Manipur: A case for asymmetric federalism

What is the issue?

The dissolution of Article 370 in 2019 and the integrationist approach followed by Manipur government were in lines with the majoritarian idea of homogenous nation opposing the asymmetric federalism

Why is it said that India has asymmetric federalism?

- There are some differences in the way some States and other constituent units of the Indian Union relate to the Centre.
- This creates a notable asymmetry in the way Indian federalism works.
- Article 370, Art 371, Art 371A to Art 371H contains special provisions for certain states
- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution contains provisions for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram through autonomous councils

Even though States are sovereign in their prescribed legislative field, and their executive power is co-extensive with their legislative powers, "the powers of the States are not coordinate with the Union".

Hence Indian federalism is often described as 'quasi-federal'.

What is the case of Manipur?

- **Article 371C** of the Constitution contains special provisions with respect to Manipur
    1. The President may provide for the constitution of a committee of elected members from the Hill areas in the Assembly
    2. It entrust "special responsibility" to the Governor to ensure its proper functioning.
- Recent attempts by Manipur government has been viewed as a move to delegitimise the demand for constitutional asymmetry
- **The Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Council (Amendment) Bill, 2021** seeks to increase the autonomy by increasing

the membership of the six district councils to 31 members each and securing more powers to the councils

- The government stalled the introduction and passage of the bill terming it to be sensitive
- Induction of nine Assembly members from the valley areas into the Hill Areas Committee is seen as a direct assault on the constitutional protection conferred under Article 371C
- Recent attempts of declaring areas around Chivu in the Indo-Myanmar border as a protected site and replacement of one of the three controversial monoliths, invoking the Forest Reserve Act are matters of concern
- Also the hill areas attracted barely 1.91% out of Rs. 21,900 crore budgetary expenditure of Manipur from 2017-18 to 2020-21

What does this call for?

- Apprehensions that tribal "self-rule" would leverage "tribalstan" or "communistan" and threaten India's security should not promote a homogenous nation
- Sincere commitment to promote tribal development, identity and culture as envisaged in Art.371C is needed
- Institutionally tribal distinctiveness should be accommodated to promote the State's integrity

Source: The Hindu

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