adjudication.

Dispute resolution can therefore be strengthened by:

1. Revitalising the Inter-State Council with regular meetings and stronger follow-up mechanisms.
2. Creating specialised and time-bound mechanisms for boundary, river-water and fiscal disputes.
3. Strengthening mediation and negotiated settlements before litigation.
4. Ensuring greater consultation with states in legislation affecting the federal distribution of powers.
5. Promoting predictable fiscal federalism and cooperative decision-making.

Thus, Indian federalism has converted diversity into an institutional resource, but its future effectiveness depends on dialogue, constitutional trust and efficient dispute-resolution mechanisms.

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