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Let us open a Pandora's box: Is India's federalism exclusionary?

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Studies on federalism stumble upon the curious case of India: ostensibly federal in theory yet uniquely unitary in practice. Be it the rhetoric of a federal democracy or the nuanced academic interpretation harping on the 'quasi-federal' feature, the stark reality from the vantage point of the marginalised is gloomy. A spate of measures in quick succession – abrogation of Article 370, the introduction of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 in the parliament – raise normatively disturbing questions and seem to reveal fundamental flaws in India's federal structure. At the heart of the problem is not merely the dominance of an ideologically driven political party with a clear-cut majority but the inherent possibility of 'tyranny of the majority', which is writ large in India's political and electoral system. The conspicuous absence of proportional representation has relegated the numerically disadvantaged regions, religious communities, linguistic nationalities and the socially oppressed classes to the margins. Perhaps, there is a method in the madness; the rationale for a unitary bias within a federal arrangement has been to infuse 'nationhood' and retain territorial integrity. However, with exclusion becoming the central tendency that sanctified rationale appears to be faltering.

Track Classification: #FutureIR @NclPolitics