

**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Utilising Comparative Case Study Design for Uncovering Variations in the Federal Governance Models in The South Asia**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research is an attempt to outline the utilities of the comparative case study design in order to decipher the variations in the federal governance models of three South Asian States: India, Pakistan, and Nepal. The Comparative case study design provides sound techniques to comparatively track the history of federal governance of the supra-mentioned states. In addition to providence of comprehensive case selection strategies, this design includes multiple case studies, in contrast with a single case study method. Moreover, its Sequential Framework to formulate the research questions, giving a right direction to the comparative study research, follows a multi-faceted data collection tools and data analysis techniques for finding the variations in the federal governance of India, Pakistan and Nepal. Finally, adaption of systematic case selection, consistent variable operationalization, and rigorous triangulation will further enhance the effectiveness of comparative case study designs.

**KEYWORDS** Case Study Designs, Governance, India, Nepal, Pakistan

**Introduction**

The contemporary state of federalism in South Asia is characterized by complexity and diversity and influenced by historical experience, peculiarities of constitutional design, and sociopolitical realities. India, Pakistan, and Nepal are the three important federal states, which represent distinct paths of development of taking and transforming federal governance.

Although they share some aspects of their constitutions, as well as a similar colonial history, the realities of how the federal system works in each of these nations are very different. There are differences that can be noticed in the relations of the centers-state, fiscal federalism, administrative devolution, and participatory mechanisms. Such heterogeneous variation can be observed through rigorous comparative case study design to ensure the comprehensive case selections, accurate research questions, triangulated data collection, broader data analysis techniques to discover the findings and reach conclusion (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2006; McNabb, 2015).

*Ipsa facto*, the application of the comparative case study analysis is not only a matter of a methodological approach but also the key factor in discovering fine-grained and practically applicable results.

**Literature Review**

The literature on federal governance in South Asia limns that Pakistan, Nepal and India, despite sharing colonial legacies, have presented divergent federal trajectories, shaped by constitutional design, administrative capacity and political history (Singh, 2019). Erudite scholars have noticed that India's federal system marks a balanced distribution of powers between the Central and Provincial tiers, strengthened through institutional

mechanisms (like Finance Commission) and landmark Constitutional Amendments (such as 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup>) (Lijphart, 1996; Saxena, 2018). Research further explores that India's federal practices are reinforced by democratic political system, cooperative intergovernmental institutions, efficient policy implementation and strong administrative capacity (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004). In contrast, Pakistan's federal structure has historically been shaped by centralized political authority, and uneven provincial empowerment, thus barricading the development of effective intergovernmental relations (Rizvi, 2014). Although the 18th Amendment is viewed as a great leap toward provincial autonomy, scholars argue that administrative and fiscal centralization continues to persist due to multiple factors (Ahmad, 2021; Oates, 1999). Nepal's transition from a unitary monarchy to a federal democratic republic presents a distinct case in which federal institutions remain nascent, resulting in capacity gaps, contested authority, and difficulties in operationalizing provincial and local governance structures (Shrestha, 2018). Comparative research on decentralization also shows that while India delineates relatively institutionalized local governance, Pakistan and Nepal confront syndromes of limited fiscal autonomy, inconsistent devolution, and underdeveloped administrative systems (Bardhan, 2002; John & Copus, 2011; Panday, 2017). Overall, the literature underscores that variations in governance models across the three South Asian federal states originate from variations in institutional consolidation, political bargaining, fiscal federalism, and commitment to decentralization, making comparative case study analysis essential for understanding these divergent trends (Ahmad, 2019; Watts, 2008).

## **Material and Methods**

This study is steered by Post-Positivist Approach, acknowledging that while objective realities exist within governance systems, they can primarily be understood through careful and systematic interpretation of evidence shaped by context. Sequentially, the research relies on Exploratory-Explanatory Design: Exploratory in finding the key dynamics, features, and variations of governance across three countries namely India, Pakistan, and Nepal; and explanatory in finding the underlying factors that account for these variations. Within this methodological and philosophical orientation, a Comparative Multi-Case Study Design is utilised to systematically analyze governance models across the three countries by focusing on fiscal arrangement, institutional structures, political dynamics, and administrative autonomy. The study integrates multiple qualitative methods—mainly semi-structured interviews and policy review for data collection and document analysis for data analysis. Moreover, Triangulation technique has been applied in order to strengthen the credibility and validity of findings. Analysis proceeds through detailed within-case examinations followed by cross-case comparison, allowing the researcher to uncover both divergent trajectories and shared patterns due to national contexts. This integrated framework provides comprehensive foundations for understanding how and why governance models differ across the three South Asian states.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Comparative Case Study Designs are best suitable for studying the variations of Governance Models in the Federal States of South Asia:**

Comparative Case Study Designs are best suitable for studying the variation trends of Governance Models in the Federal States of South Asia due to the following reasons:

#### **First Reason: Comparative Case Study design provides Qualitative Method of Research.**

Comparative case study design is a qualitative method of research, where the central aspects of similarities, differences, and causations are to be discovered by a thorough, systematic analysis of two or more cases. (McNabb, 2015) has highlighted how comparative

studies of cases enable researchers to transcend mere description, in the course of which theories can be advanced and proven in realistic settings. Yin (2018) states that the core benefit of the case study research is its capacity to respond to how and why questions, particularly in those cases where phenomenon and context have not been clearly demarcated. This method is of high importance in situations where the object of study is to determine differences and factors at the level of several cases, which is why it is particularly worthwhile in the case of the study of federal governance in South Asia.

### **Second Reason: It provides Multi- Case Exploratory Strategy**

The multi-case (or multiple-case) design is distinguished by the single-case study in that it explicitly incorporates more than a single case to study and compare in parallel. The exploratory version of the approach is used when the study field is under-theorized, or when, its purpose is to come up with novel hypotheses and theories, not necessarily to test old ones. Exploratory multi-case studies are therefore dynamic: open to fresh considerations, capable of uncovering unforeseen disparities or likeness, and prone to situational sensitivity (Stake, 2006). This exploratory nature is essential to the South Asian context, where federalism is ever changing and extremely situational.

### **Third Reason: Best suitable for understanding the contexts of Governance of Federal States of South Asia**

The use of the comparative case study method when it applies to South Asian federal governance is particularly suitable due to the realities on the ground of the region. The federal forms of each country show different historical paths like the post-colonial unity and diversity of India, the centralization, and decentralization seesaw of Pakistan, and the newfound federalism of Nepal after unitary monarchism became federal democracies. A side-by-side comparison allows the researcher to shed light on differences in interpretation and application of constitutional texts, the handling of intergovernmental tensions and explain success or failure of some reforms. As an illustration, though the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in India are commonly recognized as catalyzing the institutionalization of local self-government in the country, how they are implemented varies widely between-states in India-how research on subnational comparative politics in a single federal system can be highly informative and useful (Singh, 2019).

### **Fourth Reason: Comparative Case Study explores wider than other Methods**

The comparative qualitative case study will allow the researcher to draw below the layer of formal structures unlike purely quantitative methods, which can fail to capture vital context or power relationships, and informal institutions. It gives the versatility to integrate various data sources, including constitutional texts and government reports, expert interviews, and policy outcomes, facilitating triangulation and more detailed explanation (McNabb, 2015). A single-case study may tell us much about the domestic dynamics of any given country, whereas cross-nation comparative research can tell us what the differences in cross-country comparison are: why the devolution of fiscal powers has been successful in some states in India, but it has faltered in the provinces of Pakistan, or how the new provinces in Nepal are haggling their powers with the federal center in a different way than their South Asian neighbors.

### **Fifth Reason: Comparative Case Study Design offers comparative insights**

These advantages will be achieved only in case the comparative case study will be designed properly. Cases would be chosen based on maximizing meaningful variation and comparability, research questions should be designed to focus both on common ground as well as upon hypothesized differences, and analytical designs should be geared toward identifying patterns and building theories. The comparative case study research following

these principles not only brings out what makes South Asian federal governance unique in the respective contexts but also leads to a wider theoretical understanding of federalism as a mode of governance.

### **Comparative Case Study Designs provide perfect sequential understanding of variations in governance of Federal States of South Asia:**

The comparative case study designs follow a logical chain of following five steps that will provide perfect understanding of the governance variation of the federal states of South Asia:

#### **Step One: Perfect Case Selection-- Building a Comparative Lens for research problem**

The comparative case study design will enable the researcher to do case selection of three federal states of the South Asia namely Pakistan, India, and Nepal. The chief focus of the case selection will be to form the research problem that is described under:

- i. **Different Federal Trajectories:** These three states follow different historical and political trajectories to federalism: India remains a postcolonial federation based on the slogan of unity in diversity, with Pakistan as a federation that is marked by ethno-regional tensions and centralization, and Nepal as a new convert to federalism due to enduring conflict and constitutional reform.
- ii. **Different Institutional Structures:** The three countries have constitutional rules on federalism however all of them differ in the way they distribute legislative, fiscal and administrative authority between government and authorities at the central and subnational levels.
- iii. **Different Governance Performances:** The cases chosen to provide a range of federal outcomes, including effective decentralization (as it occurs in a number of Indian states), continued struggle in the fight between federal and provincial jurisdiction (as is the case in Pakistan) and weak experimentation (in Nepal).
- iv. **Different Governance Patterns:** To capture and describe the patterns and outliers as well as underlying causal mechanisms those generate differences in governance in South Asian federal states.

#### **Step Two: Formulating the Relevant Research Questions**

After the case selections and the making of research problem, the comparative case study research will provide the formulation of clear-cut and specific research questions to give direction to find the variations in the governance models of India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

#### **Central research question**

Through comparative case study design, the researcher will formulate a comprehensive central research question (that comparative question cannot be formulated in a single case study).

- What are some differences in the practical operation between governance models in India, Pakistan, and Nepal at the federal and subnational level?

#### **Sub-Research Questions**

- What are the institutional arrangements by which centre-state/province relations are organized in which country and what are its practical practices?
- What are the dynamics of fiscal federalism: how are revenue sharing, fiscal transfers, and financial autonomy achieved?
- How far have constitutional amendments or reforms (e.g., 73/74 Amendments in India, 18th Amendment in Pakistan, 2015 Constitution in Nepal) led to decentralization of power?
- How negotiations of administrative autonomy take place between subnational units and central units and what are its implications on policy implementation and service provision?
- How are political, historical, and socio-economic influences involved in determining the effectiveness and character of federal government in these cases?

The comparative case study designs will enable systematic cross-case comparison; each research question is paired with the following clear, operationalized variables and indicators:

**Table1**  
**Variables and Indicators**

Variable/Concept	Indicator/Measure
Center-State Relations	Practice of Federal Commissions; Constitutional powers, Federal- Provincial dissonance or functionality
Fiscal Federalism	Revenue sharing formulas, budget allocations, fiscal autonomy indices, and actual transfers.
Administrative Autonomy	Delegation of administrative powers, appointment processes, control over executive.
Local Governance	Efficiency of Local Governance. Devolution of powers
Reform Effectiveness	Impact of constitutional amendments on power-sharing and implementation outcomes
<b>Political Dynamics</b>	Intergovernmental relations, Party systems and role of political leadership,

(Stake, 2006).

Basing on the definition and measurement of these variables, the comparative case study will be able to state the similarities and differences on the way federal governance takes place in the countries chosen, systematically.

### **Step 3: Providing tools for data collection on Governance variation in South Asia.**

Based on the guidance of the research questions, the comparative case study studies will provide amalgamation of various sources of data to be comprehensive, offer triangulation and contextual richness. By comparing the systems of governance in India, Pakistan, and Nepal, use of only specific of evidence, type would make partial or subjective interpretation. Instead, using several, mutually reinforcing sources allows providing a sophisticated and precise description of federal practices because it can show formal setups and informal realities.

Data, through Comparative Case Studies Designs will be collected through following sources both primary and secondary data collection tools:

- i. **Interviews:** The interview will be semi structured and be guided by the research questions and variables operationalized. In cases where the direct interview is not possible, the published interview or the proceedings of expert round tables will be analyzed.
- ii. **Document Analysis:** The Indian (1950), Pakistani (1973) and Nepali (2015) constitutions are primary, as are significant amendments (e.g., India: 73rd and 74th, Pakistan: 18th Supporting Legislation: Acts of subnational governance, statutes of finance commission, ordinances of local government and other legal instruments.

### Study of Reports and Policy Documents.

- iii. **Official Budgets:** Budget documents including national and subnational budget document provide a picture of fiscal relations.
- iv. **Commission Reports** Finance Commission reports of India, National Finance Commission reports of Pakistan, and Provincial Finance Commission reports of Nepal provide an insight into fiscal arrangements in their reports and their implications.
- v. **Evaluation and Implementation Reports:** Reports that examine the effects of a decades-long decentralization reform, e.g. the level of implementation of the *Panchayati Raj* institutions in India, implementation reports on the federalization of Nepal.
- vi. **Testimonies and Inter stances** of the expert
- vii. **Interviews with policymakers** and bureaucrats who were or still are federal, provincial/ state leaders and local leaders can be used to add context and explain any holes in documentary sources.
- viii. **Other Scholars and Policy Analysts:** The ideas of academic scholars or policy-oriented think tanks specializing in South Asian federalism (e.g. Centre of Policy Research in India, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency).
- ix. **Civil Society actors:** Commentary by non- governmental organizations and advocacy groups on governance and decentralization.
- x. **Academic Studies:** Editorial review journal articles, books, and edited materials regarding federalism and government in South Asia.
- xi. **Policy Briefs and Working Papers:** Study reports of such organizations as World Bank, UNDP, or even national research institutes.
- xii. **Media Coverage:** Investigative journals, commentaries and news, notably of grand intergovernmental disagreements, reform or local implementation disputes.
- xiii. **Systematic collection and evaluation of the available documents** like legal, policy, and budgetary texts online on official websites, parliament, and government portals.

Its study employs triangulation in order to achieve the maximum credibility, that is, cross verifying the findings with several sources of information (Yin, 2018). As an

illustration, the information, captured in government documents is compared with the opinions of experts and research results in a way to make sure that a conclusion is based not only on the intent of law, but also on practice. Paradoxical evidence is not rejected but analyzed in a more correct interpretation of the realities of governance.

#### **Step Four: Excellent Data Analysis Strategies to record the governance variations**

The comparative case study analysis is all about finding out patterns. This process will enable the researcher to translate data description into substantial interpretation, and this will help in gradually discovering the similarities and differences in practice governing different cases. Pattern identification in South Asian federalism context would aids in answering such questions as under what circumstances fiscal decentralization is successfully implemented, where it aborts, or under which conditions administrative autonomy is mere rhetoric but not reality. The following data analysis tools to understand the governance variations in the Federal States of South Asia will be provided by the comparative case study designs:

- i. **Coding:** All data material, including legal texts, interviews and reports, will be coded deductively (based on predefined themes related to research questions) and inductively (based on emerging themes related to research questions) in an orderly manner.
- ii. **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis helps in coming up with the major themes, sub-themes as well as the analysis of tracking how certain variables (such as fiscal autonomy or administrative delegation) are manifested in various federal systems through a process that involves the use of coding.
- iii. **Inductive (arising out of data) and deductive (depending on theory) methods** are adopted to guarantee a complete picture.

**Matrices and Tables:** Comparative matrices provide an overview of important variables (e.g. by type of fiscal transfers, administrative powers, implementation mechanisms) in India, Pakistan, and Nepal in graphical form. They assist in drawing patterns at a glance and in the stand-up-question kind of cross-case analysis. Pattern identification is more than the presentation of differences it also aims to explain patterns.

Moreover, one of the most significant advantages of comparative approach is that it not only reveals the general tendencies, but also supports the recognition of outliers, or rather those, which do not comply with the theoretical expectations.

In comparative case research, identification of the patterns is recursive-the results are re-reviewed and iterated as additional data or opinions are obtained. Reflexivity is needed on the side of the researcher, and the biases cannot influence the decisions regarding the designation of patterns to the foreground or to the background (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

#### **Step Five – Logically Drawing Conclusions and Testing Theory**

Once the patterns have been found in the studied cases, the comparative case study approach would enable the researchers to generalize these empirical observations in general findings. This step shifts over that which is different to questions of why the differences exist, and what they entail, both theatrically and at the policy level. This, within the framework of South Asian federalism, translates to articulating not only the reason/existence why there is governance variance, but the causal explanations, the generative processes, and the outcomes of the same.

The trends made in the cases of India, Pakistan and Nepal can be examined on the basis of key theories of federalism which include:

- i. **The Theory of Federalism Propounded by Riker:** This focuses upon bargaining within the political classes and the equilibrium of power between the subnational and the central governments.
- ii. **Models of Cooperative and Competitive Federalism by Watts:** These identify whether systems are characterized as collaboration-emphasized (cooperative), or what is characterized as jurisdictional contest (competitive).
- iii. **Institutionalism** which studies how formal and informal institutions determine longer-term performance in governance.

As an illustration, the development of India into cooperative federalism, which is indicated by the efficient center-state commissions and the decentralization reforms within states such as Kerala, corresponds to the cooperative model developed by Watts. On the other hand, the frequent intergovernmental conflicts and limited provincial empowerment is an indication of more competitive and occasionally dysfunctional federal model demonstrated by Pakistan in the event of 18th Amendment.

- i. **Fiscal Federalism:** The predictability and fairness in the distribution of resources can be traced to regular and rule-based operations of the Finance Commission in India as the theories that emphasize the role of institutionalized intergovernmental processes.
- ii. **The politicization of National Finance Commission:** In Pakistan exemplifies the weakness of formal constitutional establishments in absence of political will or capacity to act thus lending credence to arguments suggesting the importance of informal bargaining and negotiation by elites.
- iii. **The difficulty encountered in Nepal:** With regard to setting up efficient provincial budgeting procedures reveals the limits of federal institution importation in the absence of sufficient administrative capability, as well as political agreement, touching on the relationship between the formal regulations and practice on the ground.
- iv. **The achievements of Kerala:** In this respect of empowering the local governments does help prove the hypothesis that in order to achieve decentralization, one has to commit not only constitutional amendments, but perseverance within the state, investing its capacities, and an engaged civil society.
- v. **The series of decentralization and recentralization:** Witnessed in Pakistan reveal that amending the constitution is not the sole approach of beating the tendency of being a centralized state when party system or the political culture are lacking.
- vi. **The current journey of Nepal:** Testifies to the capabilities of provincial governments to be creative, and in ways that might not readily be anticipated, provided they are allowed their room, as well as to ongoing conflicts with the federal center.

In the process, the comparative multi-case case study technique proves its distinctive advantage: it does not validate old theories or reproduce known trends, but produces new explanations, contextualizes theoretical models, and reveals outliers that might be a starting point in further investigation (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2006). The comparative

presentation of the case such as that of India, Pakistan, and Nepal in systematic juxtaposition enables the researchers to test the theoretical propositions about the changing circumstances, thereby increasing the explanatory and predictive basis of federalism studies.

### **Step six: They will provide Key Findings and Discussion**

The comparative case study designs will be useful to the variations of governance of the federal states of South Asia, as it will provide the key findings and discussions. It will provide the following (hypothetical at this point, as research is yet to be conducted) findings and discussions:

- i. **Similar formal patterns:** There are very similar formal patterns of the constitutional arrangements in place in India, Pakistan, and Nepal.
- ii. **Different Center-Province Relationship Patterns:** Center and State/Province in India, Pakistan, and Nepal are variant. **In India**, Center-state relations exist within very established institutions, and they are governed by such institutions as the Finance Commission and the Inter-State Council. States such as Kerala have used the provisions of the constitution in the attainment of strong autonomy and decentralization. Nevertheless, that balance is a moving one, these days' different states will have differing balances, and political congruence (between the center and state governments) may sometimes affect the outcome. **In Pakistan**, there has always been tension and bargaining between the federal and provincial units. Although 18th Amendment was supposed to strengthen provincial autonomy, the reality is that the province operates within the parameters of the central domination, politicized fiscal transfers, and delegated administrative power. Provinces like Punjab and Sindh have not had such smooth experiences as the indicators of the problems of intergovernmental power relationships. **In Nepal**, the federation center-provinces relationship is not so developed yet. The sources of tensions arose as new institutions are constructed, functions being defined, and mechanisms of resource sharing are formed. The role of the central government is to continue to play an important role, but the province has relative autonomy constrained by the ability and continued consolidation that translates into institutions.
- iii. **Different Fiscal Decentralisation Patterns:** **In India**, there is some form of predictability and transparency in financial interface through Finance Commission technique, which gives states a chance to frame and enact policies based on local consideration. States with robust systems of managing the fiscal front (e.g. Kerala, Tamil Nadu) experience a greater degree of fiscal autonomy and improved service delivery. **In Pakistan**, the National Finance Commission award is irregular and politicized and there is a failure to allocate resources fairly and in time. The provincial governments have limited access in generating their own revenue, therefore, hindering their capacity to develop independent development projects. **In Nepal**, there is a work in progress on the fiscal federalism and provinces rely on transfers by the central government and are failing to develop effective institutions of public finance. The contribution of the donors is important in terms of involvement and technical assistance in capacity-building acts.
- iv. **Different levels of Devolution of Powers:** **In India**, the local governance has been institutionalized through the process of decentralization mostly through the 73rd amendment and 74th amendment as well, and it has different

effectiveness seen on ground. Political commitment and civil society involvement has delivered significant fruits in local service provision and participation politics in states where these concepts are highly prevalent. **In Pakistan**, Local units are in many countries, the weakest element in the federal system, with irregular devolution, recurrent restructuring, and little in the way of administrative or fiscal autonomy. The consistency and powerfulness of local agencies is often tied to political patterns. **In Nepal**, new actors are Nepal provinces, and local governments, they are experimenting with various ways of doing things. The initial indicators are of innovational practices in certain areas, yet there is a general delay in the development because of the minor administrative experience and continued negotiations between the centers and provinces.

- v. **Different Institutional Efficiency:** The Indian Governance is marked with efficiency. Whereas that of Pakistan and Nepal are struggling due to institutional underdevelopment.
- vi. **Different Administrative Capacity:** Subnational capacity in administration and technicality is instrumental in success of the governance at the federal level. The greater the presence of a strong bureaucracy, survivability of public finance administration and participatory procedures in states and provinces the greater is the ability to use constitutional powers to local advantage. Unlike Pakistan and Nepal, India has a strong administrative capacity.
- vii. **Different Open Governance Models:** India has efficiently transmuted the ideals of modern governance. Whereas Pakistan and Nepal are struggling to meet with the global governance trends.
- viii. **Different levels of Administrative Cultures:** The governance of India is marked with high level of efficiency, accountability, effectiveness, rule of law, consensus, participation and inclusiveness. Moreover, India governance is moving towards data and IT governance. On the other hand, the governance of Pakistan is mired by colonial legacy, paper based old communication model, antiquated laws, pristine culture and ineffective institutions. The situation in Nepal is worst of the three.

## Conclusion

The comparative multi-case study design is very relevant towards the discovery of the subtle and significant changes in the governance models across the federal states in South Asia. The comprehensive case selection opportunities, the relevant formulation of research questions, the triangulation of data collection, the comprehensiveness of data analysis, the plunging on the findings and reaching the conclusion will enable the researcher to unearth and decipher the variant patterns, trends, systems and cultures of governance of the three federal states of the sub-continent like India, Pakistan and Nepal. To be brief, the single case study design cannot do all these comparative tasks due to its limitation to only one phenomenon, event, or focus.

## Recommendations

- i. The comparative case study designs should adopt clearly justified case- selection criteria, based on maximum variation and analytical comparability to strengthen the explanatory power.

- ii. The Researchers should properly operationalize governance variables consistently across cases, enabling the systematic within-case analysis followed by a rigorous cross-case comparison.
- iii. Greater use of methodological triangulation—combining multiple primary and secondary sources of data—should be employed to improve validity and reduce single-source reliance.
- iv. Iterative pattern-matching and theory-building techniques should be applied throughout the research process to better refine the causal explanations of governance variation.

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