CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

Every political system is a result of a delicate balance between the various centripetal and centrifugal forces operating in a society. But since the balance is a delicate one, the emergence, the strengthening, the weakening or the disappearance of any forces can cause considerable tension within the system, demanding new relationships and even rearrangement within the federal system. The federalism which came into operation in India after the inauguration of the constitution in 1950, also developed strains during the period of its operation in the last four decades.

The present study has underscored the role of political parties and party system in influencing the structure and dynamics of federal polity in India. The shift in the Indian party system from one party dominant system to multi party system after the fourth general election had a considerable bearing on the working of Centre-state relations in India. These political changes in Indian politics brought the need to study the role and attitude of Indian political parties with regard to the Centre-state relations. This is already becoming a major concern of today's study of federalism.

This study of the Centre-state relations in India
reveals that, in each phase of development of India as an independent sovereign state, the problem of Centre-state relations has become more complex. The socio-economic and political changes during the past four decades reveals that the problem can no longer be considered within the framework of a traditional federal structure, as it ceased to be merely a constitutional problem but has become essentially a political one.¹

The Constituent assembly though convinced, that in a vast country characterised by cultural and religious diversity, a federal governmental structure alone could work, yet it couldn’t move away from the idea that a strong and dominant centre was essential to preserve the unity and integrity of the country and to prevent the constituent units from falling apart. In its quest for a unified polity, federal in structure but unitary in spirit, considered essential not only for keeping in check the centrifugal tendencies, but also for the building of a nation state. The constituent assembly, conceived Centre-state relations not as those between two autonomous and inter-dependent spheres, whose areas of powers were clearly defined and therefore also restricted by the constitution, but as between two unequal parties, one of which was to be placed in a position
of dominance.

The shadow of partition which led to the emergence of a strong centre at the time of the framing of the constitution, continue to influence events in the period immediately following independence. This process to a larger extent assisted by the phenomenon of one party dominance and the leadership of towering personality like Nehru. Amal Rav has portrayed this picture by saying:

"The dominant style of India's politics at the time of constitution framing as well as constitutional development was a clear single party hegemony. The growth process, thus, reflected an awareness in depth of one party dominance system. Though the inter play of political forces could operate within the broad framework of an open system, the opposition was insignificant and its role was mainly limited to influencing the governmental decisions marginally rather than substantially. Actually the evolution of India's federal constitutional system came to be generally by the historically set character of the Congress." 2

The question of Centre-state relations in India aroused tremendous controversy after the fourth general elections in 1967; Earlier to this, despite the pronounced centralizing tendencies, Indian federal polity didn't face much stress or strain (except the dismissal of Kerala's CPI government in
1959). The obvious reason for this was the rule of Congress party both at the Centre and the states. Therefore any dispute that arose over the functioning of federal polity resolved in most cases "across the table" at the party level and the problem of Centre-state relations never appeared insurmountable. There was not only the single party rule in the Centre and the states, but the state Chief Ministers also seemed to have approved the concentration of power in the centre as the only means to safeguard the integrity of the country. The consensus was in favour of the centralisation on the ground that for a newly liberated country to build its economy and ensure its economic future, a strong centre was most appropriate.

The 1967 election proved to be a turning point in Indian politics and for the federal axis of India. The outcome of 1967 elections put an end to the era of one party dominance and brought the party system of different complexion, where the different political parties (National and Regional) came to power in various states other than the Congress ruling at the centre. The congress government at centre not only faced several non-congress state government but also a sizeable opposition which advocated the state rights and the autonomy. Thus the situation demanded a
redefinition of the operational aspect of Indian federalism since there was a collapse of the Congress system, which acted as the principle centripetal force. The breakdown of Congress system led to a situation of multi party system straining Centre-state relations. The change in the complexion of political elites (from the urban professional to rural preponderance of agriculturalists in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies) also provided a strong support for the change in the Centre-state relations. The Centre under Congress rule instead of responding favorably to this demand resorted to misuse of article 356 by dismissing opposition led state governments. This further strained the federal relations. Indira Gandhi led regime (1967-84) witnessed an emasculation of powers of the states. Her centralized style of functioning and use of Presidential rule as a federal instrument (As many as 71 times) turned out to be suicidal for the development of a healthy federal polity in India. After Nehru's death, Congress under Indira Gandhi's leadership deinstitutionalised the Congress party contributing further to the erosion of the India's federal system. The process of deinstitutionalization not only led to massive concentration of power in the central leadership but also deprived the Congress Party of seasoned national and State Party leaders. The Congress Party under the Nehru
and Shastri's stewardship faced no serious debate over the question of centralization, because the consensual approach exhibited a liberal attitude which restrained the misuse of an instrument like Presidential rule (only 11 times during Nehru, Shastri period) in dealing with the states. But India witnessed a gradual centralization of power under Indira Gandhi's leadership straining the Centre-state relations. This in turn led to growth of regionalism and more particularly the regional political parties in the 1980's. The changed political situation of the eighties gave a fillip to the demand for change in Centre-state relations culminating in the appointment of Sarkaria Commission to look into Centre-state relations by then Prime-Minister Indira Gandhi. Congress party under the leadership of Indira Gandhi became an appendage of the leader and democratic sustenance of party at grass roots level totally overlooked and internal elections were repeatedly bypassed. Indira Gandhi over-looked the need for building a consensus and adoption of a new approach in dealing of Centre-state relations. Indira Gandhi regime witnessed the transformation of Congress Party into a highly centralized body totally depending upon the leaders, reducing its electoral base and performance after 1980 election and the loss of its dominant
character.

The Bharatiya Janata Party consistently supported a strong centre to preserve Akhand Bharat. Among the all India Parties, the B.J.P. believes that only a strong national government can maintain national unity based upon "Hindu culture" (now nationalist culture) and protect against the various separatist or fissiparous forces. B.J.P. as a right-wing national opposition party propagated for one nation, one culture and one language and insists that the national interest should have primacy over regional or local interest. The party in all its election manifestoes has supported the idea of strong centre or strong nation. Though, B.J.P. has advocated strong centre, but it has also talked of decentralisation, mainly in financial spheres. The party wants the existing financial relations to be changed in favour of the states. It wants that state should not left on the mercy of centre for their funds and economic development. The party also wants to make units like Zila-parisad and Gram panchayat financially strong and viable. The B.J.P. in the recent years particularly after 1989 & 1991 elections has taken a position to review the Centre-state relations and implement the Sarkaria Commission report. This is the out come of party's expanding social base, improved electoral performance and increased share in
the power structure in Indian federal system. The process of polarization and more of federalization made the party to demand for change in Centre-state relations.

The Communist Party of India was the first political party which demanded a change in the existing Centre-state relations in the early sixties itself. The Communist Party of India was the first opposition party to come into power in Kerala after the 1957 election and also to experience the partisan use of Presidential rule by centre to bring down the elected government of E.M.S. Namboodripad. Ever since the Communist Party of India has been very critical of Centre-state relations. After the split in the Communist Party of India, the CPI(M) and CPI have not changed much their position on Centre-state relations. Though the CPI (M) has been more vocal and critical of existing federal relations because of its stronger mass base and sharing of power in few states, whereas, CPI has been rather mild and less radical in demanding an alteration in the Centre-state relations. Understandably, the Party's narrow social base, having no government of its own in the states and on occasion extending support to the Congress led centre were the reasons for its being less critical than CPI(M) on existing Centre-state relations. Both these Communist
Parties however, did not confine their position on Centre-state relation to just some provisions of the Indian constitution, rather they considered this as serious contradictions which were coming to the surface as class contradiction matured in the Indian society with the sharpening of the economic and political crisis. Hence to CPI and CPI (M), the problem essentially embraces the question of class policies and conflict and to remove this, there is need to change the existing Centre-state relations, which is the only way to achieve the real equality and autonomy for the states.

However, the emergence and growth of regional political parties in Indian federal system is the consequence of an articulation of the regional interest in an organised manner. The system of democratic periodic election brought to prominence rural-elites having mass support base in the country side which strengthened regional grievances. The regional party in general aim at counteracting the centralising effect of the national parties.

The Akali Dal of Punjab and D.M.K. of Tamil Nadu are regional parties, who have vigorously advocated the drastic change in the existing Centre-state relations. Both parties have firm roots in their respective regions and therefore have been able to capture the power in the states on their
own on more than one occasion.

The Akali Dal demand for change in Centre-state relations emanates mainly from Anandpur Sahib resolution. The resolution demanded that Foreign affairs, Defence, Communication and Currency should remain with the centre and rest of subjects should be given to the states. The Akali Dal highlighted the demand for state autonomy on various platforms and occasions. In the eighties the Akali Dal demand for restructuring the Centre-state relations was further accentuated in the wake of Punjab problem. The Punjab accord between the Akali Dal leader Harcharan Singh Longowal and then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 followed with Akali Dal victory in the election of Punjab Assembly. The Akali Dal government of Surjeet Singh Barnala also projected the Centre-state relations as an important issue and demanded to restructure it in accordance with Anandpur Sahib resolution. The Akali Dal has become the faction ridden party and few of its faction support the demand for separate Khalistan whereas other faction wants to drastically change the existing Centre-state relations by amending the constitution itself. The Akali Dal demand for change in Centre-state relations has both the religious and regional tinge. Akali Dal by demanding more power for state
wants to preserve Sikh identity as a distinct religious group and also to protect the Punjab identity as a Socio-cultural group in a definite territory. Both these urges of Akali Dal have been manifested in the demand for restructuring federal relations to achieve real state autonomy.

The D.M.K. is the another regional party of South India, which demanded restructuring Centre-state relations during the sixties. The party captured the power in Tamil Nadu in 1967 election by projecting an anti centre stance. The D.M.K. put forward the demand that centre should be confined to only Foreign affairs, Currency, Defence and Communication and the rest of powers should be with the state. The party successfully projected itself as a champion of state autonomy by winning the 1967 and 1971 election in Tamil Nadu. It was the first regional party to appoint a commission (Rajmunnar Committee) to recommend suggestions on Centre-state relations. The D.M.K. in all its election manifestoes since 1967 has projected the Centre-state relations as an important issue and demanded to change it. The party has been able to defeat Congress Party in assembly elections on anti centre, anti Hindi campaign, cultural nationalism (to preserve Dravida culture) and state autonomy demand. The D.M.K. demand for more power to state is however
essentially the political one to achieve state autonomy unlike Akali Dal of Punjab which is more blended with religious demands than the political one.

The cumulative impact of the regional parties and regionalization of political parties in India has been the cause as well as the effect, among other things, of the growing importance of the rural vote and the emergence of the regionally oriented elites in state capital and districts. At the same time most national level leaders have become increasingly rooted in the politics of their states and are often known to promote the interest of their own regions even when this involves working against the federal centre. The recent years have witnessed more and more this tilt in the operation of federal polity in India.

The Centre-state relations after 1984 election more and more strained. The political changes taking place in Indian federal polity has brought the question of Centre-state relations into greater prominence. Centre-state relations in the Rajiv Gandhi era initially showed signs of improvement since he didn't try to destabilise the non-Congress (I) governments and refrained from using article 356 to impose President rule. But soon all this disappeared and he resorted to the old practice of intolerance for
dissent and personal dominance in the party organisation. This led to the revival of Indira Gandhi's centralised and authoritarian style of functioning causing an immense strain in Centre-state relations.

The change of government in 1989 election from Congress to National front at centre didn't result in any substantial change in Centre-state relations. The 1991 election which brought the minority government of Congress Party at centre has yet to start function properly.

The most significant development with regard to Centre-state relations after Indira Gandhi's era has been the submission of Sarkaria Commission report, set up to review the Centre-state relations. However the commission in its report was limited by its commitment to the framework of the Indian constitution. The commission found that the basic framework of the constitution with regard to Centre-state relation is sound and only some anomalies crept in the working of the constitution needs to be corrected. But commission seems to have ignored those factors which caused strains in the Centre-state relations especially in the post Nehru period due to cultural, religious and regional challenges to the integrity of India. The commission couldn't show a comprehensive understanding of the factors responsible for the change in the atmosphere of country
because of its beliefs that constitutional arrangement itself will provide a satisfactory solution to the problem. This has led it to ignore the changes that have taken place in the organisation, role and culture of the various political parties and their technique of mass mobilisation and the emergence of new forces in the form of regional elites, who view their economic interest in conflict with the interests of industrial bourgeoisie having an all India character. This is the changing reality of the federal polity of India to which proper attention has not been paid by Sarkaria Commission. But in spite of these shortcomings, the recommendations of commission will have far reaching impact on Centre-state relation if implemented by the Central government sincerely.

The phase of Centre-state relations (1967-84) thus may be characterised as confronted leadership and distorted federalism. By distorted federalism not to mean factors leading to secession but factors due to which federal compromise is achieved with great difficulty. The post 1967 period has been the scene of lack of party discipline and party leadership to continue its dominance as it has done for 20 years since independence. The federal system has to operate within a multi-party framework, which perhaps is
more akin to the plural society background of India's federalism. Confrontation of the centre with those of the states are seen in matters particularly relating to economic policy, and the use of Article 356 for partisan interest which has affected the federal process as well as the process of integration.

In short, it could be argued that during the last four decades, independent India has undergone a transformation from homogeneous polity where power was shared between the centre and the states. But, now what is being witnessed in India could well be the development of a federal political culture, which can't tilt the operational balance of power in the federal system advantageous to the centre. The point to be emphasised is that the emergence of a federal political culture need not, by definition, be antagonistic to a strong commitment to national power. It spells no danger to the unity and integrity of the country and at the same time, it is likely to provide a strong psychological support for a truly federal equation between the centre and the states. The Indian federalism today seeks to reconcile unity with multiplicity, centralisation with decentralisation. Therefore the pattern of Centre-state relations has to be dynamic, to response the centripetal and centrifugal forces operating in the functioning of federal polity of India.
FOOT-NOTES
