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Evolving Dynamics in State Politics and Cooperative Federalism in India Since 2014

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ABSTRACT:

The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the state politics and cooperative federalism framework in India since 2014 delving into the significant political trends, key developments and transformative events that have shaped the landscape of the country's regional politics. The year 2014 marked as a turning point in India's political history as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a decisive victory in the general elections forming the first single-party majority government in three decades. My study examines the consequences of this landmark event on state-level politics, highlighting the BJP's expansion at both the central and state level. The rise of the BJP in state politics has resulted in an altered political dynamics and realignment of alliances leading to the party's increased footprint in various regions. Another crucial aspect explored in this paper will be the impact of social and cultural factors on state politics. The paper provides an insightful examination of the complexities and dynamics of state politics in contemporary India since 2014. It highlights the transformational changes in party politics; the rise of regional forces; federalism challenges; the impact of social and cultural factors and the growing influence of technology in shaping the political landscape at the state level. Understanding these developments is crucial to comprehend the broader picture of Indian politics in the 21st century.

Key words: State Politics, Identity politics, caste-based mobilization and regional aspirations.

Introduction

India, as the world's largest democracy is known for its vibrant and complex political landscape. As Granville Austin recognizes Indian federalism as not a static phenomenon but dynamic, evolving over time in response to political, economic, and social changes. Historical and other factors have played an important role in the formation of State politics and have impacted over the federal structure in India.

A general theoretical understanding of creation of federation can be understood under three conditions. First, when the existing state is divided into several regions either for administrative reasons or to address the regional demands. Second, when federal structure division is undertaken to create new units. For example, the State of Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated and a new state Telangana was formed. Third, in some cases, new states are added to the existing federation. For example, once a small independent nation, Sikkim, was integrated into the Indian union. All those three types of formation of federalism are found into the evolution of the Indian federation.

To begin with hitherto existing independent provinces were amalgamated into Indian union. A new political map was drawn out of British India and independent provinces were merged into one Indian Union. Some boundaries of provinces were redrawn. But it was herculean task which only an iron-man could comprehend. Following to this, the demand for linguistic division of the country was another issue that India faced post-independence. So, the map of India was again drawn with language as the basis of new states. Faizal Ali Committee and JVP committees had different recommendations, but the will of the people caused for linguistic division. Another issue that lingered was not on the linguistic basis but on the developmental issues. This persistent demands which was for creating smaller states for better administration further divided bigger states. For example, Uttar Pradesh was divided to create Uttarakhand, Bihar was divided to create Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh to create Chhattisgarh in 2000. As latest as in 2014, Andhra Pradesh was divided into creating Telangana.

The Political Debate of Federalism

The period since 2014 has witnessed significant shifts and developments in Indian politics both at the national and state levels. This study seeks to delve into the nuances of state politics in India, focusing on the period since 2014 and to analyse the multifaceted dynamics that have emerged during this time. The year 2014 was a pivotal moment in Indian politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party led by Narendra Modi, secured a historic victory in the general elections forming a majority government at the national level. This marked a departure from the era of coalition politics that had characterized Indian governance for decades. Since 2014 several factors have shaped the political context of India's states and union territories. The BJP's electoral dominance

has extended too many states leading to the party or its alliances forming governments in several regions. While the BJP has expanded its influence in numerous states, although some states have witnessed the rise of regional parties that prioritize local issues and identities. Caste-based and identity-based politics continue to be significant with parties aligning themselves with specific caste groups to secure electoral support. Economic disparities among states persist with some regions experiencing rapid growth while others face developmental challenges. Environmental issues such as pollution and climate change, have become important factors in state politics. Inter-state water disputes, border conflicts, and regional cooperation have shaped the political interactions between states. The decentralization of power to local self-government institutions has influenced state-level politics and governance. The implementation of social welfare programs, including health and education initiatives has varied across states and the states have played an active role in global trade, investment, and economic development.

Research Objectives

1. To comprehensively analyse the evolving political landscape of Indian states since 2014 and identify the key trends and shifts in state politics.

2. To examine the impact of regional parties, identity politics, and electoral dynamics on the composition of state governments.

3. To examine the specific policy initiatives and reforms implemented by the central government to promote cooperative federalism in India since 2014, and what impact have they had on the federal structure of the country?

4. To examine the challenges and obstacles exist in the path of cooperative federalism, and how can these challenges be effectively addressed to ensure its success?

Key trends and Shift in State Politics

The political landscape of Indian states has undergone significant changes since 2014, marked by key trends and shifts that have reshaped the dynamics of state politics. The 2014 general elections saw the Bharatiya Janata Party secure a decisive victory at the national level. BJP added 6.4% to its 2014 vote share, taking it to 37.4%.[i] This victory had a cascading effect on state politics across India. The most significant trend has been the BJP's expanding foot prints in state politics. This expansion has been particularly notable in states like Assam[ii], Tripura[iii], Manipur,[iv] and Arunachal Pradesh[v] in the north eastern region, as well as in West Bengal and even in some southern states like Karnataka. In Assam, As per the party wise vote share data of the Election Commission the BJP contested in 92 seats and secured 6,84,538 (33.21%) of the total votes polled. According to the Election Commission in Tripura, the BJP bagged 30 seats while the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) got one. BJP in Arunachal Pradesh won seven Assembly seats and is leading in 11 constituencies. In Manipur BJP coasted to a clear victory picking up 32 seats in a house of 60.

The Indian National Congress, historically one of the two major political parties in India has seen a decline in many states. Its inability to counter the BJP's electoral strategies and leadership has resulted in losses in several state elections, including crucial ones like Uttar Pradesh its seats tally came down to two from seven in 2017 and its vote share declined to 2.35 per cent from 6.25 per cent. In Gujarat[vi] the Congress was reduced to 17 seats having lost 14% of its 2017 vote share in 2022 and in Madhya Pradesh[vii] its vote share was 19.5 per cent, is almost the same as 2014.

Despite the BJP's growth, many regional parties have remained resilient in their strongholds, Parties like the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in Telangana, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha have retained their political influence.

In some states coalition politics has become the norm. States like Maharashtra, Bihar, and Jharkhand have witnessed complex alliances to keep the BJP at bay. These coalitions have had varying degrees of success in thwarting the BJP's attempts to form governments.

Election campaigns have become increasingly personalized, with charismatic leaders often taking centre stage. The use of technology and social media has also played a crucial role in shaping the narrative and mobilizing voters. In many states, identity politics based on caste, religion, and regionalism continues to play a significant role. Parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) primarily represent Dalits, while parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Samajwadi Party (SP) have their base among Yadavs and other backward castes. Parties often align themselves with specific identity groups to secure electoral support. This trend also influenced state-level politics significantly.

The BJP's government emphasis on infrastructure, economic growth, and welfare schemes has been a key electoral strategy. There have been tensions between the central government and state governments, especially those led by opposition parties. Issues related to the distribution of resources, administrative autonomy, and political interference have strained the federal structure. There has been a noticeable increase in voter turnout for 2019 Lok Sabha poll it was 1.16% higher than the 65.95% turnout in 2014, reflecting a growing interest in politics and a desire for change.[viii] High voter participation has led to more competitive elections. There has been a growing role of youth and women in state politics. Parties have recognized the importance of these demographics and have tried to engage them actively in the political process.

Regional Identity and Identity Politics

The impact of regional parties, identity politics, and electoral dynamics on the composition of state governments in recent times has been profound. These factors have played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape at the state level in India. Regional parties have been instrumental in

determining the composition of state governments. They often represent the aspirations and interests of specific states or regions. Their influence can be observed in the following ways like Formation of Coalition Governments, Regional parties frequently form alliances with national or other regional parties to gain a majority in the state assemblies. These coalitions are often ideologically diverse but come together to prevent a single dominant party from taking power. In states where regional parties have a stronghold they can dictate the political agenda and hold significant sway in the formation of governments. Examples include the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, and the BJD in Odisha. Regional parties often focus on state-specific issues and governance, which resonates with the local population. This focus can translate into electoral victories and a mandate to govern. Identity politics, which includes considerations of caste, religion, and regional identity, has a significant impact on state governments, Parties often cultivate vote banks based on caste or religious identities. They strategically field candidates from particular communities to consolidate these vote banks, which can be decisive in close elections. Identity-based politics can lead to the formation of alliances or counter-alliances to appeal to different segments of the electorate. Parties may ally with caste-based or religious outfits to gain an electoral advantage. Identity politics also influences policies related to social justice and reservation. Governments often implement quotas and reservations for certain communities, reflecting the demands of identity-based interest groups. Electoral dynamics, including voter turnout and campaign strategies, can sway the composition of state governments: Increased voter turnout, particularly among youth and women, can lead to unpredictable outcomes. Parties need to cater to the diverse preferences of a more engaged electorate. Charismatic leaders often become the face of their parties. Their popularity can significantly impact electoral outcomes, as voters often choose candidates based on the leader's appeal. Electoral dynamics can also be influenced by anti-incumbency sentiments, where voters seek change due to dissatisfaction with the incumbent government's performance.

Policy initiatives to strengthen cooperative federalism

India's federal system is a cornerstone of its governance, recognizing the diversity of states and the need for cooperation between the centre and states. Pratap Bhanu Mehta has often emphasized the significance of cooperative federalism in India. He argues that a harmonious relationship between the central government and states is crucial for the country's unity, stability, and effective governance. Since 2014, the central government has introduced several policy initiatives to strengthen cooperative federalism. GST was implemented in July 2017, replacing a complex web of indirect taxes. This reform streamlined taxation promoting economic integration across states. GST collections have shown a steady increase since its introduction in 2017-18 it was ₹7.41 trillion but now in 2020-21 it was ₹10.71 trillion. The 14th Finance Commission (2015-2020) recommended an increase in the states' share of central taxes from 32% to 42%.[ix] This enhanced fiscal autonomy for states and increased resources available for state-specific development.

NITI Aayog formation has fostered cooperative federalism by promoting direct interaction between states and the centre. It has facilitated collaborative policymaking and encouraged states to undertake governance reforms. Data on intergovernmental transfers underlines the central government's efforts to support states financially. There is an increase in funds transferred to states for various schemes in 2016-17 it was ₹5.24 trillion, in 2020-21 it was ₹8.50 trillion also helps in strengthening cooperative federalism in India.

Challenges before Cooperative Federalism

Cooperative federalism is critical to India's governance structure but it faces numerous challenges and obstacles that impede its effectiveness. This paper identifies and analyses these challenges, ranging from fiscal imbalances to political differences, and proposes recommendations to address them. By addressing these hurdles, India can further strengthen cooperative federalism, fostering greater collaboration between the centre and states and achieving more equitable and efficient governance, Unequal distribution of resources and revenue-sharing formulas can lead to fiscal imbalances, affecting states' financial autonomy. To overcome this fiscal imbalances, Develop a more equitable formula for revenue-sharing, ensuring that states receive their fair share of resources. Periodic revisions of Finance Commission recommendations should address this emerging fiscal challenges. Sometimes Political differences and ideological variations between states and the centre can hinder cooperation on key policy matters, to counter this differences establish bipartisan committees or forums to foster consensus on national policies. Ambiguities in the Constitution and legal provisions can lead to disputes over jurisdiction and powers. Try to ensure a balance between state autonomy and national interests, Clarify constitutional provisions related to federalism through appropriate legal amendments or judicial interpretations. There is a lack of public awareness about cooperative federalism that hinder its success, citizens may not fully understand the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government and for this government should launch public awareness campaigns and civic education programs to inform citizens about the benefits and importance of cooperative federalism. Engage civil society organizations in promoting dialogue on federalism-related issues.

Research Methodology

This research paper will be primarily descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to explore and analyse the relationship between state-level politics and national politics in India. The paper also examines the cooperative federalism framework for that this study will encompass a period of at least 10 years, from 2014 to the present, to capture recent political developments. The research aims to provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between state and national level politics in India and how it influences policy formulation. The findings can inform policymakers, academics, and the public about the dynamics of Indian politics.

Conclusion

The relationship between state-level politics and national politics in India is a dynamic and intricate one with far-reaching implications for governance and policy formulation. State level politics, characterized by regional parties, identity politics, and diverse electoral dynamics, holds significant sway over national outcomes. These states serve as crucibles for testing political strategies, shaping alliances, and determining the direction of policy decisions at the central level. The decentralization of governance structures empowers local communities, enhances citizen participation, and contributes to effective, responsive governance. This has not only enriched democracy at the grassroots but also influenced national policies, as innovative state-level initiatives often find their way into national program. It is essential to acknowledge that the relationship between state and national politics is not without challenges. Managing regional aspirations, resolving inter-state conflicts, and ensuring equitable resource allocation are ongoing challenges that require deft political manoeuvring and policy coordination. In a diverse nation like India, state-level politics continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the country. It reflects the federal nature of Indian democracy, where regional diversity and local dynamics coexist with national unity and aspirations. Recognizing the implications of state-level politics for national governance and policy formulation is essential for a comprehensive understanding of India's political landscape and the development of policies that address the diverse needs of its populace. A commitment to fostering collaboration, transparency, and equity will be crucial in ensuring a prosperous and harmonious future for the nation.

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