

# **FEDERALISMS - EAST AND WEST INDIA, EUROPE & NORTH AMERICA**

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*St Antony's College, Oxford*

## **Reflections and Conclusions**

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*Firstly I take this opportunity to thank Paul for inviting me for this conference. I am a green horn in this area but have tried to get insights into this vital subject. I thank all the stalwarts who have been invited here and given some exceptional and brilliant insights into the federalism form of government in India, European Union and also USA and Canada.*

*I do not possess the expertise to make comments but I put forth my observations as a common man, not even as a journalist, because federalism, as we listened to, was also about the last man being the participant and recipient. At the top of my observations is one fact that came to light – that none of the federal forms of government be it India, USA or EU, has succeeded in living up to the people's aspirations and representations – though it varies for countries in various degrees and due to various reasons. I shall attempt to give my understanding of the same with reference to India and the European Union.*

*As for India, while the leaders had chalked out a federal form of government with grass-root level empowerment at the outset, the partition changed the Philosophy for fear of internal*

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*break-ups if such independence is given at the state level – the Pakistan partition was disastrous enough in terms of human killings of more than five lakh. Also is the fact that leaders who scripted the Constitution of India did not really fancy empowerment to people as they underestimated their capability. Thus 60 years down the line as Prof Vijay Joshi pointed out and has been quoted over and over again in the last two days, India is stuck with a two tier economy – advantageous for the rich and the middle class and on the second dire, the fate of stagnancy for millions of people.*

*The problem of good governance and unemployment besieges India. However as Meghnad Desai pointed out, there are lots of reasons why India should not be a nation and therefore has to recreate itself as a nation everyday and thus remains a nation. However, he observed interestingly that ‘federal government’s power has been healthily weakened’ due to coalition government which in effect means that regional parties that rule state governments and are part of the central government hold the key to any decisions, hold more clout and therefore any decision is preceded by constant negotiations and once reforms done they are not reversed. This in effect has meant that power has been de-centralised to the state government level, which is in itself a triumph for federalism. He gave the recent example of how 44 parties represented Kashmir after the recent violence. He called the federal government of India the ‘snow white’ and the state governments the ‘dwarfs’ with the latter holding more control which is good for federalism.*

*Mani Shankar Aiyer gave a brilliant presentation in which he gave adequate importance to citizen empowerment and governance at the grass root level. Hence while Desai dwelt on empowerment to the state government due to coalitions, Mani Shankar Aiyer went one step further giving importance to empowerment to people and their participation at the grassroots level, which has already seen mind-boggling results in terms of governance at the village level. He stressed on inclusive governance and decentralization of the planning process if governance has to be development of the people, for the people and by the people.*

*Unlike USA and India, the European Union which is a relatively recent phenomenon is as Paul Flather has said in his communication to all of us ‘a loose knit confederation of the sort that preceded the creation of the United States. It is a highly original and often confusing blend of federal and con-federal elements. The European parliament and the court of justice are essentially federal in role and inspiration; the European Council and Council of ministers are con-federal. It is governed according to rules derived from binding treaties, and interpreted by a super-national court reminiscent of the Supreme Courts of India and the United States.’ Some of my observations based on the numerous eminent speakers are: Is it the Christian values that really bind the EU – the basic premise on which the EU took shape as per Peter Sutherland? Or Is it the market forces that bind the EU more than a spirit of being European?*

David Hannay mentioned about various advantages of travel and commercial enterprise during the enlightening discussion on 'Common values and Federalism today?' At the same time as is the innate patriotic spirit of any human being, is the nationalistic spirit clashing with the global nature of the European Union? Perhaps in good times the EU is more tolerant than in bad times like financial crisis and unemployment. As Peter Sutherland has mentioned in his article in the Financial times, "without the single currency, Europe would be an economic wasteland...Competitive devaluations of national currencies after the financial crisis of 2008 would have led to economic chaos incomparably worse than the turbulence we are now experiencing."

The migration of people as I gather is another aspect of concern for some countries. A case in point was Germany which is scorning migrants. There have been proponents of a common president for the EU but as others point out will that be acceptable considering that the populace in every country of the EU would not be able to identify itself with the potential candidates. However, we have seen optimism in further stability of the EU in years to come – experts have asked for patience and for more time. Desai criticized the EU as being 'non-transparent' but he was politely admonished. A couple of other experts too felt that discussions and policies are confined to the top notch powers-that-be in the governments of various countries of the EU and the information does not percolate to the people. In short, it is the lack of transparency that is making the masses eye suspiciously at the oneness of EU.

With people not being taken into confidence and with no transparency, people's participation and involvement is still on the fence. Also a thought of EU giving the USA a run for its status as a superpower – this is my layman's thought.

We also got a good insight into Spain's federal form of government besieged by the problems of regions like Basque, Catalonia and Galicia demanding autonomy yet they continue to be "nations within a nation." A new thought came from Gary Hart the new world wherein a plethora of issues of pandemics, climate change etc cannot be addressed by one nation but need collective action by involving developing nations. He called it "unconventional federalism" or "international federalism" which would involve networking of public health services across the globe. He also called in 'Federalism 2.'

We also got a deep insight into the USA and Canada's federalism.

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The conference has thrown a spectrum of thoughts particularly on the aspect of the EU and as Paul had stated at the outset – the Oxford Conference will discuss "face testing challenges –

*economic, political, cultural and even existential – specially the challenge of adaptation, identity and legitimacy.” It has more or less been successful in bringing out these discussions.*

*However, to conclude, we need to ponder as to what is the way forward? Will the conference close with a resolution or plan of action? I am eager to know that.*