



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the constitutional role of the Vice President of India. Assess how effectively this office contributes to upholding and promoting federalism in the Indian political system. (150 words)

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Approach:

- Start with a brief introduction to the office of the Vice President of India.
- Examine the constitutional role of the Vice President of India.
- Assess how effectively this office contributes to upholding and promoting federalism.
- Conclude with a suitable way forward.

Introduction:

The Vice President of India, established under **Articles 63-71**, is the second highest constitutional authority. Although the office has limited executive authority, its importance lies in being the ex-officio Chairman of Rajya Sabha, the chamber that embodies India's federal character. Thus, the Vice President's role directly influences the functioning of federal democracy.

Body :

Constitutional Role

- **Election and Position** – Elected by both Houses of Parliament (Article 66), reflecting parliamentary consensus. Functions as Acting President in case of vacancy (Article 65).
- **Chairman of Rajya Sabha** – Regulates debates, maintains order, interprets rules, and exercises a casting vote in a tie (Article 100).
- **Referral to Committees:** The Chairman plays an administrative role by referring bills, motions, and resolutions to parliamentary committees for detailed consideration.
- **In Case of Presidential Vacancy:** When the Vice President acts as or discharges the functions of the President, they temporarily stop performing duties as Chairman.

Contribution to Federalism

- **Guardian of State Representation** – By presiding over Rajya Sabha, the Vice President ensures the voice of states in legislation, especially in constitutional amendments (e.g., passage of GST Act, 2016).
- **Neutral Arbiter** – Expected to rise above partisanship to balance the Union's dominance with state interests.
- **Continuity of Governance** – Acting President role provides stability in the federal framework during emergencies.

Limitations and Challenges

- **Partisan Allegiances** – Vice Presidents are often political veterans, which raises doubts about

neutrality.

- In **Kihoto Hollohan (1992)**, the Supreme Court upheld the Chairman's disqualification power but subjected it to judicial review, underscoring that neutrality cannot always be presumed.
- **Limited Federal Influence** - Unlike the President or Governors, the Vice President has no direct role in Centre-State relations; impact is procedural rather than substantive.
- **Dependence on Personality** - The effectiveness of this office relies on the stature and impartiality of the incumbent rather than constitutional design.
- **Rajya Sabha's Declining Space** - Frequent disruptions reduce opportunities for meaningful federal dialogue.

Conclusion:

The **Vice President, as Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha**, upholds the chamber's role as a forum of federal balance and deliberation. As Subhash Kashyap reminds us, the Rajya Sabha must act as a "mature revising chamber," safeguarding against majoritarian impulses. Strengthening the impartiality of the Chair and fostering constructive debate will ensure that the office continues to safeguard cooperative federalism and deepen India's democratic fabric.

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