

The Sarkaria Commission on Centre State Relations

Mains: *GS II - Centre State Relations*

Why in News?

The Recent debates in the Tamil Nadu Legislative assembly has brought the Sarkaria commission once again into public discussion.

What is Sarkaria Commission?

- **About** - The Sarkaria Commission was a panel established by the Indian central government in **June 1983** to review and make recommendations on the **power balance and relationship between the central government and the states.**

Overview of the Sarkaria Commission 1983

- **Chairperson** - Justice Ranjit Singh Sarkaria, a retired Supreme Court judge.
- **Members** - B. Sivaraman and Dr. S.R. Sen.
- **Report** - Submitted in January 1988, containing 247 recommendations across 19 chapters.
- **Core Goal** - Promote cooperative federalism without changing the basic framework of the Indian Constitution.

*(Note: There was also an earlier **1976 inquiry commission** under **Justice R.S. Sarkaria** that investigated corruption allegations against Tamil Nadu **Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi** regarding the **Veeranam project**, but "the Sarkaria Commission" most commonly refers to the 1983 commission on Centre-State relations.)*

What are the Key Findings and Recommendations?

- **Article 356 (President's Rule)** - Advised that this article should be used very sparingly, only as a last resort in extreme cases of constitutional breakdown, after all other alternatives fail.
- **Role of the Governor** - Recommended that Governors should be eminent persons from outside their assigned state, have no recent active political involvement, and be appointed after consulting the state's Chief Minister.
- **Inter-State Council** - Proposed setting up a permanent Inter-State Council under Article 263 to handle coordination, dialogue, and dispute resolution between the Centre and States.
- **Financial Relations** - Suggested strengthening fiscal federalism and limiting the use of income tax surcharges by the Union government unless meant for a specific, temporary purpose.

What were the concerns regarding the commission?

- **Status Quo** - Generally favored keeping the existing legislative balance and strong center structure, though with operational improvements.
- **Pro-Center Bias and Status Quo** - Critics argued that the commission favored maintaining a strong central government rather than restructuring power.
- It recommended retaining the status quo on key legislative and financial distributions instead of radically empowering states.
- **Weak Recommendations on Article 356** - While it advised that Article 356 (President's Rule) should be used only as a last resort, critics felt it did not go far enough to completely eliminate the potential for political misuse by the Centre.
- **Non-Implementation of Key Suggestions** - A major grievance among regional parties and federalists was that successive central governments delayed, ignored, or only selectively implemented its 247 recommendations, diluting its overall impact.
- **Fiscal Centralization** - Observers noted that the commission failed to sufficiently address state financial dependency on the Centre, leaving states vulnerable to fiscal constraints.

What were the Other Important commissions established on Centre - State relations?

- **Rajamannar Committee (1969)** - Set up by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the chairmanship of Dr. P.V. Rajamannar, it was the first state-appointed committee to review Centre-State relations and advocate for greater state autonomy.
- **Punchhi Commission (2007)** - Appointed by the Central Government under the chairmanship of Justice M.M. Punchhi (former Chief Justice of India), this commission reviewed the working of Centre-State relations in light of socio-economic developments since the Sarkaria Commission.
- **Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC, 1966)** - Headed initially by Morarji Desai and later by K. Hanumanthaiah, the first ARC examined various administrative aspects of federal interactions, including Centre-State coordination.
- **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC, 2000)** - Chaired by Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, it reviewed the broader constitutional framework, including specific challenges and recommendations regarding federal and fiscal Centre-State dynamics.

What lies ahead?

- India's Centre-State relations represent a dynamic balance between national unity and regional autonomy. While a strong Centre is essential for maintaining territorial integrity, economic stability and coordinated responses to national challenges, excessive centralisation can weaken the spirit of federalism.
- The Sarkaria Commission, Punchhi Commission and GST Council have highlighted the need for greater consultation, fiscal autonomy and institutional cooperation.
- Strengthening bodies such as the Inter-State Council, ensuring transparent use of Article 356, improving fiscal devolution and promoting cooperative and competitive federalism can deepen trust between the two levels of government.
- The COVID-19 pandemic, GST implementation and disaster management demonstrate

that neither level can effectively govern in isolation. Thus, India's federalism must evolve from a "Centre versus States" approach to a "Centre with States" approach, where constitutional morality, mutual respect and consensus guide decision-making.

- Such cooperative federalism, complemented by healthy competition, is vital for achieving inclusive development while preserving India's unity in diversity.

Reference

[The Hindu| Sarkaria Commission](#)

