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EMERGING TRENDS IN INDIAN
FEDERALISM

Collaboration, Competition and Coordination

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Introduction

The natural composition of the Indian subcontinent is such that federalism and pluralism stand as the necessary basis for its governance. Owing to the size, population, geographical, linguistic, religious and other diversities, a federal feature is the most apt form of governance (Narang, 2015, p. 3–25). This chapter seeks to locate the current trends in Indian federalism in the broader context of seven decades of politics since independence. A special focus is on the dynamics of administrative coordination, compulsions of political competition and the realities of inter-governmental cooperation witnessed in recent years.

Political leaders, on the other hand, had different views with regard to the adoption of federal features in the Indian Constitution. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel stood in favour of federalism. Mahatma Gandhi favoured the decentralised structure and preferred a Panchayat/village-based federation, while the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, was in favour of a unitary system of governance (Kumar, 2018; Shastri, 2019). It must be conceded that the differences in approach were because of the distinct way in which these leaders viewed the reality of the challenges that India faced at the time of independence. For Ambedkar, protection of the minorities was a priority, and this would be possible in a unitary form of government. He says:

As members of a minority, we look to the Central Government to act as a powerful curb on the provincial majority to save the minorities from the misrule of the majority. As an Indian, interested in the growth of Indian

nationalism, I must make it plain that I am a strong believer in the Unitary form of Government and the thought of disturbing it, I must confess, does not please me very much (2019, p. 508).

However, Dr. Ambedkar was ready to consider a federal form '*if it can be shown that in it, local autonomy is not inconsistent with central unity*' (Ambedkar, 2019, p. 508). The implication was that a federal framework would be accepted if it ensured the unity and integrity of the country. Subsequently, a healthy compromise was reached, resulting in the balance of power between the Centre and the States. Accordingly, India was described as a 'Union of States', the union being indestructible. Ambedkar believed that the federal system of India would help in cementing the forces of national unity and integrity, but he had also warned that once the Constitution came into operation, a host of forces would be unleashed which would possibly threaten the unity and integrity of the nation. He specifically states

in addition to our old enemies in the form of caste and creeds, we are going to have many political parties with diverse opinions...if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost forever (Ambedkar, 1949, p. 977–8).

The federal arrangement that was envisaged by the Indian constitution was clearly reflective of the 'strong central government' mindset of the members of the members of the Constituent Assembly. By tilting the balance of power in favour of the central government, the Constituent Assembly unequivocally endorsed the view that the unity and integrity of the nation could only be maintained by a fortified central authority (Shastri, 1994, p. 54). In the process, the question of 'State rights' was relegated to the background and was given little attention. As in the case with many other provisions of the constitution, the decision-makers in the Constituent Assembly appeared more keen to legitimise the existing federal arrangement, as outlined in the Government of India Act of 1935.

Several indications in the constitutional framework illustrate this fact: the Constitution's reference to India as a 'Union of States'. Further, single citizenship (citizenship of only the country and not the states), a single constitution, initiation of constitutional amendments only by the federal government, a single integrated judicial system and an elite All-India civil-service system all point to the preponderance of the role envisaged for the central government. The Constitution also has a special provision relating to emergency powers, under which the central government can take over the administration of a state on the grounds of a 'breakdown' of a state's constitutional machinery (Article 356). Even in the distribution of powers between the different orders of government, the decisive role of the central

government is delineated clearly. Though the Upper House of Parliament – the Rajya Sabha – translates to mean House of the States, its membership and powers provide no proof of it being a body intended to represent and protect state interests in the federal arena. The few exclusive powers it enjoys are largely meant to endorse initiatives that may be taken by the central government on matters of intergovernmental relations or intervention by the central government in state affairs. This in brief was the constitutional design of the federal scheme.

It would be useful at this stage to contextualise the federal design that the Indian constitution provided for. Although many observers have described India's federal system as essentially having unitary features or at best quasi-federal features, scholars of Indian federalism have asserted that when a country designs its federal system, it keeps in mind its historical circumstances and specific requirements (Frankel et al., 2000). Federalism is rightly defined as a 'question of degree' (Bothe, 1998, p. 17). As a form of political organisation, federalism permits both the compulsions of collective action – in terms of shared values, and the need to protect regional space – to be meaningfully reconciled. India, in this regard, is no exception.

The global discourse on federalism is clearly focusing attention on the fact that federal systems are inherently political arrangements that afford an opportunity for the plurality within a political system to find legitimate expression. The federal principle is intrinsically an expression of political diversity and accommodation without in any way undermining the basic commitment to the sovereignty of a nation (Elazar, 1993). The fact that federalism 'rests upon the love for complexity' (Rougement, 1986, p. 21) is clearly demonstrated by several studies, which have focused on the capacity of federal systems to successfully negotiate and manage political cleavages (among others Ducachek, 1970; Morrison & Stevenson, 1972; Mehden, 1973; Hibbs, 1973; Riker, 1975; Barrow, 1976; Gurr & Duvall, 1976; Powell, 1982; Diamond & Jelling, 1988; Kothari, 1988; Ekeh & Osaghae, 1989; Frankel & Rao, 1989; Frankel & Rao, 1990; Osaghae, 1991; Elazar, 1993; Watis, 1995; Mitra & Singh, 1999; Frankel et al., 2000; Shastri, 2001; Tummala, 2007; Linz, Stephan & Yadav, 2011). It is also relevant to note that in the 'new' democracies of Asia and Africa, federalism has been considered the 'one best way' to celebrate diversity and manage conflict situations. Several nations have experimented with federal arrangements and crafted institutions and processes to serve their unique needs [the cases of Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa and Nepal can be cited in this regard].

The Indian federal design too was in the context of the historical circumstances and ground realities in which the constitution was prepared and adopted.

Working of Indian Federalism: An Overview 1952–2022

For a meaningful analysis of the developments in Indian federalism over the last seven decades, five clear phases can be delineated: a) Independence to 1967; b) 1967–1977; c) 1977–89; d) 1989–2014; and e) 2014 to the present. Important developments in four crucial years permit the clear demarcation of these five phases. The year 1967 saw, for the first time, the defeat of the Congress party in several states of India. In 1977, the Congress faced its first defeat at the federal level, and the country witnessed the formation of a non-Congress government, and the 1989 marked the end of one-party domination in Indian politics. The year 2014 saw the return of a single party with a clear majority in the Lok Sabha after 25 years. Interestingly, all four developments are linked to the electoral fortunes of the Congress party!

During the first phase – often referred to as the Nehruvian phase, the political leadership underscored the inevitability of centralisation of power to ensure 'nation building'. When ticklish state problems demanded immediate solutions, Nehru counselled the disputing parties to 'keep in mind the larger view' (Shastri, 1992, p. 59). Further, this phase witnessed the gradual – yet steady – thinning down of the line of distinction between the party and the government (Shastri, 1991, p. 15). Politics, in this phase, saw an attempt to forge 'broad consensus' on issues, which resulted in what Kothari has referred to as the 'Congress system'. The consensus became possible because of the high level of legitimacy of the 'national political elite' and the coalition of diverse social groups that was brought together in that period. The low level of mobilisation among the depressed social groups also facilitated this process.

The second phase (1967–1977) was witness to increasing tensions between the federal and state governments on account of the breakdown of the consensus culture of the earlier years. With non-Congress governments [until 1989, political parties other than the Congress party were referred to as non-Congress parties. This was reflective of the centre stage occupied by the Congress in Indian politics] being voted to power in the states on the one hand and Indira Gandhi attempting to increasingly assert her authority within the party on the other, the constitutional provisions relating to centre–state relations were systematically abused (politicisation of the office of the Governor, misuse of Article 356 and further erosion of the fiscal autonomy of states), and the values that governed the functioning of federal institutions were greatly undermined. The dismantling of the federal structures (and traditions) in the Congress party, with 'loyalists and favourites at state and constituency level' replacing 'party officials and candidates with local knowledge and support' (Rudolph & Rudolph, p. 138) shows that the collapse of internal democracy in the Congress was more or less complete.

With the Janata Party coming to power (at the central level) in 1977, it was hoped that the aberrations in federal-state relations would be corrected and the

principles of federal fairness respected and scrupulously adhered to. However, within months of assuming power, the new government established a record of sorts by resorting to the mass dismissal of Congress governments in the States, by invoking Article 356. The absence of internal democracy in the Janata Party resulted in frequent change of chief ministers – often at the directions of the leadership at the central level in several states where the party was in power (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh can be cited as examples).

Increasing tensions in centre–state relations became clearly evident in the early 1980s, with Indira Gandhi's return to power. While the 1978 split in the Congress had further consolidated her hold over the party and the Chief Ministers of Congress-ruled states were her hand-picked choices, non-Congress Chief Ministers came together to articulate their demand for greater state autonomy.

Commenting on developments in this phase, the Commission on Centre–State Relations (hereinafter referred to as the Sarkaria Commission) averred that those in power at the centre have been 'obliged to use diverse strategies and tactics, which were not always sound from long term interests' (Commission on Centre-State Relations, 1988, p. 15). Commenting on the ills of over-centralisation, the Commission asserted 'centralisation leads to blood pressure at the Centre and anaemia in the periphery. The inevitable result is morbidity and inefficiency. Indeed, centralisation does not solve but aggravates the problems of the people' (Commission on Centre-State Relations, 1988, p. 542).

The 1980s were also witness to the collapse of the 'consensus model' of governance, and Kothari has succinctly expressed the changes it brought in its wake:

An electoral democracy that had ... broadened its social base and showed special regard for diverse types of minorities and hence gained so much legitimacy got eroded over time and forced the political managers to compromise with ... monied and mafia interests... The erosion of parliamentary, party and federal institutions and decline of authority of the State and of the national political leadership has also been one of the reasons for the rise of new actors on the scene, new forms of political expression and new definitions of the content of politics. (Kothari, 1988, p. 28, 175).

The political developments since the 1990s have clearly contributed to 'greater democratisation of federalism and federalising of democracy' (Shastri, 2001). States have today emerged as the focal point of Indian politics and have significantly influenced the nature and course of federal politics. Various factors have contributed to the emergence of this trend. The politics of the 1990s have clearly seen the impact of social change on political/electoral processes. With the democratic process 'seeping downwards'. The implication here is that social groups which had earlier been denied their rightful role in the political/electoral process were now demanding their legitimate

share of the 'political cake', new social/political alliances have been formed, and this has permanently altered the landscape of Indian politics. The end of one-party domination and the emergence of a competitive party system is merely a reflection of this trend. Their implications for federal governance are far-reaching and significant.

This 'new language of politics' was succinctly articulated in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) formulated by the 13 party United Front (UF) Government (which came to power in 1996), when it promised an 'alternative model of governance' based on 'federalism, decentralisation, accountability, equity and social justice' (CMP, 1996). While making an unequivocal commitment to strengthening the forces of political federalism – a strong centre, strong states and viable local bodies (CMP, 1996), the CMP went on to add that there had been a new articulation of states' rights and the need for greater power to the states to meet the aspirations of their respective states (CMP, 1996).

The National Agenda for Governance (NAG) – formulated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (hereinafter called BJP) and its allies [The BJP led alliance, which formulated the NAG, came to power in 1998] – also underscored the changing contours of federalism and recognised the need for devolution of more financial and administrative powers and functions to the states and promised to effect decentralisation right up to the grass-root level by activating and involving local bodies (NAG, 1998).

It needs to be stressed that the National Democratic Alliance (1999) was formed by the BJP and its allies. It remained in power until 2004. The NDA manifesto released during the 1999 Parliamentary elections emphasised that the BJP-led government had 'set new parameters of purposeful governance' especially in the field of 'centre–state relations'. The alliance promised to usher in 'a new political age of reconciliation and accord' based on their commitment to 'federal harmony – ensuring a partnership of the Centre and the States'.

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which came to power after the 2004 elections and was once again given the mandate in 2009, has underscored its commitment to cooperative federalism in its Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

The results of the National Election Study '96, '98, '99, '04, '09 coordinated by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) clearly indicated that local and regional issues have determined electoral outcomes since the 1990s. A linked trend is the polarisation, which Indian politics has witnessed at the state level. While nationally India has seen the emergence of a multi-party system, at the state and constituency level, there is a bi-polar or at the most a tri-polar electoral contest (Heath, Oliver, 1999, p. 66–71). Voters at the state/constituency level have reduced the effective competition to two or three major political players. This implies that the voter choice at the local/state level is very clearly articulated. However, when this is aggregated

nationally, the number of effective players dramatically increases – a near ‘multiple bi-polarity’ (Sridharan, 1999). This fact was reinforced by the 2009 Lok Sabha elections (Kailash, 2009). The political preferences that voters indicate at the state level vary significantly from one state to another, resulting in the need for coalitions at the federal level.

The fifth phase (2014–2022) was a period which brought greater stability in the government, with the BJP securing a clear majority in the Lok Sabha both in 2014 and 2019. While in a formal sense the government at the central level was an NDA government, in reality it was a BJP-led and dominated NDA. While India has been witnessing to a string of coalition and minority governments since 1989, the one formed after the 2014 elections was distinctly different. In coalitions between 1989 and 2014, the position of the Prime Minister was not necessarily one of pre-eminence. The role of coalition partners in endorsing the candidate of the leading party in the coalition was quite common.¹ In the choice of Ministers and distribution of portfolios among members of the Union Cabinet, the bargaining power of the coalition partners (many of whom were from state-based parties) was patently visible. More often than not, the coalition partner leaders decide who would represent their party in the Ministry. Further, they also bargained (successfully) for key portfolios. This was also true of the NDA government, which came to power both in 1998 and 1999.

One witnesses a clear change from 2014 onwards. The BJP nominated Narendra Modi as its Prime Ministerial candidate, long ahead of the election. While the NDA partners endorsed the same, it was not without friction.² After the 2014 election results were announced and the Ministry was formed under Narendra Modi’s leadership, there was a token representation given to some of the NDA allies of the BJP. More importantly, the portfolios assigned to them were politically lightweight. There was little bargaining power that the coalition partners had in the light of the BJP having secured a majority on its own. This trend was further strengthened after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. If one were to look at the Union Council of Ministers today,³ the clear dominance of the BJP both in numbers and portfolio distribution is evident. Post 2014, one notices a return to a strong central leadership. One would offer the assessment in the next section that this has not altered the trend of the states of India continuing to be at the centre of Indian politics.

Recent Trends in the Working of Indian Federalism – Post-2014

The reason to delineate developments in Indian federalism since 2014 as a separate phase has been listed out in the previous section. The period 2014–22 has seen a few significant developments. Firstly, a ruling party securing a clear majority, but formally working within a coalition arrangement, has been a feature of this phase. It is posited that this was necessitated by the fact that the BJP (in 2014) was still waiting to gain a national footprint. Over the

last eight years, it has consciously spread that political presence much wider. Yet, this was also indicative of the fact that ‘states continued to be at the centre of Indian politics’.

Secondly, the manner in which the BJP chose a Prime Ministerial candidate for the 2014 elections indicates a clear new emerging trend (Shastri, 2015). A sitting Chief Minister⁴ was declared well before the 2014 elections as the BJP Prime Ministerial candidate. He continued to discharge the role of Chief Minister until the 2014 Lok Sabha victory of the BJP and his formal appointment as the leader of the BJP (and later NDA) Parliamentary Party. This was the first time in independent India’s electoral history that a sitting Chief Minister was declared as the Prime Ministerial candidate of a party. There have been cases of a Chief Minister becoming Prime Minister, but the manner in which it happened in 2014 was clearly different.⁵ This again is an indicator of ‘states continuing to be at the Centre of Indian politics’.

A third trend witnessed is the clear distinction that voters across the country have been making (especially after 2014) between a national election and a state-level election. The electoral choice made has been distinctly different. This was witnessed in Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Karnataka, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.⁶ This has led to the electoral jigsaw puzzle across India becoming extremely complex and each piece in that puzzle (each state of India) throwing up a different verdict. If one were to look at the five states in South India, no two states have the same party in power.⁷ This further heightens the ‘states at the Centre of politics’ argument.

Fourthly, the fact that throughout the year we continue to have elections as each state has a different election cycle has led to the country virtually being in permanent election mode. This is not uniquely a post-2014 development. Yet, the impact of this is seen clearly after 2014. The move of the BJP to popularise the slogan ‘One Nation, One Election’ needs to be seen in this context. The party has been favouring a common time table for Lok Sabha and state assembly elections once every five years. Today, given the fact that there are crucial state assembly elections every year and a Lok Sabha election once every five years, political parties (especially the BJP) seem to be always geared to facing an election and their leaders frequently in ‘campaign’-ready mode. Two developments merit attention in this regard. The focus during campaigns on the ‘virtue’ of a double-engine government is increasingly heard (Shastri, 2022c). The appeal for voting the same party to power at the national and state level is increasingly being voiced and has important implications for the working of federalism. Another linked factor is the active involvement of central leaders (especially of the BJP) in the campaigns in state elections. Studies have clearly shown that the BJP has been returned to power in states often on the strength of the charisma of the central leadership of the party and the public perception of the work done by the Central Government (Shastri, 2022a, 2022b).⁸

Finally, one notices the dominance of the three Cs: dynamics of administrative coordination, compulsions of political competition and realities of intergovernmental cooperation since 2014. The COVID-19 pandemic has further heightened the impact of the three Cs.

Dynamics of Administrative Coordination

A key element of federal dynamics and centre–state relations has been the nature and necessity of administration coordination across levels of government. A major contributor to this inter-governmental coordination has been the bureaucracy. Given the nature of the working of the two key All India Services – IAS and IPS – much of the administrative coordination happens on account of the networking among the bureaucracy. As all key positions in the Central Secretariat are occupied by officers from the All India Services on deputation to the Centre, the connections that are often established between officers in the state and central government often allow for administrative coordination in spite of the raging political tensions that may often be witnessed between the political leadership at the two levels, especially when different parties are in power⁹ at the two levels. This was especially seen in handling the COVID-19 pandemic and is discussed in the intergovernmental cooperation segment.

It has also been persuasively argued that much of the ironing out of tensions and differences relating to the GST was resolved through discussions among the top bureaucracy at the two levels. Frequent Secretary-level meetings of those heading a ministry at the Union and State level have also led to better administrative coordination.

The impact of limited administrative coordination was often seen on matters listed in the concurrent list. Subjects in the concurrent list are typically left to the states, but when there is a need for developing a national framework on a particular issue in the said list, the centre often takes the initiative. However, the point of debate is the level of consultation that is put in place as policies on matters in the concurrent list are evolved. What often happens is direction from the centre to the states rather than consultation with the states. A case in point is the National Education Policy 2020. While there is general praise for the Policy Document as developed by a very competent NEP Committee, its success would have been on a much wider span if the representatives of state government were part of the said committee (Shastri & Panjwani, 2023). There would then have been a sense of ownership on the part of the states, and this would have led to better coordination in implementing NEP 2020. It is now caught in the vortex of politics with BJP-ruled states being in the forefront of its implementation, and in states where non-NDA parties are in power, there is a much more lukewarm response to the said policy.

Compulsions of Political Competition

Post 2014, politics has clearly seen the entrenchment of a multi-party competitive system in India. For the purpose of analysis, it may be more useful to speak of multi-state parties and single-state parties rather than to use the nomenclature of national and regional parties. Till 2014, the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress was the ruling alliance/party in nine states, while the BJP was in power in just five states. This equation was changed by 2017 when the BJP came to power in 17 states, while the Congress was the ruling party in merely six states (Kailash & Sandeep Shastri, 2017). At the end of 2022, the BJP was in power in 11 states, and its NDA ally was in power in six states, thus accounting for governments in power. The NDA thus has a presence as a ruling party in 17 states – a little over half the states.¹⁰ The Congress is in power in merely three states, and a UPA partner leads the government in an additional three states, which accounts for 20% of the states. In seven states, a party/alliance which is not part of the UPA or NDA is in power. This indicates an authentic power-sharing arrangement across political parties. It has also resulted in centre–state relations being caught in the vortex of competitive politics. This is reflected in three important developments.

Firstly, given the fact that there are different cycles of elections for the state legislatures, the country seems to be in campaign mode, in long phases, every year. During these campaigns, the shrill rhetoric that one notices between parties in the competition is often on account of the fact that parties in power at the centre are often challenging a ruling coalition in the state, which is from a different political formulation. This often results in the ‘flourish of rhetoric’ with little attention to the ‘facts of reality’. This has been seen in the recent election campaigns in West Bengal, Punjab and Gujarat. For short-term electoral gain, ‘divisive rhetoric’ replaces ‘disciplined discourse’ and has often vitiated both relations between political parties, especially when different parties are in power at the centre and in the states.

Secondly, the office of the Governor has been in the zone of controversy in the working of the federal system. This is not merely a post-2014 phenomenon. Ever since the inauguration of the Constitution, the office of the Governor has been embroiled in contentious debates. Much of the controversy is related to the relationship between the Governor and the Chief Minister. This is especially so in states where a different party is in power as compared to the centre. Two dimensions of this controversy assume special significance. One, the profile of individuals appointed as Governors and secondly, the procedure followed for their appointment. On both counts, it is noticed that the conventions that were hoped to be followed, or an assurance which was given in the Constituent Assembly, have been set aside by the government in power.

This lends credence to the argument that the ruling parties at the centre have used the gubernatorial office as an important benefit that can be distributed among its political loyalists and retired officers, who need to be rewarded. It could thus be argued that this fact has resulted in the devaluation of the office of the Governor as the original constitutional intent of the Constituent Assembly members have not been honoured. In the Constituent Assembly, the assurance was held out that while appointing Governors, the Chief Ministers of States would be consulted. Over time, this convention has been consistently violated and Chief Ministers have been informed of a gubernatorial appointment rather than being involved in a consultation process prior to the finalisation of the appointment. The record of the National Front Government (1989–1990), Congress government (1991–1996), United Front Governments (1996–1998), NDA governments (1988–2004; 2014 onwards) and UPA governments (2004–2009) have been the same in this regard. If one were to review the individuals occupying the office of Governor today,¹¹ eight out of every ten have been politicians supporting the ruling party at the centre. The remaining two have been retired government and military officers. It is a fact that Governors in states where a party other than the ruling party at the centre is in power have been the most controversial and have running feuds with the Chief Minister. This includes states like Rajasthan, West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh.

Thirdly, the compulsions of political competition are also reflected in the criticism of the centre by the state government of favouritism towards specific states in particular or states ruled by the party in power at the centre, in general. The recent unease in Maharashtra over the shifting of the Vedanta-Foxconn project and the Tata-Airbus aircraft project from Maharashtra to Gujarat has been the focus of attention.¹² (DH Web Desk, 2022) Further, the approval by the Centre of three Bulk Drug Parks to Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh has also been a bone of contention for several states.¹³ Similarly, the Chief Minister of Telangana and his supporters have been consistently arguing that the conditions that needed to be fulfilled as part of the AP State Reorganisation Act have not yet been fulfilled.¹⁴

The impact of these developments on Indian federalism in general and centre–state relations in particular have been far-reaching and has been a cause of friction and tension. While it is good to have a strong government at the centre, it is all the more important to have a healthy, transparent and fair competition between the states, with the centre not being seen as partial to a few states.

Realities of Intergovernmental Cooperation

In recent years, all federal systems have seen an increased focus on intergovernmental cooperation. It is increasingly apparent that no function of

government is exclusively in the domain of the centre or the states or even the local governments. Most functions involve the need for intergovernmental cooperation. This cooperation has seen some interesting trends since 2014, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Saxena and Pathak have elaborated at length on how the issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic were handled. As per the Constitutional mandate in India, healthcare has been assigned to the state governments. Yet, as per the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 and the Disaster Management Act 2005, the central government is required to play a coordinating role. Soon after the declaration of COVID-19 as a ‘disaster’, the Union government imposed a nationwide lockdown in late March 2020. Many believe that this was done without any prior consultation with the states. While the states had serious reservations about the lack of adequate discussion on this matter, the frequent video dialogues between the Prime Minister and the State Chief Ministers after the declaration of the lockdown saw detailed and sustained intergovernmental interaction. As a result of these consultations, state governments secured greater autonomy in managing the pandemic in their states. The states also depended heavily on the local administrations to test and isolate affected populations. The Union government continued to play an important role. ‘Intergovernmental relations during this period were not free of conflict, and the Supreme Court was called to settle some disputes’ (Chattopadhyay & Knupling, 2021). Saxena and Pathak maintain that the Prime Minister is on record admitting that without the coordination and cooperation between various levels of the government, containment would not have been possible (Saxena & Pathak, 2021). It was clear that after the declaration of the first lockdown, the Prime Minister thought it important to involve the state Chief Ministers in all decisions relating to the pandemic.

In a blog titled ‘Reforms by Conviction and Incentives’ written on LinkedIn, Prime Minister Modi asserted that a ‘significant increase in the availability of resources was made possible by an approach of Centre-State *bhagidari*.’¹⁵ He went on to assert that we realised one size does not fit all, and therefore the centre had to work with the states. Prime Minister Modi said that this cooperation represented a ‘pleasant departure from the past’.

Conclusion

In the larger political landscape of Indian federalism and centre–state relations, the developments since 2014 have had a multi-track impact. There has been an increase in the base of electoral participation, an attempt at democratisation of the federal process and the emergence of a polity marked by the compulsions of political contestation, realities of sporadic inter-governmental cooperation and administrative coordination behind closed doors.

The working of the federal system has had to accommodate the emergence of a range of state-based political parties. These state-based parties are not merely the nucleus of politics in many states, they have come to play a pivotal role in national politics. The re-emergence of a single party majority trend in the Lok Sabha has not diluted this fact.

Parties in India reflect the changing contours of politics across the country. In significant ways, the emerging competitive party system reflects the increasingly assertive role the states have come to play in national politics. While commentators have spoken of the emergence of a new one-party dominant system, it is still in its infancy and may not well have all the features of the earlier one-party dominant system. The multi-verse of Indian democracy is truly reflected in the dynamics of federalism and centre-state relations.

Notes

- 1 One notices this is in the way V.P. Singh, Chandrashekar, H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral rose to the position of Prime Minister. Even in the nomination of Manmohan Singh to lead the UPA coalition, the non-Congress partners of the UPA played a crucial role. This would also be true in the case of Vajpayee (especially in 1998 and 1999) where the support of non-BJP, NDA partners was crucial.
- 2 The manner in which Nitish Kumar's JDU withdrew from the coalition is a case in point.
- 3 As on 31 December 2022.
- 4 Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat.
- 5 Among our former Prime Ministers, several had been Chief Ministers earlier in their career. The cases of Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, V.P. Singh and P.V. Narasimha Rao can be cited in this regard. However, there was a long gap between their relinquishing the Chief Ministership and becoming Prime Minister. H.D. Deve Gowda was one case where a Chief Minister directly went on to become Prime Minister (1996). Yet, he was never announced as the Prime Ministerial face of the alliance during the elections. Deve Gowda himself conceded that he never thought he would emerge as a consensus candidate for Prime Ministership during the election campaign and was more keen on retaining his Chief Ministership of Karnataka (Shastri, 1996).
- 6 It may be fair to point out that Karnataka initiated this trend in 1984–1985. In the Lok Sabha elections held in late 1984, the voters in Karnataka endorsed the claims of Rajiv Gandhi to lead the Congress by giving 24 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats in the state to the Congress. This was even as there was a Janata party government in Karnataka led by Ramakrishna Hegde. Hegde resigned on moral grounds necessitating a mid-term State assembly elections within a few months in March 1985. In this election, the Karnataka voter gave a clear mandate and majority to the Janata Party.
- 7 While Andhra Pradesh has the YSR Congress in power, in Telangana it is the TRS, in Tamil Nadu it is a DMK-led coalition, in Kerala it is a Left Democratic Front government and in Karnataka a BJP government.
- 8 The recent cases of Goa, Uttarakhand and Gujarat can be cited in this regard.
- 9 Senior bureaucrats at both the central and state level have conceded the fact in interviews that in closed-door meeting away from the media and political rhetoric, a lot gets done at the level of the bureaucracy. Yet, it must be conceded that this

collaboration of often on issues that the bureaucracy would like to prioritise and not necessarily what the political leadership may want.

- 10 There are 28 states and elected governments in Delhi and Puducherry, making a total of 30.
- 11 As on 31 December 2022.
- 12 <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/west/maharashtra-loses-three-major-projects-to-gujarat-1157377.html>
- 13 Bulk drug park that MVA worked for has gone to Gujarat, Andhra and Himachal: Aaditya Thackeray/Cities News, The Indian Express.
- 14 Modi is icon of partiality, says KTR-The New Indian Express.
- 15 Bhagidari means partnership.

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