

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 15 marks

The recent developments in Indian Politics has not eroded the true spirit of federalism in India. Critically examine this statement with the help of appropriate examples.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Elazar's "self-rule + shared rule" test → developments strain but do not erase spirit

R2 federalism as India's multi-level device for diversity → "not eroded" claim must be tested against recent practice

Body flow

self-rule/shared-rule benchmark → fiscal-political pressures: GST compensation, NEET/farm laws, Governor delays, central agencies, scheme conditionalities → **Stalin's** NEET/NEP/GST critique → **Mehta** "vanishing act... grin" → reads as recentralisation

Counter-view

resilience holds the spirit → S.R. Bommai caps Art. 356 → GST Council institutionalises bargaining → regional parties/coalitions sustain negotiation → judiciary guards basic structure → asymmetry + State welfare innovation → **Mustafa**: regional aspirations strengthen unity

Conclusion routes

R1 statement holds with qualification → spirit strained, not destroyed

R2 survival rests on consultation, fiscal fairness, constitutional restraint → a negotiated, resilient federation

Federalism, in Daniel J. Elazar's words, means "self-rule plus shared rule" i.e. autonomy for the units alongside their participation in common decisions. In India it is also a multi-level structure for managing diversity.

Judged against this test, recent developments have strained federal practice but not erased its spirit. GST compensation disputes, the NEET and farm-laws controversies, Governors delaying assent to state Bills, central agencies pressing opposition-ruled states, and the conditionalities attached to centrally sponsored schemes have deepened fiscal and political dependence.

M.K. Stalin's sustained criticism of NEET, the NEP and GST reflects this state anxiety over autonomy. Pratap Bhanu Mehta describes Indian federalism as "a vanishing act.... leaving only the grin."

However, S.R. Bommai limits the misuse of Article 356; the GST Council institutionalises regular fiscal bargaining; regional parties and coalition politics keep negotiation alive. The judiciary guards the basic structure. Faizan Mustafa argues that recognising regional aspirations strengthens, rather than weakens, unity.

The statement therefore holds with qualification. The federal spirit is under stress, not destroyed; its survival rests on consultation, fiscal fairness and constitutional restraint.

Indian Federalism — the trend

13 questions over 2015–2025 · marks span 10 / 15 / 20

Theme	PYQ years & marks
Distribution of powers — reassessment	2016 / 10m
Cooperative federalism	2015 / 10m
Cooperative → competitive federation	2017 / 10m
Contested areas in Centre–State relations	2015 / 15m
GST & NEET as a federal challenge	2018 / 10m
Asymmetrical federalism	2018 / 15m
Inter-State Council (working / composition & success)	2019 / 10m · 2022 / 15m
Mechanism for settling inter-state disputes	2020 / 10m
Unitary appearance & centralising tendencies	2020 / 20m · 2023 / 20m
Changing basis of new-State demands	2021 / 15m
Recent developments & the true spirit of federalism	2025 / 15m