CHAPTER – III

IMPACT OF COALITION POLITICS ON CONSTITUTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

India, having adopted a parliamentary structure of government within a federal system, has constitutionally provided for parliamentary structures at both the Centre and in the States. The same principles and norms of parliamentary practice are applied at both levels substantially. Innovations experimented and successfully operated at the Centre or in anyone of the States may be accepted as models or precedents by the rest whenever found useful.

It is largely the Westminster model of parliamentary structures that the Indian Constitution has adopted for both the Central and State government. But the Indian political culture being different from that of the UK, the structures have had to be functionally modified. India being a vast subcontinent with innumerable culturally and ethnically diverse groups, political behaviour within the country has proved to be different from region to region or State to State. Ethnic loyalties and cultural diversities have tended to produce political behaviours different from each other, but within the same constitutional and legal framework. Therefore although the legal framework is uniform throughout the country, political behaviour and practices tend to be different.

The constitutional system envisages a majoritarian from of parliamentary government in India at the Centre and the State, more or less like the British. However the political reality has brought about multiple parties resulting in governments of party coalitions or alliances. The Congress party emerging from the national movement and seeking to represent a national consensus on political programmes and ideology wished to provide governments for the Centre
and all the States for all time to come. But the majoritarian single-party
governments became an impossibility with the breakdown of the Congress and
with the inability of the other parties to provide a single-party alternative being
established. Although the Congress party has shown unwillingness to share
power with other parties at the Central Government, it has permitted its State
units to do so and thus participated in coalition governments early in the fifties.
The Congress party of the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State had been
compelled to share power with the Tamil Nadu Congress and the Socialists in
1952 and in 1954. The political developments in Kerala since 1960 were results
of coalition games centred on two major political parties - the Congress and the
CPI(M). The communal equation had established the predominance of Nair and
Christian communities in Travancore-Cochin State. The merger of Malabar and
the formation of Kerala State shattered this equation and led to the considerable
rise of Muslim and Ezhava power in the State. Thus the change in communal
equation produced its impact on the politics of the State and this appears to be
the underlying factor of power politics in the State.

West Bengal was under Congress rule until 1967 when the party’s grip
was crippled and the Communists started rising in popularity. For one decade
since 1967, West Bengal underwent a traumatic experience of governmental
instability and political violence, and finally got settled under the leadership of the
CPI-(M). Thus while Kerala has been practicing coalitional politics for more than
40 years. West Bengal has experimented it for about 30 years and achieved
stability since 1977.

The year 1967 marked a watershed in Indian politics as about eight
States had formed non-Congress coalition governments. The Congress
dominance in Indian politics clearly broke in several States and the party had to sit in the Opposition. Although the Congress could regain power in some of these States, its popularity throughout the country was further eroded. The Congress lost power at the Centre within a few years and although it could come back in full glory it was doomed to lose it again. It lost control of more States in succeeding years so much so there were non-Congress coalition governments in fourteen States in 1997. The number of States that opted for coalition governments was increasing from 1967, but all States were not steady in the path of coalitions in this period. States like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh went back to Congress rule, while new States embarked on coalition experiment. Some States like Orissa, Maharashtra, Punjab, Bihar and Goa went back and forth between single-party rule and coalition rule. The steady decline of the Congress and the absence of another strong party to take its place either at the Centre or in the States in general has brought the coalition system to stay as a prevailing mode in the end of the 1990s.

The coalitional experience within the framework of Westminster model parliamentary structures, based on the present study, may be summed up as follows:

1) Coalition government in a parliamentary system are not necessarily unstable. Stability depends on several factors.

2) Coalition politics compel deviations and innovations in the parliamentary model to suit the needs of the coalition system.

3) The areas wherein coalition politics have made noticeable impact are broadly the Executive, the Legislature ad the Party system.
Early writers used to presume that coalition politics undoubtedly led to short-lived governments, and they proffered statistics to prove the same. Their treatises failed to analyse the multi-dimensional causes involved and tended to make the inferences biased. E. Sreedharan points out four sets of factors that affect the stability of coalition governments. First, the regime-level attributes or the institutional structures within which coalitions are formed. These include the fragmented character of the parties, the effective number of parties, the degree of ideological polarization, the opposition’s access to policy influence, the legal provision for elections in case of a government collapse and the provision for a constructive no-confidence vote as well as for a formal confidence vote after investiture. Second, the attributes of the coalition itself, such as the majority or minority status of the coalition, the number of parties in the coalition, its ideological cohesiveness, etc. Third, the nature of the ideological spectrum, that is, whether the coalition is ideologically single-polar, bi-polar or multi-polar. Fourth, the incidence of any political event that creates diverging reactions among members of the coalition. Gregory M. Luebert points to the kind of compromise reached between partners on the basis of their respective policy profiles as the key to stability.

The above observations based on Western theories are presumed to be universalistic in character and application. But the Indian society and politics do not fit into the Western framework. In the Indian situation, the present study leads to certain inferences which may be listed as follows:

1. Coalitions cut across Left-Right, communal-secular national-regional divisions with the chief pursuit of office as the only reality.
2. Coalition between an anchor party and satellite parties tends to be stable.

3. Among such coalitions, if the anchor party commands a majority by itself as in West Bengal, it is likely to be stabler. A coalition of mutually dependent parties (that is, no party having a majority on its own) also is likely to be durable as in Kerala. Of the two categories mentioned, the former is likely to be stable.

4. Minority coalitions, propped up by external support whether conditionally or unconditionally, are not likely to be stable.

5. The anchor party tends to make more than proportionate concessions to the smaller ones who gain more than proportionately to their strength.

6. Factions within the parties, particularly the anchor party, threaten the stability of the coalition.

7. Factional splits tend to be accommodated in the pursuit of office-seeking interest.

8. Surplus majority or large-size coalitions are stable than minimal-winning coalitions.

9. Political cultures of Indian States vary, and some are more conducive to stable coalition politics than the others.

Impact made on the Executive, the Legislature and the Party System may be analysed separately with respect to each area and the consequences assessed.
The Executive

The three dimensions of the parliamentary executive that are influenced by coalition politics are: Cabinet formation, Cabinet management and the nature of the Cabinet. The institutional and legal, the political and personal dimensions of the Cabinet system get interlinked with the two basic processes of the parliamentary executive, viz. Cabinet formation and Cabinet management. The majoritarian Cabinet and the coalition Cabinet, being different as regards the above three dimensions, tend to produce different impacts on the two processes and their results. The Constitution envisages, as already pointed out, a majoritarian government of the British model and provides for a parliamentary government. Article 74 and Article 163 respectively state that there shall be a Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister / Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the President of India / Governor of the State in the exercise of their functions. According to the parliamentary practice the leader of the majority party in the Parliament / State Legislature becomes the Prime Minister / Chief Minister and he in turn selects his colleagues in the Council of Ministers.

In coalition politics, the leader of the leading party is usually elected as the leader of the parliamentary party of the coalition, but he shall be acceptable to the allies as well. Sometimes the leader of a minority party may be chosen by the coalition to head the Cabinet. The general principle seems to be that the head of the Cabinet, whatever the degree of standing he has in his own party, shall be acceptable to all partners of the coalition whose will may turn out to be decisive in the matter of electing the Prime Minister/Chief Minister. It is generally observed that the general election to the Parliament or the State legislature is today the occasion for electing the Prime Minister/Chief Minister also, as the
whole election process is centred round the leader of the party or alliance of parties. But in a coalitional set up the post-election situation can upset the earlier arrangements.

As regards the appointment of the Council of Ministers, Article 75(1) and Article 164(1) of the Constitution say that the Prime Minister / Chief Minister shall be appointed by the President / Governor and that the other Ministers shall be appointed by the President / Governor on the advice of the Prime Minister / Chief Minister. The traditional practice is that the Prime Minister/Chief Minister will choose the Ministers by paying due weight age to various factors to be considered. In coalition politics in India the Ministers are chosen by the respective parties themselves, and the Prime Minister/Chief Minister may not have a say in normal circumstances. This situation further weakens the position of the Prime Minister / Chief Minister in relation to his own party, particularly if it is ridden with factionalism. There are instances of Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers being dictated to by factions in their own party about appointing some members as Ministers or even about avoiding the appointment of somebody whom they do not like to be with them in the Cabinet. This is possible in a single-party government also, but in a multi-party government the Prime Minister/Chief Minister is comparatively weaker.

Coalition is a bargaining process between the partners, and the process is on-going from the start to the finish. The representation of the partners in the Ministry, the allocation of proportionate seats and the distribution of portfolios among them often occasion serious bargaining. It is admissible if the major parties get a bigger share as they can be supposed to have a bigger stake in election campaigns and a greater responsibility in administration. But it often
happens in India that the smaller parties plead for a disproportionately larger pay off in terms of the number and importance of positions, and they often succeed in winning them. This is particularly so when the leading party is dependent on the minor parties for the maintenance of the coalition. The minor partners seem to presume that it becomes solely the responsibility of the leading party to preserve the coalition and they behave in irresponsible ways very often. So to say, the leading party becomes the loser in the bargaining game as it has to give up a party of its due share in order to satisfy the bullying partners. It must be surprising that in some coalitions, all MLA’s of partner party are made Ministers in order to prop up the Ministry.

As regards distribution of portfolios there is always fight for ‘plum posts’ like Finance, External Affairs, Railways and Defence at the Centre and for similar prestigious portfolios in State Governments. Such distribution can be arranged to the satisfaction of all parties only by a process of negotiation and compromise. Compromise can be arrived at through inter-party discussions or discussions in the co-ordination committees. Issues like distribution of portfolios can be settled most effectively by co-ordination committees. Any discontentment left in this regard may crop up again and create fresh crises now and then which may even lead to destruction of the coalition. Hence distribution of portfolios is a very delicate task for the Prime Minister/Chief Minister in a coalition demanding astute handling.

The demand for larger representation and better portfolios is likely to create funny situations as regards the size of the Cabinet. The number of Ministers may go on increasing as the ‘accommodating spirit’ waxes, and one may wonder if a poor country like India can afford to have so many Ministers to
govern them. On the basis of the recommendation of the Karana Singh Committee (1992) it was generally accepted that ministerial positions should not exceed one tenth of the strength of the lower house concerned. But this has been violated by Chief Ministers like Kalyan Singh of UP and Rabri Devi of Bihar who offered to make ministers of all defectors in order to win their support to prop up the Ministry. Members of the Lok Tantrik Congress party who formed the new party after crossing floor from the Congress(I) were all Ministers in Kalayan Singh’s Ministry and later in R.P. Gupta’s Ministry. Some of them had only very minor portfolios or had no portfolios at all.

Once the Council of Ministers is formed, there arises the problem of co-coordinating them and pulling them together. As they belong to different political parties, the Ministers may have different or even contradictory opinions, interests and visions. The foremost characteristic of a coalition Ministry is the absence of political homogeneity. As such, the management of ministerial colleagues and monitoring of their activities call for extraordinary competence and patience on the part of the Prime Minister/Chief Minister.

The Cabinet system of UK has historically evolved the character of collective responsibility. The Indian Constitution has legalized this character in Article 75(3) and Article 164(2) which state that the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Lower House ‘Collective responsibility’ implies that all Ministers hold themselves responsible is formally taken by the Cabinet, each Minister has the obligation to defend it publicity. Even if someone has a dissent with the collective decision, the dissenting view is expected to be suppressed or kept in reserve for the time. This aspect was emphasized by the Supreme Court when he latter expressed ‘distress’ and ‘concern’ over some Statements of Ram
Jethmalani, the Central Law Minister in Vajpayee’s second Ministry, which appeared contradictory to an affidavit filed in the court by the Government of India. Jethmalani had to resign his post when he criticized the Chief Justice of India and the Attorney General following the above observation of the Supreme Court. The Prime Minister had to admit in the Rajya Sabha that the Law Minister had to admit in the Rajya Sabha that the Law Minister was not willing to submit himself to the discipline of collective responsibility and that on a number of occasions he had spoken out on matters that did not pertain to his ministerial responsibilities.

There are umpteen number of instances where in dissent has co-existed with collective responsibility in the various coalition governments. The CPI and the Forward Bloc in West Bengal could not agree with the new industrial policy of the CPI(M), but they decided to remain in government. In West Bengal the coalition partners had sometimes led agitations against the government of which they were apart. Further there were often intra-coalition dissensions in West Bengal and Kerala when one party was threatened by the growth of power on the part of another. On the eve of elections, they came to open clashes on the distribution of seats between them. In recent times the country has witnessed the PMK and MDMK ministers of the NDA government openly dissenting, with the Central Cabinet’s collective stand on Sri Lanka. Hence the concept of collective responsibility in its classical form needs to be made flexible in the coalitional structure of government. Political homogeneity being the first victim of coalition governments, an agreement to accommodate dissent becomes inevitable.

In majoritarian governments there is no institution other than the Cabinet of formulate policies and co-ordinate Ministers or departments of government.
The party machinery exercises control over the Prime Minister / Chief Minister and other Ministers directly. But in a coalition Ministry consisting of several parties, there is no single-party machinery which can control all of them. Ministers belong to several parties and their future political prospects rest with their own parties. In such circumstances it is quite rational to evolve a separate forum for bringing the coalition allies together to discuss policy matters. In other words, institutionalized bargaining structures become relevant in coalition politics. However, there have been instances of the Co-ordination Committee becoming too powerful as a super Cabinet and interfering in administrative matters. As it is an extra-constitutional body of informal origin it is necessary to watch and control its growth so as not to infringe upon the constitutional status of the Cabinet. At the same time it is equally necessary to see that it is not neglected, as often complained by allies, and it has to be kept on an even keel. It is important that all coalition partners cultivate an attitude of respect towards the Co-ordination Committees. It is therefore advisable to provide for a constitutional status to the Co-ordination Committees in case of coalition governments.

The ideal of an all party national government was suggested time and again, since 1989, in the context of a single-party failing to get majority in the Lok Sabha.\(^7\) One of the suggestions envisaged the election of the Prime Minister by the Lok Sabha by means of single transferable vote from among candidates (not necessarily members of Parliament) who would secure support of at least 100 Lok Sabha members. The Council of Ministers would consist of representatives of all parties in proportion to their strength in the House. A common minimum programme acceptable to all or most parties should be placed before both houses of Parliament and approved. A no-confidence motion passed against the
government should be effective only after the election of an alternative Prime Minister. Other suggestions included that:

1) The Prime Minister be elected by the Lok Sabha and shall resign only when an alternative leader is chose.

2) The Prime Minister be elected by a majority of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

3) The Prime Minister be elected by a majority of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and be removed only by 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} majority in both houses; and

4) The Prime Minister be elected by a simple majority of the Lok Sabha and a no-confidence motion passed by 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} majority of the Lok Sabha.

The above suggestions are meant to be applied in a multiparty situation where no single-party is able to form a government. In such a situation the choice of Prime Minister or leader of the coalition shall be determined by a process of member participation and not by the party caucus. But any amendment of the existing system shall be done without violating the spirit of parliamentary process. The present coalition system, not being anti-parliamentary or non-parliamentary, the most that can be advised to be done by way of constitutional amendment is to see that the Prime Minister is not removed without ensuring the election of an alternative leader to be sworn in.\textsuperscript{8}

Coalition is the dexterous execution of a tight-rope balancing, involving compromise between two or more distant or even contrary stand points. The deciding factor may be the payoffs emerging out of the bargaining process. Since each partner wants to take more for itself and give less to the other
partners in the coalition, the centrally located parties are at an advantage in coalition bargaining. It may theoretically be argued that larger parties possess better bargaining power because of their conspicuous presence and leadership status. But this is not always proved in practice and in the Indian situation smaller parties are found to be enjoying a disproportionately larger share in the arrangements. The leading party in the ruling coalition is often forced to part with its favourite choice to satisfy the smaller parties. And some of the latter like the AIADMK in the 1998 BJP led government, the Trinamul Congress in the 1999 BJP led government, or like the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress parties in Kerala which are prepared for a brinkmanship game extract larger chunks. Among the perks that the parties fight for are included not merely the ministerial portfolios, but membership of committees, membership of delegations and anything that shows off a higher status or superiority. In the present system of arrangements at the center, the BJP is at a disadvantage when compared to the other partners of the coalition. Out of the eleven committee Chairmen of the Lok Sabha the BJP has only one whereas the Congress(I), the leading party of the opposition, has two. And out of six Rajya Sabha Committees, the BJP has two Chairmen and the Congress(I) two parliamentary delegations, the minor partners get more than proportionate number of representatives. It may also be noted that in the seating arrangements of the Lok Sabha, the BJP does not have a proportionate number of seats in the front row of the chamber.

Since the objective of the partners is to maximize their position and power within the government, it is presumed that they behave in a rational as it is presumed to be and as such, the durability of the coalition could be in jeopardy. The bargaining process is made more complex by the involvement of more
players like factions within the parties themselves. This is made worse when two factions of the same party hold opposite views about joining a coalition.

Sometimes there may be mini-coalitions within the larger coalition and they may function with the objective of wresting out special favours for them. Special common interests developed by a few partners thus forming a mini-coalition run against the general interest of the government and may ultimately end up in the ouster of the government. The ‘federal front’ formed under the leadership of Chandrababhu Naidu within the United Front government, and the mini-front led by C. Achutha Menon in Kerala forming the government after the overthrow of E.M.S. Namboodiripad Ministry on 1\textsuperscript{st} November, 1969 exemplify this tendency.

It is sometimes observed that two political parties representing the same social divisions or having the same ideological roots may find it more difficult to form an alliance or coalition than for two parties representing different social bases.\textsuperscript{11} But it is equally well said that like minded parties, that is, parties having the same background or philosophy are likely to coalesce more easily than parties with differing background or philosophy. Both arguments hold good, although apparently contradictory, but the success of coalition making depends on the nature of bargaining conditions. And once the coalition has been forged, the social cleavages and ideological nearness do not matter.

The Legislature

Structurally, coalition politics has not brought about any change in the Parliament or State legislatures. The parliamentary functionaries remain the same, and the rules of procedure and conduct of business also do not change.
There are as many parliamentary parties and whips as there are political parties represented; and there will be a joint parliamentary party for the whole alliance whether ruling or in opposition.

Committees will be constituted and monitored under the same norms as they exist in parliamentary practices. Bills can be passed if the required majority is forthcoming as per rules. Constitutional amendments may be severely hampered or pushed back when it becomes difficult to mustier two-third majority without the backing of the opposition. When the coalition gains a two third majority on its own, it has still the burden of carrying all the coalition partners with it.

In a parliamentary system of government, it was the Parliament that originated as the center of power, the Cabinet being dependent on and responsible to the Parliament. As time taped, the Cabinet appropriated political power and importance. And the governmental system came to be described “Cabinet dictatorship”. The growth of the importance of the Prime Minister, centralization of power in his hands and the consequent subjugation of the party and the ministers to the Prime Minister justified the sobriquet of “Prime Ministerial” government for the same parliamentary system. However, the changes were indicative of the trends in the paradigm shift of legislature executive relationship in the parliamentary system. The emergence of coalition politics and the consequent weakening of the Prime Ministerial position tended to effect a change in the role of the Parliament in relation to the executive.

The coalition partners, being participants in the government, are supposed to provide it solidity and be collectively responsible for its
performance. But being different in origin and character, they often make for dissent and mutual criticism. Thus a coalition government has also a built in mechanism for mutual checks and balances. However, the actual performance of coalitions deviate from the idealistic vision of smooth collaboration and friendly dissent. They sometimes break into open fights on the floor of the house and outside. Any observer of the conduct of business in the Lok Sabha will be struck by the behavioural contrast of the members during the Congress regime and the post-Congress coalition period. The incidence of unruly behaviour in both houses of Parliament has been more frequent during the latter, and the Speaker has been compelled to convene meetings of parliamentary party leaders more often than before to settle quarrels. This points to the absence of a centralized parliamentary party organization in a coalition system when contrasted to a single-party majority.

From a sociological point of view, this phenomenon is reflective of a general decline in the elitist character of the people’s representatives. Legislators speak in the language of the masses and behave in a style understandable to them. They come from the grassroots and represent the popular culture unlike the legislators of the fifties and sixties who represented a higher level culture. Moreover, with innumerable parties represented in the Parliament and State legislatures, the MP/MLAs feel themselves close to their respective party Chiefs and immediately responsible to them unlike in the days of the Congress dominance system. The party chiefs behave like fendal lords and demand total loyalty from their legislators. The latter are dependent on their leaders for their career and future political existence. Today the legislator’s freedom of speech in
the legislature is restrained by the party leadership even though no legal provision provides for it.\textsuperscript{12}

The Opposition may also be a coalition as in Kerala or it may consist of disunited single parties or groups of parties as in West Bengal or at the Centre. In either case one major function of the Opposition appears to be to entice the ruling coalition partners into their fold, not only to pull down the government but to strengthen their ranks. So the Opposition is never satisfied with attacking the policies of the government as in an orderly parliamentary system, but it is always alert on using other means for overthrowing the ruling coalition. Both sides being coalitions, it may be presumed that they are easily susceptible to efforts to make wedges in their blocs. Relatively, the Opposition of the coalition system at the Centre has become more powerful than that of the earlier Congress system.

**The Party System**

Coalition politics centers round political parties as it involves games played by the latter to gain the maximum pay off. It becomes relevant when no single party is able to reach power by itself. In such circumstances one party joins another one or more parties to fight the elections and / or to form a government. The word ‘coalition’ originates from the Latin word ‘coalition’ which means ‘growing together’, Coalition is basically an alliance of parties that decide together’. Coalition is basically an alliance of parties that decide to work together in the election process or after the elections and share power in running the government.

Coalitions or party alliances may be pre-election or post election phenomena. Some parties may cluster together, pool their resources and work
jointly to maximize their gain by defeating the rivals in the election process. If there is a single alliance fighting the rivals in parties, the possibility of the alliance winning more seats than the rivals is stronger. If two equally strong alliances are pitted against each other. The effect will be that of strong two party systems, either of them setting a majority to from the government. If more than two alliances contest, the result will be either in favour of one of them or none at all, with no alliance being able to win a majority. In the last situation, a government is possible only by means of a further coalition of two or more alliances.

2. First alliance Vs. Second alliance.
3. First alliance Vs. Second alliance Vs. Third alliance.

In West Bengal the Left Front alliance has come to be established as dominant in the State Legislative Assembly elections since 1977. In all successive elections after 1977 the Left Front remained united as a broad based coalition whereas the Congress(I) – the leading party in the oppositions – had failed to forge an effective alliance. In Kerala, the almost total victory of the Saptamumani led by CPI(M) in 1967 against a disunited opposition convinced all parties of the need of an alliance for winning an election. Since 1967 no election was fought in Kerala without at least two alliances. In the 1970 election to the Legislative Assembly there was a Third Front in addition. However, the phenomenon of bipolarization has appeared in Kerala politics with the emergence of two alliances – the LDF and the UDF – which may reasonably be described as a “two party system within a multi-party system”. The two coalition model presented by Kerala State ensuring the possibility of alternative
governments appears, theoretically, preferable to the single coalition dominance of West Bengal.

In the general elections to the Lok Sabha in 1996 there was a multi-cornered contest, with no strongly built alliance on the national scene. The BJP had a semblance of an alliance with three minor parties; the Congress(I) almost fought it alone; and the National Front and the Left Front could not agree on a Third Front. The result was a fragmented Parliament with none being able to form a government of its own. The BJP being the largest party was given a chance but they could not master enough support. The post election efforts brought the NF and the LF together to form a United Front and state claim to form a government with the outside support of the Congress(I). This the United Front led by Deve Gowda consisting of thirteen parties was a post election coalition formed temporarily to keep the BJP out of power. The UF-Congress(I) collaboration could not last beyond one year and a half as there was no common interest between them, and they soon fell as under.

In the next, Lok Sabha elections of 1998, the BJP alliance had expanded, its base to include sixteen parties, most of them region-based. The UF consisting of thirteen parties while in power lost its cohesion and had no accepted leader. The Congress(I) was still hesitant about a national level alliance, but was a bit rejuvenated owing to the “Sonia factor”, Comparatively, the BJP-led alliance was more strongly united and more regionally based than the other two, and the election results proved the same. The BJP was determined to continue the alliance, with necessary modifications, in spite of internal contradictions. The National Democratic Alliance was forged sufficiently early to prepare for the
electoral confrontation in 1999. It is apparent that in the present vortex of political relations in India coalitions are unavoidable.

What is the role of policy in coalition politics? According to M. Laver, political parties make use of policy packages as store fronts to attract voters and the leaders may forget them once the election is won. Riker and Laver do not consider policy even as an instrument in electoral politics and coalition formation. Anthony Downs said that parties formulate policies in order to win elections rather than win elections to formulate policies. However, that a well-drawn-out policy and an air of commitment to implement the same will help maintain long term credibility of the party or coalition of parties is nowhere doubted.

Coalition involves a commitment on the part of the political parties concerned to implement a pragmatic common programme, however, much ideologically at poles they are Partners should agree on a common minimum programme of action, the implementation of which becomes the objective of sharing power. This involves ‘ideological compromises’ on the part of radical and fundamentalist parties. Sometimes rightist and leftist parties come together to stall a common enemy. Or it may be a coalition of secularists and communalists of even of Marxists and anti-marxists. In either case there must evolve a common programmes for positive action. The negative objective of pulling down a government or preventing a party from coming to power cannot succeed in bringing about a coalition. When ‘like minded parties’ or parties with similar ideological goals make a coalitions, the making of a common programme may not have serious setbacks. Serious problems occur when ideologically polarized parties are forced to work together. The common minimum programme becomes
a common manifesto for all parties that join the coalition. It cannot be the sum
total of all the manifestos of the individual parties which may include
contradictory ideas and promises. The common minimum programme (CMP)
manifests compromise and the minimum that the partners agree upon.

With a view to accommodating the ideologically distant parties, many
ideological or ‘fundamentalist’ sacrifices will have to be made by the leading
parties. Long standing coalitions will recognize the importance of CMPs and
prepare them sufficiently early to face the elections. Hurriedly patched up
coalitions often make hotch-potch agreements, without deep understanding
between them, to forge a common programme like the National Agenda of the
UF of 1996 or of the BJP-led coalition of 1998. According to Ajay K. Mehra, the
Dave Gowda government had developed a CMP which was based not only on
the manifestos of the coalition partners, but also incorporated the political
agenda of those parties which had not participated in the government.\textsuperscript{16} The
CMP was only a broad statement of approaches to deal with India’s problems.
The BJP-led coalition of 1998 elections thought of framing a CMP after the
elections and set-up a drafting committee with George Fernandez as convener
for the purpose.\textsuperscript{17} The document, called the National Agenda and prepared by
Govindacharya, a General Secretary of the BJP, under direct inputs from
Vajpayee, Advani and Fernandez, sought to avoid the polities of confrontation
and usher in an era of national reconciliation and consensus.\textsuperscript{18} The BJP sensed
the growing returns from appearing moderate and accommodating. The BJP had
to change its stance on some contentious issues like reconstruction of the Ram
Temple at Ayodhya, introduction of a Uniform Civil Code and the deletion of
Article 370 which gave special status to the Jammu and Kashmir State. There
items were serious led-down for the BJP which had tried to build up the party organization on this plank. Moreover the AIADMK which was an ally in the election refused to give a letter of support to the BJP to form the government until some of its unreasonable demands were incorporated into the agenda.\textsuperscript{19} The AIADMK leader Jayalalitha had put forth five conditions:

1) Dismissal of DMK government in Tamil Nadu.
2) Central Finance Ministry to go to Subramanian Swamy.
3) Implementation of Cauvery Tribunal Award immediately.
4) Making Tamil an official language. And
5) Allowing states to have their own reservation policy.

She also wanted to be put on the agenda a demand for raising the height of the Periyar dam in Kerala to 150 feet. In such circumstances the process of preparing the CMP could be an impossible task. However, preparation of the CMP is also a strategy of making the partners acceptable to each other.

In the 1998 elections to the Lok Sabha the UF brought out a CMP and a joint policy statement on behalf of its partners, but the Left parties issued a separate manifesto highlighting their differences with the UF.\textsuperscript{20} In Kerala State, in the 1967 Legislative Assembly elections, the seven-party Left Democratic Front had adopted a minimum programme for the first time and continued the practice in all successive elections.\textsuperscript{21} The UDF also followed this practice and launched minimum programmes collectively. However, in the Assembly elections held in 1996 some of the coalition partners launched their individual programmes in addition to the common minimum programmes. This creates that interesting situation of the coalition projecting the minimum programme collectively and the
maximum programme individually. This also reflects a lack of total faith in the coalition system as such.

In a single member constituency multiple party system, small parties are not able to attain power by themselves and therefore they try to latch on to bigger party for the purpose. In a single member constituency system particularly, small parties fail to grow beyond their pockets of influence and their appeal is limited to their vote banks. So, in order to expand their sphere of influence or power they have to ally with other parties. At the same time each party is constrained by the other parties from growing into the areas of the latter. Thus coalition gives an opportunity for growth as well as the it put limits to growth. One party may try to break the limits by encouraging splits in other parties and weakening them. Internal splits destroy the parties themselves in the long run, but the split groups are accommodated for the time without destroying the coalition. The internal split of a coalition party, even when promoted by other coalition partners, may be treated apparently as an internal matter of the party concerned. The tendency to accommodate split groups help the smaller parties thrive in a coalition at the cost of the parent party and they get disproportionate political leverage.

Personality – based factions and parties are a common phenomenon on the Indian political scene. This provides personality clash any alliance between cause for party splits and in such cases any alliance between two newly emerging personality centred parties becomes almost an impossibility, despite policy closeness or similarity of social base. Bitter hostility between the rival leaders and their followers may force close a meeting point, as in the cases of Karunanidhi Vs. Jayalalitha, Laloo Prasad Yadav Vs. Ram Vilas Paswan and
Ramakrishna Hegde Vs. Deve Gowda. But a common enemy or the lure of office many bring them together into the same coalition or another coalition after a lapse of time, Kerala State has witnessed a number of party splits resulting from personal ego conflicts as also their existence within the same coalition in view of remaining in office. The Kerala Congress is split into four parties, and three of them remain in the UDF as partners and one in the LDF. Ram Vilas Paswan has made his exit from the Janata Dal (U) – a partner of the NDA Ministry – and yet he collaborates with the parent party led by Sharad Yadav and remains in the NDA Ministry today.

Party coalitions in India always try to expand their base by attracting more parties than required for keeping themselves bin power. That is, in other words large sized coalitions are a matter of attraction in the Indian situation. Following the tradition of the Indian National Congress in accommodating a large number of groups and interests, the party coalitions tend to make themselves ‘Mahau-coalitions’ for winning the largest number of seats for themselves and reduce the opposition to nil so the ruling coalitions seem to be an constant search to pick and swallow from the opposition. At the Centre, a government can function effectively only if it is assured of two third majority to make constitutional amendments possible. At the State level even a minimum majority can support the government in power and make it effective. Although minimum winning coalitions are applicable to State Governments, and not to the Central Government, the general tendency is to accommodate large-sized coalitions in the States also. This is a characteristic reflective of the political culture of the country.
Another phenomenon in Indian polities is the non-participating external support that some parties prefer to offer in order to prop up a party or coalition of parties in power without making a commitment to share the responsibilities of government. Parties think ahead about the consequences of their participation as regards the forthcoming elections to Parliament or regional elections to the State Assembly as well as about other reactions in State politics. And if they find the payoffs from immediate power lesser than the latent payoffs in store for them, they naturally prefer to stay off from immediate power. This has been the policy of TDP and Trinamul Congress towards the NDA government. However TDP was prepared to have a minimal participation by accepting the Speakership of Lok Sabha. This policy may result also from other covert considerations of the party leader such as stifling the growth of rival members in the party by blocking their entry into power positions. This further makes them feel free to declare their independence of the regime at slight prevarications.

The political culture-coalitional politics linkage in the Indian situation is clear from the observations made in the above pages. What may be called the Indian political culture is a composite of heterogeneous, State based political cultures further diversified by ethno-centric factors and evolutionary phases. The coalitional setup is a political power relationship evolved from an all-inclusive, umbrella organization of the Congress party and shaped by historical imperatives like the declining one-party dominance and Marxian change of attitude towards parliamentary palliative. But the common cultural elements may contribute to the emergence of stable political arrangement. In most States of the country, if not is all.
Finally, the dependence of coalition polities on the electoral system needs to be examined. Maurice Duverge evolved a three point thesis, from his analysis of European electoral politics, regarding proportional representation and the party system. The thesis included:

1) That proportional representation tends to lead to the formation of many independent parties.

2) That the two ballot majority system tends to lead to the formation of many parties that are allied with each their and

3) That the plurality rule tends to produce a two party system.²²

Duverger’s law has been examined at length, stimulating a whole body of research into the political consequences of electoral systems. But the impact of the plurality rule in the Indian situation has not been uni-dimensional or even bi-dimensional, being complicated by several factors such as ethnic divisions, economic cleavages and size of constituencies. The Italian experience of Proportional Representation compelled the revision of the electoral law in 1993, introducing plurality rule in three quarters of the seats for Senate and Chamber of Deputies while retaining proportionality for the other party.²³ The first elections held in 1994 after the adoption of the new law witnessed a trend towards three alliances – Left, Right and Centre. But in contrast to Britain and the US the Left and the Right were not Unitarian political parties but loose alliances of very diverse parties.

The experience of the Kerala State has been towards the creation and continuance of two alliances functioning more or less like a two party formation.
The plurality system’s seat vote disproportionality reinforces the stability of coalitions based on compromises. Disunity would mean to them vote desegregations and disproportionate loss of votes. Hence it follows that Duverger’s thesis that the plurality rule system would tend to produce two party system may be partly established in the situation wherein the opportunistic phase is crossed over.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. *Ibid.*, 


12. For a detailed study of party leader legislator relationship, see Raju Abraham, *Role of Political Parties in State Legislature* (New Delhi, 1999).


