Introduction and Emergence of the concepts

SYMMETRY AND ASYMMETRY
FEDERALISM

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Introduction

CONCEPT OF SYMMETRY AND ASYMMETRY

As written by Burgess the emergence and conceptual analysis of symmetry and asymmetry became necessary as it serves as springboard for both theoretical and empirical understanding of the heart of comparison and the accommodation of diversity existing within the complexity of federal systems and federations. In the bids to situate and connect power allocation within the federal systems, the conceptual explanation was closely connected to the turbulence that arose within the political science field,- behavioral revolution” where human behaviour became the parameter for understanding and interpreting political actions, hence empirical conceptualization of the symmetry and asymmetry must be kneaded with the shift. Thus, scholars like Livingston and Tarlton were able to make us understand the diverse ways in which each member state in a federal system can relate to the system as a whole, the central authority, and each other member state. We are also able to know the framework, ‘quality and levels of federalism present in the relationship between the central government and each component government considered separately may vary in significant ways throughout the system. Thus, the concept of symmetry suggests the “the extent to which component states share in the conditions and thereby the concerns more or less common to the federal system as a whole. In the ideal symmetrical system, each of the separate political units would be ‘miniature reflections’ of the important aspects of the whole system and ‘no significant social, economic or political peculiarities would exist which might demand special forms of representation or protection. While, the concept of ‘asymmetry’ expressed the extent to which component states do not share in the conditions and concerns common to the federal system as a whole. The ideal asymmetrical federal system would be one ‘composed of political units corresponding to differences of interest, character and makeup that exist within the whole society.
The Emergence- Perspective

The term ‘asymmetrical federalism’ has appeared in the mainstream literature at regular intervals but only in a fragmentary manner. Burgess, examined various trajectory of the emergence of the concept. The first person to mention it was William Livingstone in his famous article entitled ‘A Note on the Nature of Federalism’, first published in 1952 in the Political Science Quarterly, where he alluded to asymmetry when discussing the range of social diversities that gave rise to federalism. In 1970 Ivo Duchacek referred to in his classic text entitled Comparative Federalism: The Territorial Dimension of Politics. Duchacek’s approach was to identify huge disparities in what he called ‘power ingredients’ among the component units of federations which could cause dispute if their territorial boundaries overlapped with significant linguistic, ethnic, racial or religious differences or, to the contrary, if they coincided and were not formally recognized in the federation, could even add ‘an explosive dimension … to the tensions caused by the disparities in power and attachment to the federal system. Ronald Watt, mentioned in passing in 1970 when looking at federalism in Canada.

Another significant contributor to the historical emergence was R. Michael Stevens in 1977. He conducted a comparative study of some twenty ‘federacy’ types of vertical arrangements, defining them as joining separate distinct communities of disproportionate size and resources in a political association designed to maintain the integrity of the smaller community. Federacy, to him, the arrangement, was simply a form of political association that enabled smaller communities to preserve their distinct identities and separate political organisations while retaining economic, political and military links with the larger national state. According Burgess the most recent contribution came from Max Frenkel who identified ‘Asymmetrical’ as a distinctive type of federalism in his ‘Alphabet of Federalisms’ in 1986 and Daniel Elazar included a small section on ‘Asymmetrical Federal Arrangements’ in his Exploring. Federalism that appeared in 1987. Not until Charles Tarlton examined the two concepts together in his articles titled “Symmetry and Asymmetry as element of Federalism: A Theoretical Speculation’ was published in the Journal of Politics.
Asymmetry Federalism

The word asymmetry is applied to many aspects of difference between the constituent units of federation. Asymmetrical arrangement could be in term of population, wealth, strategic position or differences in political weights among constituent units. Tarlton put it this way, f ‘asymmetry’ expressed the extent to which component states do not share in the conditions and concerns common to the federal system. The ideal asymmetrical federal system would be one ‘composed of political units corresponding to differences of interest, character and makeup that exist within the whole society. In summary, in the model asymmetrical federal system, each component unit would have about it a unique feature or set of features which would separate its interests in important ways from those of any other state or the system considered as a whole. ‘Clear lines of division would be necessary and jealously guarded insofar as these unique interests were concerned’

Let’s simplify it by putting it this way this system means that different constituent states within the federation possess different powers. For instance, any of the states or a group of states may have more autonomy than the others despite having equal constitutional status. Two types of asymmetric arrangements can be identified (a) De jure asymmetry and (d) de facto asymmetry. Ronald Watts referred to as (Political and Constitutional Asymmetry
Asymmetry cont.

- **De jure asymmetry** is built around the notion of differences in legislative powers, representations in central institutions and the rights and obligations of each of the component units, all of which are outlined in the constitution.

- **De facto asymmetry** is not usually constitutionally based. They are usually based on agreements that are derived from national policies. It could also arise from bilateral and often, ad hoc dealings with specific provinces. Essentially though, asymmetric arrangements for federal states are often proposed as solution to disaffections that may arise when the needs of component units are mutual, as a result of the numerous segmental cleavages, such as ethnic, linguistic or cultural, that form part of the reasons for federalism.

- Political Asymmetry arises from the impact of culture, economic, social and political conditions affecting the relative power, influence and relations of different regional units' with each other and with the federal government. This exists among full-fledged constituents’ units in every federation.

- Constitutional asymmetry is not common in all federation, this is the degree to which power assigned to regional units by the constitution of the federation are not uniform.
Symmetry Federalism

• Symmetric federalism is a federal constitutional arrangement in which the constituent states that make up the federation possess equal powers. Thus, each of the component units have equal participation in the pattern of social, cultural, economic and political circumstances of the state. In effect, a symmetric federal system is one in which there is conformity and commonality in the relations of each separate political unit of the system to both the system as a whole and to the other component units. An ideal symmetry has these features - equal territory and population, with similar economic opportunities, similar climatic conditions, cultural patterns, social groupings and political institutions. In the workings of this system, each component unit will be concerned with the solution to the same sort of problems and with the development of the same sort of potentials. Charles Tarlton opined that all the constituents’ units will not be significantly different from one state to another in terms of the major issues about which the political organization of a state might be concerned. Similarly, there would be no significant differences in terms of the political machinery and resources with which the state would approach the major issues. He concluded that in an ideal symmetrical federal system, each of the component units would have the same relationship with the central government. In other words, the division of power between central and state governments would be equal in every area. Furthermore, representation in the central government would be on equal basis for each of the component units, and the support provided for the component units by the federal government would be in unequal measure.
In Conclusion

For us to understanding mode of operandi of federalism, either theoretically or empirically, there is the need for us to have the clarity of these terms as applies to real-life scenarios.