



The Deputy Chief Minister (DyCM): An Institution of the Strategic Coordination in the State Politics

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Abstract

In India's federal structure, the Institution of the Deputy Chief Minister (Dy CM) holds a unique position. Though, this Institution is not recognized or mandated by the Indian Constitution , it plays a significant political , administrative, developmental and strategic role in the arena of state government. In the recent trend, the role of DyCM has been prominent particularly in the coalition government , administrative support and as a tool of representation for diverse sections of the society . In the arena of the state politics , the post of the Dy Chief Minister has become a symbol of balancing tool , political accommodation, political stability, regional and caste representation and intra-party dynamics. As commented by **Pratap Bhanu Mehta** “ In India's fragmented polity, the post of Deputy CM acts as valve to diffuse political tension”. The position of the post is a product of political exigency rather than constitutional design.

This paper explores the historical evolution, funtions, responsibilities , political rationale and significance of this extra-constitutional institution. The paper also mentions the prominent case studies and the debates surrounding the institutionalization of the office. It also examines how this institution has contributed to stability in the state governance. As a Dy CM, a leader with political weight equal to that of the Chief Minister can act as a check on the office of the Chief Minister. The Institution of the Dy CM,also enhances the decentralization of power in the state cabinet. It further presents the current scenerio of the Indian States with regard to the Deputy Chief Minister.

Keywords: Federal structure, Institution, Coalition gonernment, decentralization

Introduction

The political architecture of India is a blend of constitutional mandates and political customs. One such customs is the appointment of a Deputy Chief Minister. Unlike the Chief Minister(CM), whose position is explicitly recognized in the Indian Constitution, the Deputy Chief Minister's office is a political creation with no constitutional basis (Austin,1999). Article 164(1) of the Indian Constitution, deals with the appointment of the Chief Minister and other Ministers by the Governor on recommendation of the Chief Minister, but makes no reference to a Deputy Chief Minister. As such, the office of Dy CM is entirely dependent on the discretion of the Chief Minister and is often formalized through a portfolio allotment such as Home or Defence or Finance, which provides Dy CM a substantive administrative role (Sharma,2019). The power and responsibilities of the Deputy Chief Minister is equal to a Cabinet Minister. The DyCM works as a cabinet minister with the title “Deputy CM” and having certain ceremonial significance. As said by **Yogendra Yadav** “The role of Deputy Chief Minister is more symbolic than constitutional. It reflects the political arithmetic and social engineering of state politics”. Since there is no Constitutional backing , the office of Dy CM is

flexible and at times ambiguous. Despite this, several states across the country have opted to institutionalize the office of DyCM. The office sets coordination among the various stakeholder working for State Government. It manages coalition demands, distribute power, and ensure balanced representation of region, religion, caste and communities.

Constitutional Status and Legal Framework

The Indian Constitution does not mention the Institution of the Deputy Chief Minister. Even in the Constituent Assembly of India, it was not specifically discussed. The office evolved later, mainly as a political accommodation tool in coalition government, power balance or caste/community representation. Article 153 to 167 in part VI of the constitution deal with the State executive, which comprises the Governor, the Chief Minister, the Council of Minister and the advocate general of the State. Specifically, article 164 says that the Chief Minister shall be appointed by the governor and other ministers on the recommendation of the Chief Minister. There is no reference of Dy CM at all. Subhash C. Kashyap, Constitutional Expert says “The post of Deputy Chief Minister is more political than constitutional. It helps in balancing regional, caste, or coalition interests”

On the ground of Political realities, the Dy CM works as a cabinet minister (having top portfolios like home or finance) with all the power, privileges and responsibilities. It acts as a “bridge between the CM and the cabinet”.

Historical Context and Evolution

The office of the Deputy Chief Minister in India has existed sporadically since independence. The first known instances was in 1946, when Anugrah Narayan Sinha was appointed as the Deputy CM of Bihar, even before the constitution was adopted. He served under the interim provincial government. During the early years of independence, very few states (particularly larger states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra) had Deputy Chief Minister. It was occasionally used to appease powerful faction within a party or balance caste/regional equations. With the rise of coalition governments in the 1990s at both central and state levels, post liberalization era. The Deputy Chief Minister office became more prominent and common. It was increasingly used to accommodate coalition partners, balance caste, religion, or regional demand, and to reward influential leaders within the party. The office of the DyCM in India has evolved as a political tool accommodating coalition government, identity-based representation and party management. Though, constitutionally unrecognised post, but continued to play a key and coordinating role in balancing power and ensuring governance stability in India's federal structure. India operates on a multiparty system, the Congress System defined by Rajani Kothari (1964), has withered due to the emergence of regional political parties. This phenomenon has also contributed to the rise of the institution of DyCM.

Political and Administrative role

The post of Deputy Chief Minister, in the State Political Administration is often shaped by the demand of coalition politics, power – sharing among factions or balancing regional, caste, or party interests. DyCMs are often appointed to placate coalition partners and to fulfil prepoll or post- poll alliance promises. In a state with diverse population and geography, Dy CMs are chosen to ensure representation of key demographic groups and region. This symbolic inclusion aids in social integration and vote-bank consolidation. Sometimes DyCM is from a politically influential community to ensure electoral gains. In some cases, the DyCM is a potential CM-in-waiting. In times of administrative crises or CM ill-health or death, Dy CMs can temporarily manage political affairs, although they do not possess any formal claim to the CM's office. Deputy Chief Minister come into power after negotiation, compromise and mutual adjustment. Calculated estimations, dependencies and futuristic insights also play key role in framing the post of deputy chief minister. CK Sharma & Wilfried Swenden (2020) mentioned that the emergence of DyCMs is a reflection of the trend towards, “intergovernmental bargaining federalism”.

As a political administrator, the Deputy Chief Minister, works as a coordinator in the state governance functioning. DyCMs head one or more major ministeries and ensure administrative decisions are implemented. They assist the CM in cabinet coordination, especially when the CM is overburdened or frequently unavailable. DyCMs play key role in the policy-making of the state. As stated by Dr. M.P Singh, Indian Political Scientist “The Deputy Chief Minister, though not a constitutional office, often acts as a coordinator between the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers, ensuring stability and communication across governance levels”. In today’s coalition politics, the Deputy Chief Minister post emerges as a balancing equilibrium. The Deputy CM is not a subordinate, second-in-command to CM but a key strategic person and symbolic mediator, representing the very essence of negotiated or compromised governance that characterizes the vibrant democracy of India.

Deputy Chief Ministers: Case Studies from Indian States

The emergence of the post of the Deputy Chief Minister across Indian States has been a new and innovative phenomenon. Although not recognized by the Constitution (the Supreme Legal Authority), its significance and propensity has been consistently growing across the States. Since the end of congress system and the rise of regional political parties, the post of Dy CM has been at the centre of discussion in state’s political arena. Basically the primary purpose of appointing the DyCMs across the states is accommodating the political needs, its exigencies and minimum essentialities to run the state smoothly. In the words of D.D. Basu, “it is a convention born out of political need”

- † Anugrah Narayan Sinha (INC), first DyCM in India served as a deputy chief minister in the state of Bihar, under the CM Sri Krishna Sinha (INC). He had portfolios of the finance and labour, played a crucial role in shaping the administrative and developmental foundation of the state. Here deputy chief minister played administrative and developmental role and coordinating key initiatives of the government.
- † After the formation of the state, Andhra Pradesh in 1956 by merging Andhra State and Telangana, Konda Venkata Ranga Reddy was appointed as the Deputy Chief Minister of the state (1959-1962), under the CM Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. This institutionalization of the DyCM post was largely to balance regional equations, particularly to assure Telangana of fair representation in the newly formed state. The congress party, dominant at the time, used the post to balance internal factions, to prevent dissent in Telangana and maintain stability in a newly reorganized state.
- † The Bombay State (Maharashtra + Gujarat), institutionalized the post of DyCM in 1956 by appointing Yashwantrao Chavan as a deputy CM of the state, under the CM Mprarji Desai. In the unified Bombay state, there was dominance of the Gujarati leaderships (like Morarji Desai, then CM). In 1950s, strong demand for the separate Marathi-speaking state raised, Yashwantrao was a key figure supporting the cause. To strike a balance between Gujarati and Marathi-speaking people and to accommodate Marathi aspirations within the state, the congress appointed Yashwantrao Chavan as a Deputy Chief Minister of the state.
- † In the 2004 Karnataka Assembly election, no party got a clear majority of the 224 assembly seats, B.J.P(79), INC(65), JD(s) 58. A coalition government was formed between Congress and JD(s) initially. In 2006, the JD(s) withdrew support from Congress and decided to form a government with the BJP. As part of the new powersharing agreement, it was decided that, H.D Kumaraswamy (JD-s) would become the Chief Minister. B.S Yediyurappa(BJP) would be appointed as the Deputy Chief Minister with finance portfolio.

Some recent case studies

- In 2017, following the U.P assembly election, the BJP formed the state government under the CM Yogi Adityanath. Alongside him, two deputy chief minister were also appointed. Keshav Prasad Maurya, a prominent OBC leader, played significant role in consolidating non-Yadav OBC support for BJP. Dinesh Sharma, upper-caste Brahmin community, an academic and former Mayor of Lucknow. These appointments were made as part of a strategic political decision by the Bharatiya Janta Party. The move was motivated by multiple considerations.

- In 2019, following the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections, YSR Congress Party secured a landslide victory. YSRCP leader Y.S Jagan Mohan Reddy sworn in as the chief Minister. He appointed five deputy chief minister for the purpose of social inclusion, balanced representation, administrative distribution and political strategy. K.Narayana Swamy, representing Scheduled Caste. Pamula Pushpa Sreevani, for Scheduled Tribe. Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, representing Backward Classes. Amazath Basha Shaik Bepari, representing Muslims. Pilli Subhash Chandre Bose, representing Kapu.
- In 2022, following the political upheaval in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena split into two factions, 1: Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray, 2: Shiv Sena factions led by Eknath Shinde (Real Shiv Sena recognized by ECI). Eknath Shinde formed government by making coalition with BJP and appointed Devendra Fadnavis as the Deputy Chief Minister. In July 2023, Ajit Pawar, a senior leader from the Nationalist Congress Party also sworn in as deputy chief minister in the Shinde government.
- In the assembly election of the Rajasthan (2023), the BJP government under the Chief Ministership of Bhajan Lal Sharma appointed two deputy chief minister balancing the caste equations in the state. 1: Diya Kumari, coming from the Rajput family, 2: Dr. Prem Chand Bairwa, representing the Dalit communities.
- Chowna Mein, serving as the Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh since 2016, the longest serving DyCM in India.
- In 2024, following the assembly election in Union territory of the Jammu and Kashmir. The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) formed the coalition government with the Congress. JKNC leader Omar Abdullah was sworn in as the CM and Surinder Kumar Choudhary (INC) became the deputy CM.
- After getting the thumping victory in the state of Odisha in the assembly election, the BJP government appointed two deputy chief minister under the CM Mohan Charan Majhi. 1. Kanak Vardhan Sing Deo, 2. Pravati Parida- the first women deputy chief minister in India.

Across the Indian states, appointing the deputy chief minister has become a political exigencies, a tool to accommodate diverse aspiration, coalition, a trial for grooming for higher leadership, managing crises and stability.

As per the most recent information available, 15 States and 01 Union Territory has the post of deputy CM. A tabular form of the overall scenario of the dyCM in India is given below.

The DyCM : the State Governance

The post of Deputy Chief Minister in India plays a politically strategic and occasionally coordinating role in state governance. It maintains political stability especially in coalition governments or when managing internal party factions. The DyCM often holds key portfolios such as Home, Finance or education which allows for better administrative delegation and governance. Appointment of DyCM from various communities sends a message of inclusivity and helps in social engineering. In states with heavy administrative responsibilities, the deputy CM acts as a bridge between the CM and other minister, facilitating coordination.

Some critics raise concern of the non-constitutionality of the post. They argue that the role leads to dual power centre, creating friction within the cabinet and administrative machinery. Furthermore, the role is often ceremonial, used more for optics than actual administration.

Conclusion

The Deputy Chief Minister is a political artifact shaped by India's dynamic democratic process. While the role is not constitutionally enshrined, its practical significance in managing complex political scenarios cannot be denied. Whether through representing diverse groups or balancing coalition interests, DyCM serve critical functions. However, the absence of clear legal framework for the post means its effectiveness relies on political will, administrative coordination and personal rapport. The role of the Deputy Chief Minister as a strategic coordinator is increasingly vital in the context of India's federal and coalition-driven politics. The institution ensures smoother governance by coordinating inter-departmental policies, handling administrative duties in the absence of the CM, and maintaining harmony among coalition partners or within party factions. In states

like Uttar Pradesh ,Andhra , Tamilnadu and Maharashtra , the appointment of multiple DyCM was aimed at enhancing governance, stability ,inter-ministerial coordination, and political inclusiveness,especially in large or politically diverse states. As Dr. Bidyut Chakrabarty and Mohit Bhattacharya pointed out “ The emergence of such political post reflects the adaptive strategies within Indian federalism to manage diversity and ensure effective policy implementation at the state level”

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