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Federalism and India as a Federal Country

Federalism is the sharing of power among the central, state, regional, and local governments. In a federal form of government, there is a clear division of powers among different levels of government within the country.

Key features of federalism include:

- Multiple levels of government (two or more tiers).
- Each tier governs the same citizens but has its own jurisdiction in legislation, taxation, and administration.
- Jurisdictions are specified in the Constitution.
- Fundamental constitutional provisions cannot be changed unilaterally by one level; changes require consent of both levels.
- Courts ensure legislation at all levels adheres to constitutional principles, preventing misuse of power.
- Sources of revenue for each level are clearly specified to ensure financial autonomy.

The federal system aims to safeguard and promote the unity of the country while accommodating regional diversity.

Countries with federal governments include Argentina, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Mexico, Switzerland, and the United States.

The Constitution of India, under its Seventh Schedule, provides a three-fold distribution of legislative powers between the Union Government and the States.

- **Union List:** Subjects of national importance such as defence, foreign affairs, banking, communications, and currency. Only the Union Government can legislate on these subjects.
- **State List:** Subjects of state and local importance such as police, trade, commerce, agriculture, and irrigation. Only State Governments can legislate on these subjects.
- **Concurrent List:** Subjects of common interest to both Union and State Governments such as education, forest, trade unions, marriage, and divorce.

Some units of the Indian Union are Union Territories, smaller in size and without full state powers, governed directly by the Central Government. The National Capital Territory of Delhi is an exception.

Exam Questions

Q1. What is federalism? Explain its key features in the context of India.

Answer: Federalism is the division of power between central and state governments. Key features include multiple levels of government, clear division of powers, financial autonomy, and judicial oversight. In India, this is reflected in the Union, State, and Concurrent Lists.

Q2. What are Union Territories? How do they differ from States?

Answer: Union Territories are regions smaller than states and do not have full state powers. They are governed directly by the Central Government.

Federalism in Practice and Decentralisation in India

The creation of linguistic states was a major test for democratic politics in India. Hindi was identified as the official language, and 22 other languages were also recognized.

States like Nagaland, Uttarakhand, and Jharkhand were created based on cultural, ethnic, or geographical differences rather than language.

Centre-State relations have been restructured to strengthen federalism. When no single party gains a majority in the Lok Sabha, coalition governments are formed.

A major step towards decentralisation was taken in 1992 through constitutional amendments to empower local governments:

- Regular elections for local government bodies became mandatory.
- Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and at least one-third for women.
- State Election Commissions were established to conduct Panchayat and Municipal elections.
- State Governments share powers and revenue with local bodies.

Local Government Structure:

- **Panchayati Raj:** Rural local government with Gram Panchayats at the village level.
- Gram Panchayat is the decision-making body for the village, supervised by the Gram Sabha, which includes all voters.
- Gram Panchayats meet at least thrice a year to approve budgets and review performance.
- Groups of Gram Panchayats form Panchayat Samitis (Block or Mandal level).
- All Panchayat Samitis in a district form the Zila Parishad, headed politically by the Zila Parishad Chairperson.
- Urban local governments include Municipalities and Municipal Corporations, headed by elected representatives such as the Municipal Corporation Chairperson.

Exam Questions

Q1. What measures were taken in 1992 to strengthen decentralisation in India?

Answer: The 1992 constitutional amendments mandated regular local elections, reserved seats for marginalized groups and women, established State Election Commissions, and devolved powers and revenue with local bodies.

Q2. Describe the structure and functions of Panchayati Raj institutions.

Answer: Panchayati Raj includes Gram Panchayats at the village level, Panchayat Samitis at the block level, and Zila Parishads at the district level. Panchayat Samitis link Gram Panchayats and Zila Parishads, which coordinate development at the district level.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the difference between the Union List and the State List with examples.

Solution: The Union List includes subjects like defence and foreign affairs, which only the Union Government can legislate on. The State List includes subjects like police and public order, on which only the State Government can legislate on.

Example 2: What is the significance of the Concurrent List in Indian federalism?

Solution: The Concurrent List contains subjects on which both Union and State Governments can legislate, such as education and marriage. It allows for state participation in these areas.

Practice Set

Easy

- Define federalism.
- What are Union Territories?

Moderate

- Explain the three lists in the Indian Constitution.
- Describe the role of Gram Sabha in Panchayati Raj.

Challenging

- Discuss how decentralisation has strengthened federalism in India.
- Explain the significance of coalition governments in Centre-State relations.

Answer Key

Easy:

- Federalism is the division of power between central and state governments.
- Union Territories are regions governed directly by the Central Government without full state powers.

Moderate:

- The three lists are Union List (central subjects), State List (state subjects), and Concurrent List (shared subjects).
- The Gram Sabha supervises the Gram Panchayat and includes all voters in the village.

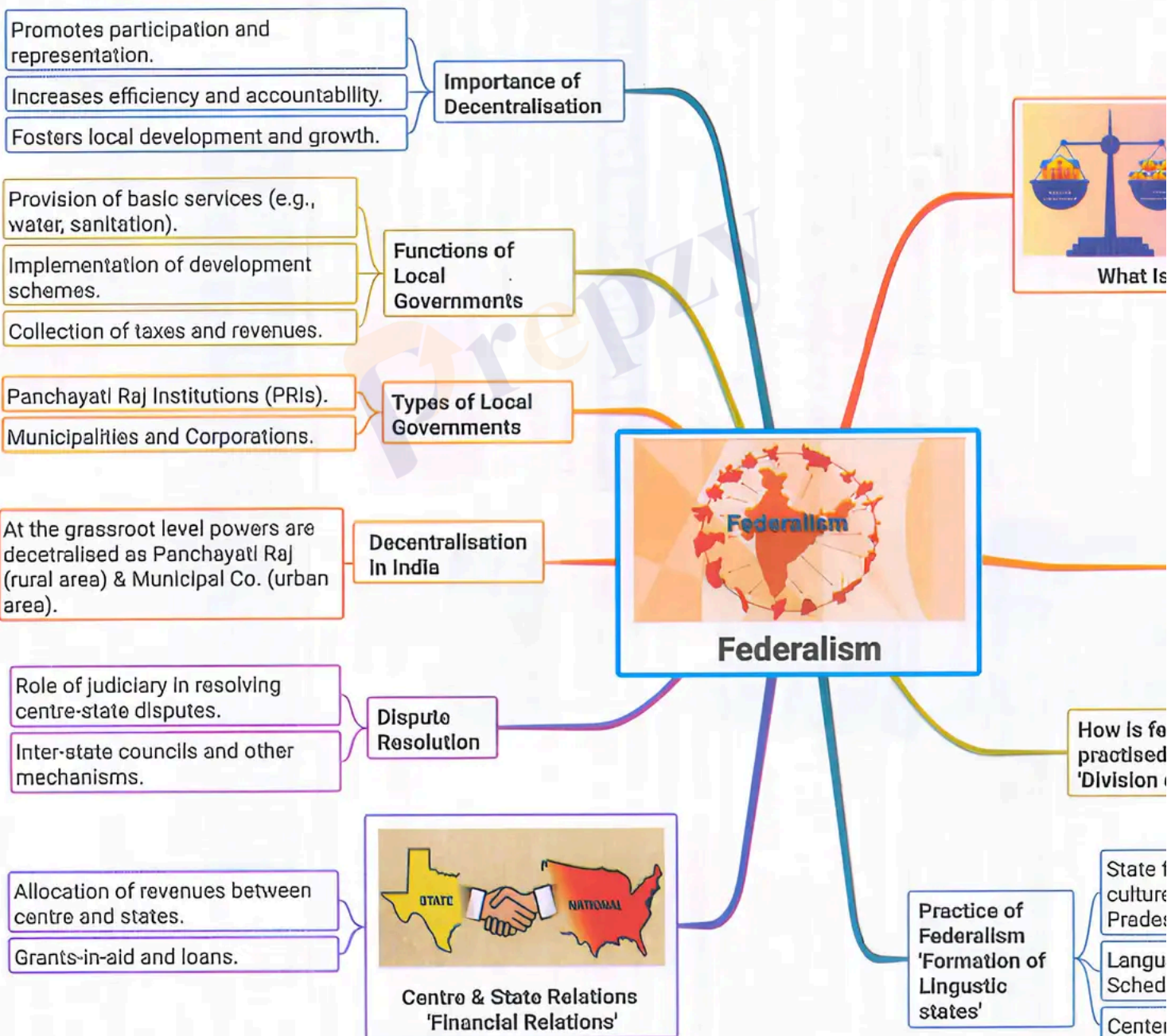
Challenging:

- Decentralisation empowers local governments through constitutional amendments, regular elections, reservations, and revenue sharing.
- Coalition governments involve multiple parties, including regional ones, promoting cooperation and accommodating diverse interests.

Quick Reference

- **Federalism:** Division of power between central and state governments.
- **Union List:** Central government subjects like defence and foreign affairs.
- **State List:** State government subjects like police and agriculture.
- **Concurrent List:** Shared subjects like education and marriage.
- **Union Territories:** Regions governed by the Central Government.
- **Panchayati Raj:** Rural local government system.
- **Gram Sabha:** Village body supervising Gram Panchayat.
- **Decentralisation:** Transfer of power to local governments.

- **Federalism:** A system of government where power is divided between a central authority and constituent units.
- **Jurisdiction:** The official power to make legal decisions and judgments.
- **Legislation:** The process of making or enacting laws.
- **Autonomy:** The right or condition of self-government.
- **Scheduled Languages:** Languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- **Gram Sabha:** The assembly of all voters in a village.
- **Panchayat Samiti:** Local government body at the block or tehsil level.
- **Zila Parishad:** District-level local government body.
- **Municipality:** Urban local government body.
- **Municipal Corporation:** Local government body for large cities.



Time Period / Year	Event / Change	
1950	Adoption of the Constitution of India	Established federal structure
1956	States Reorganisation Act	States reorganised on linguistic basis
1992	73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments	Strengthened decentralisation

