

Concerns with Working of National Commissions

What is the issue?

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National Commissions in India which ought to oversee implementation of human rights and civil liberties are inactive.

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What is the brief history of national commissions in India?

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- The national commissions were formed with the objective to oversee the implementation of human rights and civil liberties.

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- The exercise began in January 1978 with the establishment of a central Minorities Commission, followed by a joint Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission.

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- The Minorities Commission was eventually rechristened as the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and placed under an Act of Parliament.

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- National Commission for Women Act was passed and it was set up in January 1992, In quick succession, government decided to set up a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

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- In 2004 Two national commissions one for minority educational institutions and protection of child rights was setup

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- Union government has conferred constitutional status on the National Backward Classes Commission.

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What are the concerns with the national commissions?

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- The composition and appointment mechanism for various national commissions widely differ.
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- While the NHRC is headed by a former Chief Justice of India and has two members each from amongst judges and human rights experts, all appointed by a high level statutory committee.
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- The Chairman and members of the National Commission on Minorities and National Commission for Women are appointed by the government in its unrestricted discretion.
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- While aspirants for the chair and membership of NCM should only be persons of “eminence, ability and integrity”, the NCW chair is simply to be one “committed to the cause of women”.
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What are the implications of this?

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- The record of successive governments in adhering to the prescribed touchstones of national commissions is disappointing.
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- Under the noses of these supposedly autonomous national bodies, the situation of citizens’ human rights and civil liberties has been moving from bad to worse.
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- All these institutions are maintained with an exorbitant budget and put a hole on the state exchequer and ultimately an unwarranted burden on taxpayers.
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Source: The Indian Express

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