

Stalin sets up panel on states' autonomy: Looking back at Rajamannar Committee, with same mandate almost 50 yrs ago

In 1969, then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C N Annadurai, a federalist, established the Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee under the leadership of Dr. P V Rajamannar. Here's what its report said.

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Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin pays floral tribute to Dr. BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary, in Chennai on Monday. (ANI Photo)

Citing concerns over the erosion of state powers, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **M K Stalin has announced the formation of a high-level committee**, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Kurian Joseph, **to review the Centre-State relationship and suggest measures to reinforce the constitutional rights of Indian states.**

Almost 50 years ago, another chief minister of [Tamil Nadu](#) had set up a similar committee.

In 1969, then Chief Minister C N Annadurai, a federalist, established the Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee under the leadership of Dr. P V Rajamannar, former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court.

The three-member committee—also comprising Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar and Justice P. Chandra Reddy—was asked to study the Indian Constitution and recommend steps to ensure “the utmost autonomy of the State in the executive, legislative and judicial branches... without prejudice to the integrity of the country as a whole.”

What the Rajamannar committee concluded

“There has been a growing realisation of the strong domination of the Centre... and the tendency on the part of the Centre to exercise control over the States, drastically affecting the autonomy of the States,” the committee wrote, lamenting how state-specific matters were increasingly under central command simply because both Centre and States were run by the same party at the time (p. 2)

The report argued that while the Constitution appears federal, its working has reduced states to extensions of the Centre. “By this process, the States had practically become the administrative units of the Centre,” it warned (p. 18).

The committee backed its claim with detailed analysis of provisions like Articles 256, 257, and 365, which gave the Centre sweeping powers to issue directions to States, and enforce them through President’s Rule.

“Article 365 highlights the subordinate position of the States... This obviously results in the assumption of the legislative and executive powers of the State by the Union,” it wrote, condemning it as an unprecedented constitutional weapon (p. 21).

The committee recommended that Article 356—the provision that allows the Centre to impose President’s Rule in a state—be repealed entirely, and that a strong Inter-State Council be set up under Article 263 to resolve differences in a spirit of dialogue.

The 'whip in the Centre's hand'

The committee also criticised institutions that emerged outside the Constitution—chief among them, the Planning Commission, created by an executive order of the Centre.

“The Centre has got a whip in its hands... because the grants are given by the Centre at its discretion... the Plan allocation is left entirely—to the whims and fancies of those who call themselves Members of the Planning Body,” the committee charged (p. 8).

This, it said, had made the Finance Commission—which has a constitutional mandate—irrelevant. Worse, it had rendered states “suppliants for aid” in their own jurisdictions. The report warned of a growing trend: central planning, massive grants, and party politics forming a “Triple” that erodes federal balance.

“The way in which and the frequency with which the Centre and Parliament have sought to interest themselves and interfere in matters relating exclusively to State subjects... leave the impression of an anxiety on the part of the Centre to exercise an overall supervision,” it noted. (p. 14).

What strength should mean

The committee tackled head-on the argument that a strong Centre is essential for India's unity.

“By taking upon itself too many obligations... the Centre will become incurably weak,” it cautioned, adding that true strength lay in restraint and clarity of purpose, and not in expansionism (p. 19).

The same page had quoted a 1967 speech of Annadurai for its “trenchant criticism” of the implications of a strong Centre: “I want the Centre to be strong enough to maintain the sovereignty and integrity of India as it is the fashion to call it, I would put it in another way. It is to safeguard the independence of the country. I am prepared to say that anybody will accept without any

remorse or without any reservation that all these powers needed to make the Centre responsible for the safety of this country ought to be with the Centre.

But that does not mean that the Centre in order to safeguard India from Pakistanis or the Chinese or the Baluchis, should think of having a health department here. In what way does that strengthen the sovereignty and independence of India? Should they have an education department here? In what way does that improve the fighting capacity of the military personnel there?”

Though submitted during the first DMK regime, the Rajamannar Committee reached New [Delhi](#) under Annadurai’s successor M [Karunanidhi](#), who submitted it to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Now, again

Half a century later, under vastly different political skies, the Stalin-led DMK government is once again raising questions about federalism. Tamil Nadu has had high-profile disputes with the [BJP](#)-led central government over NEET, GST compensation, delimitation, and language policy, among others.

By invoking the Rajamannar Committee, Stalin seeks not just policy reform, but ideological realignment—returning to the Dravidian movement’s core belief in state empowerment.

The new committee will study the current legal framework and recommend steps to restore state rights. Whether its findings will be heeded in New Delhi is uncertain. The Rajamannar Report was never acted upon by the Centre. Its recommendations, echoed later by the Sarkaria Commission (1988) and Punchhi Commission (2010), remain largely shelved.

“It is my earnest desire,” Annadurai had said in 1967, “that through mutual goodwill and understanding we should forge a fraternal and beneficial nexus.”