CHAPTER VI

B.J.P. AND CENTRE-STATE RELATIONS

Bhartiya Janata party or the erstwhile Bhartiya Jansangh is perhaps the only political party which has advocated a strong Centre to preserve the unity and integrity of Akhand Bharat. Among all the organised parties, the B.J.P. has a clear pro-Centre stance. The B.J.P. firmly believes that a strong Centre was an imperative need of the country's political situation.¹

The B.J.P. has an extensive organisational base in the states of the Hindi heartland, spreading from Bihar to Haryana. The party is known for its strong, disciplined, centralized, hierarchical organisation and it works through a federated network of active local units linked to its powerful Centre. An important explanation for the party's organisational discipline lies in its ideological cohesion. It believes in the unity of the country through a assertion of dominant Hindu culture. The party believes that by setting up a strong national government based upon distinctive Hindu orientation, it is possible to maintain national unity and to protect the nation against the various fissiparous forces. Equating a strong Centre with a strong nation, the B.J.P. insists that national interests have
primacy over regional interests.

B.J.P. as a rightwing national opposition party firmly believes in one nation, one culture and one language. This encourages the party to plead for one strong Centre having all the important power of the constitution vested in it. The party stands for powerful Centre to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the Country.

The B.J.P. holds the view that the constitution of India is essentially sound. It envisages strong state with strong Centre. The distribution of power between the Centre and the states in the field of political and administrative relations doesn't need much change. But the B.J.P. argues that there is a clear case for devolution of greater financial powers to the states to enable them to discharge their developmental responsibilities more effectively. 2

The Bhartiya Jansangh in its first manifesto published on 29th Oct. 1951, focused on national integration. It stated that India's unity would be furthered by an educational system reflecting Bhartiya culture, by an indigenous link language (Hindi in Devnagri script), by the full integration of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian union, and by a policy denying special rights to any minority. The Jansangh went to the extent of saying that it considers a unitary form of government more appropriate than federal
one.3 But to the Jansangh, the establishment of unitary state didn't mean centralisation of power since it has faith in democracy. The Jansangh wanted to make all people partners in the governance of the country through decentralization of power to the lowest level. Village panchayats, municipalities, corporations and other local bodies will be given a recognition in the constitution and will derive strength from it.4

However, the position of Bhartiya Jansangh during the third general election was rather a paradoxical one. In the sub-heading of its party manifesto, Jansangh talked of 'unitary form of government'. It further said that as per the present constitution, one can call the Centre 'Union' and provinces 'States', and it is believed that a separate and somewhat sovereign status of the constituents would be a hindrance to national unity. The Jansangh went to the extent of saying that it will amend the constitution and declare India a unitary state.5

But, in the following subheading of the same manifesto 'Decentralisation of political power', the Jansangh mentioned that it will restore to local bodies, such as the village panchayats and municipalities, which are primary units of democratic system, their pride of place in the
constitution of the country. They will derive all authority from it. District councils and Janpad Sabhas will be established and they will be assured of financial resources, so that they may discharge their responsibilities fully without looking into the state government for grants. No right to supersede or dissolve duly elected local body, or to suspend or remove any of its members, will be allowed to a state government. This right will be given to an independent judicial body. 6

The Jansangh, on the one hand, stood for unitary form of government and at the same time, for decentralisation of political power. It becomes difficult to understand the real motive of the party on the Centre-state relation. This also gives sufficient scope of suspicion on the genuine desire of decentralisation or distribution of power to local units by the party. This ambivalent approach on federalism has rather projected the image of Jansangh more on the side of 'Unitary State'.

The fourth general election brought significant changes in the complexion of Indian polity. Between the 1962 and 1967 elections, a series of events had eroded support of the ruling Congress party. India fought costly wars with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965) which drained resources; it experienced severe droughts and high rates of inflation.
Anti-Congress sentiment was fueled by outbursts of popular agitation over cow protection and a choice of a national link language. The Congress missed the unifying influence of Prime Minister Nehru, who had led the country from 1947 until his death in 1964. Jansangh believed that under these circumstances, the public mood might be shifting in ways they could exploit to strengthen the party’s support base. The Jansangh did improve its position by polling 9.41% popular vote (highest till then) and 35 seats in the Lok Sabha. Though its influence and gains were largely confined to northern belt, (Delhi-6; U.P.-12 and M.P.-10 Lok Sabha seats) but due to its electoral success in various states in north India, the Jansangh couldn’t be ignored in the formation of United Front governments. It was a participant in United Front government in Bihar, Haryana, M.P., Punjab and U.P.

Though the 1967 general election brought the change in power structure of India’s politics with the sharing in ministeries by Jansangh in few states, but its stand in election manifesto remained unchanged in favour of a unitary state. The Jansangh pledged to take positive steps to strengthen the sentiments of national unity and one such step mentioned for this was a constitutional amendment to
turn India into a unitary state. The party also sought to further centralise administration by the creation of six more all India services in the sphere of Judiciary, Health, Education, Engineering, Agriculture, Public Enterprise and Police. Nevertheless, the Jansangh also sought to set up a high power commission to inquire and arbitrate on all disputes between the states and the Centre. The decision of this commission were to be made binding.

The Jansangh went to the 1971 general election with great expectations, but the results of parliamentary elections were not so good for the party. The party could get only 22 seats and 7.35% of popular vote in 1971 election. The party's performance dropped substantially. The most probable reason for this was the inability of the party to put up a viable contest against the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's most catching slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' (elimination of poverty) after emerging victorious in Indo-Pak war of 1971.

However, in the changed political scenario of post 1971 period the position of Jansangh on Centre-state relations was also not strictly for status-quo. Perhaps, the experience of sharing government in some states during coalition period (1967-71) brought about a change in its attitude. During this election, the Jansangh didn't talk
about amending constitution to make India a unitary state. Contrary to this, the Jansangh demanded 'a commission on constitution' to make recommendations for changes, if any, in the light of the experience of the last two decades.\textsuperscript{10} The party recognised that Centre-state relations was an important issue and demanded the appointment of an inter-state council. It suggested that inter-state boundary disputes as well as the demand for separate state should be passed on to statutory commission. However, on Jammu and Kashmir, the Jansangh demanded to scrap the Article 370 of Indian constitution to bring the state at par with other states. But, on the whole, the Jansangh by now felt that in the context, of the multi-party pattern of Indian politics that has emerged following the 1967 poll, the entire structure of Centre-state relations need to be reviewed.\textsuperscript{11} The party said that it would like the centralised constitution to be set up. But until such a radical overhaul of the constitution becomes feasible, the working committee recommends a reappraisal of the existing financial arrangements with a view to ensure that the states get more and more through assured devolutions rather than discretionary grants and that the quantum of finance received by states through such non discretionary
devolutions corresponds almost to their obligations.\textsuperscript{12}

The Jansangh seems to have expressed more concern on the financial relations between the Centre and the states than the political and administrative relation. The party strongly supported the rearrangement of financial relations between the Centre and the state, but at the same time wanted that Centre's political authority as laid down in the constitution should be maintained. The party, however, felt that over the years, the developmental obligations of the states have been growing rapidly and the inelastic source of revenue allocated to them under the constitution are not at all commensurate with these responsibilities. This resulted in over all dependence of the states on the Centre, especially on the discretionary grants they received from the Centre under Article 282.\textsuperscript{13} In the administrative field, the Jansangh favored the establishment of Janpads to provide an opportunity to the people to participate in governance and some degree of decentralisation.\textsuperscript{14}

The 1977 general election which brought Janata Party government at the Centre by replacing the Congress party was an important development in Indian politics. For the first time, a non Congress government was sworn in at the Centre and this could be possible only when all major opposition parties united and merged to fight against uninterrupted
Congress rule for the last 30 years. The Jansangh was one of the major partner in the Janata Party government after its merger with it. The four major political parties (Congress, Socialist, B.K.D and Jansangh) after forming Janata party fought the election on the common manifesto of Janata party. However, on the question of Centre-state relations, the Jansangh within the Janata party was not a supporter of any major change in the existing federal relations. This became evident from its endorsement of the then Prime Ministers Morarji Desai's stand, when he rejected the demand for any constitutional change in Centre-state relations proposed by C.P.M. led West Bengal government. The Jansangh strongly defended Morarji Desai on this issue.

However, the Janata party government couldn't complete its term and fell apart due to its internal contradictions. This resulted in the announcement of mid-term election in 1980 bringing back to Indira Gandhi's Congress to power at the Centre. The Jansangh, being a part of Janata party till the mid-term election had no separate manifesto. The Janata party position on Centre-state relations was the same. But, soon after the election, there was a split in the Janata party. The erstwhile Jansangh of Janata party declared its new name "Bhartiya Janata party" (B.J.P) by
shedding off its earlier name. The new Bhartiya Janata party under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee expressed its resentment on the dissolution of state assemblies by the Congress government at the Centre. Commenting on this, the Organiser wrote:

"The dissolution of seven assemblies has strained the Centre-state relations by the newly elected government of Indira Gandhi. The dissolving of assemblies when there is no breakdown of constitutional machinery and the state governments concerned enjoy stable majorities, is likely to prove highly controversial and strain Centre-state relations, apart from serious confrontations between the Congress(I) and almost other national political parties which have opposed such political vandalism."

The B.J.P.'s concern for Centre-state relations became more evident in eighties. During the Srinagar conclave of opposition parties assembled to discuss the Centre-state relations in October 1983, the B.J.P. asked for the review in the financial, administrative and political sphere of Centre-state relations. The B.J.P. and Lok Dal under the banner of "National Democratic Alliance" called for evolving a national consensus on Centre-state relations. The B.J.P. demanded at that conference the setting up of an 'Inter state council' as provided in the Article 263 of the constitution. It said that, the governor's role requires clear delineation by the inter-state council, particularly
with regard to decisions relating to the elections of a Chief Minister, the declaration of break down of law and order in the state and the dissolution of a state assembly. The inter state council should also be vested with the authority to make final recommendations on the Centre's power to dismiss a state government under Article 356 and to intervene in a state for maintaining the public order, if national interest so dictates. It further demanded that planning commission should be an autonomous body and answerable to the N.D.C, which, in turn as economic counterpart of the inter-state council, should co-ordinate Centre-state relations in economic policy and planning. The states should have more participation, initiative and autonomy in the formulation and implementation of five year plan. The Finance commission should also have the power to monitor the Centre's expenditure. 16

However, the 1984 general election further witnessed the B.J.P's position to maintain the quasi-federal character of the Indian constitution. This time B.J.P. in its election manifesto elaborately mentioned the Centre-state relations as an important issue. The B.J.P's manifesto said "ours is a federal constitution. It envisages strong states with strong Centre. Indeed the whole can't be strong unless the constituent parts are strong too. But over the years the
states have been increasingly reduced to glorified municipalities. The B.J.P. will restore the balance between the Centre and the states as visualised by our constitution makers and to that end it will

(I) Support and strengthen state governments and not destabilise or topple them.

(II) Appoint State governors in consultation with state governments.

(III) Give the state a fairer-share of central revenues and increase the financial powers of the state.

(IV) Delete the temporary Article 370 of the constitution.

(V) Constitute the inter-state council under Article 263 to settle all inter-state and Centre-state disputes.17

By 1984 general election or mid eighties, the B.J.P. demonstrated a perceptible change in its position on Centre-state relations than in the past. The changed political complexion of Indian polity and its experience of governing some state governments during the Janata Party regime made the B.J.P. realize the need for a healthy Centre-state relations and to remove the mistrust between the Centre and the states.

The B.J.P., for the first time, expressed its elaborate views on the whole, issue of Centre-state before the
Sarkaria Commission, set up by the central government in 1983 to look into the Centre-state relations. The B.J.P. in its reply to Sarkaria commission's questionnaire clearly asked for a change in the existing arrangement of the Centre-state relations. "The party felt the need for the decentralisation of political power, since a vast country like India can be administered only through regional government." The B.J.P. believes that the existence of states as political units is inevitable and desirable as well. The constitution has made certain arrangements for the distribution of power between the Centre and states and the partisan implementation of this resulted in straining the Centre-state relations. Hence, in the interest of the country's unity and integrity, effective steps must be taken to remove the strains. While doing this, Centre has to be prevented from becoming authoritarian. The states, however, also can't become the Centre of parallel or conflicting loyalties. Therefore, a review has become necessary in order to strike a proper balance.

The B.J.P. believes that the Indian constitution is sufficiently flexible to meet the challenges of time. Various tensions, problems, and issues which have arisen in Union state relationship exist, because over the years these
relationships have not been worked in conformity with the letter and spirit of the constitution. But these distortions can't be rectified merely by evolving conventions and procedures and hence, some changes in the constitution are also necessary.20

The B.J.P's General Secretary K.N. Sahni in an interview argued for the need for a review in existing framework of Centre-state relations. He wanted the states to get back their due share particularly in financial relations. He defended the need for a strong Centre but at the same time, wanted the states to have sufficient power and due recognition of its position and honor by the Centre. The mistrust and aberrations that have occurred in Centre-state relations should be removed for better harmony.21

The B.J.P, by and large, preferred to maintain the distribution of legislative power between the Centre and the states mentioned in the three lists: union, state and concurrent of the constitution. But on the misuse of Article 200 of constitution, (reserving some of the bills passed by state legislature for the assent of the President), the party wants that to be amended, so that the Governor should not have any power to reserve the bills for Presidential assent.22 The B.J.P. general Secretary K.L. Sharma in his interview felt that the present legislative relations
between the Centre and the states are adequate. However, there is a need to correct the imbalance due to the misuse of power by the Centre.\textsuperscript{23}

On the role of Governor, the B.J.P. wants the constitutional position of governor to be strengthened by bringing some changes in the manner of appointment of Governor and his power also. The Governor should be appointed by the President from a panel prepared by the inter-state council and with the consultation of concerned states. He should be removed only by the process of impeachment like Supreme Court Judge and should not be transferred from one state to other state. All questions about the majority enjoyed by the Chief Minister should be tested on the floor of assembly. The inter-state council should prepare guidelines for the Governor to help in discharging the constitutional functions.\textsuperscript{24}

Both the B.J.P. general Secretaries, K.N. Sahni and K.L. Sharma were of the opinion that Governor should maintain its constitutional status. However, on the appointment of politician as governors, they didn't oppose it, but they wanted these Governors to act for unity, integrity and dignity of the constitutional norms. There should be no other place to prove the majority of political
parties than the floor of the assembly. They also admitted that dissolution of state assemblies by Janata Party Government in 1977 and desired enmass resignation of Governors by National front government was a bad trend and it should be stopped.25

As far as financial relations between the Centre and the state is concerned, the B.J.P. has shown its major concern on this issue. The party expressed its dissatisfaction on the existing financial relations between the Centre and the states. While replying to Sarkaria Commission, the B.J.P. pointed that the present scheme of distribution of economic resources has proved a major irritant in the Centre-state relations. The party feels that26

1. The resources for raising funds available to the states are comparatively inelastic.

2. The functions allocated to the state are such as lead compulsively to expanding responsibilities, particularly in the context of ambitious development plans.

3. Important sources for national plan, financing as foreign aid, external borrowing, deficit financing, all tend to strengthen central rather than the state
resources.

Hence, the B.J.P. wants that the following steps must be taken to meet the grievances of the states.

(a) The arrangement for devolution should be such as will allow the state's resources to correspond more nearly to their obligations. State's share in the divisible pool should be enlarged.

(b) The devolution should be made in the manner that will enable an integrated view to be taken of the plan as well as non-plan needs of both the Centre and the states.

(c) The loans and advances by the Centre should be related to the developmental needs of the state.

(d) States should receive royalties on an ad-valorem basis on all major mineral resources. The royalty must bear a reasonable relationship with the price fixed.

It becomes clear from this that the B.J.P. has got comprehensive views on the financial relations between the Centre and the states and wants substantial change in this arrangement. The B.J.P. general secretary K.N. Sahni also supported the change in the existing financial relations. He wanted the states not to be left on the mercy of the Centre for their funds and economic development. In his opinion the states share should be enhanced in the divisible pool of
On the composition and character of the Finance Commission, the B.J.P. wants their it should be suitably changed and should no longer remain a Centre dominated institution. Article 280 also need to be amended, so that composition of the commission reflect the quasi federal character of the Indian polity. The Finance Commission should be given responsibility of earmarking funds for the local self bodies out of the devolution of the states.

However, on the question of supremacy to planning commission or Finance Commission, B.J.P. General Secretary K.L. Sharma was of the view that role of planning commission and Finance commission should be complementary and supplementary to each other. But the planning commission should get constitutional status.

The Article 370 of the Indian constitution was one issue, on which both the General Secretary K.N. Sahni and K.L. Sharma were of the firm opinion that it should be deleted without delay in order to solve the Kashmir problem. Their argument was that the Article 370 was incorporated in our constitution in a specific circumstances. However, the situation has changed since then and hence there is no need
for retaining Article 370 of the Indian constitution. 29

The overall recommendations of Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations, according to both general Secretaries of B.J.P. are worth considering. However, there are certain limitations in implementing all recommendations, but some of them should be acceptable and implemented. There is a need for more discussion and debate on Sarkaria Commission recommendations in the light of latest political development of country.

However, one can argue that the B.J.P. (erswhile Jansangh) approach on Centre-state relations since the beginning has been for a strong Centre. The B.J.P., though supported the idea for decentralisation of powers towards states, but mainly in financial sphere without much diluting the Centre's authority. The noticeable point of B.J.P. with regard to Centre-state relations has been the change in the demand for a unitary state. The change in the demand made by the party in the late seventies and early eighties is that the party now favours to maintain the quasi federal character of the Indian constitution. This view also got reflected in the 1991, election manifesto of B.J.P., Where it demanded the restructuring of the Centre-state relations in view of the quick economic development and decentralisation. B.J.P. also sought to implement the Sarkaria Commission
report on Centre-state relations. Although B.J.P. has not supported the "Anandpur Sahib resolution" of Akali Dal for state autonomy, it supports the formation of smaller states which are commercially and democratically viable. (Uttaranchel, Vananchal and Delhi etc.). B.J.P. has shown flexibility in accepting the quasi-federal constitution in recent years because the party has been able to expand its social base and electoral performances particularly after 1989 general election. The B.J.P., however, on the whole believes that only a strong Centre can protect the unity and integrity of India. The B.J.P. wants strong action against these states, who assert autonomy on ethnic and linguistic basis.

Till very recent years, the B.J.P. had four main limitations. It was considered to be a sectarian, northern, upper-caste led and mainly a urban party. All this had restricted its organisational growth and made it a party of Hindi heartland. However, in the recent years the party has been able to expand its social base and improve its performance drastically in 1989 and 1991 elections, disproving its earlier limitations of being a urban, northern, upper-caste party. Though the support structure of B.J.P. has been mainly the middle class, small traders and
businessmen, but the party has been able to extract and mobilise the support of rural and lower class on the plank of "Hindutva" in recent years. B.J.P. has also exhibited the tilt towards more financial powers and allocation to states besides some administrative and other powers. All this is, perhaps, the result of B.J.P's exposé to wider federalizing process of India.
FOOT-NOTES


3. Party Manifesto of Bhartiya Jansangh, 1952,

4. Ibid - 1957

5. Ibid - 1962


12. Ibid.


18. Sarkaria Commission report on Centre-state relations - part-II, p-619-(Published by Manager-Govt. of India press, N.Delhi.)


27. Interview with K.N.Sahni-B.J.P. General Secretary.


29. Interview with K.N. Sahni and K.L. Sharma- B.J.P. General Secretary.