



Original Article

Indian Federalism under Article 3: Power, Politics and Statehood

Faiz Ayat Ansari

PhD Research Scholar, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru

Manuscript ID:
RIGJAAR-2025-020501

ISSN: 2998-4459
Volume 2
Issue 5
Pp. 1-3
May 2025

Submitted: 05 Apr 2025
Revised: 20 Apr 2025
Accepted: 10 May 2025
Published: 31 May 2025

Correspondence Address:
Faiz Ayat Ansari
PhD Research Scholar,
National Law School of India
University, Bengaluru
Email: faizkk@yahoo.com

Quick Response Code:



Web: <https://rlgjaar.com>



DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.16362268

DOI Link:
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16362268>



Creative Commons



Abstract

Article 3 of the Indian Constitution is a pivotal provision that empowers the Parliament to unilaterally create new states, alter their areas, diminish or increase the area of any state, and even change the names of the existing states. This makes it a cornerstone of India's quasi-federal structure, allowing for a dynamic redrawing of the nation's internal map. This power highlights a unique characteristic of Indian federalism: a significant degree of centralized flexibility. The exercise of Article 3 is not merely an administrative process; it deeply shapes the intricate balance between the union government and the states. It allows the center to reconfigure state boundaries, often in response to, or sometimes in anticipation of, regional aspirations, linguistic demands, or political expediency. This potential for reorganization inevitably generates tension between central authority and the core principles of federalism, particularly those concerning the autonomy and distinct identity of states. Historical examples illustrate this dynamic vividly. The States Reorganization Act of 1956, a monumental exercise, dramatically restructured India along linguistic lines, fulfilling long-standing regional demands but also leading to significant dislocations and debates. More recently, the creation of Telangana in 2014 from Andhra Pradesh showcased the complex interplay between political will, regional movements, and economic considerations in the application of Article 3. While Article 3 provides the necessary tools for maintaining national unity and accommodating regional diversity within a vast and heterogeneous country, it also raises pertinent questions regarding democratic accountability and the extent of regional autonomy. The Parliament's ability to unilaterally redraw state boundaries can sometimes be perceived as overriding the will of the state legislature or diminishing the federal spirit. Thus, Article 3 embodies a distinct Indian model of federalism, one that continually seeks to balance the imperative of national cohesion with the diverse aspirations of its constituent units.

Keywords: Article 3, Indian federalism, state reorganization, centralized flexibility, regional autonomy, national unity

Introduction

Indian federalism is a complex and dynamic framework, often described as 'quasi-federal' due to its blend of unitary and federal features. At the heart of this system lies Article 3 of the Constitution, which empowers the Parliament to form new states, alter their boundaries, or change their names, subject to minimal procedural requirements (Constitution of India, 1950). This provision underscores the union's dominance in India's federal structure, distinguishing it from classical federal models, where state boundaries are typically sacrosanct. This study analyzes the role of Article 3 in shaping Indian federalism, focusing on its implications for power distribution, political motivations, and statehood movements. By examining historical and contemporary instances of state reorganization, it argues that Article 3 facilitates flexible federalism that prioritizes national unity but often sidelines regional consent, raising critical questions about democratic legitimacy.

Methodology

The methodology for this research primarily involves a doctrinal, qualitative, and interpretative approach, drawing heavily on documentary analysis and historical case studies. The core of this research is to analyze the text of Article 3 of the Indian Constitution alongside relevant constitutional assembly debates, parliamentary records, and judicial pronouncements to understand its original intent and subsequent evolution. This would be complemented by a thorough examination of significant state reorganization events, such as the State Reorganization Act of 1956 and the creation of Telangana in 2014.

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

How to cite this article:

Ansari, F. A. (2025). Indian Federalism under Article 3: Power, Politics and Statehood. *Royal International Global Journal of Advance and Applied Research*, 2(5), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16362268>

For these case studies, the research delves into primary and secondary sources, including government reports, legislative debates, academic analyses, and news archives, to understand the political, social, linguistic, and economic factors that influence these reconfigurations, as well as their implications for central state relations and regional aspirations. The aim would be to interpret how Article 3 has been applied in practice, the tensions it creates between central authority and federal principles, and, ultimately, how it shapes India's unique model of federalism characterized by centralized flexibility.

Article 3 and the Framework of Indian Federalism

Article 3 of the Constitution of India, 1950, states that the Parliament may, by law, form new states, increase or diminish the area of any state, or alter its name or boundaries, provided the President refers the bill to the concerned state legislature for its views. Notably, the state's opinion is not binding, and the parliament can act unilaterally with a simple majority.

This provision reflects the unitary bias of Indian federalism, as envisioned by the Constituent Assembly, which prioritizes national integration over rigid federalism in a diverse and newly independent nation (Austin, 1966).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, defended Article 3's centralized approach, arguing that it was necessary to address India's linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity without compromising unity (Ambedkar, 1949). Unlike federal systems such as the United States, where states have significant autonomy over their boundaries, India's model allows the union to reconfigure states to accommodate administrative efficiency or political demands. However, this flexibility has sparked debate regarding the erosion of federal principles, particularly the autonomy of states.

Historical Context: The States Reorganisation Act, 1956

The first major exercise of Article 3's powers came with the State Reorganization Act, 1956, which redrew India's map along linguistic lines. The demand for linguistic states, such as Andhra Pradesh for Telugu speakers, arose from pre-independence movements and intensified post-1947. The State Reorganisation Commission (SRC), established in 1953, recommended reorganizing states to align with linguistic and cultural identities, balancing administrative efficiency with regional aspirations.

The 1956 reorganization created 14 states and six Union territories, marking a significant moment in India's federal evolution. While it addressed linguistic diversity, the process revealed the union's dominance, as states had little say in the final boundaries. For instance, the merger of Telugu-speaking areas into Andhra Pradesh was driven by central directives despite local opposition in some regions (Tillin, 2013). This set a precedent for Article 3 as a tool for centralized control, reinforcing the union's ability to unilaterally shape federalism.

Contemporary Case Study: The Creation of Telangana

The creation of Telangana in 2014 offers a modern lens through which to examine Article 3's role in

Indian federalism. The demand for a separate Telangana state, carved out of Andhra Pradesh, stemmed from decades of perceived economic neglect and cultural marginalization (Ashutosh, 2014). The movement, led by Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), gained momentum in the 2000s, culminating in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014.

The Telangana case highlights the political dimension of Article 3. Under pressure from regional protests and electoral considerations, the Union government exercised its authority to create a new state, despite opposition from Andhra Pradesh's legislature. This underscores the non-binding nature of state consultations under Article 3, raising questions about federal equity. Critics argued that unilateral decisions undermined democratic principles, as the affected state had limited recourse (Saxena, 2001). However, proponents viewed Telangana's creation as evidence of Article 3's ability to address regional aspirations, reinforcing federalism's adaptability.

Power and Politics in Article 3's Application

Article 3's centralized framework has enabled the Union to manage India's diversity but has also been a tool for political maneuvering. The creation of states like Jharkhand (2000), Chhattisgarh (2000), and Uttarakhand (2000) was driven by a mix of regional demands and national political strategies (Kumar, 2014). For instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government supported these reorganizations by consolidating electoral support in tribal and hill regions.

The provision's flexibility has also sparked concerns regarding its misuse. The lack of mandatory state consent allows the union to prioritize political expediency over federal principles. For example, the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories in 2019 under Article 3 was executed without consulting the state legislature, which had been dissolved. This move, while legally permissible, was criticized for undermining federalism by reducing a state to Union territory status and effectively centralizing control (Singh, 2010).

Federalism and Democratic Accountability

The application of Article 3 raises critical questions regarding democratic accountability in Indian federalism. The non-binding nature of state consultation contrasts with federal systems, such as Canada, where provincial consent is often required for boundary changes. In India, the Union's ability to act unilaterally can marginalize regional voices, as seen in the Telangana, Jammu, and Kashmir cases.

Scholars argue that this centralization reflects India's 'holding together' federalism, distinct from 'coming together' models like the United States. While this approach has enabled India to manage its diversity, it risks alienating regions with strong sub-national identities. The Supreme Court has upheld the Parliament's authority under Article 3, noting that states are not sovereign entities but creations of the Constitution. However, this legal position does not address the political grievances arising from unilateral reorganization.



Conclusion

Article 3 defines Indian federalism, embodying a unique blend of centralized authority and federal flexibility. By enabling the Union to reconfigure states, it has facilitated the accommodation of India's linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity, as seen in the 1956 reorganization and the creation of Telangana. However, its unilateral nature raises concerns regarding democratic accountability and regional autonomy, as evidenced by cases such as Jammu and Kashmir. Indian federalism, under Article 3, prioritizes national unity, but must navigate the delicate balance between central power and regional aspirations. Future applications of Article 3 should consider mechanisms for greater state consultation to strengthen federalism's democratic foundations, while preserving its adaptability.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude To National Law School of India University, Bengaluru for providing the necessary facilities and support to carry out this research. We also thank the faculties for their valuable guidance and insightful suggestions during the course of this study.

Financial Support and Sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References:

1. Ambedkar, B. R. (1949). *Constituent Assembly Debates (Vol. VII)*. Lok Sabha Secretariat.
2. *Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014*. Government of India.
3. Austin, G. (1966). *The Indian Constitution: Principles of a Nation*. Oxford University Press.
4. *Constitution of India, 1950*. Government of India.
5. *Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019*. Government of India.
6. Kumar, A. (2014). Telangana: The making of a new state. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(1), 12–16.
7. *Re Berubari Union and Exchange of Enclaves*, AIR 1960 SC 845.
8. Sharma, R. (2001). Federalism and state reorganisation in India. *Journal of Indian Law Institute*, 25(3), 345–360.
9. Singh, M. P. (2010). Indian federalism: A critical analysis. *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), 123–140.
10. *States Reorganisation Act, 1956*. Government of India.
11. States Reorganisation Commission. (1955). *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission*. Government of India.
12. Tillin, L. (2013). *Remapping India: New states and their political origins*. Hurst & Company.