



## **Coalition era and Indian politics anatomy by Pranab Mukherjee**

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### **Abstract**

Present paper is an attempt to analyze the narratives of the Ex. President of the country. Pranab Mukherjee's experiences in different capacities as the party leader, cabinet minister in different governments and President of India. Legendary figure of the Indian politics made an endeavor to explain the realities of the politics in the country. The period he selected for the book 1996-2012 was a period when the country was experiencing changes in the Indian government and politics. In 1996 country had United Front government in which regional parties had clear effective position in the centre government and the national party (Congress) was supporting it. In 1999 Nation Democratic Alliance (NDA-1) formed the government with help of the regional parties it remained successful to complete its five years tenure. In 2004 & 09 United Progressive Alliance (UPA) formed government and Mukherjee in the capacity of External Affairs minister, Finance and Defence Minister worked with Ex. Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh. In that capacity Pranab explained his experiences and limitations. His experience as the senior most members of the oldest party of the country (congress) and work environment depicts that within the party democratic principles were less important party leadership dominated party's functioning. In his political journey he held the position Of President of India. His experiences as President were important due to his long experience as cabinet minister. His work is not merely narrative of his times. It's a great discourse which could prove to be a guide to the coming generation of the leadership.

**Keywords:** coalition era, Indian politics anatomy, Nation Democratic Alliance

### **Introduction**

'Coalition Years 1996-2012, 'is a standard work by Mukherjee, Pranab one of the legendary politician and statesman of the country. He served the country in various capacities as the President of the country and held important portfolios such as defence, finance and foreign affairs. This work deals with multiple issues concerning government, political parties and emerging trends of the coalition governance in the country from 1996-2012. He has made an endeavor to compare the period after 1996 with political situation in the late sixties when he became first parliamentarian. He narrated many incidents of late sixties as the member of the Parliament. Through his work he also provides certain guidelines to the future generations regarding the value based politics. His work is an effort to analyze the period of the Indian politics from 1996-2012. The oldest party of the country Congress receded to the back position and new forces in the form of regional parties and national parties came in the forefront. From 1996 to 2004 Congress lost its central position. Regional parties and BJP in the coalition era gained the indispensable position in the Indian national polity. From 2004-2014 Congress with the alliance of the other parties as UPA (1&2) governed the country. Book gives worthy and extensive understanding of this period. It is an account based on the author's distinct qualities of precision, photo memory and maturity to analyze the things he opted descriptive, narrative and analytical approaches to explain the different phenomena. Book is divided into the ten chapters.

### **In Parliament**

He describes the Parliament and his experience as Parliamentarian. His experience as young Parliamentarian in the late sixties of the twentieth century indicates the working style of the Parliament their commitment to the institution and their learning capacity from the senior parliamentarians. They were serious about their role in the Parliament and Parliamentary debates were meaningful. They treated experienced parliamentarians as their role models. He opines 'Parliament is 'Gangotri' of the Indian democracy...it is incumbent upon all the parliamentarians that they maintain the highest standards of democracy and parliamentary functioning', (Mukherjee 2017: 7). He expressed his concerns regarding the decreasing quality of the parliamentary debates and mal-use of the parliamentary hours. Ruling party and opposition leaders both do not behave like mature leaders in the Parliament which affects the entire system. 'When the parliament fails in discharging its law making role or enacts law without discussion, it breaches trust reposed in it by the people' (p.10)

With the evolution of multiparty system in 1989 at the national level Congress lost its past position as the umbrella party. Mushrooming growth of ethnic parties provided the pace to the periphery interests who were looking for space and identity. These configurations played determining role and changed the political scenario. National parties lost their position [rior to 1989 and regional parties based on ethnicity and other sub-nation interests gaining momentum in the Indian democracy.

Mukherjee takes the Position that people had little to do with economic policy they were more concerned with the issues like Mandir. His analysis of the Narasimha Government 1991-96 based on his understanding of economic issues and political developments. In his opinion P.V. Narasimha Rao was seasoned politician; he headed the government and the party when both were facing hard times. Empirically he inferred that the cause of the Congress's poor performance in 1996 Parliamentary elections was demolition of the Babri Masjid and developments in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. New Economic Policy (NEP) which was the brain child of Narsimha Rao and sitting Finance Minister had little to do with the election results. People were not disappointed with the shift in the Indian economy. It's also evident from the later developments of the economic policy in the country. Coming governments from different backgrounds made no drastic change in NEP (1991). Congress in 1996 supported to the United Front (UF) alliance to keep the BJP out of the power. No national party was able to get majority. Congress intended to control the coalition government which was formed by United Front. In lieu of that it was not ready for any investigation against its leaders. 'The Congress party could not support a government which was bent upon maligning and persecuting its leadership' (p21). Mukherjee describes the developments of the United Front and Congress during the United Front government from 1996-98 in which Congress supported the alliance which had strong regional aspirants. H D Deve Goda Leader from regional party Janta Dal (Secular) became the Prime Minister. Like other regional parties it also supported state autonomy and decentralization of powers. Congress leadership was not able to adjust with the leadership and style of functioning. Goda blindly did not follow the dictates of the Congress which backed the government. Within the Congress among the leaders there was frustration and leadership did not enjoy the confidence of the majority of the leaders. There was need of effective and acceptable leader in the party. In the past Congress never faced leadership crisis. Mukherjee seasoned leader of the party indicates his discontentment with the leadership style. He felt uncomfortable with the growing disenchantment among the party leaders and undemocratic atmosphere that was prevailing within the party. His main focus to explain the 'coalition period' from 1996-98 is to clarify the Congress stand on the United Front coalition and internal upheavals in the party. Congress culture of the debate, discussion and efforts to resolve the issues amicably have little relevance in the contemporary period. Congress President Sita Ram Kesri was reluctant to resign from the post of the President while majority of the leaders wanted him to resign. Mukherjee confessed tactfully he forced the Sita Ram Kesri to resign and Congress working committee (CWC) passed the resolution to appoint the Ms Sonia Gandhi as the president of the party. Finally her election ratified on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998 in the plenary session. After becoming the president a conclave was held of the party to rejuvenate the party at Pachmarhi. Sonia summarized the existing conditions and her future plan for the party. She made the statement in this context "the fact that we are going through a coalition phase as the national politics reflects in many ways the decline of the Congress and on our

own steam," (p42).

His democratic outlook is evident from his objective view point about the opposition leaders. He had long political life. His understanding of political culture was excellent. He was fond of his associate parliamentarians from different parties and ideologies. According to him I.K. Gujral the Prime Minister of the country during the United Front was person of high caliber, vision and maturity. He appreciates his skill as diplomat also. Mukherjee's appreciation of his staunch opponents shows his democratic approach. He describes the traits of Mamta Banerjee 'she has an aura which is difficult to explain but impossible to ignore', (p36). In Mukherjee's opinion stable term of the UPA1 & 2 is credited to Ms Sonia Gandhi's capability to manage the alliance with innumerable small parties.

#### **NDA 1998-99**

Author narrates the compulsion of the coalition government and Congress's unwillingness to form the government besides its status as the largest party in the Parliament (1998). He open heartedly appreciated the moderate behavior of the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee. He also recognized his contribution to conduct nuclear tests and to raise the stature of the country at the international level. He also expressed the nature of his relationship with the stalwart leader of the BJP L.K. Advani. He confessed that he had differences with Advani ji on the Bangladeshi issue and on many other political issues. Besides these differences on certain issues he maintained good relations with the opposition leaders. 'I always looked up to Advani ji for wise counsel and friendly advice... we drew closer as we both share interest in books and music' (p60). During the BJP government Congress was in the opposition with the new president who enjoyed the status respect from the party leaders being the family member of Nehru and Gandhi. Leaders extended their full cooperation minus few leaders. She gradually developed her skill to manage the party.

#### **2004**

Title '2004' mainly focused on the developments of 2003 -04. In this chapter he analyses the parties' position in the pre election year. Election was due in 2004. In his opinion in the state legislature elections held in 2003 Congress had better position as compared to the BJP. Both the parties chalked out their strategies for the coming elections. He himself was not in the favor of the coalition in the near future. Congress party president Ms Sonia Gandhi and Dr. Man Mohan Singh both were in the favor of the coalition. Keeping in mind the developments of the past decade of the Indian politics their understanding was; alliance and coalition was their compulsion when the Indian party system was changed. Regional parties became the reality of Indian politics. On the contrary to their view point He stated, 'sharing a platform and /or power with other parties would undermine our identity... I maintained that the party should not forsake that identity for the sake of forming a government; there was no harm in sitting in the opposition,' (p63). His belief was ethic based politics. Further he gave his argument for contesting the Lok Sabha election: he believed that anybody who either hold or aspire to hold any

executive position should be people's representative directly. He considered it the ethical responsibility of the leader. He contested his third Lok Sabha election from Jhangipur in 2004. Before that he was always elected from for Rajya Sabha. After the election results it was presumed that Pranab would be the choice for the Prime Minister being the most experienced minister in the Congress. Ms Sonia Gandhi's choice was Man Mohan Singh although he had experience of services but far behind the Pranab as minister. In the capacity of the party president she convinced Mukherjee to join the government. She assured him 'Dr. Singh would talk to me (Pranab) on all important issues and seemed to depend on me', (p70). In the formation of UPA1 and to evolve workable solution with other parties Mukherjee played an important role. He also kept in mind skill and political weight age of the candidate. He tried to make the best configurations out of the confused parties' scenario. For the future course of action he made assiduous exercise with the leaders of the alliance partners to come out with the 'Common Minimum Program me'. These developments of the Congress leadership indicate that the seniority, experience was at the stake and the Ms. Sonia Gandhi loyal people were rewarded. His candidature was overlooked and Dr. Man Mohan Singh was selected as the Prime Minister still he large heartedly applauded the contribution of the Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh '(A) a strong nationalist, a man of courage and conviction, Manmohan Singh was not an accidental Prime Minister... An apolitical person, he held the national interest above all else, had the courage to stand firm on his convictions, and was able to build consensus when needed through his persuasive nature' (77).

#### **Mukerjee's Experience of Different Ministries**

In UPA (1&2) Mukherjee held position of minister Defence, External affairs and Finance. He narrated his experiences in the different capacities. His views are reflections of his intellectual ability, his capability to understand the multiple fields and vision of a statesman to deal with the problems. His views indicate all the times he was chosen by the party president rather than he was himself intended for the given position. It also reflects his commitment to the party and national interest. He always tried to put his hundred percent in various capacities in the Indian polity. As a Defence minister he made every effort to strengthen the defence services and modernize the equipment of the defense forces. To boost the morale of the defence personal he made efforts by providing them financial benefits. From defence he was shifted to the external affairs in Oct 2006. His focus being the foreign minister was to strengthen the regional relations in the south Asia by evolving confidence among the neighbor countries. He was of the opinion by maintaining the good relations in the region India can contribute to the world peace and prosperity.

#### **India- US Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement**

India- US nuclear Cooperation agreement was one of the most important policies issue of that time. UPA was supported by leftist who were not in favor of this agreement. He gives an account of the various developments regarding the signing of the nuclear deal with USA. Congress leadership and the top

officials were of the opinion the deal would be favorable to the national interest. It would enhance the bargaining power of the country. Being Defence minister he made every effort to convince the opposition and its alliance partners [CPI (M)] to sign the agreement keeping in mind the national interest. UPA leadership took the stand and Mukherjee played important role in signing the agreement by taking in confidence some of the regional parties.

#### **Returning to finance**

Being economist Mukherjee had his own economic vision. He confessed that his approach towards some economic issues was different from Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh's approach. He has given detailed description and logistic explanation of his working as the Finance minister in the last of the UPA1 and his continuation in the same position in UPA2. He was designated as Finance minister in UPA2 on the proposal of the party president. Pranab was hesitant to join the Manmohan Singh team as Finance minister. Both of them had different financial orientation. Being the party loyalist and on the command of the president of the party he could not reject the proposal. He had certain objectives in mind related to the common man's social security, revival of the Indian economy by introducing tax reforms (GST and Retrospective taxation) and inclusive development by revamping delivery system to benefit the last one in the society. To enhance the employment opportunities for the unskilled rural people he supported MNREGA. To strengthen the infrastructure Bharat Nirman Programme and Pradhan Mantri Sadak Yojna were other programmes which he supported ardently. He also indicated his dissatisfaction with the alliance partners approach to conduct themselves as the part of the coalition government. In his opinion '(E)ndless discussion those can never lead to a decision and simply because we are running coalition government ...a party with just a dozen members harasses the largest party in the coalition', (p192-93). Issues of food security, Lokpal indicate limitations of the main ruling party which sometimes find it difficult to work according to its agenda.

#### **To Rashtrapati Bhawan**

Great leader seasoned politician and statesman of stature appointed president of India. During his tenure as President of the country NDA formed government in 2014. His entire political auto biography reflects he was a active leader and had taste for active politics. He was chosen candidate for the President ship according to the wishes of party President. In the last of the book he 'deals with his experiences as the 'first person of the country'. For this post also he was the choice of the party high command. Till the last of his political career he always directed by the party high command. He never got the chance to express his will although he was one of the senior most leader and assiduous worker of the party. It also reflects the inner working of the Congress where the party president has free will to take the decisions. In the end of his political career he had to maintain his relationship with the Prime Minister having his distinct way of working. He confessed his relationship was formal with Prime minister. Sometimes he was uncomfortable with the ordinances those were issued by

the executive. He strongly felt some practices of the modern days like attitude of alliance partners, misuse of parliamentary platform by the parliamentarians are really damaging the Indian democratic practices and institutions.

### **Conclusion**

Narratives and experiences of the statesmen always remain bacons to the coming generations. Mukherjee was not an individual an institution himself. Pranab's this work is his political auto-biography has immense importance to the academia and future political leadership to deal with political situations.

### **References**

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