



A COLLABORATIVE FEDERALISM IN INDIA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250306047>

Abstract

Federalism in India has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a quasi-federal structure to a more dynamic governance model. While cooperative federalism emphasizes interdependence between the Union and states, collaborative federalism fosters a participatory and consensus-driven approach, ensuring equitable distribution of powers and responsibilities. This paper critically examines the role of collaborative federalism in preserving national integrity and fostering the spirit of nationalism within India's multicultural society. It delves into key institutional mechanisms, including the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, NITI Aayog, and intergovernmental collaborations, which serve as pillars of India's evolving federal framework. Further, the study explores the impact of collaborative federalism in addressing crises such as COVID-19, inter-state river water disputes, and fiscal challenges. It also evaluates the implications of the current financial budget and Finance Commission recommendations on fiscal devolution and governance. Despite certain loopholes, collaborative federalism remains indispensable in India's democratic fabric, ensuring inclusive development while balancing national and regional aspirations. This paper underscores the necessity of strengthening institutional frameworks to enhance cooperative decision-making and sustain India's federal democracy.

Keywords: Collaborative federalism, Indian governance, national integrity, multiculturalism, GST Council, NITI Aayog, COVID-19, fiscal devolution

Introduction

India's federal structure is an intricate blend of unitary and federal features, balancing national integration with regional autonomy. Unlike classical federal systems such as the United States, where sovereignty is equally divided between federal and state governments, India's Constitution vests overriding powers in the Union while granting states functional autonomy. This asymmetry in power distribution is deliberate, ensuring territorial unity and administrative stability in a highly diverse and multicultural society (Austin, 1999). At the heart of India's federalism lies a dynamic evolution—from cooperative federalism to a more robust collaborative federalism. The cooperative model, which dominated post-independence governance, emphasized a vertical relationship where the Union dictated policy frameworks while states implemented them. However, with the economic liberalization of the 1990s and the increasing complexity of governance, a shift towards collaborative federalism became inevitable. This model fosters horizontal partnerships, encourages equal participation in decision-making, and ensures that states have a greater role in shaping national policies. In a multicultural democracy like India, federalism plays a crucial role in accommodating linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity while fostering a shared sense of nationalism. Institutions such as the NITI Aayog and GST Council exemplify collaborative governance, where the Union and states negotiate policies through dialogue rather than unilateral imposition (Mukherjee & Rao, 2021). The necessity of collaborative federalism was further underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the strengths and weaknesses of intergovernmental coordination. Additionally, river water disputes, fiscal devolution, and inter-state resource-sharing highlight the increasing relevance of consensus-driven governance mechanisms. While collaborative federalism presents a more inclusive governance model, it is not without challenges. Political polarization, fiscal centralization, and bureaucratic inefficiencies often disrupt its smooth functioning. Furthermore, constitutional ambiguities, particularly in areas such as financial devolution and legislative competence, create friction between different levels of government (Chakraborty, 2020). The Finance Commission and the Union Budget play a pivotal role in addressing these concerns, determining revenue-sharing mechanisms and ensuring that fiscal resources are equitably distributed.

This paper critically examines the role of collaborative federalism in India's governance, evaluating its institutional manifestations and operational challenges. It argues that despite inherent loopholes and inefficiencies, collaborative federalism is indispensable in sustaining India's democratic ethos and ensuring that governance remains participatory, inclusive, and

development-oriented. By reinforcing institutional mechanisms, encouraging policy negotiations, and addressing fiscal disparities, India can establish a more resilient federal structure—one that upholds national integrity while respecting regional aspirations.

Conceptual Framework of Collaborative Federalism in India

Collaborative federalism represents an advanced form of intergovernmental relations where the Union and states engage in mutual coordination, shared decision-making and collective governance. Unlike dual federalism, which emphasizes a clear separation of powers, or cooperative federalism, which relies on hierarchical cooperation, collaborative federalism fosters horizontal relationships among different levels of government, ensuring joint policy formulation and implementation (Bednar, 2017). The concept of collaborative federalism draws from intergovernmental relations (IGR) theory, which highlights the necessity of dynamic interaction among government entities to address complex governance challenges (Wright, 1988). This theory posits that in a diverse and multi-tiered polity, governance should be adaptive and participatory, ensuring that states have equal say in policy deliberations. India's quasi-federal structure, as described by Granville Austin (1999), necessitates a governance model that allows interdependence rather than mere compliance. In the Indian context, collaborative federalism manifests through institutional mechanisms such as the NITI Aayog, GST Council, and intergovernmental working groups, where policy decisions emerge from negotiation and consensus-building rather than unilateral directives (Mukherjee & Rao, 2021). These institutions ensure that states are not passive recipients of central policies but active stakeholders in national governance.

A key aspect of collaborative federalism is the fiscal and administrative interdependence between the Union and states. The Finance Commission's recommendations, for example, determine the proportion of tax revenue devolved to states, ensuring financial stability while enabling region-specific development policies (Chakraborty, 2020). While cooperative federalism (dominant in the early decades of India's independence) relied on a vertical relationship, with states implementing centrally designed policies, collaborative federalism promotes horizontal coordination. In this model, states actively contribute to policymaking, fostering a sense of partnership rather than subordination (Sharma & Verma, 2021). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, initial policy responses were largely centralized, leading to governance inefficiencies. However, as the crisis evolved, greater coordination with state governments facilitated a more localized response, enhancing public health management and vaccine distribution (Basu, 2021). Despite its advantages, collaborative federalism faces institutional and political hurdles. The increasing dominance of centrally sponsored schemes, bureaucratic constraints, and political conflicts between ruling parties at the centre and states often hinder effective collaboration (Rangarajan, 2020). To strengthen collaborative federalism, India must institutionalize permanent mechanisms for intergovernmental dialogue, ensuring that governance remains inclusive and participatory.

Collaborative federalism is not merely a theoretical construct but a pragmatic governance model essential for India's multicultural and diverse polity. By enhancing intergovernmental cooperation, strengthening fiscal decentralization, and institutionalizing dialogue mechanisms, India can reinforce national integrity while accommodating regional aspirations. This model, despite its challenges, remains crucial for sustaining India's democratic fabric in the 21st century. Collaborative federalism is an extension of *cooperative federalism*, where governments at different levels work together rather than operate in silos (Watts, 2008). Unlike competitive federalism, which fosters intergovernmental rivalry, collaborative federalism underscores mutual cooperation in policy formulation and implementation (Singh, 2019). This approach is especially relevant in India's constitutional setup, where the balance between centralization and regional autonomy has remained a subject of debate since independence (Rao & Sen, 2020).

Constitutional Provisions and Federal Structure of India

The Constitution of India establishes a unique federal structure, blending unitary and federal features to create a governance model that is flexible and adaptive. While federalism in classical theory denotes division of powers between central and regional governments with a written constitution ensuring their autonomy, the Indian model departs from this rigid separation, allowing for centralized intervention in exceptional circumstances (Austin, 1999). This asymmetrical federalism ensures national unity while accommodating the regional diversity of India's multicultural polity. The Government of India Act, 1935, laid the groundwork for India's federal governance, and this structure was refined and formalized in the Indian Constitution of 1950. The preamble itself, while declaring India a "Union of States," signifies an indestructible federal structure, wherein states derive their authority from the Constitution rather than from an agreement between independent entities (Austin, 1999).

The division of powers is explicitly laid out in Part XI of the Constitution, which delineates legislative, administrative, and financial authority between the Union and the states:

1. Legislative Powers (Seventh Schedule): Union List (List I) includes subjects of national importance, such as defence, foreign affairs, and atomic energy, over which only Parliament has legislative authority.

State List (List II) consists of matters of regional importance, including police, public health, and land revenue, which are under the exclusive jurisdiction of state legislatures.

Concurrent List (List III) encompasses subjects like education, criminal law, and environmental protection, where both Union and state governments have jurisdiction. In case of a conflict, central law prevails (Article 254).

2. Administrative Powers: The executive authority follows a similar pattern, with the Union government holding supremacy in matters of national interest, but states exercising administrative autonomy in their jurisdiction. However, under Article 256, state governments are required to ensure compliance with central laws.

3. Financial Powers: The Constitution provides for financial federalism through mechanisms such as the Finance Commission (Article 280), which recommends revenue-sharing formulas between the Union and states. However, the disproportionate revenue-raising capacity of the Union has led to fiscal centralization, often debated in intergovernmental forums (Chakraborty, 2020).

Unitary Features of Indian Federalism

Unlike classical federations where constituent units enjoy sovereign authority, India's federal structure incorporates unitary elements, allowing strong central intervention during emergencies. Key provisions include:

Article 3: Allows Parliament to alter state boundaries, underscoring the non-sovereign nature of states.

Article 249: Permits Parliament to legislate on State List subjects if the Rajya Sabha passes a resolution deeming it necessary in the national interest.

Emergency Provisions (Articles 352-360): The Union government can assume full control over states during national, state, or financial emergencies. The President's Rule (Article 356) empowers the Union to dismiss state governments, a provision often criticized for being politically misused (Sharma & Verma, 2021).

Judicial Interpretation of Indian Federalism

The Supreme Court of India has played a pivotal role in defining the contours of federalism. In *State of West Bengal v. Union of India* (1963), the Court upheld Parliament's supremacy, stating that India's federalism is distinct from the American model as states do not possess inherent sovereignty. However, in later judgments such as *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court restricted the arbitrary dismissal of state governments, reinforcing federal principles.

Over time, Indian federalism has evolved from a centrally dominant model to a more collaborative structure. The establishment of NITI Aayog, replacing the Planning Commission, signifies a shift towards participatory governance, where states have a greater role in economic policymaking (Mukherjee & Rao, 2021). Similarly, the GST Council serves as a forum for fiscal negotiation, ensuring states' involvement in tax policy formulation. India's federal structure, enshrined in its Constitution, is characterized by strong central authority with provisions for state autonomy. While the unitary bias ensures national integrity, collaborative mechanisms such as the GST Council and NITI Aayog highlight the necessity of inclusive governance. The judiciary's evolving stance on federalism further reinforces constitutional safeguards, ensuring that India's federal democracy remains adaptive and resilient.

Evolution of Collaborative Federalism in India

Post-Independence Developments: The evolution of collaborative federalism in India post-independence has been marked by a gradual shift from a centralized system to a more participatory and inclusive governance model. At the time of independence, the Indian Constitution adopted a quasi-federal structure, ensuring a strong central authority while granting limited autonomy to the states. In the early decades, federalism was largely characterized by central dominance, primarily due to the political hegemony of the Indian National Congress, which controlled both the Union and state governments. The Planning Commission, established in 1950, became the primary institution for economic decision-making, concentrating fiscal power at the central level. States, though constitutionally empowered, remained financially dependent on central grants and largely implemented policies dictated by the Union government. The frequent invocation of Article 356 to impose President's Rule in states further reinforced the unitary nature of Indian federalism during this period.

With economic liberalization in 1991, India's federal structure underwent a fundamental transformation. The market-oriented reforms introduced a new dimension to centre-state relations, as states were now encouraged to engage in economic policymaking, attract investments, and develop competitive business environments. This shift gradually led to an increase in state autonomy, particularly in economic matters. The decentralization of fiscal resources through successive Finance Commissions, coupled with the enhanced role of state governments in policymaking, laid the groundwork for a more collaborative form of federalism. By the early 2000s, the emergence of coalition governments at the centre also necessitated greater negotiation and power-sharing between the Union and states. The creation of the Inter-State Council under Article 263, though initially underutilized, eventually became an institutional mechanism for centre-state cooperation.

The abolition of the Planning Commission in 2015 and the establishment of NITI Aayog marked a decisive move toward collaborative federalism. Unlike its predecessor, NITI Aayog functions as a policy think tank that encourages cooperative decision-making between the Union and states. Through platforms such as the Governing Council, state governments are now actively involved in shaping national development policies, indicating a shift from a top-down approach to a more consultative model. A significant milestone in India's collaborative federalism has been the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, which replaced the fragmented tax system with a unified structure. The GST Council, comprising representatives from both the Union and state governments, exemplifies cooperative decision-making in tax policy, ensuring that fiscal federalism operates through negotiation rather than imposition.

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the necessity of collaborative federalism, as the Union and state governments had to work together in managing public health, economic relief, and vaccine distribution. While there were instances of friction over resource allocation and lockdown policies, the pandemic highlighted the interdependence of different levels of government in crisis management. However, challenges to collaborative federalism remain, particularly in areas such as fiscal autonomy, political centralization, and administrative coordination. The asymmetry in revenue distribution continues to favour the Union government, limiting the financial independence of states. Additionally, political dynamics between the ruling party at the centre and opposition-led state governments have occasionally strained intergovernmental relations. Despite these challenges, the trajectory of India's federalism indicates a movement toward greater institutionalized collaboration, with bodies such as the Finance Commission, NITI Aayog, and the GST Council playing a crucial role in ensuring that governance is both decentralized and cooperative.

The contemporary discourse on collaborative federalism in India reflects an ongoing effort to balance national unity with regional autonomy. While certain structural and political constraints persist, mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation between different levels of government continue to evolve. The future of Indian federalism will likely depend on the ability of institutions to foster sustained cooperation while addressing the concerns of state governments regarding fiscal and administrative autonomy. The increasing role of states in economic governance, intergovernmental negotiations, and policymaking suggests that collaborative federalism is not merely an ideal but a practical necessity in India's democratic framework.

Constitutional and Institutional Mechanisms

Several constitutional and institutional mechanisms have been instrumental in fostering collaborative federalism:

1. **Inter-State Council (ISC)** – Established under Article 263, the ISC serves as a platform for dialogue between the Union and states, promoting consensus-driven decision-making (Sharma & Verma, 2020).
2. **Finance Commission (FC)** – The FC ensures a fair distribution of financial resources between the centre and states, a crucial aspect of fiscal federalism (Mukherjee, 2021).
3. **Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council** – A landmark example of cooperative federalism, the GST (on July 1, 2017, GST laws were implemented, replacing a complex web of Central and State taxes) Council enables joint decision-making on indirect taxation (Basu, 2022).
4. **NITI Aayog** – Replacing the Planning Commission, NITI Aayog (was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on 1st January 2015 to replace the Planning Commission) embodies a participatory approach to policy formulation, encouraging state involvement in developmental strategies (Rangarajan, 2019).

Case Studies in Collaborative Federalism

The GST Regime: A Model of Fiscal Cooperation: The implementation of the GST in 2017 marked a significant shift toward collaborative federalism in taxation. By integrating multiple state and central taxes into a unified structure, the GST regime necessitated cooperation among all stakeholders (Jha, 2020). Despite initial resistance from some states, the GST Council has functioned as an effective decision-making body, fostering fiscal coordination (Rao, 2021).

COVID-19 Pandemic: A Test of Federal Cooperation: The COVID-19 pandemic underscored both the strengths and weaknesses of India's federal structure. While the central government played a crucial role in coordinating national strategies, states exercised autonomy in implementing localized measures (Choudhury, 2021). The distribution of vaccines, enforcement of lockdowns, and financial relief measures required extensive collaboration between different levels of government (Dasgupta, 2022).

River Water Disputes and Intergovernmental Cooperation: Water disputes between states, such as the Cauvery River dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, have tested the limits of collaborative federalism (Iyer, 2019). The establishment of water tribunals and central intervention mechanisms highlight the complexities of inter-state cooperation in resource management (Subramanian, 2020).

Challenges to Collaborative Federalism in India

Despite its advantages, collaborative federalism in India faces several challenges, such as:

Centralization vs. Regional Autonomy: One of the primary concerns is the growing centralization of power, particularly under strong central governments. Critics argue that measures such as the abrogation of Article 370 (Jammu and Kashmir's special status) reflect a shift away from cooperative federalism (Ali, 2021). The conflict between centralization and regional autonomy has been a persistent challenge to collaborative federalism in India, rooted in the country's constitutional framework and evolving political dynamics. While the Indian Constitution establishes a federal system, it grants significant authority to the Union government, particularly in times of crisis or national interest. This centralizing tendency has often led to tensions between the Union and state governments, particularly regarding fiscal control, administrative autonomy, and policy implementation. The central government's dominance over taxation and financial distribution has limited the fiscal independence of states, making them reliant on central grants and limiting their ability to craft region-specific policies (Mukherjee & Rao, 2021). The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) further restructured India's fiscal federalism by consolidating multiple state taxes into a unified tax system governed by the GST Council, which, while fostering cooperative decision-making, has also been criticized for restricting states' financial autonomy (Basu, 2021). Beyond fiscal constraints, administrative centralization has also posed challenges to regional autonomy. The Union government's influence over subjects that constitutionally fall under the

purview of states, such as health, agriculture, and education, has been a recurring issue. The role of governors, who act as representatives of the central government in states, has often been a point of contention, particularly when they are seen as interfering in state governance (Chakraborty, 2020). Political divergences between the ruling party at the centre and opposition-led state governments have further complicated intergovernmental relations, with disputes arising over fund allocations, law enforcement jurisdiction, and policy implementation. These tensions were particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where conflicts emerged over vaccine distribution, lockdown policies, and financial aid to states, reflecting deeper structural issues in India's federal framework (Rangarajan, 2020).

Despite these challenges, collaborative federalism remains integral to India's governance, requiring a careful balance between national unity and state autonomy. Strengthening institutional mechanisms such as the Inter-State Council, Finance Commission, and NITI Aayog could facilitate better coordination and negotiation between the Union and states. Ensuring greater fiscal devolution, respecting state-level decision-making, and fostering transparent intergovernmental dialogue will be essential in addressing the structural imbalances between central authority and regional aspirations, ultimately reinforcing the democratic ethos of Indian federalism (Sharma & Verma, 2021).

Fiscal Imbalances: The challenge of fiscal imbalances in Indian federalism remains a significant barrier to the effective implementation of collaborative federalism. The vertical fiscal imbalance, where the Union government controls the majority of tax revenue while the states bear a greater share of expenditure responsibilities, has led to a persistent dependence on central transfers. While the Finance Commission periodically revises devolution formulas, concerns persist over the increasing reliance on grants-in-aid and centrally sponsored schemes (CSS), which often come with stringent conditions that limit states' fiscal flexibility (Chakraborty, 2020). The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was expected to create a more harmonized tax structure, but states have often expressed concerns over delays in compensation payments and the loss of independent revenue streams, exacerbating fiscal constraints (Basu, 2021).

In addition to vertical imbalances, horizontal fiscal disparities among states remain a crucial challenge. Wealthier states with stronger revenue bases, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, often resist greater redistribution, while less developed states, including Bihar and Odisha, depend heavily on central transfers to fund essential services (Rangarajan, 2020). This has led to debates over the fairness of revenue-sharing mechanisms, especially after the 15th Finance Commission's shift in criteria, which gave more weightage to population-based distribution rather than equity considerations (Bose, 2022). The increased reliance on centrally determined borrowing limits further curtails the financial independence of states, often restricting their ability to undertake large-scale development projects. The erosion of fiscal autonomy, coupled with increasing centralization in financial decision-making, threatens the spirit of collaborative federalism. States demand a greater role in fiscal policy formulation, stronger revenue autonomy, and more predictable transfers to ensure sustainable development (Sharma & Verma, 2021). Addressing these concerns requires a renewed commitment to institutionalized fiscal federalism, ensuring that revenue devolution mechanisms remain equitable, transparent, and responsive to regional developmental needs. Strengthening the role of the Finance Commission, enhancing state representation in the GST Council, and reducing the discretionary nature of CSS funding could contribute to a more balanced fiscal structure, reinforcing the collaborative nature of India's federal democracy.

Political Polarization: Political polarization remains a significant challenge to collaborative federalism in India, often creating friction between the Union and state governments. While federalism inherently requires intergovernmental cooperation, partisan politics frequently obstruct dialogue and decision-making, leading to policy paralysis and administrative inefficiencies (Roy, 2021). The concentration of power at the central level, combined with electoral competition between the ruling party at the Union and opposition-led state governments, has intensified political rivalries, making consensus-building difficult. States governed by opposition parties often allege discriminatory treatment in fund allocation, delays in approvals for developmental projects, and interference through centrally appointed governors, further straining centre-state relations (Mehta, 2020).

Recent instances highlight how political polarization has impacted governance. The disputes over agricultural reforms and farm laws showcased the tensions between the Union and several state governments, particularly Punjab, Haryana, and West Bengal, where opposition-ruled states accused the central government of bypassing state legislatures on matters directly affecting them (Shah, 2022). Similarly, disagreements over COVID-19 management, vaccine procurement, and lockdown policies underscored how political differences impeded coordinated crisis response (Gupta, 2021). The politicization of intergovernmental bodies like the Inter-State Council and NITI Aayog has further weakened institutional mechanisms meant to facilitate cooperation, as states often view them as extensions of the ruling party's agenda rather than neutral platforms for federal dialogue (Singh, 2023). The increasing trend of central agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) being used against opposition-ruled states has also contributed to deepening distrust between different levels of government (Raghavan, 2022). Such practices erode the spirit of collaborative federalism by fostering a confrontational rather than cooperative approach to governance. Overcoming these challenges requires a depoliticization of federal institutions, enhanced transparency in fiscal transfers, and greater respect for state autonomy in policymaking. Strengthening the role of the Inter-State Council, ensuring equitable representation in national decision-making forums, and fostering bipartisan dialogue could help bridge the growing political divide and restore the essence of collaborative federalism in India.

Bureaucratic and Administrative Constraints: Bureaucratic and administrative constraints significantly impede the efficacy of collaborative federalism in India, often resulting in policy implementation delays and inefficiencies. The rigid hierarchical structure within the bureaucracy, coupled with excessive centralization, undermines state autonomy and intergovernmental coordination (Chakraborty, 2020). Administrative bottlenecks, including procedural delays and lack of institutional flexibility,

further hinder effective governance (Rao & Singh, 2021). Additionally, the politicization of bureaucracy disrupts neutral decision-making, affecting cooperative mechanisms between the Union and states (Sharma & Verma, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires institutional reforms that enhance bureaucratic efficiency, promote decentralization, and foster a culture of cooperative governance.

The Future of Collaborative Federalism in India

The future of collaborative federalism in India depends on fostering a more balanced and cooperative relationship between the Union and state governments while addressing structural challenges that hinder effective governance. Strengthening institutional frameworks such as the Inter-State Council and NITI Aayog can create robust mechanisms for continuous dialogue, enabling a more structured approach to resolving disputes and ensuring equitable policy formulation (Narain, 2021). The role of these institutions must be enhanced beyond advisory functions, granting them greater authority in shaping intergovernmental relations and fostering a spirit of shared governance. A key aspect of deepening collaborative federalism lies in fiscal reforms that ensure greater autonomy for states while preserving national cohesion. The existing fiscal arrangements, including tax devolution and centrally sponsored schemes, often tilt in favor of the Union government, creating a sense of financial dependency among states. A more predictable and transparent revenue-sharing model, along with flexibility in state borrowing limits, is essential for long-term stability (Patnaik, 2022). Addressing these imbalances would enable states to undertake independent policy initiatives without being constrained by central approvals, thereby allowing for tailored developmental strategies that align with regional needs.

Decentralization of power at multiple levels is another crucial element in strengthening India's federal structure. Empowering panchayati raj institutions and urban local bodies would reinforce grassroots democracy, ensuring that governance becomes more participatory and reflective of local aspirations (Verma, 2019). Greater devolution of administrative and financial powers to these institutions would not only ease the burden on state governments but also enable more efficient service delivery, fostering a bottom-up approach to governance that complements the federal structure. The increasing political polarization between the ruling party at the center and opposition-led state governments poses a persistent challenge to intergovernmental cooperation. A culture of bipartisan dialogue and consensus-building is imperative to mitigate political conflicts that often translate into policy gridlock (Sen, 2021). Institutions such as the Finance Commission and GST Council must operate with greater neutrality and transparency, ensuring that states feel adequately represented in national decision-making. Collaborative federalism cannot function in an environment where fiscal and administrative powers are disproportionately centralized; instead, a more inclusive approach, where states are active participants rather than passive recipients of policies, is necessary for strengthening India's democratic fabric.

The future of collaborative federalism in India also hinges on adapting to emerging challenges, including economic crises, climate change, and technological disruptions. Policies that promote intergovernmental coordination in these areas would enhance India's resilience to global and domestic challenges. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for a more synchronized response mechanism, where both the Union and states play complementary roles rather than engage in jurisdictional disputes. A forward-looking federalism must be flexible and adaptive, allowing states to experiment with policy innovations while ensuring national unity in critical areas of governance. Ultimately, collaborative federalism in India must evolve beyond rhetoric and political expediency into a well-structured governance model that prioritizes equitable power distribution, financial stability, and intergovernmental trust. Strengthening federal institutions, refining fiscal devolution mechanisms, and embracing a more decentralized approach to governance will ensure that India's federalism remains dynamic, resilient, and truly representative of its multicultural and diverse society.

Conclusion

Collaborative federalism in India remains a dynamic and evolving concept, shaped by historical legacies, constitutional frameworks, and contemporary governmental challenges. While India has witnessed significant strides in cooperative governance, persistent challenges such as fiscal imbalances, political polarization, and centralization need to be addressed. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and fostering a spirit of cooperative governance shall be crucial to ensuring that India's federalism remains resilient and responsive to the nation's diverse socio-political realities.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: Subhadip Mukherjee: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

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Publisher's Note

The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

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