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# Review Of Research



## PRIME MINISTER AND COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA



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### ABSTRACT

Coalition government have become an inevitable feature of Indian politics. The increase in the number of political parties make a government formation a difficult task. As no political party is in a position to get majority, political parties are involved in either pre-electoral or post-electoral alliances to form a government. While forming a coalition government, parties agree to a common agenda to governance cutting across party lines collide against each other and attempt to supercede coalition government agenda. This not only impair the working of coalition government but also affect the constitutional position of Prime Minister.

**KEYWORDS** :post-electoral alliances , constitutional position , Prime Minister ,Coalition Politics .

### INTRODUCTION

All coalition situations involve an element of threat. There is the threat of not being in a winning coalition. Threats are also employed in the bargaining process ; because of size, information, or ideological position, some coalition partner may have. Threat, communication, information and policy preferences by coalition actors represent categories in all situation Prime Minister has to compromise with all differences which leads the weak position of Prime Minister ship in coalition politics.<sup>1</sup>

The founding fathers of the Indian constitution deliberately chose to adopt the British model of parliamentary democracy. The British system of government as it exists today, is the result of continuous evolution in the course of which the real centre of executive authority has passed from the hands of the monarch to the House of Lords, from the Cabinet to the Prime Minister. The system of government in Britain is no longer as was described by Mill and Bagehot in the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1930, the position of the cabinet vis-a-vis the commons had reached a stage when Ramsay Muir spoke of "cabinet dictatorship". More recently, the British system of government has been defined as the "real executive". Over the years the Prime Minister in Britain as strengthened his position vis-a-vis his cabinet and the council of ministers, parliament and the political party to which he belongs. The position is similar in India. Many epithets have been used to describe his position. For a long time, he was regarded as *primus inter pares* later, his position was defined as "the keystone of the Cabinet arch",<sup>2</sup>

Prime Minister is regarded as the 'key stone of the cabinet arch' he is taken 'first among equals' 'above all in the words of Laski, he is 'central to the life and death of the cabinet'. Such a situation no longer exists. In a coalition system, it is the co-ordination committee of the constituent elements which sort out matters like selection of the ministers, distribution of portfolio, drafting of a common minimum programme and the like. Naturally, the position of the Prime Minister becomes very weak, rather pathetic, and he has to work during the pleasure not of the president but of the constituent elements.

The leadership of the Prime Minister is an accepted principle of the parliamentary form of government, but this hardly appears to be empirically tenable in the context of coalition politics in India. A person does not owe Prime Ministership to his election as a leader of a particular party or to his pre-eminence within a party but to inter-party acceptance which is usually the result in the creation of Deputy Prime Ministership. Some times a Deputy Prime Minister may try to outmart the Prime Minister himself. The Prime Minister's leadership, therefore, tends to be more contractual than a cultivated one and as such he is Prime Minister by courtesy and sufferance of the coalition partners than by right. Secondly, the Prime Minister does not always enjoy elbow room in the distribution of portfolio. Major parties in the coalition will have their own favoured portfolio and insist on retaining them.

The position of the prime Minister in many cases was seriously undermined to do extent that they came virtually under the influence and command of his deputy. Besides, the position of some other ministers appeared so sound that the Prime Minister virtually lost the privilege of being 'first among equals' what to say of his being 'a moon among the lesser stars' or a master of his ministers'.

The emergence of coalition politics on the political scene has altered the pattern of executive functioning in significant way. Multy-party coalition government meant a departure from or at least modifications in the pattern of west minister parliamentary tradition. The working of federal coalition cabinet has resulted in larger cabinets and in turn, greater federation of the cabinet system in India<sup>3</sup>.

What ever may be the theoretical position, in actual practice the council of ministers has been reduced to the position of an advisory body and it will be nearer the truth to say that the government of India today is run by the Prime Minister with aid and advice of the ministers. The cabinet as a single unit has been losing its authority and prestige as the final policy – formulating and decision making body with the creation of smaller, minor or core bodies, like the "inner cabinet"

"War cabinet" "emergency cabinet", " Partial cabinet", "kitchen cabinet",. The implication of the creation of such extra constitutional bodies (and the cabinet is itself an extra constitutional body) is that the Prime Minister is free to consult and seek advice from any minister of even a person from

outside, thus circumventing the legal process of working. The first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a mass leader and prominent freedom fighter. He had a high intellectual ability and was a man of character and moral values. He thus ruled as a virtual dictator and after Patel's death in December 1950 was largely unchallenged. His daughter Indira Gandhi who ruled for nearly fifteen years was very different from her father and was haughty, imperious, strict and authoritarian in her behaviour. Her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, too was aristocratic to the core and well versed in politics, government, economics and administration. He ruled for five years as a virtual monarch. The Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao is however, different. He is learned, scholarly, a polished politician and he is free from the stigma of 'dynasticism' and 'authoritarianism'. He has done well during his full term of five years in office. After the eleventh Lok Sabha elections Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, leader of the United Front, assumed office on June 1, 1996 as Prime Minister. However, the ten month old Deve Gowda government lost the confidence in the Lok Sabha on 11th April, 1997.<sup>4</sup>

The Prime Minister has unfettered discretion to appoint or dismiss his ministers as when required. In 1971, Indira Gandhi's position had become so powerful that no one could expect to be in the cabinet in his or her own right. The Prime Minister is equally free to transfer ministers from one portfolio to the other. At the time of his resignation as law minister in 1951, B.R. Ambedkar, an eminent legal luminary, lamented, "It is difficult to understand the principle underlying the distribution of government work among ministers, which the Prime Minister follows. Is it capacity? Is it trust? Is it friendship? Is it ability?" All this establishes beyond doubt that the Indian Prime Minister is the vital nerve of the cabinet and is fully free to reshuffle his/her pack as and when desired. The Indian practice is supported by practice in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

The advent of coalition government on the political scene has altered the pattern of executive functioning in significant way. Multi party coalition government has meant a departure from or at least modifications in the pattern of west minister parliamentary tradition. The working of federal coalition cabinets has resulted in larger cabinets and in turn, greater federation of the cabinet system in India.

There has also been a wider power sharing between the national and regional parties which has promoted national unity and integration. However, coalition cabinets are also characterized by instability of union government though state have become more autonomous and stronger.<sup>6</sup>

The Prime Minister is not only weak but also ineffective and inactive. He has no freedom in selecting the members of council of Ministers with the coalition system gradually gaining maturity, the position of Prime minister improved to some extent. But the very nature of their leadership denied them the dominance that a Prime Minister enjoys in the prime ministerial form of the government. The absence of a charismatic leadership and the rise of coalition system of government at the centre have led to the decline of the office of prime minister.<sup>7</sup>

The problem of appointing the Prime Minister found its first manifestation in the development of coalition politics in 1979 when Moraji Desai, instead of facing the no-confidence motion tabled against his ministry by then leader of the opposition, Y.B. Chavan of the congress (s) resigned, a section of the rest while Janata party formed the Janata (s) and thus under the leadership of Charan Singh staked its claim. The president gave first opportunity to the Leader of the Opposition Since Chavan regretted his inability, the claims of the Janata Leader and of the (s) (Chavan Singh) were submitted list of their supporters. Since the side of Charan Singh became heavier after the cancellation of certain common and working names, the chance of forming an alternative government was given to him by the president. He would seek the confidence of Lok Sabha at the earliest possible date. The New Prime Minister formed a coalition government with the help of congress (s) while congress(I) and CPM decided to support it from outside. After some time, the Akali Dal and the AIDMK also joined it. This

government failed to secure the vote of confidence. It fell after 24 days when the Congress (I) decided not to support the confidence motion tabled by the Prime Minister resigned with a written advice to the president to make an appeal to the people. It leads to great political instability in India.

Once again, the war of succession ensued. The newly elected leader of the Janata Party (Jagjivan Ram) staked his claim without agreeing to submit a list of his supporters. The president feared the adaptation of dishonourable means by the Janata leaders for winning over some legislator if more time were allowed for horse trading. Thus though mid-term poll as the only way out to solve the tangled issue. In respect, he was neither guided by the advice of the outgoing Council Minister which would have been binding on him, as so strongly affirmed by the law. A well known constitutional jurist like N.A. Palkhivala, that the opinion of a majority, which could not live with confidence even for a day, was not at all binding on him and the only possible course before him was to give chance to Jagjivan Ram.<sup>7</sup>

Absolute minority in the Lok Sabha as the Prime Minister of India is susceptible to serious doubts not only in view of the future possibilities of a coalition government at the centre but also in view of the factional politics rampant inside the majority party itself.<sup>21</sup> The record of the past indicates that while the first president (Prasad) subscribed to the doctrine of automatic nomination of the leader of the majority party (Nehru) in view of his personality of an unchallenged and also unchallengeable Caesar, his successor (Radhakrishna) acted differently under different circumstances. He appointed Nanda as the interim Prime Minister after he got the decision of the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet; he appointed Shastri as the second Prime Minister after the decision of the Congress Parliamentary Party was available, again he appointed Nanda as the sudden death of Shastri in view of the precedent of 1964 and then appointed Mrs. Gandhi as the third Prime Minister after he had got the decision of the CPP. Likewise Jatti appointed Desai as the Prime Minister without entering into the controversy whether the victorious Janata Party was in the strict sense of the term, or that it was a party according to the laws and regulations of the country, or that whether the constituents of this party had declared their resolve to merge their individual entities or not. In this way, appointment of Prime Minister by president of India is also some time pose challenge to his constitutional discretion power in coalition circumstances than single party majority in parliament.<sup>8</sup>

The functioning of Prime Minister as Party leader in coalition politics is quite critical, in a coalition government prime minister cannot take the decision in favour of his party that leads the dissatisfaction of his coalition partner. Some time he is compelled to drop some cabinet colleague of his party to maintain the appeasement of alliance partner this fact happened many times in Indian political system.

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