CHAPTER-3

Coalition Politics in Pre-National Democratic Alliance Era

This chapter deals with the origin and development of coalition politics in India. It started with the election of 1989. But the truth is that coalition politics is older than the Indian constitution itself.\(^1\) Undivided India had its first experiment with coalitions in 1937 when elections to the provincial legislatures under the Government of India Act, 1935, were held in 1937. The Congress had a tacit electoral understanding with the Muslim League when it was not fully confident of a decisive majority in the United Provinces’ Legislature\(^2\). In the Interim government of 1946, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were broadly given representation in governance. The credit for having the first ever coalition under the present Constitution goes to what was then Patiala and the East Punjab States Union (PEPSU)\(^3\)

**EARLY HISTORY**

The emergence of coalition politics from the year 1989 onwards was due to the increase in the number of regional parties. The experiments with coalition governments were not new for Indian Politics especially at the level of states. In fact, the process began with the Indian States. This was natural because states are a meeting point of traditional texture of local politics and the modern political institutions operating at the Centre.\(^4\)

The period of coalition of minority governments since the 1989 elections was preceded by at least three phases of coalition governments in the past. First of these were the non-Congress coalition governments in the

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2. But after the Elections, the Congress refused to form a coalition with the Muslim League.
north-Indian states after the 1967 general elections until 1971-72, when Indira Gandhi brought the Congress back to power in New Delhi and in a majority of states. Second of these were the Janata Party governments at the centre and most of north-Indian states in the wake of 1977 and 1978 elections. Thirdly, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led left-front coalition governments and alliances, which were most widespread and relatively more stable in Kerala and West Bengal because of the ideological factor cementing their relationship.

Indian politics was reflective of electoral game in which there was a historically dominant party- the Congress and a range of coalition experiments, especially at the state level. However, it would be incorrect to assume that all coalitions and minority attempts were between the parties which were non-congress by nature. In fact, it has been argued that the Congress too could maintain its stature of a dominant party only because it worked through a Congress system of coalitions with its own set of mechanisms to accommodate diversified interests within its umbrella organization. Thus, congress in itself existed as a virtual coalition. Even the Congress by the late 1960s was finding CPI and the DMK as its more or less stable partners together with some floating ones, choosing to join hands with it on issue to issue. During this virtual coalition, the Central government was already finding its options limited and freedom of action curtailed besides leading a hand to mouth existence.

In the existent scheme of things, a change came when the Congress

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5 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 139. In this regard, certain examples which are cited as proof of the compulsions are: Such decisions as to postpone the consideration of the Preventive Detention Bill, to withdraw the Criminal law Amendment Bill, and to withhold the discussion of the issue of compensation to the princes.
system began to crumble. The beginning with year 1967 elections marked the end of one party dominance, which had been under way for some time and started a new era of political instability, coalition politics and political alignments. Significantly, at the time of general elections the opposition parties used the strategy of forming united fronts to avoid conflicts among themselves and disallow Congress to gain from the splitting of opposition votes. Therefore, very often, the year 1967 is described as a watershed in Indian electoral politics.

In the post 1967 and pre- 1977 phase, coalition strategies gained a better grasp over Indian Politics as there was a transition from intra-party factional and infrastructural coalitions to inter-party political coalitions. This has accelerated the secularization process as the forces of polarization within political parties. At this stage, the parties were moving from the stage of temporary party coalitions to the stage of coalitional party system in which major political parties tried to enter into electoral alliance to join hands in a governmental coalition.

As a result, the elections of 1967 replaced the single dominant party system by the multiparty system in which no particular party claimed absolute majority at any level of the political structure, and resulted in the

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13 The term “Polarization” in this context requires a brief explanation. As according to Iqbal Narain: Polarization brings like minded parties together and the resultant governmental coalitions are more homogenous. This could mean that the fringe parties and groups may not be left with any critical role and may as such get merged with bigger parties or even become extinct and a more viable party system emerges. And finally, the national electoral alliance turned coalition govt. may be more stable than the present one. However, it is not contended that the alliances thus forged will be more permanent: they would hopefully be more costing. Over here, it is also pointed that polarization may not always be bi polar as Marxian theorists would postulate’ it can be tri-polar and even multi-polar. More importantly, even when ideological polarization takes place, the centrist party or parties (may) continue to play a critical role. As observed by Iqbal Narain, Coalitional Politics, p. 139.
model of intra-party express or formal coalition system. In this sense, it has been noted that coalition politics in India is a direct legacy of the period when one party dominated the political scene. It represents a situation of political change in which major political parties enter into coalitions with a view to jointly fill the vacuum created by the Congress eclipse. Nonetheless, despite the debilitation of the Congress party in the post-1967 phase, it continued to be the most dominant party at the Centre till the Ninth General Elections with the short interval of 1977-79, when the coalition ruled at the Centre as a non-Congress alternative.

It is undeniable fact that the changed environment was around the oldest party of India. New alliances centered around common interests had begun to emerge in politics, due to the growing politicization of vast numbers of the middle and lower peasantry and the middle caste groups. This led to a large-scale differentiation of the electorate, with diverse party identifications based on new interests and ideological alignments with the result, defections started in many states. These defections were not only the means of fulfilling specific desires and goals but also were important for the supremacy of a party and the multi-party system became the cradle of coalition governments.

THE JANATA PARTY

The turning point in the history of coalition governments in independent India came about with the Janata Party rule (1977-79) which brought, for the first time, a group of non-Congress parties to power at the

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The formation of the first Janata Party government at the Centre under the prime-ministership of Morarji Desai was the example in Indian politics. Though technically, the Janata Party government was not a coalition because its four constituents had agreed to merge and had fought the elections on a single manifesto and a common symbol. This was a unique phase of bipartisan tendency. For the first time in India, a two party system appeared and it was the time (1977-79) when only two parties- the Janata Party and the Congress- together accounted for over 80 per cent of votes and seats.19

The Janata Party had come into being soon after the release of opposition leaders when four major parties- the Jana Sangh, the Congress (O) the Bhartiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party- came together to contest the election with a common symbol and manifesto. The Janata Party obtained 43.17 per cent of the popular votes and captured 295 seats out of 540 (55.4 per cent seats)20. The 1977 elections are described as political earthquake in Indian politics but the inherent contradictions within the Janata Party coalition soon appeared as a warning to its existence.21 This was because the formation of this government was a result of an accommodative attitude of its constituent political groups. In this phase of Indian political system, bargaining politics reigned supreme replacing the characteristic collective leadership of pre-1977 era.22 Although, the power struggle within the coalition was muted at the time of the formation of the council of ministers in proportion to the strength of constituent groups within the Janata Party; rights began to emerge on various grounds.23

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18 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
over-ambitious attitude of some individuals, temperamental incompatibilities and the party’s failure to appeal to the people were responsible for the split in the Janata Party.\textsuperscript{24} The main reason of the collapse of this coalition was the very base of its existence.

Two of the strongest Janata Party constituents the Bhartiya Lok Dal (BLD) and the Jan Sangh had power tussles over the governing of north Indian states. Whereas parties like the former Jan Sangh shed their identity to form the Janta conglomerate and abided by the cabinet decisions, Charan Singh’s Lok Dal and George Fernandez’s faction of the Socialists could not adjust themselves to the new situation. As a result, on one hand, Morarji Desai was accepted as the Prime Minister, while both Jagjivan Ram of the Congress for Democracy and Charan Singh of Lok Dal also remained candidates for this office when they became senior ministers in the cabinet. On the other hand, the Jana Sangh’s rapid expansion irked the secularists who raised the question of dual membership of the erstwhile Jana Sangh and RSS. The other troubles were that of corruption charges against Kanti Desai, the son of the Prime Minister. After Y.B. Chavan brought the no-confidence motion against the government in July, 1979, the ministry came into minority because of resignations and defections from the ruling party. This led to the resignation of Morarji Desai from the office of the Prime Minister of India. A new coalition government was formed with Charan Singh as the Prime Minister in October, 1979. This coalition included leaders and groups from one spectrum to another; CPI, CPI(M) on the one hand, and on the other those who were close to big business houses. The party headed by Charan Singh was a party of defectors and had no absolute majority. The constant presence of the Congress party was reflected in its ability to manipulate the fall of the Janata government. By promising parliamentary support of the Congress to

Charan Singh for Prime ministership it forced upon a split in the Janata government, and also pressed for mid-term poll by refusing to extend support to him.

The Prime Minister’s advice to dissolve the Lok Sabha was accepted by the then President, N. Sanjeeva Reddy and the mid-term elections were announced. Arshi Khan was of the opinion that failure of the Janata Party coalition was caused by personality clashes, ideological differences and defections. These drawbacks were further supplemented by strategy of manipulations pursued by the Congress. However, the major achievement for Indian democracy was that the 1977 elections showed the power of the ballot against authoritarianism. Its failure gave warning to coalition-oriented parties to iron out their differences first and then get prepared for governance. The Janata Party rule also showed the force and bargaining power of the coalition against the dominant Congress at the centre which had never been challenged before.25

After the Janata experience of coalition government in 1977-79, single party dominance reemerged during the period from 1980-89. This phase was different from the earlier period of Congress dominance because it was set in a multiparty context. As at the centre many new opposition parties got established, and received electoral support in the states as well. After the Ninth General Elections of 1989, situation changed dramatically in favour of a coalition arrangement at the Centre.26 Since 1989 till 2004, five coalition governments have been formed on democratic principles. These represented the National Front Government led by V.P. Singh (1989-90), the B.J.P. led coalition government under the prime ministership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in (1998-99), the second inning by the BJP led NDA government (1999-2004) and the Congress-led UPA government in the 14th Lok Sabha27

27 2009 General elections resulted in the return of Congress led UPA, this time without the external support of the Left.
DECLINE OF THE CONGRESS AND RISE OF THE BJP

The 1984 election was the last to deliver a majority one-party government at the centre. The congress party declined as an organization. This decline was apparent long before the Congress share of the vote began to drop since 1989 onwards. Attempts to revive the party by holding organizational elections, in 1980s and 1990s indicated the institutional weakness of the party. The BJP had made the biggest gain at the expense of the Congress. The developments in the last decade of the previous century prompted the general idea that Indian politics had entered an era of post-Congress polity. The congress stopped performing the functions of interest articulation, interest aggregation, and social conflict resolution through authoritative policy outputs. One of the important consequences of this was the rise of BJP.

Since the first General Elections in 1952, Jan Sangh gradually increased its share of votes. This steady growth, despite subsequent electoral reverses, indicates that it was not the sudden disenchantment with the Congress and its defeat in 1967 which was responsible for increase in Jan Sangh’s vote. The support of the diverse sections for the Congress were giving way to disenchantment, the more radical sections moving to the Communists and the more conservative ones to the Jan Sangh. Thus, long before the birth of BJP the social base for Hindu right was already there with the backing of years of hard organizational work.

The disintegration of the Janata Party after 1979 did stop the Hindu nationalist party’s quest for broadening its base in Indian politics. Aiming to capture the gains made during the Janata experiment and to lay claim to

28 It may be note that the General Elections 2009 have changed the fortunes of Congress party but the change is more superficial than significant.
31 Ibid.
established Janata traditions, both in ideology and political aspirations, the new party was named Bhartiya Janata Party. In diluting its radical militant Hindu nationalism, the BJP was careful to keep distance from both the sectarian legacy of the Janata and also expressed its willingness to cooperate with other parties, being fully aware of its narrow support base both in geographic and demographic terms. Hence, initially the party worked hard to present a secular image and to minimize divisions in the non-Congress vote by uniting the opposition for the forthcoming 1984 elections. However, following the unforeseen events resulting in Hindu debacle and a sympathy wave for the Congress, the plans of the BJP were shattered and there were hardly any corner left for Vajpayee's insistence that there was no Hindu vote bank.\footnote{V.B.Singh “Rise of the BJP and Decline of the Congress: An Appraisal,” in: Rajendra Vora and Subhas Palashikar (ed.), \textit{Indian Democracy, Meanings and Practices}, New Delhi, Sage Publication, 2004, p. 303.} As a result, without Jan Sangh, the BJP returned to its original legacy. The soft communal policies followed by Rajiv Gandhi helped to crystallize the Hindu right in the BJP. As a result, the BJP emerged not only as a major gainer in elections, but it also began to be increasingly viewed as the major alternative to Congress.\footnote{\textit{Ibid,} p. 304.} 

**DAWN OF THE COALITION ERA**

The elections to the Ninth Lok Sabha in November 1989 marked a watershed in national politics as for the first time since independence, a \textit{hung parliament} was thrown in with no party or group getting a clear majority to form a government on its own. The Congress under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi got the largest number, i.e. 195 seats, in the House of 525, followed by Janata Dal with 141 seats and BJP with 88 seats. The Ninth General Elections of 1989 provided a coalition (minority) government, a recently emerged third force, thus strengthening the multi party system.\footnote{Arshi Khan, \textit{Op. cit.}, n.3,p. 151.} The elections of 1989 were held in an environment filled
with emotions. There was single dominating issue or slogan, political frustrations, factionalism and personality clashes which preceded the election scene. The message of 1989 Elections was priority and had a plebiscitary character.\textsuperscript{35} The agenda had now begun to be defined through the interpretation of the vote. Two types of attitudes prevailed, viz. one, the TINA\textsuperscript{36} factor namely, there is no alternative to Rajiv. It was counter challenged by the SITA\textsuperscript{37} factor, viz., Singh is the alternative. Thus, the Janata Dal was a coalition of four parties, which came under the banner of social justice. The Janata Dal and later the National Front wanted to reach an understanding to oust the Congress government because of increasing corruption and defense scandal plus the forced resignation of V.P. Singh, the then Finance Minister. After the failure of the Congress to form government, National Front (NF) got the required support for formation of the government at the centre.

**THE NATIONAL FRONT**

The National Front, the BJP and the Left formed an alliance in some 400 constituencies on the eve of November 1989 elections, to ensure that the opposition vote did not split. The most notable feature of the 1989 elections was the skilful deployment of the electoral arithmetic, which the opposition exploited to its best advantage.\textsuperscript{38} In their common pursuit to defeat the Congress at the centre, the National Front stood at the axis with the strong support of the BJP and the Left. V.P. Singh played a crucial role in uniting the opposition parties- the Janata Party, Lok Dal (A), Lok Dal (B) and others to merge under the label Janata Dal and urged several other parties to fight against the Congress. Thus, the emergence of this colossal coalition against the Congress had indicated polarization of voters with the

\textsuperscript{37} *Ibid*.
\textsuperscript{38} *Ibid*.
maximum possibility of the coalition government.\textsuperscript{39}

The 1989 results gave an ambiguous verdict against the dynastic rule and the results made a call for change.\textsuperscript{40} In 1989, the voter adjudged the Congress (I) to be incapable and inadequate, but did not give enough strength to the National Front or the Janata Dal. Thus, resulting in a minority government at the centre. The two emerging political forces-the BJP and the National Front, defeated the Congress. Despite the Congress winning 39.5 per cent of the votes, it lost heavily in terms of seats from 415 in 1984 to 197 in 1989. The Janata Dal alone had won 143 seats. While all the opposition parties agreed to come together to form a government under V.P. Singh in December 1989, the Left parties and the BJP agreed to support the government from outside.\textsuperscript{41} The NF government had managed to bring the two groups of Indian politics - the Left and the BJP together. The issue of these two groups supporting the National Front was explained by a common logic: the Congress (I) had to be kept at bay by any means. The urgency of preventing the Congress (I) from forming a coalition government was perhaps an important, but by no means the only factor in the formation of the government. Another was the opportunity for the BJP and the Left to use the minority government.\textsuperscript{42} Support to V.P. Singh's government at the Centre was part of a larger game plan of the BJP. It was the time for the BJP to play a waiting game hoping to improve its position by showing power directly/indirectly in six states, and of course, at the national level. The BJP was, of course, dreaming to come to power at the centre in next parliamentary elections. This was possible if it could take advantage of the dissentions within the National Front, the limited political influence of the Left, the confused state of affairs in the Congress (I) and

\textsuperscript{39} Arshi Khan, \textit{Op.cit.,}n.3. p. 158.
\textsuperscript{41} Arishi Khan, \textit{Op.cit.,}n.3, p.158.
most important of all, the rising militant Hinduism. Support from the Left, however, was based on short-term strategy. Its leaders realized that left support was vital to make the National Front stronger than its numerical strength in the Parliament.⁴³

It is important to note here that this phase of the Indian political system was marked by a distinct style of electoral mobilization which can be characterized as the regionally, and to an extent, ethnically segmented model in which neither overriding national issues nor primarily local issues predominate. Instead, it was the state or the region that became the level or unit of prime political importance. The 1980s saw the rise of regional parties in many states and regions.⁴⁴

The National Front was not having any formal mechanisms of coordination. The JD, the Left parties and others except BJP met every Tuesday.⁴⁵ V.P. Singh noted later that JD was the dominant partner in relation to the regional parties in 1989, it was more out of courtesy than because of the clout of the regional parties.⁴⁶ The alliance as it appears, had not given the serious thinking for need of coordination and maintenance.

**Minimum Programme**

Although there was the talk of a minimum programme for the alliance, there was no formal declaration. When V.P. Singh was asked about how he planned to deal with allies who were *diametrically opposing the ideologies*, he replied that they were committed to provide *a clean and stable government at the centre*. On the minimum programme, as such he said, it was a fight against the influence of money over politics.⁴⁷ It had

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⁴⁵ V.P. Singh, Interview by N.Ram and SukumarMuralidharan in *Frontline*, 13(12) , 15-28 June, 1996.p.16
⁴⁶ *Ibid*.
⁴⁷ V.P. Singh, Interview to Prabhu Chawla in *India Today*, New Delhi, 15 December, 1989,p.20.
been noted earlier that the Left Front and the BJP had decided to support the alliance on the manifesto of the JD.

**Ministerial Coordination Panels**

The National Front began well on this count. Soon after taking over, the Prime Minister constituted cabinet panels to deal with crucial and basic issues like price rise, panchayati raj, autonomy to the electronic media, right to work, problem in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and the right to information. However, the government itself did not last long for the results of this experiment to fructify. In this attempt, we see that the idea, that there should be coordination between ministries besides the role of the cabinet, was recognized. The NDA, made the best use of this coordination and maintenance mechanism.

**FAILURE OF THE NATIONAL FRONT**

This was the minority coalition and had great risks of its premature collapse. Squabbles within the Janata Dal surfaced soon after it came to power. Hard pressed in the internal power struggle, V.P. Singh, on August 7, 1990 announced a 27 per cent reservation for jobs in the Central Government and PSUs for socially and economically backward castes, i.e. the OBCs to further consolidate his and his party's base among them. While this hastened the disintegration of Janata Dal, it also sent alarming signals to other National Front partners who were facing the onslaught of the pro-Mandal leaders. According to George Fernandes, it was a deliberate political move which went wrong and brought the government down. V P Singh thought that by doing a favour to a segment of the population will support him and therefore he could win. But the government failed because it implemented the recommendations of Mandal Commission without taking the coalition partners into confidence. Also, it was under the tremendous pressure of the BJP to pursue soft-pedaled

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policy towards the militant-rightist forces on the Ayodhya issue.\(^{50}\) Further, during its eleven-month rule at the head of the National Front Government (Nov. 1989-Nov. 1990), the Janata Dal was rocked by intense factionalism between its Jan Morcha and the Lok Dal constituents, the latter led by the Devi Lal. Subsequently, the JD became entangled in the controversies created by the Prime Minister's decisions to reserve central government and public sector employment for the OBCs. The National Front government was finally ditched by the BJP, following the triumphant Hindu revivalist rath \textit{yatra undertaken} by L.K. Advani, the then BJP President. The National Front government, deprived of the BJP support, as a result, fell in a no-confidence vote in the Lok Sabha. Simultaneously, the National Front Coalition suffered another defeat when Chandra Shekhar engineered a split in the Janata Dal for becoming the Prime Minister that too on the support of the Congress. He too lost after six months when the Congress withdrew its support. Thus, the 1989 elections and the National Front formation showed that there is an alternative to both Congress and the BJP which can provide democratic governance. But its strength was rooted in alliance and coalitions which were not impossible but very difficult tasks.\(^{51}\)

The Tenth Lok Sabha was a minority government formed, by the Congress party under the premiership of Narsimha Rao with some dubious support resulting from \textit{horse trading} with the JMM, the government was able to complete its full tenure. Subsequently, after five years of congress rule, with the electoral verdict for the next Lok Sabha, coalition governments began to settle as a reality of the Indian politics.

The Eleventh Lok Sabha of 1996 witnessed the emergence of the BJP with 161 seats, as the largest single party in another hung parliament, followed by the Congress and the Janata Dal.\(^{52}\)

Table: 3.1
Major Party Position in 1996 Lok Sabha Verdict

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<th>Parties and Alliances</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Votes in Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BJP and Allies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>161</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHS</td>
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Note: At the time of government formation TMC and AIIC (T) Joint the United Front Council of minister.
The BJP and its allies as the largest political combine in the Parliament were invited by the President to form the government on the condition that it will have to win a vote of confidence on the floor of the Lok Sabha within 13 days of its swearing in on May 16, 1996. On May 28, the BJP failed to prove its strength in the parliament and the Vajpayee government resigned. During the debate over the confidence motion, Vajpayee, declared that his party was ready to freeze its controversial stand on the construction of Ram Temple, abrogation of Article 370 and the implementation of a uniform civil code in the interest of evolving a consensus in the country.\textsuperscript{53}

**THE UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT**

In the trial of the failure of two week BJP minority government, the NF-led Left front alliance formed a fragile United Front coalition government consisting of 13 national and regional parties headed by H.D. Deve Gowda with the outside support of the Congress. The UF consisted of various parties divided on various issues but aligned for the sake of power politics. The UF Government actually emerged in the complicated post-election negotiations among the parties. This was in a clear contrast to the formation of Janata Party in 1977 and NF in 1989. Both were formed prior to the elections. Moreover, both were marked by joint manifestos and comprehensive seat adjustments to avoid mutual contest and common campaigning.

One of the significant political developments, as an outcome of the eleventh Lok Sabha elections, was the strengthening of regional parties and other non-BJP and non-Congress parties which came together under the United Front. Obviously, the gainers were the regional parties. This fact was highlighted by having for the first time a regional leader H.D. Deve Gowda becoming the Prime Minister of the country. In fact, after the 1996

\textsuperscript{53}India Today, 26 May, 1996.
elections the regional parties had started playing an important role at the Central level politics. This spectacular rise of regional parties had many important messages. One, it can be said that growth in democratic consciousness meant that people in remote corners of the country started to judge parties by their performance. This resulted in even national policies being viewed in terms of their local impact. Not surprisingly, voters today prefer local politicians who are in a better position to understand and respond to issues in local context.\textsuperscript{54} Two, there was no single political party which could claim absolute majority to form the government.\textsuperscript{55} Three, this also meant, that federalism was placed on the national agenda. Prior to this, it was generally held that although constitutionally and politically, India had a federal system but it had been degraded and distorted in practice. However, after the rise of the regional forces the substantial chunk of votes was now being shared by regional parties and therefore suggested the above mentioned point.\textsuperscript{56} The 1996 elections and presence of variety of parties had given people the chance to exert their preferences, to choose and change their rulers in their own wisdom; this is an interpretation of such a fragmented verdict.\textsuperscript{57}

After the Eleventh Lok Sabha elections, when the United Front was in the process of being formed, a former Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, who headed the first federal coalition in 1989 was asked by the media at a press conference in Delhi as to what was needed to ensure the durability of a coalition. He laid down three factors, one, there was the need to consolidate solidarity within the third front, for this they had to devise modes of cooperation among various partners; two, there had to be an

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] Zaheer M. Quariishi, as quoted by Arshi Khan, “Coalition Politics in India Since 1967”, p. 162.
\end{footnotes}
agreement on policy parameters among the coalition constituents and its supporters from outside; and three, coping with areas of political conflict at the state level. He stressed on the importance of setting up contact groups between the Congress and the third front through which they could be in touch on a daily basis and could also keep their leaders informed. It was obviously the wisdom of experience and lessons learnt.

The National Front coalition of 1989 was singularly lacking on all three counts and it was clear that Singh had learnt his lessons. While the NF had a working mechanism to coordinate amongst its partners within the government and the supporting partners of the Left Front, it was not able to work out such an arrangement with other partner, the BJP. At the same time, it did not have any common programme of action that had the approval of the constituents of the government or its supporting partners. The complexities of federal coalitions had also not dawned upon the leaders of the NF and hence the mechanisms and the sophistication required for maintenance and coordination were also raw.

The United Front with the advise of V.P. Singh, quickly moved on to these established mechanisms of coordination and worked out a common programme. As there was no difference between the United Front I and II federal coalitions barring a change in the leadership, they are considered together coordination mechanism. The UF primarily had a three level coordination mechanism to enable it to move from the formation to the governance stage and to sustain and endure the relationship between parties both within the coalition and outside it.

**Level One: Common Minimum Programme**

Initially first of all UF had a Common Minimum Programme, this was meant to act as a guide for the whole coalition including the supporting partners within the governing coalition and those outside in the legislative coalition. The formulation of this programme began almost
immediately after the third front rechristened itself as the United Front and elected Deve Gowda as its leader. It was drafted by a sub-committee of the front with an aim to narrow down the differences among the constituents and was based on the synthesis of the manifestos of all constituents of the front.\textsuperscript{58} Meanwhile, the Congress that was supporting the government from outside also came out with a comprehensive note on the framework within which it expected the UF to function.\textsuperscript{59} As the Congress document came out first it probably gave the draftsmen of the CMP a fair idea of what was expected and also helped in the synchronisation of ideas. The UF, as one of its senior ministers remarked, was committed to reconciling the differences and enlarging the areas of consensus, and the CMP was its modus vivendi.\textsuperscript{60} The UF was aware that their coalition consisted of varied groups with different interests, therefore, it attempted to achieve the highest common factor on which there was commonality and consensus among the partners. It outlined the social, economic and political agenda of the government which was to form the basis of the functioning for the working of federal coalition.

\textbf{Level Two: Steering Committee}

The Steering Committee (SC) formed the second level of the coordination mechanism for the UF. This was a complex arrangement. It included parties not only within the governing coalition but also those outside (but not all) it. The SC was deeply influenced by the liaison committee mechanism used by the United Democratic Front (UDF) in

\textsuperscript{58} The members of the drafting committee included P. Chidambaram (TMC), Sitaram Yechury (CPM), D. Raja (CPI), and Jaipal Reddy (JD).

\textsuperscript{59} This note was prepared on the instruction of the P.V.N. Rao by senior Congress MP’s. It did not lay down any specific conditions but expected the government that the Congress supports follows policies on which there is a “broad national consensus”. Secondly, it also hoped there would be a continuity “of such policies which have acquired the imprimatur of history”. \textit{The Hindu}, 2 June, 1996.

\textsuperscript{60} P. Chidambaram, \textit{The Hindu}, 3 June, 1996, V.P. Singh speaking on the CMP said, ‘it has to be a sort of averaging. And what, after all is consensus in a democracy? It is aggregating and averaging. Interview to N. Ram and Sukumar Muralidharan in: \textit{Frontline}, 15- 28 June, 1996.
Kerala. The liaison committee, of the UDF was the *apex body of front constituents, and conceptually all major policy issues were routed through this committee*. Though the committee had no formal role in the day-to-day functioning of the government, no major policy decision could be taken by the government without debate and consensus in this committee. This Kerala UDF example was supposedly cited during the front formation details as a way of ironing out differences between political parties.\(^{61}\) There were also discussions on whether such a coordination committee should be set up between the UF and the Congress. However, it was decided that a formal mechanism as such was not needed. It was also decided that the Front would speak through the SC.

Along the way the UF- I alliance set up a Core Committee, for the purpose of better coordination among parties in alliance. The only major difference was that, while the SC began to meet at the headquarters of the Front, the Core-committee continued to meet at the residence of the Prime Minister. This arrangement continued even under the UF- II. These two committees almost always met on the same day and the Core Committee meeting usually preceded the SC meeting. The formation of the Core-Committee actually diluted the importance of the SC and it emerged as a sort of big brother to the SC as it was composed of more influential members of the UF.

The coordination mechanism of the UF played an important part in the ongoing economic reforms programme. It may be noted that some of the partners of the coalition had gone to the elections promising a rollback of the Congress initiated reforms. Rhetoric apart, the government could ill afford to pull back on commitments and secondly, by that time many of the states had warmed up to the idea of reforms. The first UF Prime Minister Deva Gowda, in his former avatar as Chief Minister of Karnataka had been

\(^{61}\) *The Hindu*, 26 May, 1996.
a liberaliser. Secondly, P. Chidambaram who held the key portfolio of finance also had a liberalisation friendly face. What was crucial was therefore the creation of an atmosphere of consensus and attempt to make the reform process more meaningful to the people. The CMP had already laid down the path to be followed. The UF coordination mechanisms enabled the partners to discuss the relevant issues away from the public eyes and put forward their concerns. On the other hand, the government was able to use this as a sounding board and in the process disarm many criticisms. In a way the SC meeting removed the sting. This is best seen with regard to the programme of subsidy reduction.

The success of reforms critically hinged on the reduction of the fiscal deficit of the government. In this connection, one of the major upsetting factors was the issue of subsidies. We had seen earlier that patronage-based mobilisation was a key factor in the strategy of almost all parties. Therefore the question of cutting subsidies was a prickly one. The UF government, however, decided to go ahead with this programme and was successful to a large extent primarily because of the fact that the issue was first thrashed out at the SC meetings and then announced by the government. Considerable amount of time was expended on the issue of subsidies to petroleum products and the Public Distribution System (PDS). The government came with rather novel solutions on both these issues. The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and oil bonds to check the deficit in the oil pool account were attempts to lessen the pain on the consumers and at the same time move towards a more rational pricing

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62 One example of this was when the government raised the prices of petroleum products in July 1996, it was soundly criticised by the partner within and outside the coalition and also the opposition parties. A Steering Committee meeting that followed this uproar on July 05 saw the government reducing the prices of diesel. This reduction in the increase from 30% to 15% obviously left both the partners and the government happy. The partners could say that got the reduction and the government on the other hand was able to get away with a 15% hike.
scheme. Though not all were satisfied with the reduction of subsidies programme, what is creditable is the process by which the programme was conceptualised and implemented.

The SC was also used to sort out problems between different states ruled by the allies. For example, on the Alamatti issue between Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh a four-member Chief Ministerial group was constituted to look into the claims of the parties to the dispute. Though there was no legal status to this group, it nonetheless represented an alternative attempt at resolving the dispute. Appendix 3.1 highlights the different issues that were discussed in the various meets of the SC.

**Level Three: Prime Minister and Main Supporting Party**

The third coordination mechanism of the UF was the direct interaction between the head of the government and the main supporting party, the Congress that was outside the steering committee and the governing coalition but within the legislative coalition. There was no formal agreement on this nevertheless contact between the two existed. While the UF was able to manage the constituents within it through the steering Committee and the Core Committee, the same cannot be said about its relations with the Congress party. UF federal coalition with Congress depended more on the good will and personal relations between

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63 The government brought out a discussion paper entitled “Government Subsidies in India” to generate debate and ensure an ‘open approach to subsidies’. On the PDS front the government introduced the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in place of the existing system from June 1997. This was part of the programme to ensure focussed distribution of subsidies and overcome the critique that the PDS was urban biased. It was basically a two tier subsidised pricing system. The central government promised to meet the food requirements at the rate of 10 kg. per family of the people falling below the poverty line (BPL) at subsidised prices. A pricing distinction ensured that a differentiation was made between the poor and needy and those above the poverty line (APL). The bifurcation of the quotas between the APL and BPL population was left to the states. Source: *Economic Survey 1997-98*, Economic Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, New Delhi, 1998 on the issue of petroleum products the government was able to set in motion the phased withdrawal of the Administered Pricing Mechanism (APM) and the prices of major petro-products was now linked with market prices. To check the ballooning deficit in the oil pool account the government issued oil bands source: *Economic Survey 1998-99*, Economic Division Ministry of Finance Government of India, New Delhi, 1999.

the leaders of the two groups than on anything else.

The third and by far the most crucial level of coordination was therefore weak due to the absence of a formal and institutionalized mechanism and the responsibility of maintaining the alliance depending on two individuals. Considering the fact, that it was basically a relationship between two personalities and not a collegiate system of coordination like the second level, the personal relationship factor between the two leaders was the trump card. Secondly, this concentration of power for coordination at the apex level in a federal polity had disaster written all over it. A successful relationship in a federal society should essentially be institutionalised at the different levels of the polity. The UF Congress mechanism could not take into account the concerns of not only the central or national level but also that of the various state units of the members of the alliance. Though the alliance was limited to the national level, it was imperative that the feelings of the state units of the Congress party be assuaged, as at the state level the various constituents of the UF were in direct competition with the Congress party. Consequently, there was bound to be tension and it was natural that in a federal polity the happenings in the states echoed in New Delhi. It would be, therefore, too much to expect from the CMP and the consultation between the top two leaders of the groups to ensure that the relations between the Congress and the UF would be incident free and harmonious.

This would explain why there was no hitch between the two groups as long as P.V. Narasimha Rao was the president of the Congress party and parliamentary leader and H.D. Deva Gowda the leader of the UF alliance. They personally hit off well thus ensuring a healthy state of relations between the two partners. However, with a change in the leadership of the Congress, the relations between the UF and the Congress started going downhill. Sitaram Kesri and Deva Gowda obviously were not comfortable
with each other and it was only a matter of time that things soured.\textsuperscript{65} Furthermore, Gowda was also accused of meddling in the internal affairs of the Congress party.\textsuperscript{66} To make matters worse, Gowda continued to meet Rao even after the leadership change within the Congress.\textsuperscript{67} It was after one such meeting that Kesri decided to pull the plug.

One of the conditions that the president laid down before inviting Gujral to form the UF II government was that there had to be a formal and institutionalised coordination mechanism between the Congress and the UF.\textsuperscript{68} The next UF Prime Minister, Gujral, it may be noted, went out of his way to keep Kesri in good humour.\textsuperscript{69} However, here though personal

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\textsuperscript{65} Sitaram Kesri, speaking to the press a few days after, he was elected as the Congress president when queered about the special relationship he had with the Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal President Laloo Prasad Yadav replied ‘I have good relations with leaders of all political parties, be it Indrajit Gupta (CPI), Harikishen Surjeet (CPM), V.P. Singh (JD), ChandraShekar (SJP). It was not surprising to see whose name was missing on the list. Kesri had obviously not had a chance to interact with Deva Gowda whose political career had primarily been at the state level. The Hindu, 30 September, 1996. After the fall of the UF I government, Indrajit Gupta in a TV interview clearly noted that the Gowda and Kesri did not get along well. Kesri is supposed to have told him this man, the Prime Minister, is treating us like an enemy and wants to destroy my party and could not sit quietly and tolerate it. Ever since i became president of the Congress he seems to think I am a potential enemy or rival of him, which I am not. The Hindu, 18 April, 1997.

\textsuperscript{66} Sitaram Kesri in his first press conference had appealed to the UF no to try to break the Congress and he is reported to have informally indicated that the UF was trying to lure away Congress members by offering them various posts. The Hindu, 7 October, 1996; Another point of irritation was the fact that a PIL, had been filed in the Delhi High Court asking the CBI to investigate into Kesri’s assets. Kesri suspected the Prime Minister and his lieutenant C.M. Ibrahim to be behind the move. At an AICC meeting on the birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, Kesri publicly lambasted the government for attempting to foist corruption cases against him. The Hindu, 15 November, 1996.

\textsuperscript{67} The list of meetings is available in Appendix 3.1 of this study, K.Karunakaran, a CWC member and former Chief Minister of Kerala who had acted as a liaison man between Kesri and Gowda once remarked at a press conference in Thrishur (Kerala), In the Congress party the Congress parliamentary party leader is subordinate to the party president, and whoever wants to know the position of the party on any major issue must consult the president. The Hindu, 17 October, 1996.

\textsuperscript{68} It had been decided that a two level coordination mechanism would be established. One at the parliamentary level through a committee headed by the Prime Minister consisting of five members each from the UF and the Congress and the second one outside the parliamentary level through a direct interaction between the Prime Minister and the Congress president. The Congress is reported to have suggested that they have a formal mechanism outside the parliamentary level also, but the left and Gowda within the UF had opposed such an arrangement. The Left insisted that they should be free to criticize each other politically. The Hindu, 24 April, 1997.

\textsuperscript{69} The list of meetings between the two found in Appendix 3.1 of this study shows that they met mostly over lunch and dinner. Other members of the alliance also testified to this close and cordial relationship that was shared by the Prime Minister and Kesri. A CWC member Vijaya Bhasakar Reddy and former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh noted that the excellent equation between the two was a reflection of the coordination between the UF and the Congress. The Hindu, 04 October, 1999.
relations help, what matters more is whether the partnership can sustain itself beyond that. The Congress as it appears had some aversion to reach any formal agreement. It rejected the proposal for a formal coordination committee with the UF-I when it was put forward.

Under the UF-II the promised coordination mechanism with the Congress never took off. It was reported that the UF constituents apparently could not agree as to its composition. The Congress took the opportunity to back off by asking the UF to name its members first. The mechanisms that were established by the UF, therefore, were inadequate to the task.

Secondly, this organisation of contact between the Congress and the UF was ill suited to the federal polity, as all powers concentrated at the national level. The Congress refused to acknowledge that it was composed of numerous state or regional units who could also have their own concerns. One of the main reasons for the souring of relations between the Congress and the UF, besides the personal relations factor, was the fact the UF refused to support the BSP, with whom the Congress had an electoral alliance to form a government in Uttar Pradesh. It must be noted that it was the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee which was the first to appeal to the central leadership to withdraw support from UF government. Kesri had even gone personally to the SC meeting of the UF to enlist the support for a BSP government in the state. He wanted the UF to make some compromise. He even suggested that this move to support a government headed by Mayawati would signal both social justice and gender equality. The UF, however, could not accept this logic, as one of its partners—

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71 Kesri had attended the 15 October, 1996 meeting of the SC. The SP in the UF was however adamant that a Mayawati led government should not be supported and threatened to walk out of the alliance. Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP) incidentally did not taken part in this meeting. *The Hindu*, 16 October, 1996.
SP, was an important player in the state. This non-cooperation by the UF not only led to a break-up of the BSP-Congress alliance but also enabled the BJP a wide threat to the Congress, to subsequently form the government there.

This one point contact mechanism between the two partners was also ill suited in other ways. It was downright undemocratic. When the cabinet was being run in a collegiate manner and government was a coalition the coordination mechanism too was be a collective affair too. A collegiate mechanism displaces the personal relationship factor and has better shock absorbing capabilities.\(^{72}\) After the fall of the UF-I government we see that the two groups actually attempted a collegial mode of interaction to sort out differences between them. It was after such deliberations that the UF agreed to change its leader.\(^{73}\) Secondly, this concentration of power caused more problems for the Congress than the UF. Sitaram Kesri faced dissidence within his own party and claimant for his post cropped up even before he could warm himself to the task. The pull out of the Congress from the UF- II arrangement actually was a result of an internal power struggle within the party.\(^{74}\)

Every coalition gives some space to its members to criticise the functioning of the alliance and to distance themselves from unfavourable issues. It is this elasticity that gives it the strength, as it enables groups to take care of their respective constituencies and interests and also makes them come to terms with the compromises that have to be endured or are

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\(^{72}\) P.V. NarashimhaRao, speaking for the Motion of Confidence, moved by H.D. Deva Gowda had the foresight to note that whatever personal angularities may appear from time to time, we will have this statesmanship, we will have the good sense to keep them aside and go ahead with a firm hand and with a firm resolve that democracy shall succeed and shall be vindicated in this country. XI Lok Sabha Debates, Session 1, Wednesday, 12 June, 1996.

\(^{73}\) See Appendix3.1

\(^{74}\) The clinching evidence to this is the fact the cause celebre, the Jain Commission report on the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case ceased to be a issue for the party beyond the few week after the leaks of it appeared in the India Today (New Delhi) and its subsequent pullout of the government. The Congress had no shame in asking the very same constituents of the UF to support its claim to form the government after the 1998 General Elections.
inherent in a coalition. This space or limit varies from coalition to coalition and it ensures that parties can maintain their distinct identity without altogether melting within the commonality of the alliance. The UF also gave its members the necessary space for such activity. The Left Front used it most frequently. They were uneasy partners to the economic liberalization programme of the government and spared no opportunity to attack the government policies on this count. Such criticism, as long as, does not undermine the alliance is a healthy sign as it is an acknowledgement of the plurality of opinions and the fact that the alliance is working.

The partners were also not always happy with the functioning of the coordination mechanisms. The Left Front within the coalition felt that the SC did not meet often and many important decisions were taken behind its back. Many decisions like the disinvestment in the public sector, the proposed formation of the new state of Uttarakhand, and the raising of prices for petroleum products were not brought before the SC until demanded by the allies. The formation of the Core Committee within the UF had also caused a down gradation of the SC, as most decisions were now being taken there and later rubber-stamped at the SC. There was also

75 The CPM for instance expressing disillusionment with the UF government performance even accused the government of acting on the agenda of the Congress and the BJP. They were critical of the government announcement, regarding the formation of the new state of Uttarakhand, which incidentally was on the BJP agenda. They also believed the economic policies of the UF government were similar to the liberalisation policies of the previous Congress regime.

76 ChittaBasu (AIFB), speaking to the press, The Hindu, 1 September, 1996; A.B. Bhardhan (CPI), was unhappy with the functioning of the UF government and held that the process of collective decision making was not being adhered to. The Hindu, 28 October, 1996.

77 Even on issues that were brought before the SC the Left felt that the Government adopted a cavalier attitude. For instance when a meeting was specifically called on the TPDS issue and the Finance Minister was to present his views, he did not attend the meeting. Furthermore when the Prime Minister was asked about the note that the Finance Minister had prepared on the issue, he is said to have replied that he forgot to bring the note for the meeting. The Hindu, 17 September, 1997.
the accusation that the UF was personality oriented leading to a reduction of space for a consensual approach.

Indrajit Gupta, the Home Minister in the UF government was of the opinion that since the coalition was being backed by supporting parties who were numerically significant for its survival there should be some proper machinery for regular consultation and coordination which was not there. He suggested that a rotational system of chairman for the committee would have been appropriate. Considering that there were numerous parties in the alliance, he believed that there should have been a much more careful handling of the perceptions of the different partners. They must be consulted more frequently and more thoroughly. This was also not done sometimes that is why some parties were openly criticizing the government.  

Similarly, K. Karunanidhi had also at one point of time contemplated pulling out of the UF and supporting it from outside, as he felt that the members were pursuing their individual minimum programmes and not the CMP.  

FAILURE OF THE UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT

The United Front coalition government led by Deve Gowda was like a chariot being pulled at times in different directions by 13 horses. There were personality clashes among the United Front leaders because of which the United Front lacked cohesion. The Front's relationship with the Congress was particularly unsteady. In the spring of 1995, the Congress appeared to be keen to replace the United Front government by a government of its own in coalition with a different set of more likeable allies. Having failed in doing so, it sought a face-serving device in dictating a change in the leadership of the United Front Deve Gowda to I.K. Gujral both from the Janta Dal on the plea of the insensitivity of the

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former to the interests and perceptions of the Congress. Finally, the Congress withdrew its support to UF in November 1997. Thus the UF Government could govern for only 19 months and the eleventh Lok Sabha was dissolved on 3 November, 1997.80

Subsequent developments after the untimely collapse of the UF coalition affected the three major forces in different terms. The BJP and its allies became the greatest beneficiary and the two other important players – Janata Dak and Congress remained weak, disorganized and divided.81

THE BJP-LEAD NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE-1

The 12th Lok Sabha elections provided opportunities to the largest political party, the BJP, led coalition governments at the centre. The only significant difference between the coalition governments of two phases was that in the latest phase, the coalition government had quite a comfortable majority whereas, number of partners sharing power at the Centre increased.

A relatively more stable coalition pattern was witnessed in the case of 1998 elections. On the one hand, there was BJP with 19 coalition partners, the Congress with six allies and the UF with eight partners. But the crown was worn by the BJP, which had the maximum number of partners and had reached the magic number of 270 seats in Parliament depicted in the table below.

The BJP had truly emerged as an all India party like Congress and there was an addition of only 18 seats to BJP’s 1996 tally. It was able to establish a strong presence in the South and in the East areas and was no longer a party solely of the Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi speaking areas. At the same time the improved status of the BJP in the 12th Lok Sabha election results and the BJP’s conciliatory approach to regional parties

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Table: 3.2

BJP Led National Democratic Alliance in 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BJP led National Democratic Alliance in 1998 Re-Electoral Allies</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Votes in Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>25.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDMK</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samata Party</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJD</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIJC</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMK</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDMK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lok Shakti</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVP</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamizhaga Rajiv Cong (o)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maneka Gandhi</td>
<td>01</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buta Singh</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satnam S. Kanth</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Sub-Total (A)</strong></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post- Electoral Allies</th>
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<th>Votes in Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HLD (R)</td>
<td>04</td>
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<td>AC</td>
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<td>SDF</td>
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<td>MSCP</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens Common Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSMC</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
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<td>TDP</td>
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<tr>
<td>JKNC</td>
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<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Indians@</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJP (Anand Mohan)++</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total (B)</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (A+B)</strong></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
<td>41.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Balveer Arora, Negotiating Differences: Federal coalitions and National Cohesion, in Zoya Hasan (ed.) *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 194. Notes: @ nominated members ++ Anand Mohan defected from RJP to support the NDA
further strengthened ties between the BJP and many regional parties. This relationship was based on two emerging political realities. First the BJP learnt that regional parties and assertion of socio-cultural realities were unavoidable forces whose support and cooperation was fundamentally required for government formation. Therefore, it was essential for the BJP to show both a moderate attitude and to get prepared for a common agenda for governance. Second, it also remained silent on three controversial issues - Ram Mandir, Article 370 and Uniform civil code, not as any retreat from its ideological commitment but as a functional necessity to temporarily smoothen the means of achieving power. Compulsions of electoral politics and the prospects of victory in the elections had prompted the BJP to adopt a much more moderate posture. This coupled with the strategic alliances have contributed to the end of the political untouchability of the BJP and enhanced its ability to stake a claim to power sharing in New Delhi.

Further, it is to be noted that after the election results of the 12th Lok Sabha elections, about 95 MPs of regional parties provided support to the BJP. This political support was again based on polarization of regional parties. This clearly shows that smaller and regional parties have made significant presence in several states. In the North East, regional parties were a dominant force. In the East, they have emerged powerful. In South, they have expanded their area of influence from Tamil Nadu to Andhra Pradesh. North India shows the balanced strength of regional parties. In the West, regional parties have doubled their strength in the 12th Lok Sabha elections.

For the first time, the BJP accepted the reality of growing regionalism in politics. Thus, in the 12th Lok Sabha, the BJP and its allies

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82 Ibid, p.165.
formed the coalition government of total 18 political parties. It remained in power for approximately 18 months which also included five months as a BJP-led Caretaker Coalition government at the centre. However, this coalition failed to win the vote of confidence in February, 1999 due to the opposition of the Congress and other parties.

Thus in 1998 the most important factor that brought BJP and its allies to Lok Sabha in such large numbers was the alliance that BJP struck in different parts of India. Although it was anticipated that such a coalition might provide stability to Indian politics but this did not happen. The poles within the BJP-led coalition took their toll and finally fell after 13th months of rule and the Vajpayee government lost the vote of confidence by one vote i.e. 269-270.

This chapter presents a critical account of Indian experience with the coalition government at national level. It examined in detail the formation, maintenance and break down of each coalition government up to 1998. India experienced its first experiment with coalition in 1937 at institutional level when elections to the provincial legislature were held in 1937. The Congress had a tacit electoral understanding with the Muslim League when it was not fully confident of a decisive majority in the United Provinces Legislature. Besides this, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were broadly given representation in Interim government of 1946.

Congress enjoyed a hegemony in government from 1952-1967 at centre and state levels. It was turning point in Indian political history when non- Congress governments were formed in eight states in 1967. This happening witnessed the decline of Congress at the state levels. The post -1967 periods represents a decline in Congress strength nationally, and in state after state. In the post –Emergency Elections of 1977, the Congress faced a temporarily united opposition consisting of the Janata Party, formed just before the elections, and having a seat adjustment with
Jagjivan Ram’s Congress for Democracy, and the CPI (M), thus consisting of virtually the entire opposition except for the CPI and DMK. But this typical coalition could not survive for a full term collapsed in 1979 due to the mismanagement and high ambitions of the leaders involved in this coalition.

Congress restored its position in 1980 again with nearly two third majority following the disintegration of the Janata Party. But 1989 elections marked another turning point with the congress crashing to 39.5 per cent and 197 seats against an opposition of electoral alliance consisting of seat adjustment, of the National Front coalition of the Janata Dal, regional and minor parties supported by the BJP and the Left parties. This was the time when the coalition politics emerged in India in true sense. The National Front government also met the same fate as it was in case of Janata Party. Diverse issues played role in the decline of National Front government. Mismanagement along with the issues of Ram Mandir and Mandal Commission was mainly responsible for defection in the National Front support. Economic crises further worsened the situation during the Prime Ministership of Chandershekher. Consequently, the National Front collapsed when Congress withdrew its support. Congress again formed the government in 1991 under the leadership of P.V. Narsimha Rao which managed the majority and successfully completed its five year term.

The election of 1996 witnessed the rise of BJP having 162 seats, which made it the largest party in the Lok Sabha. As a result, it formed the government only for 13 days. Then United Front was formed by Left Front and National Front. They formed the government under the Prime Ministership of H.D. Deve Gowda and was supported by Congress from outside. The Congress withdrew the support from Deve Gowda government in April 1997, but continued the support to the United Front government Prime Ministership under the I.K. Gujral. But Congress again
withdrew the support from I.K. Gujral government on the issue of Jain Commission report in November 1997 which led to the collapse of government.

The NDA was formed during the Mid-Term Elections of 1998. Large scale defections in Janata Dal, National agenda for governance, Coordination Committee, headed by Naidu, and Charismatic leadership of A.B. Vajpayee were the main factors which helped in formation of the NDA. Both Pre-Poll and Post-Poll alliances were forged with other regional parties. But in April 1999 AIADMK chief Jayalalitha withdrew her support from the NDA on the issue of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat. The NDA managed other regional parties named INLD of O.P. Chautala from Haryana and DMK of M. Karunanidhi from Tamil Nadu but it could not help it in saving the government. Moreover, BSP promised to abstain from the voting in the house but ultimately it participated in the voting and went against the NDA. Consequently, the NDA collapsed by the margin of one vote after the period of 13 months.