

# Prime Minister and the Indian Polity: Adaptive ‘Presidential’-Style in a Parliamentary Democracy

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## Abstract

Indian democracy has emerged as a prime ministerial system, which has taken elements of the US-style presidential style and the Westminster parliamentary system which is collegial. The system has evolved in response to the changing external environment, within the ruling party and without, and the personality of the individual holding the office of the prime minister. The movement has not been unilinear and has seen considerable variations. The jury is still out whether the present concentration of initiative in the person of the prime minister is fixed, and how the system would balance this with the cabinet system and federal nature on Indian polity.

## Introduction

The Prime Minister has emerged as the single most important institution in the Indian political system. It can be said that Indian democracy is a prime ministerial democracy, going beyond being just a parliamentary democracy. M.P. Singh drew attention to this phenomenon; according to him, “even though a prospective Prime Minister may be seeking election from a narrow parliamentary constituency, he campaigns as a national leader in the entire country.”<sup>1</sup> Singh, therefore, draws attention to the obvious “plebiscitary feature of elections that the Prime Minister becomes the real focus of power in the parliamentary as well as the federal spheres of government.” Without getting into a normative judgement, it is proposed to understand this phenomenon positively since it has not been studied adequately. I shall attempt to sketch chronologically how the office of the Prime Minister has emerged as such a key institution in Indian

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democracy over the past 70 years. I have given special attention to the first few years of the Indian democracy for it was in this period that the particular nature of Prime Minister's position was articulated, practised and developed.

### Framework

The importance of the Prime Minister of India would be expressed against a four-point framework, derived from the hierarchical presidential system, rather from the (theoretically) more egalitarian parliamentary democracy as epitomised by the Westminster model. These broadly conform to the essence of leadership over and above the traditional aphorism of '*Primus inter pares*', or the first among equals. These four criteria are (i) electoral verdict, (ii) control over the political party, (iii) Cabinet formation, and (iv) leadership effectiveness.

It is obvious that not all Prime Ministers would score equally on all or any one of these criteria, or even that all incumbents would even necessarily meet the minimum requirement to be considered a 'Presidential-style' Prime Minister (in the American sense of the term). Therefore, broad trends and a tendency towards decisive democratic leadership would be used to substantiate the basic proposition of this paper.

### Historical Background

It was two months after he was sworn in for the second time as the Chief Minister of Telangana on 13 December 2018 that K Chandrashekhara Rao expanded his cabinet with the inclusion of ten ministers. Till then, there had been just one other Minister besides the Chief Minister, with the latter holding all the portfolios except Home. This was history. It is most unusual for an elected government to function for such a long period in non-emergency situation with all formal powers vested in one individual. It was a complete negation of the fundamental principle of collective responsibility to be exercised by the council of ministers.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, halfway across the world, the then British Prime Minister, Theresa May, saw parliament reject her proposals for 'Brexit' repeatedly, with one of them being rejected by the largest margin in British parliamentary history<sup>3</sup> If the circumstances had not been exceptional, she would have been out of her office, having lost the confidence of the legislature. Instead, she continued as the Prime Minister negating another important

principle of parliamentary democracy, namely, the dependence of the existence of the government on parliamentary support. Clearly parliamentary democracies are living in changing and interesting times.

### Prime Ministers in India

The Prime Minister as an institution in this country is almost uniquely Indian, which is what I would try to establish in the course of this paper. This seemed improbable at the beginning since our political system is based on the Westminster form of parliamentary democracy, an import from the United Kingdom which was subsequently borrowed by other Commonwealth countries. In fact, many presidential systems including the authoritarian regimes have prime ministers but it is the contention of this paper that structurally the Prime Minister of India cannot be compared with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom or Australia or any other parliamentary democracy.

A phenomenon which remains unexplained within the political science discipline globally is the paucity of adequate attention given to the success of Indian democracy and its federal aspects.<sup>4</sup> This might largely be due to the fact that when observed through the lens of the conventionally 'accepted' norms, India should not have been a democracy in the first place. A certain minimum per capita income and a high literacy rate were supposed to be the minimum attributes of any society aspiring to be a democracy.<sup>5</sup> But at the time of becoming democratic, India severely fell short of satisfying both of these criteria; in fact, it substantially does not satisfy them even at present. The absence of homogeneity, no identifiable notion of one people, one religion, and one language, were also seen as factors that would militate against India's success as a democracy.<sup>6</sup> Applying the standard Western yardstick, scholars were 'often prone to fall for a general presumption of crisis in multi-ethnic developing democracies' that 'have endured in defiance of the grim predictions made in the literature during the early decades of their emergence.'<sup>7</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising to find that rather than accept India's democratic success (for that would challenge all their established theoretical underpinnings), many scholars have simply ignored the Indian story, while a few others have argued that India is not a real democracy. The Pakistani-American historian Ayesha Jalal has argued that – in view of large-scale poverty, and economic inequality – India cannot be called a 'substantive' democracy, that at best it is a 'procedural' democracy that holds elections.<sup>8</sup> Such a

characterisation, facile and easily demolished, is yet, often let pass. The vibrant, if at times chaotic, democracy that India has evolved into is vastly different from what it was at the time of Independence and also very different from the other countries which came into existence in 1947. This is because India represents a *sui generis* version of democracy and hence demands a serious enquiry by scholars. If an honest enquiry is undertaken, it would be clear that, paraphrasing Ashutosh Varshney, if India has changed because of democracy, India too has changed democracy, imbuing it its own unique characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, Indian federalism too does not fit in with the standard West European or Anglo-Saxon models. Amitabh Mattoo in an essay refers to critics describing the Indian Constitution as 'federal in form and unitary in spirit'. It is routinely described as 'quasi-federal.' This was in the context of government of India's legal ability to unilaterally create, dissolve or alter the boundary of States through parliamentary action. The PM as the leader of the government assumes greater salience accordingly.

In the next sections, I attempt to outline the key political developments and issues to establish the 'How's?' and the 'Why's?' of the prime ministerial form of parliamentary democracy that we see in India, noting that the journey has not been unidirectional and is subject to considerable ebbs and tides. This evolution is neither the last chapter in India's political journey, nor am I last attempting to present a comprehensive political history of India since Independence from the Raj. As stated before, I would initially focus on the earlier years, the period immediately after independence, before giving a lesser detailed analysis of the later years.

### The Nehru Years

On attaining Independence, the role of the Prime Minister in the context of a cabinet form of executive was immediately an issue that had to be defined and determined in practice, and not through the Constituent Assembly debates. This should not have been unexpected. The British Raj was an authoritarian government with power concentrated in the Viceroy. The coming into office of provincial governments based on limited franchise in 1937 did give the Indian political class the experience of working in a cabinet system but this experience had limited relevance to the situation within the union government post-Independence. One, the presence of British provincial Governors, ready to play games, forced the ministries

to band together to become effective. In fact, the Congress had specifically instructed that only the Provincial Premiers would meet the Governors, and ministers could only do so with the Premier's consent.<sup>10</sup> Two, the Congress leadership functioned in a collegial manner with no pre-eminent leader who could dominate provincial ministries.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, when India became free, the horizon was limitless. Though still a Dominion (till 25 January 1950), there was scope for individual ambition, factionalism and separate world views on the best way forward.

Within a month of Independence, the handling of the situation in Delhi caused Nehru and Sardar Patel to exchange a number of letters on the extent of autonomy that the local administration must be allowed if the latter had to control the situation. Of the many creases to be ironed, a few involved some deep structural issues like, if the Prime Minister should start issuing orders directly to local administrations or should he have 'independent' feedback mechanisms, both options were anathema to Patel. For him, such solutions amounted to the undermining of local capacities at a sensitive time when the different layers of the government should have been closing ranks.<sup>12</sup> These differing perceptions were further aggravated by three instances — one, Nehru deputed his principal private secretary HVS Iengar to Ajmer to review the situation in that city; two, Gopalaswami Ayyangar, the Minister without Portfolio, despatched 150 trucks from East Punjab to Jammu & Kashmir without consulting Patel who was the Minister for States and three, there was the contentious question of how to resettle the tens of thousands of Muslims who came back to Delhi from Pakistan.

While the details of these developments need not divert us, the tone of the numerous letters between Nehru and Patel became quite curt, even accusatory. Nehru conceded that there was no question of his "having issued any orders directly to the local authorities"<sup>13</sup> because he too supported Patel's understanding that "orders should be conveyed through proper authority" only.<sup>14</sup> When it came to Patel's unhappiness about actions being taken in areas of his responsibilities without consulting him, Nehru was of the opinion that no ministry was "an imperium in imperio, jealous of its sovereignty in certain domains and working in isolation from the rest" because if this were to be the case, then "the P.M. would have no function to perform." Taking responsibility for the action of transferring the trucks, Nehru wrote that it "was done at my instance and I do not propose to abdicate my functions in regards to *matters for which I consider myself responsible*".<sup>15</sup>

Nehru clearly articulated that it was ultimately under his sole authority as the PM to decide what he was responsible for and having done so, he was entitled to act as he deemed fit. No British premier, neither Churchill, nor Thatcher, not even Tony Blair, could have asserted their sense of the prime minister's prerogative as decisively, especially on a subject where there was a ministry already instituted and charged with the concerned specific responsibilities. This, however, was just the beginning of the debate that would neither abate nor be settled between Nehru and Patel.

Nehru again articulated his perception of prime ministerial prerogative when Patel remonstrated him for undermining the Chief Commissioner of Ajmer-Merwara by deputing his principal private secretary in his place to visit Ajmer, meet delegations and to assess the situation. Nehru's response was sharp – "Am I to be constrained in taking any action...which I consider necessary?"<sup>16</sup> That according to Nehru would be an impossible position for him or for any Prime Minister anywhere. He was clear that if he were to "continue as Prime Minister I cannot have my freedom restricted and I must have a certain liberty of direction".<sup>17</sup> In a classic show of his indispensability, he suggested that if the matter remained unresolved, one of them should go, and if push comes to shove, he would "gladly resign and hand over [the] reins" to Patel.<sup>18</sup> This was neither the first nor the last time when Nehru would threaten to resign from his post if the party or the government were to adopt a path that he did not favour. Patel, though, was not the kind to take such threats lying down. He was not prepared to accept Nehru's explanation concerning why the latter felt that his freedom of action were constrained if the former (Patel) pointed out the probable consequences of Nehru's action "regarding matters in my ministerial responsibility".<sup>19</sup> Patel was clear that he could not subscribe to Nehru's views and pointed to the vital difference of opinion between them on the fundamental question of respective spheres of responsibilities. He objected to Nehru's understanding that the Prime Minister could encroach on other minister's work, making it clear that doing so, would make it "impossible for me to function".<sup>20</sup>

The matter escalated and the Mahatma was brought in to resolve the issues. Nehru's detailed note dated 6 January 1948 to Gandhi clearly enunciates his understanding of the PM's role in the cabinet system. He argued that the Prime Minister had "a special function to perform which covers all the ministries and departments and indeed every aspect of government authority. This function cannot be easily defined...in discharging this function of Prime Minister I have to

deal with every Ministry not as head of one particular Ministry but as a coordinator and *a kind of supervisor*".<sup>21</sup> Nehru, therefore, felt that the "PM should have full freedom to act when and how he chooses".<sup>22</sup>

Patel too prepared a detailed note dated 12 January 1948, which he sent to the Mahatma, with a copy to Nehru. He said that he had tried to understand the matter "on the twin basis of democracy and Cabinet responsibility. Patel could not bring himself to agree with Nehru's interpretation, which "if accepted, would raise the Prime Minister to the position of a virtual dictator". Nehru's conception of the Prime Minister's freedom to act when he chooses to do so was completely unacceptable to Patel. He acknowledged the PM's pre-eminent position but argued that this did not mean "overriding powers over his colleagues; otherwise a cabinet and cabinet responsibility would be superfluous". The PM could coordinate, making him the effective head of the administration but "the entire responsibility for implementing the responsibility of the government rests upon the Ministers and the Ministries under them."<sup>23</sup>

Gandhi's fast in mid-January 1948 and Patel's tours meant that the meeting between the three could only be scheduled for 31 January. The Mahatma's two lieutenants combined forces after Gandhi's assassination on 30 January but the issue got postponed and could not be resolved in any substantial manner. This did not mean that the government could not function, which it did quite effectively in stabilising the situation, calming communal tensions and delivering the Constitution. However, Nehru's concept of the role and authority of the PM, which was challenged by Patel and others, did not acquire enough traction during the first few years of independent India.

On the other hand, Nehru as Prime Minister had to face at least three defeats in party and government matters in the years 1947–51. A quick look at these three events is useful to understand how the dynamics of power operated. After almost seven decades, looking back at these instances, one can intuit the direction and course which the importance and role of the Prime Minister was to take.

The liberation of Junagadh in 1947, which came after an initial period of uncertainty following the Nawab and his Dewan's attempt to accede to Pakistan, led to a clamour that the Somnath temple be rebuilt. The ruins of the temple, devastated a thousand years before by Mahmud of Ghazni, was seen by many as a symbol of India's shame. The cabinet presided over by Nehru agreed to reconstruct the temple, implying that the government would carry out the task. Gandhi, however, objected to the use of government funds for this purpose and Nehru could not help but agree. Sardar Patel, K.M.



Munshi and others then decided to raise funds from the public and created a Trust which was entrusted with this job. By the time the temple was rebuilt in 1951, the Sardar had passed away. Nehru advised Dr Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Republic, to not to go for the inauguration of the temple, but the latter over-ruled him and went anyway.

Similarly, Nehru was thwarted in his bid to install C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji in short) as the first President of India. Rajaji had been the Governor-General who succeeded Mountbatten when he left for Britain. Dr Rajendra Prasad, a prominent freedom fighter, was the President of the Constituent Assembly and was interested in becoming the first President. Nehru asked Dr Prasad not to press his claims, citing the discussions he said he had had with Sardar Patel. When a disappointed Prasad complained to the Sardar that courtesy demanded that he should have at least been informed about any such decision, it came to light that though Nehru and Patel had discussed the issue, they had never come to any conclusion about who should become the President of the Republic. The Patel-Prasad duo had deep roots in the party and after Nehru's pre-emptive bid to force the candidature of Rajaji failed, the path to Prasad's accession was cleared. Again, Nehru threatened to resign on this issue but ultimately did not press the point.<sup>24</sup>

The third event was the most significant as Nehru, having lost initially, was able, in a changed circumstance, to firmly establish his writ over the Congress. The party had to accept his primacy in running the government because he was the party's biggest vote-getter. Accordingly, this episode needs a little elaboration. The Congress had to choose its President in 1950. Nehru and Patel discussed the matter in detail. They ruled out Acharya Kripalani, whose presidentship of the party in 1947–48 did not inspire confidence in both of them. The Uttar Pradesh (UP) Congress chief, Purushottam Das Tandon, wanted to become the Congress President, which Nehru was determined to prevent. Nehru wanted Rajaji, and though Patel agreed, Rajaji was not willing, having just come back into the cabinet. Rajaji's suggestion of Patel as party president left Nehru cold. Nehru also ruled out his own candidacy, saying that it would not be proper as PM to be the Congress president.

In the run up to the election, Nehru's call to Tandon to withdraw was unsuccessful; Tandon instead explained why the former's fears were unfounded. Nehru made it clear to Patel that he would see Tandon's election as a vote of no-confidence, and would neither serve on the party Working Committee nor as the Prime Minister.



Nehru instead, surprisingly, threw his weight behind Kripalani. This upset both Patel and Rajaji. Despite Nehru's best efforts Tandon won comfortably, gathering more votes than Kripalani and a third candidate put together. Tandon, in fact, swept not just Patel's home state of Gujarat but UP as well, which was home to both Nehru and himself. Nehru refused to serve on Tandon's Working Committee unless Rafi Ahmad Kidwai was also nominated to it. Tandon, supported by Patel, did not budge, but Nehru eventually did – he joined the Working Committee, and continued as Prime Minister. Unfortunately, for Tandon, barely three months after his election, Patel passed away and Nehru got a fresh opportunity to control the party. By mid-1951, Nehru upped the ante and quit the Working Committee. As the party realised the indispensability of Nehru as Congress' chief campaigner for the forthcoming, (first) general elections, it clearly meant that Tandon had to go. Ironically, Nehru, contradicting his own statement of the impropriety for a PM to simultaneously become the party chief, took over the responsibility, and continued to exercise it for more than four years.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, with the death of Sardar Patel, and the resignations of Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee and Dr B.R. Ambedkar from the Cabinet, Nehru's presidentship of the party and his usefulness clearly indicated that the Prime Minister was no longer just a first among equals. In fact, immediately after independence, Nehru "rejected Kripalani's view that the party should be consulted on important decisions and policy pronouncements of the government".<sup>26</sup> The party-government relations changed very substantially with the Congress — having provided the platform for people of diverse ideologies and points of view to come together to fight for freedom and speaking for the nation — now being reduced into a vehicle for competitive electoral politics. The government became increasingly identified with the person of the Prime Minister. This was occasionally contested but each challenger had to bite the dust. Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee quit the government in 1950 itself upset over Nehru-Liaquat pact that he thought let down the interests of the Hindus of East Pakistan, Dr B.R. Ambedkar resigned when he felt let down by Nehru's backtracking on the Hindu Code Bill and C.D. Deshmukh resigned over what he said was lack of cabinet consultation on the Mumbai city-state issue. The resignations by the two leading non-Congress ministers, Dr Mukherjee and Dr Ambedkar, were particularly significant since they were brought into free India's first government by the Mahatma-Sardar combination in order to make it more representative.

This is not to suggest that Nehru went beyond democratic

norms but simply to show how Nehru rose to dominate the party and government, quashing every challenge. Against his will, Nehru conceded to the demand for linguistic states due to Potti Sriramulu's fast and subsequent death. However, Nehru's economic views prevailed at 1956 All India Congress Committee (AICC) Avadi session (Industrial Policy) and at the 1959 Kanpur session (Cooperative Agriculture). While Charan Singh did launch a strong attack on the latter, it was ultimately adopted by the AICC. Though Nehru's position weakened considerably after the 1962 China War when he had to drop Krishna Menon from the cabinet, still he was not going to let the challenge weaken him easily. His use of the Kamaraj Plan removed most senior Congress leaders from government positions at the union and the state level, a step which decisively influenced the choice of his successor.

### Institutional Innovation

Shastri came to office with two strong suits – that he had *de facto* run the government during Nehru's illness till the latter passed away, and that he did not pose a major challenge to the Congress leadership. If not for these two considerations, the natural successor to the position of the Prime Minister would probably have been Morarji Desai, who had been the number two in Nehru's cabinet till the Kamaraj Plan turfed him out. Besides, Desai was headstrong and unlikely to go along with other senior leaders of the Congress. Shastri, lacking Nehru's dominating position in the party and in the country, made the first institutional innovation in order to become a more effective Prime Minister. Nehru had toyed with the idea of setting up a high profile secretariat that could 'swamp' the cabinet secretariat and be answerable to him only, but was talked out of it by Patel and Mountbatten.<sup>27</sup> Shastri, took upon Nehru's vision and set up the Prime Minister's Secretariat (PMS) to assist him run the government and coordinate with the ministers. Fortunately, the Prime Minister's Secretariat was careful not to step on toes, in line with Shastri's own position in the party and his non-confrontational style of functioning.

Contrary to the previous arrangement, the Prime Minister's Secretariat was sufficiently well-staffed and could develop its own institutional memory. This was done by processing all references received by it from individual ministries on its internal files that it maintains on all departments and on important issues. These parallel files are called 'ghost files' since they only exist for internal purposes and never leave the PMS, now PMO (Prime Minister's

Office, considerably downsized, since Prime Minister Morarji Desai heading the Janata Party government). The Prime Minister passes her/ his orders on these internal ghost files and only the final order is communicated to the ministry concerned, not the internal discussions of PMS. This processing on internal files ensures that when any subsequent reference is sent by the ministry to PMS, the latter has a much clearer picture of the issue. This institutional memory and the requirement for PM's sign off on all senior appointments are the two most effective ways to monitor and control ministries, even by a politically weak PM. Going back to 1965, it would have been difficult at that point of time for an observer to predict that Shastri's institutional innovation would emerge as the most important organ of the executive, particularly its role in policy development, coordination amongst ministries and review of implementation. The role of the PM as the fulcrum of the government was to take an even greater role when Indira Gandhi succeeded Shastri.

### Centralisation

Paradoxically, Indira Gandhi, now remembered for the suppression of democracy during the Emergency, has been the only Prime Minister to have been elected to office in a ballot amongst the members of a parliamentary party. She received the backing of the Congress leadership for the same reasons that Shastri did, which was to stop Morarji Desai from becoming the PM. Paradoxically, she later broke with the party leadership in 1969 leaving them and Morarji Desai on the same side. From an uncertain beginning in 1966, she slowly reached out to what she saw as her constituency, first to the party bypassing the leadership, and then the poor, bypassing the party. Once P.N. Haksar joined her as the Principal Secretary, she made the PMS extremely powerful, arrogating to itself subjects that were in the realm of other ministries. The arrangement came to be referred to as a 'monstrosity' that not only hollowed the cabinet secretariat, but the cabinet itself.<sup>28</sup> Yet, even as Indira Gandhi made the PMS the pinnacle of the government, she ended up undermining the institution by establishing a small, informal group referred to as the 'kitchen cabinet'.<sup>29</sup>

The work of undermining of institutions was not complete. The bureaucracy and the judiciary were targeted since she was looking for 'committed' persons to man key positions. Interestingly, these developments took shape well before the imposition of the emergency, a period when fundamental rights were suspended, lakhs of political opponents jailed and the Constitution itself, mangled.

All this coming from the only Prime Minister to have been formally elected to office through a ballot in the Congress parliamentary party.

As the Prime Minister became increasingly powerful, the institutions of democratic governance – inner-party democracy, the party itself, PMS, ministries, judiciary, and media – were weakened systematically and made subservient to her authority. She created many new institutions to accommodate fellow travellers whose job it was to monopolise academia and create a new narrative that suited her leftward tilt in domestic politics. The overall effect was that by the time she left office after losing the 1977 general elections, even as the Prime Minister towered over the government, it was clear that unbridled power had meant a substantial loss of connect with the public.

### Recovery but not Completely

When Morarji Desai finally became PM in 1977, he provided a welcome antidote. He downgraded the PM Secretariat to becoming the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), a nomenclature which survives till date. Morarji Desai reverted to a much more collegial form of leadership, closer to the Shastri days but not quite. His inability to carry people with him and the contradictory nature of the Janata party, which was after all an amalgam of parties and not the product of a natural development, meant that the centre could not hold. The fact that he was chosen by a consensus guided by Jayaprakash Naryan and thus the Janata parliamentary party did not elect him meant that his authority could always be questioned. Such challenges to the PM came not just politically but in policy as well. The following developments illustrates these contradictions.

With the replacement of the Congress government, with its strong pro-Soviet bias, the Americans expected the new regime to seek better bilateral relations. This was not a baseless assumption for even before Desai had formally assumed power, he told an American correspondent that as the Prime Minister, "he would immediately make a policy declaration that would gladden India's friends in the West, announcing a return to true non-alignment' while not letting "the Indo-Soviet treaty stand in the way of equal friendship with any other power."<sup>30</sup> It soon became obvious, however, that this was not going to be an easy task. In effect, contradicting his PM, Foreign Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee ruled out any change in the foreign policy, making it clear that "foreign policy was not an issue in the

elections campaign”, that “there has always been a broad national consensus on external affairs”, and that the government stood by its commitments.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, Morarji’s government got increasingly bogged down in internecine war for various reasons, including the unnaturalness of the Janata party, its failure to elect the prime minister through a ballot and the Prime Minister’s inability to develop working relationships with his colleagues. Morarji Desai was a walking contradiction, universally regarded as efficient, sincere, incorruptible, inflexible, non-compromising and stand-offish. He and Charan Singh were soon warring, with the latter being dropped, then re-inducted, made Deputy PM, with the two ultimately going their separate ways, leading to the collapse of the Janata government. This was aided by Indira Gandhi’s successful play of the classic divide-and-rule policy. From the perspective of Morarji Desai, it was not only Charan Singh who saw himself as a potential Prime Minister; Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Jagjivan Ram and George Fernandes reportedly harboured similar ambitions.<sup>32</sup> Though Charan Singh succeeded Desai as the PM with outside support of Congress party, he had to resign from his office even before he could face parliament due to the withdrawal of the Congress support. He continued, however, in his position for another four months as a caretaker Prime Minister.

Though Indira Gandhi’s second term, after the re-election of the Congress party in 1980, did not repeat the excesses of the first term, yet in substance, there was no move to a more collegial form of governance. Her new party, the Congress (India) did not have a single leader capable of even remotely challenging her. Her reliance on Rajiv Gandhi, after the death of her younger son, and efforts to make him emerge as her successor consumed her political capital. Domestically, the rise of Sikh extremism and externally, beginning of the Sri Lankan Tamil movement meant that institutional innovation did not get any meaningful attention, except on the economic front which saw an upward movement in the growth rate, considerably fuelled by spiralling foreign debts. Specifically, the private sector was allowed to expand the size and scope of their operations. Though the markets were not brought under the economic rules of a *laissez-faire* arrangement, individual/ groups were given greater latitude, which marked a slight reversal from the thirty years of India’s state-practiced socialism.<sup>33</sup> These changes meant that sections of the indigenous capitalists found room to foster, even if capitalism itself did not.

### Lost Opportunity

Rajiv Gandhi, similarly, brought in a number of new ideas, further opened up opportunities for the large private sector to grow exponentially but failed to develop institutions, though he probably had the best opportunity to do so. Indira Gandhi's tragic assassination led Rajiv Gandhi to sweep the December 1984 Lok Sabha elections and win over 80 per cent of the seats. His initial efforts of portraying a new face of politics by removing old backroom boys from positions of influence was very well received across the country. His speech at the Mumbai centenary session of the Congress in 1985 is noteworthy, since it effectively put the party on the back foot. Senior cabinet ministers were checkmated by having younger ministers of states who reported to the PM. Advisors outside the government wielded considerable influence but without responsibility. There was considerable churn in the council of ministers with regular reshuffles. It did seem for a while that these changes would result in structural reforms leading to better governance outcomes. Unfortunately, Rajiv Gandhi and his team lacked stamina in sustaining these initiatives and got bogged down in business as usual. Worse, the government's reputation started sliding down with the Bofors scandal and the fallout with VP Singh.<sup>34</sup> A botched attempt to control the media through legislation,<sup>35</sup> the Shah Bano case, the banning of Salman Rushdie's controversial book *Satanic Verses* and mishandling of Ayodhya allowed the miniscule opposition to come roaring back on the scene.<sup>36</sup> The Sri Lanka crisis and deployment of Indian troops in the island nation caused considerable unease once casualty figures mounted. Suddenly, Rajiv Gandhi's charisma and goodwill looked jaded, and while the PM dominated the Congress, open revolts by VP Singh and by Arif Mohamed Khan (over Shah Bano) and the pushback by Congress back-benchers over the media bill meant that he had lost the initiative. In the 1989 elections, the Congress plunged to 194 seats, and though the largest party in the Lok Sabha, it had to be content to sit on the opposition benches.

### The Mandal 'Revolution'

The government of V.P. Singh was plagued with dissension from day one, additionally weakened with his party having just 140 seats in the Lok Sabha, at just more the half-way mark to majority. His own election as party leader in the Parliament, and hence PM, was marred by Chandrasekhar's objection and had to be achieved by a subterfuge — first elect Devi Lal who then suggested V.P. Singh's name

instead. The government lurched from crisis to crisis, starting with the kidnapping of the Home Minister's daughter, and subsequent hostage swap. Political controversies in Haryana did not help V.P. Singh consolidate his position either. Undercut by the peasant/farmer forces within the party and the BJP's Ayodhya mobilisation, V.P. Singh caused a bombshell when he announced the acceptance of the Mandal Commission recommendations on reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This step is probably the single-most defining step of independent India's political and social journey.<sup>37</sup> There is no evidence that when it was announced, anybody had any idea of how completely it would change Indian politics, giving massive strength and momentum to India's 'second democratic revolution,' one that socially and politically empowered a substantial portion of the Indian citizenry. What makes it really surprising though is that this radical step was taken by a Prime Minister, who had very little to show by way of leadership or governance while in office. There is also no evidence that this decision was either thought through or deliberated within government. V.P. Singh's earlier successful revolt, which so de-legitimised the Rajiv Gandhi government, was quickly forgotten from the public memory and his relevance in Indian politics surprisingly faded swiftly.

The Chandrashekhar government, which came next, lasted only a few months. It was pulled down by Rajiv Gandhi ostensibly as two Haryana policemen were apprehended outside his home keeping watch on the comings and goings. This seemed too trivial a reason to pull down a government, since such intelligence gathering work is routine. I have it on good authority of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee that Rajiv Gandhi pulled the plug since Chandrasekhar's efforts at arriving at a compromise between the opposite sides on the Ram *Janambhoomi* dispute appeared on the verge of success. If in fact, Chandrashekhar had succeeded, India would have been a different country today. He, unfortunately, is also not given enough credit for having laid down the path towards economic reforms that Narasimha Rao ultimately adopted.<sup>38</sup>

### Economic Liberalisation and Importance of PMO

Another unlikely PM was P.V. Narasimha Rao, who had little political charisma, no large following and who was about to head a religious *Matth*, when the tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi forced him into becoming the leader of the Congress party, since he was perceived to be the most acceptable candidate. What was even more unlikely was that this self-professed follower of Indira Gandhi initiated a major



unravelling of the Nehru-Indira model of state socialism, citing Nehru in support! If Mandal unleashed repressed social forces that substantially remade Indian society, Rao's reforms unleashed the repressed entrepreneurial energies of Indian economy/society that has impacted the country's politics, economics and social dynamics substantially. The India of 1991 was closer to the India of 1919 than it is to the India of 2019. Internationally, Rao had to negotiate a difficult path since India's sole friend who counted, the Soviet Union, imploded, leaving the US as the only superpower. Shunning hypocrisy, India established diplomatic relations with Israel. Despite US' historical bias towards Pakistan and its questioning of Kashmir's accession to India, Rao reached out to America. Again, breaking away from the Nehruvian consensus, he initiated India's Look East policy, realising the commonality of economic and strategic interests. Narasimha Rao was the force behind the economic reforms, embrace of globalisation and changed geo-strategic perspective. Even as he established himself as Congress' pre-eminent leader, dissidents rallied around Sonia Gandhi, forcing Rao's hand. Narayan Dutt Tiwari, Arjun Singh and Madhavrao Scindia quit the Congress. On the flip side, the atmosphere at the top was cynical, with senior members of the government alleged to be profiting by rent-seeking on a large scale, their malfeasance tolerated thus far as they did not rock the boat.

The two United Front Prime Ministers, HD Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral, could not have been more different. The former was a Chief Minister of a major state (Karnataka), a long-term grassroots political worker, and a leader of a national party (Janata Dal), which had a presence in three states. Yet, he liked to style himself as a humble farmer. By contrast I.K. Gujral was a leading figure of post-Independence Delhi, a cosmopolitan and a member of Indira Gandhi's 'kitchen cabinet', which further allowed him to join her council of ministers. Later, he fell out with Indira Gandhi and was in political wilderness before drifting into the Janata Dal and becoming the Foreign Minister in the V.P. Singh and Deve Gowda governments. He is also associated with the 'Gujral doctrine' which advocated India's adoption of a generous non-reciprocal approach towards its neighbours, on extending trade or other concessions. Deve Gowda's comfort level in Lutyen's Delhi was not very high but he was an assertive PM who had to balance the demands of the Congress party on whose support his government survived with the pressures coming from his colleagues, including his party president, Laloo Prasad Yadav. The particular bone of contention was a tug

of war which ensued between Deve Gowda and Sitaram Kesri, the president of the Congress Party, on the one hand, and Gowda and Laloo Yadav on the other. Kesri wanted Deve Gowda to help him survive a potential CBI action against him, while Laloo was pushing his demand to post his favourites in CBI. Deve Gowda stood his ground by refusing to oblige either side and eventually lost his job.

The succeeding Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, was a political lightweight who had mostly stayed out of the electoral arena. Unfortunately, his government was also buffeted by the demands of the Congress, and his own allies within the United Front whose sole aim was to win concessions or finances for their respective states. Between Deve Gowda and Gujral, their governments lasted 18 months, excluding Gujral's three months caretakership.

### Coalition *Dharma*

If Morarji Desai was India's first former Congressman turned non-Congress PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first PM never to have been in the Congress. He was also the first to lead a non-Congress government for a full term, after initial short terms. His first term as PM lasted 13 days (May 1996) and his second for 13 months, when it was toppled. Overall, he was finally PM from March 1998 to May 2004. Vajpayee was a life-long parliamentarian and early in his career, Nehru is said to have predicted that he would do well. Again, like Nehru, Vajpayee was very much interested in foreign affairs, but unlike Nehru, he was not ambiguous about the need to go nuclear. When India carried out nuclear tests in May 1998 Vajpayee did not hide behind the hypocrisy of a peaceful nuclear explosion. Simultaneously, he made that extra effort to improve relations with Pakistan repeatedly. India was saddled with the Kargil war and his conduct during the war won India global accolades, and helped de-hyphenate the India-Pakistan paradigm. An economic liberaliser at heart, his government did more to free up space for the private sector to thrive, creating jobs in the bargain. The highway programme, without which India's logistics costs would have been sky-high, was complimented with rural connectivity through the *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana*. The massive debt overhang of the mobile telecom sector was tackled through improved regulations that incentivised better performance. Another hypocrisy that was done away with was privatisation of public sector enterprises, going beyond disinvestment. Indian GDP growth rates soared with this restructuring. He succeeded in making Indians believe in themselves,

and liberated the country's thinking, enabling it to break out of the trap of the limited world view that had constrained the Indian story since 1947. However, Vajpayee's government was defeated in the 2004 elections, adversely affected by wrong choice of allies in Tamil Nadu, the implosion of the Telugu Desam in Andhra, BJP's faction feuds in UP, and finally, by its own inability to accurately gauge the extent of unmet aspirations - ironically raised because of the expectations engendered by the PM's own credibility.

### PM in Retreat?

The self-effacing economist with a wry sense of humour, long in government at different levels, rising to be Narasimha Rao's Finance Minister (1991-96), Manmohan Singh was in every sense, the accidental Prime Minister (in fact, as he explained, he was also the accidental Finance Minister, getting the job only when Dr I.G. Patel turned down Narasimha Rao's invitation). A choice of Congress President and United Progressive Alliance Chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, he remained Prime Minister for 10 years with only Nehru and Indira Gandhi having served for longer terms. Many of his ministers were political heavyweights in whose appointment he had no role to play. In fact, one of them, Pranab Mukherjee, had been his former boss.

Building on Vajpayee's economic restructuring and with global liquidity flush, the Indian economy grew at its fastest ever. His period as PM had three main highlights, for which he shares a lot of responsibility, both credit and brick-bats. The first of these, India-US nuclear deal, was a game changer internationally, putting India tantalisingly close to the global high table. Its shortcoming, however, was that it was largely negated by a nuclear liability law that has restricted India's access to the latest technologies. The second highlight was the adoption of a rights-based approach to development, as reflected in the Right to Education, Right to Food, Right to Information, and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA, later MGNREGA, with the addition of the Mahatma's name) amongst other schemes. But the shortfall here was that this approach was accompanied by a part rollback of reforms and fiscal pump-priming prior to the 2009 elections.

In fact, the adoption of this rights-based approach was neither driven by the government generally, or even the PMO specifically. Its champion was a new body, the National Advisory Council (NAC), headed by Sonia Gandhi, the president of the Congress party and

head of the ruling coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The party and the alliance had chosen her to lead the government but she declined to do so, nominating Manmohan Singh instead. The NAC had 14 members chosen from civil society, activists, retired bureaucrats etc. According to a government website of that time, it was set up “to help write legislation for the government”.<sup>39</sup> At one time, it was seen as emerging as a super-cabinet but it only lasted during the duration of the UPA regime (2004–2014).

With the PM not being the effective head of the government, a distorted policy environment prevailed that facilitated the rise of crony capitalism. Critics have pointed out that these policy distortions led to the rise of a paradox - there was a fall in the wholesale prices, with the simultaneous rise in the retail prices resulting from a disequilibrium on the supply side. This was also a time of rising interest rates and the net result of all these developments was a twin balance sheet problem of banks and their lenders which continued even after five years. By the end of his term, the country was suffering from the malaise of cynicism and helplessness. Sadly, Dr Manmohan Singh’s term is remembered by a phrase coined by one of his own senior ministers – “policy paralyses”.<sup>40</sup>

### Re-emergence of the PM

Narendra Modi’s track record, indefatigable energy and effective messaging, delivered the BJP an absolute majority in the 2014 elections, a phenomenon last seen in 1984, when in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi’s assassination and the anti-Sikh riots, Rajiv Gandhi led the Congress to a sweeping victory. However, Modi also came with a big disadvantage – different people with different approaches to economy and politics, saw in him a representative of their expectations and worldviews.

Narendra Modi has shown himself to be transformative, audacious and courageous. Malnutrition and stunting of Indian children, besides being ethically reprehensible, prevented the country from benefitting from the demographic dividend that represents India’s best opportunity to break out and emerge as country with high standards of living. Modi’s push for ‘*Swachh Bharat*’ to handle open defecation that is the largest single cause for gastro-enteritis, ‘*Ujwala*’ to bring down indoor air pollution that leads to respiratory diseases and the ‘*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*’ campaign to change attitudes have no short-term electoral advantages, but the country must address them without delay.

Demonetisation disrupted short-term cash flows but forced cash to move into the formal economy. This had an adverse impact on the economy which was reliant on cash. GST, another disruptive move, was essential for creating a pan-India market, lowering costs of doing business as it did away with the multiple layers of taxation and reduced incentives for tax avoidance. Critics of GST say that it could have been done better. Accepting the argument, it still does not take away the fact that the introduction of any such policy is disruptive in the beginning. These policy initiatives should be potentially game-changers since they were meant to increase the 'formalisation' of the economy. They were courageous as they potentially hindered the government's efforts to get re-elected; critically, they were seen as hurting the BJP's core support base. The honest tackling of non-performing assets of banks through more realistic provisioning and doing away with evergreening combined with debt resolution following the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, while necessary, can only benefit the economy over the medium term. The acceptance of the recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission has meant that the central government's ability to push specific development expenditures in states is severely limited. Direct devolution to states has gone up from 32 per cent in the 13th finance commission to 42 per cent in the 14th (2015–2020). Similarly, agriculture continues to suffer from distress due to a massive increase in the relative productivity gains from the same piece of land and from the inability to let markets for agricultural goods function freely. The ability of the central government to sort out agriculture, health, education and good governance needs has additionally become limited in this era of 'cooperative federalism'. A number of important questions need to be answered. Can states be pressurised to do better in this field in the absence of fiscal incentives via the planning commission? Is there clear messaging about the gains, challenges and responsibilities?

One thing is clear – Modi has emerged as the pole around which Indian politics presently revolves. In different states, the evolving political battlelines were being drawn only in order to stop Modi. Even if there is no pan-India anti-BJP alliance, Modi's success in becoming the focal point of all politics is unusual. There is no comparative precedent in India's seventy-year journey where many disparate forces gave up their mutual contradictions to come together with a single goal. The *Indira Hatao* slogan of 1971 came closest but it was not widespread and the alliance partners ended up fighting with each other in different constituencies. But there is a similarity at present, and that is the motivations driving these

parties was, and remains, a negative message, moving from *Indira Hatao* to '*Modi Roko*'. It is difficult to list any other parliamentary democracy where the incumbent or prospective Prime Minister was the key, if not sole, issue around which general elections would be fought? Neither Margaret Thatcher, nor Churchill, and definitely not the hapless Theresa May.

### Assessment

Without subjecting all the 14 incumbents to the four-part test, it is clear from the above narrative that only three (Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Modi) would score high on all counts. A more nuanced picture would help understand the issue better. One, at the time of writing, these three have held the job of PM for 40 out of the 73 years, a figure likely to go up. Two, Vajpayee's personal popularity was seen to be more than that of his party. And he was the prime ministerial candidate through four elections, that of 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004. In the first, he led his party to the pole position, a first. In the next two, with a much larger alliance to lead, and with all campaigning with him as the candidate, victory was achieved. Three, Rajiv Gandhi would score very high on three parameters, flunking the test on 'leadership effectiveness, despite his overwhelming support. Four, both Shastri and Manmohan Singh would rate very high on effectiveness, the former in the 1965 War with Pakistan, and the latter, on pushing through the Indo-US nuclear deal, and on management of the implementation of rights-based development programmes. Arguably, the 2009 general election verdict was that of Manmohan Singh more than that of the ruling UPA alliance, or that of his party.<sup>41</sup> Fifth, Morarji as PM of a government plagued with factionalism, demonstrated that when he felt that indiscipline had been breached, could go ahead and sack important leaders like Charan Singh and Raj Narain from the Council of Ministers, though their faction was the second biggest component of the Janata party. Similarly, VP Singh removed Devi Lal from the Cabinet though he too was Deputy Prime Minister. In both cases, these removals led to the unravelling of the Government.

In another exercise, Singh uses an alternative typology to analyse the relative strengths of the Prime Minister vis-à-vis the polity.<sup>42</sup> These are the 'pluralist-parliamentary' system, where the ruling party enjoys the monopoly of power in the Union and States, allowing it to act in classical parliamentary style, subsuming the federal division of power. The second style is the "neo-patrimonial parliamentary

premiership”. Here the party is controlled by a political dynasty from the top, and even the government is run in a highly centralised manner. It is parliamentary despite the federal make-up due to political predominance. The third is the “federal-parliamentary” one, where the party can pressurise the leadership. The “parliamentary” component in all three captures the asymmetrical federalism that structurally dis-favours the States.

The movement towards a prime ministerial system is not linear, and while in future, an unclear mandate and an unwieldy coalition, may see a diminution in the position on the Prime Minister than what is at present, two factors would still provide for a relatively strong PM. One, the institutional need in the government for a sign-off by the PM on all important decisions. Two, the need in this era of 140 characters and short attention spans, the need for political parties and alliances to project a single face in the campaign, as their ‘decisive’ leader, gives extra attention and exposure to that chosen individual.

### Conclusion

It, thus, seems undeniable that within the political context of India’s parliamentary democracy, the Prime Minister has emerged as the single-most important institution, embodying both the executive and legislature. This analysis covers the reigns of not just the politically powerful PMs like Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Narasimha Rao, Vajpayee or Narendra Modi, to name a few, but even the comparatively weaker PMs like V.P. Singh, Shastri or Deve Gowda, Gujral who left their mark in different ways. However, as against the popular assumption, there seems to be no standard template that guarantees this pre-eminence of the Prime Minister’s position. The PMO as a unit of governance, when backed by the cabinet secretariat in particular, has in the past 70 years assumed for itself enough authority to allow even the most politically weak PMs to play the leading role in policy making and guiding the government, though of course not uniformly. This is because its role as the coordinator of government, across ministries has only grown from the time Nehru felt that this power would not be enough to allow the PM to lead the government. Contrary to Nehru’s assessment, this coordinating role has become, what has become, the “keystone in the cabinet arch”,<sup>43</sup> indispensable to government’s functioning.

Therefore, to end where we started – when did the first thought about having a strong chief executive appear and from whom? The



answer is not surprising if one has followed the course of this narrative. Nehru, as the Congress president in 1936, made public statements about adopting socialist policies, which upset Patel, Rajendra Prasad and others since neither the Congress Working Committee nor the All India Congress Committee had debated this, let alone adopt it. The damage had to be repaired. Patel clarified, “the Congress President has no dictatorial powers. He is the Chairman of a well-knit organisation. The Congress does not part with its ample powers by electing any individual no matter who he is.”<sup>44</sup>

Till the time Patel remained at the forefront of the party and the Government, the powers of the Prime Minister, taking shape under Nehru’s vision, were kept under check. But with the death of Patel, the elevation of Rajendra Prasad, and the resignation of vocal figures like Ambedkar and Mukherjee, the authority encompassed within the person and institution of the Prime Minister soared. This institutional power, once generated transformed into a reservoir which could be tapped into by a leader who had the will and the means to do so. Indira Gandhi became the first to realise this. The occupation of the centre stage by humble, democratic, politically weak or even ineffective figures like Lal Bahadur Shastri, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, V.P. Singh, Deva Gowda, I.K. Gujral and Manmohan Singh did not take away from the powers of the Prime Minister’s Office in any substantial way. Those powers remained intact. What was rather impacted during these periods of troughs and crests, was merely the *capacity* to make use of these powers.

With this analysis in hand, the paper must end by asking the obvious: what next? If the power under the PMO has indeed become both massive and multi-directional, encompassing within its jurisdiction diverse ministries like foreign affairs, defence, and even finance, then how must the Indian democratic structure deal with and balance such a powerful political institution? I present this question with two implicit assumptions – One, the recognition that checks and balances lie at the heart of any democracy, and two, an aspirational society like India, which still grapples with the challenges of substantial poverty and rising expectations, requires a clear vision about the country’s future and a high degree of coordination amongst the various stakeholders. India cannot afford, and will not accept, either authoritarianism or business as usual. Does the prime ministerial democracy have sufficient robustness to balance democratic values and growth imperatives? Does Mattoo’s argument for a new federal compact merit a serious discussion on consciously arriving at a better balance between the Centre and the States?<sup>45</sup> Or

would Indian polity continue to be work in progress, evolving to meet changing circumstances, as has been the practice since 1947? This is an important question that Indian democracy must address.

### Notes

1. Singh, MP, 'The Union Executive', Chapter 11, page 180 in *Indian Political System* edited by Himanshu Roy and MP Singh, New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2018.
2. According to Article 164 (2) of the Constitution of India, the 'Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly of the States.' Art 75 (3) is the parallel provision making the Union Council of Ministers collectively responsible to the House of the People (Lok Sabha).
3. Stewart, Heather, 'May suffers heaviest parliamentary defeat of a British PM in the democratic era', *The Guardian*, January 15, 2019, accessed on September 16, 2020 and available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jan/15/theresa-may-loses-brexiteer-deal-vote-by-majority-of-230>
4. Sinha, Shakti, "Federalism and Development Cooperation: An Indian Perspective" in *Federalism – A Success Story?* Edited by Hanns Buhler, Susanne Luther and Volker L Plan; Hanns Seidel Foundation, Munich, 2016.
5. In the Introduction to his book, 'Making Sense of Indian Democracy: Theory as Practice' (Permanent Black, 2020), the political scientist Yogendra Yadav points at the shortcomings of pigeonholing regimes as democracy/ non-democracy by ticking off entries on an institutional checklist. He argues that 'making sense of democracy in most parts of the world in the twenty-first century demands that his orthodoxy be challenged on multiple grounds.'
6. Harrison, Selig, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades*, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1960.
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8. Jalal, Ayesha, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
9. Varshney, Ashutosh, *Battles Half Won: India's Improbable Democracy*, Penguin India, 2013.
10. Gandhi, Rajmohan, *Patel: A Life*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2011, p. 266.
11. Sinha, Shakti, 'Introduction', in *Patel: Political Ideas and Practice*, edited by Shakti Sinha and Himanshu Roy, New Delhi: Sage Books, 2018.
12. Neerja Singh (ed.), *Nehru-Patel: Agreement within Differences, Select Documents and Correspondences 1933-1950*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2010.
13. Ibid 77.
14. Ibid, 82.
15. Ibid 260, 261.
16. Ibid, 266.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid, 267.
19. Ibid, 268.

20. Ibid, 269.
21. Neeraj Singh (edited), *Nehru-Patel: Agreement within Differences, Select Documents and Correspondences 1933-150*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 273-276.
22. V.A. Panandiker and Ajay K Mehra, *The Indian cabinet*, New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1996, p. 239.
23. All quotes from Neeraj Singh (above cited), p. 279-283.
24. Gandhi, above cited, p. 504-507.
25. For further details, refer Gandhi, Ibid. 521-28, and (ii) Manoj C G, 'Congress Party and its Presidents: Past and Present, as Future Nears', *The Indian Express*, Nov 17, 2017, accessed on June 15, 2019, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/congress-leadership-past-and-present-as-future-nears-4948840/>
26. Manoj C.G. Ibid.
27. Panandiker, *The Indian Cabinet*, 215-16.
28. Ajay Mehra Cabinet System.
29. Ibid.
30. B R Nayar, 'India and the Superpowers: Deviation and Continuity in Foreign Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly* 12, No 30, 23 July 1977: 1186.
31. Ibid. 1186.
32. Panandiker, *The Indian Cabinet*, 60.
33. Dani Rodrick and Arvind Subramanian, 'From "Hindu Growth" to Productivity Surge: The Mystery of the Indian Growth Transition', NBER Working Paper no. 10376, March 2004. Accessed at: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w10376>
34. There was evidence that Bofors, a Swedish gun manufacturer had paid bribes to win the Indian contract. The government refused to allow proper investigations. Popular Finance Minister V.P. Singh was shifted to Defence Ministry where he promptly ordered an enquiry into the German HDW submarine deal and was rewarded with being sacked.
35. Prabhu Chawla, 'Rajiv Gandhi Government withdraws infamous Defamation Bill', *India Today*, October 15, 1988, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19881015-rajiv-gandhi-government-withdraws-infamous-defamation-bill-797786-1988-10-15>
36. In the Shah Bano case, the Supreme Court had held that a divorced Muslim woman was entitled to a miniscule compensation of Rs 125 per month under the criminal code. This was reversed through legislative action. India became the first country to ban 'Satanic Verses,' even before the Ayatollah's fatwa. To counter these efforts that were seen as Muslim appeasement, legal processes were subverted to unlock the Babri Masjid/ Ram Janambhoomi structure and 'shilanyas' (foundation stone ceremony) of the temple carried out. Significantly, Rajiv Gandhi began his losing 1989 election campaign from Ayodhya.
37. It created a single OBC identity by bringing under its rubric diverse non-upper caste, non-Dalit communities, many of who had attained different political, social and economic status.
38. Sanjay Baru, *1991: How Narasimha Rao made History*, New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016.
39. <http://www.allgov.com/india/departments/ministry-of-youth-affairs-and-sports/national-advisory-council-nac?agencyid=7592>
40. The media and critics of the government said that UPA II (2009-2014) was struck by policy paralysis, which effected governance since policy decisions

were kept on hold. This effected economic growth, held back investment etc.

41. Sanjaya Baru, *The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh*, Penguin 2014.
42. MP Singh, above cited, 186.
43. MP Singh, above cited, 186.
44. Neerja Singh, above cited, 74.
45. Mattoo, above cited.