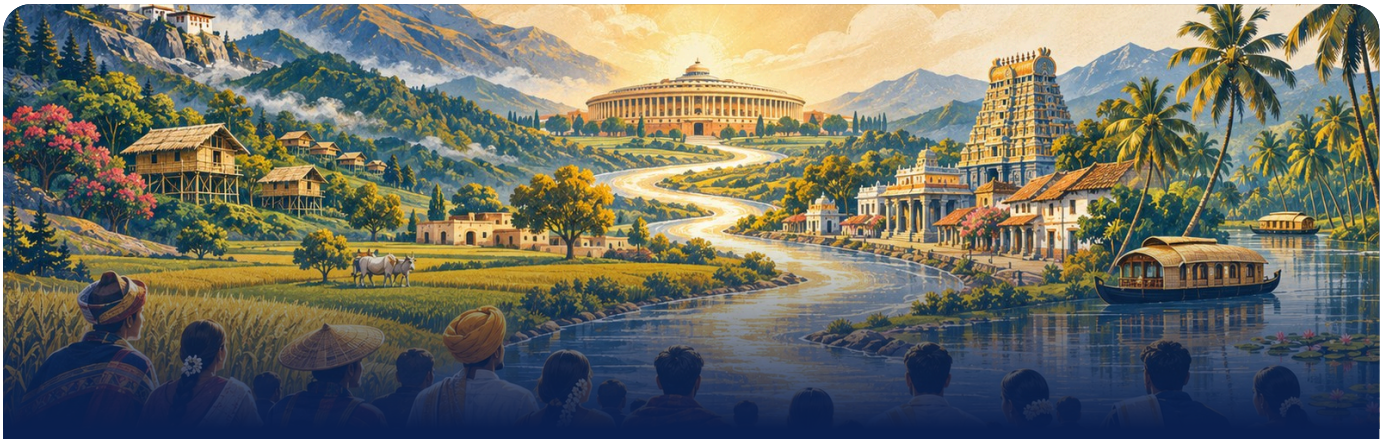
How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.



MAINS MASTERY 2026 · GS PAPER II · QUESTION 13 · STUDENT EDITION

Diversity, Asymmetry and Federal Trust

THE QUESTION, AS SET IN UPSC CSE MAINS 2026

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Directive: How far · Highlight · Suggest | 15 marks | 250 words

Indian Polity: federalism, diversity and inter-State relations

1 **PYQ Deep Decode**
Demand, hidden demand, structure, form

2 **PYQ Intelligence**
2013 to 2026: autonomy, asymmetry, federal disputes

3 **Additional information**
Constitutional protections, agreements, dispute mechanisms

4 **Pitfalls and variations**
Constitutional corrections and changed directives

5 **The model answer**
Balanced assessment, headed points, institutional reforms

6 **Other ways to write it**
Five outlines and when each works

7 **Quick recall**
Sixteen facts for Mains and Prelims

8 **Write it yourself**
A seven-point self-check

Guranchal Ma'am, Founder, UPSC Gurus · upscgurus.in

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

1 PYQ Deep Decode

Read the question the way the examiner set it: the demand, the hidden demand, the structure that follows from both, and how the answer should be presented, opened and closed.

1.1 The demand

The question begins with an **assessment of India's federal experience**: has the Constitution enabled different linguistic, cultural, ethnic and regional communities to preserve their identities while belonging to one Union? **"How far"** demands a reasoned verdict, showing both achievements and unresolved tensions. The second part asks you to **highlight the particular contribution of asymmetric federalism**, where different States or regions receive different constitutional arrangements. The third asks for **practical improvements to dispute resolution**, not merely a list of existing institutions. The answer must connect these three demands: **accommodation, differentiated autonomy and the institutions that sustain federal trust.**

Words in the question	What they ask you to do	What goes wrong if you miss them
How far ... successful	Assess the extent of success through constitutional arrangements, actual outcomes and continuing gaps. Reach a qualified judgment.	Describing constitutional provisions without assessing whether they have worked.
Indian federal framework	Consider the distribution of powers, State formation, cultural protections, special arrangements and intergovernmental institutions as parts of one constitutional system.	Restricting federalism to the Union, State and Concurrent Lists.
Regional and cultural diversities	Distinguish territorial and developmental aspirations from linguistic, ethnic, customary and cultural identities. Show where they overlap.	Using linguistic reorganisation as the only example of accommodation.
Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism	Explain why differentiated constitutional powers and protections matter, and illustrate their contribution with precise provisions and regions.	Equating asymmetry with financial grants, or merely listing Articles 371A to 371J.
Suggest measures	Propose specific improvements, linked to institutional weaknesses, and indicate how those improvements would operate.	Ending with generic recommendations to strengthen cooperative federalism.
Dispute resolution mechanisms	Distinguish political consultation, statutory forums, water tribunals, constitutional adjudication and implementation arrangements.	Assuming every Centre-State or inter-State dispute follows the same judicial route.

THE DEMAND IN ONE LINE

Assess how far India's federal design has accommodated regional and cultural identities, show how differentiated autonomy has contributed, and propose workable reforms to resolve disputes before they undermine federal trust.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

1.2 The hidden demand

The underlying question is whether **unity requires institutional uniformity**. India's experience suggests that it does not: linguistic States, protected customary institutions and special territorial arrangements allow groups to remain culturally distinct within a common constitutional order. Yet recognition creates further questions. Who speaks for a region? Do minorities within autonomous areas enjoy equal protection? Can a differentiated arrangement survive without adequate funds, implementation and consent? The small final part must therefore establish that **constitutional equality does not necessarily mean identical institutional arrangements**, but differentiation must remain compatible with fundamental rights, democratic accountability and reciprocal trust between governments.

Use the following distinctions to move beyond a catalogue of provisions. Each identifies an institutional achievement, its unresolved problem and the constitutional principle at stake.

Arrangement	What it accommodates	The deeper test
Linguistic Statehood	The States Reorganisation Act, 1956, and later State formation brought regional identities into elected State institutions.	Can territorial recognition remain inclusive of linguistic and cultural minorities within those States?
Protected autonomy	Article 371A protects specified Naga practices, customary law and land rights; the Sixth Schedule provides tribal self-government in specified areas of four northeastern States.	Does the authority transferred to local institutions carry accountability, inclusion and sufficient resources?
Negotiated accommodation	The 5 February 2026 Frontier Nagaland agreement envisaged a territorial authority for six districts and devolution concerning 46 subjects.	Can an agreement be translated into legally valid institutions without ignoring constitutional limits?
Adjudication after failed negotiation	In the Pennaiyar dispute, the Supreme Court directed constitution of a water tribunal on 2 February 2026.	Can negotiation be attempted sincerely without becoming a means of indefinitely postponing adjudication?

WEAK

India is a diverse country, and the Constitution gives special status to some States. Federal disputes should therefore be solved through cooperation and dialogue.

STRONG

The 5 February 2026 Frontier Nagaland agreement demonstrates accommodation through negotiated regional autonomy, but the March Bill was deferred over constitutional questions concerning legislative powers. Successful asymmetry requires not only recognition of identity but also legally workable powers, resources and credible implementation.

1.3 The structure

The question contains **three explicit demands, in order**: assess accommodation, highlight asymmetric federalism, and suggest dispute-resolution reforms. The hidden demand becomes a **short fourth part**, where the relationship between diversity, constitutional equality and federal trust is settled. The shares refer to the body between the introduction and conclusion; they are a teaching guide, not a UPSC rule.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Introduction	1. Success of accommodation about three-tenths	2. Asymmetric federalism about three-tenths	3. Dispute-resolution reforms about three-tenths	4. Equality and trust about one-tenth	Conclusion

Part 1 Success of the Indian federal framework in accommodating regional and cultural diversities about three-tenths

Constitutional accommodation	Seventh Schedule; Articles 29, 30 and 345; Eighth Schedule; State formation under Article 3.
Regional autonomy	Linguistic States, elected legislatures, local self-government, cultural recognition.
Achievements	Linguistic reorganisation, recognition of 22 scheduled languages, negotiated settlements and tribal self-government.
Continuing tensions	Regional inequality, competing identities, boundary and river disputes, fiscal dependence and centralising pressures.

Part 2 Role of asymmetric federalism in accommodating regional and cultural diversities about three-tenths

Meaning and basis	Constitutionally differentiated powers and protections; Articles 244 and 371A to 371J; Fifth and Sixth Schedules.
Differentiated arrangements	Nagaland and Mizoram's customary protections; Sikkim's special provisions; tribal autonomous councils.
Contribution	Recognition without separation; local decision-making; negotiated integration and protection of identities.
Limitations	Incomplete devolution, council capacity, competing tribal claims and questions of equality within autonomous regions.

Part 3 Measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective about three-tenths

Consultation	Regular Inter-State Council meetings, empowered Zonal Councils and structured Union-State consultation.
Institutional resolution	Article 131 jurisdiction; Article 262 and the 1956 water-disputes law; technically capable tribunals.
Timeliness and credibility	Prompt referrals, clear procedures, independent evidence, transparent orders and implementation monitoring.
Negotiated solutions	Mediation, basin-level cooperation, community participation and agreed mechanisms for implementing settlements.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Part 4 **Balancing diversity, constitutional equality and federal trust** about one-tenth, hidden demand

Principle	Differentiated institutions need not mean unequal citizenship.
Safeguard	Fundamental rights, representation of minorities within regions, financial accountability and negotiated implementation.
Verdict	Federal unity is strongest when regional self-government is credible and shared constitutional obligations are respected.

1.4 How to present it

This is an **assessment followed by an explanation and a reform agenda**. The most economical form is **headed points in the question's order**, supported by a few carefully chosen constitutional provisions and one contemporary example. A compact **institution-to-reform matching** within Part 3 is more useful than a decorative diagram. The assessment in Part 1 must contain both successes and limitations; Part 2 must demonstrate the distinctive mechanism of asymmetric federalism, not repeat Part 1's achievements.

Form	Fit here	Reason
Headed points with institutional reforms	**Best**	Preserves all three demands and permits clear comparison of achievements, limitations and solutions within 250 words.
Compact three-part table	Good	Useful for contrasting constitutional provisions, outcomes and reforms, provided the evaluation remains visible.
Historical narrative of State formation	Weak	Consumes space without adequately explaining asymmetry or improving dispute resolution.
Long constitutional article list	Weak	Displays recall but does not establish how accommodation works or why disputes persist.

1.5 The introduction and the conclusion

The introduction serves the whole question. Present Indian federalism as an arrangement for governing a diverse society through shared authority, differentiated autonomy and intergovernmental negotiation. Signal that its achievements are substantial but contested. Do not spend the introduction defining asymmetry alone, because the question has three demands.

The conclusion settles the demand. Give a qualified verdict: India's federal framework has largely accommodated diversity without requiring uniformity, but the endurance of that achievement depends on workable autonomy, equal citizenship and timely dispute resolution. The conclusion should be a judgment, not another reform list.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

2 PYQ Intelligence 2013 to 2026

The question's context in 2026, its place in UPSC's sustained examination of Indian federalism, and the connected areas worth preparing next.

2.1 Why the subject was topical in 2026

By the 2026 examination, three strands of India's federal debate had converged: **regional demands for greater autonomy**, **Centre-State financial and institutional relations**, and **the difficulty of resolving disputes through consultation and adjudication**. Eastern Nagaland's proposed territorial authority offered a particularly direct example of negotiated asymmetry, while the Supreme Court's Pennaiyar judgment showed what happens when negotiations do not produce agreement. The Sixteenth Finance Commission brought resource-sharing back into the discussion. These are **context, not an asserted cause** of UPSC's choice of question. Every development below predates the August 2026 GS examinations.

When	What happened	Why it matters for this question
27 January 2020	The Union, Assam Government and Bodo organisations signed the **Third Bodo Accord**. It sought greater powers for the Bodoland Territorial Council, protection of Bodo cultural and linguistic identity, safeguards for tribal land rights and development measures. The Ministry of Home Affairs reported in April 2023 that most clauses had been implemented, including a Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council and a Directorate of Bodo Medium Schools.	A negotiated settlement combines territorial self-government, cultural recognition and development. **Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, PIB, 9 March 2021 and 5 April 2023.**
29 March 2022	Assam and Meghalaya signed an agreement addressing **six of twelve areas of difference** along their inter-State boundary, following negotiations involving the Union Government. The remaining areas were not settled by that agreement.	Political negotiation can resolve boundary disputes incrementally, but partial agreements must not be mistaken for complete settlement. **Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, PIB, 29 March 2022.**
8 April 2025	In **State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu**, the Supreme Court addressed the prolonged withholding of action on State Bills and formulated safeguards concerning the Governor's role under Article 200. The subsequent presidential reference examined important propositions in that judgment.	Institutional conflict between elected State governments and constitutional authorities became an important federal issue. **Source: Supreme Court of India, April 2025 judgment.**
17 November 2025	At the **32nd Northern Zonal Council meeting**, the Union Home Ministry reported that 1,303 of 1,600 issues discussed in Zonal Council meetings had been resolved; it stated the proportion as **81.43%**. This is an official aggregate reported at the meeting, not a measure of all inter-State disputes.	Consultative institutions can achieve settlements, but their effectiveness must be judged by the character of disputes resolved and compliance with outcomes. **Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, PIB, 17 November 2025.**
20 November 2025	In **Special Reference No. 1 of 2025**, the Supreme Court held that courts should not prescribe universal constitutional timelines or create deemed assent under Articles 200 and 201. It nevertheless recognised limited judicial intervention against prolonged gubernatorial inaction, without substituting the court's decision on assent.	The boundaries between judicial remedies, constitutional discretion and State legislative autonomy remained contested. **Source: Supreme Court of India, 2025 INSC 1333.**

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When	What happened	Why it matters for this question
1 February 2026	The Union Government accepted the **Sixteenth Finance Commission's recommendation** to retain States' vertical share at **41% of the divisible pool of Union taxes** for its award period. The Budget also provided ₹1.4 lakh crore in Finance Commission grants for 2026-27.	Fiscal capacity affects whether formally autonomous States and local institutions can exercise their responsibilities effectively. **Source: Ministry of Finance, PIB, 1 February 2026.**
2 February 2026	In **State of Tamil Nadu v. State of Karnataka**, **2026 INSC 113**, the Supreme Court found that negotiations over the Pennaiyar River water dispute had failed and directed the Union to notify and constitute a water-disputes tribunal within one month.	Precisely illustrates the need for a credible transition from negotiation to adjudication. The judgment ordered tribunal constitution; it did not decide the rival States' water entitlements. **Source: Supreme Court of India, 2 February 2026.**
5 February 2026	The Union Government, Nagaland Government and **Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation** signed an agreement envisaging the **Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority** for six eastern districts, with devolution relating to **46 subjects**.	A contemporary case of responding to sub-State regional demands through differentiated autonomy without creating a separate State. The agreement envisaged devolution; it did not itself complete the transfer. **Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, PIB, 5 February 2026.**
26 to 27 March 2026	The **Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority Bill, 2026**, was introduced in the Nagaland Assembly on 26 March, but its consideration was deferred on 27 March. A central issue was whether legislative powers could constitutionally be conferred on the proposed authority through State legislation.	Shows the distinction between a political commitment, a proposed law and an operational constitutional arrangement. **Source: Department of Information and Public Relations, Nagaland, 27 March 2026.**
6 July 2026	The Nagaland Government stated that the earlier Frontier Nagaland Bill had been returned for further examination and that it intended to pursue legislation after addressing constitutional questions in consultation with the Union Government.	Asymmetry works only when the negotiated arrangement has a legally sound division of authority. **Source: Department of Information and Public Relations, Nagaland, 6 July 2026.**
22 July 2026	In a Rajya Sabha reply concerning inclusion of **Gor Boli** in the Eighth Schedule, the Union Government stated that no fixed criteria existed for adding languages to the Schedule and that earlier committee exercises had not produced conclusive criteria.	Cultural recognition remains dynamic: the presence of 22 scheduled languages does not exhaust India's linguistic aspirations. **Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, PIB, 22 July 2026.**
30 July 2026	**The New Indian Express** reported, citing official documents, that the Central Water Commission had returned Karnataka's revised **Mekedatu** detailed project report on 29 June for alterations because its proposed consumptive use did not conform to the Cauvery award and the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment.	The need for agreed scientific information, legal compliance and consultation persists even where water-sharing decisions and implementing institutions already exist. **Source: The New Indian Express, 30 July 2026.**

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2.2 The skill UPSC keeps testing

Across the examination papers, UPSC has repeatedly moved between **India's centralising constitutional structure**, **cooperative federalism**, **judicial settlement of competence disputes**, **regional autonomy**, **fiscal accommodation** and **mechanisms for resolving conflict**. The 2026 question requires all these threads to be brought together around the distinctive problem of cultural diversity. The questions below are reproduced verbatim, with their original question numbers.

Year	The question as UPSC set it	What it asked of you	What changed in 2026
2013 GS II, Q6	Constitutional mechanisms to resolve the inter-state water disputes have failed to address and solve the problems. Is the failure due to structural or process inadequacy or both ? Discuss.	Diagnose defects in water-dispute resolution.	Reform of dispute resolution now sits alongside regional accommodation and asymmetry.
2014 GS II, Q2	Though the federal principle is dominant in our Constitution and that principle is one of its basic features, but it is equally true that federalism under the Indian Constitution leans in favour of a strong Centre, a feature that militates against the concept of strong federalism. Discuss.	Assess the centralising bias of Indian federalism.	The question now asks whether that framework nevertheless accommodates differentiated identities.
2015 GS II, Q2	The concept of cooperative federalism has been increasingly emphasized in recent years. Highlight the drawbacks in the existing structure and the extent to which cooperative federalism would answer the shortcomings.	Connect structural deficiencies with cooperative remedies.	Apply cooperative federalism to concrete dispute-resolution institutions.
2019 GS II, Q4	From the resolution of contentious issues regarding distribution of legislative powers by the courts, 'Principle of Federal Supremacy' and 'Harmonious Construction' have emerged. Explain.	Explain judicial principles for legislative competence disputes.	Distinguish those constitutional doctrines from negotiation and specialised statutory dispute resolution.
2022 GS II, Q13	"While the national political parties in India favour centralisation, the regional parties are in favour of State autonomy." Comment.	Examine political competition over centralisation and autonomy.	Look beyond parties to the constitutional accommodation of ethnic, linguistic and regional aspirations.
2023 GS II, Q15	Explain the significance of the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act. To what extent does it reflect the accommodative spirit of federalism ?	Test accommodation through the GST constitutional framework.	Consider whether differentiated arrangements and consultative institutions make accommodation durable.
2024 GS II, Q13	What changes has the Union Government recently introduced in the domain of Centre-State relations ? Suggest measures to be adopted to build the trust between the Centre and the States and for strengthening federalism.	Analyse recent relations and propose trust-building measures.	Federal trust becomes the condition for preserving diversity and enforcing settlements.
2025 GS II, Q14	Examine the evolving pattern of Centre-State financial relations in the context of planned development in India. How far have the recent reforms impacted the fiscal federalism in India?	Evaluate the evolution and effects of fiscal federalism.	Financial autonomy is now a necessary support for differentiated political and cultural autonomy.

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Also related, verbatim: 2026 GS II, Q11: "Discuss the position of the Governor in the federal polity of India. What is the nature of his power while giving assent to a bill passed by the State Legislature ? Is he bound by the aid and advice of his Council of Ministers in all his functions ?" The same paper examines another important source of friction in Centre-State relations.

CARRY THIS METHOD TO ANY "FEDERAL ACCOMMODATION" QUESTION

1. **Identify** the diversity or regional aspiration the Constitution is asked to accommodate.
2. **Show** the ordinary federal arrangement and, where relevant, the differentiated arrangement.
3. **Test** the outcome against actual recognition, autonomy, resources and democratic inclusion.
4. **Distinguish** political consultation, adjudication and implementation when conflicts arise.
5. **Conclude** on the constitutional principle that reconciles diversity with equal citizenship and federal trust.

2.3 What to prepare next

CONSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Articles 1 and 3	Union of States and alteration of State boundaries. Article 3 requires reference to the affected State Legislature for its views, not its consent.
Articles 245 and 246; Seventh Schedule	Territorial legislative competence and Union, State and Concurrent Lists.
Articles 29, 30, 345, 350A and 350B	Cultural and educational rights, State official languages, mother-tongue instruction safeguards and linguistic minorities.
Article 244; Fifth and Sixth Schedules	Different forms of administration and protection for Scheduled Areas and specified northeastern tribal areas.
Articles 371A to 371J	Different special arrangements for particular States and regions; not one uniform form of autonomy.
Articles 131, 262 and 263	Supreme Court original jurisdiction, special treatment of river-water disputes and intergovernmental consultation.
Article 279A and Article 280	GST Council and Finance Commission; two distinct forms of fiscal cooperation.

IDEAS AND DISTINCTIONS

Symmetric versus asymmetric federalism	Whether constituent units have broadly identical constitutional powers or constitutionally differentiated protections and institutions.
Territorial versus non-territorial recognition	Autonomous territorial institutions versus cultural, educational and linguistic rights that protect communities wherever applicable.
Political autonomy versus fiscal capacity	Authority over a subject does not by itself guarantee staff, resources or institutional capacity to exercise it.
Shared rule and self-rule	Participation in Union-wide decisions alongside meaningful decision-making within States or regions.
Consultation versus adjudication	Negotiated outcomes depend on consent; adjudication produces a legal decision under a defined jurisdiction.
Internal minorities	Communities within autonomous areas may have distinct identities and rights of their own.
Constitutional equality	Equal citizenship does not demand identical regional institutions, but fundamental rights remain a central constraint.

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3 Additional information

Everything needed to answer this question well. Tier 1 follows the question's three explicit demands and its constitutional conclusion. Tier 2 develops the wider questions of identity, territorial autonomy, institutional design and federal trust.

TIER 1 · ESSENTIAL: ACCOMMODATION, ASYMMETRY AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The constitutional logic: how diversity becomes self-government

Recognise language, culture and identity → **Empower** States and autonomous institutions → **Negotiate** overlapping interests and disputes → **Review** rights, resources and implementation

A teaching flow, not a constitutionally prescribed procedure. Recognition, self-government, consultation and accountability are complementary elements of a functioning federal settlement.

1. How far has the federal framework accommodated diversity?

Dimension	Constitutional design and actual experience	Assessment
ACCOMMODATION THROUGH STATEHOOD, REPRESENTATION AND CULTURAL RIGHTS		
Territorial recognition	The **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, reorganised States substantially along linguistic lines. Later formations, including Nagaland (1963), Mizoram (1987) and Telangana (2014), responded to distinctive regional circumstances and aspirations. Article 3 enables Parliament to create States and alter their boundaries.	**Major achievement:** regional aspirations can obtain political recognition within the Union rather than only through demands for separation. Statehood, however, does not automatically resolve internal regional inequalities.
Representative self-government	Part VI and the Seventh Schedule provide for elected State governments with specified legislative responsibilities. The 73rd and 74th Amendments create constitutional institutions of local self-government, subject to their applicable constitutional arrangements.	Federalism disperses political power, but State and local autonomy depend on actual legislative, financial and administrative devolution.
Linguistic recognition	The **Eighth Schedule recognises 22 languages**. Article 345 permits a State Legislature to adopt one or more languages in use in the State, or Hindi, for official purposes, subject to constitutional conditions. Articles 350A and 350B provide safeguards relating to linguistic minorities.	Multilingual governance reduces pressure for cultural uniformity. Demands for recognition of additional languages and provision of public services in minority languages continue.
Fundamental cultural rights	**Article 29(1)** protects the right of a section of citizens with a distinct language, script or culture to conserve it. Article 30 protects religious and linguistic minorities' right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.	These protections are not limited to groups controlling a State government. They help preserve cultural diversity within States as well as across them.
Tribal protections	The Fifth Schedule provides a distinct administrative framework for Scheduled Areas in specified States; the Sixth Schedule gives legislatively defined self-governing powers to councils in certain northeastern tribal areas.	Recognition of customary and territorial institutions advances self-government, although funding, administrative capacity and competing claims remain important limitations.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Dimension	Constitutional design and actual experience	Assessment
EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS, AND THE LIMITS OF THAT SUCCESS		
Bodo settlement, 2020	The Third Bodo Accord sought to strengthen the **Bodoland Territorial Council** and protect Bodo identity while remaining within Assam. The Ministry of Home Affairs reported implementation of major provisions in 2023, including institutions supporting Bodo education and welfare.	A substantial example of negotiated accommodation. It demonstrates progress but does not establish that every territorial, resource or intercommunity concern has disappeared.
Assam-Meghalaya, 2022	The two States negotiated an agreement covering **six of twelve** areas of their boundary dispute.	Federal bargaining can produce partial, implementable settlements. The remaining disputes show why continuing institutional consultation is necessary.
Water and territorial disputes	The Cauvery dispute required a tribunal award, Supreme Court consideration in 2018 and the establishment of the **Cauvery Water Management Authority** and **Cauvery Water Regulation Committee**. The Pennaiyar dispute required a fresh tribunal direction in February 2026.	Institutions exist, but sustained disagreement over shared resources exposes weaknesses in negotiation, timely adjudication and implementation.
Fiscal and political tensions	States differ in revenue capacity and expenditure responsibilities. The Sixteenth Finance Commission's **41% vertical tax-devolution recommendation**, accepted in February 2026, addresses the Union-State share of the divisible pool, not the whole question of State fiscal autonomy.	A balanced verdict is necessary: political recognition has been more extensive than the resolution of every financial and administrative grievance.

What makes the record substantially successful. India has permitted successive territorial reorganisations, multiple official languages, elected governments at different levels, cultural and educational protections and differentiated forms of tribal autonomy. These are institutional mechanisms for maintaining diversity within one Union.

Why the record is not complete. Accommodation sometimes shifts disputes downward: a regional majority may become the dominant group within a State or autonomous area. Recognition must therefore be accompanied by protection of internal minorities, adequate resources and meaningful dispute-resolution mechanisms.

2. Asymmetric federalism: what is different, and why it matters

Asymmetric federalism means that the constitutional relationship between the Union and its constituent units, or between States and specially protected regions, is **not identical everywhere**. It is not an exception to federalism but one method of accommodating distinctive historical, cultural, tribal, geographical or developmental circumstances. India's asymmetry is plural: some provisions protect customary law, some establish territorial councils, and others provide special administrative or developmental arrangements.

Constitutional basis	Differentiated arrangement	Contribution and limitation
Article 371A: Nagaland	Acts of Parliament concerning specified **Naga religious or social practices, customary law and procedure, customary-law-based administration of civil and criminal justice, and ownership and transfer of land and its resources** do not apply to Nagaland unless its Legislative Assembly resolves otherwise. The Article also contains additional provisions relating to the Governor and particular areas.	**Contribution:** identity protection through a constitutionally specified consent requirement. **Limit:** the protection covers defined subjects, not every parliamentary law or an unrestricted State veto.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Constitutional basis	Differentiated arrangement	Contribution and limitation
Article 371G: Mizoram	Provides a comparable Legislative Assembly consent safeguard for parliamentary laws concerning specified Mizo religious or social practices, customary law, customary-law-based justice and **ownership and transfer of land**, subject to its express transitional proviso.	Protects historically important institutions and land relationships. Unlike Article 371A, its protected land category does not expressly include the words **"and its resources"**.
Article 371F: Sikkim	Contains special constitutional arrangements associated with Sikkim's incorporation into the Union in 1975, including provisions relating to legislative representation, protection of the rights and interests of different sections of its population and continuity of existing laws subject to constitutional conditions.	Demonstrates how a distinct historical transition can be accommodated without requiring identical constitutional arrangements across States.
Articles 371B and 371C	Provide respectively for a committee of the Assam Legislative Assembly concerning tribal areas, and special arrangements concerning hill areas of Manipur, including a legislative committee and specified gubernatorial responsibilities.	Recognise that cultural and territorial demands can exist **within** a State, not only between States.
Articles 371D and 371J	Article 371D provides special arrangements concerning equitable opportunities and facilities in public employment and education in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Article 371J addresses the special developmental and representational needs of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, now commonly called Kalyana Karnataka.	Asymmetry can address **intra-State regional disparities**, not merely ethnocultural identity.
Sixth Schedule, Article 244(2)	Provides for autonomous districts and, where applicable, autonomous regions in specified tribal areas of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**. District and Regional Councils have enumerated legislative, administrative and judicial functions, subject to the Schedule's conditions.	Local institutions can regulate specified matters such as customary practices, land and village administration. Their powers are **enumerated and conditional**, not the unrestricted powers of State legislatures.
Fifth Schedule, Article 244(1)	Provides a distinct framework for Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in States to which it applies, including gubernatorial regulatory powers and Tribes Advisory Councils. It is complemented in applicable areas by the **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**.	Provides protective administration and participatory safeguards but must not be confused with the Sixth Schedule's autonomous district council system.

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The Sixth Schedule in practice

State	Autonomous council examples	What candidates should notice
Assam	Bodoland Territorial Council; Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council; North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, also known as Dima Hasao Autonomous Council.	Autonomy can operate within a larger, linguistically and ethnically diverse State.
Meghalaya	Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills Autonomous District Councils.	Cultural and customary-law protection can coexist with elected State institutions, producing questions of overlapping jurisdiction.
Tripura	Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.	Sub-State territorial recognition protects tribal political participation within a State with a different overall population composition.
Mizoram	Lai, Mara and Chakma Autonomous District Councils.	Special protection for the broader Mizo identity under Article 371G coexists with separate recognition of minority tribal communities.

These are the ten councils listed by the Ministry of Home Affairs under the Sixth Schedule. The number is an institutional count, not the number of States covered. Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Lok Sabha reply, 11 August 2015; constitutional coverage verified against the Sixth Schedule.

A contemporary test: Frontier Nagaland, 2026

Stage	Verified development	Its constitutional significance
Demand	Representatives of eastern Nagaland sought a distinct institutional arrangement to address developmental inequalities and cultural and regional aspirations.	Regional demands may emerge inside an already specially protected State.
Agreement, 5 February 2026	The Union, State and Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation agreed on a proposed **Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority**, covering Tuensang, Mon, Longleng, Kiphire, Noklak and Shamator and envisaging devolution in respect of 46 subjects.	Accommodation through negotiated decentralisation rather than immediate creation of another State.
Bill, March 2026	A proposed State law was introduced, but the Nagaland Government deferred its passage following questions concerning the legality of conferring legislative powers on the authority.	The scope of autonomous power cannot be settled by political agreement alone; the legal source of the power matters.
Government position, 6 July 2026	The Nagaland Government explained the deferral and the need for further constitutional consultation with the Union.	At the relevant pre-examination date, the agreement and the proposed institution had to be distinguished from an enacted and operating legal arrangement.

Sources: Ministry of Home Affairs, PIB, 5 February 2026; Government of Nagaland, Department of Information and Public Relations, 27 March and 6 July 2026. The chronology above records the pre-examination position. Post-examination update: a revised FNTA Bill was passed by the Nagaland Legislative Assembly on 3 September 2026 and received presidential assent on 25 October 2026. Under the Act, commencement requires a separate State Government Gazette notification.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

What asymmetric federalism contributes, and what it cannot do alone

Distinct contribution	How it works	Qualification
Recognition without uniformity	Constitutional institutions can protect customary practices or regional interests while remaining within India's constitutional framework.	Protection must operate within the relevant constitutional limits.
Political integration	Negotiated powers and guarantees create an alternative to treating every regional aspiration as a demand for separation.	A settlement's legitimacy requires continuing consent and credible implementation.
Locally informed government	Institutions closer to a community can reflect customary practices, language and local developmental priorities.	Representation of women, smaller tribes and other internal minorities cannot be presumed.
Conflict management	Territorial councils, special provisions and negotiated agreements can institutionalise claims before they become larger constitutional conflicts.	Overlapping jurisdictions, uncertain funds and unimplemented agreements can produce new disputes.
Unequal needs, differentiated tools	Different historical and developmental circumstances justify different institutional responses.	Asymmetry must be reasoned and accountable; it should not be confused with arbitrary political preference.

3. Which mechanisms resolve which disputes?

Mechanism	Constitutional or statutory role	Present weakness and reform direction
Inter-State Council Article 263	The President may establish a council to inquire into and advise on disputes, discuss matters of common interest and recommend improved policy coordination. The Inter-State Council was established in **1990**.	It is an advisory and consultative forum, **not a binding court or tribunal**. Improve regularity, agenda-setting, ministerial follow-up and public reporting on accepted recommendations.
Zonal Councils States Reorganisation Act, 1956	Statutory regional consultative forums for participating States and Union Territories. They address issues such as inter-State coordination, administrative problems and regional cooperation.	Make better use of standing committees, tracked action points and structured negotiations. Do not describe Zonal Councils as institutions created by Article 263.
Supreme Court Article 131	Confers exclusive original jurisdiction over specified disputes between the Union and States or between States, where the existence or extent of a legal right is in issue, subject to constitutional limitations.	Reserve judicial determination for justiciable issues, distinguish it from political bargaining and use effective compliance mechanisms. Article 131 is not a general route for every administrative disagreement.
River-water tribunals Article 262 and the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956	Article 262 authorises parliamentary legislation for adjudication of inter-State river-water disputes and permits exclusion of court jurisdiction. The 1956 Act supplies a special tribunal mechanism, with negotiation preceding reference.	Reduce delays in referral and adjudication; strengthen independent hydrological evidence, implementation arrangements and compliance monitoring.
Water-management institutions Cauvery example	The **Cauvery Water Management Authority** and **Cauvery Water Regulation Committee** were constituted under the scheme notified on 1 June 2018 to implement the modified Cauvery award.	Ongoing operation requires reliable flow data, regular coordination and enforceable implementation rather than one-time adjudication alone.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Mechanism	Constitutional or statutory role	Present weakness and reform direction
GST Council Article 279A	A constitutional intergovernmental forum for GST-related recommendations. Article 279A(11) requires the Council to establish a mechanism for adjudicating specified disputes arising out of its recommendations or their implementation.	Greater transparency, consultation and a workable dispute mechanism can support fiscal trust. Do not conflate this mechanism with water tribunals or Article 131.
Finance Commission Article 280	Recommends tax devolution and specified grants and related financial measures. The Sixteenth Finance Commission's 41% recommendation concerns the States' vertical share of the divisible pool.	Fiscal grievances require predictable transfers, transparent criteria and consultation. The Finance Commission is not a general constitutional court for Centre-State disputes.
Negotiated settlements Executive and political processes	Intergovernmental agreements, regional negotiations and peace settlements can address political or identity-based disputes where adversarial litigation is insufficient.	Agreements need clearly defined responsibilities, legally competent authorities, funding arrangements, milestones and monitoring.

The Pennaiyar judgment: when consultation must give way to adjudication

In **State of Tamil Nadu v. State of Karnataka**, decided on **2 February 2026** (2026 INSC 113), Tamil Nadu had challenged Karnataka's alleged construction of check dams and diversion works affecting flows in the Pennaiyar basin. Efforts at negotiation had not produced a mutually acceptable settlement. The Supreme Court explained that, when the statutory negotiations no longer offer a settlement and the conditions of Section 4 of the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956** are met, constitution of a tribunal is mandatory. It directed the Union to notify and constitute the tribunal within one month.

What the Court decided. The statutory process could not be held in indefinite suspension after failed negotiations. The Union was directed to constitute the adjudicatory forum, with substantive issues left open for that forum.

What it did not decide. The Court did not finally allocate Pennaiyar waters or pronounce on every factual allegation concerning the challenged projects. A direction to constitute a tribunal is **not** an award resolving the underlying dispute.

Reform agenda: match each institutional defect to a remedy

Problem	Practical measure	How it improves resolution
Reactive consultation	Hold regular Inter-State Council and Zonal Council meetings with advance circulation of position papers, joint agendas and recorded follow-up.	Creates opportunities for early settlement before disputes become entrenched.
Unclear institutional ownership	Assign one lead institution, participating governments, milestones and an escalation route for each intergovernmental disagreement.	Prevents disputes being passed indefinitely between departments and governments.
Failed negotiations without referral	Enforce statutory referral obligations where applicable; use fixed administrative processing standards and transparent reasons for delay.	Makes the transition from consultation to adjudication timely and credible.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Problem	Practical measure	How it improves resolution
Conflicting technical evidence	Create jointly accessible river-basin datasets, independent hydrological assessments, common monitoring protocols and transparent disclosure of assumptions.	Separates disagreements over evidence from disagreements over political entitlement.
Weak tribunal capacity	Provide adequate judicial and technical staffing, case management, expert assistance and published procedural schedules.	Reduces preventable delay without predetermining adjudicatory outcomes.
Non-compliance after settlement	Provide implementation plans, measurable obligations, monitoring bodies and periodic compliance reviews.	Transforms a judicial award or negotiated agreement into an operational settlement.
Low regional participation	Consult autonomous councils, local bodies and affected communities where disputes concern land, culture or resources, consistent with applicable law.	Improves legitimacy and captures interests that State-level bargaining may overlook.
Fiscal mistrust	Publish comparable fiscal and scheme data, consult States during policy design and clarify funding responsibilities when functions are devolved.	Reduces conflict created by unfunded obligations and unpredictable implementation.
Identity disputes treated as technical files	Combine constitutional safeguards with facilitated political dialogue, minority protections and scheduled reviews of negotiated commitments.	Addresses recognition and representation, which adjudication alone may not resolve.

These reforms are recommendations derived from the institutional design and the cases above. They are not claims that the Constitution or an enacted law already mandates every proposed step.

4. Balancing diversity, constitutional equality and federal trust

Principle	What it requires	Why it matters
Differentiation with justification	Special constitutional arrangements should answer identifiable cultural, historical or developmental circumstances.	Different arrangements need not compromise equal constitutional citizenship.
Autonomy with accountability	Local institutions require enforceable powers, funding, transparent decisions and meaningful representation.	Recognition is incomplete if institutions cannot govern or exclude parts of their own population.
Negotiation with legal certainty	Governments should bargain sincerely, respect applicable legal limits and implement settlements through constitutionally competent bodies.	Trust cannot be sustained by agreements that remain unenforceable or unimplemented.
Unity without uniformity	Maintain common fundamental rights and constitutional supremacy while respecting legitimate differentiated self-government.	Federal integration becomes more durable when diversity is recognised rather than administratively suppressed.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

TIER 2 · EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING: THE WHOLE TOPIC AROUND IT

Where accommodation has worked

1. **Constitutionalised regional identity:** linguistic reorganisation made regional political representation compatible with the Indian Union.
2. **Protected cultural rights:** Articles 29 and 30 preserve important non-territorial safeguards for distinct groups and minorities.
3. **Specialised autonomy:** Articles 371A and 371G and Sixth Schedule councils protect specified local institutions and customary practices.
4. **Negotiated settlements:** the Bodo Accord and Assam-Meghalaya boundary agreement show how political negotiation can support integration.
5. **Institutional cooperation:** Zonal Councils and specialised water-management bodies provide continuing channels for coordination beyond individual court cases.

Where accommodation remains incomplete

1. **Territorial recognition is not final:** demands for further regional autonomy continue even within specially protected States, as eastern Nagaland illustrates.
2. **Power is not always matched by resources:** autonomous institutions may face limited financial and administrative capacity.
3. **Overlapping authorities:** State governments, autonomous councils and customary institutions may disagree about jurisdiction.
4. **Internal minorities:** a territorial majority's autonomy may fail to reflect the aspirations of smaller linguistic or tribal communities.
5. **Dispute fatigue:** prolonged water, boundary and administrative conflicts can erode trust even where formal resolution mechanisms exist.

Three distinctions that deepen the analysis

Distinction	The precise constitutional reading	Application
Statehood is not the same as autonomy	Article 3 permits Parliament to alter the federal map. Special provisions and autonomous councils may provide differentiated powers without creating a State.	Telangana's creation in 2014 and the proposed Frontier Nagaland arrangement answer regional aspirations through different institutional routes.
Fifth Schedule is not Sixth Schedule	The Fifth Schedule principally provides protective administration of Scheduled Areas, while the Sixth Schedule establishes specified autonomous district and regional councils with enumerated functions.	Neither the existence of tribal populations nor a State's northeastern location automatically establishes Sixth Schedule coverage.
Judicial resolution is not political reconciliation	A tribunal can determine legally justiciable water claims; it cannot by itself create cultural recognition, representative institutions or political consent.	Pennaiyar requires statutory adjudication after failed negotiations; Frontier Nagaland requires constitutionally valid political and legislative implementation.

The wider constitutional tension: central strength and State autonomy

India's Constitution combines a **strong Union** with the constitutional status of States. Parliament's power under Article 3, Union legislative predominance in specified circumstances and emergency provisions demonstrate that the federation is not organised on the assumption of equal sovereign units. But the Supreme Court has also affirmed the importance of the **federal structure as part of the Constitution's basic structure**, notably in **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)**. In its 11 May 2023 Delhi Constitution Bench judgment, the Supreme Court reiterated that States are not mere appendages of the Union within their allotted constitutional spheres. The relevant question is therefore not whether the Union must be weak, but whether central powers are exercised consistently with the constitutionally assigned space for representative State government.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

Fiscal autonomy and the difference between transfer and control

Article 280's Finance Commission framework supports vertical and horizontal fiscal redistribution. The **Sixteenth Finance Commission's 41%** recommendation, accepted on 1 February 2026, concerns the vertical share of the **divisible pool of Union taxes**. It should not be presented as 41% of all Union receipts or as a measure of total State autonomy. For culturally differentiated institutions, the more specific question is whether funds, staff and decision-making powers accompany assigned responsibilities. A tribal council that has authority over local services but insufficient budgetary control may have **formal autonomy without adequate operational capacity**.

Why recognition must extend to minorities within minorities

The protection of a region's identity does not settle every question of representation inside that region. Mizoram provides an instructive example: Article 371G protects specified Mizo practices, while the Sixth Schedule separately recognises the **Lai, Mara and Chakma** autonomous councils. This reflects the layered character of cultural diversity. More broadly, reforms should consider fair representation, access to education and public institutions, transparent administration, women's participation and protection against discrimination. **The aim is not to abolish differentiated protections but to prevent them from becoming unaccountable concentrations of power.**

Institutional design: why agreements need enforceable machinery

A negotiated settlement is often only the first stage of successful accommodation. Its durability depends on whether the parties have agreed on the **legal source of power, boundaries of jurisdiction, financing, administrative responsibility, mechanisms for resolving future disagreements and independent monitoring**. The March and July 2026 developments in the Frontier Nagaland process demonstrate this problem unusually clearly. A political agreement envisaging legislative devolution must still be translated into constitutionally competent legislation and institutions. Conversely, adjudication must be followed by implementation: the Cauvery framework demonstrates the need for continuing management arrangements after an award.

Two debates worth knowing

Does asymmetric federalism advance equality or undermine it?

One view holds that differentiated constitutional guarantees correct the disadvantage experienced by culturally distinct or historically marginalised regions. Uniform legal arrangements can produce unequal practical outcomes where identities and institutions differ. The opposing concern is that special protections may entrench local elites, produce competing claims for preferential treatment or leave smaller groups within autonomous areas inadequately represented. The balanced constitutional position is that **justified differentiation and equal citizenship are compatible**, provided fundamental rights, democratic accountability and meaningful participation remain protected.

Should federal disputes be settled politically or judicially?

Negotiation permits flexible solutions, protects relationships and can consider questions of identity, development and shared resources together. Adjudication provides legal certainty when rights are contested or bargaining fails. But exclusive reliance on either creates problems: negotiation can become indefinite delay, while litigation may produce an award without durable political cooperation. The Pennaiyar judgment illustrates the transition from failed negotiation to statutory adjudication. The balanced approach is **consult first where appropriate, adjudicate when legally necessary, and monitor implementation throughout**.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

4 Pitfalls and variations

The mistakes that weaken this answer, the factual claims to avoid, and how the structure must change if UPSC alters the directive or focus.

4.1 Six pitfalls, each with its correction

Provisions without a verdict

~~India has linguistic States, 22 scheduled languages and Articles 371A to 371J.~~

Assess the outcome: substantial recognition and integration, but persistent disputes, uneven autonomy and regional grievances.

Confusing diversity with asymmetry

~~Every State has its own language, so Indian federalism is asymmetric.~~

Ordinary State differences are not necessarily constitutional asymmetry. Identify the distinctive constitutional powers or protections.

Overstating special powers

~~Nagaland and Mizoram can reject all laws made by Parliament.~~

Articles 371A and 371G protect specified subject matters through a Legislative Assembly resolution requirement, with materially different wording.

Ignoring minorities within autonomous regions

~~Granting autonomy to the dominant regional community automatically protects everyone's identity.~~

Discuss smaller tribes, linguistic minorities, representation, fundamental rights and accountability within autonomous areas.

Treating all dispute forums as identical

~~The Inter-State Council, Zonal Councils, Supreme Court and water tribunals all settle disputes in the same way.~~

Distinguish advisory consultation, statutory coordination, constitutional adjudication and specialised water-dispute tribunals.

Reforms without institutional detail

~~Strengthen cooperative federalism and promote dialogue between States.~~

Specify regular councils, timely statutory referral, shared technical data, empowered tribunals, implementation monitoring and inclusion of affected communities.

4.2 Never write these

- "The Sixth Schedule applies to all northeastern States."
  It applies to specified tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, not uniformly throughout the Northeast.
- "Article 371A gives Nagaland power to veto any Union legislation."
  Its non-application safeguard concerns four defined subject categories and requires a resolution of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly for the specified parliamentary laws to apply.
- "Articles 371A and 371G contain exactly identical land protections."
  Article 371A refers to ownership and transfer of land and its resources; Article 371G refers to ownership and transfer of land.
- "The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority was fully established by the February 2026 agreement."
  The agreement envisaged its creation. The March Bill was deferred, and the State Government was still pursuing constitutionally viable legislation in July 2026, before the examination.
- "The Supreme Court resolved the Pennaiyar water dispute in February 2026."
  It directed the constitution of a statutory tribunal after failed negotiations. The substantive water-sharing claims remained for adjudication.
- "Zonal Councils are established under Article 263."
  They are statutory institutions under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. Article 263 concerns an Inter-State Council.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

- "Article 131 gives the Supreme Court unrestricted jurisdiction over every inter-State river-water dispute."
  Article 262 and the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, establish a specialised statutory scheme and jurisdictional restrictions.
- "The 2019 Inter-State River Water Disputes Amendment Bill established a permanent tribunal."
  The Bill passed the Lok Sabha in 2019 but lapsed in 2024. Its proposed mechanism must not be presented as enacted law.
- "The Sixteenth Finance Commission recommended that States receive 41% of total Union revenue."
  The accepted recommendation concerns 41% of the divisible pool of Union taxes, not all Union revenue or cesses and surcharges outside that pool.
- "Article 3 requires the affected State Legislature's consent before Parliament changes State boundaries."
  The Constitution requires referral for the State Legislature's views, subject to Article 3's procedure; consent is not required.
- "Asymmetric federalism necessarily violates equality."
  Reasoned differential treatment can accommodate distinct circumstances, although its exercise remains subject to applicable constitutional rights and constraints.

4.3 If the question changes

If it asks	The structure becomes	What must change
Critically examine asymmetric federalism in India	Meaning and basis; forms of asymmetry; achievements; risks to equality and inclusion; reforms; judgment.	Place Articles 371A to 371J and the Fifth and Sixth Schedules at the centre. Ordinary federal arrangements become background.
Has **linguistic reorganisation** strengthened national integration?	Historical demand; the 1956 settlement; political inclusion; regional development; continuing linguistic minorities and territorial tensions.	Focus on linguistic State formation, not a general survey of special constitutional provisions.
Assess the functioning of **Sixth Schedule councils**	Constitutional basis; powers; achievements; council-State overlaps; financial capacity; internal minorities; reforms.	Analyse the four covered States and the enumerated council powers in detail.
Why do **inter-State water disputes** remain unresolved?	Article 262 and the 1956 Act; institutional and procedural defects; Cauvery and Pennaiyar; reforms to negotiation, adjudication and implementation.	Water tribunals and implementation mechanisms become the main focus; cultural accommodation is secondary.
Compare cooperative and competitive federalism	Definitions; institutions; examples; benefits and trade-offs; conditions for balanced federal relations.	Use the GST Council, Finance Commission, Inter-State Council and policy competition, rather than leading with asymmetry.
Evaluate Centre-State trust after recent constitutional disputes	Constitutional division of powers; gubernatorial disputes; judicial position; fiscal and policy tensions; consultation and accountability reforms.	Bring the November 2025 presidential reference and federal institutional practices into the foreground.
The same theme with **"Discuss"** rather than "How far"	Constitutional framework; forms of accommodation; asymmetric contribution; continuing problems; dispute-resolution measures.	Maintain both successes and problems, but a formal assessment of the precise extent of success becomes less central.
The same question for **10 marks**	One line of overall assessment; two success examples and one limitation; two asymmetry provisions; three targeted dispute-resolution reforms; verdict.	Compress examples and institutional detail while preserving all three explicit demands and the small hidden demand.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

5

The model answer

One model answer, written to the UPSC Gurus house range of 250 to 253 words (252 words including headings and labels; UPSC's printed limit is 250 words). The form follows the question's three demands: a balanced assessment of accommodation, a distinct explanation of asymmetric federalism, and institution-specific dispute-resolution reforms. A short final part addresses constitutional equality and federal trust. The introduction covers the whole question; the conclusion settles its demand.

Model answer **A balanced assessment, headed points and institutional reforms** **252 words**

India's federal framework combines national unity with regional self-government, cultural safeguards and negotiated accommodation. It has largely absorbed diversity, although territorial, fiscal and resource disputes reveal unfinished federalism.

1. Success and limits

Linguistic reorganisation in 1956 brought regional aspirations into elected State institutions. Articles 29 and 30 protect cultural and educational rights; the Eighth Schedule recognises 22 languages. Statehood and tribal autonomy have strengthened participation, while the 2020 Bodo Accord illustrates negotiated integration. Yet persistent water disputes, uneven devolution and minorities within autonomous regions temper this achievement.

2. Asymmetric federalism

Constitutional differentiation recognises needs that uniform arrangements cannot address. Article 371A protects specified Naga customary practices and land rights; Article 371G provides corresponding safeguards for Mizoram. The Sixth Schedule establishes autonomous councils in specified tribal areas of four northeastern States. These arrangements preserve identities within the Union, but overlapping jurisdictions, limited resources and unequal representation can weaken their promise.

3. More effective dispute resolution

- **Consultation:** Convene the Inter-State Council regularly; give Zonal Councils tracked agendas and follow-up.
- **Adjudication:** Ensure timely tribunal constitution under the 1956 water-disputes law, independent technical evidence and predictable procedures. The Pennaiyar ruling (2026) shows why failed negotiations cannot justify indefinite delay.
- **Implementation:** Use shared, validated basin data, transparent compliance reviews, facilitated mediation and participation by affected communities.

4. Equality and trust

Protect fundamental rights and internal minorities while financing meaningful regional autonomy.

India therefore needs differentiated self-government alongside reliable intergovernmental institutions: unity survives not through uniformity, but through accountable autonomy and credible, timely and fair settlement of disputes.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

DEMAND
Assess the success and limits of accommodating diversity, highlight the distinct contribution of asymmetric federalism, and suggest practical dispute-resolution reforms

HIDDEN DEMAND
Justified differentiated autonomy must preserve equal citizenship, protect internal minorities and sustain trust between governments

STRUCTURE
About three-tenths each on success, asymmetric federalism and dispute-resolution reforms, followed by a short final part on equality and federal trust

BALANCE
Introduction 28 words, conclusion 26 words; 252 words in all

Why it works: The introduction addresses national unity, regional autonomy and unresolved federal tensions together. Part 1 gives a qualified verdict on accommodation, grounding success in linguistic reorganisation, cultural rights and the Bodo Accord while identifying continuing weaknesses. Part 2 explains the distinct constitutional logic of asymmetric federalism through Articles 371A and 371G and the Sixth Schedule, then tests its effectiveness. Part 3 gives three practical routes to stronger dispute resolution, distinguishing political consultation, statutory adjudication and implementation, with the Supreme Court's February 2026 Pennaiyar ruling as evidence. Part 4 answers the hidden demand through equal citizenship and meaningful autonomy. The conclusion reconciles differentiated self-government with constitutional unity and federal trust. The model answer contains 252 words under the source-text count, including section numerals, headings and labels.

6 Other ways to write it

The model answer above remains the answer. These outlines show how a different, equally valid answer could be built, and when each choice works.

Approach	How it is built	When it works
Accommodation-outcome matrix	A compact table links linguistic reorganisation, cultural rights and tribal autonomy to achievements and unresolved tensions. A separate headed part explains asymmetry, followed by institution-specific dispute-resolution reforms.	When you want to demonstrate the extent of success through evidence rather than a constitutional article list.
Constitutional architecture first	Open with Articles 3, 29 and 30 and the Seventh and Eighth Schedules; assess their outcomes; explain Articles 371A and 371G and the Sixth Schedule; close with reforms to consultative and adjudicatory institutions.	When your strongest material is constitutional and you can keep the evaluative judgment visible throughout.
Case-led assessment	Use linguistic reorganisation, the 2020 Bodo Accord and the proposed 2026 Frontier Nagaland arrangement to illustrate different modes of accommodation. Identify achievements and limits, then match disputes to institutional reforms.	When contemporary examples are well recalled and accurately distinguished as enacted arrangements, agreements or proposals.
Institutions-and-reforms answer	Keep the first two parts concise. In the third, use a small matrix: Inter-State Council and Zonal Councils for consultation; tribunals for adjudication; technical bodies for evidence; monitoring mechanisms for implementation.	When the reform dimension is your strongest contribution, while still allocating adequate space to the first two demands.
Equality-versus-differentiation lens	Assess whether uniform institutions can represent diverse identities; show how justified constitutional asymmetry provides recognition; examine internal minorities and resource dependence; propose negotiated, rights-compliant solutions.	When you want to bring the hidden demand into the reasoning without allowing it to displace the three explicit demands.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

7 Quick recall and Prelims crossover

Sixteen verified facts for rapid revision and Prelims, spanning constitutional provisions, institutional arrangements and significant developments before the 2026 examination.

1. **Article 1:** India, that is Bharat, shall be a **Union of States**.
2. **Article 3:** Parliament may form new States or alter boundaries; the affected State Legislature's **views, not consent**, are required through the prescribed reference procedure.
3. **Articles 29 and 30:** protect specified cultural, linguistic and minority educational rights; Article 29(1) covers any qualifying section of citizens.
4. **Eighth Schedule: 22 languages**; the 92nd Constitutional Amendment added Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santali.
5. **Article 371A:** protects four specified categories concerning Naga practices, customary law, customary-law-based justice, and land **and its resources**.
6. **Article 371G:** provides Assembly-resolution safeguards for specified Mizo practices, customary law, customary-law-based justice, and ownership and transfer of **land**.
7. **Sixth Schedule:** applies to specified tribal areas of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**, with **10** autonomous district councils listed in a Ministry of Home Affairs reply on 11 August 2015.
8. **Sixteenth Finance Commission: 41%** vertical share of divisible Union taxes recommended for 2026 to 2031, accepted by the Government on **1 February 2026**.
9. **Article 263:** enables the President to establish an **Inter-State Council**; the existing Council was established on **28 May 1990**.
10. **Zonal Councils:** statutory bodies under the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, not Article 263 institutions.
11. **Article 131:** Supreme Court's exclusive original jurisdiction over specified Union-State and inter-State disputes involving legal rights, subject to constitutional limitations.
12. **Article 262:** permits special legislation for inter-State river-water disputes; the **1956 Act** provides for tribunals and associated procedures.
13. **Pennaiyar judgment: 2 February 2026**, 2026 INSC 113; Supreme Court directed tribunal constitution after unsuccessful negotiations.
14. **Assam-Meghalaya agreement: 29 March 2022**; settlement concerning **six of twelve** disputed boundary areas.
15. **Frontier Nagaland agreement: 5 February 2026**; proposed authority for **six districts**, envisaging devolution concerning **46 subjects**; implementation required legislation.
16. **Zonal Council record:** At the Northern Zonal Council meeting on **17 November 2025**, the Ministry reported **1,303 of 1,600 issues** resolved, stating the rate as **81.43%**.

THE ONE SENTENCE TO CARRY OUT OF THIS DOCUMENT

Indian federalism accommodates diversity most effectively when differentiated constitutional autonomy is supported by equal citizenship, meaningful resources and institutions that resolve disputes before they destroy trust.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

8 Write it yourself

Write the answer in 250 words without looking back, then check it against each line below.

	Check	Yes / No
1	Does the introduction address **regional and cultural diversity, differentiated accommodation and federal trust** together?	
2	Does Part 1 answer **"How far"** with a balanced assessment of constitutional achievements and continuing tensions, rather than simply naming provisions?	
3	Does Part 2 explain **what makes asymmetric federalism distinct**, using accurate provisions and showing how differentiated autonomy contributes to integration?	
4	Does Part 3 distinguish **consultation, adjudication and implementation**, and give specific, workable improvements to each?	
5	Is there a short final part explaining how **differentiated autonomy, constitutional equality and protection of internal minorities** can coexist?	
6	Does the conclusion give a **reasoned verdict** on accommodation and dispute resolution, at roughly the introduction's length?	
7	Is the answer **250 words or a little over**, counting headings and labels, with no factual or constitutional misconception from section 4.2?	

Sources

- **Constitution of India:** Ministry of Law and Justice, Legislative Department, official constitutional text, including Articles 1, 3, 29, 30, 131, 244, 245, 246, 262, 263, 279A, 280, 345, 350A, 350B and 371A to 371J; Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Schedules. Official text: legislative.gov.in. Particular attention was given to the different wording of Articles 371A and 371G, the scope of Article 3, and the territorial application of the Sixth Schedule.
- **Government of India:** States Reorganisation Act, 1956, particularly Part III concerning Zonal Councils; States Reorganisation Commission Report (1955). Official legislation available through India Code, indiacode.nic.in. The Act provides the statutory basis of the five Zonal Councils.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** Annual Report 2021-22, chapter 16, Inter-State Council, recording its establishment by Presidential Order dated 28 May 1990 and its consultative functions. Ministry of Home Affairs parliamentary information on Centre-State coordination, PIB release of 20 July 2022, PRID 1842780. These distinguish the existing Inter-State Council from the broader range of functions that Article 263 permits.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha material on autonomous district councils under the Sixth Schedule; Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2745, answered 4 August 2026, identifying **ten councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura** and their respective years of constitution. The constitutional scope is also verified against the Sixth Schedule as published by the Legislative Department.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** "Bodo Agreement", PIB, 27 January 2020, PRID 1600717; "Bodo Peace Accord", PIB, 9 March 2021, PRID 1703510; "Status of Implementation of Third Bodo Accord, 2020", Rajya Sabha reply, PIB, 5 April 2023, PRID 1913900. These document the agreement, proposed strengthening of the Bodoland Territorial Council and subsequently reported implementation measures.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** Government material concerning the Assam-Meghalaya Inter-State Boundary Agreement of 29 March 2022, including the PIB publication on northeastern peace agreements, March 2024. The agreement concerned six of twelve identified areas of difference and must not be treated as a settlement of all areas.

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities ? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** Agreement involving the Union Government, Nagaland Government and Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation, PIB, 5 February 2026, PRID 2224071. It records the proposed Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority covering six districts and devolution relating to 46 subjects.
- **Government of Nagaland, Department of Information and Public Relations:** Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio's statement to the Legislative Assembly on the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority Bill, 27 March 2026; and "Statement on the constitution of Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA)", 6 July 2026, ipr.nagaland.gov.in. These establish that the Bill introduced in March was deferred, with unresolved constitutional questions concerning legislative powers, and that further legislative action was being pursued as of July 2026.
- **Supreme Court of India: State of Tamil Nadu v. State of Karnataka and Another**, Original Suit No. 1 of 2018, judgment dated 2 February 2026, **2026 INSC 113**, particularly paragraphs 7 to 13. The Court directed the constitution of a Pennaiyar Water Disputes Tribunal after failed negotiations, without deciding the substantive claims. Official judgment: Supreme Court of India, 2026 INSC 113 (official judgment).
- **India Code:** Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, Act No. 33 of 1956, especially Sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 6A. **Ministry of Water Resources:** parliamentary replies on inter-State tribunals, PIB, 6 and 9 August 2018, including the Cauvery Water Management Scheme notified on 1 June 2018 and the constitution of the Cauvery Water Management Authority and Cauvery Water Regulation Committee.
- **PRS Legislative Research:** legislative tracking of the Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019. The Bill passed the Lok Sabha but remained pending and lapsed at the end of the Seventeenth Lok Sabha in 2024. Its proposed single permanent tribunal must not be treated as an enacted reform.
- **Supreme Court of India: S.R. Bommai v. Union of India**, (1994) 3 SCC 1, on federalism and the basic structure; Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India, Constitution Bench judgment of 11 May 2023, concerning representative government and the federal distribution of powers.
- **Supreme Court of India: State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu**, judgment of 8 April 2025; **In re: Assent, Withholding or Reservation of Bills by the Governor and the President of India**, Special Reference No. 1 of 2025, opinion dated 20 November 2025, **2025 INSC 1333**. The later advisory opinion rejects universally prescribed judicial timelines and deemed assent while recognising limited judicial intervention against prolonged inaction.
- **Sixteenth Finance Commission:** Report for 2026-27 to 2030-31, Volume I, and the Government's Explanatory Memorandum, fincomindia.nic.in. **Ministry of Finance:** Union Budget 2026-27 announcement, PIB, 1 February 2026, PRID 2221390, accepting the recommendation to retain States' vertical share of the divisible pool at 41%.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs:** Northern Zonal Council meeting, Faridabad, 17 November 2025, PIB, PRID 2190941. The Ministry reported that 1,303 of 1,600 issues discussed in Zonal Council meetings had been resolved; its published rate was 81.43%. This aggregate should not be interpreted as a settlement rate for every category of federal dispute.
- **Ministry of Tribal Affairs:** Rajya Sabha reply, "Inclusion of Gor Boli in the Eighth Schedule", PIB, 22 July 2026, PRID 2287692, concerning demands for further language recognition and the absence of fixed inclusion criteria. **Ministry of Home Affairs:** parliamentary statements on the 22 languages in the Eighth Schedule and the changes under the 92nd Constitutional Amendment.
- **The New Indian Express:** "Karnataka's Mekedatu DPR returned as CWC finds proposal violates Cauvery tribunal award, SC verdict", 30 July 2026, reporting the Central Water Commission's examination of the revised detailed project report and its return for alterations. This is a contemporary news report of the Commission's observations, not a fresh judicial determination of water allocation.
- **UPSC:** Civil Services (Main) Examination, official previous-question-paper archive, upsc.gov.in/examinations/previous-question-papers. GS Paper II questions consulted for section 2.2: 2013 Q6, 2014 Q2, 2015 Q2, 2019 Q4, 2022 Q13, 2023 Q15, 2024 Q13 and 2025 Q14; also the related 2026 GS Paper II Q11. The question texts are reproduced verbatim.

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