NEW ADDITION
CHAPTER VII NEW ADDITION

If the beginning of the 1990’s witnessed the earth shaking events of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist regime a decade earlier in the Indian National polities an event of great historical importance occurred changing the very face of the country. If it was the Soviet Union and the Communist regime that were crumbling, the paving way for the economic liberalization and globalisation, the beginning of 1980’s saw on the Indian national horizon the steady decline of the then 90-year old Indian National Congress constitute as if it were the watershed in Indian politics.

For the first time in the post-independence India the two neighbouring states of Karnataka and AndraPradesh’s the change of guard with congress thrown down from its pedestal to form the non-congress government in the states*1


The two charismatic personalities that emerged on the scene to bring about a revolutionary change on the political scenario were

Ramakrishna Hegde in Karnataka and N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh.

If Rama Rao, a film star turned politician was making a debut in the political arena and saw through successfully his newly founded Telugu Desam Party. In Karnataka Ramakrishna Hegde who was having a political hibernation was recalled by desperate groups of people who wanted him to lead a conglomeration of political entities called Janata Party. Hegde created history when his party won the elections and he was elected as Chief Minister of the state. He touched the chord of the millions of people in Karnataka by his innate nature of enduring himself.*

In a caste-ridden society like Karnataka, Hegde a Brahmin, was a true leader of lingayats besides other non Brahmin.* His popularity can be judged from fact that where in a span of hardly four months there were elections to the Lok-Sabha and later to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, the mature voters preferred to have Rajiv Gandhi at the center-while in subsequent elections they wanted Hegde to lead

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At a time when politics was taking its first firm steps towards becoming the first refuge of scoundrels. Mr. Hegde emerged the sole votary of "Value based politics." A phrase coined by him to use. He had been a witness to the fast drifting of values in politics. He had been a witness to the fast drifting of values in political field having lived earlier through the golden era of Gandhiji and Nehru. He was been to see politics in the state were cleansed injecting in its bloodstream a sense of values. He called it as value based politics".

But so deftly Hegde played cards that from Bangalore to Delhi and everywhere else in between he was spoken of as a possible Prime Ministerial candidate. A slew of controversies involving his family members turned Mr. Hegde in the eyes of some of his detractors as a practitioner of "Politics-based values."

Ramakrishna Hedge's ushering in of Panchayatiraj reforms that helped political power to percolate to the grass roots. His shepherding

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of the position to form the Janata Dal. But all things considered, if Mr. Hegde is remembered by the common man and woman it is because the soft spoken man from Sirsi put the word “gentleman” back into politics which is why he thought of setting up of a “think tank” to guide and advise his government of consisting of intellectuals academics, artists, economists etc., That it failed however, is no reflection on his good intentions.

Ramakrishna Hegde had built a reputation as a politician of principle as opposed to customary wheeling and dealing. His reputation had taken a fall several times including in 1988 when, as chief minister he was accused of ordering of telephones of his party men. He responded by stepping down from his post another embarrassment was the appointment of a commission of enquiry to investigate charges of corruption.

He had attributed the growing corruption in the Government to ‘its over-expansion. The credit for setting up the institution of Lok-Ayukta in state 1984 goes to Mr. Hegde. Unlike the various Lok-pal bills thought of or introduced by the centre, the Lok-Ayukta Act adopted by his government had brought under the pervious of the anti-corruption

authority the chief minister and his minister.*7 The first noncongress government of 1983-1985 Hegde was the cleanest administration in state’s history.** He also ended the politically promoted goonda raj that had become a culture under some earlier Chief Ministers *9

Mr. Hegde set a record by ordering a judicial inquiry with regard to an allegation against his son, Bharat. Justice Parameshwar Dayal, a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court, had gone into the MD seat scandal involving Mr. Bharat Hegde. A legislature committee came to be appointed to probe the allegation of smuggling rice against a cousin of his, Ganesh Hegde. The then Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, S. Bangarappa, had leveled the allegation.

However, another action of Mr. Hedge was to lead to a rupture of ties with his then senior Cabinet colleague, the former Prime Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda. Mr. Hegde ordered a Corps of Detectives investigation into certain charges leveled by a BJP MLC, B.B., Shivappa. It resulted in Mr. Gowda parting ways with Mr. Hegde. In 1988 Mr. Hegde permitted the CBI to investigate the involvement of

*8. T.J.S. George Message for our times, mainstream feb ,2004, p2
his Home Minister, R.L. Jalappa (now congress MP) in the advocate Rasheed murder case. Mr. Jalappa came to be arrested by the CBI although the court later absolved him.

In February 1986, Mr. Hegde had resigned as Chief Minister following the adverse verdict of the Karnataka High Court in the Liquor Bottling Case. Supreme Court of India (SC) termed deal arbitrary but exonerated Hegde.

He withdrew the resignation following pressure from his party legislators. Mr. Hegde’s resignation as Chief Minister came on August 10, 1988, when he accepted moral responsibility for the tapping of telephones of prominent politicians of the State by the State Intelligence. It was the transcript of a telephone conversation between Mr. Deve Gowda and the former union minister Ajit Singh published in a newspaper, which led to his exit.

It was Mr. Hegde who made the moves to bring together the non-Congress and non-BJP political parties. He launched the Janata Dal in October 1988 through the merger of the Janata Party and the Lok Dal.

It was another thing that even today, the merger of the JD parties is only being talked of Mr. Hegde himself came to be expelled from the

Janata Dal in June 1996 and he had launched the Rashtriya Navanirmana Vedike.

'An advocate of greater powers for the States vis-à-vis the Centre and implementation of the report of the justice Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations Mr. Hegde had even formed a Council of Chief Ministers of Southern States. To reintroduce PanchayatRaj in the State, Mr. Hegde had brought in the former Union Minister, S.K. Dey.

Although belonging to a family steeped in the congress culture, Mr. Hegde was to emerge as a pillar of the anti-Congress movement in the state. The movement had been founded earlier by outstanding parliamentarians and leaders such as J.M. Imam, S, Gopala gowda, and J.B. Mallaradhya.* It was in the fitness of things that he became the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Karnataka. He never looked back on the Congress after he swore his loyalty to S.Nijalingappa and the Congress (Organisation) in 1969. However, he had revealed that as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had asked him to rejoin the Congress promising positions. His long-time comrade, Veerendra Patil, rejoined the Congress in 1979 but not Mr. Hegde. In recent months there was the talk that Mr. Hegde had softened towards the Congress. His "blessings" bestowed on the industrialist and Janata Party MP. Vijay

Mallya, had intrigued even his close supporters.

One of the weak points in Mr. Hegde's political career was his inability to build up or nurse a parliamentary constituency of his own.*12

In a way he was a victim of the Nijalingappa-B.D.Jatti conflict in the congress in the late Fifties. His home constituency, Sirsi, came to be declared as a reserved constituency and Mr. Hegde had to shift to Haliyal to get elected to the State Assembly. He lost the 1977 Lok Sabha elections from Canara and later from Bagalkot in 1991.

An able administrator, Mr. Hegde is better known as Finance Minister of Karnataka. He had the record of presenting 13 State budgets. His first Government (1983-85) was a trendsetter in many ways though it was depending on the support of the BJP from outside.

A Secularist in every sinew he found himself supping with the B.J.P. Government at one time.*13 Hegde's alliance with the B.J.P. as the head of the Lok-Shakti was a disappointment to those who had trust in him as a politician with high standards. Earlier he had been critical of the BJP, but Hegde asserted now that under the leadership of Vajpayee

the party had been moving away from extreme positions. As a young party which was mainly associated with the person of its leader the only hope for survival for Lok-Shakty was electoral alliance with a greater party. It appears that Hegde refused to consider allying with the United Front. After Hegde died (Jan 2004), former Prime Minister I. K. Gujral a friend of Hegde said, the latter had hoped to be allied with the Congress Party and turned to BJP only when circumstances in the Congress made alliance there impossible.*

Since Hegde had spoken out against dynastic rule in political parties observers argued that Sonia Gandhi was opposed to his reincorporation in the congress fold.

In the late 1990’s many people argued that whatever expectations Ramakrishna Hedge had of a desirable position at the center by joining the BJP, his other agenda was the destruction of the Janata Dal in revenge for his being expelled from the party. It seemed to many that more importance than breaking the principled mold in which Hegde had cast himself was the destruction of the career of Deve Gowda.**


Hegde was the original “suave politician” a man who understood the power of the media in crafting a positive public image. He relentlessly wooed and pursued the rich and powerful – artists, authors, businessmen, dancers, editors liquor barons, playwright, poets – to good effect. Sandeep Shastri argued that Hegde was “over projected” in a generally friendly media.*16

In an era of narrow partisan politics, it is difficult to find any politician speaking well of any of his compatriots, leave alone opponents. Yet it is a measure of Ramakrishna Hegde’s appeal that his death on 12th January 2004 was greeted across the political spectrum with unalloyed regret, respect and genuine sense of loss. That, in itself is the finest tribute to the personal charm, political acumen and the interpersonal skills of the late Chief Minister. *Theses first submitted on Jan. 2004