Chapter 14: Federalism

Exercise 14.1 — Exercises

Q1 Point out one feature in the practice of federalism in India that is similar to and one feature that is different from that of Belgium.

SOLUTION

Similar feature: Like Belgium, India has a clear division of powers between different levels of government, and this power sharing is guaranteed by the Constitution. Both are examples of 'holding together' federations where a large diverse country divides power to keep the country united.

Different feature: Belgium has a special 'community government' elected by people belonging to one language community to look after cultural, educational and language-related issues. India has no such community government; India instead added a third tier of local self-government (panchayats and municipalities) below the State level.

Answer: Similar: constitutionally guaranteed division of powers between levels of government. Different: Belgium has a 'community government'; India has a third tier of local government instead.

Q2 What is the main difference between a federal form of government and a unitary one? Explain with an example.

SOLUTION

In a federal form of government, power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of the country, and both levels of government enjoy their power independent of the other. The central government cannot order the state government to do something; the state government has powers of its own for which it is not answerable to the central government.

In a unitary form of government, there is only one level of government, or the sub-units are subordinate to the central government. The central government can pass on orders to the provincial or local government, which have to obey them.

Example: India, the USA and Belgium are federal governments, while Sri Lanka has a unitary system where the national government has all the powers.

Answer: Federal: power is divided between a central and constituent (state) governments, each enjoying power independently (e.g. India). Unitary: one central government controls the sub-units, which must obey it (e.g. Sri Lanka).

Q3 State any two differences between the local government before and after the Constitutional amendment in 1992.

SOLUTION

Before 1992: Elections to local governments were not held regularly, and local governments did not have any powers or resources of their own, so there was very little decentralisation in effective terms.

After 1992: It became constitutionally mandatory to hold regular elections to local government bodies; seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and at least one-third of positions for women; a State Election Commission was created in each State to conduct these elections; and State governments were required to share some powers and revenue with local government bodies.

Answer: Before 1992 elections were irregular and local bodies had no powers/resources; after 1992 regular elections became mandatory, seats were reserved (incl. one-third for women), a State Election Commission was set up, and States had to share powers and revenue.

Q4 Fill in the blanks: Since the United States is a _____ type of federation, all the constituent States have equal powers and States are _____ vis-à-vis the federal government. But India is a _____ type of federation and some States have more power than others. In India, the _____ government has more powers.

SOLUTION

The USA is a 'coming together' federation formed by independent States joining together — so the constituent States have equal powers and are strong vis-à-vis the federal government.

India is a 'holding together' federation where a large country divides its power — such federations do not give equal power to units, so some States have more power than others, and the Central (Union) government is more powerful.

Answer: coming together; strong (equal); holding together; Central (Union)

Q5 Here are three reactions to the language policy followed in India. Give an argument and an example to support any of these positions. Sangeeta: The policy of accommodation has strengthened national unity. Arman: Language-based States have divided us by making everyone conscious of their language. Harish: This policy has only helped to consolidate the dominance of English over all other languages.

SOLUTION

Supporting Sangeeta: India's policy of accommodation has strengthened national unity. Unlike Sri Lanka, India did not impose one language on all; besides Hindi there are 21 other languages recognised as Scheduled Languages, and Hindi was not forced on non-Hindi speaking States. Example: the decision to continue the use of English along with Hindi for official purposes (after 1965) respected non-Hindi States and helped keep the country together.

Supporting Arman: Creating States on the basis of language has made people conscious of their linguistic identity, which can divide people — as seen when the demand to make Hindi the sole official language was resisted by non-Hindi speaking States.

Supporting Harish: Because States could not agree on any one Indian language, English continued alongside Hindi, which has helped English retain its dominant position in administration, higher education and courts over other Indian languages.

Answer: Any one position defended, e.g. Sangeeta: accommodation strengthened unity because India recognised many languages and did not impose Hindi (unlike Sri Lanka), so the country stayed united.

Q6 The distinguishing feature of a federal government is: (a) National government gives some powers to the provincial governments. (b) Power is distributed among the legislature, executive and judiciary. (c) Elected officials exercise supreme power in the government. (d) Governmental power is divided between different levels of government.

SOLUTION

The defining feature of federalism is a vertical division of powers between two or more levels of government — a central authority and its constituent units — with each level enjoying its power independently.

Option (b) describes separation of powers among organs of government, while (a) and (c) are not the essential feature, so (d) is correct.

Answer: (d) Governmental power is divided between different levels of government.

Q7 A few subjects in various Lists of the Indian Constitution are given here. Group them under the Union, State and Concurrent Lists as provided in the table below. A. Defence; B. Police; C. Agriculture; D. Education; E. Banking; F. Forests; G. Communications; H. Trade; I. Marriages.

SOLUTION

The Union List contains subjects of national importance on which only the Union Government can make laws. The State List contains subjects of State and local importance on which State Governments make laws. The Concurrent List contains subjects of common interest to both, on which both may legislate.

Union List: A. Defence, E. Banking, G. Communications.
State List: B. Police, C. Agriculture, H. Trade.
Concurrent List: D. Education, F. Forests, I. Marriages.

Answer: Union List: Defence, Banking, Communications. State List: Police, Agriculture, Trade. Concurrent List: Education, Forests, Marriages.

Q8 Examine the following pairs that give the level of government in India and the powers of the government at that level to make laws on the subjects mentioned against each. Which of the following pairs is not correctly matched? (a) State government — State List (b) Central government — Union List (c) Central and State governments — Concurrent List (d) Local governments — Residuary powers.

SOLUTION

State governments make laws on the State List, the Central government on the Union List, and both on the Concurrent List — so (a), (b) and (c) are correctly matched.

Residuary powers (subjects not in any list) belong to the Union Government, not to local governments, so pair (d) is not correctly matched.

Answer: (d) Local governments — Residuary powers (residuary powers actually belong to the Union Government).

Q9 Match List I with List II and select the correct answer using the codes given below the lists. List I: 1. Union of India; 2. State; 3. Municipal Corporation; 4. Gram Panchayat. List II: A. Prime Minister; B. Sarpanch; C. Governor; D. Mayor. Codes: (a) 1-D 2-A 3-B 4-C (b) 1-B 2-C 3-D 4-A (c) 1-A 2-C 3-D 4-B (d) 1-C 2-D 3-A 4-B.

SOLUTION

The Union of India is headed at the government level by the Prime Minister (A); a State has a Governor (C); a Municipal Corporation is headed by a Mayor (D); a Gram Panchayat is headed by a Sarpanch (B).

So the correct matching is 1-A, 2-C, 3-D, 4-B, which is option (c).

Answer: (c) 1-A, 2-C, 3-D, 4-B.

Q10 Consider the following two statements. A. In a federation, the powers of the federal and provincial governments are clearly demarcated. B. India is a federation because the powers of the Union and State Governments are specified in the Constitution and they have exclusive jurisdiction on their respective subjects. C. Sri Lanka is a federation because the country is divided into provinces. D. India is no longer a federation because some powers of the States have been devolved to the local government bodies. Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) A, B and C (b) A, C and D (c) A and B only (d) B and C only.

SOLUTION

Statement A is correct: in a federation the powers of the two levels are clearly demarcated. Statement B is correct: India is a federation because Union and State powers are specified in the Constitution with exclusive jurisdiction over their respective subjects.

Statement C is wrong — Sri Lanka has a unitary government, not a federation. Statement D is wrong — devolving some powers to a third tier of local bodies does not stop India being a federation. Hence only A and B are correct.

Answer: (c) A and B only.