

* In Manipur, a case for asymmetric federalism

- Asymmetrical Federalism:

- It is found in federation in which different constituent states possess different powers.
- Some sub-states having more autonomy than the other, although they have the same constitutional status.

- Eg:

- Art 370 that gave J&K a special constitutional status (Abrogated in 2019).
- Art 371A which gives more constitutional powers to Nagas over land & resources
- Art 371C gives powers to Manipur's Hill Areas Committee over tribal identity, culture, dev. and local administration.

- Critics of Asymmetric Federalism:

- Based on idea of monolith, homogenous nation.

- It has recently received negative media coverage in India.

- Driven by the argument that giving distinctive constitutional status to territorially concentrated minorities would promote centrifugal tendencies.

- It is argued that it would over time inhibit national/state integration, development, and peace.

- Examples of Destabilising Potential

- East European communist states failed to hold together in the 1990s ..

- Views in the Constituent Assembly -

1. **Gopinath Bordoloi Committee** was a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly

- Sought to accommodate the distinctive identity of tribal groups in the Northeast by envisioning self-rule.

2. Jaipal Singh and B.R. Ambedkar recognised tribal distinctiveness and underscored the need for separate institutional accommodation.

3. Kuladhar Chaliha, from Assam, brought in an integrationist approach when he openly advocated assimilation of tribal groups.

- Recent Developments in Manipur:

1. The Manipur govt recently :

- Stopped the introduction of the Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Council (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

- Inducted 9 Assembly members from the valley areas into the Hill Areas Committee.(HAC)

2. Manipur government following the integrationist approach.

- The govt says that the Bill is a sensitive matter.

.While the Speaker ordered to induct 9 Assembly members from the valley areas is seen as a direct assault on the HAC.

.It amounted to a transgression of a domain exclusively reserved for the Prez of India

Democratise and empower city govts

The RBI in its report, "State Finances, Study of Budgets of 2021-22"-

- 3rd-tier govts are playing a frontline role in combating the pandemic by implementing containment strategies, healthcare.
- The finances of these civic bodies have come under severe strain
- So there should be an increase in their functional autonomy & their governance structure be strengthened.
- This could be achieved by empowering them financially through higher resource availability.

Challenges faced by the Local Govts

- An RBI survey of 221 municipal corporations revealed that more than 70% of the revenues saw a decline and in contrast, their expenditure increased by almost 71.2%.
- Limited collection of property tax and its failure in consolidating municipal corporation revenues.

- Data from OECD shows that India has the lowest property tax collection to GDP ratio in the world.
- Further, during the pandemic, leaders from both centre and states were taking calls on disaster mitigation strategies, without the involvement of city mayors.
 - Under the disaster management plan of action, cities are at the forefront.
 - And the elected leadership finds no place in disaster management.
 - The approach of treating cities as subordinates of State govts continues in policymaking.
- During the VAT regime, one of the major earnings of cities was from octroi i.e. a duty levied on various goods entering a town or city for consumption.
 - Now FC recommended grants to ULBs based on a formula of demographic profile.
 - Earlier, while almost 55% of the total revenue expenditure of urban bodies was

met by octroi, in contrast now, the grant covers only 15% of expenditure.

Way Forward

- Functional autonomy of city govts must be allowed.
- Functional autonomy should be accompanied by three F's: Functions, Finances and Functionaries to city govts.
- Financial empowerment must be added to the 18 functions listed in the 12th Schedule introduced by the 74th Amendment aimed at empowering urban local bodies.
- Cities must be treated as important centres of governance, where democratic decentralisation can bring transparency and adequate participation of the people.
- States should follow the people's plan model of Kerala where 40% of the State's plan budget was for local bodies with transfer of important subjects.

- The cities must be considered as spaces for planned development by giving adequate attention to resources.
- The cities in the Scandinavian countries have been examples of managing various functions, from city planning to mobility to waste management.
 - It is because the income-tax from citizens is given to the city govts.
 - Even India's Ministry of Housing and Urban Development recommended to transfer 10% of income-tax collected from the cities back to them
- The leadership in the cities must be elected for a term of five years. In some cities, the term of the mayor is for one year.