

Dr. B R Ambedkar's Vision of Federalism & Its Relevance in Current Indian State-Central Relations

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyses Ambedkar's ideology of federalism, highlighting the importance he placed on maintaining a balance of authority between the central and state governments to ensure equitable administration and regional self-governance.

Design / Method / Approach: The research uses historical-analytical qualitative research. It includes reviewing primary sources like Constituent Assembly talks and Ambedkar's writings, as well as secondary sources like scholarly research and current analyses.

Findings: Through an analysis of historical context, constitutional provisions, and Ambedkar's socio-political objectives, the paper emphasizes the significance of his federalist ideas in the current Indian political landscape. The article examines how these principles confront contemporary challenges in the relationship between states and central governments, including autonomy, allocation of resources, and administrative effectiveness.

Originality / Value: The study integrates historical federalist concepts to current Indian state-central relations, making it unique. Analysing present-day political situations, the research intends to prove that Ambedkar's principles continue to be relevant in promoting a more equitable and decentralised system of government. Also, it aims to find ways to apply Ambedkar's ideas to reduce regional inequality and increase democratic engagement in governance.

Keywords: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Federalism, Center-State Relation, Indian Constitution, Cooperative Federalism,

Introduction

Federalism is a concept that Dr. B R Ambedkar, the primary architect of the Indian Constitution, deeply understood, as well as its importance within the country's vast and diverse socio-political structure. He viewed federalism as a system that safeguarded the rights and interests of every citizen, not as a tool for power division between the central government and the states. The theories on federalism proposed by Ambedkar remain particularly pertinent in the contemporary state-central dynamics of India, given the nation's ongoing challenges with minority rights, regional self-governance, and power allocation between the federal government and the states. The primary objective of this study paper is to examine Ambedkar's theoretical framework of federalism and its current significance within the Indian context. Furthermore, it will analyse the historical development of Indian federalism, the elements that contribute to its unique

character, and the persistent difficulties in preserving the fragile equilibrium between the purposes of the central government and the states. Furthermore, focusing on the work of Ambedkar and other scholars, the study will examine how federal institutions, such as judicial and financial institutions, shape the dynamics of state-central interactions. The dynamics of the relationship between the state and the central government in contemporary India remain a subject of intense academic debate and analysis. Federalism in India exhibits a dynamic complexity that reflects ongoing challenges and changes in the domains of politics, economy, and society. Considering the existing socio-economic and political circumstances, the framers of the Constitution of India saw the necessity of a robust central authority (Babar, 2018). In his speech to the Constituent Assembly, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stated that "The Indian Constitution is a federal Constitution as it establishes a dual political system, with the Union at the apex and the States at the periphery, each provided with sovereign powers to be exercised in their designated regions as stipulated by the Constitution." (*Constituent Assembly Debates*, n.d.).

A Balanced View of Federalism in Ambedkar's Vision

India formally adopted federalism in 1935 after years of utilising a unitary system. The legislature passed the Government of India Act, which introduced the concept of federalism and officially used the term "federation" for the first time. The Government of India Act of 1919, however, had previously initiated devolution of power and decentralisation of authority. Nowhere in the Indian constitution are the words "federation" or "federal" used. The framers employed the word "union". Article 1(1) states that "India, namely Bharat, will be a Union of States." In India's federal system, there is a clear procedure for changing the constitution, a separation of powers between the federal government and the states, an independent judiciary, and the supremacy of the constitution as the primary document. Every federal system divides powers between the federal government and the states. This provision is mandatory under Part XI and Schedule VII of our Constitution. Articles 245–255 of the Constitution deal with the separation of powers in the legislature, whereas articles 256–261 deal with the separation of powers in the administrative division. In federalism, the states and the federal government share power, and one of the main goals is administrative decentralisation. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments introduced Panchayats and Municipalities as an additional level of government. This might be considered a tertiary level of government. India has three levels of government, a unique form of federalism that is absent in other countries around the world. Therefore, we can argue that Indian federalism has a unique character and offers potential solutions to various issues. The country's unique requirements influenced its modifications.

In order to preserve the integrity of the nation and grant sufficient autonomy to the states, Ambedkar argued for a strong central authority. He thought that India's complex and diverse society needed a middle ground between the federal government and the many states. Ambedkar upheld the ideology of social justice and equality, promoting a society in which every person may flourish irrespective of their origins. In order to create genuine empowerment for all, he stressed the need for a balanced strategy that incorporated economic, political, and social aspects. He contended that without addressing structural imbalances, any improvement would be superficial and unsustainable. An overview of his key arguments is as follows:

Strong Center: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strongly advocated the establishment of a strong central government as a fundamental principle of his federal concept. In his view, a robust central authority was essential for preserving national unity, consistency, and stability in a heterogeneous and complex country such as India.

Ambedkar's advocacy for a strong central government was based on his apprehension over the possibility of India becoming fragmented after independence. Given the country's extensive ethnic, linguistic, and geographical heterogeneity, he was concerned that a weak central authority may result in fragmentation and regional separatism. Accordingly, he supported the establishment of a central government endowed with significant authority to supervise crucial national operations such as defence, foreign policy, and national security (Ambedkar, 1949). Preventing the Union's disintegration and efficiently resolving issues that surpassed geographical boundaries were the major goals of this powerful entity.

State Autonomy: Despite his support for a strong central authority, Ambedkar recognized the importance of state autonomy within the federal framework. He promoted a distinct separation of powers between the federal and state governments to enable states to exercise efficient control over their own issues while protecting national interests. Ambedkar's vision encompassed the delegation of substantial power to states in areas of local governance, including education, health, and agriculture. He was of the opinion that this independence was crucial for addressing the specific requirements of different regions and sustaining the uniqueness of local identities. The goal was to give states the authority to manage their own territories while still maintaining a harmonious relationship with central authority (Ambedkar, 1945). The primary goal of this powerful central authority was to prevent Union division and efficiently manage issues that extended beyond regional boundaries.

Cooperative Federalism: Ambedkar's federal vision also included the fundamental principle of cooperative federalism, in which the central and state governments work together to accomplish shared objectives. He envisioned a federal structure in which two tiers of government would cooperate and coordinate their efforts to effectively address the nation's complicated needs. From his perspective, cooperative federalism played a vital role in cultivating a cordial relationship between the central and state administrations. Ambedkar believed that sharing information and working together could help solve problems more effectively and increase government efficiency. This method was intended to proactively avoid conflicts and facilitate collaboration between central and state authorities in order to accurately address issues and successfully enforce policies.

Centre-State Relations in Contemporary India: Relevance and Challenges

Centre-State Relations: A challenging framework binds the central and state governments of India to ensure a fair allocation of power and responsibility. The Indian Constitution upholds Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's proposal for a federal structure as a means of preserving the country's integrity and unity while addressing the complex and varied demands of such a large nation. Various political, economic, and social factors have caused the dynamics of the federal government's relationship with its member states to change over time. The design of power allocation ensures both levels of government function effectively within their designated areas and fosters collaboration on common matters.

● **Constitutional Framework**

The Indian Constitution institutes a quasi-federal system characterised by a strong central government and significant freedom of the states. The structure that governs interactions between the centre and the state is largely characterised by:

The Union List includes topics including defence, foreign policy, and atomic energy that are exclusively subject to federal legislation.

The State List specifies legislative domains that are solely within the authority of state governments, including police, environmental health, and agriculture.

The Concurrent List consists of topic matters that are covered by legislation enacted by both the federal and state governments.

The design of the power allocation ensures both levels of government function effectively within their designated areas and facilitates collaboration on common matters.

- **Distribution of Powers and Functions**

Central Powers: The central government has jurisdiction over national interests and critical domains that require consistency throughout the country. It includes defence, diplomatic relations, and economic policy. Furthermore, it possesses the authority to supersede state laws in specific circumstances, such as during a national emergency (Article 352, 356, and 360).

State powers include the jurisdiction of states to oversee domains that affect municipal governance, such as local law enforcement, public health, and education. Authorities, subject to the restrictions imposed by the State List (Article 246), possess the power to formulate policies and regulations specifically designed to meet the needs of their respective regions.

A Concurrent Power is the jurisdiction of both the central and state governments to pass laws on subjects specified in the concurrent list, such as criminal law and marriage and divorce. Despite this, in case of a conflict, central legislation has priority (Article 254).

- **Fiscal Federalism:**

The fiscal relations between the central government and the states cover the distribution of monetary resources and responsibilities. The most important mechanisms include:

Financial Commission: Established at five-year intervals to propose the allocation of federal revenues between the central government and the states. It evaluates the fiscal requirements of governments and guarantees fair allocation of resources (Article 280).

Grants and Loans: To assist with development initiatives and resolve budgetary imbalances, the federal government offers loans and grants-in-aid to the states.

Taxation Powers: Taxation powers are vested in both levels of government. The federal government imposes taxes on income, customs duties, and central excise duties, while states impose taxes on goods and services (post-GST implementation), land, and personal property.

- **Political Dynamics**

The existence of several political parties at both the national and state levels contributes to a diverse range of interests, which may occasionally clash. These factors can influence the execution of central policy, resulting in discussions and concessions between the central government and individual states. Inter-state councils, created in accordance with Article 263, serve to foster dialogue and collaboration between the central government and individual states on matters of shared concern. Their objective is to settle conflicts and advance collaborative federalism. Central-state conflicts refer to disputes that can occur between the central government and the states about matters such as the distribution of resources, execution of central programs, and administration of political affairs. Established institutions like the Inter-State Council and the judiciary facilitate the resolution of these disputes.

- **An Analysis of Political Polarisation and Governance**

Political polarisation, especially in the realm of state and central politics, has had a significant influence on federal diplomatic relations. The growing political disparity between the federal government and distinct state administrations can result in tension and restrict collaborative governance. The presence of divergent political parties in the federal government and state governments frequently leads to tensions and impedes successful implementation and coordination of policies.

- **Regional Aspirations:**

Implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) marks a substantial change in fiscal dynamics, necessitating strong collaboration between the central government and state governments to establish a uniform tax system. Some states have advocated for increased autonomy or special status in order to tackle regional inequalities. This includes requests for augmented financial resources and enhanced administrative authority over specific operations. Concerns over the influence of federal policies on state sovereignty and the trend towards greater centralisation of power have recently gained traction. There are still many discussions about the distribution of authority and the need for changes to strengthen collaborative federalism. In present-day India, Ambedkar's concept of including regional ambitions within a federal structure remains relevant. Controversies about regional autonomy, resource allocation, and representation frequently characterise the ongoing discussions over federalism. The task of balancing regional ambitions with national goals continues to be a crucial concern in Indian federalism.

- **Inter-state Disputes and Coordination**

Interstate conflicts over resources such as water, borders, and economic initiatives often demonstrate the complicated dynamics of regional interests and government collaboration. Insufficiently effective mechanisms for settling these disagreements might result in long-term disputes and jeopardise cooperative federalism. People sometimes doubt the ability of institutions like the Inter-State Council to deal with and settle such conflicts, leading to demands for changes to enhance cooperative efforts between governments. Conflicts of a legal and constitutional nature frequently emerge over the allocation of powers and duties between the national and state governments. The judiciary's interpretation of the Constitution, particularly in significant instances, can affect the distribution of power and shape federal government relations. Ongoing disagreements about the extent of federal and state authority, especially concerning topics included in the Union and State Lists, constantly challenge the integrity of federal systems.

- **Emergence of New Regional Movements**

New regional movements and demands for increased autonomy or statehood complicate Indian federalism. Frequently, these movements emerge as a result of perceived historical injustices, socio-economic neglect, or cultural uniqueness. Satisfying these requests requires a precise equilibrium to meet legitimate regional aspirations while preserving national cohesion and integrity.

However, the present challenges emphasise the urgency and demand to tackle numerous crucial aspects in order to enhance Indian federalism. Firstly, it is imperative to strengthen and enable federal institutions, such as the Inter-State Council, to promote authentic communication and cooperation between the central and state heads of government. Engaging in this practice can facilitate the resolution of conflicts and promote optimal collaboration. Furthermore, it is crucial to uphold fiscal federalism, as states require increased financial independence. Modifying revenue-sharing agreements and empowering states to produce a larger portion of their own resources can accomplish this. Such measures would effectively mitigate inequalities and enable nations to more successfully fulfil their developmental requirements. Furthermore, it is critical to remove political influence from the relationship between the center and the states by overcoming partisan motives and emphasizing collaborative federalism, which gives priority to national cohesion and the welfare of the people. To achieve a more balanced and harmonious federal system, India should re-examine Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concept of federalism and tackle the current issues. This will ensure the proper management of both central authority and regional aspirations.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concept of federalism provides a sophisticated framework for understanding and navigating the intricate state-central interactions in contemporary India. Rooted in the ideas of equality, autonomy, and pragmatic governance, his vision emphasises the need for a federal system that can adapt to the varied socio-political and economic environments of the Indian subcontinent. Ambedkar's emphasis on a strong central authority, together with substantial state autonomy, sought to establish a unified national identity while acknowledging the diverse character of Indian society. The continuously changing dynamics of the relationship between the state and the central government in India, marked by the conflict between centralised authority and regional ambitions, demonstrate the lasting significance of Ambedkar's federalist principles. The model he proposed anticipated certain issues encountered in modern administration, such as the requirement for a flexible and responsive federal structure capable of resolving regional inequalities while preserving national unity. Contemporary discussions on federalism in India, characterised by discussions on fiscal federalism, political decentralisation, and the significance of state autonomy, still reflect Ambedkar's ideal of a democratic and equitable federal system.

As India enters a period of swift economic development and social change, the significance of Ambedkar's federalist philosophy becomes more evident. The proposed paradigm offers a critical perspective for evaluating present state-central interactions and serves as a useful point of reference for addressing future developments. Using Ambedkar's federalist view in the creation of new policies and the study of the Constitution can make the federal system last longer and be more flexible, ensuring that it stays true to the basic principles of fairness, equality, and democratic government. In conclusion, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's concept of federalism remains a fundamental principle for comprehending and managing the complex dynamics of state-central interactions in India. His views provide a sustainable direction for establishing a federal system that harmonises continuity with variety, central power with regional self-governance, and administration with equality. As a result, it is critical to maintain active involvement with his ideas in order to promote a federal system that can efficiently address the needs of a diverse and changing nation.

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