CHAPTER – 3

Evolution Of The Party System In India

Having discussed the theories of coalition, we may turn our attention to India. We cannot contemplate a modern or modernizing society having a democratic political system without a political party. Political parties are an irrefutable feature of these two types of society. The process of formation of party system embarks on a relatively slow pace in a modernizing society than in a modern society as a consequential effect of the absence of many favourable objective conditions closely connected with a thriving and robust party system. India, being a modernizing society, is not an exception. The theoretical models having an Eurocentric thrust is of little help in exploring the genesis and gradual evolution earmarked by so many ups and downs of political parties and the party system gradually sprouting in post-colonial independent India. The theories analyzing the origin and growth of parties and party systems in terms of aristocratic cliques, plebiscitarian democracies and the initiation of mass politics or those that seek to link the sprouting of parties and party systems to parliamentary politics, cannot afford adequate explanation for post-colonial societies like India. Even the Eurocentric theories do not considerably account for the numerous challenges confronted by parties in a pluralistic society of India. Anti-colonial movements spilling over every nook and corner of the country during British rule did not pursue the same track in all cases. The movements were forced to follow different courses of actions due to explicit eccentricity ingrained in the Indian society. Not only this, anti-colonial movements had varied impact on colonial rule and the means the movements adopted to respond to the oppressions and repressions of colonial rulers depending upon mottled local situations as well as the nature and strength of leadership and the magnitude of mass participation in the movements. Another equally important factor in sustaining the party systems in these societies was social adaptability, better called social resilience, to the emerging political scenario incompatible with the traditional primordial forms of political institutions and government. Political parties develop themselves into a "well-knit party system only when the primordial social institutions will overcome the intrinsic social cleavages, acclimatize themselves to modern democratic politics and create sustainable political institutions."1

To delineate the history of the genesis and evolution of Indian parties and party system in post-independent India will be a deluding one without referring to the role played by the British in creating the institutional framework for electoral politics having a profound impact on the development of political parties in India. Political parties in India first appeared at the local self-governing institutions level such as the district boards or municipal councils in the last quarter of the 19th century. Harold A. Gould has called

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such premature parties like Kayastha Party, Khatri Party etc. as 'micro-parties'. These parties were something more than the traditional caste parties as they included elements other than castes after which they were named. They were far removed from the model of modern political parties and can better be called pre-party factions or cliques in that sense they even had their existence in pre-British India such as the liberal and orthodox factions in the Maurya and the Mughal courts. These pre-party factions began to acquire more and more the distinct characteristics of modern political parties with the introduction of party elected councils and assemblies by the British Raj.

Myron Weiner has written "Political parties and organizations in India are an outgrowth of an historical process, not a foreign transplant." Before the introduction of the electoral principles in India into the local bodies and the Provincial Councils in 1884 and 1892 respectively, there were two influential groups – one concerned with the interests of the landholders, like the British Indian Association and the Zamindar Association of Calcutta and the others that represented the interests of the newly emerging educated urban middle class.

However, before we come to the discussion of parties and party system in India, it is pertinent to go through the emergence of India as a political nation. Here, historians are poles apart in their views. Focusing their attention to the cause of the emergence of the Indian nation state, some go on to argue that the Indian political nation did not precede the British rule. Again, many a historian and nationalist leader debate over the nation's foundation being entrenched in the Indian civilization and its gradual evolution through history to take its present form. Recently, such a proposition has been criticized as "teleological model of Enlightenment History" leading to the creation of a "false sense of unity" within the "contested and contingent nation." Now there is hardly any sharp disagreement that Indian nationalism, entangled in stiff contest with the British colonialism throughout the 19th century and culminated into its victory in the formation of the Indian nation-state in 1947, was an upshot of colonial modernity. The colonial rulers were heading for a self-motivated assignment to put the colonized people on a pedestal of modernity. The latter realized the inevitability to do away with the stigma of their backwardness and affirming ability for uniting and governing themselves. Thus, nationalism in colonial India had to face a twofold challenge: an inclination for forging unity and an assertion of self-governance. India is a pluralistic society resplendent with a variety of diversity based on different primordial sentiments such as religion, language, caste, region, race, ethnicity and so on. It is out of this diversity, to use Surendranath's observation, that "a nation (was) in making."

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5 N. Jayapalan, Indian Political Thinkers: Modern Indian Political Thought, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2003, p.55.
Also see Surendranath Banerjee, A Nation in Making, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1925, passim.
At one end of the broad canvas of Indian nationalism there were the proponents of the model of universalism who construed Indian nationalism as an offshoot of the West. At the other end of the spectrum, there was an alternative version of universalism that held Indian nationalism to be inherent in the Indian civilization. Partha Chatterjee has argued that there was no denying the fact that India's western educated political leaders assigned a privileged position to Indian nationalism. Nationalism in India "was a 'different', but a 'derivative' discourse from the West."\(^6\) The alternative version of universalism that considered Indian nationalism to be deep-rooted in the civilization of India was enunciated by "the counter-modernist critic(s) of the imperial West"\(^7\) like Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. The Western educated middle-class India did not accept the alternative version of universalism. That could bind India only socially, not politically, by accommodating the differences. The Western model of nation-state was the only determining principle of nationalism to the Indian nationalists. C. A. Bayly searching the pre-history of nationalism opined that Indian nationalism is based on "pre-existing sense of territoriality, a traditional patriotism rationalized by indigenous ideas of public morality and ethical government."\(^8\) But how a broader cultural milieu emanated in India from those regional solidarities remains as yet an issue of an on-going controversy. As the whole gamut of the nation-building process was full of multifarious contradictions and influences, it is difficult to depict a one-dimensional icon of a nation-state carving out of such a complicated situation.

Historians belonging to the Early Nationalist School, Neo-traditionalist School, Marxist School, Subaltern School etc. have envisaged and constructed the forms of colonial resistance and political ideologies lying behind the formation of nationalism in India in their own ways. The early nationalist school and some of their subsequent followers in pursuing their studies of nation-building have placed primary emphasis on the predominance of a nationalist ideology and a nationalist consciousness. The consciousness of being a nation emanated from a commonly shared anti-colonial awareness, from an emotion of patriotism and an ideology ingrained in a sentiment of pride in the traditions of India. However, this school totally neglects the inner conflicts inherent in Indian society, which among other things, led to its division into two nation states and assumed the existence of nation as a homogeneous entity with a single set of interests.

In contradiction to the views of the early nationalist school, the Anglo-American academia has developed a new interpretation that has modestly been termed as "neo-traditionalist school."\(^9\) This new interpretation is a reflection of the old imperialist thinking as revealed in the writings of authors like Valantine Chirol. According to them, Indian society had been politicized along with various primordial social configurations.

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such as religion, language, caste, race, region, ethnicity in lieu of the modern categories of class and nation. Institutional devices, particularly the introduction of Western education and political representation, acted as the principal ingredients of change in this perspective. These new opportunities criss-crossed by the traditional Indian social formations were confined to a newly emerging status group, the western educated elite, that drew its members from the existing indigenous privileged social stratum, such as the bhadralok (gentry) in Bengal, the Chitpavan Brahmins in Bombay or the Tamil Brahmins in Madras. The advantages of modern life available in colonial India were not within the reach of the disadvantaged sections and underdeveloped regions of the society. Thus, the underprivileged stratum of the Indian society remained outside the purview of the limited political nation. Such a situation continued till the end of the First World War when Gandhi, for the first time, gave a mass character to nationalism by starting the politics of constitutionalism.

While the 'neo-traditionalists' studied the politics of India from the provincial perspective, the 'Cambridge School' have done this from the viewpoint of locality attaching predominance to successive localized movements developed in the fringes of colonized India instead of a cohesive nationalist movement. Excessive reliance of imperialist rulers upon Indian collaborators without whom it was not possible for them to function, set off an intense rivalry among the Indian collaborators themselves to extort patronage from the imperialist rulers. A large number of interest groups emerged in the political arena due to this contest and they began to widen their constituencies to take the advantage of local-self government and electoral principles introduced by the British to bring more and more collaborators within its fold. The leaders of these interest groups, being motivated only by their narrow personal or group interests, spearheaded the national movement. They were tied to imperialist rulers through patron-client relationship and drove a hard bargain with the British for patronage and power-sharing. Unlike the 'early nationalist school', this school does not recognize any importance of the role played by a nationalist ideology in the nation-building process. To them, India was, for all practical purposes, far remote from a nation, at best, nothing more than an aggregation of divergent interest groups. As these interest groups had to negotiate with the imperialist rulers within a centralized administrative set-up founded by the British, they had no other alternative than to form a nexus among themselves for getting their demands granted. Following a narrow 'Namicrite model', the 'Cambridge School of History' offered a pessimistic view that scaled down the pinnacle of the nationalist movement to the level of 'Animal Politics'.

The class character of the nationalist movement was sought to be explored by the orthodox Marxists and in analyzing the nationalist movement, they laid emphasis on the level of economic growth achieved during the colonial period, particularly the expansion of industrial capitalism and market society in India. In its opinion, the leadership of the movement was found to be located in the hands of the bourgeois class that regulated the course of movements in such a way as to go with their own class interests. The interests of the common people went unnoticed by the bourgeois leadership and even they

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deceived them to some extent on many occasions. R. P. Dutt and the Soviet historian V. I. Pavlov were among the early Marxists who brought into play such a narrow class approach and economic determinism in explaining their perceptions of the character of nationalism developed in India. Subsequently, S. N. Mukherjee, Sumit Sarkar and Bipan Chandra further dealt with it. "The complexities of nationalism, its multiple layers and meanings, the importance of castes along with class and the simultaneous use of a traditional as well as a modern language of politics" – have been dealt with by Mukherjee.11 Sumit Sarkar has echoed a warning that "class and class-consciousness are analytical tools which has [sic] to be used more skillfully and flexibly."12 He has accredited the legitimacy of the movement, but doesn't forget to indicate the "internal tensions"13 imbedded in it. The anti-imperialist struggle in India had passed through two stages – the elite level and the populist level. Each level has its importance and one should look at the "complex interaction of these levels."14 This interaction has resulted in "the pattern of continuity through change"15 that constituted the central thematic point of this age.

Bipan Chandra and some of his colleagues have offered a nationalist orientation to the Marxist interpretation of nationalist struggle.16 They have argued that the Indian nationalist movement was not fully controlled by the bourgeoisie, rather it was a popular movement that entangled various classes. In colonial India, they have identified two types of contradiction. The prime one was concerned with the interests of the Indian people and those of the British rule and the secondary one was there in the Indian society between castes, classes and different religious communities. Primary contradictions prevailed over the secondary with the advancement of anti-colonial struggle and the emphasis on the primary contradictions at the cost of the secondary ones led to the foundation of the supremacy of a nationalist ideology. Conflicting interests of various groups necessitated constant compromise and accommodation of divergent interests to evade tensions and conflicts among different caste, class and community groups and to assemble them under "one umbrella type leadership"17 The Indian nationalist movement took a populist turn irrespective of its failure to resolve all secondary contradictions.

A new courageous attitude was manifested in the ongoing debate on nationalism immediately with the publication of the first volume of Ranajit Guha (ed) Subaltern Studies in 1982, whose opening statement was: "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism."18 This "blinker ed historiography", Guha continues to say, cannot explain Indian nationalism, as it ignores "the contribution made

12 Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, Macmillan India Limited, Delhi, 1983, p.11.
13 ibid.
14 ibid.
15 ibid.
17 ibid, p.30.
by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite the making and
development of this nationalism."\(^\text{19}\) Although the subaltern groups took part in the
movements launched by the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie did not succeed in establishing
its hegemony "through either persuasion or coercion" as it was incessantly challenged by
the peasantry and the working class whose interests and mode of action did not coincide
with those of the bourgeois class interests.\(^\text{20}\)

As the seeds of the Indian party system were sown in pre-independence India, a
short historical account of the pre-Congress political organizations that expedited the
formation of the Indian National Congress deserves consideration. As Anil Seal points
out, the associations of the nineteenth century were indeed precursor of modern politics
in India, for they created the superstructure for party system in the country. Seal\(^\text{21}\) argues:

Associations brought nineteenth-century India across the threshold of modern politics. Sometimes
religious zeal, some times caste solidarity encouraged the propensity towards associations, but during the
course of the century more of the associations in India were brought into being by groups of men united by
secular interests. What now held them together were common skills and functions, a common education,
and common aspirations and resentments against the policies of the Raj, not simply the bonds of joint
family, caste and district. There was a time when these would have been the only points of union; but now
that this was no longer so, Indians were converging on modern politics.

Till the advancement of political ideas and organizations in the latter half of the
nineteenth century, the Indian leaders were satisfied with administrative reforms
undertaken by the colonial rulers for granting more power to the Indians. However, they
were permeated with the demand for representative government, "the natural and
legitimate product of the public activities that had preceded it."\(^\text{22}\)

The demand for a representative government was not new. In Bengal, the British
Indian Association, Calcutta, made a demand to this effect for the first time in its petition
to the British Parliament in 1852. W. C. Banerjee also suggested in his speech delivered
in England on 25 July 1867 to set up a "Representative Assembly and a Senate in India
with a power of vetoing their decisions given to both the Governor-General and the
Crown."\(^\text{23}\)

In this connection, the Home Rule Movement and the Indian League are
noteworthy.\(^\text{24}\) The controversy over the Ilbert Bill made the educated Indians aware of
their inferior position in the imperial power structure. The counter protest staged by them
and the press publicity they received, constituted an important hallmark in the history of

\(^{19}\) ibid.
\(^{23}\) ibid, p.325.
\(^{24}\) ibid.
the evolution of modern political activities in India. Another notable feature of organized political activities of the nineteenth century was the supplantation of the older associations, so long controlled by landed aristocracy, by new organizations under the dominance of the middle class intelligentsia. In Calcutta, the British India Association, appeared to be an exclusive organization. The new professional classes threw a challenge before it and ultimately forged a new organization called the 'Indian Association' on 26 July, 1876 under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjee at the Albert Hall, Calcutta, with an avowed objective of 'representing the people.' The 'Indian League', passing through a short span of its existence, was superseded by this relatively stable political organization imbued with the objective of becoming the center of an all-India movement.

The 'Bombay Association', founded in 1852, was the oldest political association of Bombay, but it was also a short-lived one that lost its vigour within a decade. Though Naroji Ferdunji and Dadabhai Naroji attempted to give it a fresh lease of life in 1876, the association came under challenge from a group of western educated leaders like P. M. Mehta, Badruddin Tyabjee, K. T. Telang and M. G. Ranade who declared the launching of a new organization named the 'Bombay Provincial Association' in a public meeting convened on 31 January 1885. The Bombay Provincial Association multiplied the alacrity of the agitation in Bombay against the Ilbert Bill. However, the most serious challenge to the Bombay Association came from Poona, the capital of Maratha culture and a centre of old patriotism. 'The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha' was established in 1867. It published a quarterly journal since 1878 to represent the political aspirations of the inhabitants of the Deccan. Being cautious of and chagrined with its activity, the Government made no delay in withholding its recognition in 1897 as a political organization. Many aristocratic members, including Princes and Sardars, relinquished its membership. From 1891 to 1896 the Sabha was under the dominance of M. G. Ranade exercising control through his disciple G. K. Gokhale who acted as its Secretary during that period. When B. G. Tilak established his hegemony in conducting all the affairs in the Committee of Management of the Sarvajanik Sabha, Ranade, accompanied by his own group, left the Sabha to found a new political organization known as the Deccan Sabha.

Political activities in Madras did not receive much attention and politics there went on a low profile unlike in Bombay after the end of the Madras Native Association in 1862. In 1884, after a lapse of two decades, political life in the Madras Presidency started stirring only with the coming of the Madras Mahajan Sabha into being. Outside the three Presidencies of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, organized political activities were developed spinning around the associations like the Lahore Indian Association in Punjub or the Allahabad People's Association in the United Provinces. Political activities of Bengal and Bombay created little or no effect in Madras while the North West Province and the Punjub were completely silent. The Muslims also stood apart from this agitation.

The agitation over the Ilbert Bill, followed by the imprisonment of Surendranath, created much enthusiasm among many of the members of the Indian Association to give it an all-India character. When the Government held an international exhibition in Calcutta in 1883, the Indian Association availed itself of this opportunistic moment and
decided to inaugurate an all-India National Conference in Calcutta almost at the same time on 28, 29 and 30 December, 1883 with the expectation of a mammoth gathering of distinguished Indian personalities in Calcutta on that occasion. The objects of the National Conference were truly national rather than sectional or regional in nature.

The second session of the National Conference was held on 25, 26 and 27 December, 1885 in Calcutta where the delegates attended the Conference with heartfelt compassion for the forthcoming Bombay Conference. The Indian National Congress that was predestined to play a dominant role in the nationalist movement as its lynchpin finally came into existence at a national convention held in Bombay in December 1985.25

The origin and growth of the Indian National Congress, both as a movement as well as a party, in the three broader stages of its development during the anti-colonial movement, prepared the backdrop in which the Indian party system, though not in the strict sense of the term, started to take its roots in Indian politics.26 In the first stage of its development, starting from its very inception in 1885 and continuing to 1905 just before the emergence of the Muslim League in 1906, the Congress was basically nothing more than a debating society of the Western educated Indian elites engaged in appealing to the British government for additional privileges for a handful of people through petition, protest and propaganda. Even in this period of submission, the national leaders were not ready to see the Congress as an "isolated demonstration, but the beginning of a movement."27 During this time, the British Government's decision to partition Bengal to weaken the growth of Indian nationalism, led to the launching of the Swadeshi and Boycott movement on 7 August 1905. Apart from this, such a decision was taken to provoke Muslim communalists "as a counter to the Congress and the national movement, which was getting increasingly crystallized in the last quarter of the 19th century."28

The second stage started in 1906 with the emergence of the All-India Muslim League in the Indian political scenario and culminated in 1916 with the return of the extremists to the main stream of the Congress after a split of the party in 1907.

The trends in Muslim politics also played an important role in giving a shape to the evolving party system of India. The growing feeling of a distinct identity, if not separateness, amongst the Muslim intelligentsia that developed in the latter half of the 19th century imbued some of them to form the All-India Muslim League on 30 December, 1906. The Muslim League challenged the unilateral role of the Congress in national politics and became busy in proving its affirmative relations with the British. The British did not lose time in taking the advantage of the flattering tendencies of the League when they realized that the Congress was getting abandoned. In all the cases, whether it was in the case of partition of Bengal or in the case of separate electorate, the British acted very

26 Mehta, Khanna, Kueck (eds), n. 1, p.63.
28 Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Mahajan, n. 16, p.127.
cautiously so that their actions could not blaze the embers of separate identity existing among the Muslim elite. Despite the soft attitude of the Congress, conflicting trends and forces fomented communal politics.

The Lucknow Pact, 1916 between the Congress and the League led the former to accept some of the demands of the latter including separate electorate in specified provinces. But there was a controversy for greater share of seats was allotted to Muslim minority provinces like Uttar Pradesh than recommended by the Morley-Minto Reforms at the cost of Muslim majority province of Bengal. Muslims constituted 52 per cent of the total population of Bengal, but 40 per cent share of seats were allotted to it. Likewise, Punjab had a Muslim population of 54.8 per cent, but it was given a share of only 50 per cent of seats. However, not less than 30 per cent of seats were given to the United Province though it had only 14 per cent Muslim population. In spite of having some loopholes in the Lucknow Pact, its positive side cannot be underestimated, for it brought the Congress and the Muslim League together on the same platform to fight the British Imperialism, though only temporarily.

The third stage spanning over a longer period started in 1916 when the Congress was consolidated into a major mass movement and ended in 1946 with the formation of an interim government by the Congress in coalition with the Muslim League. This stage was very crucial in the sense that the Congress and its breakaway groups learnt the art of coalition, acting together on the basic issue of the country's independence from foreign rule. As many rival groups sprang from both within and around the Congress, it was during this period that the rules of the game for political parties were defined, which they started learning – sometimes with collaboration and sometimes in opposition to one another. As the Congress and the League exerted pressure on each other to fulfill their aims, the British took the side of the rival axis. The decision of some of the Congress members in 1923 and 1937 to act within the political framework emerging from their discussions and deliberations with the colonial rulers equipped them with the lessons of the basic rules of electoral battle.

From the very beginning, the Congress depicted divisions. During the 1920s, the proposals of Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru were rejected by Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari – leading the former to launch the Swarajya Party.

In the early and later half of 1936, the Congress decided in Lucknow and in Faizabad to participate in the provincial elections with the firm commitment inter alia, of repealing the Government of India Act of 1935 in its entirety and to accept office after elections. The Congress received a massive mandate in its favour despite limited franchise. It gained majority in a large number of provinces barring a few, viz. Bengal, Assam, Punjab and Sind and the North West Frontier Province where it emerged as the single largest party. After a lapse of several months, the Congress Working Committee decided to have a stake in power under the 1935 Government of India Act and formed

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30 Majumdar, n. 22, pp.322-324.
Ministries in Bombay, Madras, Central Provinces, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. After some time, Assam and the North-West Frontier Province also came under the Congress Ministries. Thus, the Congress got an opportunity to project itself not merely as a reliable patron of the nation's freedom struggle but also as a befitting contender in the process of power-sharing and a "user of state power" for the benefit of the masses.31

However, the electoral debacle of the Muslim League and the victory of the Congress created acrimonious relations between them which was further accentuated with the involvement of Hindu Mahasabha and Congress aligning with it for electoral benefit. 1937 saw the predominance of the Congress over the League as a result of that partnership.

The emergence of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and some other left-wing groups within the Congress in the 1920s and 1930s gave a socio-economic dimension to the nationalist movement of India. M. N. Roy and six other Indian revolutionary leaders met at Tashkent to set up the Communist Party of India in October 1920. Apart from this, a large number of communist and left-wing groups that came into being assembled at Kanpur in December 1925 to formally establish an all-India organization named the Communist Party of India (CPI). Beside the CPI, there was the Workers' and Peasants' Party (WPP) consisting of several provincial organizations like the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress in Bengal, the Congress Labour Party of Bombay, the Kirti-Kishan Party of Punjab and the Labour-Kishan Party of Hindustan functioning in Madras. In 1934, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was founded in Bombay in October 1934 under the leadership of Jayprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Minoo Masani. Several other leftist groups and movements flourished in India in the 1930s. After returning to India in 1930, M. N. Roy organized a powerful group of Royists. Subhas Chandra Bose, being compelled to resign from the post of the Congress president, formed the Forward Bloc in 1939 along with his left-wing followers. The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and various Trotskyite groups were also functioning during the 1930s.32

In the eve of the transfer of power, the British Government was confused in taking decisions about the formation of the Interim Government in 1946, as it was wavering over the choice of the Congress to hand over power or to wait for the League's approval. However, the British Government, particularly the Secretary of State, gave priority to getting the co-operation of the Congress. Thus, the Interim Government was formed on September 2, 1946 only with the Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru became its de facto head.

The frustrated and furious Muslim League did not initially join the Interim Government as the British Government's decision to form the Interim Government with the Congress "went against the League's insistence that all settlements be acceptable to it."33 Though its attempts to stage demonstrations in Delhi and other parts of the country

31 Hamza, n. 29, p.4522.
32 Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Mahajan, n. 16, 300-307.
were foiled, such initiatives created turmoil and disturbances throughout the country. The stalemate could only be resolved with the initiative of Wavell who persuaded the League to join the Interim Government and it did so on 15 October 1946.

However, there were fracas within the Muslim League over the issue of selection of ministers in the Interim Government. Jinnah excluded the names of the two most important and experienced leaders, Khwaja Nazimuddin of Bengal and Nawab Ismail Khan of Uttar Pradesh. from the list of the ministers, probably for this reason that they "had never taken an extreme position in the disputes between the Congress and the League." The most surprising thing was the inclusion of Jogendra Nath Mandal's name in the list. The Congress included ministers from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and Parsee communities and one from the Scheduled Castes in the Interim Government. The Muslim League decided to nominate another Scheduled Caste member "to put Congress to shame" and "to prove that it was a greater friend of the Scheduled Castes than the Congress." The Congress had to reshuffle the Ministry in order to provide for ministerial berths to the Muslim League. Sarat Chandra Bose, Sir Safat Ahmed Khan and Syed Ali Zaheer of the Congress had to resign from the Ministry to accommodate the League's nominees in the Interim Government.

Thus, it becomes evident that the kernel of accommodative coalition politics had already been there in the Congress even prior to independence. The Congress platform was the melting ground of groups with opposed views and line of actions although their common goal was the achievement of Swaraj. Thus, it could accommodate within its fold both the Swadeshi and Boycott Movements, rift between the moderates and extremists over the issue of expanding the periphery of the movement beyond Bengal and to give it an all-India shape. This attitude to concede space to intra-party as well as inter-party dissent was further manifested in the formation of ministries in six provinces in 1937, emergence of left groups within the Congress during the 1920s and 1930s and mutual co-operations between the left and the Congress to give a fillip to the freedom struggle and the settlement of the disputes between the Muslim League and the Congress through the process of persuasions and negotiations in matters relating to the formation of the Interim Government in 1946. It goes without saying that the Congress had experience in running coalition governments even before independence as is evident from the Congress-Unionist Party coalition in Punjab in 1937 and the Congress-Muslim League coalition at the central level in 1946. In the wake of independence, the Congress formed social and not political coalitions to establish itself as the only dominant party in a competitive multi-party system.

After independence, India got a comprehensive party system combined with a first-past-the-post electoral system. A party system essentially implies interaction between significant political parties responding to the initiatives of one another, operating in the constitutional and political set-up of the country of which they are an integral part. The Indian party system morphed through various phases to take its present form of a competitive multi-party system. At the very beginning, she adopted a Westminster model of democracy, often used interchangeably with the majoritarian model of democracy.

This prevailed till the existence of the one-dominant party system or the 'Congress system' as Rajni Kothari described it.\(^{35}\) After the ending of the Congress hegemony, India switched over to the consensus model of democracy. From 1947 to 1967, the Indian National Congress established its predominance in the electoral politics of the country, as against the two-party model cherished so long by many scholars, opposition leaders and many prominent Congress personalities,\(^{36}\) making its entrenchment into the ground level of the Indian society. In the first general elections held in February 1952, the Congress achieved 364 out of 489 seats, i.e. 74.4 percent of total seats. The party won 2,246 out of 3,283 seats amounting to 68.4 percent of the total seats in the elections to the legislative assemblies of the states. With a low magnitude, it retained the same position up to the holding of the fourth general elections in 1967. Party system during this period has been characterized by "dominance coexisting with competition but without a trace of alteration,"\(^{37}\) because the opposition parties failed to forge a combined effort to prevent the Congress from gaining thumping majorities in the Parliament. In the state assemblies, the opposition parties did not want to have a stake in power-sharing with the Congress. That was why there emerged a "competitive party system," in which the competing parties played "rather dissimilar roles."\(^{38}\) The ruling Congress Party was a 'party of consensus' which was susceptible to the demands and aspirations of different sections of society and the opposition parties were the "parties of pressure" in the sense that they played an important role to influence opinion and interest inside the party.\(^{39}\) The opposition parties played a diametrically opposite role. Instead of providing an alternative to the Congress party, they wanted to influence sections inside the Congress to create anti-Congress feelings within it. Groups within the ruling party assumed the role of opposition parties, often quite openly, reflecting the ideologies and interests of other parties. But their efforts to weaken the Congress from within did not succeed because of the all-inclusive character of the Congress.\(^{40}\)

Four factors are mainly responsible for the dominance of the Congress when it was in its heyday. Effective and valuable guidance and leadership of the Congress during the freedom movement attributed a special position to it in the mind of the masses. Party leaders gained reverence for the sufferings and hardships they had to endure inside jails. "The shared experience"\(^{41}\) gathered in the independence struggle fostered a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the party ranks and files in the midst of the internal pluralism of the party. The second reason escalating the growth of the Congressional paramountcy was the ever expanding organization of the Congress as a political party all over the nation down to the local level, gave it an additional advantage over others. The federal structure of the party based on internal democracy acted to resolve the disputes and conflicts among the party members and to uphold party cohesion, to train party activists in handling the sensitive issues efficiently in the competitive political ambience, and to form "channels of upward mobility"\(^{41}\) rewarding its most competent members. A

\(^{36}\) Rajni Kothari, Politics in India, Orient Longman Private Limited, New Delhi, 1970, pp.159-160.
\(^{38}\) Kothari, n. 35, p.1162.
\(^{39}\) \textit{ibid}.
\(^{40}\) Weiner, n. 3, p.195.
\(^{41}\) \textit{ibid}.
third factor that contributed to the dominance of the Congress was its in-built capacity to respond to the local needs and aspirations rather than moulding them to subserve its own interests often through the locally influential leaders having a grip upon the local people who constituted a major portion of the local vote bank. The local elites owing their social status to their traditional profession and grabbing of land, created factional groups within the party that vied for political power. Internal democracy, in tandem with successive electoral victories, ultimately strengthened the power of these traditional elites and enabled the party to adjust to the changes in local balance of power. Fourth, the distribution of political patronage acted as a 'lubricating oil' to make the party organization movable as well as workable. With the expanding role of development, the state amassed a substantial amount of resources that could be distributed to the party members. The party enhanced its accommodating capacity of mitigating the conflicts arising among its members. The Congress was the chief beneficiary of the prevailing 'vicious circle' in which its electoral success was embedded that gave it an unlimited access to the political and economic resources of the country. Politics came to be viewed not in terms of ideology but in terms of patronage and administration.

Kothari has identified six elements that contributed to the decline of the Congress. The Congress depended heavily on the personal charisma of high profile leaders like Gandhi, Nehru or Patel throughout the regions and districts of the country. After some time, however, the personal charisma and role of these leaders ceased to work favourably for the Congress in the electoral process and called for a replacement of personal diffusion by an institutional one. The informal factional groups, which were very much active within the party, also inflated the ranks of contestants far beyond available resources. This factional network challenged the framework and discipline that was prescribed by the Congress. This resulted in increasing incidents of sabotage followed by open dissidence and defections. Secondly, a political process that emphasized the here-and-now in place of the historical and the traditional, coupled with the growing emphasis of the Congress on a futuristic ideology, declined the basis of legitimacy and underscored the need for its continuous revival on utilitarian and performance grounds. Thirdly, the consensual style, that facilitated the dominance of the Congress and its leadership, became a matter a joke to the new-generation leadership. They ridiculed the glaring hypocrisy of maintaining a formal consensus amidst constant bickering and disputes, and the need for compromise on the selection of Congress candidates for different elections. All these fomented resentment leading to defection. Fourthly, the Congress’ effort to expand its support base by the displacement of the rank and file of the nationalist movement after independence and the cooption of new elite groups within the traditional framework of the party to perpetuate edge over other parties and groups, though benefited the Congress considerably on a short-term basis, eventually backfired. Fifthly, greater secularism of politics, that the Congress had fashioned in its drive for political modernization and a viable support structure in response to competitive and demand-oriented processes, ultimately confronted the Congress with a more

42 ibid.
43 ibid.
44 Rajni Kothari, Rethinking Democracy, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005, pp.112-117.
pluralistic structure of political competition, and undermined its authoritative and consensual character.

The disintegration of the Congress system started in the later phase of the Nehruvian era (1962-64). Although many thought that India is best fitted for representative democracy among all the post-colonial countries, it proved to be different for the quality of leadership, the basic requirement of a successful democracy, was absent here.

Power negotiation is closely related to some important factors such as leadership strategies, the design of political institutions, and the political role of diverse social groups, or, in short, to the interaction of the state and society. \(^{45}\) Immediately after independence, consolidation of democracy in India was possible by the consensual basis of the Congress rather than by the towering presence of Jawaharlal Nehru who dwarfed the Congress President U. N. Dhabar and wielded virtually unchallenged centralized power after the death of Patel. Over-centralization of political power in the hands of a single leader like Nehru led many thinkers to speculate about the future of Indian democracy, particularly in the absence of Nehru as he never indicated, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, his mentor, who would be his successor. No deputy Prime Minister was appointed in his cabinet. In addition, the party was in quandary as many prominent leaders were sacked from important government positions by the Kamraj Plan which raked up controversies between the ministries and the syndicalists.

However, the political order of India continued to be based on consensual model of democracy with the Congress which, even being an umbrella party, was largely dominated by an upper class leadership. The soft state structure failed to take effective hard policies to initiate meaningful reforms and to implement them in the right direction. After Nehru, Indira Gandhi reached the pinnacle of national politics only with a short interval of Lal Bahadur Sastri as Prime Minister and a split in the Congress in 1969.

The proclamation of emergency in 1975 and the incarceration of a large number of opposition leaders in its wake, led to a more centralized style of politics by Indira Gandhi. Personalized and populist style of politics weakened many democratic institutions of India. Internal elections to party organizations did not take place for over 17 years up to 1984. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi started their political career with an added advantage and in this context both of them came nearer to Nasser of Egypt than to any other Indian of their times. \(^{46}\) Since then, the Congress had completely lost its consensual character of the Nehru era. Indira Gandhi used the Congress as a 'personal tool' \(^{47}\) to strengthen her own position within the party that led to a slow but steady decline

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\(^{45}\) Subrata Mukherjee, "Dynastic Faultiness" – (1), The Statesman, 28 June 2007.


\(^{47}\) ibid.
of the Congress after her assassination. Centralized power politicized the civil service and weakened the federal system, evoking a sense of deprivation and thereby a strong opposition in some regions that declined to accept loss of autonomy. Political decay has badly affected formal and informal political institutions which basically sprouted from the temptations of selfish politicians to stabilize their rule even at the cost of erosion of "the substance and autonomy of institutions." This has resulted in frustration among organized sectors producing a far more disparaging rivalry with the state than arose in the first twenty years after independence. Indira Gandhi even took a hostile attitude to her own party colleagues and a "new political process" emerged. As Kochanek has rightly observed, she created "a pyramidal decision-making structure in party and government." The fact that Indira had a charismatic appeal to the masses moved them away from the concept of a legal-rational authority. A charismatic authority is sure to be unstable in nature and they perpetuated that trait. This severely damaged a strong political organization like the Congress that had an enriched past of democratic processes for more than eight decades as a movement and then a party.

However, the halcyon days of the Congress hegemony did not last long. In the fourth parliamentary elections held in 1967, the Congress received a serious debacle. The election results were dramatic. Congress gained 283 seats out of 520. The percentage of votes cast by the Congress was 40.8 per cent, while in the previous general elections of 1962 it retained 361 seats with 44.7 per cent of total valid votes cast indicating a loss of 78 seats and a variation of 3.9 per cent in vote-sharing. It was far away from securing majorities in eight state assemblies and its majority at the Centre was narrowed down to a margin of 54 per cent of the seats. The Congress was not only ousted from power in many states, but many of its prominent leaders were defeated in this election. Kamraj, the Congress president himself, lost his seat to a student leader in his home constituency. The same fate occurred to nine Union ministers and six state Chief Ministers. The degeneration that started in the Nehru era, declined further and culminated in 1969 with a split in Congress.

1978 brought some spectacular changes in the party system of India having a tremendous impact in the way of making room for the emergence of coalition politics here. The changes that India is experiencing in recent times in its party system are: (1).fragmentation and federalization of political parties; (2). regionalization of the party system; (3).ascendancy of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and (4). deideolization or ideological depolarization of parties in the perspective of globalization. All these changes are intertwined

Party fragmentation is considerably significant in determining the structuring of party systems and the political practices that have emerged in India over the last decade. Party systems, in Eckstein's terms, can be defined as "competitive interaction patterns among parties"\(^{51}\), or, following Maurice Duverger, as "the forms and modes of their coexistence."\(^{52}\) If party systems are defined in this way, the degree of party competition then appears to be a crucial variable. From this it also appears that non-competitive parties or the parties having a little influence on party competition are marginal to the national party system. The competitiveness of a party system can be measured through winning differential – the difference existing between the shares of votes obtained by the first and the second parties in an election.\(^{53}\) A constituency will be more competitive when such a difference between the percentage of vote share of the first and the second parties is narrower than in another constituency where such a difference will be greater. Since 1957, winning differential has varied from 20 per cent in average in all constituencies through 1989 to about 10 per cent in 1988. The decrease in the share of votes of the largest party from 50 per cent till 1967 to 47 per cent in the 1990s is not as large as the decrease in the winning differential. The degree of fragmentation of the party system can be measured by using the 'index of factionalization' developed by Douglas Rae.\(^{54}\) Effective parties have increased in number from 2.27 during the 1970s and 1980s to about 3 in the 1990s. Factionalization has also shown a rising trend from 0.44 in 1984 to 0.83 in 1999 at the all-India level. Factionalization, though it has increased at the state level, is lower than that at the national level. Nevertheless, party fragmentation does not lead to parallel changes in party competition. Party fragmentation in 1998 was similar to what it was in the period from 1957 to 1967, though the winning differential or the difference between the share of votes of the two largest parties reduced in the 1990s. So, an increase in party competition does not necessarily lead to an increase in party fragmentation.

Lack of intra-party democracy intensifies fragmentation within parties and the party systems. Intra-party democracy is essential in ensuring transparency within the internal functioning of parties. Decision-making process of any party is either obscured by ambiguity or narrowly distributed to one leader or a few leaders. "The more the discretionary power vested with leaders, the more a political party will depend solely on

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This index measures both the number and size of parties in calculating the intensity of fragmentation of the party system. Factionalization may vary from 0 indicating maximal concentration where only one party possess all the seats to a maximum of 1 denoting the existence of as many parties as there are seats in the legislature. Where there are two parties with exactly half the number of seats, the degree of factionalization scores to 0.5. The larger the number of nearly equal parties, the larger will be the extent of factionalization.
its leaders for renewal."\textsuperscript{55} Parties suffering from fragmentation cannot include newly emerging marginalized classes and caste groups within their ambit because of the criteria for the admission of those are not always clear in the absence of specific guidelines and norms. Finding no space in the existing political parties, backward classes and caste groups have no other alternative than to form their own parties. It may have a dual effect. First, fragmentation leads to the erosion of the support bases of the prevailing parties and secondly, it encourages emergence of new regional parties in the prevalent party system.

Since independence, although a large number of political parties came up, control over the Central government and most of the state governments, coupled with its organizational strength, enabled Congress to have a command over state resources, to recruit elites from different levels of the society within party organization and to increase its support base. At the same time, it become "an arena for bargaining, conflict and arbitration."\textsuperscript{56} Multifarious social and political organizations such as party factions, caste and tribal parties, regional parties and other political outfits emerged in the political scenario to assert their voices and position by pressuring the Congress in the political process through excessive bargaining. The Congress was under the control of various caste groups and assorted interests at the village level. Elections for constituting local, district, state and All-India Congress committees were keenly contested as the parliamentary or assembly elections because the winning groups in these organizational elections of the party would control the distribution of nominations to the state assemblies and to parliament. The competition among the village level elites often revamped the Congress as each factional group attempted to rally a massive gathering to recruit party members.\textsuperscript{57}

The fragmented groups, deeply rooted in the district and state level organizational structure, often encouraged keen competition and rivalry between two opposing wings of the ruling party - the 'ministerial' and the ‘organizational’. The organizational wing preferred the opposition to play a representative role, often taking an anti-government stance leading to a "displacement of government elite."\textsuperscript{58} Differences often arose over policy and political strategy. The other political parties were also not spared from the malaise of fragmentation. Thus, factional groups of the State Congress Committees formed rival Congress parties in some states. This first took place in Kerala in 1964 when the 'Kerala Congress' was formed from the break-away group of the official Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. This was followed in West Bengal by the foundation of the 'Bangla Congress' in 1966 and by the 'Jan Congress' in several states of North India before the 1967 elections. Similarly, the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) was split into warring factions. The Jan Sangh was divided between its moderate and extremist groups while the Swatantra Party had always been in the process of relentless internal squabbles and defections. Moreover, several frontal groups have emerged among the marginalized

\textsuperscript{56} Kothari, n. 36, p.24.
\textsuperscript{57} Weiner, n. 3, p.196.
\textsuperscript{58} Kothari, n. 36, p.182.
sections like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and tribal parties which were excessively prone to factionalism. The non-Congress parties after 1967 entered into coalitions among themselves and even with the Congress dissidents irrespective of their ability to stay together. Incongruous coalition-making of this kind led to the emergence of nebulous and assorted groups to a greater extent which was never found in the Congress before. This had a two-way effect "leading to the defeat of the Congress governments in the 1967 elections and soon thereafter, the inability of the anti-Congress united fronts to 'hang together' led to a toppling of those governments in one state after another."  

Many varied and complex factors like caste, class, religion, community, language and regional identities are directly responsible for the fragmentation of parties and party systems. As Francine Frankel observes: 'The increased participation in electoral politics of groups long considered peripheral, has ratcheted up pressure on the cohesion of national and even state political parties in the wake of voter fragmentation along regional, religious and caste lines." Contemporaneous Indian electoral politics has come to be essentially characterized by fragmentation of the party system. The extent of fragmentation was measured by calculating the average effective number of parties in the various constituencies for all Lok Sabha elections. The effective number of parties has increased from 2.27 in the 1970s and 1980s to almost 3 in the 1990s. Changes in the extent of fragmentation had not always led to similar changes in competitiveness. Party fragmentation in 1998 looked similar to that during the period of Congress dominance, but the difference in the vote share of the top two parties dropped in the 1990s, especially when compared to earlier periods. Hence, there was an increase in party competition in the 1990s, but not in party fragmentation which was similar to the period of Congress dominance, i.e., 1957 to 1967. Participation of Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes, women and other marginalized sections of the society in elections has increased by varying degrees in different states during the second upsurge of participatory democracy.

It should be noted here that "unlike the other deprived groups, there does not seem to be any simple linear trend among Muslims from a low to a high turnout." However, to treat the entire Muslim community as a single unit is a mistake as it may exclude politically significant segments of the Muslims like the lower castes within it. The Lok Sabha election of 2004 was held within the existing structure of party competition that started unfolding since the 1989 Lok Sabha election. Since then, no party has gained a clear majority in the Lok Sabha. The fractured mandate of the

59 ibid.
61 Roy and Wallace (eds), n. 53, p.40.
electorate provided an open space to the political parties for the formation of more than one kind of government. But political competition in this election was narrow in many ways. The first phase of the 'third electoral system' was characterized by a period of fluidity. The reconfiguration of the party system that was going on in India's party system over the last 15 years, has also finished by 1999. With the elections of 1996, 1998 and 1999, participatory upsurge of the marginalized classes has reached a saturated point. All these closed the possibility of competitive politics in which the voters could have exercised a substantial choice. In that sense, the 2004 general election marked the closure of a historical possibility that arose in the beginning of the 1990s, the possibility of competitive politics providing space for exercise of substantial choices by ordinary citizens. The replacement of the 'Congress system' by 'a system of multiparty convergence' \(^{64}\) does not expressively widen the scope of choices available to and exercised by the voters. The demise of the 'Congress system' in 1991 has opened new possibilities in democratic politics through changes in the structure of party competition. One aspect of these structural changes in party competition is that it has facilitated the emergence of state politics as the basic arena of political contestation. Another important dimension of changes in the structure of party competition has been a reconfiguration of the party system. A new structure of political competition started to evolve by the end of the 1990s. In this new system both the Congress and the BJP, two main contenders for national power, faced a structural deficit and none of these was closer to majority to form a government on their own. Thus, pre-poll alliances and post-poll coalitions became inevitable and unavoidable.

Ever since the perceptible decline of the Congress, many regional parties rose to prominence in national politics with their narrow parochial outlooks and aspirations. The 14\(^{th}\) Lok Sabha elections have added another dimension to the pattern of party competition. A varied range of regional formations has become the focal point of the emerging party system. The Indian party system has been undergoing many transformations since the late 1980s. Numerous political parties have originated from the Congress in the 1950s and 1960s. The Janata family of parties has given birth to quite a full political formations both at the national and at the state levels. The changing pattern of social cleavages has also affected the nature of the party system and party competition. Changes in the Congress have provided a space for an open and competitive party system.

Alongside the diminution of the Congress, another important change that India witnessed in the 1990s was the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP made its debut in electoral politics by winning 2 seats in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections. The 1989 Lok Sabha elections indicated a crucial step forward for the BJP which emerged as the third largest party with 85 parliamentary seats after the Congress ( 197 seats ) and the Janata Dal ( 143 seats ). Following the anti-Congress stand of the opposition parties, the BJP was forced to support V. P. Singh's National Front cabinet along with the left parties

\(^{64}\) *ibid.*
and thus it "entered, hesitantly, into a precarious position as support party ...."\textsuperscript{65} V. P. Singh Government's announcement of its intention to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission enraged the Sangh Parivar and the upper-caste constituencies of the BJP. Under the pressure of the RSS and the Viswa Hindu Parishad, the BJP decided to break its ties from the National Front Government and to propagate Hindutva with much more enthusiasm than before to challenge the threats posed by the Mandal Committee Report creating "dangerously divisive effects" on a Hindu majority state. In the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP galvanized its electoral machinery with the 'theme of Hindutva'\textsuperscript{66} and used it as its main electoral plank. The BJP tried to occupy the vacant space rendered by the Congress to become the natural emblem of national unity and to provide a stable and responsible government for the nation. Though the Congress shared a considerable amount of Lok Sabha seats (227 seats) due to 'sympathy effect',\textsuperscript{67} it could not check the BJP from becoming the second largest party with 119 seats in the Lok Sabha. The eleventh general elections held in 1996 propelled the BJP to the position of the largest political party. This time it increased its number of representatives through a soft campaign of Hindutva and making alliance on a limited basis even with regional parties having no ideological consistency with Hindu nationalism, other than the Shiv Sena, a traditional coalition partner of the BJP. In 1996, the BJP captured 161 seats. In 1998 and 1999 it won 184 and 183 seats respectively. However, in spite of its phenomenal growth between 1989 and 1996, the BJP could not expand itself either in terms of its support-base or in terms of its spatial presence across the states. These developments are a clear indication of the fact that straight party political competition is rare between the Congress and the BJP, rather, competitive politics accommodates a large number of parties in addition to the Congress and the BJP. The two most important features of the 1990's politics in India is the occupancy of the central position in politics by the BJP as a rising political force with the states having emerged as a space for manifestation of party-politics through regional political forces. In the three consecutive elections of 1996, 1998 and 1999, Congress trailed behind the BJP because of its failure to grasp the dynamically changing nature of the political competition. Worried of regional forces and guided by the erroneous assumption that it could revive its past glory as the central focal point of national politics, the Congress well appreciated the fact that it would be beyond its capacity to lead anti-BJP forces alone. The skeptical support and withdrawal of it from the United Front governments was "symptomatic of this megalomaniac self-image of the Congress party"\textsuperscript{68} and its failure to respond positively to the changing nature of party political competition. As a consequence of these changes, elections in the 1990s were mainly a triangular competition. The Congress has come to realize, albeit somewhat inadvertently, that it would not be possible for any single party to capture power on its own strength alone at the Centre and the contour of party competition has to be studied not at the national but at the state level. This realization

\textsuperscript{65} Thomas Blom Hansen, The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp.165-167.
\textsuperscript{66} ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} ibid.
forced the Congress to forge alliances in different states with the regional forces of the states concerned on numerous occasions to have a share of power.

In the perspective of these developments in competitive politics and the growing role of regional parties in India's politics in the 1990s, it has become a trend to evaluate the past credentials of regional parties before choosing them as coalition partners. The existence of the regional parties is not a new phenomenon in Indian politics. What appears to be new is the role played by the regional parties in the national politics and their relations with the so-called all-India parties. The Akali Dal and the DMK were the constituent partners of the government led by the Janata party in 1977, though it had a clear majority with 295 seats of its own. This was the first time for the regional parties to share power with the national parties at the Centre. There were altogether 51 members having affiliation to different regional parties in 1977. In 1980, with the return of the Congress to power, regional parties lost their prominence. In the Seventh Lok Sabha elections, the DMK managed to win 16 seats at the best and the Akalis were marginalized to one seat only and the total strength of the regional parties in the Seventh Lok Sabha, including the small left parties of West Bengal, reached the tally of 36. Though the elections to the Eighth Lok Sabha were held in the backdrop of the 'Indira wave', regional parties strengthened their previous position and 76 members belonging to different regional parties entered the Lok Sabha. Aggrandizement of seats by the regional parties was made possible by the invigorating ascendancy of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh and of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam. However, as the Congress gained massive victory, having 415 seats, the regional parties had no scope for power-sharing in national politics at that moment. Many regional parties such as the DMK, the TDP, the AGP, and the Congress (S), apart from the Janata Dal, coalesced out of their anti-Congress stance to form the National Front (NF) in 1988 on the eve of the 1989 elections. But the NF allies did not succeed in the 1989 elections, the only exception being the TDP that bagged two seats, though the regional parties had 45 members in the Ninth Lok Sabha. These regional parties did not hesitate to join the NF-led government irrespective of their poor performance in the elections. In 1991, 56 seats went to the regional parties of which the TDP alone gained 13 seats. Having won 227 seats, the Congress installed a minority government under the leadership of P. V. Narshimha Rao as the Prime Minister with the support of the All India Anna Dravida Munettra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Janata Dal (G), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and Kerala Congress (KC) without being the part of the government. The regional parties played havoc with the installation and destruction of the Central government both in 1989 and 1991. The 1977 elections were a turning point in the sense that it expedited the process of the decay of the Congress, the emergence of regional parties in all-India politics and heralded a new era of partnership between the national and the regional parties in the game of power-politics.

69 Suhas Palsikar, "The Regional Parties and Democracies: Romantic Rendezvous or Localized Legitimation", Mehra, Khanna, Kueck (eds), n. 1, pp.308-309.
Since 1996, regional parties have been playing a wider role. Their support has become so indispensable that without them, formation of the Central government has become a futile endeavour. They have been crucial partners of the United Front (UF) coalition government that was voted to power in the 1996 elections. The UF experiments were not satisfactory. In the 1996 Lok Sabha, 95 members of a total 137 members of different regional parties from different regions of the country were part of the UF coalition. It seemed that regional parties were advancing to occupy the 'third' space outside the Congress and the BJP. Moreover, the UF coalition was a short-lived one.

The regional parties, barring some others, quickly came out from the United Front and joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1998 considering the gloomy future of the UF. The 1998 Lok Sabha had 161 members from the regional parties and 92 of them were part of the NDA government. The TDP, an important partner of the UF, settled its mind to join the NDA and the existence of the NDA government was largely dependent upon the TDP. Regional parties are habituated in shifting their allegiance from one front to another having a brighter prospect of winning elections and the national parties co-opt those regional parties that represent a wider spectrum of social cleavages of that region. The AIADMK, another constituent partner of the NDA, played a vital role in dislodging the NDA from power. 168 members, excluding 20 of the Janata Dal factions, belonged to the regional parties in the 13th Lok Sabha of 1999. The NDA had 109 members of different regional parties. 15 regional parties out of 32 representing the Lok Sabha joined the hands of the NDA. The remaining 17 regional parties – 4 Left Front allies having 6 members, 6 Congress allies with 23 members and 7 other regional parties did not join any alliance or front.

In the elections of the 14th Lok Sabha held in 2004, the Congress-led UPA came to power and formed an incongruous coalition government with the support of the left parties though the left parties were not a part of the government and lent support from outside. However, the election results do not justify the claim of the Congress and its allies to secure a clear mandate from the people and to rule the country. In spite of increasing its tally to 145 by wresting 31 seats more than its previous performance in the 1999 elections in which it was the worst affected victim, its vote share actually decreased by 1.9 per cent. There is no denying the fact that the low percentage of vote share was a consequence of contesting smaller number of seats this time. The congress contested 414 seats in 2004 in comparison to 453 seats in the 1999 elections, the Congress and its pre-electoral allies, taken together, captured 222 seats with 36.5 per cent of vote share, an improvement of 2.5 per cent over the previous percentage of vote share obtained by the Congress and its allies in 1999. It hardly indicates an increase in 'popular support' for the Congress and its allies, as Yadav thinks. The UPA established a threadbare lead of half a percentage point of vote share over the NDA. Compared to the Congress, the performance of its allies, mostly regional parties, was far better. They increased their seats from 23 in 1999 to 77 in 2004 and their vote share also showed an

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70 Yadav, n. 63, pp.5384-5385.
71 ibid.
upward movement from 5.7 per cent to 10.1 per cent. The BJP secured 138 seats in 2004 as against 182 in 1999, 44 seats dropped. Its vote share also decreased by 1.6 percentage points though it contested 25 more seats this time than in 1999. All these indicated a real decline in its support base. The allies of the BJP did not escape the debacle either as they established a win over 51 seats in the 2004 elections as against its previous tally of 114 seats in 1999. Nevertheless, their vote share fell by only 1 per cent.

The Congress-led UPA established its predominance over the NDA not by the Congress itself but by the fresh support brought by its regional allies. It has been argued that coalitions have played a significant role in the winning of the UPA. The Congress-led UPA has largely benefited from making alliances with regional forces in seven states, viz., Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand and Maharashtra, the Congress was confronted with serious challenges either from the BJP alone or the NDA alliance in which the BJP was a partner. In Tamil Nadu and Bihar, the Congress had to face the NDA alliance with the BJP as a junior partner. The Congress could have formed an alliance with a third force, a party or a coalition that emerged this time in these two states. In Andhra Pradesh, the newly emerging Telengana Rastriya Samity (TRS) provided a ‘coalition-building opportunity’ to the Congress. In Maharashtra, the Congress forged an alliance with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), an existing partner in the state government and a strong rival of the BJP ally. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was an effective anti-NDA partner in Jharkhand. In Jammu and Kashmir, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), being an anti-NDA and anti-National Conference force, was a natural choice to the Congress. In Bihar, the Congress came down to the fourth position and already had an alliance with the Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD) at the state level. In Tamil Nadu, the Congress, with the third party status, could have developed coalitions as before with any of the two regional parties, the AIADMK or the DMK and in 2004 elections the Congress joined the DMK-led alliance. In Himachal Pradesh, the Congress coalesced with Sukh Ram's Himachal Vikash Congress (HVC), a breakaway faction of its own. Thus, the Congress which was averse to coalitions up to 1998 became a builder of coalitions by making it more 'coalitionable' to the regional parties.

In almost all the states, political space has been divided between the state-level regional parties and the national parties except in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh presently run by the BJP government and Himachal Pradesh where the Congress is in power at present. In Tamil Nadu, state politics is centered around the two state parties – the AIADMK or the DMK. In Jammu and Kashmir, the National Conference and the PDP constitute the two alternatives with which the national parties enter into alliances. The only exception is Uttar Pradesh where the Bahujan Samaja Party

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73 ibid.
74 ibid.
(BSP) under the leadership of Mayawati, could achieve a landslide victory on its own strength with the help of 'social engineering' in the state assembly elections in 2007 and wrested power from the previous SP-led coalition government.

Regional parties represent a wide range of variegated social cleavages and ideological opinions revolving around caste, religion, ethnicity, language etc. In India, newly emerging aspirations unfold in non-aggregative regional parties which will lose their existence if they choose to operate in the broader spectrum of social schisms. The narrower the party, the greater will be its chances of success in electoral politics. Disaggregated framework of representation leads to some kind of "ideological fuzziness." It is very difficult to draw ideological boundaries between regional parties as they are little interested in developing an ideology than in representing some particular section. Yet there are some "ideological zones." The Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party and some others are based on the rhetoric of social justice. The second ideological zone is represented by regional identity. The AGP, the Akali Dal, the DMK and the AIADMK, the National Conference etc. belong to this second category. Developmental logic is the basis of the third ideological zone and the TDP and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) are the regional parties based on this. The fourth ideological zone consists of political Hindutva of which the Shiv Sena is an example. The fifth ideology is that of neo-liberalism. The Congress, BJP and many other political parties are the staunch advocates of neo-liberalism. The ideology of anti-globalization has emerged in opposition to the ideology of neo-liberalism in the arena of politics as the sixth ideological zone. But to be sure, these are as porous as they can be. Ideological fuzziness is often a product of the amalgamation of the claim of "sharp representation" made by regional parties and their aspirations for power-sharing in place of "ideological formulations and clarity." The structure of political competition is closely linked with the process of power-sharing. Politics has become so much competitive today or the arrangements for sharing have taken such a shape that formation of cross-ideological alliances or, as it is commonly known as incompatible alliances, has become a regular practice among political parties – both regional and national. It is frequently claimed that the 1990s witnessed a tendency towards a bipolar ideological competition among the forces of communalism and secularism. But it is a superimposed version that cannot be accepted in its entirety. As Sridharan commented: "alliances have been driven by the imperative to aggregate votes to win and not by ideology, programme or social cleavages".

Note: The term 'social engineering' means the assimilation of different social groups, particularly Brahmans and other upper castes with Dalits, forged to win elections.

Palsikar, n. 68, pp.1478-1479.

ibid.

ibid.

ibid.

ibid.

Against the backdrop of the massive growth of regional parties, two interrelated developments have recently emerged in the Indian party system. First, parties are retreating from performing their role of setting political agenda and secondly, core issues of contestation are rapidly being politicized. In place of parties, the agenda are being set by the state bureaucracy and the media. As a result, many issues are remaining outside the domain of contestation. In fact, this process started in response to the changes of economic policy brought about by globalization. Since then, changes in different issues like defense, foreign policies, trade policy and the very directions of Indian states have occurred outside the domain of political parties. The same process has also weakened collective actions and political movements. Therefore, the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the media are now engaged in framing public policy.

During the first few decades after independence, political parties in India were distinguished from one another on the basis of ideology. Anti-colonialism, democratic socialism or anti-Congressism were the bases of the formation of political parties for a long time. The Congress has lost its past glory and the contribution of the Congress in the freedom struggle to overthrow the British rule does not attract voters’ minds any more. The Congress has been ousted from power several times. Therefore, anti-Congress propaganda can no longer serve as a rallying point against it. Secularism and communalism ostensibly have a clear dividing line between political parties. However, this division has also blurred as almost all political parties invoke communal and/or caste sentiments to woo voters of particular castes and communities. Many of these parties have claimed themselves to be secular vis-à-vis the hardcore Hindutva policy of the BJP. On the other hand, the BJP has somewhat deviated from its ideological line of Hindutva to attract more and more regional parties as its coalition partners, particularly when the Congress has entered the realm of coalition politics and challenged the BJP as a rival in coalition formation.

The attitudes of the political parties towards economic reforms could have acted as an ideological division among them. Interestingly, all parties, whether ruling or opposition, hold more or less similar attitude towards reforms. Parties in power implement reforms by degrees to downplay its significance. Similarly, the opposition parties maintain a safe distance from the reforms so long as they are in opposition. Almost all political parties, whenever in power, has implemented reform policies with some reservations. The Congress opposed the reform policies of the BJP-led NDA government but returning to power in 2004, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has pursued the same track. Apart from this, it is not uncommon to find a party in power in two different states simultaneously advocating reforms in one state while opposing the same in another. The CPI (M), while opposed reforms at the Centre and in Kerala, it advocated reforms in West Bengal, though both the states were under its rule. A growing trend towards ideological depolarization is now
being perceived among parties in which they are striving for changing themselves into pragmatic associations to win elections and seize political power.\textsuperscript{81}

However, this is not to say that in Indian politics there is no dividing line. But the number of such lines are so many that they cannot be categorized into a single dimension of a Left-Right variety. During the last few years, most political parties are constantly changing their ideological positions from one dimension to another resulting in an ideological shrinking among parties. On most major policy matters, there is hardly any fundamental difference between the views of the BJP and the Congress, of course, with some differences in emphasis and techniques. The strategy of both the Congress and the BJP has been in most occasions, if not all, to retain silence on controversial issues. The Left parties, in particular the CPI (M), being fully aware of the ideological inclination of the Congress for reforms, were extending outside support to the UPA 1 government of which the Congress was a leading partner. Sharp ideological differences no longer commensurate with the prevailing ambiance of political pragmatism. Electoral considerations seem to assume greater significance than ideological divergences in the age of coalition politics where the only issue that concerns political parties most is power-sharing, even if it can be achieved by forming coalitions with ideologically incongruous political parties.

As the Indian party system is constantly passing through a process of changes, it has not yet developed a stable party system like its British or American counterparts. The party system of India has wavered in between one-dominant party system and competitive multi-party system with an interlude of a two-party system in 1977 and the formation of a 'Third Front' under the leadership of V. P. Singh in 1988. India has developed a 'federal and bi-nodal'\textsuperscript{82} party system in the wake of 1998 and 1999 general elections. At the central point of the party system, there is either the Congress or the BJP and almost all the coalitions, except a few at the state level, are being formed and revolved around either of the two parties. It is evident that the two polity wide nodal parties may together be winning a large proportion of the seats, but their asymmetrical spread across different regions makes it difficult for them to form government of their own. They have to depend on the 'other parties', i.e., the group of coalitionable parties. The spatial distinction of different political parties makes alliance formation essential either before or after the election. Federal coalitions fulfill the needs of the two nodal parties – the Congress and the BJP – in so far as they give them the numbers needed for government formation. At the same time, they give space to the coalitionable parties for the fulfillment of at least some of their long-standing demands. They seek proper representation and participation in power-sharing at the federal level.

\textsuperscript{81} Mooij (ed), n. 54, pp.79-84.
Though the Congress and the BJP have come to the central point of the party system in India, both the parties are suffering from serious organizational deficiencies. FDI controversy 2007, high command high handedness, intriguing over inclusion and exclusion of members are a few instances of this.

Political parties, like any other organizations, considerably require a decision-making body at the national level founded by party constitutions to protect and rejuvenate the health of the party organizations and to standardize and control ideology, ideas and individual workers and party representatives with the changing needs of the time. The national decision-makers should have the power to insist the regional leaders or the operatives on 'course correction' so that they may not deviate ideologically from the path collectively accepted by the national decision-makers. It is often mistakenly assumed that the high command syndrome is essentially related to the Congress but the Communist parties are also centrally organized on the principle of 'democratic centralism'. The BJP too, like its predecessor the Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS), is centrally directed and under the aegis of the Rastriya Sayam Sevak Sangha (RSS). BJP’s predicament in losing strength has much to do with its ideological expressions like rastra bhakti / paribar bhakti which eulogizes as manifestations of national interest. Moreover, it has led to total alienation from the Muslim community which has been exemplified in Gujarat. It has also been trapped by the Ayodhya syndrome. Finally, the unanswered question of political successor has continuously plagued the BJP for long.

Likewise, the Congress has not yet developed an internal mechanism to include the members of newly emerging groups and to recruit new leaders “with some popular base and having an open discussion of ideas.” In the Third Front, there has been no settled criteria as to the future inheritor of the leadership. The parties continue to be seriously affected by increasing factionalism in the absence of procedural norms in their organizational structures. Recruitment of party leaders and workers without such norms and depending on one bureaucrat-styled leader or a few leaders for the renewal of parties jeopardize both the interests of political parties and the party systems as a whole.

It is both interesting and intriguing to note that excepting for the minority issue, there is not much difference between the Congress and BJP over their foreign and economic policies.

In spite of all failings, the Indian political system cannot do away with the democratic order. Therefore, many suggested reforms to resuscitate the party system.84

83 Mehta, n. 55, pp.155-156.
An attempt can be made to explain the changes in the core structure of the Indian party system in the light of Smith Gordon's analysis of the Danish party system by four parameters. These four parameters are: temporary fluctuations, restricted change, general change and transformation. While 'temporary fluctuations' refer to changes in support bases of parties for a short time or temporary shifting of power from one party to another, etc., transformation denotes radical changes in the core structure of the party system. Restricted change involves stable vote shares of a party for a long time despite its remaining out of governmental power for several times. General change differs from transformation both in the degree and quality of changes.

In case of India, the party system has undergone only temporary fluctuations and restricted change. Transformation in the core structure of the party system has not cropped up here. There are changes in the support bases of parties, an upward tendency in factionalism, an increase in the number of dissident groups within the same party, a growing proliferation of regional parties and so on. These are all temporary fluctuations and restricted change in the Indian party system. Unless transformations, that is radical changes take place in the core structure of the party system, India is likely to have a 'bi-nodal' or at best a 'tri-nodal' party system depending on the viability of the so called Third Front. The Third Front may become a force to reckon with in Indian politics only with the leading role of the left parties. The existing trend is likely to continue and the future course of coalition politics in India depends largely on how the course of party-politics takes twists and turns vis-à-vis the possibility of transformations in the core structure of the party system.

The next two chapters will deal with coalition politics at the state and national levels.

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86 Under the nomenclature of the United National Progressive Alliance (UNAP), eight regional parties – the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Kerala Congress have formed the Third Front with the pledging of building a viable alternative to the Congress and the BJP. Ten regional political parties in the north-east – AGP, the Naga People's Front – the ruling party in Nagaland – the United Democratic Party and the Hill State People's Democratic Party of Meghalaya, the Manipur People's Party, the Manipur State Congress Party, the Manipur Democratic People's Front, the Mizo National Front, the People's Party of Arunachal and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) – recently resolved to form a new political front – the North-East Regional Political Front (NERPF) – seeking a fresh look into Centre-State relations in the true spirit of federalism. 14 non-Congress and non-BJP parties, at the "Convention for People's Unity Against Communalism" organised by the CPI (M) on October 30, 2013, came closer to one another to counter communal forces in a united manner. The JD (U), the JD (S), the AIADMK, the SP, the BJD, the AGP, the NCP, the JVP, and four left parties were the participants among others.