CHAPTER – IV

CHANGING ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIAN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

Political parties, Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner aptly remark, are a feature of “modern and modernizing societies”.¹ They would appear to be indispensable to representative democracy. Local political institutions of direct democracy can presumably work without parties. However, wherever and whenever democracy is practiced in larger aggregates, it must rely on representational devices through elected officials. For this, political parties cannot be dispensed with. That has at least been the experience of modern democracies in the contemporary world. In Western liberal democracies across the board parties, the leftwing included, are in decline, but no competent observer of comparative politics has diagnosed it as the terminal phase in the life and times of political parties.²

Conservatives and liberals and founding fathers of nation-States or mass movements are inclined to express anti-party sentiments, e.g. George Washington, Lord Bolingbroke, Mahatma Gandhi, Jayaprakash Narayan in his Gandhian phase, and M.N. Roy in his Radical Humanist phase.³ This is for the reason that parties are supposed to be inherently divisive of the organic unity of the national community. However, these initial reservations about political parties did not forestall their onward march to becoming one of the two major pillars of the nation-State along with bureaucracy. This is because parties are the vital link between the civil society and the State. As organizations, parties are amphibious creatures equally at home in the civil society and the State.
The importance of political parties has grown proportionately in accordance with the growing extension of franchise as it typically happened in Western liberal democracies. As political suffrage gradually became universal, parties emerged as the agency through which parliamentary cliques needed them to acquire mass electoral support.\(^4\)

In the Indian context, the earliest political parties emerged in local self-governing institution introduced in British India by the Liberal Viceroy Lord Ripon after 1883. Subsequently, parties acquired more concrete form and functions in the councils and assemblies under the various Councils Acts after 1861 and the various Government of India Acts 1909, 1019 and 1935.\(^5\)

In India, however, the more significant context of emergence of mass movements and political parties was the freedom struggle against British colonial rule, particularly beginning with the twentieth century. In fact, the nationalist leaders gave greater importance to agitational politics than to institutional politics for the obvious reason that the representative institutions with limited franchise and power did not satisfy the nationalist leadership which increasingly moved towards the goal of complete independence and fuller democracy.

India’s “tryst with destiny”—democratic and developmental—may be divided and discussed into five waves of democratization the country has undergone since the faint beginnings of modern institutional politics in the latter half of the nineteenth century and vigorous advent of mass politics in the 1920s. The present discussion is here concerned more with the development of the party system than with other aspects of democracy and development. The five phases of party system development here suggested are:
a) The “Movement” party system (1920-1947);
b) The “Congress System” ala Rajni Kothari (1952-1969)\(^6\);
c) The phase of confrontation between the Indira Gandhi Congress and the J.P. Movement (1971-1977)\(^7\);
d) The phase that witnessed the growing differentiation between the national party system and party systems in States (1980s)\(^8\); and

e) The deepening of the trends towards a regionalized multi-party system with federal coalition/minority Governments (1989 to date).\(^9\)

The significance of the first phase for the party system is that almost all political parties or their antecedent organizations can be traced back to the freedom movement in India. The Indian National Congress (INC) founded in 1885 was, of course, the aggregation of the crucible for practically all political parties that came to be formed since the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. The Congress was, in fact, first formed as a pressure group for lobbying support for participation of Indians in British Indian administration and governance. It gradually acquired the role of a mass movement beginning with the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the Swadeshi movement to annual it and especially since the 1920s with the advent of Gandhi on the Indian national scene in the wake of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar. The Congress in reality was a national platform with which all other political organizations of the period had co-operative or confliction relationships at various points in time. Even the Muslim League and the Scheduled Castes Federation had periods of reconciliation and pacts with this organization of central importance in British India, to say nothing of the Communists, Socialists, Hindu Mahasabha and Akali Dal who had more of co-operative interaction with
Congress than confliction during the freedom struggle. It is for these reasons that this phase of party system growth in India may be appropriately characterized as the "Movement Party System".\textsuperscript{10}

The "Congress System", as conceptualized by Rajni Kothari, comprised what he called the "party of consensus" (namely, the Indian National Congress) and the "Parties of pressure" (i.e. the non-Congress parties on the margins of the system). Buttressed by its institutional charisma as the party of Indian Independence and the personal charisma of its leaders, combined with the divided opposition, the Congress appeared invincible. Non-Congress parties did not appear to have a chance of forming Government in the foreseeable future. The Congress combined within its fold the role of the Government as well as of the Opposition. The more effective opposition came from the Congress dissidents than from the formally Opposition parties. The non-Congress parties had a closer understanding and interaction with the like-minded Congress factions. It was through these mechanisms that the "dissident" Congressmen were able to dislodge the "ministerialists" and come to power.\textsuperscript{11}

The third phase may be said to have started with the 1971 snap parliamentary elections called by the Congress minority Government of Indira Gandhi after the Congress debacle in 1967 and the great split in the party in 1969 partly for personal and partly programmatic reasons. Reversing the decline of the party in the late 1960s, Indira Gandhi forced her right-wing senior colleagues out of the party and remodeled it into a more progressive party committed to ‘\textit{garibi hatao}'. This strategy paid her a good divided in the form of restoration of the Congress to power in New Delhi as well as in most States. This electoral success was, however, gained at a great cost to democratic as
well as the developmental dimensions of the Indian State. Bypassing the intermediary structures of power in the Congress party and State Governments, Indira Gandhi established a direct mass contact with the people, but in the process the democratically institutionalized party organization of the Nehru era was lost. It turned into a pack of personal and dynastic loyalists and followers. This populist turn in politics also hurt the development process as economic resources had to be diverted to mobilize mass support at the cost of rational economic decisions in pursuit of planned economic development initiated in the Nehru era.\textsuperscript{12} The Congress regime under Mrs. Gandhi in the 1970s turned into a political pyramid marked by extreme centralization of power at the top and populist mass mobilization of the electorate through personal and dynastic political charisma rather than a democratically constructed pluralist and federal Congress Party. How did Mrs. Gandhi succeed in doing this despite a considerably institutionalized Congress regime that preceded it? Stanley A. Kochanek offers a persuasive explanation: “since the formal structure of power outlined in both the Indian Constitution and the Constitution of the Congress Party was federal with strong unitary and centralizing features, the initiation of this new process did not require major structural change”\textsuperscript{13}.

This centralized political pyramid provoked the building up of a strong extra-parliamentary mass movement that first surfaced in the Navanirman Movement in Gujarat led by Morarji Desai and subsequently spread to Bihar and all across north-India down to Karnataka that finally drew Jayaprakash Narayan (J.P.), the Socialist-turned Gandhian living in political retirement in Patna, to offer an overarching all-India leadership. Gradually, massive Congress majorities in the Parliament and State legislatures came to be confronted by the J.P.
Movement and all-India railway workers strike in 1974 that paralysed the largest railway network in the world. All these developments culminated into the proclamation of internal Emergency in June 1975 after the Allahabad Bench of the Lucknow High Court unseated Mrs. Gandhi on the charge of electoral malpractices in the 1971 elections. The entire leadership of the movement and the opposition parties, including Congress dissidents, were put behind the bars and the press censorship was imposed. The Emergency excesses and the rise of Sanjay Gandhi to extra-constitutional power made the Congress regime extremely unpopular, despite the initial sigh of relief by the public by restoration of law and order disrupting normal civic life in the country due to continuous political agitations for years.

The 1977 Lok Sabha elections offered a provisional escape from this politics of confrontation between the J.P. Movement and Indira Gandhi’s party by bringing into power the Janata Party formed on the eve of elections by the merger of major non-Congress and non-Communist parties into it. This new centrist party could not, however, complete its mandate of power for five years and fell prematurely in mid-1979 due to internal factional fights and ego clashes between the top leadership. In the 1980 mid-term elections, Indira Gandhi’s Congress was restored to power on the electoral slogan of the ‘Government that works’.

From the point of view of party system evolution in India, the two notable developments of this phase were the rise and fall of the Janata Party and the restoration of the Congress Party after its worst defeat. The 1977 elections that formalized the ascendancy of the Janata Party to power heralded a brief period during which India was closest to the two-party system model inasmuch as only
two parties-Janata Party and Congress Party—accounted for nearly three-fourths of the votes and Lok Sabha seats. The newly emergent party was the product of the shared experience of the parties that merged (to form the Janata Party in the eve of elections) during the J.P. Movement and during the jail terms of their leaders after the proclamation of Emergency. The Congress (organization), the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), and Socialists that hurriedly formed a common platform that facilitated their merger to face the common challenge. The Congress for Democracy led by Jagjivan Ram joined the band wagon a little later but prior to the election. However, the rise of the Janata Party was as spectacular as its premature fall midway through its mandate of five years. As an organization, the Janata Party suffered from three major debilitating factors that incapacitated it to transform itself from a movement to a party, despite its large constituency. First, its ‘big three’ leaders-Morarji Desai of Congress (O), Charan Singh of BLD, and Jagjivan Ram of Congress for Deocracy that merged with Janata Party after the elections-had their enormous ego-clashes that could not be contained. All three wanted the top position in the Government and it was only the intervention and persuasion of Jayapraksh Narayan and J.B. Kripalani that could clinch the issue in favour of Desai. Even though the Jana Sangh constituent of the Janata Party had the largest number of MPs, its top leaders Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lalkrishna Advani appeared to be more understanding and reconciliatory in the internal bickering of the party. This was probably for the reason that they were relatively younger at that point in time and the stigma of Hindu Communalism was a heavy cross they carried around their neck. The Janata experience for them was their first opportunity to join the national mainstream of Indian politics.
Second, the five constituents of Janata Party, despite their formal merger into one party, in fact continued to function as separate units. The formal merger could never reach the level of real integration into one party. Despite its ad hoc common organization, the party could never complete the mass membership enrollment drive and hold full-fledged organizational elections at the grassroots.

Third, the vast rural leadership and mass support for the Janata Party could be mobilized into a mass movement that helped it win the 1977 elections, but party cohesion and discipline could not be consolidated. Different castes in the rural society could not submerge their conflicting identities and interests and the party became a victim of factionalism and feuds, which is a characteristic of the Indian rural society. The ego clashes among leaders and previous party legacies of the constituent parties merging into the Janata Party aggravated this tendency towards fatal factionalism. In this light, it is possible to understand and explain why the party could not even complete its first mandate to rule and disintegrated between 1979 and 1980. The process of disintegration started on the issue of “double” membership of the BJS constituents in the Rashtriya Swayamseval Sangh (RSS) raked up by the BLD elements. BJS elements refused to budge arguing that the RSS was a cultural rather than a political organization. The Janata Party split on the issue. By the beginning of the new decade, all the major constituents had deserted the parent party and formed new political formations along their previous party lines, e.g. the BLD resurfaced as the Lok Dal, and the BJS as the Bhartiya Janata Party. In fact, the tendency to fragment continued and by the end of the 1980s, the Janata Party, which was transformed into the Janata Dal in 1988 with the merger into it of a group of Congressmen led by V.P. Singh who left the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1987,
split into the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Samata Party in Bihar, the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa, the Samajwadi Party in UP, and the Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka.

The fourth phase in the evolution of Indian Party System marked the restoration of the Congress party in 1980 under Indira Gandhi’s leadership and came to be subsequently led by Rajiv Gandhi after her assassination in 1984. However, this opportunity of renewal was lost for rebuilding a democratically constituted pluralist and federal Congress Party. They party organization that suffered decline after the 1969 split and came to be transformed into a personalized following of Mrs. Gandhi could never be rebuilt into a democratic institution comparable to what it was in the Nehru era. Internal organizational elections were practically dispensed with from 1971 to 1992, when P.V. Narasimha Rao revived them in his own interest to free the party from the hold of the Indira Gandhi dynasty and acquire some degree of autonomy for his action and control in the party.

For these reasons, neither the Congress nor the Janata Party, the two major centrist parties of Indian Politics, could restore the institutionalized character of the party system that was evident in the Nehru era. Since these centrist parties dominated the system, their organizational traits (e.g. lack of democratically constituted organization) determined the dominant features of the whole party system.

In the fourth phase in the 1980s there occurred the growing differentiation and distance between the party system at the Union level and State party system. Beginning with the assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh and
Karnataka in 1983 and continuing with elections in Assam, Punjab, Kashmir and the North-East through the rest of the decade, the Congress lost one State after another to Opposition parties, even though it continued to rule in New Delhi until 1989 under Indira Gandhi and after her assassination under Rajiv Gandhi. Besides these electoral changes, mass movements verging on separatism surfaced in Assam, Punjab and Kashmir. Under pressure from these developments, underscored by the emergence of new regional parties like Assom Gana Parishad and Telugu Desam, in addition to the old ones in Jammu and Kashmir (National Conference), Punjab (Akali Dal), and Tamil Nadu (DMK, AIADMK, etc.), Indira Gandhi appointed the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations in 1983 that submitted its two-volume monumental Report in 1987-88. These subterranean tectonic shifts altered the parameters of politics during the decade in spite of the apparent continuation of the Congress at the Centre. After Indira Gandhi's demise, Rajiv Gandhi signed a series of peace accords with dominant regional parties in Assam, Punjab, Mizoram and Tripura. Through the decade, the Congress lost power in half of the States of the Union, and by 1989 it also lost control at the Centre.

The fifth phase in the growth of the Indian party system started in 1989. It brought about a multi-party system with federal coalition/minority Government at the federal level that is still continuing. The trend of regionalization of politics that began in the previous decade impacted New Delhi by the 1990s where a broad power sharing with stronger regional parties became necessary on the part of three major national parties-Janata Dal (JD), Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC)-that ruled alternatively at the head of the United
Front (UF), National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and United Progressive Alliance (UPA), respectively.

This phase of party system development is marked by the phenomenal growth of the BJP from the third position among national parties after the Congress and the Janata Dal to the first. The BJP’s rise to power heading the NDA coalition is linked with the assertion of Hindu identity through the Ram Mandir Movement, backed by electoral mobilization. Oliver Heath has categorized the States where the BJP holds some ground in terms of “primary”, “secondary” and “tertiary” States. Primary States were those where the Jana Sangh had emerged as a viable opposition party in the 1950s and 60s (e.g., Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, UP, and Himachal Pradesh). Secondary States are the States where the Jana Sangh and subsequently the BJP made their presence felt before the 1989 boom (e.g., Karnataka, Bihar, Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Assam, Punjab, and Haryana). In the Tertiary States, BJP expanded in the post-1989 period (e.g., Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and North-Eastern States).

To quote Heath:

“In each successive step that the BJP makes away from its home-land of the primary States, the groups that have expanded the most also move a step down the ladder of the party’s traditional support base. Thus in the primary States, which represent the core of the party’s stronghold, its core source of social support, that of the upper castes, has remained intact. The only other community that has been significantly mobilized in this region is that of the Scheduled Tribers”.17
The 2004 Lok Sabha elections have brought back to power a new coalition at the Centre. At the core of this coalition is the Indian National Congress, and the largest partner extending support from the parliamentary floor are the Left Parties led by CPI (M). This left-of-centre coalition reflects a rather unlikely alliance between the left parties and the Congress. On economic issues, the Congress has moved right since the Rao Congress Government accelerated the neo-liberal economic reforms in 1991. Unlikely, because throughout the NDA regime, the left parties tried to build bridges with the Congress and the latter largely remained lukewarm. Following the debacle of the NDA, the Congress joined hands with the Left, which was elected with the largest ever contingent of leftwing MPs in the Lok Sabha numbering 63. In fact, the voters realignment that turned the tide in favour of Congress and its pre-election allies also indicated a strategic electoral shift in favour of the Congress in the rural sector and among Muslims, and Scheduled Castes who had in previous elections drifted away from the Congress. The post-election Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress interpreted the poll verdict in terms of the people voting for “secular, progressive forces, for parties wedded to the welfare of farmers, agricultural labour, weavers, workers and weaker sections of society, for parties irrevocably committed to the well-being of the common man across the country”.

Reporting on a national probability sample survey of the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, Yogendra Yadav observed:

*Some distinctive patterns of caste and community support are evident for various coalitions and parties. For example, the NDA registered a marked lead of more than twenty percentage points over the UPA among the*
upper Hindu castes. In lower caste cluster, there was a gradual decline in support for the NDA, though it continued to have an edge over the UPA. On the other hand, the UPA decisively scored over the NDA among dalits, adivasis, Muslims and Christians. The UPA’s lead amounted to more than forty percentage points among the Muslims and Christians followed by fifteen per cent among. The dalits and slightly less than ten per cent among the adivasis. The left Support was more concentrated in a few States than in most others. The BSP Got about one-fifth of the dalit vote nationwide as compared to Samajwadi Party which secured about one-sixth of the Muslim vote. The Samajwadi Party also had strong support among yadavs.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite proliferation of parties in the process of electoral deepening of democracy since 1951-1952 when the first general elections in India were held after Independence, it is possible to delineate nearly half a dozen of what may be called “party families” and associated networks of organizations. If we count parties and organizations in a particular party family as ‘one’, the number of individual parties is considerably reduced. Moreover, despite internal differences among them, and occasionally open conflicts, organizations in such a party family are more like-minded than others and they are also more likely to coalesce with each other than is the case with organizations outside such a party family. We sketch below the major party families operative in party politics in India today.

The Indian National Congress is the party family, the party patriarch of India so to say. It was the \textit{locus classicus} of the nationalist movement, a platform holding practically all parties within its fold in conflict-co-operation
relationships. The only parties that largely remained outside its umbrella were the Justice Party/Dravida Kazhagam. Even the Muslim League, the vehicle of the dubious “two-nation” theory in British colonial India, had periods of warmth with the Indian National Congress during the Khilafat movement and the Lucknow Congress-League Pact during and immediately after the First World War.

The Congress, that started as a pressure group of English educated middle classes in British India and turned into a mass political movement during the inter-war period, had to undergo a gradual process of transformation into a political party after Independence. One by one, Congress Socialists, Praja Socialists, Socialists, Gandhians, etc. had to depart from the broader Congress platform. The departure of these ideologues made the Congress a more pragmatic and electoral success-oriented party. A difficult period of transition began from a national movement to a political party after India’s Independence.

In the post-Nehru era, the Congress is said to have come under the spell of the Nehru-Indira Gandhi dynasty. The dynasty has been a divisive factor, yet also a symbol of unity, loyalty, and allegiance. The party has been a witness to Nehruvian ‘socialism’, Indira Gandhi’s populism, Sanjya’s cronyism, Rajiv’s Doon School boys’ techno-managerial temperament, and Sonia’s graduated apprenticeship in politics, understanding and adaptation, ambivalence between power and renunciation.

The Congress Party has also seen over the years several splinters of family resemblance: Jan Congress parties, Bangla Congress, Kerala Congress, Loktantric Congress Parties, Indian National Congress (Requisitions/
Organization), Congress for Democracy, Congress (Swaran / Urs), Congress (Pawar), Jan Morcha, All India Indira Congress (Tiwary/Arjun Singh), Trinamol Congress, Tamil Manila Congress, Nationalist Congress Party, etc. These splits appear to be caused more due to politics of ambition and power-personal and regional-tan programmatic or ideological differences. Only those with some prominent all-India or regional leaders of following have had some chance of survival or effectiveness. Most tend to merge back with the Congress or some opposition party. Greater chance of survival of such splinters has come to pass in the era of coalition Governments.

A new organizational tendency is palpable in the Indian National Congress of late. We have seen a greater tolerance of somewhat autonomous State units in the 1990s and after, especially under Sonia Gandhi. The examples are Madhya Pradesh (Digivijay Singh), Rajasthan (Ashok Gehlot), Punjab (Amrinder Singh), Delhi (Sheila Dikshit), Manipur (Ibobi Singh), who have been allowed long innings in State politics by the central party leadership. In the decades preceding, Congress Chief Ministers were frequently changed mid-term to undercut their independent personal or regional following.

The Congress Party has been since the early 1990s ambivalent between neo-liberalism and electoral compulsions (Congress ka hath aam admi ke sath, 2004). Also, there was some slowing of the pace of economic reforms in the second half of Rao’s mandate (1991-96) in response to electoral reprisals, and there is the current phase of co-operation and conflict between the Manmohan Singh Government and the Left parties. Congress and communists are in coalition at the federal level but are main adversaries in West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura.
THE SANGH PARIVAR

This party family is divided among five broad streams:

1) RSS: The sangathan core, the Maharashtrian Brahmans were founders and Sarsanghachalaks until Rajendera Singh (Rajju Bhaiya) in the 1990s and now K. Sudarshan from Tamil Nadu. There have been bands of dedicated pracharaks for Jan Sangh/BJP in the Hindi belt, tribal belts in the hinterland, and elsewhere. Pracharaks were planted from outside areas beyond RSS’s initial strongholds;

2) Then there are the parliamentary and Assembly wings of BJP;

3) Vishwa Hindu Parishad was later founded in the 1980s by resident or non-resident Indians of the Hindu Diaspora;

4) The new political recruits followed since the period of electoral ascendance, the lumpen riotous elements and election workers aggregated in the Bajrang Dal;

5) The Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, a nativistic movement in Bombay/Mumbai/Maharashtra since the 1960s is now spreading its tentacles elsewhere. The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance formed a Government in Maharashtra in the late 1990s.

The BJP has tended to develop beyond the Hindi-speaking States and its Brahman-Bania syndrome has also become somewhat more inclusive of OBCs/Dalits/Muslims under the tutelage of the “true believes”. There have been BJP’s areas of direct influence and those where it managed to strike deals with regional allies during the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance Government in

This party is said to have oscillated between moderation and militancy (a la Christophe Jefferlot) in the BJP phase which really started right from the time of the Jana Sangh’s merger with the Janata Party in 1997. During the earlier phase, the strategy of stigmatization and emulation of the threatening “other” (a la Christophe Jaffrelot) was more determinedly followed by this party family and its hangover continues today.

The Sangh Parivar has followed the strategy of sanitization of the Hindu religious identity which has historically been not a religious phenomenon in the sense of Islam and Christianity but a civilization phenomenon of Indic or Indological vintage. The word ‘Hindu’ is not found in the Amarkosh supposed to be compiled by one Amar Singh, a princeling during the Gupta period. The word ‘Sindhu’ is there, but not ‘Hindu’.

There was an attempt at the creation of an expanded business class/industrialists supportive of BJP via privatization during the NDA regime by the Ministry of Disinvestment headed by Arun Shourie. The Disinvestment Commission formed during the United Front regimes earlier was disbanded during the NDA rule. It has not been revived during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government.
THE JANATA PARIVAR

The genesis of the Janata Party family goes back to the JP Movement and Emergency jails. Merger of 4/5 parties on the eve of hurriedly called 1977 Lok Sabha elections gave rise to the confederal Janta Party mainly by non-Congress and non-Communist parties active in the JP Movement. The electoral turnover of 1977 was followed in quick succession by the Janata Party Government headed by Morarji Desai (1977-79), Janata Dal-led National Front/United Front Governments (1989-1991 & 1996-98). The process of merger in the Janata Party-Dal since 1988 in the run-up to the ensuring Lok Sabha election with the merger of V.P. Singh’s Jan Morcha-could never be brought to its logical conclusion and its pre-merger constituents continued to function practically as separate parties or strong regional units. It was only a matter of time that this plural and confederal party fragmented into regional splinters of Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, Samajwadi Party in UP, Biju Janta Dal in Orissa, Janata Dal (secular) in Kamataka led by H.D. Devegowda and J.H. Patel, and Lok Shakti of Ramakrishna Hegde. Gujarat Janata Dal ledby Chimanbhai Patel had already parted company with the parent party much earlier.

Two notable features of the Janata Dal as a sociological and organizational phenomenon may here be sketched. Sociologically, it is a party of middle castes / OBCs / Bullock capitalists. Organizationally, as already mentioned, it is a confederal party with minimal central direction and control. Personality clashes and peasant feuding culture put its confederal organizational style under extreme pressure/tension, resulting in the hopeless fragmentation of the Janata Party/Dal, which in 1977 was seen as a historic centrist alternative to the Indian National Congress. That was not to be however.
BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY

We may delineate the following cultural/ideological streams of this party of Scheduled Caste ‘reservation aristocracy’: Some Bhakti Saints, Jotiba Phule, Ad Dharam, Ambedkarism, etc. Its organizational genesis may be traced to the Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) founded by Kanshi Ram. We notice two major clusters of Dalit political power: Culture (Phule)/Ideology (Ambedkar)-driven Dalit politics in Maharashtra and politics-centred Dalit electoral success in Hindi speaking States, especially in UP.

We also notice a transition from clientelism to autonomous agency politics in the BSP. From Harijan identity to Dalit identity has been a long journey. The party is, however, caught between the new middle class leadership and the landless and poor followers. There is also the anti-‘Manuvadi’ rhetorics and the rubbing of shoulders with the so-called ‘manuvadi’ parties or bourgeois parties: BSP’s allies in politics at various points in time have been Samajwadi Party, Congress, BJP, but never the left parties. There were an extremely short-lived alliances with the Samajwadi Party or the Rashtriya Janata Dal. These alliances were bedeviled by a fundamental conflict between the Dalits and the OBCs in rural political economy. The politics of defection for power and pelf has also hit the BSP severely below the belt in the Parliament and Assembly. Particularly debilitating was the loss of 40-odd MLAs to join hands with the Samajwadi Party to form the Mulayam Singh Yadav Government in UP in the early 2000s. The party did, however, retain its gait and kept going under Mayawati following the failing health of the indomitable Kanshi Ram.
In the 2007 U.P. assembly elections, the BSP staged a sort of miracle by gaining one-party majority for the first time in more than a decade and a half by forging a social coalition of Dalits, Brahmins and other upper castes, and Muslims.

**THE LEFT WING/THE VAMPAKSHA**

Communism in India has traveled a long way from Communist International to national organization of CPI in the early 1920s to the regionalist CPI(M) in West-Bengal, Kerala, Tripura. The CPI(M) in West Bengal combines the class and culture of the Bengali *Bhadralok*.

Communism in India tended to get transformed into parliamentary communism in the Nehru era. By 1958, Amritsar Congress of the CPI adopted the idea of parliamentary road to communism. T.J. Nossiter was later to note that Communism in India was gradually patriotism home and ‘democratized’. He, however, considers it more of a tactical change rather than a genuine ideological conversion. For, Indian Communism has never formally abandoned the creeds of revolutionary transformation and the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional prelude to communism, as the Euro-communist parties have formally done it. For this reason, according to Nossiter, Indian Communism has only a *practice* of democracy, not a *theory* of it.

The 1964 split in the CPI, giving birth to the CPI(M), was a result of the division in the World communist movement and the domestic factors in the Indian Communist movement in the form, class radicalization, and regional differentiations.
The ultra-left or Naxalite divide since 1967-69 has marked the communist movement in India as a residue of leftwing radicalism in parts of the country. Thirty-odd such organizations are active today, mainly in the hinterland or inland tribal belt stretching from Indo-Nepal border down to the Deccan spanning the States of Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh, including parts of Bihar. Inequities from control over land and forests and habitats due to industrialization and construction contracts cause the occurrence of Naxalism.

REGIONAL PARTIES

There are three geographical zones of varying intensity of regionalism:

1) areas of strong regional cultures and identity, e.g. Deep South, Northwest; and Northeast;

2) Areas of intermediate regionalism, e.g. Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra;

3) Areas of Moderate regionalism which had been the centres of sub-continental or nearly sub-continental States in Indian history.

These areas have been more nationalistic than regionalistic in present times, e.g. Hindi-speaking States, Gujarat, Orissa, Maharashtra, Karnataka. The oldest regional parties have sprung from areas of strong regional identities (e.g., J&K NC, Shiromani Akali Dal, Dravida Parties, some Northeastern parties). More recent regional party formations have been witnessed in the areas of intermediate regionalism (e.g., TDP, AGP, PDP, etc). Areas of moderate regionalism are the locus of fragments of erstwhile national parties.
IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

The cynical view of Indian politics is that ideology has no place in it. It is supposed to be motivated largely by issueless factionalism and opportunism. Yet, this view does not fit well with the fact that political parties spend so much on manifestoes and other publicity material and on campaigning which is publicly coached in programmatic terms. The reality obviously lies somewhere in between. Indian politics is perhaps neither entirely doctrinaire nor entirely pragmatic.

Deep down the flickering images and issues in particular elections, certain issues, interests and identities have endured ever since India first went to the polls in 1951-1952 on universal adult franchise. These enduring policy issues and cultural cleavages may be synoptically subsumed by the binaries of nationalism and regionalism, State and market, secularism and communalism, caste and class, etc. Political parties in India have taken different views on these issues. The two largest parties today—the INC and the BJP—can each be characterized in terms of their respective position on these issues. The former has conventionally been identified with nationalism, statism, secularism and a multi-class, multi-caste, multi-cultural, multi-regional orientation. The latter has tended to be associated with Hindu Communalism which it prefers to call “cultural nationalism” (“Hindu Rashtravad”). It has also been more oriented towards subordination of individual and parts to collectivity and society which it calls “Integral Humanism”. It has also advocated an economy in which market is largely free from State regulation. The party has also been dominated largely by an upper caste/middle class Brahmin-Bania elite, although, of late, it has tried to cultivate wider social base in urban and rural areas.
It is additionally possible to characterize Indian parties in terms of centrist, rightist, leftist orientations, although these demarcations are often blurred, especially in more recent times, on account of major shifts in the area of economic policies. The major centrist parties of Indian politics have been the INC and Janata Dal, now fragmented into several splinters like Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, Samajwadi Party (SP) in Up, Biju Jnata Dal (BJD) in Orissa, Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka and Jantal Dal (United). The Janata parivar parties, by and large, have their roots either in the Janata Party formed in 1977 (which became Janata Dal in 1988 following the merger of V.P. Signhs Jan Morcha with it) and the INC. The Janata Party represented the merger of Congress (Organization) led by Morarji Desai, Bharatiya Lok Dal led by Charan Singh, Bharatiya Jana Sangh led by Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lalkrishna Advani, Socialists led by Raj Narain, George Fernandes, Madhu Limaye and others, and Congress for Democracy led by Jagjeevan Ram, H.N. Bahuguna and others. It was an assortment of those subscribing to free enterprise in business and agriculture as well as socialists with a broad anti-Congress platform supported largely by peasants and traders. As a national party, it seemed to be a surrogate Congress backed by leaders and interest groups who deserted the Congress. It was also joined by the Bharatiya Jana Sangh which had until then remained a “political untouchable” on account of its identification with Hindu communalism. It is for these reasons that only the Congress and Janata Party/Dal may be regarded as the centrist parties in Indian politics.

The Congress Party of the past was considered left-of-the centre due the its heritage of Nehruvian “Socialism” and Indira Gandhi’s pro-poor “populism”. Since 1991 when its minority Government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao
introduced the comprehensive package of neo-liberal economic reforms, it has shifted to the right at least on economic issues. However, electoral reverses due to its identification with economic reforms have acted as a check on its right-wing shift. When it has come back to power in 2004 after about a decade in political wilderness, it self-consciously tried to identify itself with the masses by its electoral slogan of “Congress Ka Haath Aam Aadmi Ke Saath” (Congress hadn with the common man). The Janata Dal has always retained a left-of-the centre orientation on economic issues. It has also retained a pro-peasant and rural bias.

The major right-wing parties in Indian politics are the BJP and the Akali Dal, the former being a national party and the latter being a regional one. These parties are largely status quoits on social and economic issues which is understandable in view of the upper caste/middle class leadership of the BJP and the Sikh Jat/farmer and peasant leadership of the Akali Dal. The neo-liberal economic policy shift has not left these parties untouched. During their stint in power in the NDA coalition Government at the Centre, the BJP has compromised a bit on Swadeshi and favoured globalization.

As a party of agriculturists, the Akali Dal also hoped to gain some benefits for its supporters who stand to gain from capitalist developments in agriculture and globalization.

The BJP has also undergone some change in its position on cultural issues. As the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, it had stood for “Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan”. When it merged with the Janata Party in 1977, it joined the ideological mainstream of Indian politics. Rajni Kothari argued that this experience liberalized the Hindu communalists in the same way as the communists were
liberalized who joined the Congress in the Nehru era. After the collapse of the Janata Party Government in 1979, the Jana Sangh elements in it left it in 1980 to establish the Bhartiya Janata Party. The BJP ever since has come a long way meandering through the zigzags of militant Hindutva and a more secularized orientation resulting from the experience of the coalition Government with secular allies. As a part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the BJP removed the contentious issues of Ram Mandir, uniform civil code, and Article 370 from the Common Minimum Programme. As the leading party in the NDA Government, it also deftly distanced itself from the more Hindutva-oriented Sangh parivar constituents like the RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal. After the loss of power in 2004, the party is going through an identity crisis. It must resolve this crisis by opting to move closer to the Sangh Parivar or to continue to remain a part of the mainstream which, to an extent, must be secular and development-oriented.

The BSP, a party of SC “reservation aristocracy”, is somewhat difficult to be classified in terms of right and left. For, it takes a position leaning on the left on social issues (e.g., its critique of the “Manuwadi” parties). However, it is overtly opposed to the left parties on economic issues. On these issues it is, if anything, centrist in orientation. It has never aligned with the left parties. All its alliances so far have been with the Congress, Samajwadi Party, and BJP. Its honeymoon with the Samajwadi Party was most short-lived. These contradictory traits of the party can be explained in terms of its SC middle class leadership and the support base among poor SCs in urban and rural areas. It may also be pointed out that even though it is a National Party according to the Election

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Commission criterion, for all practical purposes, it is a regional political force largely based in UP.

However, the BSP’s success even in UP is remarkable and needs explanation. There are three other States-West Bengal, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh—which have a higher concentration of SC population than UP. Then, why only in UP has the BSP made a significant political advance? One explanation could be that sizeable SC population in the State is coupled with a fairly fragmented caste and community arithmetic in UP. Another explanation could be that political space in West Bengal is ideologically dominated by Marxism or Social Democracy, by religious mobilization of the Akali Dal in Punjab, both bridging over caste divisions. Himachal Pradesh continues to be relatively backward and less politicized, where both secular mobilization by the Congress and Hindutva mobilization by the BJP in recent years have formed the Government and opposition alternately. In an interesting theoretical and empirical study of the BSP and some other ethnic parties, it is suggested that in a type of electoral democracies which can be categorized as “patronage democracies”, voting behavior is determined by competition among parties that campaign on ethnic head counts rather than policy or developmental performance of parties in power. Such electoral competition among ethnic communities is also functional for democracy inasmuch as it leads to democratic completion rather than ethnic confrontation and extremism.  

The Left-wing in Indian politics today includes the CPI(M), CPI, Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Forward Bloc, and CPI(ML). The 1964 split in the parent CPI was related to the split in the International Communist Movement between Moscow and Beijing. The CPI(M) identified itself with the
Chinese Communist Party. The CPI(ML) proclaims its adherence to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism which verges on radical class violence often called Naxalism. Among these Left parties, the CPI(M) is regionally concentrated in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The CPI(ML) is not much of an electoral force, though in the last few elections, it has tended to file a large number of candidates in several States and secured some votes. It is a protest party campaigning against the established Communist parties which have become embourgeoisied.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front has continuously ruled in West Bengal since 1977. This phenomenal electoral success is attributable to a combination of Marxism with Bengali cultural regionalism. The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front in Kerala has regularly alternated in power with the Congress-led United Democratic Front.

The CPI and CPI(M) have also shared power at the centre in the Janata Dal-led United Front and the Congress-led UPA coalition Governments. The CPI was part of the United Front Cabinet whereas the CPM extended support to it from the parliamentary floor. In the UPA coalition, both are extending outside support to the Government. In these Governments, the Left has played a pragmatic role in partly accepting the neo-liberal economic reforms and partly using their influence in the Government for slowing the pace of privatization and globalization of the economy. In the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the Left parties have been returned with their largest ever parliamentary presence with 62 Lok Sabha members.

Another important category of parties is that of the regional parties. There are two kinds of regional parties in India. First, there are the long-standing
regional parties owing their origins to deep cultural divisions of the Indian society, e.g. the Tamil Parties whose origins go back to the period around the First World War, the Akali Dal that originated in the Sikh Gurudwara Movement of the 1920s, and the National Conference that can be traced back to the Muslim Conference founded in the late 1930s. These old regional parties are a feature of areas with strong religious or linguistic regional identities, even going to the extent of being ambivalent to separatism. Second, there are relatively new regional parties in the States where previously the Congress or Janata Party/Dal held sway in the past. These regional parties emerged in the 1980s and the ‘90s with the growing politicization of the mass public and the diminishing capability of the Congress to absorb and satisfy regional or ethnic identities. The Telugu Desam, Asom Gana Parishad, the various Janata Dal and Congress splinters in different States are cases in point. A characteristic common to these new parties is their by and large centrist orientation in economic terms. Had they not been regional parties, they could have very well merged with the Congress or the JD. The factors that have contributed to the growth of these parties are the growing salience of the caste, community and local factors in politics. To an extent, they are also related to some personalities with regionalized support base identifiable in terms of regional and caste/tribe factors. The decline of national parties and the advent of coalition Governments at the Union level has enormously increased the role, relevance and leverage of regional parties. They play a balancing role in competing coalitions and make or mar the prospect of a coalition Government.

The trajectory of regional parties in general is associated with the demand for a separate State within the Indian Union and in some cases, espousing even
separatism. Such State autonomy demands after Independence were responsible for the rise of several regional parties in Assam that subsequently was divided into six other units. Most of these regional parties have their bases in tribal regional identities. However, these parties are marked by a great degree of volatility and splits and mergers. Except for a few such tribal political formations such as the Mizo National Front (MNF), they generally tend to coalesce with the national party or party coalition in power in New Delhi.

The proliferation of regional parties in recent decades is attributable in political terms to the decline of the Congress both the terms of its internal accommodative capability and erosion of its electoral base on the one hand, and the inability of non-Congress national parties like the BJP, communist parties and Janata Dal to replicate the political formula of the old Congress as an umbrella party.

In their ideological positions, regional parties base themselves on a broad spectrum of regionalist platforms. The issues espoused by them include demands relating to language, religion, caste and community, sub-State regional economic backwardness, etc. Several of these factors enter into complex combinations in specific cases of political regionalism. Suhas Palshikar perceptively observes:

Many times regional parties cover non-regionalist ideological ground. While the Akalis tend to define regional identity in terms of religion, the Shiv Sena uses the two ideologies of regionalism and religious communalism. According to the exigencies of electoral politics. Regional parties also rely. On castes for their ideological formulations. Thus, the DMK originally combined
Dravidian identity with non-Brahmanism. By employing anti-caste ideological resources, the DMK strengthened its claims pertaining to a separate Dravida identity vis-à-vis the Aryans. More recently, the PMK in Tamil Nadu has also combined the regional rhetoric with an anti-caste social position on behalf of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). Such ideological formulation should not be seen cynically only as marriages of convenience.26

Nevertheless, regional parties can, to an extent, be said to be a moderating influence on ideological or doctrinaire tendencies in politics. It is notable, for example, that regional parties have readily coalesced with Left-of-the-centre as well as the right-of-the-centre coalition Governments more freely than national parties. The TDP was a regional kingpin in the JD-led United Front as well as the BJP-led NDA.

Political implications of the rise of regional parties with variegated localized power bases are evident in several ways in the contemporary dynamics of federal politics in India today. For one thing, regional parties have “tended to limit the political space for national alternatives to the Congress Party. For instance, the BJP has been competitive in those State assemblies where regional parties are weak or non-existent.”27

For another, inability of the regional fragments of the Janata Dal has scuttled the possibility of that party to provide a national alternative to the Congress. Thirdly, the failure of the Communist parties to extend their electoral bases beyond West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura has meant that regional identities in States outside their sphere of influence cannot be easily aggregated into a broader national framework within their leadership. The net effect is that
the current regionalist thrust in Indian politics appears unlikely to be “nationalized” within a broad national party in India today. This is an indicator of the continuing importance of regional parties in State politics and federal coalitions. However, the failure of the regional parties to form a viable their front between the two largest national parties-INC and BJP-is also quite evident. From available indicators, the United Front led by the Janata Dal (JD) was the heyday of the Third Front which is over. The three major components of the Third Front were the Janata Dal, regional parties and the Communist parties.

The Janata Dal (United)-despite its name-is a divided house and the Communist parties have now joined the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government at the Centre. If the UPA endures, it may well portend that the sunshine days of regional parties are more in the past than in the future. The flagship of the communist movement is a ‘national’ party by the Election Commission classification. And despite the regionalist existence of communism in India, its motivation is, deep down, nationalist today.

Electoral democracy coupled with federalization of the polity has largely succeeded in containing separatism. Regional parties of all varieties are today interested in greater State autonomy within the federation. Participation in various federal coalitions by some major regional parties has further moderated or “constitutionalized” and “nationalized” them as they have become co-sharers in federal power along with ruling at the State level without the fear of being toppled by the Centre.
Political parties in any democratic polity are supposed to be vital links between the State and the civil society. Parties in India have failed to perform the basic functions of Government and Opposition on account of a number of reasons. As already pointed out earlier, very few parties take their own Constitutions seriously. For this reason they have come under personalized and dynastic dominations. Another dimension of illegality of Indian parties is evident from the Writ Petition No. 24 of 1995 to the Supreme Court by the Common Cause, a registered society headed by H.D. Shourie. The public interest case arose out of the alleged violation of the provisions of Section 13A of the Income Tax Act and Section 293A of the Companies Act by political parties with regard to their income and expenditure. The Common Cause argues that these laws “clearly indicate the legislative scheme, the object of which is to ensure that there should be transparency in the matter of sources of funds of the political parties and the manner in which the funds are spent”. The laws put “all political parties under mandatory obligation to maintain accounts, issue receipts for voluntary contributions above the prescribed limit and of getting their accounts annually audited”. Of the major fifteen parties approached for confirmation, none could claim that the legal requirements were complied with (barring the Janata Party, a rump of its name sake of the yore and a pocket organization of Subramaniam Swamy). The responses from the Government department concerned confirmed the contention of the Common Cause (1995: 13; Responses of the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, attached to the petition). The Supreme Court’s ruling on this petition was: “if a political party deliberately chooses to violate or circumvent these
mandatory provisions of law and goes through the election process with the help of black and unaccounted money, the said party ordinarily, cannot be permitted to say that it has incurred or authorized expenditure in connection with the election of its candidates in terms of Explanation to Section 77 of the Representation of People Act (Para 19). The Parliament subsequently circumvented the judgment by ‘suitable’ amendments.

Another aspect of the degeneration of the party political processes in the country is what has commonly come to be known as criminalization of politics. There is probably no political party today that does not harbor a number of criminals holding party and even legislative/ministerial posts, the figure in some parties running into double digits as revealed by press reports. In the 1990s, economic scams and political scandals has reached the proportions of an unending deluge. The octopus-like hold of politics and economy by business-politics-administration-crime nexus has reached a stage where even Joint Parliamentary Committee investigations have proved to be utterly ineffective, fruitless and farcical exercises. In July 1993, the Government of India established a committee at the administrative level headed by the then Home Secretary, N.N. Vohra “to take stock of all available information about the activities of crime-syndicate/mafia organizations which had developed links with and were being protected by Government functionaries and political personalities. The Report submitted in October 1993 made the following sinister submissions, among others: “Central Bureau of Investigation has reported that all over India crime syndicates have become a law unto themselves. The nexus between the criminal gangs, police, bureaucracy and politicians has come out clearly in various parts of the country. The existing
criminal justice system which was essentially designed to deal with the individual offences/crimes, is unable to deal in the activities of the mafia.\textsuperscript{33} There is evidently little follow-up action on the Report, notwithstanding the Supreme Court directive to the Government to report what steps have been taken to implement its recommendations.

Another dimension of political corruption is the so-called politics of defection, which since 1967 has turned the legislatures and ministries into licensed casinos for political opportunists and defectors. Huge sums of money change hands and plane-loads of legislators are flown to five-star tourist facilities, often outside the State, to insulate them from temptations offered by other parties. Formerly known to have taken place only in State capitals, a similar vice for the first time surfaced at the national level in the notorious JMM bribery cause adjudicated by the Supreme Court in 1998 the Supreme Court ruling in this case was:

1) An MP is a public servant under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988; since there is no competent authority under the provisions of the act to remove an MP from his office, the Court can take cognizance of his offence without seeking sanction from any other authority.

2) However, the prosecuting agencies need to seek sanctions for proceeding in the framing of charges from the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
3) MPs charged with taking bribe for voting against a no-confidence motion enjoy immunity from courts under Article 105 of the Constitution relating to the parliamentary privileges.

4) Bribe-givers enjoy no such immunity.

5) It is for the competent parliamentary authority to take proper action against offending MPs.\textsuperscript{34}

Under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution introduced in 1985 and amended recently (the Ninety First Amendment), a party member of a House is liable to be expelled from a legislative body unless at least one-third of members of the legislative party desert it to form a new party or merge with another party. To reduce temptations for defection, the size of a Council of Ministers is fixed at 15 per cent of the total membership of the Popular Chamber.

Concluding a monograph on Indian politics, an expert so aptly describes the contemporary trends in the Indian party system. `Indian politics is both coalitional and regionalized'.\textsuperscript{35} Beginning with the mid term polls of 1998, the face of the Indian party system seems to have changed beyond recognition for an observer who stood witness to the nature of the party system in the country during the times of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The changing in the party system of the country which may be said to have begun in 1977 appears to have reached its culmination with not only the Congress party losing much of its political space and preeminence in the Indian politics but also with the emergence of the BJP as the formidable rival of the erstwhile dominant party at both the levels of forming government at the Centre as well as upsetting the Congress game plan in most of the states of the north and western India. With
the exception of a few states like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala and so on, the party system in India looks like a two coalitional party system where by the power at Centre as well as in different states is being shared by the Congress led coalition of UPA and the BJP led coalition of NDA. The other exceptional parties, based mainly in a particular state, seem to be in completion with either of the two coalitions to corner the seat of power in the state without any overt aspirations to play a decisive role in the national politics.

The current phase of the Indian party system is probably the product of the inability of the pan Indian parties like the Congress and the BJP to expand their electoral base to all nook and corner of the country in such a manner that either of the two are able to secure at least a workable majority in the Lok Sabha to form the government at the Centre. The basic reason behind their inability happens to be the irreversible social and economic churning taking place in the country since early 1990’s leading to a number of desirable and undesirable consequences for the polity of the nation. Not only the caste awakening in the different sections of the society has become very acute, the assertion of such caste consciousness has given birth to new trends in the politics of the country whereby the previous caste affiliations with different political parties are getting broken down and new caste equations are emerging to replace the old ones. Similarly, the economic reforms introduced in the country since early 1990s have brought about drastic structural transformations in the Indian economy, exposing hitherto untouched masses to the changing economic realities of the country in both pleasant and unpleasant manner. While in the urban and semi-urban areas the educated people seem to be reaping the riches of the economic reforms, in the remote and backward areas, the incidents of the farmers committing
suicide for the fear of not being able to repay their debt to the money lender presents an altogether different story of the economic reforms. The cumulative effects of these transitional socio-economic processes on the polity of the country are coming in the form of people getting disaffected with the hitherto ruling formations and become prone to be drawn towards the localized and sometimes parochial political outfits who appear to them to be capable or remedying the ills plaguing their socio-economic life. The decline of the fortunes of the national parties and the emergence of the regional parties as the custodian of the interests of such distressed people come out to be the obvious consequence of the socio-economic churning in almost all states of the country.

Placed in a piquant situation, both the national as well as the regional parties, thus, become the partners in convenience as none of them stand a long standing chance of remaining in the fray without the support of the other. However while choosing their partners, the different political parties initially look to ideology to seek a long standing alliance with the other parties but in the long run, most of the regional parties are found to be motivated by their concern to remain the right camp at the time of government formations without any special love for the ideology. For example, at the time of the formation of the NDA, the important regional parties joining hands with the BJP included the National Conference, Akali Dal (Badal), Indian National Lok Dal, Trinamol Congress, Samata Party, Lok Janashakti Party, Biju Janata Dal, Janata Dal (United), Shiv Sena, and the DMK. At a latter stage, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and many other smaller political parties also became an ally of the BJP. However, with the collapse of the government of the NDA after the 2004 general elections, the party configuration of the country changed
dramatically with a number of allies of the BJP leaving the sinking ship to join the upcoming UPA. The prominent deserters of the NDA in the eleventh hour included the National Conference, Indian National Lok Dal, DMK, Lok Janashakti Party, TDP and the AGP, who no longer found NDA a worthwhile formation to stay with. Thus, barring a few ideologically congruent partners like the Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal (Badal), and successful winners of consecutive elections, like the Biju Janata Dal, most of the allies of the coalition are bound to change sides with the swinging fortunes of the coalition.

In addition to the two clearly defined coalitions of the NDA and the UPA, the reincarnation of the so-called Third Front came into being in July 2007 with the new nomenclature of United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA) just on the eve of the presidential elections. Interestingly, most of the partners of the UNPA at one point or the other had been allies of the BJP who deserted the party when they found it more of a liability than an asset keeping in mind the electoral calculations in their respective states. However, their staunch anti-Congress stand did not allow these regional parities to join the fold of Congress-led coalition of UPA, as it would have been suicidal for them in their home states. Still, the fragility of the UNPA became clear just in the presidential elections itself when despite a call for the abstentions in the elections, the electors belonging to the AIADMK participated in the elections, albeit on the pretext that they did so without the knowledge of the party leader. But in substance, this formation of the ousted chief ministers might not be able to acquire any substantial space in the polity of the country.

If any political formation is feeling most suffocated in the contemporary times of the Indian party system, it would arguably be the Left parties. Being able
to secure the most spectacular electoral success in the Lok Sabha elections in 2004, these parties would have been poised to perform the functions of a formidable opposition in the Parliament in the wake of the fast-changing economic situations in the country. But faced with the two plausible opponents in the form of the BJP and Congress, the Left parties were compelled to shed the broader outlook of their scheme of things and supported Congress just to confine their attention to ward off the BJP led NDA from forming the government at the Centre. As a result, the Left parties, for the last three years, have found themselves in a love hate relationship with the government of a person who they allege to be the harbinger of the economic reforms in the country. Not only have they to support the UPA government form outside even by swallowing bitterly certain very unpleasant decisions of the government (including the recently concluded Indo – US Civil Nuclear Deal, also called the 123 Agreement), but they have also lost many of the long – time allies like the SP of Mulayam Singh who could not digest the stance of the Left parties and the Congress are able to adjust their relationship in the next general elections as well as the elections to the assemblies of the states like West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala would be interesting to see.

The Indian party system is passing through a phase of transition which looks to be full of contradictions and paradoxes. Old enemies are becoming friends as in the case of Congress and SP, and old friends are turning hostile to their ex-allies as in the case of Congress and the Left on the issue of Indo – US nuclear deal in July 2008. While at the state levels, two parties are sworn enemies, at the Centre, they supplement the efforts of each other to form and sustain the government even at the cost of compromising on the issues that had
remained very dear till quite some time. For public consumption, the decisions and policies of the government may be criticized stridently but when it comes to vote in the Parliament, the escape route is found to hold the discussion under such a section that does not provide for voting on the issue. The ruling coalition appears to be a marriage of convenience when finding no other way out, the parities joined hands to form the government even with those people who were criticized and ditched on account of their being ‘persons of foreign origin’. Despite the regional allies having the controlling powers of the government in their hands, the dominant partner in the coalition appears to be willing to walk to any length and compromise on the constitutional propriety and norms of political conduct in order to save the government. And the height of the matter reaches when one finds that how the government is being run by people sitting outside the formal hierarchy of the system and still holding the remote control in their hands to enjoy the benefits of governance without any accountability to the parliament and to the people.

If the ruling combine seems to be an abject opportunist formation to enjoy the fruits of power, the opposition also does not present a rosy picture of the prospects of the party system in India. Remaining a divided lot as ever, the opposition parties are not able to even expose the hypocrisies of the government, what to think of their offering themselves as a viable alternative to the ruling combine in the coming general elections. While the main opposition coalition finds itself incompetent to bringing the government to book, the splinter groups are seemingly grouping in the dark to find a respectable political space for them both at the national as well for the level of their states. In such a scenario, the party system in India appears to be poised for some degree of
stagnations for the time being, for the realignment of political forces in the country would take place only at the time of the declaration of the general elections in 2009. In the mad rush for securing the seat of power at any cost, the party system in the country is arguably losing much of its ideological sharpness and commitment to certain programmers and policies.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


5. This pre-history of modern Indian parties is yet to come under the scan of historians and social scientists.


15. For a detailed historical study, see Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy, op. cit.* Chandra concludes that while the Emergency “was out of step with the Indian people’s interests and traditions”, the JP Movement too “was not the answer to the problems that the Indian people were facing during 1974-75” due to “its undefined goal, inadequate forms of struggle, gross ideological confusion, absence of a autonomous organization and dependence on the RSS cadres for mass mobilization” (p. 294).


23. The term is attributed to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, a former President of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, who discourse on this theme is published as a booklet by the BJP office, New Delhi.


34. *P.V. Narasimha Rao v. the State* (CPI/SPE), (JMM Bribery case), Supreme Court, 1998.