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Phenomenal Changes in India's Federal Democracy and Governance

Dr. Papia Deb

Federalism is an instrument of power-sharing between union and the states. In the truest sense, it must combine both structure and process. Where a federal structure exists with any support from the federal process, the operational aspect of federalism is bound to be weak. On the other hand, if there may be cases where federal process works without there being any federal structure, but in the ultimate analysis it will be seen that such a federal structure should gain the support of federal process in order to become both theoretically and operationally acceptable. But whatever may be the position, it can be concluded that structure alone is not sufficient in determining the federal character of any particular polity. The emergence, consolidation and subsequent changes in the federal governance of a country depend, to a large extent, on the historical process of that particular country.

Any discussion on this aspect may start by referring to Art.1 of the Indian Constitution which describes it a 'Union of States'. This term rests on the assumption that the concept of power is 'one dimensional' and 'one directional'. The whole idea proceeds on the assumption and paradigm that power is to be understood in a 'possessional' or 'capability' sense. But the working of India's federal system over the last few decades has proved that the term used in Art.1 was to convey the general trend of the federal governance in India. Indian constitution lays down guidelines for a parliamentary system of government which is federal in structure with unitary features. It is federal in structure but unitary in spirit. Federal in normal times but with possibilities of being converted into a purely unitary one during emergency, etc. Side by side, the preamble of Indian constitution visualizes not only a democratic form of government but also a democratic society. The democratic Republic stands for the 'good of all the people'. Dr. Ambedkar has mentioned that "Democracy is a form and method of government where revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed".