Chapter 3

ATTEMPTS AT COALITIONAL POLITICS IN INDIA

COALITIONS in the polity are reflective of the state of democracy in parliamentary systems across the world; but in Third World settings democracy has to face many trammels and innumerable challenges to its operation. A political system has many complexities especially, when it pertains to a Third World country like India. Coalitions are an important mechanism through which caste/class, religious cleavages, regional or territorially-based identities are sought to be put in a cohesive frame even in the absence of shared ideologies in India. More so because India is a compendium of encyclopaedic diversities, multivariate specificities of social, anthropological and racial heterogeneities which converge on the political domain very aggressively and nonchalantly.

Indeed coalition, at the political level is not merely a federal requirement but an important medium of assertion of the various pluralities that constitute the Indian state. Though finding no constitutional sanction, it has found manifestation now and again, intermittently earlier, but now seems to be more pronounced in the la-politique. Changes in party systems have also accounted for the
rise and growth of coalitional governments in India, as they have led to powerful changes at the level of the political process and in the constitution. Our objective in this chapter would be to trace political coalitions in India in the light of the theorizing on the subject (recapitulated in Chapter No.1) and find out how it fares with the comparative experience of other parliamentary systems (as seen in Chapter No.2), and also to account for the sui-generis features of the coalitional experiments in the Indian context. We would in this process, learn of the specificities of minority and coalitional governance and trace out how these have been an advance over the dominance of majoritarian centralist one-party rule.

Political coalition in India needs to be viewed in a slightly different perspective than it is usually seen in the west. We need to perceive that the mechanism of coalition is an important forum of articulation of various concerns, aspects of consensual politics, demands, requirements and grievances or grousers that remain unattended and unaltered by the political process. Though it is so understood in some measure, even in the West, what doesn’t find reflection there is that coalitions are manifestly a mechanism to even rectify historical wrongs such as the assertion of caste inequities, class discrimination and mirrors the emergence of articulate and combative regional forces smarting against political neglect and alienation from the mainstream. Hence, in the Indian context apart from viewing coalitions as representations or manifestation of the usual fractiousness that human associationism is associated with, one needs to be aware that in a Third world country of sub-continental dimensions, with a people who are largely untouched by the
development process and marginalized both socio-economically and in terms of a representation of their felt needs and aspirations in the polity, recourse is often taken to political modalities such as coalition building for the sake of articulation and if possible, redressal of grievances and grouses.

There is a feeling gaining momentum that the political process, the apex level of reordering of society has been negligent, if not apathetic to the bulk of the remnants of the society, that elites have dominated Indian politics and by and large, the majoritarian process that democracy is identified with, has left many out of its ambit, quite high and dry. Coalitional politics has come to fit this bill. The assertion of the neglected, the outcaste and the marginalized have become the engines of change from one party dominant majoritarian rule that India enjoyed continuously for a long time to the current political phenomenon of living with the changed reality.

As indicated earlier, the theoretical premises applicable to multi-polar systems apply to the Indian case largely provided we make the above mentioned proviso.
COALITION AS POLITICAL/ELECTORAL ALLIANCES

Coalitionalism as a form of government has close historical antecedents in India and may be said to have preceded the Constitution. The Congress party, though recognised as the leviathan of Indian politics, emerged as the torchbearer of the National movement largely as a coalitional force. It brought within its fold various multitudes of different political shades and leadership with the singular objective of redeeming the country of imperialist hegemony of the British. We also have example of pre-independence collective political arrangements which can be categorized as organised coalitional forms of governance.

In the pre partition days under the colonial yoke, perhaps the first example of coalitional government was occasioned in 1937 when the Government of India Act of 1935 provisions became operative. The Congress Party secured a clear majority in many regions such as in the Central Provinces, Orissa, Bihar, Madras and the United Provinces. In the presidency of Bombay although the Congress won half the seats and could count the support of the other parties', including a tacit support of the Muslim League, its bete noire; a coalition government could not be formed
because the Congress refused to share power with the Muslim League. Mohammed Ali Jinnah had earlier hoped for his inclusion in the cabinet following the formation of a coalition cabinet. It was his opinion that in India, coalition was the only respectable device to give to Muslims their share of governance.

In 1946, the Interim Government under the stewardship of Nehru who became its formal head as the Prime Minister was the first formal coalition consisting of the Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha among others. Properly speaking, this was not a full fledged government because it was set up as a shiftover. Yet, in representing the diverse political forces that were present at the time it made the transition to independence easier, but not without hiccups. After independence, “the initial attempt was made by the crypto-left as early as 1949 to form a United Socialist Organisation in India which disintegrated in 1951. But the idea of alliance politics was an integral thought of the Communist movement. The credit for having the first ever coalition under the present (i.e., the new Constitution of 1949) goes to (what was then Punjab) Patiala and the East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). As no party could get a majority in the State Assembly in the first election of 1952, a coalition of non-Congress parties was formed in April 1952.”

There have been other states where coalitions were to be formed, in due course of time. Though the Left evolved united left fronts in a number of states for

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contesting elections like the United People's Front in Punjab, People's democratic Front in Hyderabad, United Fronts in Bengal, Travancore-Cochin, Tripura etc these could not transform into coalition governments. "Shyama Prasad Mukeiji made several efforts to form a right-wing united front but in vain. The left-wing had a relatively more stable alliance in view of ideological factor cementing their relations. However, efforts to have electoral adjustment were wide-spread, frequent and ubiquitous."\(^2\)

There is evidence of later attempts at forging electoral alliances or adjustments which were forged for some specific political purpose. It could be in the form of seeking unity of a divided opposition like Minoo Masani when he attempted their cohesive support for the Presidential candidate Subba Rao. During the 1969 elections, the Swatantra party, the Bharatiya Kisan Dal came together with the Jana Sangh to support the candidature of N. Sanjiva Reddy for President ship. After the split in the Congress the initiative went to the Congress(O) and the BKD, Samyukt Socialist Party, Praja Socialist Party, Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh to forge an alliance in1970 to face the elections together in 1971. But this effort seemed abortive, in terms of success. Yet another effort was made in 1974 when the Bhartiya Lok Dal was formed of the constituents of various parties such as the Swatantra party, Utkal Congress, BKD, Samyukt Socialist party, Rashtriya Loktrantik Dal and some twenty smaller formations.

Balraj Madhok attempted another alliance of a different sort—that between a cadre based party such as the Jana Sangh with the Congress(O), but failed. In 1976, “Jayaprakash Narayan was able to announce the Janata party. Despite ideological rift, the instantaneous merger was insisted upon as a necessary preparation for the ensuing elections. The Janata aggregation could not really unite the parties which were worried about the loss of their identities. In a way, the structure of the Janata party corresponded to that of the Congress. While the latter had centripetal factions, the former had centrifugal ones, as each one of it had an earlier history as a party and represented a volatile trend of its corresponding Congress faction. There was a total absence of political consensus except on the personality and role of Mrs. Gandhi. Its survival depended on the complementarity of the four major components. Jana Sangh supplied the organization, whereas the BKD mobilized it for rural votes, the Congress(O) provided leadership and Socialists prepared the blueprint of its economic programme. The intervention of elder statesmen (such as Jayaprakash Narayan and J.B Kripalani) made it possible for it to come into existence. Though it formed a government it could not project a true united face and ended within two years."

Hence alliances formed in India which were purely for the sake of some particular enterprise have met with some success but when it has come to forming alliances or adjustments for fighting elections these have notoriously been short lived and ephemeral, besides ranking up rancour. This is perhaps largely due to the fact that there were very little ideological give and take on such occasions. On the

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Quraishi, Z.M. *ibid* p.115
other hand, the parties belonging to the Left have shown greater resilience. "The Communist (Marxist) party left alliance in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala gave out a greater propensity to survive rather happily and even a dialogue between the two Communist parties was also carried out for mutual understanding."

We have noted here a few instances of alliance which for a varied number of reasons failed. Now we would be highlighting the ones which have met with varying degrees of success.

II

COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

In India, the coalition governments which were formed initially, quite interestingly emanated from the states, rather than at the centre. "This is natural because states are a meeting point of the traditional texture of local politics and the modern political institutions operating at the centre. While multiparty system surfaced at the state level at the outset of the political process, even the constitutional cases of far-reaching consequences for the political system like the Nanavati, the Keshav Singh

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4 Quraisbi, Z.M. *ibid.* p.115.
and Speaker-Governor relations cropped up in states. All that transpires in states is anticipated to befall to the centre after a decade or so." 5

It is therefore appropriate that the first experiments of coalition government were made in Madras, Travancore-Cochin and PEPSU. In 1957, a coalitions government of the Congress party and the Gantantra Parishad came into being which was in existence till 1961. In Kerala, a coalition of the Congress, PSP and the Muslim League was in operation in the 1960-1964 period. In the post 1967 period, pragmatic SVD governments were formed in various states such as in Punjab, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Kerala. A large scale of defections from Congress party led to more coalitions in MP, UP and Haryana. "These pragmatic governments were the sumnum bonum of coalition governments at the state level. The Janata Party government (1977) was the first coalition government at the Union level. The movement of the Grand Alliance was given a fillip by the Emergency, so that the alliance called Janata Party was able to win the elections of 1977 on the basis of a negative verdict." 6 Hence, at the national level, no express coalition emerged till 1977. The one party dominance of the Congress was responsible for this. There was a break in the tradition when the fourth general elections in 1967 , for the first time challenged the hegemony of the Congress by throwing up new political forces.

5 Quraishi Z.M. ibid p.115.
To understand this reality which has been characterised as the 'dominant party system' by Rajni Kothari and W.H Morris - Jones we need to reflect what it was. Both Kothari and Morris-Jones have defined it as a multi-party system in which free competition among parties occurred but in which the Congress enjoyed a dominant position, both in terms of the number of seats that it held in the Parliament and the state legislative assemblies and in terms of immense organizational strength outside the legislatures. Thus, India had a party system characterized by 'dominance coexisting with competition but without a trace of alternation' because "the opposition parties had little hope of preventing the Congress from obtaining sizable majorities in the legislatures despite the ruling party's failure on most occasions to gain a majority of the valid votes cast. Neither, by and large, did opposition parties share power in coalitions with the Congress at the state level."  

A). CONGRESS HEGEMONY (1952-67) : The Era of Nascent Coalition

Indian party system was a competitive party system "... in which the competing parts play rather dissimilar roles. The ruling Congress party was a 'party of consensus' and the opposition parties were 'parties of pressure'." 9 The opposition parties had quite a distinctive role as Kothari says. "Instead of providing an

alternative to the Congress party, they function by influencing sections within the Congress. They oppose by making Congressmen oppose. Groups within the ruling party assume the role of opposition parties, often quite openly, reflecting the ideologies and interests of other parties. The latter influence political decision making at the margin. Kothari has gone on to say that such was the extraordinary Congress dominance that it was within the Congress and not between the Congress and the opposition parties, that the major conflicts within Indian politics occurred, and that it was within the Congress that nearly all of the groups that mattered in Indian politics could be found.

Manor has suggested that the Congress was an umbrella party that dwarfed all others. There were various ways in which the Congress occupied not only the broad centre of the political spectrum but most of the left and right as well. This relegated the opposition parties not only to the margins of the political and party systems as well. To make matters worse, these parties often found themselves on opposite sides of the Congress, which killed any hope of their making common cause against it. To save themselves from absorption by or by the loss of defectors to the Congress, opposition parties tended to develop rigorous ideologies and tightly disciplined organizations. Congress could manage such a position in the country as a party that occupied most space in the political system because “... there (was)
plurality within the dominant party which (made) it more representative, (provided) flexibility, and (sustained) internal competition. At the same time, it (was) prepared to absorb groups add movements from outside the party and thus prevent other parties from gaining strength.¹²

According to Morris-Jones the task of creating and sustaining the immensely broad Congress coalition was facilitated by the sui-generis character of the Indian society, with its multiple ambiguities and vexacious complexities, which prevented the polarisation of the Indian identity (in class terms or any other terms) and formation of contradictions that might fracture such an all-embracing alliance of interests. The Congress party "possessed a large number of skilled operatives who were able to arrange bargains between important social groups, to interpret the logic of politics at one level of the system to people at higher and lower levels, and to knit together the varied regions and subcultures of the sub-continent. The Congress organization was also the main instrument that knit together state and society, which is to say that it was India's central integrating institution. As a consequence, one did not find in India, as in the West, a relationship between the government and the party organisation in which the latter plays an important instrumental and subsidiary role. Congress was more important than that, and arguably the more important than all of the formal institutions of the state put together."¹³


¹³ Manor, J. op.cit. p.434.
Manor is of the view that the survival of the Congress dominance was sustained by the efficient party organisation. "...its effectiveness in distributing the resources, which it acquired from its control of state power, among existing and potential clients in exchange for their political support. This management of resources, at which many within the Congress organisation excelled, was essential to the proper functioning of the 'conciliation machinery within the Congress, at various levels and for different tasks, which (was) almost constantly in operation, mediating in factional disputes, influencing political decisions in the States and districts. The same skill at allotting patronage also enabled the Congress to co-opt and absorb within itself groups whose grievances had been 'ventilated through agitations launched by the opposition parties.' This was reinforced by Congress 'policy of neutralising some of the more important sources of cleavage and disaffection' and by the leadership's tendency to 'preserve democratic forms, to respect the rule of law, to avoid undue strife ... and to show great sensitivity on the question of respect for minorities.'

Kothari has noted that under the circumstances, political competition was internalized and carried on within the Congress. There developed an elaborate systems of factions at every level of political and governmental activity and a system of coordination between the various levels through vertical 'faction chains'. Originating on the basis of individual competition between leaders, these factions were then built around a functional network consisting of various social groups and leader-client relationships. In the process, a system of patronage was worked out in the countryside,

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14 Manor, J. op.cit. p.436.
traditional institutions of kin and caste were gradually drawn and involved, and a structure of pressures and compromises was developed. These were mediated through two new tiers of political organisation, a managerial class of politicians occupying critical organizational positions in the state and district Congresses, and a class of 'link men' in the field through whom they operated... The system got aggregated at the state level where individuals who had risen to power in Congress organization sometimes constituted the chief opposition to government, provided an alternative leadership exercised controls ...and overthrew it from power.\(^\text{15}\)

This view of Kothari and Manor is different from Myron Weiner's contention but is broadly in agreement with the view that the building of the Congress coalition was eased by traditional values and roles of conciliation that Congressmen took upon in a traditional country.\(^\text{16}\) It also agrees with the Rudolphs' view that traditional elements of the caste system assisted the development of modern representative politics in India.\(^\text{17}\) The Congress dominance can be seen from the success it achieved in the first four general elections to the Lok Sabha in 1952, 1957, 1961 and 1967; and can also be seen in some measure in state legislative assemblies' polls in the period. In the first three general elections the Congress won an over two-third majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha (364 seats in 1952; 371 seats in 1957; 361 seats in 1962) though this depreciated to 283 seats in 1967. Its vote share


fluctuated between 44% and 48% (45% in 1952; 47.8% in 1957; 44.7% in 1962) in the first three elections and was 40.8% in 1967. It also won a majority of seats in the state assemblies of all the then existing states from 1952-1962, again on the basis of mostly a plurality of the votes against a fragmented opposition that varied from state to state. The only exceptions were Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, and Kerala dominated by the National Conference, Independents, and in alternation with the then united Communist Party of India-led coalition, respectively. In three Congress-dominated states it fell a little short of a majority in Orissa (1952-57), M.P(1962) and in pre-1956 (presidency) state of Madras (1952). It needs to be pointed out that the 1967 marks a break-off point, for various reasons, which we will analyse a little later, both for elections at the centre and in the states.

The major conclusion to be drawn from the Congress hegemonic status in the 1952-1967 period is not simply that it dominated the system, as has been the inference in most works written on this phase of Indian politics. It needs to be highlighted that the Congress, because of its peculiarity and the sui-generis factors of the terrain of its operation had this pre-eminence, because it assiduously worked towards attempting the first coalitions in independent India, albeit intra-party and within its fold. The type of coalitions that students of coalition politics are familiar with, namely, the operation of formal structures of power brokering, manipulation and then its sharing did not occur under the Congress system. However, as traced above, Sridharan, Easwaran. "The Fragmentation of the Indian Party System, 1952-1999: 7 Competing Explanations" in Z. Hasan (ed.), Parties and Party Politics in India OUP. Delhi (2002) p.478.
the management of diversities of political opinion, minorities and voices of plurality were achieved by openness, if not fairness.

Hence, it would be wrong to attribute that this period in Indian politics was bereft of coalitions, as is wont. The coalitions were present but were within the suzerainty of one - dominant party. The social background of the Indian polity helped as did the historical legacy that the Congress was the progenitor of the Indian national movement, aided by the survival of this dominance by the efficient functioning of the Congress party leadership made possible by tall leaders such as Nehru, Patel, Maulana Kalam Azad, L. B Shastri etc, in post independence India. The Congress 'system' in India provided for a comprehensive mechanism of change (unlike the Western systems of parties, it is within the same party and it is also quite unlike the 'one-party' system one that emerges from a coup d'etat) as also "for a system of conflict articulation and resolution (through the operation of the margin of pressure, both internal and external) and a system of communications between society and politics (through the factional network). It has worked rather well so far," as Kothari says. Kothari was also prophetic when he visualised in 1964 that if the Congress relatively lost its control then "the opposition may even be able to form a government in one or more states. Only if this happens on a large scale, and percolates to the Centre, however, can the system be said to have undergone a major change. Even in that case, the question (would) remain whether the new party or coalition provides us with another party of consensus or is just an expression of accumulated protest on the part of the public likely to wither away after a short time in office....Either through a purposive
coalition of dissident and opposition groups or through some sharp break within the Congress, or perhaps through the independent strengthening of one of the opposition parties, such a change may come in the future."  


1967 marks a change in Indian politics which led to change in the character of party system then obtaining in India." The (fourth general elections in 1967) led to the replacement of single dominant party system by the multiparty system in which no particular party claimed absolute majority at any level of the political structure with the result that the model of intra-party (tacit or implied) coalition was replaced by inter-party(express or formal) coalition system. The Congress vote dropped from almost 5% and while it had held 74% of the seats in the previous Parliament, it now managed to win only 54%. Even more stunning was the number of seats in which it failed to win a majority (or lost it because of defections soon after the elections) ; there were as many as nine states -Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, W.Bengal, Orissa, TamilNadu and Kerala -which now had non-Congress governments. This brought in a completely new situation in Indian politics.

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19 See Kothari, R. "The Congress System ..." op.cit.pp.54-55.
politics whereby opposition parties in some states experimented with coalition politics and government formations."

It needs to be noted that the Congress had political majority in every state and in a few cases where this wasn’t the case, it still managed to rule, except for three exceptions, the Jammu & Kashmir where the National Conference was in power; Kerala where the CPI formed the government during 1957-1959 period and Nagaland which had a Naga National Organisation government. After 1967 elections, Opposition parties secured electoral success in many states. " Though the Congress was not removed from power by any singular party, with the exception of Madras where the DMK had absolute majority; most of the non-Congress governments that were formed were coalitions. For example, in Bihar, a Samyukta Vidhayak Dal was formed by the SSP, PSP, Jana Sangh CPI and the Jan Kranti Dal which had managed a majority. In Punjab, all the forces that were the opposition constituted of the CPM, Akali Dal (Sant group), Akali Dal (Master group), CPI, Jana Sangh, and the Republican party formed the popular United front government in Punjab. In Orissa, the Swatantra Party along with Jana Congress and the support of erstwhile princely state scions formed the government. In Kerala, an united front of KSP, RSP, KTP, CPI, SSP, CPM and the Muslim League came into being. In W.Bengal, the Bangla Congress, the CPM with fourteen other parties forged a coalition. Thus, coalitions came into being in those states where the non-Congress parties were in a position to challenge the domination of the Congress. Most of the

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coalitions in this phase were short lived. Between 1967 and 1971 Bihar had the maximum turnout of some seven governments, with the average tenure of 4.2 months per coalition ministry. Close on its heels was Haryana where three coalition ministries were formed where the average life of a ministry was only 3.2 months - perhaps the lowest in terms of longevity. Orissa was at the other end of the scale and it managed to have just one coalition government which averaged almost 46 months of longevity. Plus it had the advantage of not being placed under President's rule during the entire tenure.

The emergence of coalitional governments in the states failed largely due to their inexperience in coalitional politics. These non-Congress parties having failed "... to hold themselves together as an emerging alternative force to the Congress but their initiatives, efforts and aspirations to challenge the single party dominance certainly became catalyst in strengthening the unity of the opposition against the Congress in some states. Their failure to emerge as a consolidated coalition force was caused by large-scale defections, leadership conflict and non-implementation of minimum common programme. Defections became the order of the day as the United front governments in UP, Bihar, West Bengal Haryana, Punjab and MP collapsed ...It has been calculated that whereas in the ten-year period between 1957 and 1967 there has been in all of India, a total of 542 legislators changing parties, in a single year following the 1967 elections there were as many as 438 defections."²¹

²¹ Khan, Arshi, op.cit p. 142.
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<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
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Note: The second figure in percentages indicates the vote share.
Source: Sridharan, E. The Fragmentation of the Indian Party System ... in Z. Hasan op.cit. p.478-480
Concerted attempts were not made to seek coalitions at the Centre, where the Congress though depleted of its dominant position was strong enough to form the government. In 1967 elections to the Lok Sabha it reached the figure of only 283 seats, a climb-down from the 1962 figure of 361 seats. In 1971 elections, it did better, receiving 352 MPs at the hustings, as victorious candidates. Some feeble hearted attempts were made to seek coalitional support for the Presidential candidate. Whereas Minoo Masani brought in a semblance of unity among the opposition for supporting Subba Rao, in 1968 the Bharatiya Kisan Dal and Swatantra Party carried on talks for merger, latter joined in by the Jana Sangh in supporting Neelam Sanjiva Reddy in the 1969 Presidential elections. Hence, in the post 1967 phase most the alliances, adjustments were limited to state level coalitional forces.

**Expert’s Analyses**

Perceptive works on this period (post 1967 that is) by Morris Jones, Kothari etc., reveal that although change had occurred, some feature of the old system was still persisting. Kothari while maintaining that, the central role of the Congress in maintaining and restructuring political consensus' was very much in force stated that some new factors, had emerged. He noted that “The socio-economic and demographic profile of the polity is changing rather fast .... The mobilization of new recruits and groups into the political process ...has given rise to the development of new and more differentiated identities and patterns of political cleavage ...[This gave rise to] the expectation of freer political access... and a greater insistence on government
performance. Intermediaries and vote banks, while of continuing importance, have become increasingly circumvented as citizens search for more effective participation in the political market place and develop an ability to evaluate and make choices.”

Morris Jones also noted that the ‘market of politics has expanded by the participation of new groups in government. He says “There was plenty of competition and bargaining before 1967...[but it had taken place] largely within the Congress, between groups and semi-institutionalized form.[Post 1967 election, however, which saw the Congress lose power in six states, the competition had grown too severe to be contained by the party's internal bargaining so that] ... dissident Congressmen played an important role in the weakening of the party... in perhaps every lost State except TamilNadu.[This brought a number of political parties of the Opposition fully into the market place] ...and coalition governments are themselves small markets . Another new phenomenon after 1967 ] was a pretty regular and continuous defector market”.23

The defections that took place were affecting all parties but they hit the Congress most because more defectors flowed out of the party than they came into it. Leaving the disciplined ideologically integrated parties of the Left and the Hindu chauvinist Right which remained immune to defections, all other parties were in the same boat.(The Communists did experience a split in 1969 over ideological matters but that was different from defections. As Manor has characterised it, "parties to the

23 Morris Jones, W.H. “From Monopoly to Competition in India’s politics” in Morris- Jones Politics mainly Indian Orient Longman p.154-156.
far right and left tended to remain 'hard' in that they retained tough shells through which people did not pass in and out, and in that they maintained their organizational integrity through centralization, discipline, and ideological consistency. They also retained narrower social bases than most of the other parties in that period and narrower bases than the CPI(M) and the Jana Sangh / BJP have developed in the post 1977 years. They nonetheless moved very cautiously along the road to more moderate policies a road down which as Stanley A Kochanek observed other opposition parties were motoring once the possibility of power presented itself. It has been observed that "Defections were not only the means of fulfilling specific desires and goals but were also catalysts in thwarting dominance and supremacy of a party at the level of party system. Defections also contributed to the fragmentation of parties which contributed to the strengthening of multiparty system. And the multiparty system became the cradle of coalition governments."  

Hence, under its impact (of defections that is), the emergence of non-Congress parties as serious players to provide feasible political alternatives the Congress received a setback. The Congress system which has been characterised as the locality-oriented pluralist model marked by complex multi layered factional and party political structures articulated along caste, community, factional lines, villages and district level and aggregated at the State level by reasonably autonomous sets of

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party elites was now endangered. According to E. Sridharan, the post 1967 period also saw "a very important delinking of parliamentary and state assembly elections since 1971, and a suspension of organizational elections within the Congress from 1972 to 1992, hand in hand with a centralisation of power at the top of the party apparatus. It also saw the emergence of anti-Congress alliances, then of a principal opposition party to the Congress in state after state, in most states, representing a consolidation of the non-Congress space at the state level. The Index of opposition Unity (IOU), rose in states over 1967-1989." This appears to be true if one considers opposition coalitions (in which the dominant or first party and its pre-electoral allies are counted) as a single party for the purpose of calculating IOU. Sridharan has explained that IOU refers to the measure of the fragmentation of the opposition space represented by the percentage share of the largest non-Congress (or non-ruling party) vote in the total opposition vote. The higher the IOU the less fragmented the opposition space. In other words, a consolidation of the non-Congress opposition, state-by-state, broadly in tandem with such consolidation in the state assembly elections, took place over the period, leading even to the displacement of the Congress as one of the two leading parties or coalitions. This bipolar consolidation was the key feature and the driving force of the fragmentation of the nation party system.
Sridharan has traced the bipolarisation of the states. He notes that over the period 1967-1989, statewise the following pattern emerged. In MP, Delhi, Rajasthan and HP there was a movement towards the two-party system. This began in early 1967 with the consolidation of the non-Congress vote behind the Jana Sangh. In the states of Kerala, W.Bengal and Tripura, a bipolar Congress versus the Left two alliance system emerged in which the Congress (in W.Bengal) or Congress led alliance of state based minor parties (in Kerala, Tripura) on the one hand, contested against the Left front coalition of the CPM, CPI (since the late seventies' in Kerala), and smaller parties, with the two coalitions alternating in power. In five other states namely, in J&K, Punjab, AP, Assam and Goa, a Congress-regional party two party system came into being over the period of 1967-1989, disintegrating or changing in the nineties' with the rise of the BJP in all these states. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the Congress was eliminated right from 1967 from the first two positions. There was a different scene here with two strong regional parties the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) ruling the roost here, with one of the two being allied to the Congress for parliamentary and assembly elections. In this arrangement, which has remained stable from 1977 onwards Congress got the majority of seats for the parliamentary elections, while in exchange the regional ally was given lion’s share in the assembly elections.

In the North-East, in Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, an unstable two party or two-alliance contest prevailed between the Congress and a variety of regional parties. For the majority of states namely seven in
number such as Orissa, Maharashtra, Haryana, Gujarat, UP, Bihar, Karnataka - where no alternative party or alliance consolidated itself as a successful challenger for parliamentary elections, although a broad-front anti-Congress alliance, had it been conjured up, could have challenged the Congress as it happened in 1967 and in 1977.

We have traced here the fragmentation of party system on an all-India perspective, state-wise. Similarly, the pattern of bipolarisation is discernible for state assembly elections also. The Congress party's position suffered erosion even more than for parliamentary elections and the consolidation of principal challenger parties or alliances at the state level is even more pronounced. The split in the Congress in 1969 which actually hastened the process of party fragmentation (for the Congress, especially) and consolidation (for opposition parities, notably) has been described as a major shock to the political system in India. Due to this cataclysmic event, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's post-split Congress outfit faced a concerted opposition united to root out the Congress in the elections of 1971.

B.1.) INDIRA'S INTERLUDE: Restoration of the Congress Dominance

The elections of 1971 and 1972 marked the return to strong central leadership in the Congress and the apparent emergence of a party which was ideologically moored on some coherence. The Dominance manifested in the states as well as at the Centre. Nehru's era in Congress ended in 1964 and in its wake emerged a collective leadership which believed in decision making based on consensus. Unlike
the centralized leadership style of Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, who followed Nehru as the Prime Minister, had a more collective approach to governance. “Although the same combination of forces that had managed to smooth the succession of Shastri had managed a similarly successful, if not as smooth, succession of Indira Gandhi, the new Prime Minister had proved unwilling to accept the restraints imposed on Shastri.”

The outcome was six years of conflict, factional intrigue and the first split in Congress at the national level (in 1969) since independence. As Kochanek says, “During her struggle for control over party and government from 1966 to 1972, Indira Gandhi had found herself challenged, or potentially threatened by almost every major institutional structure in India, including the central cabinet, the president of the republic, the courts, the president of the Congress party, the Working Committee of the Congress, and the chief ministers of the states.” She therefore, created a more centralized and personalized fulcrum of monopolized power which was less institutionalized than Nehru’s.

Having had problems with two presidents of the Congress earlier viz., K. Kamraj and S. Nijalingappa, she kept the presidents' that followed them under

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31 Kochanek, S.A. *op.cit.* pp.77-78.
her control. Since the split the Congress had five presidents, all of whom she admirably had in her control viz: C.Subramaniam (Nov- Dec 1969); Jagjivan Ram (Dec 1969 - Mar 1971); D. Sanjivayya (Mar 1971 –May 1972); Shankar D. Sharma (May 1972-Oct 1974); D.K Barooah (act 1974 -1976). She also dexterously managed to retain the loyalty of the majority of members of the Congress Parliamentary Party.

I. Gandhi’s victory in the 1971 elections when the Congress secured 352 seats (which was a definite improvement over the 283 seats in 1967) with 43.1% of the vote share, made it appear what Morris Jones claimed that ‘the end of the dominant party had been too readily proclaimed in 1967 and now it is back’, and led him to think that now the opposition parties would be ‘forced to operate less by confrontation than by interaction with segments of the centre mass.’ Gandhī’s Congress did not interact with the opposition. She adopted an antagonistic posture both towards opposition parties at the national level and towards opposition-controlled government at state level. As quoted above, Stanley A. Kochanek has noted that the Congress party was under a siege. Gandhi had taken an aggressive stance with her own party as well and instituted a new political process which involved creating a ‘pyramidical decision making structure in party and government’.

Though this did prevent threats to her personal power aggregation, it tended to centralize decision making weaken institutionalization and create an overly personalized regime. Moreover, the new political process proved unable to manage the tensions and cleavages of a heterogeneous society, federally

governed. A major crisis in the system followed.\textsuperscript{33} The face of Congress was authoritarian with no intra-party democracy. The positions in the Congress were filled by appointment from above rather than filled by elections from below. As Manor notes, "This change caused people at all levels to extend to tell people above them what they thought those people wanted to hear, so that the organization's once formidable powers as an information-gathering agency soon wasted away." The centralization of power within the party did not, however, mean that factionalisation ceased to be a problem. Instead, partly because Mrs.Gandhi set leaders and factions at the regional level against one another, and partly because she had largely abandoned the use of bargaining, conflict within the organization grew more severe and dysfunctional. All of this reduced the party's ability to cope creatively or even adequately with conflicts that arose from a society facing real churning. I.Gandhi's reaction, which laid down the tone of relations between her party and the oppositional forces (with the exception of the communist parties and one or the other of the two main parties in TamilNadu) was severe. As Kochanek noted, "...in a heterogeneous segmented society like India, there exists a political and functional interdependence that cannot be sustained by the kind of centralized control Mrs. Gandhi has attempted to employ. Nehru learned the lessons of overcentralization and the limits of central manipulation in the early 1950s in dealing with the problems of Andhra Pradesh... Because of the complexities of social, religious, sub-regional and ethnic differences, the Indian political system faces severe problems of political cohesion and stability

\textsuperscript{33} Kochanek, S.A. \textit{op.cit.} p87.
reflected in its style of factional and alliance politics...Mrs. Gandhi's Congress became increasingly intolerant of dissent and came to rely more and more on coercion in an attempt to control it. Dissent within the Congress, party opposition, and press criticism ceased to function as thermostats measuring discontent. They were now interpreted anti-party, anti-national and traitorous, or even foreign increasing economic hardship."

The segmental character of the Indian social base and the open character of the Congress exacerbated the structural incompatibility of a centralised party in a federal system creating severe problems of conflict management. Following the organizational elections in the year 1972, dissident factions came out in full swing to challenge the leadership of Mrs. Gandhi's nominees placed in power in the states' or as ministers in the cabinet. The mounting factional instability of the Congress governance developed in the middle of the severest economic crisis in India since 1947. The costly Indo-Bangladesh exercise which meant fighting with Pakistan, the two successive drought years, the oil and fertiliser crisis growing out of the OPEC countries/ Arab-Israeli conflict marked the period of recession and economic stagnation.

This helped the Opposition find its feet and by 1974, under the veteran Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan's leadership, an opposition movement gathered momentum. Congressmen who insisted on a dialogue with Jayaprakash Narayan were expelled from the Congress. All party attempts of the

34 Kochanek S.A "Mrs Gandhi's ..." op .cit ,p.94-5.
Opposition to mobilize and express local grievances, were perceived as law and order problems.

B.2) THE CRISIS IN CONGRESS DOMINANCE

The Opposition that had percolated under the 'Total Revolution' call of the Narayan movement had a deep impact on national politics. It appealed to urban intellectuals and students, emphasizing on Gandhian (Mahatma Gandhi's preaching's and philosophy) morality and tactics. It was able to resuscitate the fragmented political opposition. It also raised serious threat of a possible split in the Congress. It was feared by Congressmen that oppositional forces uniting behind Janata party candidates could, as in 1967 earlier, translate the fragmented votes of diverse parties into pluralities in single-member districts and therefore the Congress dominance might not survive. Indira Gandhi found herself harangued by a typical concert of factors. The hopes generated by her populist rhetoric of 'Garibi hatao' etc collapsed, for both the urban and rural Indian society experienced severe economic deprivation. There were spontaneous outbreaks of violence and protest against ineffective Congress governments, occurring first in Gujarat and then in Bihar. The inchoate nature of these regional explosions were galvanized into a significant new movement by Narayan, who threatened to translate these regional protests into a national anti-Congress alliance. There emerged a serious factional split within the Congress party in Parliament, at around this time based on ideological differences.
 Former PSP members (also called 'Young Turks') were anti-communist and pro-Jayaprakash Narayan, so were the centrists and who were fearful of the impact of his Total Revolution call at the polls (borne out by the result of the Gujarat elections of 1975). Thus, the Congress response to the Narayan movement engineered a split in the Congress.

I. Gandhi under increasing pressure, even from within her own party, turned to an entelechy of confidants in which her son Sanjay figured prominently. She declared Internal Emergency in June 1975 under Art. 352 of the Constitution, soon after the Allahabad High Court indictment for alleged corruption in an election; and arrested major opposition leaders and imposed rigid press censorship throughout India. As Kochanek says, the declaration of Emergency was "...end product of a process which saw the weakening of political support for Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress party, the emergence of a revitalized opposition, the development of increased factionalism and tensions within the Congress, and a seeming lack of governmental capacity to govern despite massive Congress majorities." The relations between the Congress and Opposition parties worsened. Power within the Congress was further centralized. This centralizing had the effect which was the opposite of what was intended. "Instead of homogenising the regions as intended, centralization made possible the assertion of their natural heterogeneity, so that they actually diverged from one another. Mrs. Gandhi's centralizing violated the basic logic by which India had been governed under both the Crown and Nehru's Congress.

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According to that logic, the influence of people at the apex of national and regional political systems most effectively by means of compromise.\textsuperscript{36}

The crisis in Congress dominance, as we have traced here in this section was caused by the lack of democratic functioning by the Congress despite popular vote in its favour. It was also in no small measure due to its deliberate failure to understand regionalist aspirations and vox populi. As Balveer Arora says, reconciling regional aspirations and imperatives of national policy cohesion has always been a constant feature of India's political development. "Congress dominance began to wane as the party became less democratic and more centralized.

Conventional wisdom confers watershed attributes on the 1967 general elections as they marked the beginning of the end of Congress dominance and the advent of the first non-Congress governments in the states on a large scale...It is the Emergency of 1975 -77 which has a stronger claim to this description because it permitted, or rather provoked, the forging of the first federal coalition to capture power at the Centre."\textsuperscript{37}

As we have noted earlier, federal coalitions within or between parties are an important part of India's political development. The Congress, in its earlier phase had internalised this fact pretty well, but under I.Gandhi it abandoned all such wisdom.

\textsuperscript{36} Manor, J. "Parties and the ..." op.cit. p.442.


The process of political churning had been set to roll, as we noted earlier, from the time the Congress donned the centralist authoritarian role, intensifying during the Emergency. The elections of 1977, mark the third phase in the evolution of India's party system and set the stage for the formation of the first coalitional government at the centre. At the general elections in 1977, the Congress secured only 154 seats (though they had fielded candidates in 492 constituencies of the Lok Sabha).

The Janata Party, a conglomerate of erstwhile centralist and socialist forces secured a very morale boosting 298 seats (though they had fielded some 405 candidates). They received 41.3% of the valid vote share, in contrast to 34.5% of the vote share of the Congress. Interestingly, at these elections the Communist parties registered lower percentages of vote share when compared with their earlier showing. The CPM got 22 seats and 4.3% of the vote share (as against 25 seats and 5.1% in 1971 elections); the CPI's tally dropped to 7 seats and a vote share of 2.8% (as against the total of 23 seats and 4.7% vote share received in 1971).\(^{38}\)

Hence it was evident that the 1977 elections were a watershed for coalitions. Though the third phase in the evolution of parties in India, it was the most substantive period for the formation of coalitions in independent India, especially at the Centre. The

\(^{38}\) The statistics cited in this section have been taken from Table No. III.1
earlier period of coalitions since 1967 had been limited to the functioning of coalitions at the state level.

The Janata Party had been formed when four parties viz, the Congress(O), Bharatiya Lok Dal Socialist Party and the Jana Sangh came together to contest the election under a single common manifesto and symbol. The years from 1977 to 1984 were broadly speaking, a time of abrasive conflict and bad feeling between political parties and a period marked by decay and fragmentation within parties. The internment of opposition leaders by I.Gandhi, denial of habeas corpus and writ to judicial review among others perpetuated the bad vibes. Not only was it a period of decay, but also of awakening - which occurred among the masses. The Indian voter realised the power of their vote. This has been observed upon by analysts as well.39 Resultantly "...disadvantaged rural dwellers largely ceased to vote according to the wishes of the landowning groups that continued to dominate life in the villages. Voters became more assertive and competitive, and their appetites for resources from politicians grew. Interest groups crystallized and came, increasingly into conflict, so that it became harder to operate a political machine that could cater to every organized interest, as the Congress had very nearly done in the Nehru years. India became increasingly democratic and increasingly difficult to govern."40

Another important change noticed in this period was quite disturbing. The decay talked about in the political parties affected to such an extent

40 Manor, J. "Parties and ..." op.cit. p.443.
that something unimaginable, but logical took place. This pertains to the tendency for society and politics to diverge from their norms. Manor notes this and explains that “as political institutions, especially parties, became less able to respond rationally to appeals that arose from society, social groups tended to give up on politics and politicians and to turn inwards, batten ing on parochial sentiments and whatever internal resources they possessed. This led to an increase in conflict between many social groups as the social-political divergence and decay of political institutions reduced the capacity to manage and defuse conflict.”

Another significant development seen during this period was that there was a gradual dissolution of the clear lines that had existed between political parties and their social bases hitherto.

C.1. THE JANATA PHASE OF COALITION POLITICS
(Mar 1977 - July 1979)

The Janata party had coalesced, general opinion suggests, due to a negative vote, but as we have suggested, due to the groundswell of various democratic, regional and suppressed forces. The Janata party was quick to point that theirs was a victory of democracy over authoritarianism. However, once a coalition government was formed with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister, the euphoria soon evaporated. The Jana Sangh gave it outside support. Since it was a hastily assembled coalition of quite different opposition groupings united mainly by their opposition to

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41 Manor, J. *ibid.* p444.
I.Gandhi, the election victory itself was construed as an achievement and that their objectives had been realised, they felt after the win. Therefore, the natural divisions between them emerged sooner than later. It had disparate elements within it. The Congress (0) had conservative and secularist members of the old guard within the Congress which had after 1969 split from the mainline Congress and had a rigid stance. Jana Sangh was the battlefront of the hardcore fundamentalist Hindu chauvinist right who sourced its support from high caste, upper and middle class Urban belt of North and central India. The Congress for Democracy, was formed out of the Congress when after the Emergency, Jagjivan Ram walked out of it. Its support base was the untouchable Scheduled Caste, the poor and rural people. The Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) was a party of the middle and small peasant proprietors of the North and had as its agenda, the reallocation of resources from the urban to the rural sector; and from the industrial to the agricultural. The Socialist party, another partner of the Janata, was a genuinely rural based party and its base included some of the rural poor of north India and minority of support was secured by it from scattered trade union among the urban labour.

Though there was only one Prime-Minister to be selected, there were at least two other Prime-Ministerial aspirants namely, Charan Singh of the BLD and Jagjivan Ram of CFD. From day one, there was no cohesion or coordination between the various partners of the Janata umbrella. The disparate elements that had come together to form a coalition had no experience of operating in coalition, which involves compromise, negotiation and bargaining. Moreover, another impact of the
intransigence of the parties involved was "a loosening of ties between the national and state, levels within both the Janata party and the political system. The factions that tended to dominate the Janata Party in the national Parliament were antagonistic to those that held sway in several Janata controlled states. This antagonism set the national and state governments at loggerheads on some important questions, a trend that was reinforced by friction between the Janata regime in New Delhi and opposition -controlled governments in several other states."  

The reality of worsening federal relations was fuelled by the upsurge in regional movements that took place with the deterioration of Centre-state relations. The Janata party suffered from various lacunae. Personality clashes, intra-party squabbling, factional and regional skirmishes and all these were responsible for its disintegration in 1979. These drawbacks were supplemented by the strategy of manipulations pursued by the Congress. The disintegration of the Janata party "...paralleled the disintegration that had occurred on the Congress side after the 1977 election, and the result was a confusing array of fragmentary parties many of which were little more than personal cliques presided over by individual politicians. In this context, Mrs. Gandhi's party was the only coherent national party -even though its own organization was in considerable disarray -and this image enabled it to take advantage of the strong popular reaction against the Janata government and win the 1980 election."  

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42 Manor, J. *ibid.* p.447.

43 Manor, J. *ibid* p.447.
Thus the 1977 elections brought the first coalition government in Indian politics at the Centre. Apart from the inbuilt structural problems in the coalition from the very beginning, the conflicting personal ambitions of Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram, Charan Singh the role of Jana Sangh was very critical. "... the Jana Sangh's involvement in expanding its base irked secularists who raised the question of dual membership of the erstwhile Jana Sangh members in Jana Sangh members in Janata Party who retained RSS membership. This issue between the Jana Sangh and Bharatiya Lok Dal widened and affected the Janata governments in north Indian states. The other set of troubles were of corruption charges against Kanti Desai, son of the Prime Minister."

The fall of the government came when a no-confidence motion was tabled in the Lok Sabha by Y.B.Chavan in July 1979 and the spate of resignations brought the ministry into a minority. There were large scale defections, from the Janata party. Hence, the Janata party replayed the mistakes of the Congress by emulating their practice of dismissing several Congress governments in the states.

Morarji Desai resigned in July 1979. However, the Janata interlude of 2 years and 5 months is an important chapter in the politics of independent India. It for the first time was a major achievement in more senses than one. It marked the end of one-party hegemony and the beginning of consensual democracy (even though considering that it was a squabble ridden consensus); it vindicated the might of the

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44 Khan, Arshi. *op.cit.* p.156.
common man through the mechanism of the ballot box against the state authoritarianism set up by the Congress; it clearly showed that there could be two dominant parties in the multi-party democratic system that India possessed but could not find manifestation earlier. "Its (i.e, the Janata Party's) failure gave warning to coalition oriented parties to work out their differences first and then get prepared for governance. The Janata Party rule also showed the force and bargaining power of the coalition against the dominant Congress at the Centre which had never been challenged before."45

Immediately after the disintegration of the Janata led coalition, Charan Singh's Bharatiya Lok Dal was propped up by the Congress(I) and some Left groups into power. Charan Singh became the Prime-Minister. But this ragtag combination did not last long. After only three weeks, the Cong.(I) withdrew its support and the Lok Sabha was in a limbo.

**Upshot**

Indeed, the general elections of 1977 ushered in a new era in Indian politics. Since then, Indian politics has entered a period of broad-based coalitions forming part of an unstable multi-party system that is available in India. "During this period, India witnessed a situation where relatively stable multi-party systems at the regional level found themselves within an unstable multi-party system at the national

45 Khan, Arshi *op.cit.* p.157.
There were noticeably, distinct regional patterns of electoral behaviour against the Congress(I) party. The horizontal decline of the political strength of the party occurred first at the regional level, to be followed by a vertical decline of the Congress (I) at the national level. There is a body of work which had forecasted such a change much earlier. For example, Selig Harrison had asserted that 'the possibility of divergence on a multiplying scale between the national party in power and an assortment of ruling state party now looms unmistakably, on the Indian political horizon.' Selig had stated further in 1960 itself that "...residual political power in India in the decades ahead will rest in the regional capitals; the makers of any regime in New Delhi, Right-or-Left inclined, will face first and foremost the necessity of coming to terms with widely dispersed centres of power." Other writers have noted, though later that the importance of regional factors in politics. As noted above, James Manor has concluded that the cult of centralisation has increased rather than decreased the disparities between the national and lower levels. Balveer Arora has noted that "... the hyper accentuation of the centralist character of the Congress has resulted in a sharp decline in the capacity of its state-level leaders to effectively articulate regional sentiments and aspirations within the party." Some have even suggested, that Indian politics has now become regionally and ethnically segmented.

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50 Lawrence Saez *Federalism without a Centre: The Impact of Political and Economic Reform on India's Federal System* N.Delhi :Sage , 2002 p.59
and in this framework, ‘...neither overriding national issues nor primarily local issues pre-dominate (anymore).’

The failure of the Janata was, though not unexpected, significant. It brought into focus the importance of better coordination in coalitional government. “The main significance of the 1977 elections was that it introduced, for the first time in India, the idea of coalitional governments at the national level. ...These pre and post-election political alliances have now become the dominant features of India's political system, both at the national and state level.” We may now turn to an exhaustive study of this period of Indian political history.

C.2). POST JANATA PHASE

Immediately after the Janata experiment there was a lull in the history of coalitions. We see no coalitions at the centre till 1989. At the 1980 elections, the Congress (I) returns to power with 353 seats in the Lok Sabha, which was a definite improvement over its tally of 154 seats in 1977. Afterwards, at the 1984 elections much more impressive gains were recorded when it swept the polls returning with an impressive haul of 415 seats.

Indira Gandhi’s return to power was smooth sailing, in many ways because the people were expecting a change. She made it all the more easier as she, responded with a break in the modus operandi of her functioning. J.Manor has
noticed an interesting shift in her manner of operation in her second innings. According to him she adopted themes that have traditionally been the preserve of the Hindu rightist parties like the BJP.  

The assassination of Gandhi for her role in Operation Bluestar was a major boost to the Congress, one which gave it a landslide victory in the polls in 1984 bringing Rajiv Gandhi to power. He also continued in his late mother’s footsteps, assuring ‘badla’ for the assassination. In fact Sikh bashing became the norm and the Congress came from behind and it was a miracle that it was back with a thumping majority only because it played this card. This rhetoric of all out confrontation in which opposition parties were repeatedly attacked as anti-national forces was a shift from its hoary tradition of Congress claiming to speak for the whole country, for all Indians of yore. Rajiv Gandhi as did his mother claimed in his speeches that the opposition parties were receiving assistance from foreign powers who were interested in making India weak. For example he claimed that the Janata party, the BJP and the Dalit Mazdoor Kisan party had links to Sikh extremists living in Britain. She also insinuated that the opposition parties had supported the Anandpur Sahib resolution. This gave rise to recriminations and infuriated the opposition parties especially when considered alongside official figures that showed a steady rise in disorder and riot during I. Gandhi’s reign of her last five years. Rajiv’s non-action over two independent enquiries set up after the slaughter of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi despite evidence that it was the handiwork of Congress lumpens


steady rise in disorder and riot during I. Gandhi’s reign of her last five years. Rajiv’s non action over two independent enquiries set up after the slaughter of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi despite evidence that it was the handiwork of Congress lumpens further fuelled their disenchantment. There was a danger that the parties in general and not only the Congress suffered and this pertained to their flock. They felt that their followers would leave their parties if there was no effort made at confrontation. “The more that the Congress(I) and opposition parties suffered organizational decay, ideological laxity, and the imposition of personal control by those at the apex, the more they resembled each other. Potential defectors from one party to the next therefore felt that they had less distance to travel.”

A second reason was that the Congress had very little options. I. Gandhi had lost all confidence in the State as an important redistributive and welfare agent for the society. No new legislative actions were taken in the period between 1980-1984. Largely because she felt less motivation to draw popular attention to the successes in the political, administrative or social fields where there were hardly anything to boast about. Instead they focused on other achievements such as the Antarctic expedition, Asian Games Commonwealth Heads of Government Meet, foreign policy exploits etc. India despite having a multi-party system where plausibly free competition was allowed, was in reality experiencing the dominance of the Congress(I), though the party no longer possessed the party organization which was

53 See Manor, J. op.cit. p.458.
strong enough. The 1984 landslide was achieved in spite of these serious organizational weaknesses. Rajiv Gandhi was able to maintain political consensus in the polity largely because he received an overwhelming majority. Yet within the Congress(I), he could not stop the flow of defections. Morris Jones has maintained that the defections in the Indian setting help serve an important purpose—namely of providing to the maintenance and restructuring of consensus in Indian politics. He believes that defections in national parties represent rational responses from social or sub regional groups to parties' misdeeds and omissions and they serve to remind parties of the need to maintain consensus.

It is also stated that the defections were overwhelmingly and largely a response to the large cash payments being made to MPs and MLAs. The post 1984 period saw the emergence of hope initially that all this would be changed due to Rajiv’s fresh dynamism and the promises of clean government that he made. After coming to power he did do some candid loud mouthing. At the Congress hundredth anniversary he provided the trenchant critique ever delivered by any of its leaders. He spoke of ‘cliques...enmeshing the living body of the Congress in their net of avarice’. He averred further of Congress operatives’ ‘self aggrandizement, their corrupt ways, their linkages with vested interests...and their sanctioning posturings...’, and added that ‘corruption is not only tolerated...but even regarded as a hallmark of leadership’.

Political commentators reflecting on this period have written despondently about the state of politics, but Manor has opined that he did not think that India was on the

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54 See *The Times of India* Bombay, 29 Dec 1985.
 verge of a crisis or breakdown. He has stated that Indian society was well equipped structurally and with habits of mind to insulate itself from damage that might result from decay and anomic forces of the Indian political sphere in the bureaucratic maze and institutional gravitas that surrounded him. However the initial tempo and bravado of Rajiv was quickly lost and status quo was reinstated.

We have earlier mentioned that by the time of 1989 elections a bipolarization had taken place with a consolidation of the non-Congress opposition forces. The respective pattern of bipolarization which was discernible state wise for the general elections was noted. 1989 is an important turning point in the history of coalition governments. Since that year some four coalitional governments have come to power, namely:-

a) National Front government under the Prime Ministership of V. P. Singh. (1989-1990)


Constituted of 22 parties & Independents.


C.3). THE 1989 ELECTIONS

In 1989 elections to the Lok Sabha took place and shortly thereafter in 1990 elections to various state legislative assemblies took place. The general elections threw up an uncertain verdict of the electorate. The Janata Dal won the highest number of seats, among all the opposition parties. It secured 143 seats; followed by the BJP with 85 seats. The Congress secured 197 seats. Amongst the Communist parties, the CPM bagged 33 seats and the CPI got 12 seats.

Similarly, in the Assembly elections that followed, the Congress lost heavily in UP, Bihar, Orissa and Haryana to the Janata Dal; in Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh to the BJP; and in Rajasthan and Gujarat to a Janata Dal – BJP coalition in both the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections (with the exception of Haryana where no assembly elections took place in 1989 and 1990.)

The 1989 elections are not to be treated as just yet another anti-Congressism wave, but in essence were a more far reaching shift in the party system rooted in the shifts in party organizational strength and support bases at the state level in an increasing number of states, and in India’s political economy and changing patterns of social mobilization. The big story of 1989-1999 is the relative decline of the Congress and the rise of the BJP and regional or state-based parties. While the Congress retained a vote plurality in all five elections over 1989-1999, it failed each time to translate that into a seat majority, failing behind the BJP in seats in 1996, 1998 and 1999.'
Before 1989, the BJP and in its earlier avatar, the Jana Sangh had never recorded its vote share more than 10% of the total votes polled or exceeded 35 seats in the Lok Sabha, nationally speaking. The only possible exception was in 1977 when it won 99 seats out of 295 seats won by the Janata party.

Before 1989, the BJP and its precursor, the Jana Sangh had never recorded its vote share which was more than 10% of the total votes polled or exceeded at best 35 seats in the Lok Sabha, on a national scale. The only possible exception was in 1977 when it won 99 seats out of the 295 that was won by the Janata Party. The rise of this party has, since then, been steady both in terms of vote and seat shares. From just 2 seats in 1984 despite securing 7.4% votes to 86, after contesting for 226 seats, mostly in de facto alliance with the Janata Dal in 1989 set the tone for coalition.

The elections were held in a surcharged atmosphere which had been aroused most notably by the communally polarizing atmosphere in the backdrop of the Babri Masjid agitation of the late eighties, the anti-corruption campaign in the wake of Bofors kickbacks started by V.P. Singh, the protest against liberalization of the economy started by Man Mohan-economics as also the general anti-Congressism which was imminent due to achievements in the field of communications,
Table No. III.2

**COALITION GOVERNMENTS AT THE CENTRE**

* 4 Dec 1989 - 10 Nov 1990 > National Front Minority Coalition Government - V.P. Singh was Prime-Minister. Coalition constituents - Janata Party, Congress(S), AGP, CPM, CPI, Lok Dal, DMK. Outside support of the BJP.

* 10 Nov 1990 - 21 June 1991 > Minority Government Coalition Chandrasekhar was the Prime-Minister. Formed with the outside support of the Congress.

* 21 Jun 1991 - 28 Jul 1993 - 31 Dec 1993 > Congress Minority Government - headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao. It lost minority status after the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Janata Dal (Ajit) helped defeat the no-confidence motion and these splinter groups were inducted into the Congress (I) party.


* 19 Mar 1998 - 17 Apr 1999 > Minority Government led by BJP with outside support from the Telugu Desam, Trinamul Congress etc. A.B. Vajpayee, the PM continues till 12 Oct 1999 as caretaker PM.

* 13 Oct 1999 - continuing > BJP's second Minority government formed with Vajpayee as PM. Coalition constituents - 24 parties such as Shiv Sena, DMK, Biju Janta Dal, INLD, PMK, Akali Dal, Janata Dal United, HVC, Trinamul Cong. Outside support of the Telugu Desam.
foreign policy (notably the success in launching SAARC, a regional grouping of South Asian countries), the successes (albeit controversial) in counter insurgency and terrorism in Punjab, Assam and the North-East.

The National Front was formed as a coalitional arrangement in the backdrop of these developments after the voters returned a hung parliament. There were some socio-regional developments also which favoured a change from the erstwhile rule of the Congress.

The National Front was made up of the Janata Party (which had 142 MPs), the Lok Dal, the DMK, Congress (S), Asom Gana Parishad, CPM, CPI which were supported by the BJP. This was an alliance which was partly a pre-poll alliance and partly a post-poll arrangement. It was an arrangement in classic Riker-Dodd's theoretical formulation. The only common meeting point between the various constituents was their burning desire to come to power after they had thrown the Congress off its saddle. This combination of emerging political forces, however disparate in nature was able to force a change. Both the Left parties and the BJP agreed to support the new coalition from outside.

Hence there were deep divisions and differences between the various parties. Though the majority of the constituents had decided to forge a common platform to fight under a single symbol - with Janata Party, Lok Dal (A) and Lok Dal (B) agreeing to merge their respective parties under the nomenclature of Janata Dal - they did not subsume their respective identities. A lot had been promised by the manifesto which they had issued jointly. The
alliance had stated that they would usher in constitutional changes, root out the evil of corruption, seek social justice for the socially and educationally backward castes, seek federal solution for Kashmir and Punjab.

Thus, 'the emergence of this mammoth coalition against the Congress had also indicated polarization of voters with the maximum possibility of the coalition government.' This proved to be its undoing, as well, as we shall see later. The coalition's Achilles heel was that it was a minority coalition. The supporting parties such as the BJP had all the aces up on its sleeves. The ministry which was formed had members from all parties except the BJP which preferred to remain out of it. The National Front government was confronted with seemingly insurmountable problems from day one. Almost all the policy pronouncements that it made in its lifespan were controversial and it was compelled to take precautions before taking any policy decision. Therefore, there were confrontations galore within the ruling coalition. There were various pressures on it from every side. The BJP wanted it to soft pedal on its communal agenda that had started with the Ayodhya temple movement. It also wanted that the dual membership issue (of BJP members being also members of RSS) and the activities of the RSS should be overlooked. It is a fact that the BJP consolidated its vote bank in this period.

There were internal contradictions within the front. In July 1990, these emerged with the adoption of the New Industrial policy. Like the opposition members in the Congress, several coalition leaders criticized this new
policy as one that had been dictated by the World Bank and Trans-national corporations. V.P. Singh had decided almost beforehand, that he would create a new group of 'Socially and educationally backward castes' (including thereby some 27% of the posts in the government as reserved for them) and give them reservation in very much the same manner as the Constitution had given to the Scheduled castes / tribes. Hence he sought implementation of the B.P. Mandal Commission Report which had categorized the Other Backward castes as falling in the category of SEBCs. He termed this endeavour of his as a crusade for 'social justice'. After the implementation of this report the total percentage of posts reserved went up to 49 (if one adds the already existing provision of reservation of 22.5% for SCs and STs). The move by Singh was to capture the votes of the non-upper castes which constituted a major vote bank. As would be seen in the chapter on social bases and configurations of coalitions (to follow this chapter) the lower castes had improved its social status somewhat, but importantly, due to the operation of the democratic process in India for four decades had begun to assert itself politically and articulating its new found status. These were then the constituency that the Janata Dal was seeking to target.

The Mandal commission report had a catastrophic impact and created a serious backlash from the urban and educated middle classes, which historically constituted primarily of the middle and upper caste Hindus. The Congress and the BJP openly and blatantly sided with the upper caste Hindus and fanned the student anti-reservation stir which claimed many lives. BJP also seized
this opportunity to mobilize the society into communalist overdrive with L.K Advani launching his famous Rath Yatra to gather momentum for demolishing the Babri Masjid. This created severe anti-Muslim feelings and unleashed communal riots in its wake. V.P Singh’s coalition government was in a way, blackmailed to get a free hand for the Rath Yatra. BJP openly hinted at withdrawing its support to the government if it was stopped. Advani’s arrest by the government led to the withdrawal of BJP’s support and consequently, the government fell.

Soon thereafter, Chandra Sekhar further weakened the Janata Dal when his outfit broke away from the Front for becoming the Prime-Minister with the support of the Congress Party. He remained in power for six months, in what must remain in India’s coalition history the ruling coalition with the least majority, propped up by the Congress(I), for its partisan glee that though it could not come to power it was able to manipulate a government, nevertheless (and of course, the satisfaction that they had in seeing the back of the National Front coalition).

Perhaps, the most significant of coalition governments’ the National Front’s success for less than a year was an important milestone. Its formation gave an optimism to the down and out marginalised forces, both political and social, that they could be factors of governance. Despite being perpetually in a state of vulnerability the coalitional government that was headed by V.P. Singh was able to restore some democratic principles in the body politic. These were not implemented even when the Congress had the benefit of almost a brute majority (when in Rajiv Gandhi’s time it had the strength of 415 MPs in Lok Sabha).
National Front under him took decisive measures such as instituting an Inter-State Council based on the Sarkaria Commission Report on Centre-State relations in 1988. It also was able to take steps to normalize relations between the Centre and the states. An effort was also made to find solution to the Kashmir and the Punjab terrorist related secessionism and their subsequent alienation through a concerted political will to solve them within the rubric of the federal framework. But the National Front government failed to achieve its goal due to its minority status in Parliament and internal conflict caused by Chandrasekhar, Devi Lal and other leaders. …One of the major advantages of this National Front government experiment was the cultivation of a new hope for a new era in which marginalised groups, i.e., periphery could become source of governance. The 1989 elections and the National Front formation showed that there is an alternative to both Congress and the BJP which can provide democratic governance. But its strength was rooted in alliance and coalition which were not impossible but very difficult tasks. Indeed, the Janata phase of coalition was a brave attempt to provide a coalition at the formal super structural level in a country where a social tradition apart from a political tradition (which as indicated earlier was well understood by the Congress Party) of coalition exist.

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C.4. INTERREGNUM BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE UNITED FRONT COALITION

The Nineties’ thus witnessed a succession of minority or coalition governments which ‘though reflecting the intense democratic churning in the states, were not able to generate confidence in their governance capabilities’. Momentous events took place in the aftermath of the fall of the National Front coalition. The Congress which had upset the Chandrasekhar coalition government because of very flimsy reasons (namely that two policemen were found spying at the residence of Rajiv Gandhi, the then supremo of the party), found itself facing an uncertain future after the assassination in 1991, of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur in Tamilnadu (brought about by the LTTE operatives, for his role in sending the IPKF to Sri Lanka, to fight on behalf of the government with them).

Bereft of Gandhi – Nehru icons, the Congress found it difficult to stand on its own. In a party where there were no grassroots elections took place and no internal party democracy worth the name existed, the party sustained on ‘leaders imposed from above’. Simultaneously, the BJP was thriving in on the communal polarization that it had engineered on the Ayodhya issue. It had found a niche audience even among the educated intelligentsia apart from the middle class. Alongside this, a new development took place namely, that the non-Congress parties,
the regional outfits apart from the Janata Dal and the BJP were slowly entrenching their influence and were succeeding in forming governments in several states'.

The eighties' and the beginning of the nineties' were also a period of great social transition. Though V.P Singh is pilloried for having opened the Pandora's box of what is being termed as the Mandalisation of politics, all parties' openly played this brand of politics - namely of espousing the cause of the OBCs (renamed as SEBCs), just as the Congress had in the past championed the cause of the SCs and STs. The resurgence of marginal castes and the backwards' is explained in details in the next chapter. It would suffice to say here, that regionalism was an articulation of the new class of political power, constituted of the marginalized castes, apart from the articulation of region-specific problems, aspirations of the local elites in the states. The emergence of Regionalism was a new challenge to reckon with. Due to the increasing political mobilization of parties, the regional parties started asserting and gradually in course of time evolved as big-time power sharers, both at the state level and later at the Centre. The motley group of state specific parties have come to rule the roost in Indian politics.

The BJP closely after its new found popularity after Advani's Rath Yatra steadily rose on the poll ratings. In the 1991 elections, it won 120 seats in the Lok Sabha (of an unprecedented 468 contested). Its vote share zoomed to 20.1%, which was second only to the Congress which had secured 232 seats, with a vote share of 28.8%. It was sweeping the key state of Uttar Pradesh in both the Lok Sabha and the Assembly elections, marking a major leap forward in
its positioning in the Indian party system. It won handsomely in Gujarat, decimating the Janata Dal there, and showed impressive performance in its traditional strongholds of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, winning more than 40 percent of the votes in each. 'More significantly, and portending developments to come, it significantly increased its vote share, in several states of the south and east, and in Bihar, contesting alone, and took 20.2% of the vote and five seats in Maharashtra in alliance with the Shiv Sena.' 58

The BJP came into power at the level of state government for the first time in 1990. It formed the government on its own in MP and HP, and formed coalition governments with the Janata Dal in Rajasthan and Gujarat. In Rajasthan it dominated the coalition with its leader becoming the Chief Minister. This was only the second time that it had dominated state governments; the earlier precedent was during 1977-1979, during which period the Jana Sangh component of the Janata Dal dominated the government and occupied the Chief Minister's post in MP, HP and Rajasthan. So it can be said that 'thus the BJP arrived as a regional political force, whereas earlier it had essentially been sub-regional, thereby contributing to national party system fragmentation.' 59

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58 Sridharan, E. *op. cit.* p.486.

59 Sridharan, E. *op.cit.* p486.
The Congress came to power in 1991 with the support of the 11 member AIADMK and some smaller allies. The Congress was put in power and the minority government that it formed was possible because of abstention in confidence votes by a section of the opposition. Later on it added to its numbers by splitting small parties such as the TDP and Lok Dal (Alit Singh faction), which was itself a breakaway from the Janata Dal after its defeat in 1991. The Congress brought its retiring war horse P.V Narasimha Rao to head a faction-ridden party. By his clever manipulations, Rao was able to attain a majority on its own exactly when it was half-way through its term (in the middle of 1993). These machinations however, could not half it to come back to power on its own at the elections in 1996. The Congress could only gain a mere 140 seats, which was a historic low from the earliest lowest figure of 154 seats recorded in 1977. Its vote share declined to 28.7%, because it was badly hit by the breaking away of the Tamil Manila Congress (constituted out of its Tamil Nadu unit) which won 20 seats, and by the formation of Congress (N.D Tiwari) and the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress [both of them were formed by renegades from the Congress party]. Due to these developments, the Congress found that for the first time, the party had been overtaken as the single largest party, by the BJP, winning only 141 seats compared to the BJP’s 161 seats. It however did remain the single largest party by vote share with 28.8% as compared to BJP’s 20.3%. (See Table No.III.1) The BJP started asserting its new found confidence.
A new alignment of political forces also took place at the regional level. This may be found reflected if one analyses the results of the fifteen state assembly elections that took place between November 1993 and March 1995, which favoured the smaller parties at the state level, and to some extent, also the BJP. It benefited the Shiv Sena, Telugu Desam, and though considered a national party, but essentially state-based such as the Samajwadi party, the Samata party and the BSP. Only in Himachal and Madhya Pradesh, the Congress could barely retain its hold.

An effort has been made in this section as also in earlier sections to highlight, by virtue of reflecting on the political developments in order to point out the structural framework of the party system in India and the polity which created the subsoil for coalitions to become indispensable for governance. Indeed, "... the electoral strategies and governance policies of the Congress over the past two decades provide the context which has shaped and determined the development of coalition politics. As the political system demanded more federalism, the Congress responded with less. There is by now sufficient evidence of its inability to secure a majority on its own strength for the last two decades. It can be argued that it has not obtained a convincing majority since the 1980 Lok Sabha elections, for political assassinations scramble voter preferences in 1984, and again in the second round of the 1991 elections. Deluded by the fortuitous and patently
artificial majority it was able to muster then, the Congress persisted with its policy of combating regional parties as the principal obstacle to single-party majority."

The Congress made a decision not to participate in coalition governments as it did not believe in the essentiality of newer forms of power sharing at the national level. It repeatedly denounces the evil forces of regionalism in its election manifestoes, the Congress has in fact had a long history and a rich tradition of coalition building at the state level. As a party with a unifying vocation, it perfected with considerable finesse its rallying skills during the national movement, and developed a coalitional strategy based largely on assimilation through co-optation. After Partition, it gradually slipped into a centralist mould, and its federal mainsprings were pushed into the background."

Concurrently, some other developments were also taking shape that would have a bearing on the later course of events that would lead to coalition governments. In the history of political developments, the period after the Janata experiment showed the marked emergence of the subalterns in Indian politics. The rise of marginal and middle classes and the dispossessed castes who hitherto had remained in the fringes came into the mainstream steadily and this process continued well into the nineties' and may be said to be continuing even now. There was a steady increase in the average number of contestants per Lok Sabha seat. Whereas it was 3.8 per seat in 1952; it kept on increasing and by 1996, it had climbed to 26.3. There has

60 Arora, Balveer. *op.cit.* p.185.
61 Arora, Balveer. *ibid* p.186.
been an increase over the years of candidates with a rural background, coming into the Lok Sabha. Whereas only 97 candidates hailed from a rural/agricultural background in the first general elections; the figure had risen to 163 in 1996.62

C.5). THE UNITED FRONT COALITION

In the eleventh Lok Sabha elections in 1996, the Congress could manage only 140 seats, the lowest tally in its entire history. The BJP had increased its tally to 161 from 120 seats in the last elections in 1991. The Janata Dal secured only 46 seats. The CPM had 32 and the CPI had 13 MPs respectively. It may be noted that the results aggregate for the top five national parties that we have charted here totaled 391 seats in a house where elections were held for 543 seats, i.e., it represented 72% of the total seats. As can be seen in Table no. III.1, this percentage had been falling. In 1977, these five parties (with the possible exception of the BJP when it was a constituent of the Janata Party) accounted for 481 seats out of 542, giving a percentage of 88.8%. This had fallen quite consistently over the years representing the new phenomenon that regional and other castiest/linguist parties were slowly appropriating the space that was captured earlier by the top five parties.

62 This information has been cited in Arshi Khan _op.cit_, p.160.
For the first time the BJP emerged as the single largest party with 187 seats (if one adds the tally of its pre-election allies namely, the Shiv Sena with its 15 seats; Haryana Vikas Party with 3 seats; Samta Party with 8 seats). Later with the post election alliance with Akali Dal, its tally increased to 195 in Lok Sabha. The Congress had been hit very severely. It had lost power in all the states where it had been in power in all states except with the exception of Orissa, Punjab and Himachal. Congress was also ridden with its perennial problems associated with defections, personality cult and factional fights *inter se* in the party.

Narasimha Rao and Sitaram Kesri, the party President were at loggerheads. Sonia Gandhi’s taking over as the President did little to improve matters. Factionalism reached greater heights when splinter groups emerged from within the Congress – viz, the Congress (Tiwari), Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress headed by Madhav Rao Scindia and Tamil Manila Congress (Moopanar). Under these circumstances, the Congress was in no position where it could serve as a bulwark to the rising aspirations of the BJP. It merely indulged in supporting parties which had an anti-BJP stance such as the Janata Party and other constituents which later formed the United Front.

The BJP and a few regional outfits could not muster the support of other parties to their cause, largely because the BJP had a rigid fundamentalist self-righteousness, a specific agenda and carefully nurtured electoral support base, which ideologically was not comfortable with the idea of coalition, in which they would have to compromise with their fundamentalist philosophy. Hence it could gather around itself only the
Akali Dal and the Shiv Sena, which were like-minded parties. It formed a
government and ruled for a dozen of days, after which it bowed out in the floor of
the House where it had to prove its majority. Within the short span of 12 days, it
took some major decisions which proved quite costly for the nation. The
decision to invite Enron Corporation and clinch some defence deals proved
detrimental to the nation's interest. "A 13 day government (which later fell for its
inability to secure majority legislative support in Lok Sabha) under Atal Bihari
Vajpayee was the one which cleared the decks for the Enron project. Significantly no
competitive bids were invited and non received for undertaking possibly the most
costly power project of all times in independent India. Hence the Central government
virtually gave Enron the project on a platter. Maharastra government didn't have the
choice of deciding the feasibility or otherwise (both the financial and logistical) of the
project... It is perspicacious now that the contract (which was forced down the throat
of the Maharashtra government by the Union government) is violative of the nation's
Constitution. The type of guarantees and counter-guarantees that were accorded to
Enron are not allowed under the constitution, and although this agreement declares
that the constitution is not binding on the deal, but then no state or central government
is allowed under the Indian constitution to sign a deal that does not recognize the
constitution. It has also been traced ... that the contract is against public interest."\(^{63}\)
The Enron saga which was called off only in 2002 was one of most exploitative
contracts ever as also the most costly to boot. It indicates what a government that

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does not have a majority support can decide in haste and force the nation to repent at leisure. This exemplifies the type of responsibility governments at the federal level bear and how much caution is necessary in the national interest.

With the failure of the Vajpayee government, the President invited the United Front to form the government at the Centre. The United Front was composed of 13 parties in which the Janata Dal, DMK, CPM, CPI, Tamil Maanila Congress, Asom Gana Parishad, Samajwadi Party played the central role. The Congress party gave it support from outside. H.D. Deve Gowda was the Prime Minister from 1 June 1996 and remained in power till 21 April 1997. It was a minority coalition government dependent on the support of the Congress.

The United Front had internal fissures over quite a number of issues, including the issue of leadership, which surfaced later, leading to a change in the saddle, by substitution of I.K. Gujral in place of Deve Gowda mid-stream. Other issues related to the coordination between the various alliance partners. The United Front was responsible for some positive developments. It sought to accelerate the federalization process in the country by forming a Federal Front to look into various conflicting issues relating to Centre-State relations. In the common minimum programme which was the basis of the alliance of the 13 parties there was special emphasis given on greater autonomy to the states such as Jammu & Kashmir. A two-pronged strategy was adopted which included implementation of Sarkaria Commission recommendations and a fresh re look at
the vexatious question of devolution of financial powers from the Central to the State governments. It also tried to mark a positive development by providing legitimacy and importance to regional parties in federal governance. "But it could not achieve the desired goal because of pressures and instability created by the Congress party whose support was fundamentally required for the very existence of the United Front government. Owing to lack of coordination between the United Front and the Congress leaders, on the one hand and the assertive role of the United Front at the Centre on the other, caused tensions within the Congress. As a result, the Congress pressurized the United Front to change its leadership from Deve Gowda to I. K. Gujral which embittered relations between the two."

The Congress finally withdrew its support to the Front in November 1997 despite the fact that from 21 April 1997 till 28 November 1998 the United Front was headed by I.K. Gujral who was an ex-Congressman and a Prime-Minister who enjoyed the support of the Congress and had been changed expressly on their bidding. The party stated that its demand to throw out the DMK from the ruling coalition had not been heeded. The DMK party had been implicated in the Jain Commission Report which had been set up to investigate Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and hence it was demanded that the links with the DMK be severed. Another possible reason for destabilizing and later reneging on support was the fact that as a party, the Congress felt frustrated at not being able to share in the

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64 Khan, Arshi op.cit. p.163.
governance. As a party it had little experience of remaining outside the corridors of power.

The United Front which shared power with outside support of the Congress in the eleventh Lok Sabha thus, took a drumming during and after the 1998 elections. As noted by Arora, "the secularism cement proved inadequate when pitted against the compulsions of anti-Congressism. The losses suffered by the non-Left segments of the UF showed that it was not able to derive political advantage from the manner in which it was first destabilized and then toppled by the Congress. In fact, UF leaders turned their attention away from national politics to constituency related concerns and no alternative leader was projected. While the Left parties managed to substantially retain their earlier tally, there was a sharp decline in the political fortunes of some key non-Left members of the Front, with others detaching themselves and moving towards a closer understanding with the BJP-led majority."

The United Front's tenure was from 1 June 1996 till 28 November 1997, roughly about 19 months (though I.K. Gujral served till 18 March 1998 as the caretaker Prime Minister). We thus see that after the fall of Rajiv Gandhi's government and the elections to the 9th Lok Sabha in 1989, India enters a period of coalition government - a phase which is to continue for long. As can be seen in the Table No.III.2 there have been six significant coalition governments since then. Of all the coalitions the United Front seemed to have the maximum number of parties

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till it was upstaged by the second National Democratic Alliance that came to power in October 1999.

The United front was constituted of a total of 13 parties. As can be seen from Table No.III.1 the Janata Dal had 46 seats in the 1996 elections. In the Non-Left parties group the Samajwadi Party had the maximum total of 17 MPs in the twelfth Lok Sabha. It needs to be noted that the Samajwadi Party was a regional party based in UP. Again, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Tamil Maniila Congress were regional parties from Tamil Nadu. The Bahujan Samaj Party is also largely concentrated in UP and only partially has a presence in Haryana. Even the Janata Dal, though accorded the status of a multi-state party was in reality returned from Karnataka, as the bulk of its members hailed from this state. Among the Left parties, the CPM had 32 seats and its distribution was largely concentrated in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The CPI had 12 which had a similar geographical expanse as that of the CPM excepting Tripura and substituting in its place the states of AP and Tamilnadu instead. The RSP and the Forward Bloc also had origins from similar states. Thus, the United Front marked the beginning of truly regional parties and forces coming to national limelight. This trend will grow in future, unmistakably and without fail. The United Front thus was not only an agglomeration of the maximum number of parties that ever came to form power at the Centre, but also it marked the initiation of regional and local politics in the mainframe of Central politics.
The tribulations of the United Front for some 19 months brought to sharp focus the changed face of reality of Indian politics. Though this change was not abrupt, but was evolving over the years, the demise of brute majorities (for e.g., the type of which was enjoyed by the Congress under Rajiv Gandhi, which happened to be the last such) and comfortable majorities' for parties' (the type of which was enjoyed by the Congress for many years at the Centre) served a notice to political parties of all hues that the era of coalitions had dawned and had to be accepted by them. Similarly, it was now recognized that it was not easy to form governments and run them as even the given belligerence of a small splinter group/faction could upset the most well conceived strategy. The parties' which understood this ground reality prospered and those who didn't were sent to the wilderness.

The post United-Front period brought the 12th Lok Sabha elections. As was the nature of the polity, the elections spawned yet another uncertain mandate and a hung Parliament was procrastinated by pundits. A lot of media reports have raised the question if this parliamentary de-rigueur form of uncertain mandates could be someway averted and suggestions have been bandied about. These are quite half-baked and immature because, a series of hung parliaments have occurred by now, and
political scientists believe a hung Parliament is not necessarily a pejorative or prejudicial to the interests of democracy in a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and fractitious polity. The election mandate merely reflects the plurality of political and social reality and despite the reports of elections being rigged in certain belts of the country such as in UP, Bihar etc. the basic truth in this argument holds true. Hence, there is no escape from uncertain mandates and the lack of clear majority for any political party.

Partly, the reason for yet another electoral uncertain mandate may be accounted for by the profile of political parties who fought the elections. There were forty political parties, national, regional and some very small sized ones who were in the fray for the 12th Lok Sabha elections, in place of the 28 parties that participated in the earlier elections.

In the elections of 1998, the BJP received the honour for bagging the maximum number of seats. It's tally of 182 seats was an improvement marginally over the 1996 tally of 161 seats. The Congress came second with 141 seats. The Janata Party reached its nadir managing just 6 seats (It is to be noted that its tally of 21 seats in the 1999 elections was largely due to total seats added of its allies such as Samata Party in Bihar and Lok Shakti in Karnataka). The Left parties more less secured their seats, from their traditional constituencies.

The BJP was one party that had to shelve its ambitions in 1996. Its 13 day government fell for want of support. It had always claimed that it was a party 'with a difference'. With its specific agenda and carefully nurtured social support base,
the idea of federal coalitions was an anathema to it, initially. It therefore quickly learnt from its 1996 experience. It sought the support of like-minded parties with whom it had shared power at the state level, such as the Akali Dal and Shiv Sena, in the beginning. However, it soon decided that it was to become a party 'like' any other. Vajpayee's experience earlier when despite his moderation and conciliatory gestures the minority government could not muster up the majority came in handy. As would be discussed in the next Chapter in detail, the BJP did some sound homework this time around. It was clear to the BJP that for coming to power they were to tone down, if not compromise on their fundamentalist position of 'mandir and kamandal'. Its party President, L K Advani admitted the limits of its Hindutwa agenda. He stated that "...since the 1996 elections, it is not the same ideological factors which have sustained our growth. Equally emphatically, it is not these ideological factors which have brought us new political allies in different states."

The BJP interpreted the 1998 mandate as one that 'vindicates our stand on national issues and gives us the responsibility of setting right the grievous wrongs of the past'. That the BJP had consciously accepted the inevitability of coalitions and now was actively justifying their bending over backwards was a sign of new thinking and reconciliation within the party. LK Advani in response to Congress

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President Sonia Gandhi's speech of 6 April 1998 wherein she had spoken of the necessity to re-store the Congress to its earlier position of 'the natural party of governance' stated on 12 April 1998 at the National Executive Meeting stated that it was the BJP which was the 'natural party of governance' in the changed setting dictated by coalitional situations, and that "... the interest of the coalition at the Centre are paramount. The party's strategies in the states must be subordinate to its national strategy. As a broad policy, it should be our endeavour to develop the right coalition chemistry with our allies by constantly enlarging the area of common interests and shrinking, or at any rate inactivating, the area of differences."  

The BJP had pre-poll arrangement with 12 parties and various independents and it assiduously increased in the post election calculations to include some minor parties to take its post electoral coalitional tally to 283. This included the Indian National Lok Dal (O) with 4 MPs, ; Arunachal Congress( 2 MPs), Sikkim Democratic Front, Manipur Congress Citizen's Front, Bodoland State Movement Committee (all with 1 MP each). Its later adhesions with National Conference (with 3 MPs), 2 Anglo-Indians,1 Unattached MP (Anand M Singh ) made the BJP and its coalition a 24 party behemoth.

As can be seen from Table No.III.4 the BJP was the only National level party in this coalitions. All the others were basically single state regional outfits who were concentrated in one state or the other. The Samata Party was the exception which had secured 10 seats from Bihar and 2 Seats from UP making it the party which was a two-state regional party. The total of pre-electoral arrangements

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68 See B. Arora – *ibid* p.193.
was with 12 parties and two independents (namely with Maneka Gandhi and Satnam S. Kainth). Later in post-poll adhesions some 8 parties and 3 MPs (one Unattached and two nominated Anglo-Indians) were added. By 28 March 1998, a tortuous majority was manufactured, capped by an eleventh hour deal with Telegu Desam.

The Telegu Desam party was the most hard to negotiate, being the most opportunist of the pack. This is revealed by its insistence not to participate in the cabinet, and support the coalition from outside; the only supposed barter it agreed to being the claim on the Speaker's chair. This was strictly speaking, an aberration in the politics of coalitions. Usually the distribution of ministerial berths in any coalition is conceived of as an integral part of the power sharing process that sustains coalitions. By not participating in the process, the 12 member Telugu Desam appropriated to itself greater leverage and power over the other coalition partners; despite the fact that AIADMK and Samta (having 18 and 12 MPs respectively) had as many if not more MPs than the Telugu Desam.

It is also to be noted that the BJP had, as indicated earlier, pre-election seat arrangements with as many as 13 pre-election allies, including two independents, which was spread over 9 states. (as may be seen in Table No. III.4) It is therefore inexplicable that whereas these allies should have been strategic to BJP’s sphere of influence, it was not so. More than the pre-electoral allies, the Telugu Desam began to wield the greatest influence over the BJP and the coalition. Another party, which supported it from outside was the 2-member National Conference, which didn’t have half as much influence as the Telugu Desam. It has been argued by some that the
election mandate was not so much a mandate for the BJP as a vote of confidence in A.B. Vajpayee, the party's only liberal leader capable of a degree of accommodation and toleration which the party's rigid hierarchy is not usually associated with. “Such majorities are not unknown in parliamentary systems: they rally round a leader, but do not necessarily transfer subsequently to the party... Having managed to put together a parliamentary majority, Vajpayee was confronted with the task of converting it into a coalition government.”

The BJP's 182 seats had given it a 25.5% vote share and its pre-poll allies which had 74 seats got a vote share (combined) of 11.6%. With post poll adhesions the total went up to 282 (with the support of TDP and the National Conference). If one analyses the results, the BJP fared better in 1998 than it did in 1996, because of the critical support of the allies. It was able to secure more seats in almost all states except in Rajasthan, Haryana & Maharashtra. It enjoyed a positive vote swing in all states except in Meghalaya, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat. In some states, its best-ever performance got registered, namely, in Karnataka, Orissa, A.P., TamilNadu and Punjab. It also succeeded in winning its first seat in West-Bengal. It could establish both socially and geographically, its influence and consolidate itself in fresh territories and capture the imagination of new social groups in the south and east, among lower and middle castes and classes.

The BJP's 24 party coalition, called the National Democratic Alliance consisted of the AIADMK, which initially was very vocal on the issue of dismissal of

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69 Arora, B. Ibid. p.195.
the elected government in TamilNadu, while the Trinamool Congress even suspended its support to the coalition for a week to express its dissatisfaction with government policies concerning West Bengal.

Although a coordination committee was formed to smoothen relations between the pre-poll and post-poll partners, the committee proved ineffective, mainly because it did not meet often periodically. The BJP's ascendency to power was clearly the result of understanding the emerging political realities of regional politics and was the assertion of socio-political realities of a set of parties that had never tasted power at the Centre. But, in matching up with them, the BJP showed its slip. There were differences galore which could not be resolved. The major differences within the coalition then had to be either resolved bilaterally or were aired in the Press or in the Parliament.

The new multi-party system was largely concentrated in the states. There was no national level political party that supported the development of regional parties and their agenda and distinct regional patterns of politics initially. It was the exigencies of BJP's political fortune that made it the hero of the moment. The BJP together with its problems of gaining a majority and acceptability on a national scale was forced to accept the alternative of gaining coitalional support and sustenance of the regional parties. As can be seen from Table No. III.3 the rise of the regional parties in the Parliament helped their cause (from a bare 3% in 1952 to a healthy 10% by 1998).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Seats in the Lok Sabha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thirteen months that it was in power from 19 March 1998 till 17 April 1999 were tortuous because the coalition that it had garnered was very disparate in its character and priorities. There was regular tussles between them, despite the fact that the BJP had realized the pitfalls of its Hindutva philosophy and was willing to be accommodative. As indicated, it had cleverly made alliances (some pre-poll and others post-poll) to expand its influence geographically to the south and the east and socially downwards to the backward and the Scheduled castes/tribes and the poor. Its election success and coalition manoeuvring helped it to successfully overcome its isolation by managing to exploit the splits in the other parties such as the Janata and the Congress party. In West Bengal, it was by striking a deal with the Trinamool Congress making seat adjustments in the state. Trinamool was a breakaway splinter from the Congress. In Janata Dal it was the breakaway Lok Shakti Dal of Ramkrishna Hedge of Karnataka and the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa which were ensnared by the BJP. This marked an advance over its existing alliances in Punjab with the Akali Dal; the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Samata Party in Bihar. More importantly, it could make inroads into the Tamil heartland by an alliance with the AIADMK - led group of regional parties, exploiting state level rivalries in all cases. Thus, the BJP’s claim to power was dependant on its success in forming a rainbow of alliances and by the particular strategy of vote management in different states by clever thinking.

In addition, the BJP, as noted herein earlier prepared itself for projecting a moderate face of the party as its realization was that without the
cooperation of regional parties and assertion of socio-cultural realities as seen by them it'd be well nigh impossible for government formation. It therefore, proposed a common agenda for governance. And though, in hindsight we can observe, it decided to shelve its own agenda and maintained silence over its three controversial issues namely, the Ayodhya issue, Article 370 and Kashmir and its views on the Uniform Civil code. Notably, these were not a retreat from its ideological commitment but were deemed as a functional requirement for coming to power. This certainly should count as an adjustment it made for power sharing. It has been made clear, thereafter, at many forums that these concessions were strategic in nature, as the BJP had been forced by circumstances to make them and that the moment the BJP was able to gain an electoral verdict of two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, it'd revert to its ideological commitment for which it was founded by Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, including its forthright stand on these three most crucial issues. This became clear most categorically after the party was dethroned when the first coalition of March 1998 was out of power after 13 months. The RSS insistence on the Ram mandir issue was not condoned openly and the RSS used the political space to keep "...mandir issue still alive and kicking. The RSS chief asked Muslims to hand over the temples of Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura to the Hindus."71

Yet, when the BJP executive met at Bangalore in January earlier in that year against the background of the BJP's dismal performance in the recent state assembly elections and the attacks on Christian places of worship (quite in line

71 "RSS asks Muslims to hand over three temples to Hindus", The Times of India, Sept 22, 1999, p.1.
with BJP-RSS philosophy of ‘Hindu rashtra’ there was an attempt to redefine BJP government and Sangh parivar relations. Vajpayee was successful in getting his moderate line partially incorporated in the political resolution which stated that ‘Any attack on a place of worship, whether a church or temple is deplorable and cannot be condoned.’

It is to be observed that “at the state level, which was the significant level for these alliances, the newly ‘moderate’ BJP became an active partner for a regional or state-based party opposed to the Congress or Congress-allied regional rival (such as in Punjab, Maharashtra, TamilNadu, Karnataka, Haryana, Orissa) or to a Congress faction (Trinamool Congress) versus the major regional party (West Bengal). The logic of the enemy’s enemy being one’s friend overpowered the ideological incompatibility between these centrist, secular parties, and the BJP’s ideology.”

During government formation the BJP-led coalition government adopted a National Agenda for Governance in which the BJP’s Hindutwa agenda items were dropped. This was the price of ‘at least tactical and temporary moderation to sustain the alliance’. Due to this modification in its stance it was able to win the post-election allies such as Om Prakash Chautala’s Haryana Lok Dal and the external support of TDP and national Conference for its coalition government.

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72 Importantly, there is no mention of mosques in this quote. See The Economic Times, 4 Jan 1999.

Once the coalition government was formed, the various partners came up with their own agendas, which to some extent had to be taken care of or the party had to be placated considerably. In many instances, the BJP had to make important concessions even though it was not within the agenda of their own party nor of the National Democratic Alliance. For example, the increase in the price of fertilizers which was effected by the withdrawal of subsidies in the Union Budget of 1998 (which was in line with the conditionailities of the IMF, World Bank etc, which were funding the Indian state in the Globalization and Liberalization context) greatly irked the Akali Dal. The Dal was largely a party of rich and middle farming lobby of Punjab, whose economic interests were directly hit by this measure. It protested vociferously against the move and although Yashwant Sinha, the Finance Minister claimed that it was sound economics to raise the fertilizer price, he had to reverse his decision and maintain the status quo on the matter of fertilizer prices due to the pressure built up by the Akalis. Further evidence may be seen in the case of AIADMK's peculiar demand that the elected government in Tamil Nadu of the regional party (DMK) be dismissed. Though this was only partially heeded to, a reason for which Jayalalitha, the supremo of the party created all sorts of problems for the coalition and ultimately threw the government out of power in April 1999, by withdrawing support from the NDA coalition.

A point needs to be noted that the BJP despite reconciling its key agenda and agreeing to the common agenda was able to carry through some of its avowedly top priority items of its agenda in the governance
through the coalition. For example, immediately after coming to ascendancy, it detonated five nuclear tests at Pokhran in Rajasthan, in May 1998. By doing so ‘...the BJP ...as the head of a fractious coalition government, would so suddenly and dramatically alter India’s global strategic relations... and claiming status as a nuclear weapons power.’\(^74\) It is well known that the Congress headed by Narasimha Rao earlier was also determined to push through these tests, but under pressure from the United States government dissuaded it from going ahead with nuclear tests earlier. This nuclearising of India forms a constituent part of BJP’s ideological history and falls in line with Veer Savarkar, the ideological father of modern Hindu nationalism, whose rallying cry that Indians should ‘Hinduise all politics and militarise all Hindudom’.\(^75\)

It needs to be noted that the BJP headed coalition was selling dreams of ‘Mera Bharat Mahan’, at least atomically, but was unable to provide onions (and through this metaphor, one should understand the basic necessities of life) to the people, far from improving their quality of life. Hence BJP’s ‘hindu nationalism’ which had taken a leap forward after demolition of the Babri masjid at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 was set in top gear after the blasts.

The breakdown of the coalition and the collapse of the Vajpayee government on 17 April 1999 was the result of ‘...the ruling alliance ...(losing) its


majority because of a lack of cohesion within its ranks, and those who voted out the alliance showed the same lack of cohesion when trying to form an alternative government'. 76 The President K.R. Narayanan had in mind the minority government that Sonia Gandhi promised with outside support after the B J P headed coalition fell. She failed to do this and withdrew from forming a government. The Congress mistakenly perceived an anti-coalition mood of the public and was therefore averse to any power-sharing commitment at the national level, though it had not ruled out election understandings and adjustments with other parties in the states. Sonia Gandhi in her strategy for the 1999 elections was clear that "When the electorate sees us strong, united and single-minded, and contrasts us with the multi-headed monster the B J P is fielding, there is no doubt that their vote will go to the solid, reliable, time-tested stability which the Congress has on offer." 77

76 President's Secretariat Rastrapati Bhawan, Press Communiqué, 26 April 1999.
77 This quote is taken from an address of state party chiefs, Congress chief ministers at N. Delhi on 6 May 1999. See The Hindu, 7 May 1999, p2.
### Pre-electoral Allies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Seats in Lok Sabha</th>
<th>Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>National Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. All. India Anna DMK</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Single-state(T.Nadu)</td>
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<td>3. Samata Party</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single-state(Bihar/UP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Biju Janata Dal</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>Single-state(Orissa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Shiromani Akali Dal</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>Single-state(Punjab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Trinamul Congress</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>Single-state(W.Bengal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Shiv Sena</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>Single-state(Maharastra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Pattali Makal Katchi</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>Single-state(T.Nadu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Marumalarchi DMK</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Single-state(T.Nadu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lok Shakti</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Single-state(Karnataka)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Haryana Vikas Party</td>
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<td>Single-state(Haryana)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Tamizhaga Rajiv Cong (O)</td>
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<td>Single-state(T.Nadu)</td>
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<td>13. Independents</td>
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<td><strong>Sub-Total (A)</strong></td>
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### Post-electoral Adhesions

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<td>Single-state(Haryana)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Arunachal Congress</td>
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<td>16. Sikkim Dem. Front</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Manipur State Congress</td>
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<td>Single-state(Manipur)</td>
</tr>
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<td>18. Citizens Common Front</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Single-state(Mizoram)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Telugu Desam</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Single-state(Andhra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Anglo Indians</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Nom. (Foley, De Souza)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Unattached</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Defection(A.Mohan)</td>
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<td><strong>Sub-Total (B)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL (A + B)</strong></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
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</tr>
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Source: Balveer Arora - *Negotiating Differences... op.cit.* p.194.
In the opinion of B. Arora "The absence of effective coordination to resolve intra-coalition spats was one of the notable failures of the Vajpayee government. Its partners repeatedly complained of being ignored or not being consulted often enough on major policy issues. They felt that sharing power had not resulted in their being able to influence policies. On the other hand, efforts by the dominant party to push forward its own agenda provoked sharp protest, notably its policy towards religious minorities and the resultant attacks on Christian missionaries. The BJP crafted a majority but had not yet evolved a strategy of living in peace with minorities. The traditions of the Sangh Parivar and its unfulfilled projects arguably prevent it from seriously negotiating differences.\(^78\)

IV

SECOND BJP COALITION: THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE
(13 Oct 1999 - continuing)

The elections were called after Sonia Gandhi could not muster up a majority in the Lok Sabha and these were scheduled for September. An advertisement carried out in many publications in May 1999 summed up the achievements of Vajpayee’s first tenure of 13 months. It made various claims on

\(^78\) Arora, B. "Negotiating Differences..." p.198-9.
behalf of the then recently defeated BJP government. Its main claim to fame however, was the detonation of 5 nuclear bombs in Pokharan. This falls in well in the BJP's scheme of things. Despite being made to eschew its own fundamentalist agenda, it nevertheless could manage to sneak in some of that ideology. BJP had promised in its earlier manifestoes in the background of swadeshi rhetoric that it would resume nuclear testing. Prakash Karat, a politburo member of the CPM wrote that 'The bomb was the mascot of the RSS long before the Ram temple acquired religious – political overtones for it in the 1980s.' That seemingly was the most important achievement for the party. Another one was the realization that the BJP had to carefully manage the system of alliances. Hence, if after the 1996 humiliation, the BJP learnt the importance of vigorously forging alliances on a major scale, it realized thereafter the significance of having pre-electoral alliances. This paid rich dividends later, as its parallel arrangement of projecting BJP as the saviour of the India's patriotic Hindu nationalism through its nuclear ruse, did not work at the 1999 polls.

The elections results threw up a result that again saw the assertion of regional parties in national politics. The BJP was in for a surprise, because it received exactly the same number of seats that it secured in the last elections in 1998 – namely 182 seats. This time the BJP lost in some seats that it had secured earlier; it also found that it had made fresh gains at places not

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79 Quoted in *Frontline*, 21 May 1999.
considered to be its stronghold. But it had put up marginally speaking, lesser number of candidates. If in 1998, it had managed to put up 384 candidates in that many constituencies (though it was a fall from the historical high of 471 candidates put up in 1991) in 1999 it had 339 candidates in that many constituencies. Further, it also encountered a fall in its share of votes.

Whereas it had registered a 25.5% vote share in 1998, in the year 1999, it could manage only 23.8%.(See Table No: III.1). The Congress had also lost considerably; it was down from 141 seats to 114 seats. The Janata Dal (United) got a similar verdict – though its tally improved from 6 to 21 due to the inclusion of the Samata and Lok Shakti in it. The left parties, in particular held out to their tally more or less similar to their past experience (though the CPM took its tally from 32 to 33 seats, the CPI dropped its figure from 9 to 4). The big five National parties then, as seen here, registered a decrease. Whereas, they captured between themselves, 370 seats out of the total 543 seats in the Lok Sabha in 1998; they accounted for merely 354 seats in 1999. (See Table No: III.1) The regional parties and the smaller outfits were the major gainers (See Table No.III.3).

The BJP again had to form a coalition government and the National Democratic Alliance was formally formed with Vajpayee being sworn in on 13 October 1999 as the Prime Minister. It marked a first in two ways. Firstly, an incumbent Prime Minister was returned to office – something that had not happened earlier. Secondly, it was the first time since the end of the Indira Gandhi – Rajiv Gandhi phase that a pre-electoral alliance obtained a clear majority
"The 1999 Lok Sabha elections marked a significant break in the succession of hung Parliaments. State parties, aggressively pursuing the developmental interests of their respective states, joined hands with the BJP after the dissolution of the 12th Lok Sabha in an alliance which marked the advent of 'electoral federalism'.

a) The Regional spread or Electoral federalism of the BJP

The electoral federalism of 1999 meant that the BJP led ideologically diverse minority coalition which essentially was a pre-election coalition fought the Congress-led coalition. The BJP had with it 24 parties whereas the Congress group had 5 parties. The Congress alliance was a 'tentative coalition with state-by-state agreements but no common national platform. The BJP alliance consisted of the Janata Dal (United) - which was a conglomerate of the erstwhile Samta Party, Lok Shakti and Janata (Sharad Yadav) faction; Shiv Sena, DMK, PMK, TRC, MGR-ADMK, MGR-K, BJD, TRC, Sikkim Dem. Front, Arunachal Congress, Manipur State Congress, Loktantrik Cong., Janatantrik BSP, Himachal Vikas Congress, Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha, INLD, Independent (Maneka Gandhi) from Pilibhit constituency. There were some parties in this alliance such as the Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha, Jantantrik BSP which did not win a single seat in the elections.

Balveer Arora - "Political Parties and the party System..." op.cit. p.513
The Congress alliance consisted of the Rashtriya Janata Dal, AIADMK, Kerala Congress (Mani), Muslim League, and Rashtriya Lok Dal. The alliances as drawn up now after the breakdown of the Vajpayee government in April 1999, was different only marginally - in place of the recalcitrant AIADMK, the BJP sought the support of the DMK in Tamil Nadu (while the AIADMK shifted its alliance with the Congress; and secured the support of Indian National Lok Dal of Om Prakash Chautala in Haryana.

The September 1999 elections were fought by the BJP with a seeming vengeance. It had to prove that it could come back with a majority. However, it knew this was an uphill task, hence the coalitional pre-electoral alliance was forged with greater panache. "Through skillful bargaining and seat sharing, the BJP manage to penetrate into areas which had hitherto resisted its efforts at expansion. While the 1998 majority was hastily cobbled together, with all its consequent uncertainties and weaknesses, the preparation for the 1999 elections (had been) taken up more systematically. For the first time, a major national party pursued a comprehensive strategy of alliances and seat-sharing arrangements, accepting to field few candidates in the bargain.(In this election it fielded 340 candidates as compared to 384 in 1998 and 471 in 1996) Reviewing its strategy after the elections, the BJP National Executive noted with satisfaction that the decision to align with non-Congress regional parties had strengthened the federal character of the national polity by making them important partners in the task of governance at the national level and proclaimed: 'This will enable the union government to address regional
### LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 1999: PERFORMANCE OF PARTIES

(Bloc wise)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance / Party</th>
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<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<td>Bhartiya Janata Party</td>
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<td>National</td>
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<td>Shiv Sena</td>
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<td>Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam</td>
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<td>2.20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biju Janata Dal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>Single state-Orissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinamool Congress</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>Single state-W.B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INLD</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>Single state-H.W.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattali Makkal Katchi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>Single state-T.Nadu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marumalarchi DMK</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Single state-T.Nadu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiromani Akali Dal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Single state-Punjab.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.B.Loktantrik Congress</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Single state - UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Himachal Vikas Congress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state- H.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Congress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state – Ar’chal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGR-ADMK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state – T.Nadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akali Dal (M)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state-Punjab.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim Dem. Front</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state – Sikkim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONGRESS &amp; ALLIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>21.17</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIADMK</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>Single T.Nadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rastriya Janata Dal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>Single state-Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Single state-Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Single state- UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Name</td>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala Congress (Mani)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state - Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEFT PARTIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI(M)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Socialist Party</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-India Forward Bloc</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala Congress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Parties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telugu Desam</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>Single state - Andhra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samajwadi Party</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>Single state - UP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahujan Samaj party</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>State-UP, Haryana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Congress Party</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>State-UP, MP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Conference</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state - JK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIMIM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI-ML</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>All-India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata Dal - Secular</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Single state - Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants' &amp; Workers' Party</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samajwadi Janata Party-Rashtriya</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>543</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: This Table has been computed by the author on the basis of Data published in the Keesing’s Record of World Events Keesing’s Worldwide, England (October 1999) p.43200. & CSDS data published in Frontline (Chennai) Vol.16, No.22 (Oct-23-Nov 5, 1999) p.122-23. Also includes later Inputs published separately in Newspapers.
aspirations more effectively and thus prepare India for the challenges of the new century.”

As can be seen from Table No. 3.5 the BJP won 182 seats (out of the 339 contested), which constitutes 33.51% of the total seats in the Lok Sabha. Its national vote share fell from 25.47% in 1998 to 23.7% now. The Congress however gained, certainly not in the number of seats which fell from 141 in 1998 to 114 now; a loss of 27 seats but gain in terms of 2.54% over the last election in terms of national vote share. It secured 28.4% in 1999 as against the 25.9% vote share of 1998. “The most important reason for non-convertibility of votes into seats seems to be the Congress undermining of regional parties/groups, therefore, not striking pre-electoral alliances with them. On the other hand, the pre-electoral alliance with almost all the important regional groups helped the BJP to win about 50 seats (and the clinching margin) despite a drop in its vote share.”

Indeed, the BJP, apart from a few states where it confronted the Congress directly on its own strength such as in MP, Delhi, HP, Gujarat, Rajasthan, had significant electoral alliances in virtually all other states, with the exception of the North-East. It is claimed that these allies contributed as many as 123 supporters of the Vajpayee government, and accounted for nearly 23% of the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha.

The BJP carefully noted that in the East, South and the North-East its organizational capacity was weak and its presence also minimal. Hence the maximum number of allies were from these areas. If one sees Table No. 3.5 the

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81 Arora, B. *ibid.* p.513.
82 Arora, B. *ibid.* p.513.
### Table No : III.6

#### LOK SABHA ELECTIONS: 1996-1999: EMERGENCE OF STATE PARTIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats%</td>
<td>Votes%</td>
<td>Seats%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other National Parties</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other National Parties are: CPM, CPI, Samta, Janata Dal (Tiwari), Janata for’96; CPM, CPI, Samata, Janata Dal & BSP for’98 & same plus Janata Dal(U) & (S) for’99

State parties & Others (includes Registered parties & Independents )

|                                | 25.8 | 30.9 | 28.7 | 32.0 | 32.2 | 32.9 |
|                                | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

spread of allies make it clear that this election spawned the power of the allies as never before.

It can be seen quite clearly from Table No. 3.6 that the seat share and the vote share of the both the major National parties such as the Congress and the BJP has been falling. Similarly the shares of the Other National parties such as the Left parties, the BSP, Janata Dal (United), Janata Party, AICC(Tiwari) etc. has been declining. If one adds up the respective seat share of these two categories of parties (i.e., National and Other National Parties) we find that whereas the Seat share used to be 74.2% in 1996, it had fallen to 67.8% by 1999. Similarly, whereas the vote share was 69.1% in 1996; it had fallen to 67.1 by 1999. This is a clear vindication that the popularity of the dominant National parties was waning and the electorate was slowly but steadily shifting its preference elsewhere. There are plausibly manifold reasons for this, which we would examine in the next chapter.

The beneficiaries of this changing voter preference have been the numerous state based regional parties, which have as noticed earlier, carved out their special enclaves of popularity among the masses. This table shows that these parties have increased the total seat share received by them from 25.8% to 32.2% in the period from 1996 till 1999. Similarly, they have increased their total vote share from 30.9% to 32.9%, in this period.

Due to various factors such as the increasing political mobilization of regional parties, they have evolved into big time power sharers. These motley group of state specific, region/linguistic specific and community specific parties have
come to rule the roost in India politics. They, between them lay claim to 204 seats in the Lok Sabha. If we add to this tally, the ideological parties like those of the Left parties (such as the CPM, CPI et al.), which are also region specific parties to a large extent, though credited with an all-India status by the Election Commission as national parties', they the tally goes up to 247 seats. This means that they between themselves, have captured 45.48% of the seats of Lok Sabha. Thus, they are credited with securing close to 30% of the national vote share. It is this size of representation that makes coalition inevitable. Each of them has weaved a presumably enduring social coalition for power sharing. Being too localized, social coalitions cause subregional fragmentation of electoral spectrum in which the entirely 'local' determine the voting behaviour in national elections. Thus, earlier demarcation of universe between parliamentary and assembly elections seems to be disappearing. The salience of the 'local' introduces multipolarity in the political system in which the two major parties have to share power with the 'local'.

The verdict of 1999 is loud and clear. It has characterized the emerging Indian political party system as coaltional. Coalitional systems may also be seen as multi party systems. However, in the Indian system it needs to be clarified that coaltional governance or multi party functioning, as is known, assumes the

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presence of at least two major national level parties around whom a number of smaller parties’ veer around for the intricate and confounding task of alliance formation.

IV b). The BJP coalition’s functioning

The theory of coalitions suggests that regular sharing of power is the hallmark of any coalition. In the Indian system, this process of power sharing is largely done by the allocation of portfolios such as that of Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State, Deputy Ministers, giving of important positions of authority, sinecures, Constitutional posts such as that of Governors, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Legislative posts such as headship and membership of parliamentary committees, consultative joint committees and others where nominations can be made by the Prime Minister such as appointing the Chairman and members of Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Lalit Kala Akademi, Indian Council of Social Science Research, etc. Usually this is a fine art and the ruling party allocates such positions of authority in an effort to give a quid pro quo for the support, political and strategic in the realms of power. This is usually done on a mutual give and take basis. There are innumerable instances to show that this is done on a continuing basis. Perhaps the first such one was wagered by the Telegu Desam party which has played the most opportunistic and hard to get role. After dilly dallying in 1998 for an agonizingly long time, it agreed at the eleventh hour not to participate in the cabinet but secure the post of Speaker of the Lok Sabha. In 1999 also, its member G.Balayogi was given
the post of the Speaker. The Telugu Desam has without participating in the cabinet perfected the art of manipulating the Vajpayee government and getting things its way and at times even bulldozing the central government into conceding aid, supplies and favourable decisions for Andhra Pradesh. In fact, Chandra Babu Naidu, its supremo has played a far determining and dominating role than Jayalalitha’s AIADMK ever did in the course of the history of thirteen months’ in Vajpayee’s first coalition government. Hence this is an aberration which goes against the canons of coalition theory. In coalition theory literature it is clearly a rule that all the components of a coalition government must participate in power sharing. The main vehicle for grand coalition was the cabinet, which is an unique aspect in India in that cabinets were produced by the broadly representative and inclusive nature of a single dominant party, the Congress earlier. Indeed the Congress party’s policy of inclusion and its political dominance had generated grand coalition cabinets with ministers belonging to all the main religious, linguistic, caste and sub-caste and regional groups. At the summit of political power was a national political elite who was committed to reconciling differences through bargaining amongst themselves.

There has been a tradition with the BJP coalitions whether they were formed in 1998 or in 1999 to accord more importance to small coalition partners. For example coalitions partners such as the AIADMK and the Samata party received a disproportionate from number of cabinet positions in the BJP government in exchange for their support. In 1998 the AIADMK from Tamilnadu held only 18 seats and the Samata party had only 12 seats UP and Bihar in the Lok Sabha, but they held
sex key cabinet berths in the coalition government. Similarly, in the coalition formed in 1999, the Samata got prize cabinet portfolios such as that of Defence, Railways and held at least seven cabinet berths at one time. The Samata party's strength (in the Janata Dal [United] under whose banner it fought the elections in 1999) is 18 out of the 21 for JD(U).

Another feature of the minority governing coalition led by BJP is that some regional parties are becoming critical for the survival of the multiparty coalition. Among them are the Telegu Desam party, the Samata party prominently and the AIADMK and DMK alternately at other times. Chandrababu Naidu has played the kingmaker's role. In almost every crisis his views and intervention is sought. He has very skillfully played the largest tranche of 29 MPs that he has brought into the coalition (though technically speaking, he is merely supporting the coalition from outside) and the Telegu Desam, especially its leader has become crucial in every deliberation, strategy and resolution of conflicts in the coalition. Not merely this, there are reports that Naidu has managed to gain economically by wresting from the Centre innumerable grants, aid, packages for Andhra Pradesh which amount to thousands of crores of rupees. Similarly, Samata has due to the adroitness of George Fernandes, a one time socialist (who was involved in trade union politics and counts his masterminding the railway strike of the seventies' as one of his achievements who is equally at home criticizing Narendra Modi one day and defending him with all his verbosity the next day) is considered critical to the survival of the BJP led coalition. On the other hand, the post-electoral bargaining of regional parties has also taken new
forms. For example, after the coalition was formed in 1998, the AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha made increasing demands on the coalition, and throughout the 13 month tenure she persistently used her magnified leverage within the BJP government to make demands to stall a series of corruption investigations against her. The DMK who followed her in the 1999 coalition similarly did the opposite — asking for action against Jayalalitha when in power. Other coalition supporters have not been so lucky as these parties. Emulating Jayalalitha experience (who demanded and got an increased share of cabinet positions for her party at the Centre) Mamata Banerjee demanded a similar prize for herself and her party. She demanded her inclusion as the Railway Portfolio and other portfolios for her followers. Though initially, she was not given the post, only two railway conversion projects in her state of W.Bengal were approved. (Mamata’s elevation as the Union Cabinet Minister for Railways was done on the basis of other calculations and that also at a much later stage in the 1999 coalition) Further, in the 1999 coalition, once Mamata Banerjee reneged from her post after resigning from Ministership with an eye on the Bengal assembly elections, her later cringing that she be relocated as the Railway Minister on the eve of cabinet reshuffle in early 2002 has broken no ice. Nor has her prolonged tantrums and mobilization in Bengal over the relocation of the Headquarters of the Eastern railways from Calcutta to Bihar. This is interesting because Mamta has tied her successes or failures as a Minister of Railways with a Cabinet rank at the centre with her personal graph of ascendancy or otherwise. This indicates the weakness of her party, Trinamool Congress which has hardly anything to show as concrete achievements.
Hence the change from Calcutta to Hajipur in Bihar brought about a predictable election plank.

Thus, power sharing may take various forms. The difference now in the power sharing model that the BJP led coalition is involved in is that no such grand consociationalism is possible, the type of which was prevalent in the 'Congress system', whose internally strong federal organization ensured proper participation in the spoils and mutual discipline. No section or group remained outside of the sharing of power. However, this is now not enforceable as each small party, group has larger than itself ambitions and expectations and with a greater capacity for blackmail and manipulation of the government at the centre. The Vajpayee government has had to do innumerable somersaults to accommodate the recalcitrant constituents of the NDA – including many cabinet reshuffles to maintain its status quo. Be it the wiles of George Fernandes the Samata party chief whose strategic position in the cabinet and as the chief fire-fighting man of the Vajpayee coalition is unquestioned and whose aspirations to the top post of Prime Minister had to be curtailed by induction of L.K Advani as the Deputy PM, the tantrums of Mamta Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress whose periodic threats to the coalition to walk out over gaining the high moral ground over a lot of issues, the Shiv Sena's spasmodic utterances against the central government over grievances or perceived grievances or seeming neglect of B.Thackeray or Maharashtra etc the coalition government has borne it all. There have been constant demands from constituents that they have been neglected or that their state has been bypassed in fund allocation.
such as the demand by the Samata party, the Biju Janata Dal that the Central government has been negligent in giving grants to them in *normal course of time* and during the time when calamities have struck them like the Orissa super cyclone of 1999 or the periodic floods that ravage Bihar. There have been demands from the Akalis and Chautala’s INLD who wanted to play to their constituencies by offering them subsidies , gratis electricity . These have been conceded to at times, especially when Surjit Singh Barnala was the Agriculture Minister (fertiliser prices have been reduced, electricity overdues have been waived for rich farming lobbies in Punjab and Haryana). 

One has witnessed *infighting* between ministers belonging to various constituents where the BJP has had to play a definitive role in brokering peace and providing palliatives to the warring groups. For example the spat between Trinamool Congress chief Mamta Banerjee and Samta party functionary Nitish Kumar over regaining the Railways portfolio (after reneging it when Mamta walked away from the NDA) on the eve of a cabinet reshuffle in early 2002; or over the relocation of the Headquarters of Eastern Railways to Bihar from Calcutta.84 Similarly the infighting between Maneka Gandhi and CP Thakur, both ministers in the council of ministers or the ego clash between Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj

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84 "Mamata vs Samata" *The Hindustan Times* (N.Delhi) July 8, 2002 p.10 states : ‘How the self-serving brand of politics pursued by the constituents of the Vajpayee govt. can tie them up in knots is again evident from the Mamta-Samata spat. Not an iota of principle is involved in this row. Instead, the whole issue revolves round personal and political aggrandizement...She never said a word about the new railway zone in Hajipur when she was the minister even though the proposal was mooted by her predecessor Ramvilas Paswan. If she is now threatening to disrupt Parliament, it is because of her realization that she has lost out in a game of one-upmanship with the Vajpayee government because of her weakened political position.’
etc, represent junctures wherein the BJP and its close allies has had to step in and redraw the lines. The consistent support and acquiescence to Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat by the BJP despite his Miloslav Karadzic type of ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the post Godhra incident in February 27, 2002 has drawn some of its constituents in direct confrontation with the BJP, especially the Telegu Desam. Yet these have cast no threats to the continuation of the alliance at the centre.

Hence, though power sharing the type of which was prevalent in the Congress system is not available, yet the BJP and its allies have managed a different variant of power sharing. Whether this is normatively speaking, a step forward or backward will be discussed at length later. The second BJP led coalition National Democratic Alliance has since the 1999 elections endured for the longest period of coalition history in India since independence - for about three years now (and about four years if one adds the thirteen months of its first tenure). It is though not admirable, but quite successful management of various interstices of the complex and conflicting and even confounding realities of Indian politics. Indian politics is a mesh of dialectical perspectives on caste, religion, creed, language, fractitious regional aspirations and developmental issues and these get articulated in political activity of parties. Apart from the management of intricacies by deft political bargaining, sharing of power, resolution of intra-coalition spats, offering of sops or otherwise to parties withdrawing or threatening to withdraw support and other seemingly irreconcilable intractable issues that crop up almost daily with bewildering frequency and periodic regularity and which are contributing factors for the longevity
of this government, perhaps the most important reason why the BJP led coalition has survived is due to the acceptance and preparation for it (the coalitional situation) with adequate groundwork by the BJP if not by its allies, to alter its politics, its priorities and ideological baggage for the new reality of Indian politics, namely the age of coalitions.

It has been mentioned elsewhere, that this has become possible on the part of the BJP, in a large measure because of the moderate line of the party brought about by the stewardship of leadership of the likes of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Though a party man, who is almost wedded to the 'sanghatan' and has espoused the philosophy of the founding fathers of the Jana Sangh, BJP's predecessor and of Shayama Prasad Mookherjee, Deen Dayal Upadhyay etc, its progenitors, Vajpayee has brought in an element of liberal toleration and moderation in the BJP which even hawks like L K Advani, Janata Krishnamurthy and others have acquiesced to. Moreover, it has also been recognized that this moderation and policy of co-existence, as it were, of the party is a strategic necessity for the party at this juncture. BJP has realized that its organizational base is still in an infancy in many states and though accorded the status of a national party it still has a long way to go. Therefore, in the last quinquennium or so, it has deliberately decided to extend a power-sharing offer to all regional parties engaged in state level contests with the Congress or with other parties, so that these could come up to the level of the centre and support the BJP. In fact this was the main philosophy guiding it and so at the Political Resolution
passed at the New Delhi session in May 1999 it was stated that “India’s interests can be served best by involving regional parties in the process of governance.”

If one sees the situation in the states where the regional parties fought and won their seats they can claim to have bagged the bulk of the seats, it would be clear that the BJP’s stand has been vindicated. As can be seen from Table no.3.7 the various regional outfits have had the preponderance of the seats in their respective states. In the states included in this table there are some states like UP for example, where the BJP fought the elections by fielding candidates. It did not register much success, nevertheless, as these states were domains of the regional parties. Almost all states have shown preference for regional and state based outfits that has had historical linkages with their states and in every state there is a new set of parties, which are state-specific and region-centred. For example, it is Biju Janata Dal for Orissa, the Trinamool Congress for Bengal, Akali Dal in Punjab, Kerala Congress and IUML for Kerala, National Conference in Jammu & Kashmir etc. It is seen from Table no. 3.7 that these state based parties salience is that they are able to get the preponderance or the major portion of the votes in their states. For example the Telugu Desam party had secured 29 out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh; the National Conference has 4 out of the 6 Lok Sabha seats; the Indian National Lok Dal managing 5 out of the 10 seats from Haryana. Whereas this shows perspicaciously that regional and smaller state parties have made significant presence in almost 16 states out of the 25 states of the Indian Union; it is in the North-East that they have

85 See *The Hindu*, 3 May 1999 fp. BJP’s political Resolution at the New Delhi session of its National Executive.
traditionally been the dominant force. In Northern India, however there is a balanced spread in the strength of the regional parties. In the Western part of India they have doubled their strength in this Lok Sabha.

It is a matter of great importance that none of the regional parties except the Shiv Sena has adhered to the philosophy of Hindutva that BJP espouses, which has expressly stated its agreement and connivance with the fundamentalist agenda of the BJP. Though not expediently and openly, yet other parties have retained their identities and have openly maintained a distance from the agenda of the BJP. They have extended support, shared power and expressed commitment to the BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee who is broadly taken as a moderate leader. Moreover, they have coalesced into a coalition only because the BJP prepared a moderate agenda for governance called the common minimum programme. Hence, the BJP is practically obliged to follow moderate path in order to retain their continuing support as also ensure that the allies do not feel alienated. Therefore, there is a great onus on the party to liberalise its strategy, programme and ideology. Thus, the BJP has started believing that the issue of federal sharing in political power is an important achievement. It has also accepted for the first time, the reality of coalitions as a response to growing regionalization of politics.
Table 3.7

**DISTRIBUTION OF REGIONAL PARTIES’ SHARE : 13TH LOK SABHA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regional party &amp; others</th>
<th>Total seats won (out of total)</th>
<th>% seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>North</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J&amp; K</td>
<td>National Conference</td>
<td>4 (out of 6)</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>Sh. Akali Dal &amp; others</td>
<td>4 (13)</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>INLD</td>
<td>5 (10)</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>SP,BSP,Ind., Others</td>
<td>46 (85)</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>DMK, AIADMK, PMK, MDMK, Others</td>
<td>33 (39)</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>TDP, MIM</td>
<td>30 (42)</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>IUML,KC(M),KC</td>
<td>4 (20)</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>Janata Dal (U)</td>
<td>3 (28)</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>Biju Janata Dal</td>
<td>10 (21)</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>JD(U), RJD</td>
<td>24 (54)</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.Bengal</td>
<td>Trinamool,RSP,FB</td>
<td>13 (42)</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>CPI,MLL</td>
<td>1 (15)</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>SS,NCP,Others</td>
<td>25 (48)</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North-East</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>MSCP</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BJP's PATH TO SUCCESS: TORTURED TRAJECTORY

The BJP's chart of glorious ascendancy (ever since the demise of the Narasimha Rao government) in national politics was largely made possible by the coalitional strategy that it has adopted so successfully. We have had occasion to note earlier that this strategy was thought of by the party think tanks when they realized the limits of being a lonely warrior and also the practical reality that they had organizationally to go a long way before they could gain power (to be precise, gain absolute majority in the Lok Sabha) on their own. Hence the need to go in for coalition was a well thought out trajectory, for the short run.

In contrast to this, the Congress has still not woken up to this reality of Indian politics. Its dogged resistance to coalitions and its living in a chimera that coalitions are a passing fad and harking back the past nostalgically are evidence that its is ill-prepared for coalitions. At the Panchmarhi conclave of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) Sonia Gandhi, its President exhorted "...The fact that we are going through a coalitional phase at the national level politics reflects in many ways the decline of the Congress. This is a passing phase and we will come back again with full force and on our own steam". 86

86 Quoted in Balveer Arora - supra p.197.
How the BJP has somehow managed to overcome the precarious instability of minority and coalition governments, is something which could be the subject matter of another research thesis. We wouldn’t have much scope to digress on it here. It is however, important to note that the BJP has recorded the successful operation of a coalition government for the longest period of time in post-independence period, till date. This has been possible, in no small measure, due to its concerted management of alliances, coalition formation through liberal give and take and effective strategies for perpetuation of such a system - which happens to be the governing reality of politics today. It seems therefore, that BJP has learnt that coalitions and alliance politics have come of age. We may have witnessed relative political stability for close to three years but it needs to be assessed whether governance that has been under this coalition has not been compromised.

There is an increasing body of analyses \(^{87}\) which claims that in the pursuit of staying in power the BJP has compromised on basic democratic ideals of governance, thrown democratic niceties to the winds and by its revival of its Hindutva agenda has done much harm to the body-politique. The entire post-Godhra incidents in Gujarat and the steadfast assertion of support to N. Modi, the Chief Minister, the sudden but not incomprehensible failure at the hustings in Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Municipal elections in Delhi, the Goa

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\(^{87}\) 69% of the middle class respondents of an opinion poll commissioned by a leading newsmagazine (the Outlook -C.foe survey) recently have expressed dissatisfaction on the quality of life that they lead and 62% of people (out of 1618 persons interviewed in six metro cities of the country) feel that they are more financially insecure now than they were 5 years ago. On the question whether they would vote for the BJP in the next elections only 32% replied that they'd vote for it (asked of respondents about 48% who voted for BJP in the last election.). See ‘No Middle Ground’ Outlook (Sept. 23, 2002.) p44-50.
conclave of the party where a rigid pre-coalition fundamentalist agenda was re-emphasised is a recrudescence of the BJP of yore — as it was known for ideologically. However, it seems plausible that the BJP has not the faintest idea why it is losing elections after the reverses in Assembly elections in UP, Uttaranchal and Municipal elections in Delhi (and just managing to scrape through Goa). With the coming of Assembly elections in many states next year and general elections thereafter, its recent cabinet reshuffle in July reveals its hardcore knee-jerk response to it. The Goa conclave earlier in the year had given a hint of all this. “In Goa we realized that unless we stress Hindutva we cannot enthuse our workers... In 1996 when our government fell after 13 days we realized that our strategy had made us untouchables among political parties. Thus contentious issues were put on the back burner. But now we find that while this brought allies, it has lost us workers. The Goa meeting will be the starting point of another decisive shift towards our old agenda” a senior BJP functionary is quoted to have revealed. Clearly the ‘sensitivities of the allies will be kept in mind, but only up to a point. The allies, toothless response, both to the BJP’s handling of the Gujarat riots and the VHP’s threatened agitation in Ayodhya, has further emboldened the hardliners.’

The allies of BJP today need the BJP more that the BJP needs them largely due to their regional nature of the support. As Amar Singh of the Samajwadi Party stated “Owing to their own political problems, the allies need the BJP more than vice-versa. Mamta Banerjee and Karunanidhi have lost elections, while Chandrababu

Naidu fears the Congress in Andhra. They are not going to say anything whatever the BJP does. Hence, it would have been in the fitness of things if the BJP had persisted in its self-assessed policy (of pre-coalition days) of accommodation and suspension of its Hindutva agenda. It ought to have realized that it is in the best interests of the coalitional government. As would be argued later in the succeeding chapter, this is historically not in favour of BJP perceived interest now.

VI
RECAPITULATION

To recapitulate then, the trends in the last quinquennium or so, have shown amply clearly that the Indian democratic experiment is now set to chart coalitional designs which are as variegated in their nature as are the colourful cultural fabric of this nation. It has also highlighted the centrist (or at best veering towards ‘left of centre’) ideologies of the major national and regional parties at the national level, which augurs well for forming coalitions as broadly parties of the same ideological spectrum or similar to it can form adhesions in any pre-poll or post-poll arrangement. The BJP, notably profited from coalitions only after it shed its ultra-rightist and fundamentalist posturing and adopted an acceptable liberal face via Vajpayee and adopted a consociationalist attitude to power. The Left parties who were at one time strongly opposed to coalitions, have in the recent past, been forced to

tone down their trenchant criticism and were participants in the Cabinet as Ministers at one time. The ones who have not cognized this reality of power sharing in Indian politics have been left out in the political wilderness, namely, the Congress party. Regional and fractitious outfits have gained and so have small caste based parties.