CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The three systems of prime ministerial leadership outlined in the previous chapters are, as a matter fact, more related to the variations of the nature of the party system than the personalities of the incumbents. To be sure, personalities of the incumbents have varied considerably from Nehru to Manmohan Singh. However, personalities were party helped or hindered by the varying political atmospherics shaped by the prevailing party system. A strong personality (e.g. Nehru) would emerge as a stronger prime ministerial leader in a one-party Government sans factional feuds than a modest personality (e.g. Shastri). However, even a strong personality would be hamstrung in a factionalized and fragmented party Government (e.g. Desai in the Janata Party Government during 1977-79). Minority and / or coalition Governments in a multiparty system are, of course, an entirely different proposition; they require moderate personalities with reconciliatory skills, i.e, leaders who creatively lead by following. What we have earlier called the federal prime ministerial leadership style is typically the product of the post-1989 multiparty system.¹

This phase has witnessed coalition Governments with the number of parties ranging from eight to 24, some of them “national” or all-India parties and some other, “State” or regional parties.

Three different coalitional assortments of these parties have rallied round three “pivot” national parties at various points in time since 1989; Janata Dal, Bharatiya Janata Party, and Indian National Congress. A fourth national party, Communist Party of India (Marxist), was once offered the leadership of one of the Janata Dal-led United Front Governments with Jyoti Basu, the West
Bengal Left Front Chief Minister, as the Prime Minister. While Basu was inclined to accept the offer, his party rejected it on the consideration that it would not join, let alone, lead, a coalition Government in which it was not in a dominant position. Basu later described this decision of his party as a “historical blunder”.

These four real or potential pivot national parties are of special importance to the working of federal executive governance in India today. They are more likely than regional parties to head a federal coalition Government, although the later have often played a crucial balancing role in deciding which of the thee major national parties was to form the Government.²

In a country of multicultural and federal proportions like India, coalition politics in the legislative arena may find expression at two planes: intra-party and inter-party. The Indian National Congress in its dominant phase was the locus classics for intra-party coalitions on a grand scale. The Janata Party of the late 1970s was at least formally such an intra-party coalitional formation, although one can also argue that it would be more appropriate to regard this party as a de facto inter-party coalition of Congress (Organization), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Socialists, Bharatiya Jan Sangh, and Congress for Democracy. For, these pre-merger constituent parties of the Janata Party never fully merged their separate organizational elements into a truly single party and kept working as veritable parties (rather than factions) under the makeshift canopy of the hurriedly formed Janata Party.

The inter-party coalitions since 1989 have provided a fecund breeding ground for mushrooming and growth of regional parties – new and old – and
fragmentation and dwarfing of national parties. One can delineate at least two types of national parties that have led the various inter-party coalitions since 1990s. federal and confederal. A federal party may be defined as one with a more regularized pattern of articulation between the central and State units of the party organization with reasonable degrees of central direction and branch autonomy for State units. A confederal party is an amalgamation of fairly strong State branches with nominal central control. The Indian National Congress, BJP, and CPI(M) illustrate the category of federal parties, while the Janata Party / Dal exemplified a confederal party.³

It may briefly highlight the relational aspects of the constituent elements of the Union executive. The President is primarily a nominal parliamentary functionary with some nominal federal roles to play. He, must act on the advice of the Cabinet. The Vice-President chairs the meetings of the federal Second Chamber of the Parliament. The Prime Minister is elected from a Lok Sabha constituency, but ultimately he ends up having a nationwide audience and influence. The Union Cabinet usually represents all the regions and States of the Union and is a more effective forum of federal representation than the Rajya Sabha. The All India Services are a unique bureaucracy in the universe of federal political systems in the sense that they alternately serve both the federal and the provincial States.⁴ By virtue of this experience, they build bureaucratic bridges between the Union and State Governments under the respective political executives of both orders of Governments in India.

The relational aspects of the political component of the Union executive have a different beat under a majority party or under a minority party coalitional or multi-partisan configuration. These two different parliamentary situations do
not make much of a difference so far as the role of the President is concerned. However, a minority party Prime Minister must contend with an oppositional parliamentary majority as the opposition. A Prime Minister under a coalitional dispensation finds himself under the compulsion of a bi- or multi – partisan Cabinet control which is a different proposition than a single party and party Whip. Even in a majority party Government, the prime ministerial authority is subject to the factional balance of forces in the Cabinet (e.g., period of the Nehru-Patel duumvirate). In case of a Prime Minister with an undisputed supremacy in the Cabinet, his authority may transform the collective Cabinet system into virtually a prime ministerial (or presidential, in the US American sense) Cabinet system (e.g., the Cabinets under Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi). In such a situation, if the Parliament turns into a meek assembly, the parliamentary checks and balances may give way to a potentially authoritarian situation (e.g., the Emergency regime, 1975-77). In such a situation, only civil society checks and balances and the mass electoral intervention remain as devices of the last recourse.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


