

# **ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS OF CONGRESS (I) (1978-1999)**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**SWAPNA PATRONIS**



CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI - 110067  
2000



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI-110067 INDIA

CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

28 July 2000

## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled '**ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS OF CONGRESS (I) 1978-1999**' submitted by **SWAPNA PATRONIS** is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

**Prof. Zoya Hasan**  
(Supervisor)

**Prof. Kuldeep Mathur**  
(Chairperson)

CHAIRPERSON  
Centre for Political Studies  
School of Social Sciences  
Jawaharlal Nehru University,  
New Delhi-110067

*Dedicated*  
*to*  
*my Parents and my Brother*

## **Acknowledgements**

*I take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Prof. Zoya Hasan who has been a constant source of inspiration for my research work. Throughout my study she has tried to clarify my innumerable doubts. I extend my sincere thanks to the Chair Person, CPS (SSS) and the Dean, SSS for providing academic ambience.*

*For my collection of materials, initially I had to face some difficulties. But with the complete support and co-operation of the staff and members of the All India Congress (I) Committee Office, my work was being made easy. I extend my sincere thanks to Mr. Ranuj Basu (Permanent Secretary of AICC (I)Office) who provided me with the copies of the AICC (I) publications. At the same time the other staff were fully co-operative with me and provided me encouragement in my task.*

*A friend is someone who helps in distress.. This has been proved throughout my work by 'Abhay Kumar' who has stood behind me during my difficult days-having debates and discussions on various aspects of my work and helped me to do the editing. My special thanks to 'Krishna Kumar' who helped me in the initial stages of my work.*

*Also I extend my thanks to my friends; Deepa, Chandrima, Sudakshina, Reema, Rajendra, Ajay, Dimpi, Rashmi, Ravi, Rishikesh, Vedanshu, Udaiveer and Sundar for their support. And finally a note of gratitude to the JNUSU President Naseer Hussain for the constant moral support.*

**SWAPNA PATRONIS**

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# CHAPTER-I

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of political parties is a relatively recent development in the paradigm of political history. Parties are the instruments or agency for representing the people by expressing their demands.<sup>1</sup> This development process has taken place mainly in the twentieth century to convey the wishes of the people to the authorities. Thus parties became a mean of expression along with the process of democratisation of politics. A political party emerges to perform some common functions in a wide variety of political systems at various stages of social, political and economic development, where the public has to be participated effectively or to be controlled for a public cause in any social and political structure. Party as an organisation is expected to organise public opinion and to communicate the demands to the centre of governmental power and decision.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have suggested that the modernization process itself produces political organisations, that political organisation is a consequence of

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Sartori –“Parties and Party systems :A framework for Analysis” volume I (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pg.27.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Lapalambara and Myron Weiner –“Political parties and Political Development” pg.1.

increased occupational differentiation, which in turn results from economic growth and technological change. Just as the presence of entrepreneurial talents in a traditional society is a key element in whether or not economic growth occurs so the presence of organisational talents may be an important element in whether or not there emerges a leadership with the capacity to run a political party.<sup>3</sup>

The power relation between parties and other organisation in different political arenas favours the parties when they can use their ability to organize/ represent collective interests. When this trump card is no longer exploitable their position is weakened in every arena.<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Neuman suggests that 'Every party in its very essence signifies partnership in a particular organisation and separations from others by a specific programme.'<sup>5</sup> A successful organisation should be therefore able to maintain themselves precisely because their leaders give a higher priority to maintaining the organisation than to any external goals. Also in an open competitive environment it has to recruit and train its personnel. This perpetuates itself as an organisation and wins

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<sup>3</sup> Myron Weiner -'Party Building in a Nation-The Indian National Congress' pg.5.

<sup>4</sup> Angelo Panebianco-"Political Parties: Organisation and Power" (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pg.23.

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Neuman (ed.) -'Modern Political Parties (Chicago, 1957), pg.396.

support from the population or substantial parts thereof and maintain internal cohesion. All modern systems do not have the same types of organisations or for that matter the citizens of all modern societies have an equal propensity to organise. The inability of many political leaders to maintain internal party and government unity in many new nations of Asia and Africa had resulted in the collapse of parliamentary government and the establishment of military dictatorships. But India is an exception where democracy still exists.

Due to historical reasons, in India, the basic requisites of a democracy were in existence prior to political independence. Political associations started functioning from the closing decades of the nineteenth century. They were not, however, the integral part of a democratic system, but were mainly engaged in the struggle for national liberation. With the achievement of freedom, they became active institutions of representative government and adopted objectives in accordance with the new role they assumed. The political ferment in the first four years of independence had generated a highly conducive climate for the mass production of parties. In the course of development and transformation parties and party system are bound to face numerous problems that are characteristic features of this evolution. The party system in India in the pre-independence years was characterized by an identifiable



centre, which was represented by the Indian National Congress. It was the only party, which developed nation-wide organisation and leaders.<sup>6</sup>

The Indian party system owes its origin and transformation to the 'political centre' of independence years. Parties like CPI, Akali Dal, and the DMK originated from outside the Congress. Whereas other parties like the Socialist Party, the Swatantra, the BKD, the Janata Party were formed by political leaders who were members of the Indian National Congress. Political dissent has, therefore, been a fragmentation of political centre of the society rather than a projection of autonomies interests in the social and economic spheres. It is difficult to make a clear-cut classification of the Indian party system because of its multiplicity and diversity. To quote Hanson and Douglas: "Multiplicity and diversity made an attempt to classify Indian political parties as a very hazardous undertaking... Nevertheless, a provisional classification can be made- parties of the left, parties of the right, traditional parties, regional parties, and minor parties."<sup>7</sup>

The Congress party, the Socialist Party, the Swatantra Party, the Bhartiya Kranti Dal are parties frequently built upon

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<sup>6</sup> Rajni Kothari-'Politics in India' (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970) pg:-9.

<sup>7</sup> A.H.Hanson and J.Douglas-'India's Democracy' (Delhi: vol.1972), pg.79.

traditional loyalties. They comprise very heterogeneous social currents and interests, which get reflected in the variety of political representation. These parties worked as a medium of integration and had the capacity to provide the public with a measure of national identification as distinct from parochial parties. Most of the functions performed by the smaller political parties are not particularly political oriented, but are determined by the structural elements of the society. There are two types of parties; one broad-based and functional, and other local in character and based on primary groups or centred around personalities. The co-existence of both these types of parties must be regarded as an important characteristic of the Indian party system. The Indian parties have adopted themselves to the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy in which they compete with the parties of "social integration". Parties in India are accused of creating artificial splits among the people and the disintegration of the society is to be traced to their existence. Such a criticism ignores the fact that Indian society is in any case, divided into many social, linguistic and religious groups. It is the function of the political parties to break and control the political consequences of these disintegrating tendencies. Especially in India, without parties the integration process just cannot be realised, because they stand as more or less the sole intermediaries between state and society.

The first two decades after independence was characterised as a system of one-party dominance. It was a competitive party system, but one in which competing parts play rather dissimilar roles. In India, the Congress, which is the party of consensus, functioned through an elaborate network of factions, which provided the chief competitive mechanism of the Indian system. Several groups and opposition parties, dissident groups from the ruling party and other interest groups used to exist outside the Congress party. Their role was to constantly pressurise, criticise, censure and influence the Congress party and exert a latent threat that if the ruling group stays away too far from the balance of effective public opinion, and if the factional system within it is not mobilised to restore the balance, it will be displaced from power by the opposition groups. Although a number of opposition parties came into existence, it was recognised that the Congress was the chief party, representing a historical consensus and enjoying a continuing basis of support and trust. Under the circumstances, political competition was internalised and carried on within the Congress.

The 1967 elections proved a setback to the pattern of Congress dominance in India. Greater competitiveness and decreasing institutionalization was the general trend after 1967. Political fragmentation, defection and dissidence were the features

of the party system both at national and state level. The Congress lost 95 seats in the Lok Sabha elections in 1967, although it did retain a majority. Also, the party failed to win majority in many states. The instability in the party system during 1967-71 period came to an end with the re-establishment of the Congress dominance in the 1971 Lok Sabha polls. From 1971-77, the Congress ascendancy in the Indian party system was strengthened by the declaration of national emergency in 1975 -1977. The decision of Mrs. Indira Gandhi to hold election to parliament in 1977, and withdrawal of emergency, resulted in the origin of a new party alliance in the Indian party system. As a result of this, Janata party came to power for a brief period of two years. The Janata party however, could not face the challenge from inside the party as it was undergoing a process of party building and party consolidation.

Due to the centralizing tendencies and differences within the Congress Party, it split for the second time into Congress (I) led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Congress (U) under Devaraj Urs., The Congress (I) won a thumping 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority in the 1980 Lok Sabha election and it was repeated in the June Assembly elections. We can see the same pattern repeated in 1985 elections. Congress (I) under Rajiv Gandhi lost power in the 1989 elections which resulted in the formation of National Front government. With the

assassination of Congress (I) President Rajiv Gandhi, the party was voted back to power in 1991 under Narasimha Rao. After 1991, the Congress (I) never came to power till 1999 (the end period of my study).

### **Earlier Studies**

The Congress party which has been one of the most successful of the nationalist movements of Asia and Africa though disintegrating, but which has still survived, has received surprisingly little attention from scholars. Among the few scholars who have shown their interest in the study of the Congress party include Rajni Kothari, Atul Kohli, Morris-Jones, Myron Weiner and Stanley Kochanek. Rajni Kothari had described the Congress rule for two decades, since independence as one-party dominant system. He emphasized that the Congress as a ruling party had to combine the functions of a continuing movement and a political party. This function of the party was better understood by Nehru who was less apprehensive about ideological differences within the party. From time to time, powerful political personalities have enjoyed an almost arbitrary role in crystallizing political relationships. In the absence of a sufficient challenge from outside, as was the case until 1967, factions within the ruling party assumed the role of opposition parties. This was quite openly reflected in their policy position and ideological stands. Congress

has been more a framework of consensus than a discrete political party. Since it performs both, the political power has given a command over different kinds of resources at various levels and the organisational power has enabled it to recruit various kinds of elite and mobilise intermediaries. The people who support these elite has provided the Congress an arena of bargaining, conflict and arbitration.<sup>8</sup>

W. H. Morris Jones attempts to discover the changes that have been taking place in the Indian political system during the pre-independence and post-independence. The Congress learned that it had to be an Aristotelian party, a party of the middle way to survive and succeed. The interaction between internal party dynamics and dynamics of other parties constituted the core of Indian Political life. Tensions and factions within the Congress have stimulated and were stimulated by the pressures of outside groups.<sup>9</sup> The political movements within Congress operated under its own constitutional framework. The party had to struggle with the problem of creating effective lower units and integrating them

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<sup>8</sup> Rajni Kothari- 'Politics In India'- (Orient Longman Ltd., 1970), pg.66.

<sup>9</sup> Morris Jones- 'The Government and Politics of India' Hutchinson and Company (Publishers Ltd., 1964), pg.250.

in the party's electoral and decision-making structure.<sup>10</sup> The advent of Congress to power in government and the achievements of large majorities of Congressmen in Parliament and State Assembly prompted to consider the integration of these persons with the party organisation which has placed them in the legislatures. This led to changes in the relations of the higher organs of the party.<sup>11</sup> These several changes were not enough to combat inner party critics. The changes in the party constitution was designed to break down the tensions in the 'parliamentary organisation' by creating some ex-officio membership of party bodies of parliamentarians. But this failed to achieve the desired effect. Any understanding of the split was related to the familiar ministerial organisational division or the broadly left right attitudes according to Morris-Jones.

The party's success during the first two decades has been explained by Myron Weiner. One explanation attributes party success to Nehru, a dynamic, charismatic leader, capable of winning popular support and maintaining internal party discipline. The other explanation focuses on the pre-eminent role

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<sup>10</sup> Morris Jones- 'The Government and Politics of India'. (Hutchinson and Company (Publishers) Ltd., revised edition, 1971, pg.202-204.

<sup>11</sup> Morris Jones- 'The Government and Politics of India'. (Hutchinson and Company (Publishers) Ltd., revised edition, 1971, pg.202-204.

Congress played before independence as a nationalist movement.<sup>12</sup> All his Congress party leaders in order to succeed politically are concerned first and foremost, with doing whatever is necessary to adopt the party to its environment. In an effort to win elections Congress adopted itself to the local power structures. This process of adaptation was undergoing great change. Paradoxically most of these change were brought by the government itself. The result is a political system with considerable tension between a government concerned with modernising the society and economy, and a party seeking to adopt itself to the local environment in order to win elections.<sup>13</sup> Congress is relatively sensitive to local discontent, which it communicates to government in its effort to reduce discontent and thereby avoid political defeat. In short, while Congress restrained its government it also reduced tensions created by the modernization process. The central aim of his study, therefore was to examine how the Congress party coped with a changing environment in its effort to win and maintain supports.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Myron Weiner –‘Party Building In A New Nation-The Indian National Congress’ (University of Chicago Press, 1969), pg:11.

<sup>13</sup> Myron Weiner –‘Party Building In A New Nation-The Indian National Congress’ (University of Chicago Press, 1969), pg:11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pg.16.



Atul Kohli's 'Democracy and Discontent' attempted to describe the political situation that had emerged as the decline of 'Congress system' in India. More specifically, the study intended to explain how the political process has been involved in the erosion of India's established patterns of authority. The districts were chosen as the unit appropriate for study of local politics. An important concern of this study is how authority patterns have changed over time and what extent India's central government had dealt with the growing problems of nation. In this regard the study analysed how Indian government under Rajiv Gandhi had managed the economic policy and how it dealt with such troubled political institutions as the Congress party and centre-state relations with Punjab. The purpose of the study has been to describe how and why India has become difficult to govern.

Atul Kohli has emphasised that inspite of a turbulent past, post-independence era raised hope for a stable, democratic India.<sup>15</sup> Under the leadership of Nehru and others the vision took shape in the form of new political institutions. Dominance by a single party provided stability. The party five-year plans stressed a mixed-economy model of development that sought economic growth, self-sufficiency and a medium of wealth redistributions. Today, the Congress party according to Atul Kohli has lost its

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- Atul Kohli - Democracy and Discontent - India's growing crisis of governability (Cambridge University Press, 1991) Pg: - 25 - 36

hegemony over Indian politics. Partly as cause and partly as consequence of its loss of control, Congress has experienced a profound organizational decline.

Stanley Kochanek in his book "The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of One-Party Democracy" deals with the relationship between the national party and the national government, tracing its focus in the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Congress President. It attempts to show how the Prime Minister subordinated the mass organization to the needs of the function of the party as government, what the role of the Congress President was during the period of centralization and convergence, and what changes developed during the period of divergence as the Congress presidency gained new period of divergence as the Congress presidency gained new status and authority. The book explores the changing role of the Working Committee of the Congress. It deals with the changes in the composition of the party executive, its behavior and decision-making style, its relationship to the national government, the state governments, and the state parties and its role in candidate selection. It also examines the sources of Congress recruitment and the nature of the leadership elite in party and government.

Kochanek's work provides an analysis of the dynamics of one-party democracy in India.

### **Present Study**

This dissertation examines the structure of the Congress party from 1978 after the second split leading to the formation of Congress (I) till the period of 1999. This study is concerned with the internal dynamics of the Congress Party; especially in relation to the centralisation of power and the building up of the personality cult. This is the focus of the second chapter on 'The Leadership in the party'. The issues on which defections and splits occurred, the leaders of various groups within the party and their connecting link with the absence of inner-party democracy have been analysed in the third chapter. The concluding chapter deals with the need to revitalise the organisation and how to go about it.

### **Research Methodology**

Methodology constitutes an important aspect of any study. Several scholars have followed many techniques of method to collect data, analyze it and come to their own conclusions. In the present study, which is to be supposed to complete within a short span of time as per rules by the university was announced as soon

as the course work was over and completed within the time framework as per the regulations of the institution. However, it may be assumed that within the limitations of the study, many techniques have been followed for completing the present assignment within the framework of M.Phil programme of the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. It may be pointed out no field study has been carried out just like in the case of any research assignments. However, within the limited framework, the following techniques have been adopted for the analysis and for the arrival of conclusion of the aspects under investigation. The methodology adopted for the study of political parties in the present case is different from one followed for the study of social institutions, social-political issues and economic problems and development.

Political parties are the developments of recent times and infact, they originated in the west, particularly in England in the context of social and political developments that have taken place there. Though, the democracy, is called direct and slave-owning by the scholars which originated 2000 years ago in Athens, it did not contribute much to the evolution of modern political process under modern political democracy. It was the Roman Empire, which lasted for more than 500 years that laid the foundation for modern democratic institutions. Political parties originated at a time when

feudal and other social and political institutions connected with kingly power declined in the process of their natural disintegration. Political parties in general, originated in different occasions and in different contexts.

Immediately after renaissance, many countries including India were colonized by the west. Towards the end of the II<sup>nd</sup> world war, many countries which are called developing countries or Third World countries by the western scholars became independent and they did not have any alternative to accept. The western style of democracy is based on party system. India, as a developing country, also adopted western model of political democracy, with party system as its basis. One has to examine, in this context to what extent the Indian democracy with its party system has been successful in the light of political conditions and developments that have been taking place in the neighbouring III<sup>rd</sup> World countries such as Srilanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar etc.

Some western scholars such as David Apter wonder why there has been political stability in India in comparison to other countries where democracy has not taken its routes, Though Pakistan started functioning on the model of western, political democracy, it could not function and establish its roots properly

because of frequent military takeover. In Srilanka, one wonders whether sovereignty of the people exist or not mainly because of the fact that then established government of Srilanka is challenged by the militant group of LTTE led by the pro-democracy movements in that country. The social scientists wonder the reasons why it has not taken place in India hitherto. It is in this context that one has to examine the success of the Congress party which has been able to bring about stability at all fronts, inspite of social, political, cultural and economic problems in the country. The Congress party, a centrist party after independence constituted in itself the aspirations of all the people of the country. In the initial stages it has been able to bring about many fruitful results including political, social, cultural and economic stability taking into consideration various serious problems facing the country. It may be pointed out here that the great charismatic leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy Y.B. Chavan and Kamaraj provided stability to the emerging nation-state of India. The methodology adopted for the study is carried out on the basis of the issues and problems raised above in the context of India as a developing nation which grew and developed slowly under parliamentary democracy provided by Congress party in the initial stages. It was

already pointed out that the study has its own limitation and therefore taking into consideration of this aspect, the following techniques of study have been adopted for the present research assignments.

**The objectives of the present study: -**

- a) To examine the decision-making process in the party and the role of the congress president in this process.
- b) To investigate how centralization in the party led to the disintegration of the organization.
- c) To deal with the influence of personality cult and dynastic rule in the party.
- d) To study what other factors led to the disintegration of once-a-great organization in a developing country like India.
- e) Finally to examine to what extent the disintegration and split of the party in the multi-dynamic cultural federal aspects of the country led to the stability or instability of the Indian polity.

**Sources Used**

I have relied mostly on secondary sources for my work and a great deal of the work is from newspapers and journals due to the scarcity of necessary data.

## **Concepts Used in the Study**

Any theory has its own concept. The words that we choose to describe the behaviours and attributes of certain events and developments are called concepts, which should in fact, be informative. These concepts are useful to us because they help in observing and understanding various aspects. Mosca in his 'Ruling class' uses a number of concepts like Political Power and Religion. In the present study we have used a number of concepts which are explained below one by one.

### **Stability**

Here 'stability' refers to political stability of India in the context of a national government which have been established by the Congress party, in a developing country like India, inspite of various challenging problems. In other developing countries where modern western democracy has been established, the leadership could not bring about political stability. The examination is also focussed on whether such a powerful organization can decline mainly as a result of defection with the party.

### **Organizational Structure**

Functions are determined by structure, which may be broadly defined as structural functionalism. One may wonder and



investigate further how the Congress succeeded in bringing about political stability, inspite of various challenges facing the country and why the countries like Pakistan and Srilanka which had also adopted political democracy could not sustain political stability.

### **Organizational Dynamics**

Organizational Dynamics refers to the dynamics of the leadership extended by the congress party under various charismatic leadership from Nehru onwards. It was because of these reasons that the Congress party has been able to achieve its dynamic character that enabled it to guide the country even at the time of great crisis. From India Gandhi's period onwards the party organization came to fully rely on charismatic leaders for personality cult to win elections and the organization began to slowly disintegrate.

### **Conceptual Framework**

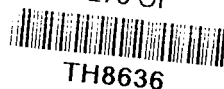
Every theorist makes his/her own conceptual framework which is an important aspect. Mosca in the 'ruling class' uses a number of concepts like 'political power' and 'Religion', 'wealth and political power' etc. Rules, according to him have become powerful by making use of religion. Throughout history, there are some people who have got political power through the medium of wealth.

This is Mosca's conceptual framework as applied in his book the 'Ruling Class'. Marx uses a number of concepts like 'class struggle', 'mode of production' and 'Dialectics' to the study of history. Dialecticism, coupled with a changing mode of production can change the course of history. This is his conceptual framework in regard to his study of history.

In the present study, we have made use of a number of concepts like stability, political power, leadership and political and economic development. If the leadership is dynamic and capable, provided by a political party in a modern democracy, there can be social and political stability. Infact, the Congress party, like Banyan tree provided dynamic leadership under various charismatic leaders leading to the organizational structure.

Though, it was built up by various leaders like Nehru, it declined in terms of political and social power in recent times, especially after the disappearance of Charismatic leadership, provided by the Gandhi Nehru family. During the crisis and struggles of the country, the Congress under various leaders stood by the moderate, balanced and secular policies of the Congress. This dissertation examines the reasons under which the party declines and as a consequence of which it lost its power at the centre in recent times.

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## CHAPTER II

### LEADERSHIP IN THE PARTY

The study and analysis of political parties constitutes a new branch of science and it occupies an intermediate field between the social, the philosophico psychological and historical discipline. In this context, the study of political parties becomes a part of applied sociology.<sup>16</sup> At the same time the study of political parties constitutes a part of a wider study of the subject of politics. The origin and development of political parties is a recent phenomena and it is linked to the modern western democracy and its institutions. It may be pointed out here that almost simultaneously with the development of democracy, there originated in recent times, the nation-state. Today, party systems function within the framework of democracy in a nation-state, which has brought in its fold a number of nationalities in order to create a bigger empire in the modern sense of the term. It is in the context that one has to examine the leadership of a political party that may comet to power in such a society.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Michels- "Political Parties: A Sociological Study of The Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy", (Translated from Italian Into English Language by Eden and Cedar Paul (New York, Dober Publications, 1959) pg: - Viii -9

Political parties play a very crucial role in the working of a democratic system, and Epstein treats political party as “any group seeking votes under a recognised label.”<sup>17</sup> A political party is not a loosely knit organisation of some persons. However, the whole concept of political party can be traced to the origin and development of political democracy and nation-state in the west. The eastern countries did not adopt the party system during their time. These countries adopted the party system and democracy and also created nation-state simultaneously when they became free from the colonial bondage. India also adopted the party system which has inspite of many demerits, succeeded in upholding democracy and nation-state of India. It was the leadership given by the Congress party that enabled the country to retain political democracy within the framework of the nation-state; based on feudal polity. Many developing countries which adopted political democracy failed to retain democracy in the larger interest of their own countries. Infact, democracy in Pakistan has failed to take its route because of the dominant role being played by the military. That is also the reason with many neighbouring countries including Bangladesh. It is in this context

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<sup>17</sup> L.B. Epstein-“Political Parties in Western Democracies” (New York, Prager, 1967) pg:- 9

that the leadership and party system shaped under the leadership of the Congress party is to be examined here in this dissertation.

The Congress party which came to power at the centre had to face a number of problems such as integration of the princely kingdoms in the Indian union, fissiparous tendencies, illiteracy, the crisis created by the partition in the country and many other innumerable social and economic problems.

To quote Stanley Kochanek, it could be understood that during this process of change and adaptation, the most delicate problems facing the Congress arose from the need to determine the appropriate relationship between party and government.<sup>18</sup> As this relationship evolved over the years, it was accompanied by far reaching modifications in the functioning of the party executive. The evolution of Party-Government relations and the transformation of inner-party structure passed through three phases. The first, a period of transition, which lasted from 1946 to 1951, was marked by conflict between the party and government. The period of transition came to an end with Nehru's assumption of the Congress presidency in 1951, the year, which marked the beginning of a period of centralization and convergence. As

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<sup>18</sup> Stanley Kochanek-"The Congress Party India-The Dynamic of one Party Democracy" (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968), pg. 23.

Congress President and Prime Minister, Nehru succeeded so well in restoring harmony between party and government that it was possible after 1954 for him to turn over the day-to-day work of the party to a series of Congress Presidents chosen with his approval and responsible to him.<sup>19</sup>

The powerful syndicate had continued to function through the party president, the state party bosses and the old guard within the cabinet before the first split of 1969 and Indira Gandhi had to depend on bureaucrats and a few trusted members of her kitchen cabinet.<sup>20</sup> Indira Gandhi soon became aware of the designs of the syndicate and started building up an independent image of her own. The result of the 1967 election changed the position of Indira in relation to her standing in the party and the government. Though she got herself re-elected as Prime Minister, the party bosses sought to clip "Indira's wings". But the manner of the formation and composition of the new cabinet reflected Indira Gandhi's independence and the growing weakness of the syndicate. She inducted those she trusted into the cabinet and

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<sup>19</sup> Stanley Kochanek-"The Congress Party India-The Dynamic of one Party Democracy" (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968), pg. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Kuldip Nayar-Indira: The Critical Years (Vicar New Delhi., 1971) pg: - 26

rewards those who supported her in the party.<sup>21</sup> Though Indira Gandhi had thought that she might wield more influence in organisational matters than S. Nijalingappa, after the 1967 elections the latter had adopted the line that the "prime minister and her cabinet were answerable to the CWC". At the next Congress session at Hyderabad in 1968, she again found herself isolated, which made it claim further that unless she had a provincial or an organisational balance in the party, she could not have her say. Thus the split of 1969 was brought about between the group headed by Indira Gandhi and the old guards.

The party which has a centralised structure in its constitution has its structure being more re-inforced from Indira Gandhi's period onwards. This process of centralisation was carried forward by her successors also. The process of centralisation has led to decision-making being concentrated in a few hands which ultimately led to the decline of the party. James Manor in his study assigned responsibility for the decay of the Congress organisation primarily to the centralising drives of the Congress during Mrs. Gandhi's tenure in office. In her efforts to extend more effective control over state politics, however the long-term results have been the opposite. This process has been

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<sup>21</sup> Ram Avtar Sharma-Indira Gandhi and Congress Party (New Delhi, Northern Book Centre, 1980) pg: -214.

continued even during the later periods also. The chapter has focussed on how decision-making was centralised in the hands of the Congress Presidents from the period of 1978-1999. But at the same time the study has gone a step further to analyse the initiation of the re-inforcement process of centralisation even before the period of the formation of the Congress (I). This chapter is divided into subsections – The first subsection from 1969-1978 deals with the analysis of the process of decision-making before the formation of Congress (I). The second sub-section 1978-1984 deals with the process of centralisation after the death of Indira Gandhi. The third sub-section 1984-1991 deals with the Rajiv era and how the process of centralisation was carried forward. The fourth sub-section (1991-1996) deals with the process of decision-making during the period of Narasimha Rao. The last subsection (1996-1999) deals with the periods of Sitaram Kesri and Sonia Gandhi as Congress Presidents and the process of centralisation during their periods.

### **Decision-Making (1969-1978)**

From the period after the split, decision-making became more and more centralised in the person of Indira. Issues of personal loyalty and favouritism were given importance in this top-



down political system.<sup>22</sup> Instead of the Prime Minister deriving her authority from the parliamentary party, the party manifesto derived its authority from her. The office of the Prime Minister and her Secretariat became more important. In the Congress party as in the government, Indira Gandhi's supremacy in its outward manifestation was greater than Nehru's. The Congress Presidents since the split of 1969 had been her nominee and obediently transmitted her instructions to the party. She had the deciding voice in appointments to all party offices in the composition of the CWC and other party organs and also in the selection of Congress candidates for elections to the parliament and state legislatures<sup>23</sup>. She was the supreme arbitrator in all inner-party disputes whether factional or ideological. Unlike Nehru's authority which was not confined to the central level only, his daughter's was extended to the states as well. In the aftermath of the 1971 general elections she was about to dissolve the existing Congress committees in several states replacing them with centrally nominated 'ad hoc' committees and to induce well -entrenched Congress chief ministers those of Rajasthan, Andhra pradesh, Madhya pradesh and Assam to stand down in favour of her own

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<sup>22</sup> "State, Power and Social Faces, Domination and Transformation in 3<sup>rd</sup> world " Edited Joel. S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, Vivienne Shue, pg:92.

<sup>23</sup> Indira Gandhi: A Biography- Zareen Masani pg:290-294 (Oxford university press, 1975).

candidates. The process of centralisation reached its height after the February, 1972 elections to 18 state legislatures.

The local issues played a minor role in the elections and the Congress victory was widely interpreted as a vote for Indira Gandhi and her role in the creation of Bangladesh. Even without any worthwhile party structure, the party won elections. This was mainly due to her populist posture which she established due to her direct links with the masses. The party's function were just to collect funds, distribute tickets for legislative elections and canvass for the party's candidates.<sup>24</sup> Membership of party committees and offices was valued only in so far as it provided access to the legislatures and ultimately to ministerial office and patronage. Elections to organisation virtually ceased to exist, and in many districts, its offices literally had to close down. There was no cadre of trained full-time workers and most of the party workers were tired at election time. When Indira Gandhi realised that the party won elections due to her Charisma, she successfully reduced the party to irrelevance. This virtual demise of the party organisation brought an end to the pre-split conflict between the governmental and organisational wing of the party.

In the absence of a genuine primary base the party was inevitably a house of cards, controlled at every level by self-seeking

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<sup>24</sup> Zareen Masami- "Indira Gandhi :A biography " 292 (Oxford University press, 1975) -pg:

eliques who represented fictitious members and who were accountable to none but themselves and the Central High Command. This situation had concentrated imperiled power in the Congress high command, while drastically reducing the latter's activity to see that its directives receive more than lip-service. Party discipline was weakened and party organisation got more atomised than ever before <sup>25</sup>. All sections of the Congress professed loyalty to the Prime Minister and the word ostensibly was her's. One of the criticism directed against Indira Gandhi was that she mutilated the federal principles of the Constitution. She appointed Chief Ministers of her choice in the Congress party ruled states and appointed political persons as Governors of the States. Over the 1970's nearly all members of the cabinet, the parliament as well as the Congress party came to be filled by those deemed loyal and useful by Indira.<sup>26</sup> More and more individuals, both in the party and in the government were appointed rather than elected to power. But this personalistic and populist rule, in turn tended to be inherently centralising and de-institutionalising and did not offer a long-term solution to the problem of building democratic authority

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<sup>25</sup> Atul Kohli - "State, Power and Social Force ,Domination and Transformation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world pg:92

<sup>26</sup> Dhruv Kumar- "Impact of Indira Gandhi on Indian Political system" (Deep and Deep Publications, 1993) pg: - 106

The excesses of centralisation led to the declaration of emergency. The accentuation of the economic crisis in 1972-1974 had led to several agitations against the government, most notably in Gujarat and Bihar. But from all indications it appeared that the strength of these movements was distinct on the wane by April or May 1975<sup>27</sup>. The real crisis was precipitated by the judgement of the Allahabad High Court, for the opposition was directed not so much against government policies, but against the person of the crassest leader. The immediate context of the declaration of emergency was the attempt to preserve the position of 'Caesar' and to scotch attempts by the opposition to jeopardize this position. If our characterisation of the crucial role of a Caesarist leader in the Indian political system is correct, it goes a long way in explaining a task not quiet accomplished by merely labeling the entire political leadership of the Congress as servile or spineless why such drastic measures were accepted more or less without major protest the imposition of emergency. The Janatha party came to power as a result of, by the Congress party. After all, the most overwhelming vision of the aims of the emergency was conjured up by that great political theorist and Congress president during the

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<sup>27</sup> Partha Chatterji – "A possible India- Essays in political critics" (Oxford Universtiy Press, 1998-pg:62

times of emergency D.K.Barooah in the aphorism" India is Indira, Indira is India"<sup>28</sup>

During the emergency, the organisation of the party was made coordinate with the government, and particularly the executive, as it had never been before. The entire structure of a division of power between the centre and the states, both in government and party affairs, was replaced by a virtually total, both centralization of all effective powers. Chief ministers were changed at will, state ministers were shuffled and reshuffled on directives from the country legislation virtually became defined, and even for arbitration. In the mean time differences started brewing up inside the Congress party against the excesses of emergency <sup>29</sup>. The Congress party was demoralised at their defeat in the hands of the Janata Party. The members of the party raised their voice against the personality cult within the party. It could be understood that Indira's aim of having a party to support her fully and also to prove herself against her party members who had not supported her during the Janata government harassment against the excesses of emergency enabled her to split the party. By splitting the party for the second time in 1978, Indira once again

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Sachchidand Sinha- "Emergency in Perspective: Reprieve and Challenge" (Heritage Publishers, 1977) pg: - 48-49.

tried to establish the supremacy of the governmental wing over that of the organisation.<sup>30</sup>

### **Decision-Making (1978-1984)**

After the split of 1978, Indira Gandhi formed her Congress(I) which were later accepted by the Election Commission as the "real Congress". She held the post of presidentship in the new Congress and when the party was voted to power in 1980, she became the head of the government also. Her expansion and use of intelligence and paramilitary forces had taken the place of ordinary administration.<sup>31</sup> There were debates as to whether Indira should occupy both the posts of party president as well as that of the prime minister, or get someone else elected as the head of the organisation. There were others those who felt that Indira Gandhi had in her hands too much power and the elected Congress organization should be allowed to act as a foil to her. They wanted her to give up the party presidency. Yet others wanted a change in order to relieve her of the great burden of the party and the government she carried. Still many others did not want Mrs. Gandhi to resign as Congress president on the ground that it would have created within the ruling party another centre of

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<sup>30</sup> A.M.Zaidi and Q.S.G.Zaidi- "The Encyclopaedia of Indian 'National Congress' Volume-24, (1976-1977) See also Hindustan Times (4<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1978).

<sup>31</sup> Nayantara Sahgal- "Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power" (Macdonald and Company (Publishers Ltd. London and Sydney, 1983) pg: - 189.

power. There was weight in the argument that Indira Gandhi should shed her organisation responsibilities and pay undivided attention to the government. But if this separation of responsibilities could be brought without creating difficulties which may weaken the government was doubtful.<sup>32</sup>

Even senior Congress ministers had shared the view that her style of leadership had become counter productive. Mrs. Gandhi had taken too much of responsibility on herself and the result had been disastrous. Her ceaseless drive to establish herself as India's exclusive leader had revealed fundamental anxiety and weakness in her position, driving her to measures that a genuinely mass-based, psychological leader would never have needed to take.<sup>33</sup> Senior ministers waited for her to settle all issues, important and unimportant. This had virtually paralysed the administration in New Delhi. The institutions over which she herself presided the cabinet, the Congress parliamentary board, the working committee and the AICC had all become destitute since they were no longer being manned by men of stature and no longer had decision-making power.<sup>34</sup> The Congress had a working

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<sup>32</sup> "India : The Year of Indira Gandhi"; Edited by Yogendra. K. Malik and Dharendra K.Vajpeyi (Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data (1989) pg: - 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Bipan Chandra-"Essays On Contemporary India" (Har-Anand Publications, 1993) pg:-121.

<sup>34</sup> Atul Kohli-"Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability" (Cambridge University Press, 1991) pg:- 16.

president even though the constitution of the Congress did not permit it. Kamalapati Tripathi , the working president and a politician not enough to run a ministry and who did not have a following in his own state was nominated by Indira so that he would not challenge her stature and was permitted to function at sweet will and changing mercies of the leader.

Even the PCC Chiefs often happened to be High Command's creation. When the High Command was over anxious to control the organisation at various levels, local initiative was dampened.<sup>35</sup> Instead of accommodating the growing demands of power challengers, Indira Gandhi sought to block their access of power by undermining democratic institutions. Having reduced the significance of important institutions she found that when she needed institutional support to implement desired goals such support was not available. The trend towards centralisation and powerlessness have run in tandem. <sup>36</sup> After the electoral debacle of the Congress in the Karnataka and Andhra assembly polls, Indira understood that she was losing the magic. She made changes within the party to choose a successor to Bhosle , as an earnest of her intention to let state party units run their own show. These

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<sup>35</sup> Telgraph (3<sup>rd</sup>, Feb 1983).

<sup>36</sup> Deol-"Charisma and Commitment: The Mind and Political Thinking of Indira Gandhi" (Sterling Publishers, 1981) pg:- 125-126.



changes were also made keeping in view of the 1985 Lok Sabha elections, so that she and her party would be fighting fit to take on any challengers.

Indira Gandhi in her capacity as party president appointed her son Rajiv Gandhi and C.M.Stephen as general secretaries in place of Vasanta Rao and Sathyanarayanan Rao.<sup>37</sup> This action showed that she wanted power to stay within the Nehru-Gandhi family. The most serious charge which had been made against her has been over her pattern of over centralisation wanted to decentralise organisational responsibility. The appointment and changes made intend to do that. At the executive level, Indira called for a change "in the political and administrative culture" which entailed a similar assumption of responsibility by decision makers at various points, the end being to bring about honest and efficient administration<sup>38</sup>. Kamalapaty Tripaty , announced that he had made the appointments within which was made clear the frustration he had as working president of the party. He had said that the party should resume the poll process from where it got stuck and that the main reason why elections had to be put off frequently was inclusion of large member of bogus members in the

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<sup>37</sup> Deccan Chronicle(21<sup>st</sup> March 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Hindu 20<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1983.

electoral role<sup>39</sup>. The working committee and the Congress parliamentary board, the highest decision taking bodies were earlier nominated from time to time in the same way as state presidents, office-bearers and the entire units were selected renewed and reselected by Indira, at times in consultation with her senior associates. Of late she had sought to caution party members against their continued dependence on her and of carrying it an extreme limit in near total disregard of the organisation functioning.<sup>40</sup> There were further changes with a reallocation of duties among the general secretaries. Two of the general secretaries-Rajiv Gandhi and C.L Chandrarahar had been totally divested of territorial change while a third , Mrs Rajendra Kumari Vajpai had been loaded with additional responsibility, with her supervisory role having being extend to 12 states. <sup>41</sup> Further, the numbers of Joint Secretaries had been increased from five to ten. An explanation of the reshuffle and expansion of the party secretariat was still not be found in a proportionate increase in activity on responsibility.<sup>42</sup> Indira was also thinking of reviving

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<sup>39</sup> Indira Gandhi-"The Task Ahead" (S.Chand and Company Ltd, New Delhi, 1984) pg:-15, see also the Telegraph (April 15<sup>th</sup> 1983).

<sup>40</sup> The Tribune (Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>/1983).

<sup>41</sup> Blitz (16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1985).

<sup>42</sup> A.S. Abraham-"Revitalising the Congress" (Times of India 24<sup>th</sup> May 1985).

the cadre proposal and thought to train a whole army of her party man for the purpose.

Thus it could be understood that Indira Gandhi had enjoyed the dual powers of being both the president of the organisation and also the head of the government. She left a legacy for her successors- from Rajiv Gandhi upto Sonia; (through the latter could not head a government) The "coterie" close to Indira and even she herself was not really interested in holding organisational polls, as it was seen as a threat to the powers of the then nominated Chief Ministers, PCC chiefs and Indira herself. Despite repeated assertions by the congress (I) leadership that party state units and governments would be encouraged to handle their own affairs without local bigwigs making "airdashes" to New Delhi on the slightest pretext, there was little evidence of any such devolution of organisational responsibility during Indira Gandhi's time. Thus the centralisation process reached its height during her period and this trend was continued during the later periods also. Thus the disintegration process which started during her period could not be stopped in the years ahead.

### **Decision-Making (1984-1991)**

Rajiv Gandhi who succeeded Indira Gandhi also had combined both the posts of the president of the party and the head of the

government in his own hands. After taking charge, his first step was to restore inner party democratic processes in the selection of candidates for the Parliamentary poll.<sup>43</sup> Rajiv's most difficult challenge in so far as the Congress was concerned was how to turn back the clock. In non-party matters, he had already set about doing so, with the passage of the anti-defection bill, the abstention from pressuring the Karnataka Chief minister RamKrishana Hegde to resign after the Janata party had fared poorly in the Lok Sabha poll and the co operation the centre had given Andhra Pradesh in the abolition of that states legislative council<sup>44</sup>. Rajiv as president of the party said that the "brokers of power and influence" dispensed patronage, to convert a mass movement into a feudal oligarchy which meant that unless their brokers were rooted out, the party could not be cleansed. The goal therefore was to revitalise and reshape the party to make it ideological and programme oriented. And to that end the nexus between politician and the vested interests had to be broken, elections made more meaningful and reflective of the popular mood.

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<sup>43</sup> V.M.Badola- "The Problems Deeper" (Deccan Herald (25<sup>th</sup> Jan/ 1986).

<sup>44</sup> Harish Khare- "Congress and Rajiv Gandhi: Danger of Indian Marcoism" (Times of India 6<sup>th</sup> Sept 1986).

Efforts had been made to include in the Congress working committee the CPB and the party secretariat people who were "traditional Congressmen" and did not belong to the "new culture". If he had decided to go back to the traditional Congressmen, it was not because he had any love lost for them ,but the move was aimed at countering the professionals within the party and the government who had an inborn hatred for tradition<sup>45</sup>. When in December 1985, the prime minister criticized the party over which he presided it was naturally expected that he would soon go about overhauling the organisation in a manner as to make it a viable instrument for carrying out the kind of economic and political changes he had in mind. Since then, not much had happened in that direction-except frequent changes in the cast of characters at the AICC headquarters. The state of affairs in New Delhi had reached such a pas that considerable energies were spent in speculating as to who is in and who is out of the prime minister charmed circle. The Prime Minister was determined to keep control over the party in a manner that was not too different from that of his mother.

Following a massive and unprecedented four-fifths majority in the Lok Sabha. Rajiv Gandhi decided to restructure the party by

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<sup>45</sup> Satish Kumar Rastogi- "The Congress Crucible" (Anu Publicaitons, 1980) pg: - 267-268.

bringing in his loyal followers at every level of leadership. This was the basic mistake he committed, because neither he, nor his set of advisers knew Congress history well enough to understand how to manage the party. Nehru also faced challenges within the party, but he dealt with them in a different manner. In the fifties, the official candidate for the party presidency months since Nehru, with the help of his party managers in the states, got the latter of Tandon.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Indira took on the syndicate and destroyed it recursively but took care to create a party man at the set who stood by her like a rock. If Devraj Urs replaced Nijalingappa in Karnataka it was Y.B.Chavan who took care of S.K.Patil and Sanjiva Reddy.<sup>47</sup> The pattern was clear Indira never let anyone feel secure. If one was thrown out, another was ready to take his place and run the show for her. But this cannot be said of Rajiv Gandhi. Most of the General Secretaries complained that they had not met the party president for long and that Rajiv's decisions were communicated to them by vice president Arjun Singh. Sitaram Kesri the party treasurer was not nominated for election to the Rajya Sabha, after his term expired. Yet he continued to remain a minister. G.K. Moopanar had been made inactive and Kishore

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<sup>46</sup> V.M.Badola- "High Command Gets Cold Feet" (Deccan Herald (21<sup>st</sup> Sept/ 1986).

<sup>47</sup> Report of the General Secretaries (Dec 1985 to April 1992) pg: - 62-63.

Sharma, was relieved of his ministerial berth to work for the party. On the other hand Najma Hephthullai had to relinquish the Deputy Chairmanship of the Rajya Sabha to become General secretary in charge of press and publicity.<sup>48</sup> All the Pradesh Congress committees had become almost and defunct. They neither had the will nor the power to implicate their new programmes of the party, since their writs ran only within the four walls of their respective offices.

In an effort to bring about widespread changes, Rajiv Gandhi, who was the Congress president followed a managerial approach to make the government more effective and result-oriented and the party to revive its contact with the masses. The PCC's were also sought to be changed to ensure greater participation of the elected representatives in the implementation of party programmes, especially those aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the weaker sections of society<sup>49</sup>. As regards concentration of power Rajiv said, he did delegate authority to the Vice-president and the acting president and if they had not gone down it was not its fault<sup>50</sup>. Rajiv wanted to induct

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<sup>48</sup> Hindu (3<sup>rd</sup> Feb. 1985).

<sup>49</sup> Nikhil Chakravarty-"Rajiv Gandhi has been Party-Building with Determination" (Telegraph 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1987).

<sup>50</sup> Indian express (10<sup>th</sup> Dec/ 1987).

traditionalist Congressmen into the decision-making bodies. But later his plans for party's renewal changed and wanted to entrust the party affairs to younger people. The generational change was sought to be accelerated and it produced a sharp reaction, inspite of stiff resistance. The old timers in the party were unwilling to give up the lever of power and the young had the advantage of support and encouragement from the top. The clash surfaced earlier on the eve of the 1984, Lok Sabha poll during the time of selection of candidates. Rajiv Gandhi wanted a total break with the past and opposed the re-nomination of a large number of old foggies in the Lok Sabha<sup>51</sup>. Kamalapati Tripathi otherwise not very effective as working president of the party cautioned against wholesale changes and was able to exert some restraining influence. The compulsions of the elections led to a give and take though clearly weighted in favour of Rajiv Gandhi But in between he had supported the traditionalists and again went back to support the new guards of the party. The usual attempt had been to shed the traditional image and not re-inforce it. Indira Gandhi did this in 1969, blaming the syndicate -the old power brokers for the party's past transgressions and promising to make amendments.

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<sup>51</sup> Attar Chand- "Rajiv Gandhi-His Mind and Ideology" (Gian Publishing House. 1991) pg: - 176-177.



Although Rajiv Gandhi had fortified his parliamentary position by passing the anti-defection law, his grip on the party continued to be tenuous. But he had one overwhelming advantage: the people and the media hailed him and were keen to back him up in his resolve to cleanse the public life and end the politics of confrontation.<sup>52</sup> He made frequent reshuffles of cabinets. Thus by 1986, Rajiv Gandhi had changed as many as 38 central ministers dropping 15 of them, the Pradesh committees had been changed in atleast 10 states and even the central working committee and general secretaries had been reconstituted again and again. Efforts to change the old order had invariably resulted in a series of meaningless short-term changes with no coherence or pattern.

Indira Gandhi had run the organisation with the help of a coterie around her. Rajiv Gandhi had also strengthened his control over its affairs in a similar fashion. Both of them had selected members for their personal loyalty. Regular elections in accordance with the party constitution had been postponed from time to time on the pretext that problem of bogus membership had been creating difficulties. In order to bring about changes after the special centenary session Rajiv Gandhi appointed Arjun singh as the vice-president in addition to Kamalapati Tripathi continuing as working president. Tripathi was inducted as working president

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<sup>52</sup> Hindustan times (10<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1988).

around the time Gandhi became general secretary after the death of Sanjay Gandhi in 1980. <sup>53</sup>

The Congress (I) president had come up with a novel plan to replace the existing party committees all the way up from the village level with new ones. According to the Congress (I) general Secretary, Naresh Chandra Chaturvedi , the Chief Ministers of Congress (I) ruled states, the PCC (I) Presidents, party MP's and MLA's and DCC (I) president would submit a list of atleast 15 names each of active Congress "workers in each block of their respective constituencies. The party headquarters in New Delhi would then go through these lists. The scrutiny would be carried out with the help of various party functionaries within whose jurisdiction the listed members fall. The idea obviously was to check the loyalties of the members. The next important step would be the despatch of AICC (I) observers to the state capitals where the block and district Congress (I) Presidents would be chosen. The choice would be on the basis of a "consensus" among the leading party functionaries who hold party offices because they had been handpicked by the existing party bosses<sup>54</sup>. After the presidents of the lower party committees were thus nominated, the

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<sup>53</sup> Hindustan Times (10<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Inder Malhotra- 'A most Muddled Culture' (TOI, 19<sup>th</sup> May/ 1988) pg: -

central party office bearers would hold "consultations" with them to name the members of the respective committees. The final step would be the election of the AICC (I) delegates. The party high command was obviously anxious to take every case to ensure the reliability of the delegates who would be asked to go through the motion of electing the AICC (I) office-bearers.<sup>55</sup> All these strongly emphasised the continuing centralising trends during the period of Rajiv Gandhi which was initiated by Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

A historical process had been at work since independence which developed in the 1970's into a trend which was characterised by a neglect of the party in preference to the governmental wing of the party. To understand how this process evolved, one should go back to the dawn of independence. A day before his death on January 30, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi advised Congressmen to disband their party and form instead a Lok Sevak Sangh for doing social work. He did not want the Congress to continue as a political party, and suggested that those who wished to engage in political and parliamentary work should leave the Congress and constitute their own parties. But the working committee, dominated by the Sardar Vallabhai Patel, rejected the

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<sup>55</sup> Deccan Herald (30<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1988).

Mahatma's proposal<sup>56</sup>. To give the Congress greater cohesiveness as a political party, its constitution was amended in 1948, forbidding a Congressman from becoming member of any other political party. Following this amendment, the Congress Socialist Party of Jayaprakash Narayanan, Achyut Patwardhan, Acharya Narendra Dev and others, formally parted company with the Congress. The move sought to create the impression that the national movement had been tamed and the Congress had been shorn of its character as an omnibus platform. But this was hardly so. In effect, the amendment led to the creation of two rival poles of power resting on the government and the organisation, Nehru and Patel, at the two ends of the poles, worked out a coalition as political equals and shared power. After Patel's death, Prime Minister Nehru could take on Congress president Purushotham Das Tandon. The conservative Tandon was forced out and before long Nehru himself took charge as Congress President to end the possibility of fiction between the two offices he had held.<sup>57</sup> Nehru subsequently kept the office of Congress president office to himself, except on occasions when he had a non asserting U.N Dhebar or daughter Indira holding the post. With

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<sup>56</sup> India: The Years of Indira Gandhi- Edited by Yogendra K.Malik and Dharendra K.Vajpayi (Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data 1989) pg: - 14-15.

<sup>57</sup> Prem Shankar Jha -'Congress is Dying' (Sunday Observer (17<sup>th</sup> Feb/ 1988)

this he ended the potential for power rivalry between the prime minister and the Congress president. Indira Gandhi largely followed this pattern entrenching herself in power. After her, the pattern of merging the posts of the Congress president and prime ministership in one person was followed in Rajiv's time and later also

At a meeting of one of the CWC's, during the period of Rajiv Gandhi it was announced that no Congressman would hold two posts-either one in the government and the other in the party. To nobody's surprise, the announcement made it clear that the decision would not apply to the prime minister who was also the Congress president. As a result of this decision Tariq Anwar PCC chief in Bihar, who headed the Congress Seva Dal in the entire country promptly resigned the Seva Dal post. Yet another J. Vengal Rao, Union industry minister, offered to quit the post of PCC chief in his homestate of Andhra Pradesh, where of late, he was harassed and harried by his own party challengers, not by Telegu Desam or anyone else. The AICC "classified" that the idea of a Congressman not holding more than one job at a time was only a "suggestion" not a directive.<sup>58</sup> The conclusion one could draw was that, irrespective of whatever may have been said at the working

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<sup>58</sup> Nayantara Sahgal-Indira Gandhi's Emergence and Style (Vikas Publishing House Private Ltd. 1978) pg: - 192.

committee meeting, the Congress leadership was not prepared to abandon the strategy of using Central Ministers, usually in charge of important economic departments, to checkmate non-Congress ministries in various states. It was in pursuance of this strategy that Vengal Rao was asked to head the PCC in Andhra, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi in west Bengal and Janardhan Poojari in Karnataka. Lately Rajiv Gandhi had thrown open the party doors to a host of leaders who had left or had been expelled earlier which showed a measure of his despair after the disastrous June by -elections in Allahabad and some other Lok Sabha Constituencies.<sup>59</sup>

If we go a little further back it could be understood that a remarkable transformation of the modern concept of democracy into a new variant of Indian feudalism took place essentially during the era of Indira Gandhi. Between 1971 and 1977, at a rough count, she had replaced 15 Congress chief ministries. Many states had as many as three chief ministries during this period.<sup>60</sup> Nandini Satpathi in Orissa, H.N. Bahuguna in U.P, Kedar Pandey and Abdul Ghaffoor in Bihar, were all creatures of the centre foisted on the state Congress parties to make them subservient to

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<sup>59</sup> Prem Shakar Jha- 'Congress is Dying' (Sunday observer 17<sup>th</sup> Feb/ 1988).

<sup>60</sup> J.N.Sahni- 'Rougues Gallery' and Indian Politics" (Allied Pulishers, Pvt. Ltd, 1982) pg: - 163-164.

Indira Gandhi's will. In removing Harideo Joshi from the chief ministership of Rajasthan by Rajiv Gandhi was not setting a new precedence but only returning to an old practice. What gave his action special significance was that he tried to break the pattern set by his mother in the first three years of his government. During this period, he had changed only two chief ministers in Haryana and Maharashtra and this change in Haryana could be attributed to the exceptional conditions created by the militancy in Punjab<sup>61</sup>. Joshi's removal was interpreted as Rajiv Gandhi having gone back to the ways of his mother. Indira Gandhi had even nominated state and district party chiefs from New Delhi, just as she nominated chief ministers and ministers in the Congress-majority states. There was a "saving grace" in Indira's care in as much as she knew a lot of Congress workers up to the Taluk/District level all over India. Rajiv Gandhi had continued the practice without even the limited advantage of the mother's acquaintance with the party workers<sup>62</sup>. In the days of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Govinda Vallabh Pant, B.C.Roy, Sri Krishna Sinha and other, the central government had no more than one occasion to change the chief minister, but it did so only when it was convinced and when there was this feeling that the party was

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<sup>61</sup> Times of India (9<sup>th</sup> July, 1988).

<sup>62</sup> Current (11<sup>th</sup> June, 1988).

out of touch with the changing sentiments of the people, as reflected in the urgings of the party cadres. Nehru often resolved this problem by moving the chief ministers to the centre, thereby strengthening his cabinet and /or another powerful member of the legislature party backed by the PCC chief to take over the reins of the government.<sup>63</sup> All these practices which were the very essence of the Congress culture in the Nehru years, vanished long ago.

In the olden days, the concept of High Command was fairly well defined and equally well understood. Its membership consisted of three or four senior partymen who were the final decision-makers and arbiters in the Congress party's internal affairs. The membership generally reflected the views and opinions of both the Congress parliamentary Board and the Congress working committee which in turn, were elected bodies correctly representing the interests and views of various leaders at the state and the central level. The efficacy and legitimacy of the high command depended upon its representative character as well as its sincere projection and promotion of the cross-section of views in their party. Neither the parliamentary board nor the working committee had, in the bargain , ever to act nor were these groups ever perceived as mere rubber-stamp bodies because the so-called

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<sup>63</sup> Venkateswer Rao Adiraju-“Gandhi to Gandhi” (Sathya Publications 1986) pg: - 92



high command made sure that the decisions taken were based on objective information and insights gained from extensive personal contacts of leaders. In other words, the high command was never a clique. Nor was the working committee its claque. Even after the 1969 split and the massive electoral mandate in 1971 Indira Gandhi before imposing her views and preferences on the decision-making bodies, she had the advantage of knowing first hand a large number of party workers from New Delhi to the taluka level. Indira Gandhi also had the experience and insight to know which Congress leader to rely upon and when and to what extent.<sup>64</sup> And despite her considerable dependence upon R.K.Dhawan , she had retained an uncanny gift for sensing the situation on the ground. More importantly, she also had requisite self-assurance to take corrective action when things went beyond a point. Whereas the legitimacy of the high command in the earlier days, depended to a considerable extent, on the fact that it was a sort of executive committee of the working committee and the parliamentary board it was never thought of by partymen as either arbitrary or whimsical. Its efficacy depended upon its capacity and track record to take fair and reasonable decisions which were perceived as such. The hallmark of good decision - making is to ensure that

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<sup>64</sup> K.K. Katyal- 'Running the Ruling Party-Back to tried tested Method' (Hindu (27<sup>th</sup> Feb/ 1989)

information from more than one source is made available and that such information is processed in a fairly rational and dispassionate manner. In the times of Rajiv Gandhi it had collapsed because it was a transient group, whose membership depended upon the all too ephemeral likes and dislikes of the prime minister.<sup>65</sup> As party president Rajiv Gandhi was entitled to choose his own advisers. But the requirement nevertheless remained that he should at least pick up those who would have some rapport, however feeble, with taluk level partymen.

Rajiv Gandhi had decided that whether in the selection of a candidate or appointment of an official, it would be in consultation with those who are immediately affected. This was being done so that party cadres at all levels get a sense of participation in the decision making process. The scheme was flagged off after Rajiv Gandhi held meetings with the office bearers of three party committees- the manifesto implementation committee, evaluation of the 20 point programme committee and economic and social perspectives committee. The reasons for such a decentralisation process were two- fold. One, the right representatives would be chosen and two, their responsibilities would be owned by concerned district and state Congress and not by AICC<sup>3</sup> alone.

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<sup>65</sup> Minhaz Merchant- 'Rajiv Gandhi: The End of a Dream' (Viking Publishers, 1991) pg: - 267-268 See also Deccan Herald 10<sup>th</sup> March 1989.

According to the plans, the candidate's name would be chosen from block level so that Congressmen did not crowd in Delhi when it was finalized<sup>66</sup>. Another modern approach which AICC had adopted was the move to select only those party men for any post who had administrative and organisational experience. All district level problems were sought to be solved at their levels. For that, all district and state Congress committees were to be strengthened.

With the modern business management techniques failing to keep the flock together it was realised that there was no substitute for personal contacts if a reasonable measure of success was to be achieved in running the party. As a result during Indira Gandhi's period she had reasonable contacts with people who could keep her in touch with the masses. Dhawan a long-time aide of Indira Gandhi served as a link between the party boss and the rank and file on the one hand, by keeping in continuous touch with persons who had mattered, both in the organisational and legislative fields, and on the other by monitoring the feelings , sentiments and concerns at various levels of the party.<sup>67</sup> This arrangement proved useful to her in a situation where party organs at the centre and in the states were packed by New Delhi's nominees and important

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<sup>66</sup> Deccan herald (10<sup>th</sup> March 1989).

<sup>67</sup> Nitish Chakravarty- 'Unrepentant after Setback' Hindu 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan. 1990.

decisions were based on adhocism. There was no change in the pattern after Rajiv took charge of the government. 'Democratic Centralism' – the name given to the arbitrary norms employed in the absence of organisational elections by their beneficiaries continued to be the order of the day but human linkages were snapped.<sup>68</sup> When Rajiv Gandhi began his term after the 1984 election, Dhawan was out of the important slot near the seat of power. That was the time when Arjun Singh a friend of Rajiv, in his capacity as parliamentary secretary, filled the gap in the discharge of official matters. Other arrangements were made for political chores performed by Dhawan. The Bihar fiasco of the Congress party highlighted the gaps in the political management and appeared to have prompted the decisions to bring back Dhawan. The same Congress (I) legislative party which had readily "elected" Bhagwat Jha Azad a year before this fiasco, as its leader following a hint from New Delhi defied a firm directive by Rajiv Gandhi and insisted on the chief minister's ouster.

Within the Congress (I) this was interpreted as a significant signal that the imbalances caused by the tilt towards freshers and the younger set, and the use of "modern " management techniques were to be corrected by giving the experienced members<sup>2</sup> in the party their rightful place. Though designated as officer on special

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<sup>68</sup> News Time (8<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1990).

duty (OSD) in the cabinet secretariat Dhawan was to be part of the prime minister's set up as in the past. In the early periods Nehru did not feel the need for a separate full-fledged secretariat, partly because of his stature and partly because he could get things done through top bureaucrats and experts under an informal arrangement. Following the British practice, he did create the post of principal private secretary. The informal arrangement did not add up to a separate outfit or a secretariat, much less a new power centre. The situation changed when Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded Nehru. Lacking the charisma of Nehru, Shastri expanded the small prime ministerial office into a secretariat with an experienced administrator L.K. Jha. A diffident Indira Gandhi did not disturb the prime minister's secretariat at the beginning of her term. In any case, her problems were different- she had to contend with the senior leaders in the party-Kamraj, S.K.Patil, Sanjiva Reddy, Atulya Ghosh and Nijalingappa. The secretariat could not help her in neutralising their influence or enabled her to carve out a secure niche for herself. For this, she turned to what came to be known as the "Kitchen Cabinet". In less than two years, of its formation, it became the main focus of power.<sup>69</sup> It was a change from the position in the early stages of Indira Gandhi's

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<sup>69</sup> Minhaz Merchant-"Rajiv Gandhi: The End of a Dream" (Viking Publishers, 1991) pg:- 269

tenure. After the party split in 1978 the intelligence network, including revenue intelligence were brought under its control. With Indira's return to power in 1980, the pendulum swung back to the pre-janata position as regards the position and role of the prime minister's office which, during the Janata rule, was changed. It was this set up that Rajiv Gandhi had inherited.

Rajiv Gandhi's grand scheme for re-arranging of the Congress (I) in advance of the Lok Sabha elections of 1989, was to provide each state and union territory with a co-ordinating committee of uniform composition. Each committee had five members-three of them Delhi based-a cabinet minister, who is the chairman, a minister of state and the AICC (I) general secretary in charge of the state who was the convenor. The two members drawn from the state were the PCC (I) president and the chief Minister or the leader of the Congress (I) opposition as the case may be depending on whether the party was in power or not<sup>70</sup>. The task of the these high-power committees, was to co-ordinate the functioning of the party and the Union government with regard to developmental activities and to plug loopholes, if any which may be taken advantage of by the opposition parties. Rajiv Gandhi was after the Lok Sabha election of 1989, was re-elected leader of the

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<sup>70</sup> Tharyan- 'After Rajiv:Congres (I)' at cross roads (H. T. 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1991)

party after P.V.Narasimha Rao proposed his name. Rajiv Gandhi said that the Congress(I) would not stake its claim to form a government but would support the National Front on all constructive programmes. He added that the Congress (I) lost elections because of the communal wave, and that because the party's organisational strength could not cope up with it. The decision of Rajiv Gandhi to sit in the opposition was, however, no indication of any change in the traditional style of Congress (I)'s functioning. On the contrary, those entrenched around him continued to rule the roost. Some Congress leaders were of the opinion that Gandhi would have made an ideal leader if he could dismantle the caucus around him. What perhaps, prevented the Congress (I) chief from giving the initiative to the rank and file was the suspicion that in the process he may buy more trouble than relief.<sup>71</sup> Before the general elections one heard the whispers about changing the supreme commander of the party to give it a different image. But the whisper never reached a crescendo, for everyone thought that Rajiv alone had leadership capabilities. The perception of most of the Congress (I) functionaries was that only Rajiv could lead the party back to power, none else matched his leadership qualities.

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<sup>71</sup> Indian Express (29<sup>th</sup> May. 1991).

With the virtual decimation of the Congress (I) in the major northern states including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan; none from this region had any pretensions of projecting oneself on the national plane. There were leading persons such as P.V.Narasimha Rao and Gundu Rao from the south, but they did not have the dynamism and the zeal needed to galvanise a moribund party. Neither Tamil Nadu nor Kerala could throw up anyone who could pull crowds in the North or even in the south. The party organisation was relegated to the secondary position when Jawaharlal Nehru decided to hold simultaneously the offices of Prime Minister and Congress president. For much of the time that she was in power- and even out of power-Indira Gandhi too held the twin offices. Rajiv Gandhi had followed in the footsteps of his mother, and held the reins of the party in his hands when he was Prime Minister.<sup>72</sup> Now since he was in the opposition, there was no need for him to divest himself of the the Congress(I) presidentship. Rajiv himself lamented that the party had no rank and file workers to fall back upon and those who were entrenched in positions from which they pulled the strings were understandably not interested in change. The chief ministers were sent from Delhi in most of the cases and even when local leaders

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<sup>72</sup> Attar Chand-Rajiv Gandhi: His Mind and Ideology (Gian Publishing house, 1991) pg: - 283



were appointed chief ministers, it was the AICC and not the Congress legislature party which had a hand in the election of the Chief Minister.<sup>73</sup> Inclined that he was trying to transform the Congress into a democratic organisation, Rajiv Gandhi ended up after some initial departures of style and substance, by returning to personalised command politics and its structure his mother had fashioned.

### **Decision-Making (1991-1996)**

The year 1991 witnessed the assassination of the Congress President Rajiv Gandhi. The traumatic shock which the Congress (I) suffered on account of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi was no less than what it had experienced at the time of his mother's death. But the impact of the two tragedies on the party had not been identical. In 1984, the Congress (I) did not encounter any difficulty in choosing a leader around whom it could rally. Rajiv Gandhi was promptly accepted as an effective link with the past, capable of keeping the party intact and leading it to victory at the hustings.<sup>74</sup> When the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, died, the then Congress president, K.Kamaraj took the initiative to settle the succession issue. His emphasis was on collective leadership and

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<sup>73</sup> P.Tharyan- 'After Rajiv:Congress (I) at Crossroads' (H.T(1<sup>st</sup> June/ 1991)

<sup>74</sup> Hindu (30<sup>th</sup> May 1991)

with the support of other senior leaders, he assessed the preferences of the members of the parliamentary party. Lal Bahadur Shastri, who had an edge over Morarji Desai, was elected leader. After Shastri's sudden death in Tashkent, the leadership question was again settled by the parliamentary party in a keenly contested election. Indira Gandhi, by defeating Moraji Desai, became Prime Minister. When she died, President Zail Singh, on the suggestion of a few Congressmen, invited Rajiv Gandhi to form a government and the parliamentary party formally elected him leader.<sup>75</sup> When Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, he was the party president and not the prime minister, and the Congress was not in power. The party's immediate task, therefore, was to elect a president and not the prime minister. The election of the party president had a significant bearing on the election of the leader of the parliamentary party by virtue of the fact that the same person used to hold these two offices. The Congress did give the impression that it was almost orphaned on account of the Rajiv's assassination. So it had approached Sonia Gandhi to take over the charge of Congress presidentship, but she rejected it.<sup>76</sup> The party's inclination to look up to the Nehru family for leadership in time of crisis was once again demonstrated. A major lesson, which

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<sup>75</sup> Mainstream (11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1991)

<sup>76</sup> Mainstream (11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1991)

the Congress should have learnt by that time was that excessive dependence on a leader or a family, however great would deprive it of the inherent strength to stand on its feet.<sup>77</sup> The party certainly needed a change in its outlook, style of functioning and leadership structure.

By electing Narasimha Rao as the party president, the working committee had settled the leadership question for the time being. The election of Rao was significant because it was thought of as an end to the party's link with Nehru and Gandhi Dynasty. Rao scholarly and respected, a former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, who held cabinet positions in Indira Gandhi's and later Rajiv Gandhi's time, was a non controversial figure without having any association with any of the party's several factions. Rajiv's confidants made concerted bid to install his widow in the top post. Whether it was a genuine desire to close their ranks for the challenges of the crucial post or a temporary patch up under electoral compulsions by unanimously electing Rao took no longer to be clear<sup>78</sup>.The "unanimity was reached through a process of consensus which had stood the test of the time for the party. One reason why Congress men shied away from voting could be

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<sup>77</sup> K.K.Katyayal- 'What does Rao's Election Signify' (Hindu (2<sup>nd</sup> March/ 1992)

<sup>78</sup> Year after Rajiv: Getting the Act Together (Indian Express (29<sup>th</sup> Feb/ 1992)

because of the historical experience of the past. Mahatma Gandhi legitimised the process of consensus to elect the top leader of the Congress. In its history over 100 years the party stayed away from this process for four times and on all these occasions the party came to grief.

Sensing the mood, the Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar announced before the Congress parliamentary party(CPP) meeting that Rao should be elected unanimously, even though he was one of the aspirants for the party position and had called for a strict adherence to the one – person, one- post principle. By this time, Sonia's decision not to contest the Lok Sabha polls led to the unanimous election of Rao as the chief of the Congress parliamentary party. By electing Rao who had a five-decade long experience of working at every level of the party from the lowest to the highest, the working committee had settled the leadership question for the time being. Rao's immediate task was to lead the party to victory. Though the sympathy wave generated in its favour in the wake of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had improved the party's electoral prospects, he claimed that there could be no stability without secularism and wanted to preserve the unity of the party by keeping divisive forces at bay<sup>79</sup>. Rao had a 'decisive

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<sup>79</sup> Bharat Bhushan- 'Rao or Congress: The Party Must Choose' (Indian Express (24<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1994)

edge over Pawar for the post of the leader of CPP for two reasons - one the over-enthusiasm of Pawar's tactless followers and two, the support from the southern states- by N.Janardhana Reddy, G.K.Moopanar, K.Karuankaran and Bangarappa.<sup>80</sup> When Pawar saw that he had no chance for himself, he gave up the fight. The CWC which had unanimously elected Rao for the post of the president insisted that the leadership did not have legitimacy and could not exercise power unless it acquired a mandate from the rank and file. As a result this election, the largest democratic exercise among the political parties of the world was held after a gap of 20 years of guided democracy. The elections held were a personal triumph for Rao, but the elections were in no way different from those held in the past.

After the CWC elections, which elected Rao as the the 57<sup>th</sup> president of the Congress party was exempted from the party's rule of one-person, one- post. Since this principle was to be followed by others, Rao first excluded Arjun singh as well as sharad Pawar from the CWC after they were elected to it since both held other posts, but they were later included as nominated members.<sup>81</sup> After Rao took over charge, he assured the party that

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<sup>80</sup> Harish Khare- 'The AICC Outcome: Rao Wings, Congress Loses' (TOT/30<sup>th</sup> March 1993)

<sup>81</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee- 'Wait Watchers Dilemma' (Telegraph 14<sup>th</sup> Jan/ 1995)

he would try to restore its glory and ensure that it occupied the centrestage of the national political scene. On the social front, Rajiv's desire to include the economically weaker sections among the beneficiaries of the Mandal Commission recommendations had been fulfilled, after Rao took charge. In parliament if it was Congress versus all other parties on the bofors issue, it was BJP versus the Congress and all other parties on the Ayodhya issue. Corruption was so rampant under Rao that merely by securing the resignation of one minister or other did not improve the public image of the party. He had destroyed the caste, class and community base of the Congress without replacing it with anything better.<sup>82</sup> Indira Gandhi had also broken up the Congress by splitting twice but she put together a new Congress in as many states as she could. Rao had let the constituency of the Muslims, the Harijans and the weaker sections slip away and replaced it with nothing. In the meantime, prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao kept on repeating pleas to Sonia Gandhi to replace him as Congress president. The political logic behind the offer was clear. By offering the party president's post to Sonia Gandhi, Rao had made an attempt to defuse the one-man one-post controversy. But he knew that such an offer would not be accepted by Sonia

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<sup>82</sup> Sankarshan Thakur- 'If looks could Kill (Telegraph 3<sup>rd</sup> March/ 95)

Gandhi, which was precisely the reason why he had taken such a suicidal attempt.

Rao's survival agenda meant to shelve the Tirupati political line of a frontal challenge to the BJP and other communal parties, Therefore when on December 6<sup>th</sup>. 1992, the Hindutva vandals demolished the Babri mosque they also burried Rao's much touted strategy of conciliation and consensus. The partymen watched in horror as the government in New Delhi remained frozen in inaction. The Sangh Parivars challenge was different and more potent than anything the Congress had ever faced, be it the communist offensive in the early 1950's on the Samyukta vidhayak Dal syndrome in the mid-1960's or the 1977 Janata wave or the 1989 V.P. Singh led rebellion.<sup>83</sup> Like Nero who fiddled while Rome burnt, Rao also twiddled his thumbs while the saffron brigade gathered its forces around the Babri Masjid and finally pulled it down on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1992. Rao, first promised that he would rebuild the mosque and then proceeded to hobnob with the Sankaracharyas and other godmen of dubious provenance to establish a trust which would build a temple on the site of the mosque. There was a presidential directive to the supreme court to find out if a Hindu structure had predated the Babri Mosque.

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<sup>83</sup> Dina Nath Mishra- 'All Gambits Have failed (Observer 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1996) (London)

When the apex court asked the government that if no evidence of a Hindu structure was found would the mosque be rebuilt, no assurance had forthcome<sup>84</sup> .The alienation of the Muslims from the Congress was thus complete. In UP the support of the Muslims was crucial for the Congress. The disappearance of this vote bank meant that the Congress had little else to fall back upon since the scheduled caste votes had gone to Kanshi Ram the other backward castes to Yadav and mostly the upper caste votes to the BJP.

The lists of party candidates for each election were replete with the friends and relatives of Rao and his supporters. Rao had virtually dismantled an elected Congress working committee and packed, it with nominees, some by his choice ,others just there by compulsion. The Babri Masjid was probably demolished because of Rao's "non confrontationist" style , to ponder and to deliberate over decisions.<sup>85</sup> No other prime minister had been openly accused of personally taking bribes. "Charisma" is something which Rao lacked in. That was something Indira Gandhi had and to some extent and for some time, Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh had: the

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<sup>84</sup> Sankarshan Thakur- 'Weitding the Razor's Edge (Telegraph 29<sup>th</sup> March ,1996)

<sup>85</sup> Sankarshan Thakur- 'Weitding the Razor's Edge (Telegraph 29<sup>th</sup> March ,1996)



ability to use force of personality to tower above issues and people working against them.

Narasimha Rao opted for heavy doses of minority appeasement. Dozens of exercises in appeasement were conducted. The Prime Minister's 15-point minority welfare programme was mooted. A corporation for their development was constituted for it. Thousands of Indians were given wages by the government through the Wagf Boards. The Prime Minister himself went to Bareilly to seek the blessings of the head of the Sunni sect. There was a flop attempt to rush through a consultation amendment bill for reservation to Dalit Christians.<sup>86</sup> The non-BJP, non-Congress parties had put the entire blame of demolition of Babri structure on Rao alone. Perhaps no other Prime Minister had as many hiccups along the way as Rao- the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the securities scandal, the Mumbai riots followed by the Mumbai blasts, the Sugar Scandal, the many electoral reverses, the Purlia armsdrop and the hawala scandal. He suffered a big set back to his plans to hold elections in the Kashmir Valley and then there was the goofed up siege of the chrar-e. Sharief.<sup>87</sup> The impact of the hawala exposure on the politics of the country, particularly on the Congress (I) itself was not taken up by the

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<sup>86</sup> V.V.Narayanan- 'One Man, No Post' (H.T (10<sup>th</sup> May 1996)

<sup>87</sup> Times of India (24<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1996)

party president to be discussed in the working committee, but he arranged to place it before an ad hoc committee of Yesmen. Rao's period saw the most corrupt period in the entire history of Congress rule. The leader of opposition then, A.B. Vajpayee charged him on the basis of CBI's documents of S.K. Jain's statement that he had taken Rs.3 crore for managing defections from the Janata Dal. But there was a lame denial.

Within the Congress, Rao did not constitute a parliamentary party, in order to show to all Congressmen that he was the fountainhead of ticket distribution. Initially he included as many members in the CWC, later he did away with the working committee meetings altogether. The political affairs committee of the Union Cabinet was rendered defunct. It had been the tradition that real power flows from power itself. He had seen to it that no power remain outside. Rao had centralised all authority in himself that he alone had to take the party's dismal performance. Perhaps the most telling example of presidential malevolence wrecking the party was the case of Tamil Nadu. In an act of inexplicable blindness, Rao aligned with a disgraced Jayalalitha regime especially for the Congress in Tamil Nadu to cut its apron strings tied to either of the Dravidian party. The consequence of this disastrous decision was a wipe-out not only of the party in

power in the state but also of the Congress headed by Rao.<sup>88</sup> In an move fraught with far-reaching political consequences, Rao announced his decision to relinquish presidentship of the Congress soon after a Delhi court named him a co-accused in the Lakhubhai Pathak cheating case. But Rao did not give up his position as leader of the Congress parliamentary party nor as the Member of Parliament. The worst electoral debacle had thus no impact on the Congress president who was determinant to thwart all attempts to implement the “one-man, one-post” norm. Immediately after the 1996, General Elections Rao faced two choices: The first was to resign gracefully from the post of Congress President taking responsibility for the party’s worst ever national electoral performance, and hope that the other controversies hounding him would eventually fade from public gaze; the second was to hang on cynically to his party post and use it through a complex backroom game of balance of threat, to protect himself from destiny’s baleful glare.<sup>89</sup> Rao chose the latter option and destiny caught him out.

### **Decision-Making (1996-1999)**

During this period the Congress (I) did not come to power at the centre. But this period had frequent changes of Congress

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<sup>88</sup> Hindu (25<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1996)

<sup>89</sup> Hindustan Times (10<sup>th</sup> November, 1996).

Presidents. The year 1996 witnessed Sitaram Kesri's assumption of office as Congress President. But Kesri's term as Congress President was short lived and he had to make way for Sonia Gandhi in 1998. Sitaram Kesri's appointment as provisional president of the Congress party was considered in Congress circles as major victory for the outgoing party president P.V. Narasimha Rao because Kesri was one of his staunch supporters. With Kesri becoming the interim party president, policies and programmes of Rao were hoped to continue as heretofore. Over the past several years the rule of one-post, one-person, has never applied to the presidentship of the Congress with the result that the president of the party invariably was the Prime Minister when the party was in power at the centre. This gave tremendous strength to the president of the party who could implement the directive of the party straight – way without any inhibition. Of course, it was the Prime Ministership that added dignity and prestige to the post of party president. Even eminent persons of the calibre of Kamaraj and Nijalingappa with all their political accumen could not function effectively as Congress presidents, while someone else was the Prime Minister.<sup>90</sup> Sitaram Kesri may not have been everybody's obvious choice but as one who stood by

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<sup>90</sup> Surendra Mohan- 'Kessi Appears to be Winning' (Deccan Herald 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 1996)

the Congress (I) through thick and thin, both in time of adversity and popularity, and being one of the senior –most Congressmen, no one could grudge him this honour , which had come to him without seeking it. The main qualification seemed to be the capacity of the leader to take all partymen with him and this Kesri had in abundance. He had no pretensions to intellectual qualities of the kind Rao possessed and he did not also hold very important posts in the central cabinet . And yet he was no novice to the act of politics and his elevation from the post of the treasurer to the party president would be widely accepted especially at a time when the search was for a person who was experienced without being a high profile personality and one who could be relied upon to continue the exercise of consensus.<sup>91</sup> Although Kesri was supposed to be the provisional president, party leaders were keen to stress the fact that he would be a full-fledged president. Infact there was near unanimity on Kesri. But there had been once again the demand for the induction of Sonia Gandhi as Congress President which was rejected by her.

Sitaram Kesri had also warned the Prime Minster Gowda against trying to split the Congress (I) by offering inducement to its leaders. Kesri had decided to distance himself from corruption

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<sup>91</sup> Times of India (3<sup>rd</sup> June. 1997)

and all those associated with it. For this he appointed Manmohan Singh as a member of the CWC. Sonia Gandhi on the other hand had conveyed that she was willing to do whatever possible to unite and arrest the party's decline and disintegration<sup>92</sup>. Sonia Gandhi had expressed her willingness to join the CWC, provided Rao be removed from the leadership of Congress parliamentary party. Kesri had replaced party office -bearer's and those of the youth Congress and in certain cases, appointed new chiefs of the PCC's. Kesri had included in his new team all those who had criticised his predecessor Rao. Tariq Anwar, Ahmed Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Nawal Kishore Sharma who were sidelined by Rao under Bhavanesh Chaturvedi's influence had returned to the party.<sup>93</sup> But although Kesri was trying to cleanse the party's image by distancing it from corrupt elements, the real target of attack was Rao. Kesri's objective was to establish his authority over the control of CPP. He seemed to have been convinced that to put his stamp of authority on CPP and change the parties negative public image, Rao had to quit. The Congress president Kesri had asked Rao to resign from the post of the leader of the CPP. The CWC authorized, Kesri to take appropriate action on the no - confidence motion passed against Rao by the executive committee of the CPP,

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<sup>92</sup> Hindustan Times (4<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1997)

<sup>93</sup> P.Raman- Kesri's Win and Pitfalls Ahead' (Tribune 7<sup>th</sup> Jan/ 1997)

and Rao had to finally agree to step down. Rao's exit was a belated, logical conclusion of the party's disastrous performance in the elections seven months ago. Rao failed the Congressman's ultimate test for the leader; ability to win votes and lead the party to power. The embarrassment of having a leader increasingly embroiled in scandals, proved decisive.<sup>94</sup>

From the time Kesri ascended the throne as leader of the CPP, he had taken the party for a roller-coaster ride. Shrugging off a series of electoral reverses and turning a deaf ear to the view of party members, he stunned the nation by toppling the Deva Gowda Government. By propping up another united front government he has not only wriggled out of a situation where fresh elections seemed the only solution but he had also ensured that the Congress under him would call the shots. The Congress president Kesri had ascended to the leadership of the party with a single mission; to give it a face more acceptable to the non-hinduta forces than that of his predecessor Rao. With 142 members in the Lok Sabha, but with little chance of winning support to form a government the Congress was compelled to support Gowda.<sup>95</sup> Ideally, the ouster of the BJP and saffron's policy of keeping a distance from the United-front should have been used to rebuild

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<sup>94</sup> P.Raman- 'Kesri's Win and Pitfalls Ahead' (Hindustan Times (4<sup>th</sup> Jan 1997)

<sup>95</sup> News Time (24<sup>th</sup> April. 1997)

the Congress organisation. Instead , leaders at every level were embroiled in court cases, tainted with the stigma of corruption. Kesri and his men were enamoured of the tactical brilliance of Indira Gandhi who managed to divide, the ruin the Janata Party and stage a return to power. But 1997 was not 1979. At that time she still had the strong support of the Dalits. She had spent a year securing control over the party apparatus . But Kesri was unable to silence his critics. And above all, Indira Gandhi never lost control over southern India, not even during her spell in the opposition. This which was not the state of the Congress party under Kesri.

The most important factor that had lifted the balance in favour of Kesri for the post of the chief of CPP was something more of fundamental. Congressmen by nature fear that a separate leader for the CPP would mean emergence of a parallel power centre. This reflected a hangover from the Congress successes under late Indira Gandhi.<sup>96</sup> The Congress chief ministers, state presidents, front organisations and even senior leaders at the centre had vied with each other to lend support to the new chief. The all powerful CWC had avoided a forth right decision on Rao , but only "authorised" Kesri to take "appropriate" action. This was enough for Kesri to rush to Rao to serve an ultimatum. The CPP executive as

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<sup>96</sup> Deccan Herald (8<sup>th</sup> June, 1997)



per rules , did set a new schedule and called another meeting to produce a consensus in favour of its president . In both cases, the legitimate forum- the 200 odd MP's constituting the CPP general body- was robbed of the right to choose their own leader. In essence, both removal of Rao and installation of Kesri as CPP leader did enjoy the overwhelming endorsement from a majority of the Congress rank.<sup>97</sup> But where Kesri went wrong was in resorting to all the manipulations and backroom, operations to facilitate it. One of the first acts after the installation of the Gujral government by Kesri had been the induction of Pranab Mukharjee into the Congress working committee, against which there were opinions expressed by Pawar and Karunakaran.<sup>98</sup> Congress president Kesri dissolved the pradesh Congress committees in six states and appointed observers to report to him on the state of the party set up in these states before constituting the new committees.

As a master -tactics, he knew the arts of power and man management inspite of his lack of Charisma. He had established direct contacts with key functionaries of the Congress to his personal advantage. With the help of most of the PCC chiefs he managed to get several senior leaders back his candidature.<sup>99</sup> The

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<sup>97</sup> Times of India (13<sup>th</sup> June, 1997)

<sup>98</sup> Rakesh Sharma- "The Sonia Offensive" (Deccan Herald, 25<sup>th</sup> Jan 1998)

<sup>99</sup> Deccan Herald (11<sup>th</sup> March. 1998)

voting pattern clearly showed his hold on a large number of Congress units in different states. Jidendra Prasad was appointed Vice-president by Kesri and later Sonia Gandhi who joined the party decided to campaign for the party in the Lok Sabha elections once the Gujral government was brought down.<sup>100</sup>

With the elections for 1998, being announced once the Congress withdrew its support to the Gujral coalition ministry, the Congress had a for less suave star campaigner in its president Sitaram Kesri who because of his age would have found the gruelling countrywide campaign for the party a bit too taxing.<sup>101</sup> In the meantime, Sonia Gandhi's entry into active politics enabled the top leadership of the Congress party to dislodge Kesri and install Sonia Gandhi as the party's president. Kesri in any case could not provide the right leadership for the party during his tenure, which was crucial for the organisation as a supporting party of the United Front Government and later as one that was trying to come back to power. As a leader, he lacked dynamism, vision and authority and foiled to give the party an agenda for revival. The crucial decisions to withdraw support to the United Front Government, taken reportedly for the personal reasons out of bad judgement or under

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<sup>100</sup> Asian Age (17<sup>th</sup> March 1998)

<sup>101</sup> Deepak. K.Upreti- 'Rekindling Dying Embers' (Deccan Herald 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1998)

pressure, would be remembered as Kesri's worst mistakes.<sup>102</sup> And in the run-up to the elections, the mishandling of Ms.Mamata Banerjee's revolt in West Bengal and the negotiations with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, cost of the party dearly , but for which the post-poll scenario would have been entirely different. Thus even during Kesri's period the centralisation process was carried forward with much vigour, though his period had to be cut short.

Sonia Gandhi's appointment came less than a week since she actually conversed to some partymen that she was ready to be the Congress President. The results of the elections after having been announced clearly indicated that Sonia Gandhi despite her hectic campaign was unable to add to the Congress numbers in the way that was expected. While she was able to draw the crowds, her party was unable to convert these into votes in a large number of constituencies that she visited. It had been wiped out in UP in these election. It even lost Amethi and Rae Bareilly, booth known as Dynastic strongholds. It had secured only five seats in Bihar. Both these state were once considered Congress bastions.<sup>103</sup>

March 14 and 16<sup>th</sup>, witnessed Sonia at the helm of affairs by first assuming charge of party president and then within two days having herself, unanimously elected as chairperson of the Congress

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<sup>102</sup> Telegraph (26<sup>th</sup> March, 1998)

<sup>103</sup> Rasheed Kidwai- 'Crowned Sonia Uveils Operation Clawback' Telegraph (7<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

parliamentary party . Kesri's long year run as Congress president saw the party's declining fortunes in the North. The party which had already lost the trust of minorities due to the Babri Masjid demolition further , discovered its support base of upper and backward castes also dwindling fast under Kesri's leadership. By electing Sonia as Chairperson, the Congress had revived a 1978 practice in what may be seen as a bid to avoid any dual power centre in the organisation. The Italian born Sonia was neither a member of the Lok Sabha nor the Rajya Sabha as her mother-in-law in 1978. The amendment in clauses(1) and(5) of article 30 of the CPP constitution ensured that the CPP Chairperson need not be a member of either of the houses and in the event of the party staking its claim to form the government, the CCP Chairperson would automatically had been the Prime ministerial Candidate.<sup>104</sup> Once in charge of the Congress party, Sonia Gandhi tightened her grip over the party organisation and its parliamentary wing rewarding loyalists and cutting to size big -wigs like AICC vice-president Jitendra Prasad and veteran Pranab Mukharjee. Brushing off claims by senior leaders like Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy and K.Karunakaran, she appointed P.Shiv Shankar as the party's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha. She ignored claims of the younger lot , like Rajesh Pilot and Ashok Gehlot and nominated P.J. Kurien

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<sup>104</sup> Tribune (29<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

, the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha. In the Rajya Sabha , Pranab Mukherjee had been forced to serve under his junior Manmohan Singh as chief whip. Manmohan was declared the Congress leader in Rajya Sabha and the leader of the opposition.<sup>105</sup> According to Congress tradition , those defeated in the Lok Sabha polls are not given Rajya Sabha nominations . However, there were members was awarded Rajya Sabha nomination from Karnataka though he lost the Lok Sabha polls.

At the AICC session held in New Delhi , Sonia Gandhi's ratification as party chief was a smooth affair. A political resolution adopted at the AICC gave her "full authority to restructure the organisation at all levels". The resolution called for setting up an "ethics" committee to weed out criminals from the party. Sonia Gandhi urged Congressmen to keep a "vigil" on the Atal Behari Vajpai government to ensure that it poses no danger to the secular democratic and egalitarian polity. She was of the opinion that the Congress revival in UP, Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu was on top of her agenda. A task force was to constituted to ensure implementation of the political resolution action plan and suggestions given by senior Congress leaders. Sonia Gandhi made it clear that she would make sweeping changes in the party and criticised the manner in which the Congress had been run under

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<sup>105</sup> Lakshmi Iyer-'Cautious Approach' (Pioneer 28<sup>th</sup> June 1998)

Kesri. Kesri the deposed Congress chief moved the resolution ratifying Sonia's appointment as party president.<sup>106</sup> In the meantime the Young Turks in the Congress were mounting pressure on party chief to "retire" those leaders who over 65 years and utilise their talent only for advisory purposes. But the party old guards, comprising V.B. Reddy, Jaffer Sherif, K.Karunakaran and others felt that Sonia Gandhi should make "good use of their experience instead of running the party with youngsters. In an attempt to revive the party, the party chief said that the party would not succeed if the common workers were not involved in electing delegates from the block to AICC level.

In a sharp departure from past party practice Congress President Sonia Gandhi had reined in her personal prejudice but allowed full play to consensus politics in revamping the set-up at the centre. She also seemed to had given thought to fair representation to various groups without pitting one against the other. Also younger leaders had been identified and offered positions both to rejuvenate and eventually lead the organisation. Above all, she had strengthened the policy formulation set-up of the party by entrusting the work to Manmohan Singh [Economics] and Natwar Singh [foreign affairs]. Interm of personalities,

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<sup>106</sup> Anand K. Sahay-"Sonia's Dreams-Revival of One-Party Rule" (New age, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

abolition of the post of vice -President of the AICC had attracted much animated attention. By stripping Jitendra Prasad of the high - profile designation had turned the spotlight on the pitiable health of the party in U.P and his role in it. On the other side was the thoughtful retention of Tariq Anwar as the treasure and R.K Dhawan as a General Secretary. Anwar was a Kesri loyalist and Dhawan had been the object of long -time dislike of Sonia Gandhi. The elevation of P.A Sangma and Rajesh Pilot pointed to the deployment of younger and well-liked men in key posts.<sup>107</sup> More was expected from revamp of the CWC; promises were made at the AICC session that there would be a “shake-up” with more representation for women, minorities and scheduled tribes and castes, none of this was evident. Most of the old faces like K. Karunakaran, Moti Lal Vohra, V.N. Gadgil, Madhavsingh Solanki and Sitaram Kesri continued to be there as special or permanent invitees. Sonia Gandhi also retained all the five general - secretaries appointed by the former President as also all the elected members of the CWC. She had almost seemed to be keeping her word when she appointed a task force under the chairmanship of P. A. Sangma to propose changes in the party structure. The task force in turn submitted an interim report as

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<sup>107</sup> Vir Sanghvi-“The Beginning of her End” Mainstream” 10<sup>th</sup> April 1999

well as its final report. But beyond the submission of the reports and implementation of one of its suggestions, that consisted of scrapping the post of joint Secretaries, no revamping at the AICC level had really occurred. All the PCC level status -quo was being maintained either on account of panchayat or assembly elections. She on the other hand, had once again revived the system of despatching party representatives to the scene of action or distress.<sup>108</sup> She had also tightened the grip on her party by making it clear that she would be the final arbiter, by her action of the leadership changes at Pradesh Congress Committee level. Sonia Gandhi addressing the AICC meeting at Talkotra Stadium said that the Congress prime ministerial candidates would be chosen by party MP's at an appropriate time. Even though Sonia Gandhi seemed to have campaigned vigorously for the 1999 Lok Sabha election Congress got the lowest number of seats since 1952. She had failed to garner the kind of support the party was expecting under her leadership.

The Congress had to settle in the opposition benches after the election of 1999. The formal announcement just a day before the new Lok Sabha was to meet was made that Sonia Gandhi would hold the post of the leader of the opposition, apart from being the party President and the Congress (I) parliamentary party

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<sup>108</sup> The Last Satrap Revolt- (EPW 19<sup>th</sup> June 1999)



leader which clearly showed the continued abject dependence of the entire party structure on the Nehru- Gandhi dynasty. After the party's worst electoral debacle, Sonia Gandhi had set up an Antony panel to introspect the reason for the debacle. The introspective panel reported- centralised election of candidates, especially for state assemblies that went to polls along with Lok Sabha elections, inordinate delay in the announcement of candidates for related Assembly segments, party's stand on Kargil among the factors responsible for the worst electoral performance by the Congress. The panel also suggested remedial measures to be taken up for correcting – the failures of the leadership and the party in general. The entry of Rajiv Gandhi's widow Sonia Gandhi into <sup>109</sup> politics in the 1998 election, thus re-inforced the leader-dominated character of the organisation. While her entry arrested the long-term decline of the Congress the setbacks suffered by the Congress party in 1999 parliamentary election suggested that charismatic leadership alone is not sufficient for Congress's renewal.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Hindu (27<sup>th</sup> May 1999)

<sup>110</sup> Zoya Hazan, Ed-“Parties and Party Politics in India” (Oxford University Press, Delhi, Forthcoming) Introduction, Pg. 10.

## CONCLUSION

If we analyse the party leadership over the years it could be understood that strong centralising tendencies have come to dominate the organisation. These tendencies started arising very much from the period of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the legacy was followed by her successors. The centralising drive had led to concentration of all powers in the hands of a single individual. The party came to depend upon personality cult for winning elections and dynastic rule had dominated the party. After Indira Gandhi's death the scene of leadership was very much open for her son Rajiv Gandhi. During the period of 1975 the centralising tendency had led power to be monopolised by Indira Gandhi and above all by her younger son Sanjay Gandhi.

The 'coterie' or 'caucus' occupied a very predominant position in the organisation. The coterie was considered the fountain the all decisions. The party had come to depend so much on the Gandhi family that after Rajiv Gandhi's death, the party turned towards his widow Sonia Gandhi. When Sonia Gandhi refused to take over the party reins Narasimha Rao and later Sitaram Kesri had held power. Even during their periods, power continued to be centralised in their hands and around their 'coterie' they had built. The lack of Charima in these leaders to win elections forced the party to loan back on the Nehru-Gandhi family

once again. Even when Sonia Gandhi took over the Congress Chief she also fell back on the line of centralising and monolising power. Strong centralising tendencies and dependence on personality cult and Nehru-Gandhi family have led to the decline of the Congress organisation. The party looks back to leaders from the Nehru-Gandhi family to win elections, instead of having mass contacts or to fight elections on policy issues. If the Congress (I) do not groom up a second line of leadership without depending on one family, or take up issues which are relevant to survive in the years to come.

## CHAPTER III

### FACTIONALISM IN THE PARTY

The Congress party, which started well under Nehru after independence, gradually lost its former idealism and sense of dedicated and selfless work. Disunity in the ranks, internal dissensions, squabbles for power and office and dominance of vested interests ate into the vitals of the great organisation. Its dwindling influence and prestige became clearly manifested in the election of 1967. The Congress suffered serious setbacks for the first time. While in the states, coalition Governments followed each other in rapid succession, the Congress party was racked with factional conflict, climaxed in 1969, by a formal split. Before 1967, the critical arena of political competition was the Congress "system" of one-party dominance<sup>111</sup>. This system which operated effectively until the mid - 1960's was a competitive one but one in which the single party of consensus occupied a dominant, central position. In this system the dominant Congress party, itself factionally divided, was both sensitive and responsive to pressures from outside. In the years of dominance, factions interacted in "a continuous process of pressure, adjustment and accommodation in

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<sup>111</sup> Rajni Kothari "Party System" Economic weekly (June/3/1961) pg. 849

the Congress<sup>112</sup>. The party retained the character of the nationalist movement in seeking to balance and accommodate social and ideological diversity within an all - embracing, representative structure.

Brass, in his study of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, described the internal life of the party in terms of factional conflict. The conflict was not ideological but personal, and it was characterised by shifting political coalitions. "Alliances develop and splits and defections occur wholly because of the mutual convenience and temporarily shared power -political interests of the group leaders." The groups were "loose coalitions of local, district faction leaders, tied together at the state level partly by personal bonds of friendship, partly by caste loyalties, and most of all by political interest."<sup>113</sup> Although there seemed to be no persistent conflicts, Brass argues, there was in each faction a relatively solid inner core, bound together in personal loyalty to the leader and divided from other factions by deep personal enmities. Factional conflict was rooted at the district level and factional system were legally autonomous arising out of conditions and personalities peculiar to the district. This served to

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<sup>112</sup> Rajni Kothari - " The Congress System In India" in Party Systems and Election Studies, occasional papers of the centre for Developing societies, ( Bombay : Allied publishers, 1967) pg. 1-18

<sup>113</sup> Paul. Brass-Factional Politics In an Indian State pg:-54-55

compartmentalise conflict, to quarantine discontent, and to make discontent more manageable.

Factionalism in the party was closely related to factionalism in the villages, since traditional village factions increasingly sought to ally themselves with a party group. The factional character of the Congress served to accommodate local conflict and to internalize it. If the Congress was unable to tolerate factions, opposition parties would secure the support of one of the two factions in each village. The factional system within the Congress, at least until 1967, was able "to sustain popular support in the midst of intense intra-party conflict"<sup>114</sup>. Factional conflict also broadens the base of participation within the party as each faction competes for wider group support by drawing in new caste and religious groups. Factionalism, however, may also lead to a form of immobilism, as each faction holds the other in check. The factional character of the Congress had meant that the chief opposition to the government had frequently come from within the Congress itself. Conflict between the governmental and organizational wings of the party virtually constituted a two - party system but one hardly designed for coherent and effective policy. With minimum response to the problems of economic inequality

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<sup>114</sup> Myron Weiner - "Party Building In a New Nation (University of Chicago Press, 1967) pg. 159-160

and social injustice, the Congress system was governed by conflict avoidance and the politics of patronage<sup>115</sup>.

It is important to understand factionism within the Congress party, which led to its decline and the various splits and formation of alternative political groups by the dissidents of the party. The reason for various expulsions, suspensions, formation of alternative political outfits during the period of the study has been analysed in this chapter. The issues on which the split took place, the leaders of different rival camps have also been looked in this chapter.

#### **Dissidence – The Indira Era (1969-1984)**

The factionalism in the Congress party reached its peak with the split of 1969. It is essential to briefly analyse how this took place. The game of power politics in the Congress party was being played adroitly by a group of Congress leaders who had emerged as the men of establishment within the Congress. Popularly known as the 'Syndicate', this group composed of the State bosses. The differences between the two groups of the progressives and the Syndicates started at the Congress working committee (CWC) meeting on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1967 in New Delhi when the progressives within the party succeeded in getting the party to adopt a time-

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<sup>115</sup> Paul Brass - Factional Politics In an Indian State, pg. 236

bound "10-point programme" including social control of banks, nationalism of general insurance, abolition of princely privileges etc<sup>116</sup>. Indira Gandhi supported the Bank Nationalisation, but Moraji Desai wanted to give a fair trial to the social control idea. Indira Gandhi used her prerogative as Prime Minister to strip Desai of his finance portfolio. This action of the Prime Minister focussed nationwide attention on the conflict and gave an ideological content to the inner party conflict. It was a warning for many that if the Deputy Prime Minister could be humiliated and ousted from the Government, no opponent would be spared. The syndicate members were not bold enough to come to Moraji's rescue on this issue openly. Within hours of the acceptance of Moraji's resignation, Mrs. Gandhi nationalised 14 major Indian scheduled banks by issuing a presidential ordinance on July 19, 1969. With the death of President Zakir Hussain, which necessitated a fresh poll, virtually took the form of factional fight within the Congress, and the whole election revolved around it. The Syndicates had proposed the name of Sanjiva Reddy, but Mrs. Gandhi chose to back V.V. Giri by remaining in the Congress.

The victory of V.V. Giri was a setback for Nijalingappa and other old guards. Another round of disagreements took place after the presidential election. Indira Gandhi asked four ministers to

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<sup>116</sup> N.P. Singh 'Split in the predominant party (Abhinav publications, Delhi, 1981) pg. 53



resign and in retaliation to this, the Congress president removed C. Subramaniam and Fakruddin Ali Ahmad, both supporters of Mrs. Gandhi from the Congress working committee.<sup>117</sup> Thus the Congress party split into two - Congress (R) led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Congress (O) led by the old guards of the party under Nijalingappa. The group led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi emphasised that the split was the natural outcome of ideological conflict. The other view expressed by Nijalingappa was that it was Mrs Indira Gandhi's ambition which led to the split the party. . Mrs. Gandhi managed to take with her the rank and file, which included the bulk of the members with her.<sup>118</sup> The syndicate had was supported by majority of the leaders within the party. The syndicate was dubbed as a group of sinners and was held responsible for all the evils of the Congress in the past and the other group projected itself as the fighter against the evil.<sup>119</sup> The masses believed it and discarded the old guards. Dissidence was still prevalent in the party, inspite of the tight grip of Mrs. Gandhi over the party.

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<sup>117</sup> Robert. L.Hardgrave- India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation(Jr Inc, U.S.A, 1979) pg: - 154

<sup>118</sup> Zareen Masamii- "Indira Gandhi: A Biography" (Oxford Unviersity Press, 1995) pg:- 294

<sup>119</sup> L.Kamal and Ralph. C.Meyer- 'Democratic Politics in India (Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. 1977) pg: - 147

In the meantime, the Jayaprakash Movement started gaining in importance. The movement had supporters within the party. Chandrashekhar and Krishan Kant became open supporters of the movement. To their support, was added, Mohan Dharia minister of state for works and housing, who went on emphasising the relevance of some of the basic issues raised by Narayanan such as corruption, unemployment and electoral reforms. And he had to pay the price for it when Mrs.Gandhi dismissed him from the Cabinet. The axe had fallen on Dharia not because he had held certain views, but the way he went about airing them. The Prime Minister hoped that the action taken against Dharia would have a deterrent effect not only on the other young Turks, but also the pro-CPI ginger groups that were making an ambitious bid to extend their leverage by crying hoarse against Narayanan's movement and raising the bogey of fascism. The blow was struck when she realized that in a way the J.P movement was spreading to the Congress itself by becoming a contentious issue for exerting internal pressure. Opposition against Mrs.Gandhi was only outside the Congress, but was getting much strong within the party itself, which ultimately led Mrs.Gandhi to declare Emergency in 1975. Even though Mrs.Indira Gandhi's decision to impose Emergency was ratified by the Parliament, opposition within the Congress against Emergency started gaining eminence, which later

made Mrs. Indira Gandhi to lift the emergency and declare elections.<sup>120</sup>

In opposition to the declaration of emergency Jagjivan Ram, tendered his resignation from the cabinet, the working committee, AICC, all subordinate committees and primary membership of the party saying that the "Congress, as it was functioning had virtually ceased to be a democratic organisation"<sup>121</sup>. Along with him H.N. Bahuguna, Nandini Satpathy, former Chief Minister of U.P and Orissa respectively, K.R. Ganesh, former minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers, D.N Tiwari, a former M.P. and Raj Mangal Pandey also left the party. The leaders who resigned from the Congress formed a new party named "Congress for Democracy" and pledged to fight for "democracy and integrity in public life". They alleged that the internal democracy of the Congress organisation at all levels were almost abolished. The AICC had been reduced to a submissive, ratifying body with half of its members in office through nomination. The dissidents demanded the immediate withdrawal of emergency on the ground that the present situation did not justify its continuance. Mrs. Gandhi was being criticised not only for destroying inner party democracy but also establishing a system of dictatorship by concentrating power

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<sup>120</sup> S.K. Aggarwal-"Whither Indian Democracy" (UDH Publishing House, 1990) pg: - 12-13 See also Hindu (Dec 17<sup>th</sup> 1974)

<sup>121</sup> People's Democracy, 1977 (Feb, 13<sup>th</sup> )

in a coterie which was filled with outright despotism. But she took the challenge in her stride as though it was something that would arouse her fighting instincts rather than frighten her.

The dissidents pleaded for the immediate lifting of the Emergency, the renewal of MISA, the release of all political prisoners, the withdrawal of the Prevention of the Publication of objectionable matters Act, the restoration of immunity for Publication of Parliamentary proceedings, safeguards against misuse of Government machinery for political purposes and the observance of pre-Emergency norms by the mass media of the Government to ensure fair and free elections without any fear of intimidation. The Congress working committee which was called to discuss the crisis was attended by 48 members and special invitees, among them Chief Ministers strongly criticised Jagjivan Ram's resignation from the cabinet, which was variously described as "an act of bad faith" "betrayal" or "desertion". On the other hand they re-affirmed their total support - for Mrs. Gandhi, in her dynamic and dedicated leadership of the nation<sup>122</sup>. It said that the very timing of this decision clearly indicated " a plan to help the anti-Congress and anti-people forces<sup>123</sup>. But dissidents in the party was of the view that they had chosen this moment to appeal

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<sup>122</sup> The Hindu , 1977, Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

to the people to fight the tendencies towards "despotic rule" in view of the fact that the coming Lok Sabha elections " provided perhaps the last opportunity for preventing the total reversal of the nation's cherished policies and for correcting the illegitimacy that predominates in several aspects of the national life. The dissident activities was probably because they came to realise that the people must be mobilised to defeat the congress drive for one-party dictatorship and subversion of the constitution. A need was felt to prevent the drift of the democratic system in the direction of a regime of authoritarian and self-centred establishment.

As a senior member of the cabinet Jagjivan Ram had been actively associated with all the decisions taken by the Government. It was quite strange that he remained silent all those months before making his charges. All the decisions in the Working Committee, Parliamentary Board and other forms had been taken with his consent, association and participation and he had never disagreed, but on the other hand defended the party policies at the Congress sessions. But it should also be understood here that even though he was supporting the policies of the government, he personally did not approve of them. His resignation followed by others was taken for accumulated decisions which they did not

like and not for a particular event in which they differed at the time of resigning.<sup>124</sup>

The exit of these leaders thus was a reflection of the grave crisis that was brewing in the Congress party and Government since long. If the emergency was clamped-down to suppress the opposition and the Congress party's inner opposition in particular, the 19 months emergency rule had not stifled the opposition, but on the other hand aggravated it.<sup>125</sup> Indeed the declaration of emergency itself which was described as a move to quell a seditious campaign by anti- Congress forces, was the direct result of a threat from within Congress to oust Mrs. Gandhi from the premiership in favour of Jagjivan Ram after her conviction for election irregularities. Opposition parties suffered often grievously during the emergency, but so did the Congress. In that slightly unhinged atmosphere which was marked by the erratic whim of Sanjay Gandhi, the party organisation which had once been India's central political institution was severely crippled across most of the sub-continent. Jagjivan Ram, the only person to survive in the national cabinet through three decades of independence and the only national leader to forecast the landslide of 1971, had solid links to the remains of the party

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<sup>124</sup> Indian Express (Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>/ 1977)

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

organisation across North India and was an evocative figure among his fellow-untouchables of the north. His defection made Mrs. Gandhi to change her tactics and she immediately dumped Sanjay's cronies and offered nominations to party veterans to prevent them from combining against her.<sup>126</sup> She succeeded with some of them, but the Congress machine - particularly in north India - had received too severe a battering at the hands of the Prime Minister to state an overnight revival. This would have been true even if party workers had been enthusiastic about their leader, and enthusiasm was in very short supply.

Mrs. Gandhi's later decided to lift the state of emergency and hold a general election in 1977. This action of her's was symptomatic of the decline of the Congress organisation. The nineteen month emergency should be seen as a period in which Mrs. Gandhi and the people close to her intervening in major and minor decisions of governmental policy or implementation at national, state and local levels and even extending into the functioning of public undertaking and nationalised banks. This created defections within the party. In the meantime, Jayaparakash Narayan appealed to the opposition parties to come together to fight the elections. He made it clear that otherwise he would dissociate himself from the elections. His ultimatum worked

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<sup>126</sup> James Manor - "Indira and After-The Decay of party Organisation In India" -(Round Table , 1978, July) pg. 319

well and on January 23, 1977 an announcement of the formation of the Janata Party consisting of Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal and socialist party was made. The Congress for Democracy (C.F.D) led by Jagjivan Ram joined hands with the Janata Party in the crusade against the ruling Congress - forgetting their ideological temperamental differences which was dividing them, they all came under one flag with one programme i.e., to oust Mrs. Gandhi and her Congress from power. The opposition charged Mrs. Gandhi of authoritarianism, of establishing dynastic rule, of using unbelievable repressive measures in implementing different programmes especially in attaining family- planning targets and for making amendments in the constitution to strengthen her position. The defections within the party was also as a result of the repressive measures taken by Mrs. Gandhi to achieve the implementation of various programmes. The dissident leaders protested against the governmental policies and the several amendments made in the constitution to subvert democracy. The general election of 1977 was the first in which party organisation did not play a decisive role<sup>127</sup>.

With the results of 1977 Lok Sabha elections being announced the Congress had a major electoral defeat at the hands

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<sup>127</sup> James Manor - "Indira and After - The Decay of party organisation in India" , - (Round Table , July) 1978 pg. 319



of the Janata Party. The opposition parties were able to carry on their propaganda without contradiction as the Congress organisation was not functioning at the grass root level and most of the central leaders were busy in building their own image in place of trying to build up the party<sup>128</sup>. The 1977 elections was the first in which party organisation did not play a decisive role. This defeat of the Congress in 1977 elections demoralised a large member of Congress leaders and they started a campaign to malign the leader Mrs. Gandhi, by putting the total responsibility for defeat on her and her policies. They accused her of emergency aberrations, for suppressing inner democracy and advocated the concept of collective leadership and protested against personality cult. It seemed that they were in no case prepared to accept the domination of a single individual in the organisation more so after having suffered a severe setback in the elections. As a result in the assembly elections as well as in the election to the Indian President the Prime Minister was not consulted by the Congress President Brahmananda Reddy.<sup>129</sup>

With 1977 drawn to a close, people in general, were restless with the Janata government's non-performance and their attempt to reverse the time-tested policies of the Congress. They

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<sup>128</sup> Report of the General Secretaries (Dec. 1975 to Dec. 1983) pg. 9

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

necessarily looked towards Congress party. Consequently, a two-day convention in Delhi was called to consider the whole situation. In this session, Mrs. Gandhi was unanimously requested to take over the Presidentship of the new party under the name and style of Indian National Congress (Indira)<sup>130</sup>. Brahmananda Reddy deplored Mrs. Gandhi's attempt to capture the leadership of the party. The working committee contested the claim of Mrs. Gandhi's convention to be the Congress and described it as a "new party" and a "breakaway group".<sup>131</sup> At an emergency meeting, where the revolt by Mrs. Gandhi's supporters were discussed, the working committee resolved to expel all those Congressmen who joined the new party formed by Mrs. Gandhi. It must be said that Brahmananda Reddy and those who were with him could not rise to the height of statesmanship required to keep the party united and it was possible to say that the split was precipitated by the partisan action taken against Devraj Urs, enabling the Janata Government at the centre to dismiss the Urs ministry and impose Presidents's rule in Karnataka. It can be argued that a debate within the organization on these matters could have led to the elimination of disruptive elements. In this context it is necessary to understand why the earlier move for a requisitioned meeting of

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<sup>130</sup> Report of the General Secretaries (Dec. 1975 to Dec. 1983) pg. 15

<sup>131</sup> Hindustan Times(1978, Jan 3<sup>rd</sup>)

the AICC was not pursued to the logical conclusion<sup>132</sup>. If Indira Gandhi had the majority with her, she would not have abandoned the requisition move, especially when it was evident that she had by then decided to split the party<sup>133</sup>. The declaration of emergency and the Congress debacle at the elections and the difficulties thereafter were not merely because of Mrs. Gandhi or her son's caucus, but because the party had accepted them, since by then it had lost its capacity to assert its democratic rights<sup>134</sup>. It could be understood that the inherent motive to become "supreme leader" of the Congress prompted Indira Gandhi to split the party<sup>135</sup>. But at the same time it should be realised that the Congress President and others who supported her during the emergency had deserted her. They had put the entire blame for emergency aberrations on her. This betrayal of trust re-inforced Indira Gandhi's decision to split the party. If proper debate and discussions could be held in a democratic manner, then defections and major differences over policy issues could be averted to a great extent. But all those were very much absent within the party. Instead of proposing loyalty to Mrs. Gandhi the leaders of the party should have made

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<sup>132</sup> National Herald (4<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1978)

<sup>133</sup> Times of India(4<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1978)

<sup>134</sup> Patriot (5<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1978)

<sup>135</sup> Janardan Thakur- "Indira Gandhi and her Power Game" (Vikas Publishing House Private Ltd., 1979) p.56-58

mechanisms to sort out differences. It is quite natural for a person who has absolute power to become autocratic. It depends upon the members of the party to subvert tendency. If some are willing to raise their voice against absence of inner-party democracy, and the others support the autocratic tendencies of the leader, it is quite natural that the voice of dissent are bound to be controlled.

Inspite of being the only supreme head of the organisation, which came to power at the centre in 1980 the Congress was not free of dissidence. It should be understood that differences in the Congress were not new. Even in Nehru's time when the party was most united, there was a distinction made between liberal and conservative party men. But after him, the divisions had not been over basic policy or objectives. In the past the revolts in the Congress at the Central level would travel down to the states, the splits were from above to below. But later the process got reversed. The states were taking the lead. Dissidents had always been there but they had in the past lowered their standard of revolt on the orders of High Command. Whether it was Anjiah in Andhra Pradesh or Mrs. Shalintai Patil-Vasantdada Patil's wife in Maharashtra, Mrs. Gandhi was the last court of appeal. Every single member of the Congress (I) who was busy in dissidence in the party in swore at the same time, undying loyalty to Mrs.

Gandhi.<sup>136</sup> The dissidence in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra or for that, any other state, was not a revolt against the party on Mrs. Gandhi. It was essentially a bid to share power, to divide the spoils. Indira Gandhi was a master of political tactics without match among contemporaries.<sup>137</sup> Squabbles continued within the party, and to prevent it, she changed her style a bit. In every Congress (I) run state the ministry had been expanded and re-expanded to accommodate more of those calling themselves 'rebels'. True, more and more Congress (I) men in the states were vocal against the leadership, but it was only against the local leadership. Indeed, much of the dissidence was encouraged by Mrs. Gandhi herself to be the supreme leader of the party. Congress dissidents have all along been invariably won over by a mere suggestion of power. This strategy of giving power to rebel leaders was used by Indira Gandhi to win over many a rebel leaders. Dissidents did not take an open stand, against Indira Gandhi, but tried devious outlets, so as not to clash with her supremacy.<sup>138</sup>

In the 1950's when the opposition was weak, dissidence within the Congress played a useful role as a check on power. Nor

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<sup>136</sup> Hindu (10<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1981)

<sup>137</sup> Bipan Chandra- "Essays on Contemporary India" (Har- Anand Publications 1993) pg. 121

<sup>138</sup> Tribune (12<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1982)

was all dissent personnel, some of it was based on sectional interest. The shape of the party was sadly, nothing better than a Praetorian Guard. Dissident factionalism in the states, where the Congress was in power as well as in those states where it was not the bane of Congress(I) called forth the intervention of the party's central leadership.<sup>139</sup> But interventions proved at best a palliative and at worst an encouragement to fresh dissidence. The persistence and growing intensity of factionalism despite the intervention of the central leadership eroded the latter's credibility. The Central leadership appeared to have felt that only by strengthening inner-party, grassroot democracy could factionalism be dealt a moral blow and erosion of its own authority be stemmed. Its involvement in factional politics in the states had gone so far as to reduce local party structures to an empty shell. In the beginning, its intervention in state Congress(I) factional politics may have brought quick results because such intervention had the potency that belongs to an august authority to which an appeal is made as a last resort. Very often, dissidents dignified their personal rivalries by passing them off as policy difference, generally they tried to pose as ultra-loyalists.<sup>140</sup> Dissident activity could be dealt by means of strict disciplinary action. But usually

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<sup>139</sup> S.A.Haqqi-"Democracy, Pluralism and Nation-Building (N.B.O.Publishers, 1984) P.60-61

<sup>140</sup> Deccan Chronicle (Hyderabad) 10<sup>th</sup> Dec,1982)

rebels are not disciplined, on the other hand they are offered important posts either in the party or government .It should be understood that whatever else may have fed the Congress(I) infighting it certainly did not have an ideological content after the formation of Congress (I).

The open revolts against Chief ministers by dissidents in many states, threatening their very survival made difficulties for the party chiefs as well as the organisation. At times, dissatisfied sections in State legislature parties turned against her nominees, but while they implicit questioned her judgement they continued to swear loyalty to her, even vying in the process with the groups in power. At one stage, soon after Sanjay Gandhi's death, dissidents became active in several states, but submitted to party discipline in the wake of her warning.<sup>141</sup> The party leadership considered a return to the pre-1967 tradition inevitable, if the growing dissidence in several states were not countered effectively. Dissensions were there in the party. Largely on account of the fact that the party at the state level was broken into factions, most of them owing allegiance to a central leader.<sup>142</sup> Bihar was often cited as a leading example of such factionalism, but we know that central ministers and leaders otherwise having some influence in

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<sup>141</sup> Hindu (5<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1983)

<sup>142</sup> Financial Express (17<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1983)

New Delhi belonging to other states also command the loyalty of some party legislatures in the states and try to manipulate it to their own advantage. The system of selecting Chief ministers may initially seem to ensure better coordination and cohesiveness, but eventually breeds dissidence and indiscipline.

The same applies to attempts to form state Governments with the help of rebels and defectors. When Chief Ministers are imposed on the states by the centre, there can be little democracy at the PCC level. The critics of a chief minister in the assembly by his own party members violate party discipline. Such gross violation of party discipline could be averted if the party works on democratic lines and the leadership encouraged healthy debate at party forums as used to happen during the Nehruvian period. While state politicians were so irreconcilably divided among themselves they were willing to accept the primacy of one of them over the rest, only if he was imposed on them by the central leadership. The more dissidence ridden a state party unit, the greater the leverage over it of the national party leadership as the final arbiter. Factional leaders often worked in tandem with prominent party politicians from the same state who had moved to the centre (either to parliament or the organisation.)<sup>143</sup> It enabled them to retain their influence in the states they came from, a

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<sup>143</sup> A.S.Abraham – “Dissidence in Every State Pie”- Times of India (12<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1983)



useful stand-by in case they had to return there some day. Collectively it gave the central leadership; enormous patronage, which would, otherwise be dispersed in a score and more local centres. During Indira Gandhi's time, dissident activities were always present, but it was kept under tight control, since the members in her party, however rebellious they would be, owed a allegiance to her. Absence of inner-party democracy was an important cause of factionalism within the organisation. After 1972, elections were not held within the organisation during Mrs. India Gandhi's period. Voices of dissent were almost scuffled. In order to avoid dissident activities, decisions should have been taken in a democratic manner involving all sections of the Congress and elections should have been held at all levels.

### **Dissidence in the Rajiv Era (1984-1991)**

With the death of Mrs. Gandhi, her son Rajiv Gandhi after taking over the reins from her, had to face difficulties arising out of dissident activities within the party. But over the domestic political scene (like Assam, Punjab, Gujarat, opposition parties etc) or with foreign policy issues there was virtually no disagreement within the party. But over Vishvanath Pratap Singh's budget and Rajiv Gandhi's policy of open-door economic liberalisation, the party was vertically divided. Although it was not even four full months since Rajiv Gandhi's formal assumption of office as Prime Minister

and leader of the ruling party, the subterranean discontent and resentment against his economic policy and the alleged pro-private sector had begun surfacing openly.<sup>144</sup> Party MP's particularly the newly elected ones, were not hesitant in articulating their views. At a meeting of the Congress(I) parliamentary party, some members pointed out to Gandhi that the controversial clause 2 (C) of the anti-defection bill should be deleted, since it conferred unlimited powers on the party president.<sup>145</sup> But instead of silencing; or best ignoring them, he actually accepted their suggestion and had the clause deleted. The dissidence threat in the party took a serious turn when the former central ministers including Pranab Mukherjee, A.P.Sharma, Jagannath Kaushal, Rao Birendra Singh, Dinesh Singh and C.K.Jaffer Sharief and former chief ministers like Vasanthdada patil of Maharashtra, Jagannath Mishra of Bihar, Madhavsingh solenki of Gujarat, Sripat Misra of U.P. Hiteshrwar Saikia of Assam Darbara Singh of Punjab and Gundu Rao of Karnataka held a secret conclave in New Delhi to work out a common strategy against Rajiv Gandhi. In the mean time they had also launched a whisper campaigning against the Prime Minister and party high command<sup>146</sup>. While

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<sup>144</sup> Deccan Herald (3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1985)

<sup>145</sup> Seema Mustafa-'Congressmen Speak Up After Fifteen Years'- Telegraph(Calcutta) (2<sup>nd</sup> Feb, 1985)

<sup>146</sup> Ajoy Bose-'Dissidents and Secret Conclave'- Sunday Observer (16<sup>th</sup> March, 1986)

Bihar, Gujrat and Maharashtra were the most affected by dissidence, similar in -fighting were there not only in every Congress ruled state, but even in those where the party had been reduced to being in the opposition, precisely because of such factionalism in the past. To a large extent the hardcore dissidents opposed Rajiv and his policies, not because of any ideological reason, but simply for not giving enough lift to them or their lobbies at the central or state level. In dealing with dissidence, the Congress(I) high command expelled Pranab Mukherjee for six years and suspended Sripati Mishra, A.P.Sharma and, Prakash Mahotra for alleged anti-party activities <sup>147</sup>. The working President Kamalpathi Tripathi, was kept out of the decision making process which led him to have hurt feelings. Tripathi made out a strong case for the "Indira loyalists" against whom disciplinary action was taken on the basis of as a person who had stood by Mrs.Gandhi through thick and thin. Rajiv Gandhi divided the dissidents by being selective in meting out disciplinary action. The charge against Pranab Mukherjee, according to G.K.Moopannar, General Secretary was that he had acted deliberately in a manner "calculated to lower the dignity of the party", while the other three had indulged in the anti-party activities.<sup>148</sup> The notices sent to the

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<sup>147</sup> Tribune (29<sup>th</sup> April, 1986)

<sup>148</sup> Deccan Herald (1<sup>st</sup> May, 1986)

four dissidents did not give any specific instances of the anti-party activities allegedly indulged in by them.

What was noteworthy was that all these inner-party factional activities had been going on without any effort at building any mass campaign on vital issues affecting the life and living of the people. And what was ominous was that the Prime Minister as party president had not built a chain of communication with the different rungs of the party hierarchy, a job in which Indira Gandhi excelled and there by could play off faction against the other, a game which debilitating for the general health of the party helped her to keep a grip over the entire organisation.<sup>149</sup> Gone were the days when Congressmen could stand for some cause or principle in opposition to the leader and when they sought substance of power and not a mere office and the pre-requisites that go with it. The party floated by Pranab Mukherjee and Gundu Rao after exit from Congress(I) did not pose much of a threat to the Congress(I). Dissidence had been a part of Congress culture and it was accentuated after Indira Gandhi ushered in the era of imposed Chief Minister. Healthy debate within the party would have reduced dissident activities and the leadership should have had a positive attitude towards inner-party democracy. To the extent no internal debate was countenanced in the party, it was

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<sup>149</sup> Hari Jaisingh- "India after Indira: The Turbulent Years" (1984-9) (Allied Publishers Ltd., 1989) P.50-51

difficult to see how anybody could raise questions about acts of omission and commission. Without inviting charge of indiscipline, Mukherjee's action in forming the 'Rastriya Samajwadi Congress' was no different from that of Sharad Pawar's in dismantling his Congress (S). Indeed, beginning almost immediately after independence, a large number of people had gone out of it and equally impressive number had periodically come back, these comings and goings had been a regular feature.

In 1987, dissident Congress leaders had stepped up their "co-ordinated activities" to replace Rajiv Gandhi with V.P. Singh as the leader of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party. Some party leaders, apparently at the behest of Singh, had demanded the immediate convening of the CPP (I) for a virtual showdown. In order to pressurise the party leadership, the Rajasthan governor Vasantrao Patil, who had been known to support the dissidents quit his post at the appropriate moment to further the cause of the dissidents <sup>150</sup>. Attempts at splitting the ruling party in Haryana were not unexpected after Devi Lal swept the polls in Haryana throwing the Congress(I) rank and file into a state of shock and confusion. A section of the opposition saw in the situation an opportunity to bring about a change in the government by splitting the party and by rallying the support of Congress(I) dissidents for

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<sup>150</sup> H.K. Dua - 'Congress(I) after Haryana' - Telegraph (21<sup>st</sup> June, 1987)

a second term for Zail Singh. The opposition attempt did not succeed because it could not line up enough people for re-electing Zail Singh. Zail Singh also saw through the impractical nature of the proposition and made it clear to the prime minister and also his friends, that he was not in the race. The crisis was warded off for sometime with, R. Vekataraman on getting elected as the president of India. If the Congress(I) president and prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had entertained any illusion of having weathered the worst of political squalls with the completion of polling for India's presidential elections on July 13<sup>th</sup>, he was wrong. The Congress(I) high command had to expel Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammad Khan and V.C. Shukla from the party. The three men had acted as a group for quite some time and had accepted V.P. Singh as their defacto leader and spokesman<sup>151</sup>. The expulsion order did not elaborate on the anti- party activities nor did it say for how long they were expelled. The expulsion was seen as a demonstration of authority wielded by Rajiv Gandhi as Congress president. Some of his colleagues particularly the younger MP's were pressing him to take disciplinary action against these elements" who they felt were primarily responsible for whipping up an anti- Congress atmosphere"<sup>152</sup>. Two days after rejecting the conditional offer of

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<sup>151</sup> Girilal Jain – "To the Finish :Rajiv Gandhi vs V.P. Singh"- Times of India (11<sup>th</sup> July,1987)

<sup>152</sup> Times of India (16<sup>th</sup> July , 1987)

resignation by V.P.Singh, the Congress President, Rajiv Gandhi expelled the former union minister from the party for anti-party activities on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1987. The action was hailed by central ministers like Dr.Rajendra Kumar Bajpai, Mrs.Ram Dulari Sinha and Ramanand Yadav, and for Kalpanath Rai it was obviously a personal Triumph.It was condemned by the supporters of Singh. V.P.Singh stated that only this action of his could have triggered off his expulsion. "If this was anti-party activity in the minds of some, to my mind it was pro-country activity" Singh observed.<sup>153</sup>

It should be noted that the major cause of decline of the Congress party was the threat from within. When action was taken against Arun Nehru, V.C.Shukla and Arif Mohammad Khan and a little later against V.P.Singh, it was probably thought that, that would silence all dissent and dissidence. But soon enough, the dissent turned into a rebellion. Ram Dhan, Satpal Malik, Manavendra Singh, Raj kumar Rai, Ram Poojan Patel and Chandra Mohan Singh Negi, all important party MP's, raised the banner of revolt demanding a full investigation into the defence deal as the opposition had held that some people at high places had benefited from Kick-backs out of the deal<sup>154</sup>. Indeed it reached

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<sup>153</sup> Surinder Sari – "The Rise of V.P. Singh and the 1989 and 1990 elections" (Konark Publishers Pvt.Ltd.,1990) P.32-33

<sup>154</sup> Madhumita Majumdar-'The Cauldron Boils Over'- (Statesman 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1987)

a stage when the latter group of MP's were virtually challenging the leadership to expel them as it had expelled V.P.Singh and others. The Congress(I) was threatened the most when V.P Singh and his associates left the organisation.

Many had thought that V.P.Singh would play the pied piper, but he could not attract more than a dozen Congress members. But the critics did not relent. They said that this had happened because of the anti-defection legislation. If this was so, why did not anyone leave at the time of elections when scales were evenly balanced?. Instead, as the elections had neared, more people had flocked to the Congress(I) than having left it<sup>155</sup>. After the elections, when the seats tilted in favour of the Janata Dal, no one in the Congress(I) thought of deserting the party. Later V.P.Singh after deserting the Congress became the Prime Minister in 1989 as head of the National Front Ministry. Even during Rajiv Gandhi's period elections were not held and inner-party democracy was throttled. The number of bogus voters enrolled by the dissidents in the states far out numbered the genuine members. The excuse of bogus voters was given in order to avoid democratic elections and bring about internal democracy.

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<sup>155</sup> National Herald (6<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1990)



### **Dissidence – The Post Rajiv Era (1991-1996)**

With the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, Congress (I) was again voted back to power with P.V.Narasimha Rao, the former foreign minister in Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet, becoming the Prime Minister as also the head of the Congress Party. Dissidence which was part of Congress "culture" continued to daunt the party. The most important differences during this period was between Rao and Arjun Singh. Significantly, it was on the Dunkel proposals that the differences between the two had made its appearance. There was opinion within the party that the Congress image of an anti-colonial force might get damaged by submission to the U.S. The new economic policies of Rao was being viewed as deviating from the Nehruvian model. Arjun Singh gave support to this opinion of some of the partymen. The differences sharply emerged at the Tirupati session of the party in 1992. But it was more a symbolic gesture than an actual confrontation, since at the end of it, nothing decisive happened to change the course of the governments new economic policies. But Singh's attempt to adopt a slightly different position than the official line, marked him out as a possible alternative centre of power in the party as a result of this move. The Tirupati session thus witnessed electoral and ideological confrontations among the Congress leaders. But there were not many takers of the arguments against the new economic

policy of Rao. Had the Rao government's economic policies been severely condemned, Arjun Singh would have emerged as a powerful political leader and Rao's position would have been weakened. Since this did not happen, Arjun Singh abandoned the baggage of the Nehruvian Economic Ideology. Arjun Singh tried to identify himself with that part of the Congress tradition which had the image of a anti-colonial and pro-Socialist ideology, there by pushing Rao to look more like the old representative of that stream of Congress politics which ran from Patel, through the syndicate of the 1960's down to the later day champions of economic liberalisation.<sup>156</sup>

Later, Arjun Singh's challenge to Rao was in the manner of assertion of the neglected in the party politics, the related question of a strategy for dealing with the B.J.P, and a bid to broadbase the party leadership.<sup>157</sup> The Singh-Rao tussle concentrated more on how to effectively fight communalism and ensure the nations unity and integrity.<sup>158</sup> The Narasimha Rao government had inherited the Mandi-Masjid controversy from the previous government. Rao made efforts for a negotiated settlement of this highly contentious as well as emotional issue in the party. But his efforts to salvage

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<sup>156</sup> Sumanta Banerjee - 'Narasimha Rao vs Arjun Singh'- Financial Express(9<sup>th</sup> August, 1992)

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Alok Jha- "Pawar vs Rao' Financial Express" (9<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1992)

the situation did not prove futile. Arjun Singh slowly and gradually disassociated himself from Rao's strategy of negotiated settlement regarding the Ayodhya dispute. He adopted a 'secular' ideological plank and in his political struggle he projected himself as the champion of aggressive secularism. Singh was of the opinion that unless the Congress re-dedicates itself to its original ideals of secularism and social justice, it could not regain the requisite organisational strength and people's support to counter the communal threat posed by the BJP and its allies. Rao was following a flexible policy on the Mandir-Masjid controversy. He did not want the BJP to seize the initiative on this controversy and isolate the Congress from the Hindu masses, whose passions had been roused on the construction of the Ram temple. Simultaneously his policy was directed to win over the Muslim masses in this region. However, a section of the Congressmen in the Hindu-speaking belt did not fully subscribe to this policy. These Congressmen were of the view that Rao was following a soft policy towards the BJP. Arjun Singh was articulating the aspirations of this section in the Hindu-speaking belt. Events have show that Rao's consensus-seeking strategy, his extreme forbearance towards the BJP government in U.P was a disaster. The Congress rank and file had no idea how to counter Hinduvta propaganda. This was the main reason why the fire of the BJP directed against Rao.

Arjun Singh had not discovered the issue of secularism or his position of opposition to the B.J.P. was not new or only to embarrass Narasimha Rao. In 1990, for instance, when Rajiv Gandhi was very much in command of the Congress, Arjun Singh had petitioned the Election Commission to derecognise the BJP and freeze its election symbol since the party had used it during L.K.Advani's 'Rath Yatra'.<sup>159</sup> During the post Rajiv phase, he began talking about the need to oppose the B.J.P. when he sensed that the Congress was falling into its trap. Arjun Singh went on to emphasise that since the Congress leadership was not actively campaigning against the B.J.P, Rao should give up the post of party president.<sup>160</sup> Arjun Singh was not only a consistent critic of Rao's policies and leadership style, but an advocate of secular, left leaning "populism". Above all, he was the quintessential Congressman, whose methods, judgements and positions struck chord among party cadres since they represented minimum conditions for the survival of the "Congress system and of the party itself."<sup>161</sup> He thus articulated the demand for change in the Congress's organisational set-up and its opening to different

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<sup>159</sup> Amrita Abraham- "Congress in Retreat Indian Express" (12<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1993) See also Y.S.Gill- Exercise in Stamping out dissidence in congress (I)- (New Age 4<sup>th</sup> April/ 1993)

<sup>160</sup> Kuldip Kumar- "What is this man Waiting for?" (Pioneer 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1993)

<sup>161</sup> Nikhil Chakravarty- 'The urge to Self -Destruct'-(Telegraph 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1993)

currents of opinion.<sup>162</sup> By tactfully playing up the government's poor handling of the investigation, he had sent out a powerful signal to Rajiv loyalists and had won the support of former "Coterie" leaders such as M.L.Fotedar and N.D.Tiwari.<sup>163</sup> Later in addition to the on-going move, he surprised friends and foes alike by quitting the union cabinet. In doing so, he had emerged as the focal point of the anti-Rao sentiment in the Congress. The impact of the key issues raised by him had become more and more pronounced. Although most of the front-ranking Rao loyalists had gone on record to deplore Singh's defiance, quite a number of them, including Rajesh Pilot, Sharad Pawar and A.K.Antony made it a point to agree with the validity of issues posed by the veteran politician from Madhya Pradesh<sup>164</sup>.

In support of Arjun Singh's resignation Tiwari called for a new-look to Congress. By way of this he was only giving a caption to Singh's resignation. But Arjun Singh was not able to attract any more members other than those who were with him in the following days. In the meantime, Rao delivered a coup de main by

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<sup>162</sup> C.P.Bhambhri- 'Arjun's Vaulting ambition'-(Financial Express 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1993)

<sup>163</sup> Sham Lal - 'Dealing with Dissidence'- Times of India(27<sup>th</sup> March 1993)

<sup>164</sup> Mohammad Sayeed Malik - 'The Conflict Within' -Sunday Observer (1<sup>st</sup> Jan, 1995) See also Congress will not Survive the current convulsions Organiser (2<sup>nd</sup> Jan, 1995)

suspending Arjun Singh from the primary membership of the party. He countered every verbal salvo against him until a concerted move was made for a patch-up. In order to further embarrass Rao, Arjun Singh repeatedly talked of Charisma as a vital ingredient of leadership. Coincidentally, he tried to enlist Sonia Gandhi's support in his bid to overthrow Rao.

The Congress Working committee Arjun Singh criticised for indulging in ill-conceived interpretation against the leader and holding him alone responsible for every temporary setback. Arjun Singh tried to create doubts in the minds of the people about the party's commitment to secularism. Organisational elections were held after twenty years, which the rank and file of the party welcomed enthusiastically all over the country. CWC criticised that in spite of the achievements, Arjun Singh's attitude and activity had been those of a confirmed opponent of the party and government. The policies pursued by the Rao government were initiated by Mrs. Gandhi when she returned to office in 1980. They were further given a fillip by Rajiv Gandhi. The Congress working committee declared that Arjun Singh had crossed all boundaries of party discipline and attacked the economic policies of the Government which had the express approval of the Congress working committee, AICC and plenary session <sup>165</sup>.

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<sup>165</sup> Deccan Herald (29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1995) See also Surandra Mohan-The nature of the Crisis the Congress (I). (Janata, May, 1995).

There was public display of differences within the Congress leadership- some clamouring, for drastic action against Arjun Singh, others supporting the resigned minister. There was a third group by Karunakaran, Pawar and Pilot who had emerged on the unity issue between the two groups. The Congress president and his supporters were of the view that the leaders who were talking about unity move were playing their own games to enhance their respective positions in the party<sup>166</sup>. Hard-liners in the Rao camp and strategists in the Arjun camp worked in such a manner so as to finish each other. Arjun Singh drew his support from the various types of dissidents, as well as all the left outs in the states and the centre. Rao's strength was in his position as Prime Minister and Congress president. The Rao camp wanted suspension to expulsion and emphasised that delay in expulsion would deliver a more serious blow to the party as the situation would allow Arjun Singh to have manoeuvrability in garnering the support of dissidents.<sup>167</sup>

Finally it was decided to expel Arjun Singh from the party after some delay. This marked the end of a particular phase of the internal conflict for some time. But at the same time, the

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<sup>166</sup> M.D.Nalapat- 'There is Dissidence in the Air'- Pioneer (10<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1995)

<sup>167</sup> Dina Nath Mishra - 'The Great Uncertainty' Observer (3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, 1995)

supporters of Arjun Singh gave voice to their demand that Rao should step down from the party post and that Singh be taken back into the party. But this was quite unpalatable to the leadership<sup>168</sup>. Since no positive result was forthcoming the rebel group declared themselves the "real Congress" on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1995 and installed N.D.Tiwari as its president at the Congress worker's convention being called for the purpose. Singh and all others who were either expelled or suspended from the Congress by Rao were revoked. The rebel Congress also adopted the nomenclature of the Indian National Congress(I). Stressing that they were not splitting the Congress, Singh said; we do not want to split the Congress but the Congress workers assembled felt that the leadership had failed to fulfill its responsibility. In view of the leadership failure, the Congress workers take this responsibility and without splitting the Congress agree to the INC (I)<sup>169</sup>. Even when Arjun Singh formed a new party the majority of the Congress (I) members remained with Rao. This was because they did not see either Arjun Singh or Tiwari as vote fetching alternatives, nor did they had the hope of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi joining the rebel party.

The entire case that Arjun Singh was pitted against Rao was mainly due to lack of internal democracy in the party. Rao's policy

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<sup>168</sup> Prakash Patra – "The Point of No Return' Pioneer" (10<sup>th</sup> May, 1995)

<sup>169</sup> Hindustan Times (20<sup>th</sup> May 1995)



to curb dissent in the name of discipline confirmed it. The fact that the organisational elections had not been held after 1992 gave credence to the argument that Rao did not want any real centre of power to grow within the party. By providing pinpricks to the leadership and promoting dissidence in the party, Singh had not been helping the Congress (I) in any way. Not that there should not be any dissent in the party but the way of differing with leadership should not appear to be a clarion call for a war of attrition. He was certainly right in some respects, particularly with regard to his views on how the party should be rejuvenated, but the manner as well as the timing of his criticism of Mr Rao had not been commendable. He resigned from the council of ministers after the party's debacle in the Assembly polls in the south. Besides, a leader of experience and acumen should have realised what harm his vicious attacks on Rao would cause to both Government and party<sup>170</sup>. The expulsion of Singh was an indication of the Congress President and Prime Minister Rao re-asserting his position and power. The CWC as usual went through the ritualistic exercise of reposing its faith in the leadership of Rao and emphasised the need to maintain strict discipline in the party. Going by the tradition of the Congress, no leader would allow an alternative power centre to emerge in the party. Nor has the

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<sup>170</sup> Hindustan Times (8<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1995) See also Rao led Government and Party in doldrums Monthly Commentary on Indian Economic Conditions.

concept of "collective responsibility" ensured smooth functioning of the party in the past. A stalwart like Nehru could not tolerate elected party presidents who tried to impose themselves. He virtually got rid of leaders like Acharya J.B.Kripalini and Purushottam Das Tandon by forcing them to resign from the party posts. Once in power through the help of syndicates, Indira Gandhi had to struggle hard against the very regional bosses who had helped her.

In the meantime, the relations between Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and Rao got strained, because of the delay by the government in the Rajiv Assassination probe. "Congress MPs were desperate that Rao mend fences with Sonia. They felt if differences sharpened between them it would be counterproductive for the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls of 1996. But Rao was banking on his policies and electoral arithmetic to win to swim through electoral challenges. He was quite convinced that his economic policies would give him a headstart. Added to this was the Rao Camp estimates that the electors would be a sizeable number of MPs returning to the Lok Sabha under their banner which would give them a formidable bargaining position in the event of regional alliances, if the Congress failed to secure a clear majority."<sup>171</sup> Rao found it impossible to concede to the conditions of the patch up

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<sup>171</sup> Patriot (29<sup>th</sup> August, 1996).

with Sonia Gandhi which meant taking both Arjun Singh and Tiwari back into the Congress apart from allowing 1- Janpath confidantes to have a say in the distribution of tickets for the election. The differences had not been over policy matters but rift had been personalised at the factional level.

Due to differences with the party leadership G.K.Moopnar, P.Chidambaran and also Madhav Rao Scindia left the Congress. The differences were mainly because the party had become the "pocket edition of one individual" under Rao.<sup>172</sup> The party organisation had become gradually weakened because of this arbitrary manner of functioning of the leadership. The dissidents charged the Prime Minister with misusing the official machinery to finish those who were perceived to pose any kind of threat to his leadership. They had demanded that the party should re-establish itself with Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. The leadership on the other hand did not pay attention to party work. Differences over issues or personal differences resulted in suspensions or expulsions.<sup>173</sup> This trend should have been avoided through meaningful debates and discussions to ward off differences. Sharpening his attack on Rao, Scindia said that Rao did not pay any attention to party work, so some rethinking was needed.

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<sup>172</sup> Times of India (4<sup>th</sup> August, 1996)

<sup>173</sup> Rasheed Kidwai-'Tricolour' Spectrum, (Telegraph 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1996)

Corruption was at the helm of affairs during Rao's period. In order to cleanse party Rao suspended Sukh Ram from the primary membership of the party for having being tainted in the telecom scandal. But in the meantime the Congress president himself became a co-accused in cheating case. This gave his detractors an opportunity to step up their efforts to seek his resignation saying that he had become a liability for the party. Dissidents in the Congress working committee asked the party president Rao to name his successor and make a dignified exit from his post. Six CWC members had written to the party chief to step down to maintain unity in the party.<sup>174</sup> They also requested Rao to convene an AICC session immediately to elect a party leader and discuss the political situation. Rao loyalists were of the view that there was no need for change in the leadership.<sup>175</sup> They stressed on the need to strengthen the organisation and maintain unity.<sup>176</sup> Later in a significant political move, Congress working committee member Rajesh Pilot distanced himself from dissident CWC members. He was against a split in the party and appealed for unity.

Having failed to dislodge Rao on grounds of political senility the rebels had turned in desperation to corruption as a stick to

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<sup>174</sup> Times of India (10<sup>th</sup> July, 1996)

<sup>175</sup> Raj Mohan Gandhi-"The Dying Congress"- Muslim India (Nov' 1996)

<sup>176</sup> Statesman (22<sup>nd</sup> Aug, 1996)

beat Rao with. To a large extent, this change of dissident tactics had been influenced by the myriad scandals threatening the Congress president. Indeed it was Rao who himself sought to play the corruption card, when on the eve of the general elections he used hawala diaries to knock of his political rivalries.<sup>177</sup> At that time the Congress spokesman V.N.Gadgil had gone to the extent of describing Rao as the 'Clean' of Indian politics. Finally under pressure Rao gave up the Congress presidentship and Sitaram Kesri succeeded him. But he did not give up his position as the leader of the Congress parliamentary party.<sup>178</sup> Except for one or two loyalists like Pranab Mukharjee, none even whispered in his favour, when the working committee met to decide on his forced offer of resignation from the Presidentship. In short, Rao's five year term was the characterised by a long procession of leaders, leaving the party. Even though the organizational election were held after a gap of 20 years in 1992, it was not held after the Rao's period. Differences made the party leadership come down heavily on dissidents in the party. Differences over ideology/policies of the government resulted in senior leaders to form rebel groups. At the same time personal differences with the leadership also led many leaders to leave the party. Overall, dissident activities during Rao's

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<sup>177</sup> Pioneer (16<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1996)

<sup>178</sup> Pioneer (16<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1996)

period was due to ideological differences as well as due to personality clashes.<sup>179</sup>

### **Dissidence (1996-1999)**

Kesri took over as the congress president from Rao in 1996. He started the move to bring back to the party the many leaders who were thrown out by the old regime. Scindia had returned back to the Congress (I) fold. The Congress president also revoked the suspension of leaders like Fotedar, Shiela Dikshsit, and K.N.Singh, who incurred gave displeasure of the old leadership led by Rao by stressing their "one- man- one- post" demand.<sup>180</sup> After welcoming Scindia back into the Congress fold, Kesri opened the door for the return of Bangarappa. Later the party president officially readmitted Tiwari, Arjun singh, Kumaramangalam, and Mohsina Kidwai back to the congress (I). Tiwari and Arjun Singh were re-admitted into the party by Kesri to check the growing ambition of Sharad Pawar.

Over the years there is a marked absence of internal democracy in the Congress (I). To most Congressmen, the very idea of organizational elections was a strange one. Yet in the post-

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<sup>179</sup> Deccan Herald (18<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1996) See also-The Battle royal in the congress (I) Janata (24<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1996)

<sup>180</sup> Tribune (28<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1996)

dynasty phase, organisational elections, became the obvious route to democratic legitimacy within and outside the party. The Congress or for that matter any other party had not devised any other principle on which legitimacy could be established. Therefore when Kesri became the provisional Congress president in September 1996, it was taken as logical and natural, that he get his leadership ratified in a proper internal election.<sup>181</sup> Indeed the party was committed to holding the organisational elections even before the leadership change. Kesri had no choice but to submit himself to the test of organisational acceptability. While he never expressed himself against the idea, Kesri did not appear to many to be keen on getting himself elected in a proper internal election. Irrespective of Kesri's presumed reluctance, the Election Commission had made it its business to see to it that the Congress (I) as well as other political parties go through the motion of organisational elections.

When Rao was made to give up his position as the leader of the Congress parliamentary party, that position also went to Kesri, primarily because most party leaders wanted to block Pawar and Rajesh Pilot from coming to power. Nonetheless the CPP election did not seem to settle the internal equations within the party. Frustrated anti-Kesri leaders began hobnobbing with the then

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<sup>181</sup> Harish Khare - 'The Struggle Within' The Hindu (11<sup>th</sup> May, 1997)

united front prime Minister Deva Gowda, with the idea of embroiling Kesri in legal controversies, leading to the unsavory developments which saw the ouster of Gowda regime.<sup>182</sup> To the extent that party elections are meant to redefine the leadership equations, Kesri's success in showing Gowda the door nonetheless produced an all-round desperation among the Congress leaders. It was obvious to one and all that being the incumbent President even if only a provisional one gave Kesri a tremendous built-in advantage.<sup>183</sup> The strategic dilemma for most pretenders to the title of "senior leaders" was whether to get on the right side of Kesri or establish themselves as "challengers". But to be a successful challenger meant having a countrywide acceptability among the Congressmen, a quality no one, not even Pawar or Pilot could honestly claim to possess. Leaders such as K.Karunakaran, Vijayabhaskara Reddy, A.K.Antony, Jitendra prasad, Ahmed patel and others knew that they did not have enough acceptability to challenge Kesri and therefore decided early enough to cast their support for him. Even Pawar was shrewd enough to realise that he had miles to go before he would be acceptable as a leader in the Congress. So he announced that he would not be a candidate for the presidentship. However, that did not mean that he was debarred from encouraging and abetting all those who wanted to

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Decan Herald (12<sup>th</sup> May, 1997)



take potshots at Kesri,<sup>184</sup> Pawar found a willing accomplice in A.R.Antulay, a life-critic of Kesri. So the day after Gowda took on Kesri during the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha on April 11<sup>th</sup>, Antulay jumped into the anti-Kesri camp. With a lot of encouragement from Pawar, he announced his willingness to enter the fray against Kesri. Though the Rao group stood somewhat demoralised in the wake of the charge sheeting of the former Prime Minister, it had pinned its hopes on Pilot and his ambition to take over the Congress party. But eventually Kesri emerged victorious.

At the same time cracks within some state units of the Congress had been increasingly visible. While West Bengal's two feuding leaders Ms. Mamata Banerjee and PCC Chief Somen Mitra had left no one in doubt who he was fighting against, the feuding was by no means confined to West Bengal and Bihar. Such dissidence was of course not a new phenomenon. However its present manifestation had undermined the credibility of the party in states where its position was not too bad. The familiar refrain of the dissident leaders everywhere was that there was no party organisation with the name at the grassroots level. Some leaders had raised the issue of lack of inner-party democracy. Given the bickering, some of the PCC chiefs and other office bearers had been replaced. It was a different matter though that the party was

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<sup>184</sup> Deccan Herald (12<sup>th</sup> May, 1997)

in such dire straits that it cannot be revamped by merely changing hands. The party had of course, come up with grandiose plans from time to time to rejuvenate it, but much of the window-dressing had failed to yield the desired results.<sup>185</sup> What caused the real headache to the central leaders was the banner of revolt raised by Ms. Banerjee. She had called the AICC plenary session in Calcutta "multi-core circus" and held a parallel meeting. Unfortunately for Kesri, Mamata Banerjee, who had boycotted the Congress organisational polls, planned to strike back just at a time when the Congress president wished to present the picture of a united and strong Congress. Mamata openly accused Kesri of making a deal with C.P.M to capture power at the Centre.<sup>186</sup> Her grass root level support in West Bengal, was stronger than that of any other state Congress leader including Somen Mitra, against whom she had been in a factional fight. She was a mass leader who was capable of gathering a massive crowd, and had carried on a relentless campaign against the Left Front government. Some of the points raised by Ms.Banerjee and others such as Congress support to the Gujral Government while the party was pitted against constituent units of the United Front in states were not without merit. But dissident leaders outburst against the Central

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<sup>185</sup> Hindustan Times (5<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1997)

<sup>186</sup> Tilak Gupta -'Mamata's parrallel Leadership' News Time (30<sup>th</sup>, July 1997).

leadership were damaging the party to the delight of its opponents.<sup>187</sup>

Since the dissident activities were getting stronger the Congress President Kesri weilded the axe to expel Ms. Mamata Banerjee and risked the wrath of Mrs.Sonia Gandhi, who had brokered the aborted truce with the West Bengal rebel, barely a few hours after she "disassociated herself from the Congress leadership under Kesri.<sup>188</sup> Kesri expelled Ms. Banerjee for six years and suspended two of her lieutenants Sudhip Bandopadhyay and Shobhandev Chathopadhyay. Ms.Banerjee later formed her "Trinamul Congress" and made it clear that she would try to rope in as many dispirited Congressmen as possible. Mani Shankar Aiyar who had pioneered the "disassociatory handshake by distancing himself from Kesri Congress was also welcomed in her party<sup>189</sup>. Mamata Banerjee who swore by the Gandhi-Nehru family, gave in to Sonia, but turned on a dime as soon as she realised that formula would not allow her any say in ticket distribution. The Pradesh Election Committee headed by state Congress chief Somen Mitra was dissolved and instead Ms.Banerjee was made the chief of an "electioneering Committee"

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<sup>187</sup> Seema Mustafa- 'Ghost of Ayodhya Split the Congress' Asian Age (25<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1997)

<sup>188</sup> Telegraph (23<sup>rd</sup> Dec, 1997)

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

which had no more say than running the campaign. By expelling Mamata Banerjee, the Congress President signalled that he would not tolerate rank indiscipline and dissidence regardless of the patronage extended to the dissidents by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. Justifying Mamata Banerjee's expulsion, the AICC general secretary Oscar Fernandez said "we tried for a settlement, but if somebody insisted on violating party discipline, we had to take action"<sup>190</sup> The Congress suffered another major setback when two of its members Ajit Kumar Panja and Krishna Bose quit the party and joined Mamata's "Trinamul Congress."

The political impact of the Ms. Bannerjee's expulsion lies in Kesri's assertion of his authority, even at the cost of displeasing Sonia Gandhi who had intervened in the West Bengal Pradesh Committee dispute and sold a patch-up formula to Ms. Bannerjee. If Sonia Gandhi would have succeeded in making peace, it would have opened the floodgates for potential dissidents seeking to by Kesari. If the leadership gave into Ms. Bannerjee demands, other in her position would have been emboldened to approach Sonia Gandhi to sort out problems. Even though Sitaram Kesri gave up his presidentship for Mrs.Sonia Gandhi, the party was still not free from factional fights. This time it was a factional fight of a different kind which the party had not witnessed earlier. The Congress

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<sup>190</sup> Telegraph (23Dec1997)

working committee members Sharad Pawar, P.A.Sangma and Tariq Anwar questioned Sonia Gandhi's credentials to be projected as Prime Ministerial candidate of the party in view of her foreign origin. Virtually revolting against her leadership, in a four-page letter addressed to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi they said "it was not possible for a country of 980 million, with a wealth of education, competence and ability to have anyone other than an Indian born of Indian soil, to head its government".<sup>191</sup> "India was a country with a history and tradition going back to thousands of years. It was a country which was self-sufficient in every sense of the word." Appreciating Sonia's efforts to rejuvenate the party organisation, they expected her to continue as the Congress president. The dissidents demanded that the Congress manifesto for the coming Lok Sabha elections should suggest "an amendment to the constitutions so that the office of the president, vice-president and prime minister of India could only be held by natural Indian citizens."<sup>192</sup> Since such a demand had been made by the B.J.P also, the dissidents were accused of colliding with communal forces and working out a plan to harm the party's electoral prospects. At a meeting held at the residence of Pranab Mukharjee, 17 CWC members decided to take a tough stand against the rebels. While the rebels appeared to be in no mood to

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<sup>191</sup> Times of India (17 May, 1999)

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

relent, the party leadership also was unlikely to let the revolt go unpunished. The party was now shown to be divided from the top.

Since opposition was brewing up, later on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the Congress working committee found itself railroaded into expelling Sharad Pawar, Sagma, and Tariq Anwar from the primary membership of the Congress(I) for six years. The moderates in the working committee were overruled. If anyone wanted to make a dissent, the crowd shouting outside the working committee enclave silenced them with overbearing force. It was claimed understandably, that the Congress had been rid of impurities and that the party stood solidly behind Sonia's leadership. The carefully cranked up demonstrations of support for Sonia and indignation against Pawar did achieve the purpose of bringing about a kind of emotional bonding within the party. In the meantime Sonia Gandhi submitted her resignation, as result of the stand of the rebels against her. Sonia's "resignation was sought to be portrayed as an act of renunciation and did help erase, even if only partly, the image she had acquired of late of a "woman in hurry " to grab power.<sup>193</sup> In a sense Sonia Gandhi seemed to have adopted a style different from that of Indira Gandhi or even Rajiv Gandhi in dealing with rebels within. Rather

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<sup>193</sup> Harish Khare - 'Winning the Battle, Losing the War' The Hindu (23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1999)

than picking up the gamble and serving the rebels with summary expulsion orders the way Indira Gandhi dealt with the syndicate and Rajiv Gandhi with V.P. Singh, Sonia Gandhi simply withdrew from the scene just when the first stone was thrown at her and watched the revolt being quelled by others. But all these gains became insignificant compared to the strategic losses for Sonia and Congress: for the first time, she had become the cause of division and discontent rather than the force of unity and enthusiasm. Mrs.Sonia Gandhi's finest achievement was that ever since she allowed herself to take over the Congress(I) on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1998, she had not only brought about a new kind of energy, but also enthused a number of individuals and groups to come back to the Congress(I). Having seen as stopping the internal bleeding, she became the instrument of organizational bleeding. The rebels themselves acknowledged her role in their letter. "Your presence in the party gave it new life .The disintegration stopped. Congressmen started returning to the fold".<sup>194</sup> But she could not reach a compromise with the rebels to settle the issue. Absence of inner-party democracy had aggravated the situation.

In 1998, these same rebel leaders joined hands in a conspiracy to get rid of Kesri, and install in his place Sonia Gandhi as President of the party. The same articles XIX (J) of the Congress

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<sup>194</sup> The Hindu (23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1999) Hindu (27<sup>th</sup> May 1999)

constitution that was used to install Sonia had been used to throw out Pawar, Sangma and Anwar.<sup>195</sup> The replacement of Kesri was sought to be justified on the ground that the announcement of his intention to resign had created a dangerous and incapable organisational void, and that a major political party could not tolerate that kind of uncertainty, was later talking about the uncertainty created by Sonia's announcement of her resignation. This internal aberration apart, the rebel departure had immediate political consequences. Not only had Sonia Gandhi been shown to the cause of division and splits, the Congress(I) had also lost its trump card as the party of stability.<sup>196</sup>

Expelled Congress leaders floated a political party- the "Nationalist Congress Party". Claiming that they were the "real Congress", the dissidents said the "Nationalist" nomenclature had been used to drive home the point that they were forced to leave the Congress which was led by foreign-born Sonia Gandhi. The hard-liners had throttled the moderate voices within the party to lend support to the personality cult. Inner-party democracy should have been stepped up within the party to prevent the leaders from learning the party. At the same time it could be understand that even though the leaders claim to have differences

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<sup>195</sup> The Hindu (23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1999)

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.



with the party leadership a spell of personnel motives seem to have been behind the departures. The party leadership should have played a more mature role in such a situation. But it failed. Thus it could be understood that inspite of having Sonia Gandhi at the helm of affairs she could not stop factionalism within the party.

### **Conclusion**

Factionalism is a virus eaten into the body of the Congress party for a long time. Whenever a party has ruled for such a long time as has the Congress party, it develops an internal identifiable structures of factions. During the period of Nehru, there was dissidence, but debates within the Congress over political, ideological, domestic or foreign policy issues existed to ward out differences. As a political organisation, Congress used to accommodate varied interests within the party itself, since opposition at that time was weak. In 1969, when the first split took place, it was stated to be a split on ideological grounds. But it may well be understood that personal ambition was the prime motive behind the split. The second split of 1978 was also the result of extending personal power. During the period of Mrs.Indira Gandhi, the party lacked inner-party democracy and opposition of all kinds was stifled. This pattern reached its height with the imposition of Emergency in 1975. All power was concentrated in the hands of a single individual. Chief ministers

and even PCC chiefs were appointed by the High command. Even when Mrs. Gandhi had agreed to rejuvenate the party and bring about devolution of power, it did not prove successful. Even the states were faction-ridden and they looked towards the central leadership for settlement of disputes. And above all, democratic elections were not held after 1972 during Indira Gandhi's period.

Later during the period of Rajiv Gandhi, dissident activities continued resulting in several suspensions and expulsions. Dissident Congress leaders had stepped up "co-ordinated activities" to replace Rajiv Gandhi With V.P.Singh. But this did not prove successful and led to expulsion of V. P Singh and his followers from the party. With the brutal assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, Narasimha Rao emerged as the Congress Chief. There was a triangular tussle for power between Rao, Arjun Singh and Sharad Pawar, which later led Arjun Singh and N.D Tiwari to leave the Congress and form an alternative political party. In the meantime, leading Congress leaders like Moopanar, Chidambaram and Madhav Rao Scindia left the Congress due to differences with Narasimha Rao. Scindia later came back to the Congress fold with the change of the Congress President. These dissident activities led to Rao's resignation, as Kesri had to take the mantle of the Congress President. One of the major dissident activities during the period of Kesri as Congress president was that of Ms. Mamata

Banerjee, who left the Congress to form Trinamul Congress. Later with the oust of Kesri, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi who took over as the Congress President to bring about unity in the de-moralised and faction - ridden party. But the result was not positive. Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar stepped up factionalism in the party by questioning her credibility for the post of Prime ministership in case the Congress came back to power, because of her foreign origin. This led to the expulsion of the trio from the party. The lack of inner-party democracy, along with lack of commitment to ideology and personal motives have led to the increase in dissident activities within the organisation during the period of the study. A careful analysis would reveal that the personal ambitions have, in most of the cases, led to dissident activities in the party. Even if ideological differences have been quoted as reasons for tussles within the party, it was personal ambitions of most of the leaders, which have led to splits and defections in the party. Lack of democratic means of discussions and debates coupled with absence of elections have led to the increase in dissident activities within the organisation or a long period of time. This trend has resulted in the decay of the party. If it is not checked, the Congress(I) would find it difficult to survive.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

#### Revitalising the Organisation

After independence, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the party had adequate transmission mechanism – organisational instruments which enabled it to know the mood of the people and their problems. More importantly, it is through these transmission channels that people exerted pressure on the Congress leadership to evolve its policies which reflected the aspirations of the people. For certain historical reasons, these transmission lines were weakened and consequently the gulf between the top leader and the rank and file Congressmen considerably widened.

Equally important is the fact that although the Congress, and especially Jawaharlal Nehru, had been passionately attached to the democratic political party system, the party slowly though surely became a highly centralised organ of political power. In this process the instruments of party organisation were weakened and the party began to lean heavily on the popularity of its outstanding leaders. That being the position, when the most popular and outstanding leaders of the party were assassinated, the party was

thrown into a serious crisis. The decline of the party is not a recent phenomenon which erupted only during the time of Sonia Gandhi or even of Kesri or Narasimha Rao. It had started during the time of their predecessors – very much from the time of Mrs. Indira Gandhi who had embraced all powers in her hands. In the Indira era which lasted roughly for a decade-and half – barring a brief intrusion of the Janata Party rule during which too she soon managed to regain political initiative, the party not only had no elections but everything in the sphere of policy and practice was left in the hands of the supreme leader. Having blunted the weapon of mass activity that the Congress party could have provided, Indira Gandhi resorted to administrative action against the rising challenge of mass discontent. That was how the Emergency was resorted to. It turned out to be politically suicidal, as it contributed towards the Congress party losing in 1977 its uninterrupted monopoly of power for 30 years since 1947. It should be noted here that Sanjay Gandhi had emerged as a powerful factor in Indian politics in June 1975 regardless of whether or not he was primarily responsible for the declaration of internal emergency then. And his influence in the affairs of the Congress did not decline with its defeat in March 1977. On the contrary, it can be said to have increased in that he played a key role first in persuading Mrs. Gandhi to split the party in January

1978, then in bringing down the Janata government and finally in selecting the Congress (I) nominees for election to the Lok Sabha in January 1980.

Although there were voices within the Congress party, however muffled, underlining the need for proper party functioning, these particular aspect of the experience of the Emergency was ignored by the Congress leadership, particularly by the supremo as she returned to power in 1980. Rather, the party was allowed to drift and disintegrate with disastrous consequences. Thus it could be understood that from the early 1970s, the decay of the organization began, and the style of decision-making became increasingly adhoc and arbitrary. And, this brought an increasing tendency towards substitution of personal for institutional channels of communication. Infact, within the party itself the establishment and non-establishment sectors had come to operate. The growing discontent among the ranks had affected the party's functioning at the various levels. In reality, the party units below the Pradesh Committee levels existed only in name. These committees were more in the nature of pressure groups than a link between the rulers and the ruled. In most cases they were propped up by the ministers to demonstrate the popular support they commanded in their respective areas. The party had become a 'one-leader' party. Indira Gandhi's

penchant for cutting people down to size before they had a chance to flower had encouraged sycophancy. This culture of sycophancy, dubbed as the “Congress Culture” had come to haunt the party during her period.

There were of course, party committees in the districts, but they have not functioned with sufficient vigour. In parliamentary democracy every where great importance is attached to functioning of the local wings of the party. It is an essential part of the party management and organisational work. It is these local bodies that brings into sharp focus the problems and difficulties of the rural areas with the party high command. The need for party work at the grassroot level was imperative. The party was changed from a bottom - up party to a top-down organisation. There was lack of inner-party democracy, since decisions were taken at the higher level and passed on to the lower levels. Gross violation of party discipline could have been averted if the party worked on democratic lines. Local level programme - based campaigns were a necessary concomitant to ensure broad-based functioning of political cadres. There should have been full scale discussion among members of the people which were hardly held. A strong grassroots organisation had not developed since the 1969 split.

Between 1980 and 1984, only two AICC sessions (1980 in New Delhi and 1983 in Bombay) were held and the plenary only

once in 1983 in Calcutta. There was no formal AICC session in 1984, although Congressmen met at least thrice in closed sessions in New Delhi and the party's front organisations (students, women and trade unions). The manner in which the three closed sessions were convened held marked a departure from the traditional "AICC culture" the closed sessions were organised on a selective basis and held in camera. One session was for DCC and taluk level functionaries, another for MPs and MLAs and the third for party PCC Presidents and activists in various organisations. The top brass of the party did not come in direct contact with the participants. Selected MPs and Ministers were appointed to liaise with them and submit an evaluation report to the Committee of General Secretaries who in turn reported to the Congress President. The only merit for such procedural change was that it did away with the Central Parliamentary Board and the Working Committee which had no role to play and thus were detached from policy-making.

Between 1971 (when the party split) and 1975 (the year of the emergency) there were at least three AICC sessions annually, and at each of these sessions policies used to be recommended to the government for implementation. (The 1972 AICC session in New Delhi had the distinction of endorsing the central take-over of wheat trade and the 1973 session of rejecting it!) In a sense,



during these periods, policy formulation had not been the role of the party. Most of the discussions within the party, at whatever level, had been on organisational matters rather than on ideological.

It is nobody's case that factionalism will evaporate once nominated party committees are duly replaced by elected ones and leaders of the legislature parties are elected by a majority or selected on the basis of a genuine consensus. But there is reason to think that the adoption of the established democratic procedures would atleast have helped contain the problems. For elected office-bearers normally command greater respect among the rank and file than the nominated ones. No political party can of course, hope to remain in business unless a strong central leadership exercised effective control over its affairs. But this need not involve negation of inner-party democracy. In western democracies, all political parties maintain a strict regimen of periodic elections and serious debates on public issues. Political parties need to combine effective central leadership with democratic functioning.

Under Rajiv Gandhi, the expectations about the possibility of the revival of the Congress were roused after his speech at the centenary session of the party in Bombay at the end of the first year of his leadership. But the promise was not followed up by

action, and all the talk of activating the party remained mostly on paper. If Rajiv Gandhi had aimed his fire only at the power brokers it might have been thought that he only wanted to replace an inherited coterie with one of his own choice and that would have only amounted to a change of power brokers, not the scattering of their system. But he also promised democracy, and because there is a nexus between the end of democracy in the party and the rise of the power brokers, it was rightly assumed that he meant to root out the system of brokerage for good. The nexus becomes clear if one traces the ancestry of the coterie system back to the “Sanjay brigade” of the late 1970s, then to the “kitchen cabinet” of the late 1960s, then farther back to the “syndicate”, and still farther back to the “old guard”.

Even though it is understood that the decline did not begin with Narsimha Rao, his own contributions to this were significant. The party’s alienation from the social segments that stood by it had preceded the Rao era. Even though the organisational elections were completed when Rao took up he was not able to complete the constitution of his working committee. The parliamentary board did not exist, even though Rao was supposed to constitute it. The CWC and the CPB are the two highest organisational forums of the Congress (I). Narasimha Rao’s great default was not that he failed to re-build institutions destroyed

during the time of his predecessors. Congressmen wouldn't have allowed him to do that. His failure lay in showing the political will to utilise the institutions on which he had control to resolve conflicts and initiate programmes. Thus, instead of leading the Congressmen into a new habit relying on their own strength and performance to establish themselves in politics, Rao withdrew himself into a cocoon and events drifted to a state where he came to be looked upon as a liability for the party.

In a sense, the Congress decline had begun three decades ago; the decline was caused not because any of its leaders lacked charisma or because there was corruption in high places. Indeed, if corruption was the issue, then it defies logic how such leaders and parties, particularly the anti-Congress formations, had managed not only to capture power but had remained alive and consolidated their bases. Even a cursory glance at the various inquiries that were carried out against the leaders of various non-Congress outfits since the Sixties would show that in most if not all cases, the charges of corrupt deals were substantial and yet such leaders and their parties did not fade into history.

Unlike the past, the Congress leadership and the Congress organisation do not have any shock-absorbing capacity to withstand the inevitable onslaught of the forces which are getting unleashed under the impact of a sharp polarisation in the polity. It

is no use blaming any particular leader for the state in which the party finds itself. If the decline was not so obvious at the time of Rajiv Gandhi and even Indira Gandhi, it was only because the Opposition parties were not ready to fill the vacuum and also because the so-called “charisma” of the Nehru-Gandhi family, its ability to marshal in a harvest of votes at the time of elections, served to gloss over the time of organisational weaknesses.

One has only to look at a few facts; one, the party held no organisational elections for 20 years from 1972; two, Indira Gandhi systematically destroyed all State-level leaders of the party who had any grassroots following to ensure that no one grew to challenge her; three, the Congress “high command” encouraged sycophancy to the extreme; four, a dynastic rule was imposed on the party (and the country) in complete contradiction to the idea of a strong party drawing its strength from a strong democratic tradition; five a major jolt to the party was given by the Emergency –in the 1977 elections it reached its nadir of 34.5 per cent of the overall national vote; and six, the long years of Congress rule in the country had led it to believe that the party was the law of the land, that it could indulge in corruption and loot without any fear whatsoever-Bofors, the securities scam, the Sukh Ram affairs the sugar scandal and the urea scam are all pointers.

Even Kesri after taking charge seemed to be worried about only one thing, how to make absolutely sure that he was elected party president for a full term. To help achieve this he sacked the presidents and other office bearers of several Pradesh Congress Committees and even went to the extent of sacking the district level committees. The PCC (I)s in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra and several other states had been “revamped” with nominated ad hoc presidents heading the high command over the years from the time of Indira Gandhi. The one message that went down loud and clear was that Kesri was no different from his predecessors.

The Congress (I) has been a personality-oriented party all its life. It drew its sustenance from the dynasty-the dynasty of Nehru. Today, as the Congress was no more the umbrella and had lost the support of most people, it was, willy-nilly forced to fall back on the personality cult. Hence the pressure on Sonia Gandhi to revive the Congress (I) after her take over. The task faced by Congress (I) under Sonia Gandhi is really a daunting one. The real revitalisation of Congress is not possible unless the party structure is overhauled; old type leaders removed; intra-party democracy established; organisational elections held; and local and regional leadership allowed to develop. The Congress as a whole has shied away from coming to grips with the changing

requirements of economy and politics in an increasingly globalised and internet worked world. This disdain for ideas, in fact, goes hand in hand with the neglect of organisation and organisational men. The main threat to the Congress today comes not from the others but from its own sloppy ways in running its affairs.

Nowadays, one leader cannot accept the leadership of another. There is no single State in which group politics is not practised by Congressmen. Had inner party democracy been followed by conducting periodic elections from the bottom to the top level, group politics could have been avoided. Many Congress Chief Ministers and PCC presidents cannot continue for a full term of office, since none of them is elected through the proper forum, but only foisted by the high command.

Thus it could be understood that the change in the party was dramatic after the passing away of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964. Congress units in almost all states were radically transformed between 1967 and 1972. The new cadres underwent little political socialisation and were accustomed to the use of weapons to achieve ends. As Rajni Kothari has noted, Mrs. Indira Gandhi shifted the institutional basis of Indian politics from the party system to the state apparatus. Even within the state apparatus, Indira Gandhi gave the Centre primacy over the federal structure. In fact, the Prime Minister's secretariat emerged as the focus of

national politics. There was no organisation worth its name from the formation of Congress (I). If the Congress was strong and resilient enough, this centralisation of power might have been resisted. Unfortunately it was not and the results have been disastrous. This process was continued throughout the period of her successors also. The centralisation of decision-making powers and absence of inner-party democracy led to the disintegration of the once-a-great organisation. Thus the organisational decline has been a major factor in the Congress losing its position in the electoral politics of India.

An analysis of the first four general elections from 1952-1967 shows that it was held under one party dominant system. The one party dominance of the Congress meant that the elections in this period were not seriously competitive in this period marked by a low level of electoral participation. The choice was between the omnipresent Congress and its regionally fragmented opposition; often the opposition came from within the Congress. Electoral loyalties were fixed at the national level unless the constituency level preferences dictated short-term deviations from it. The voter of course did not vote as an individual, but rather as a member of politicised 'jati'. Next to the candidates party, their jati had some effect on the voting behaviour. In social terms the castes that enjoyed the benefits of early entry into modern

education or early politicisation through the national movement or both dominated the list of elected representatives. The 1967 elections had already signalled a transition, for the monopoly of the Congress and the savarna jatis was challenged for the first time in north India. The process had started much earlier in the south.

Although Indira Gandhi's unprecedented electoral victory in the 1971 election was initially seen as the restoration of the Congress dominance, in retrospect that election looks like a beginning of the second electoral system. The apparent continuity of the Congress was deceptive; the Congress that Indira Gandhi led to power in 1971 was a new party that had to negotiate a new terrain of electoral politics. The move towards the new system was triggered off by the first democratic upsurge in the late 1960s. The upsurge brought a great many new entrants from the 'middle' castes or the OBCs into the game of electoral politics and turned it truly competitive. Congress was no longer the single dominant party but throughout the 1970s it continued to be the natural party of governance, the pole around which electoral competition was organised. The success or the failure of the attempts by the 'opposition' to put up a united front against the Congress, made a decisive difference to the electoral outcome. Elections turned into plebiscites where the effective unit of political choice was the entire



nation, sometimes split along the north-south lines. A typical electoral verdict in his period took the form of a nation-wide or sometimes state-wide wave for or against the Congress. The local specificities of a constituency simply did not matter. These electoral waves flattered the terrain of electoral competition, leaving little room for local variations. In social terms it was a period of cross-sectional mobilisation via state-wide jati alliances like KHAM in Gujarat or AJGAR in Uttar Pradesh. Ideologically, it was an era of populism, as the borrowed framework of western ideologies was adapted to suit popular taste.

On the face of it, the 1989 electoral verdict appeared no different from the earlier wave elections of the second electoral system. In many ways that election indeed belonged to the earlier period. The rise of V.P. Singh had galvanised the opposition to the Congress. The anti-Congress wave in north India followed the same logic of opposition unity as the 1977 wave. The Congress and the opposition tried old social alliances. Yet there were signs of the new order yet to be born. Under the umbrella of Janata Dal, state-wide political formation had already begun to exercise a significant role in national politics. Devi Lal and Biju Patnaik were already major political players. The election result also carried signs of shifting social basis of politics: Muslims in UP and dalits and OBCs in Bihar had already begun to upset the given social

equations for political parties. In that sense the 1989 election lies at the cusp of the second and the third electoral system.

The decisive stimulus for change came between the 1989 and the 1991 in what was christened as the three Ms of Indian politics: Mandal, Mandir and Market. The almost simultaneous and sudden occurrence of these three events – the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendation for OBC reservations, the BJP's rathayatra that catapulted the Babri masjid dispute into national prominence and the forex crisis leading to the implementation of the first phase of IMF sponsored package of 'liberalisation' – created an extraordinary opportunity for reworking the established political alignments. All the three offered the possibility of creating a new cleavage that cut across the established cleavage structure and thus engaging in a new kind of political mobilisation. Eventually, not all the three cleavages could be activated in politics, at least not in the same degree. But the simultaneity of this change did result in a transition of the electoral system and allowed several latent forces to surface in electoral politics.

The 1991 verdict finally inaugurated the new system. The earlier logic of regime alternation and that of Congress victory in the context of divided opposition clearly indicated a massive victory for the Congress in 1991, a repetition of the 1980 wave.

But it did not happen. The Congress improved only marginally, not enough to have a clear majority. But for the additional votes brought in by Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, it would have remained at the same level as in 1989. The BJP's success in UP, Gujarat and Karnataka defied all the established patterns of political sociology and political geography. Clearly we were in a new political era. The near majority that Congress mustered allowed it to postpone the arrival of the by now familiar consequences for the new system by another five years. The full implications were to unfold in the 1996 and the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. But the outlines of the new system were clear series of assembly elections held between 1993 and 1995.<sup>197</sup>

Electoral outcomes in the subsequent elections have established beyond doubt that we now live in a different era. Congress is no longer the pole against which every political formation is defined. In this sense we are in a post-Congress polity now. Even in those states where there is a direct race between the Congress and its rival, the Congress is no longer the natural party of governance. In fact there is good evidence that the Congress vote in the 1990s is defined by its opponent. Congress picks up residual votes after its opponents have targeted and mobilised a certain section. The vote for the Left Front in West Bengal and

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<sup>197</sup> Yogendra Yadav, 'Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third electoral System', 1989-99', EPW, August 21-28.

Kerala had long ceased to be merely an anti-Congress vote; it is more meaningful to see the Congress vote in West Bengal as anti-Left Front vote. In Delhi, Rajasthan and Gujarat the Congress has been replaced by the BJP as the natural party of governance. In Bihar, UP and Tamil Nadu any talk of Congress/anti-Congress vote is bound to invite ridicule today. Unlike the BJP, the Congress is yet to accept the imperatives of coalition politics and alliance building. The way three of its strong units (Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu) broke away from the parent party does not augur well for the future of the party. The Congress is there to stay but the Congress era in politics is behind us.

In short, it could be understood that there is no alternative to the Congress undertaking the task of reworking its ideological shibboleths. Rather than banking on its past, the Congress has to relate itself to the present. The Congress (I) can attend to its strategic deficiencies in the areas of organisation and ideas only if it moves beyond the present obsession with individuals. In short, it can hope to become a fighting force against the BJP only by exorcising itself of the individuals and impulses that thrive on the dynasty connection. Intrigues and time-servers must be shown the door, and ideologues and innovators allowed in. On this purge alone will depend the Congress (I) efficacy as a relevant all-India political force.

The Congress must do away with its special register of members, at no time exceeding one crore, not even then easily identifiable. Its registers should now be co-extensive with all the men and women on the voters' rolls in the country. The Congress business should be to see that no fake name gets in and no legitimate name is left out. On its own register it will have a body of servants of the nation who could be workers doing the work allotted to them from time to time. Internally the Congress party has to recover self respect and sink intra-party ambitions preceeding the split of 1969. Its united strength can inspire confidence necessary to convince the people that the Congress deserves support. One step that might help is to remove the stamp of private proprietorship of political parties exemplified no-where more damagingly than in the suffix of (I) after Congress. The political hold of dynasties and of party bosses with access to hush money of affluent friends has to be loosened.

To begin with the authority and the prestige of the Congress Working Committee has to be restored to its pristine glory. In fact, in the old days the Congress Working Committee's meetings used to be an occasion for the most important deliberations in the country. That CWC itself was a representative body, almost a parallel cabinet insistent on its right to examine critically the government's policy. The membership of both the CPB and CWC

was fully earned. It was neither meant nor accepted as a gift of the leader. These Committees have to be revitalised if the organisation is to regain its previous importance. The Congress Parliamentary Board should correctly reflect the strength of various groups in the organisation.

The Antony committee has given the Congress leadership plenty to think about whether major long-term changes will follow or merely a few quick fixes remains an open question. The committee did cite failures of judgement by the high command. Considering all that, the outcome of the CWC meeting called to discuss the Antony report was bound to disappoint Congress supporters. The report recommended; one, devolution of power within the organisation, the party's stance on economic reform and the new bid to reach out to "intellectuals and the urban middle class".

What is important is for Congressmen to become aware of what their party has been, what it has stood for in the past, and what it still means to over 30 per cent of Indians who have voted for it, and what role it has still to play in building up the 'India' which generations of freedom fighters dreamt of. After all, a decisive defeat for a major party and loss of political power for a prolonged period is not uncommon in democracies the world over. Rebuilding the Congress requires, above all, that it should be clear

about its political and ideological agenda – an agenda, keeping in view the party's past as well as its current position in the political spectrum. And this has to be a left-of-centre agenda, which is simultaneously committed to economic development and socio-economic equity and equality and which appeals basically to the rural and urban poor, women, minorities and the middle classes in that order. The Congress must actively cooperate with grassroots non-government organisations, working in rural areas all over the country.

A very basic task which has been neglected for decades is the rebuilding of the party at the local and district levels. The party needs, but lacks, strong and popular district and state level leaders who should be involved in party's state and central direction. There are two misconceptions here. One, that strong and popular local and state leaders are a threat to the state and central leadership. Second, that central leaders, because they are inevitably distant from the localities and states, should be discarded if the party loses at the polls. In fact, central leaders are needed to lead a democratic party; but it is also necessary to involve the state-level leaders in the evolution, direction and implementation of the party's central policies.

An equally important organisational task is to open and develop both-way lines of communication between lower-level

grassroots workers and supporters and the higher leadership, especially the central leadership. This means above all, that the state and central programmes and policies have to be framed in part on the basis of local inputs, while lower-level workers have to be constantly kept informed of the thinking of the state and central leadership. It is also necessary for the party leaders at different levels to interact with local intelligentsia who are quite knowledgeable regarding local conditions and often act as the voice of the local people and as a major influence over their political and social thinking.

While the Congress cannot have whole-time cadres and organisational structures such as those of the CPI-M and RSS, it has to have a structured mechanism for the access of its grassroots workers to the higher leadership at each level. One step would be to go back to the practice of village, town, taluka and district party offices, whose leaders are regularly available to party workers and supporters for redressal of their complaints and reception of their suggestions. Finally the party should acquire local roots and strength as well as avoid centralisation and promote inner-party democracy if it has to come back to power.



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