CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

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 Lords to the House of Commons, from the Commons to the Cabinet, and 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-à-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 “Prime Ministerial” government and the Prime Minister has become the “real executive”. Over the years the Prime Minister in Britain as strengthened his position vis-à-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 (first among equals); later, his position was defined as “the keystone of the Cabinet arch”. It is now recognized by all that the Prime Minister is the Chief Executive in a parliamentary system, more or less in the same sense as the President of the United States of America is the presidential system. In power and position he can be placed on par with the powerful President and in some respects he may be regarded as even superior to the President, provided he has a parliamentary majority behind him.
In brief, the Prime Minister is the font of authority final arbiter of policy and the ultimate repository of real power in a parliamentary government.²

The position of the Indian President has been correctly compared to that of the British monarch with some differences. The Indian President is an elected head even though the election is indirect and secondly, he takes an oath on accepting office which binds him to observe the laws and conventions as existing at a given time. Under the law the President appoints the Prime Minister but anyone, even with smattering of knowledge of the working of the Indian Constitution, will admit that in practice it is the Prime Minister who chooses the President.³

Whatever 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” and “Super 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 regarded as haughty, imperious, strict and authoritarian in her behavior. 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 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. Deva Gowda, leader of the United Front, assumed office on 1ST June, 1996 as Prime Minister. However, the ten month old Deva Gowda government lost the confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on 11th April, 1997.4

The Prime Minister has unfettered discretion to appoint or dismiss his ministers as and 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 the practice in Britain.5

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.6

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.7

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The most astonishing development in the sphere of the West Minister model of government should be discovered in the extremely powerful position of the Prime Minister calling for the rechristening of this form of political organization as the ‘Prime Ministerial Government’. The classical doctrine of the Prime Minister being primus inter pares (first among equals) now stands thoroughly discredited. It was after the realization of this astounding development that Humphery Berkeley, an independent minded member of the English Parliament, remarked”. After six and a half years in the House of
Commons, I have been at sufficient close quarters to realize that almost every premise on which my knowledge of constitutional theory was based has turned out to be untrue. Parliament is not, in practice, sovereign. The Prime Minister is not, and has not been for a very long time, primus inter pares”.

The astonishment of this English politician is contained in these words: “The Parliamentary democracy has now collapsed at West Minister, the basic defect in the British system of government is the supra ministerial power of the Prime Minister”. It has its like affirmation in the observation of R.H.S. Crossman who, in his ‘Introduction’ added to the new edition of Bagehot’s classical work The English Constitution’, said these member able words: “The postwar epoch has seen the transformation of the Cabinet government into Prime Ministerial Government. Under this system the hyphen which joins and the buckle which fastens the legislative part to the executive part becomes the single man”.

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 Minister ship 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 of a process of hard bargaining. There are claims and counter claims which result in the creation of Deputy Prime Ministership. Some times a Deputy Prime Minister may try to outsmart 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 even 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 government on the political scene has altered the pattern of executive functioning in significant way. Multy-party coalition government has meant a departure from or at least modification 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.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Prime Minister is regarded as the ‘keystone of the cabinet arch’, he is taken as ‘first among equals’, or4 ‘a moon among the lesser stars’, 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 collation system, it is the co-ordination committee of the constituent elements which sorts 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 study helps us to understand the
causes for changing role and position of Prime Minister in Indian coalition politics. The present study also enables us to find out the measures to strengthen the role and position of Prime Minister in the changing Indian coalition politics.

4. **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

1. To examine the causes for emergence of coalition politics in India.

2. To understand the role of Prime Minister in Indian Parliamentary Democracy.

3. The purpose of the study is to highlight the causes for decline in position and the role of Prime Minister in Indian coalition politics.

4. To explain the changing role of Prime Minister in Indian coalition politics.

5. To suggest measures for the success of coalition government and to strengthen the position of Prime Minister in Indian coalition politics.

5. **HYPOTHESES:**

1. The very nature of leadership of Prime Minister denied them the dominance that a Prime Minister enjoys in the Prime Ministerial form of government.

2. The coalition system gradually gaining maturity, the position of Prime Minister improved to some extent.

3. The absence of a charismatic leadership and rise of coalition system of government at the centre have led to the decline of the office of Prime Minister
6. Methodology:

In order to collect the relevant data for purpose of research work methodology is very important. Research simply means search for facts, answers to the questions an dissolutions to problems. Research becomes a systematic, controlled, and critical investigation of hypothetical pre positions.

Sources of Data:

Both primary and secondary data used for the study. The primary data consists of writings and speeches of Prime Minister. The secondary data in the form of published materials, i.e., books, journals, papers etc., used for research work.

7. Review of Related Literature:

Innumerable books and articles have been published. But works on coalition aspects, theory or practice, have been limited in number. A few works deserve mention. K.P. Karunakaran’s edited volume (Coalition Government in India, Problems and Prospects, 1975) analyses some theories and concepts about coalition making and gives brief reports about some states in India, S.C. Kashyap’s edited work (Coalition Government and Politics in India, 1997) broadly examines the question in the context of the United Front Coalition at the center. D. Sunder Ram’s work (Indian Parliamentary Opposition (ed.), 1996) contains two reprints articles on coalition politics in India, by Iqbal Narayan and Ramkrishna Hegde written much before coalitions appeared at the centre. Indian politics at the crossroads (1998) edited by Anil Kumar Jana Presents three chapter dealing with the different aspects of coalition politics.
Many articles have been published in various journal dealing with current politics of the country.

There are a few works on coalition politics in the Indian state including Kerala, West Bengal and Karnataka. John P. John (Coalition politics in Kerala, 1983) examines the working of the coalition ministers of the 1950’s and 1960’s. K.V. Varghese (UF Government in Kerala, 1967-69, 1978) makes an exhaustive study of the coalition led by E.M. Sankaran Namboodripad in 1967-69. E.J. Thomas (Coalition Game Politics in Kerala after Independence, 1994) looks at coalition politics from the game theory point of view. A. Balakrishnan Nair (Government and Politics of Kerala, 1994) makes a comprehensive study of Kerala Politics including coalition phases. There are other writers, too, like T.J. Nossiter (Communism in Keral: A Study in Political Adaptation, 1982). N. Jose Chander (Dynamics of State Politics – Kerala (ed.), 1986) who have paid attention to some aspects of coalition politics in Kerala. It may be noted here that same Ph. D. thesis have been submitted to the University of Kerala which relate to some major aspects of coalition politics. Among them A.A. Sebstain’s work (role of Chief Minister in Coalition Governments: A Study of Kerala, 1994) and Raju Abraham’s thesis (Role of Political Parties in State Legislature, 1990) are outstanding contributions.

Anjali Ghosh (Peaceful Transition of Power, 1981) makes a detailed and perceptive study of the coalition games played by the communists and non communists during 1966-77 in West Bengal. P.R. Choudhary’s work (Left Experiments in West Bengal, 1985) deals with the political history of West Bengal during two decades 1960s and 1970s. Surabhu Banerjee’s biography of Jyoti Basu (Jyoti Basu: The Authorized Biography, 1997) covers the political
development of West Bengal from a biographical perspective. A number of articles have been published on Kerala and West Bengal in current journals and dailies, in addition.

However, no comprehensive and scientific analyses regarding The Changing Role of Prime Minister in Indian Coalition Politics has been attempted so far and the present work aims at filling this gap.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

   The present study is confined only to the office of the Prime Minister and emergence of coalition politics in India in general and changing role of Prime Minister in Indian coalition politics.

9. RESEARCH DESIGN:

   The Present study is divided into six chapters:

   Chapter – I : Introduction
   Chapter – II : Nature of Indian Political System.
   Chapter – III : Office of the Prime Minister.
   Chapter – IV : Indian Constitution and Prime Minister.
   Chapter – V : Changing role of Prime Minister in Indian Coalition Politics.
   Chapter – VI : Summary and Conclusion.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


