CHAPTER-2
Coalition Politics: A Theoretical Overview

Theorizing the coalition politics of India because of her size, plurality and complexity is very essential. However, at the same time it is unavoidable because of the greatest political reality of India entering into the coalition era. As an area of intense political study, coalition politics has been both an object of empirical analysis as well as elaborate theorization. The politics of coalition has been approached primarily through two schools of traditions viz. firstly, the European Politics tradition and secondly, the Game-Theoretic tradition.¹ Both of these have evolved in different directions quite independent of each other. Most of the game theoretic work is America-centered, expressing itself in dense mathematical models and notations mostly incomprehensible. The European tradition specialists have, consequently declared it almost irrelevant, although both the traditions talk about precisely the same thing, but they are simply using different approaches to do so. Keeping in view the focus of these work coalition theories which are relevant to the study of coalitions within the Indian context has been discussed in the text to follow.

APPROACHES TO COALITION POLITICS

Politics of coalition have generated intense research giving rise to plethora of theoretical postulations. Various attempts made so far have been categorized into three different approaches through which the empirical validity of coalition experiments has been put into theoretical framework. Each approach has a range of theories and each theory within an approach shares certain key postulations with other such theories,

however, each is distinct in its intricacies. None of the theory or approach is sufficient to explain the Indian complexity. Therefore there is a need to derive a skeletal understanding and try to empirically validate the Indian experience collectively through them.

Barbara Hinckley\(^2\) has categorized the major approaches to the coalition study in three broad classes, viz. The social psychological approach, game theoretic approach and the empirical political approach.

**The Social Psychological Approach**

This approach comes from sociology and social psychology. It is both theoretical as well as empirical. It is theoretical because it seeks to identify and explain recurring patterns of coalition behaviour, but it is also empirical because it concentrates on how coalition players actually behave in the real world under different conditions. The theory develops with and depends for its support on evidence from concrete events. William Gamson has reviewed the theories of the social psychological approach.\(^3\) Firstly, *the minimum resources theory* implies that the relative resources of the actors determine the coalition formation. They seek to maximize their share of payoff at least proportionally to their initial resources. This is called the parity norm and parity here means a commensurate gain according to the resources. This theory further predicts that a coalition are formed in which all the resources are minimal, but sufficient to win. This may broadly be termed as *minimum winning coalition theory*.

Another important theory is the *minimum power theory*, which is an adaptation of game theory. It emphasizes the relative power of the players rather than their initial distribution of resources. Players’ ‘*pivotal*’ power is the proportion of times. Their resources can change a losing coalition into


a winning one. Players expect a share of pay off proportional to their pivotal power rather than their initial resources\textsuperscript{4}. However, experimental test of this theory has shown discrepancies in it and has given rise to \textit{anti-competitive theory}. This theory believes that attitudes about competition and bargaining, personality differences and other factors may lead the players to form coalitions larger than minimum size. It holds that coalitions will be formed along the lines of least resistance, i.e. between those partners for whom exists the most obvious and unambiguous solution to the problem of dividing the relative share of the pay off\textsuperscript{5}.

Finally, there is a \textit{random choice theory}, which, is a reflection of conditions which are not conducive to rational calculation and analysis and thus, coalition formation by this theory is the best as an essential random choice process\textsuperscript{6}.

\textbf{Game Theoretical Approach}

Pioneered by J. Von Neumann and O. Morgenstern, this mathematical game –theoretical approach was popularized by William Riker. This approach is not concerned with explaining actual coalition behaviour, but with elaborating the formal logical relationships in a given situation. This theory originated from the presumption that problems in politics can be dealt as if they were games like chess, bridge or poker in which players adopt rational strategies to maximize their returns. They have resources, goals and defined sets of rules of the game and they calculate the best way to achieve their goals and move accordingly after considering all factors including the counter moves of the other players. This analogy is extended to coalition politics and political parties are treated as players of the game of politics\textsuperscript{7}.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p.86.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 87.
\textsuperscript{7} Sunil Kumar, Parties and Coalition Politics. \textit{Op.cit.}, n.1,p.3.
theory are:

- **Notion of dominance**: It implies that one outcome dominates another when there are groups of people who can make the first outcome occur and when each individual in this group prefers the first outcome to the second.

- **Notion of equilibrium strategy**: This is the selected strategy of a player, which is not influenced by the new knowledge of the strategies of other players.

- **Notion of value**: This notion suggests that the worth of the reward that a factor receives for participation in a coalition is proportional to the value added by that actor to the coalition. The value or power of an actor is proportional to how he can turn a losing coalition into a winning one by joining it.\(^8\)

The most important contribution of the game theory to the study of coalition politics is *size Theory or Size principle*. Riker says: "In n-person, zero sum games, where side payments are permitted, where players are rational and where they have perfect information, only minimum winning coalitions occur.\(^9\) Here, *n-person* means that number of persons participating in a game should be more than two. *Zero sum* condition implies that loss and gains of the participating players are equal. *Rationality conditions* mean that all players are rational beings and will therefore try to maximize their gains and minimize losses. Condition of *perfect information* implies the knowledge regarding the move, counter move, pay offs, and bargaining alternatives of the players.\(^10\) The game theory, however, relies heavily on mathematical tools and is somewhat difficult to follow.

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Empirical Political Approach

This approach seeks to explain a political phenomenon, whether an event, a process, or a relationship.¹¹ This approach seeks to explain how coalition players actually behave in a real world situation and observes the actual situation instead of creating an artificial one for the purpose of experiment.

In coalitions Cabinet formation is an area, which is considerably explored by the empirical political theorists. Problems of forming and maintaining coalition governments arise from multi-party systems when no single party emerges with majority seats in legislatures. Seven Groennings has given many hypotheses in this regard.¹² He has advanced specification of variables which form the basis of coalitions. These are:

- **Situational variable:** These are concerned with opportunities like strength and position of parties
- **Compatibility variables:** These relate to partners like their ideology, social base or leadership
- **Motivational variables:** These refer to propensities like desire for self identity preservation
- **Interaction variables:** These deal with methods like bargaining strategies

He also advances a model of coalition maintenance, which has five sets of variables. These are **apparatus variables** refer to leadership and decision making etc.; **motivational and communications variables** are concerned with rewards and losses, etc. **situational variables** encompass elections and other pressures, etc. **compatibility variables** are policy goals, reliability or resources of parties etc. and **strategic variables** are related to

strategies, size, position on ideological spectrum, etc.

Lawrence C. Dodd\textsuperscript{13} has refined the size theory of Riker and applied it to party politics with special emphasis on the durability of the governments. He has further developed Minimum Winning Coalition theory by adding two bargaining conditions. (1) If there is a generalized prior willingness of parties to bargain and; (2) When there is a high degree of information certainty. A generalized prior willingness to bargain refers to the readiness of all the parties to enter into coalition and information certainty means perfect information on the prior moves like offers, bargains and counteroffers etc and complete information as to the weight i.e., the voting strength of the party in the legislature. He defines the minimum winning coalition as a coalition of parties that has a reliable majority and yet contains no party in the coalition that is unnecessary to majority status.\textsuperscript{14}

All the above discussed approaches based on their strengths and weaknesses are individually insufficient to analyze empirical coalition realities. For instance, although the social psychological approach gives many theories, yet it fails to withstand the experimental test because it is primarily built on the basis of artificial settings. At the best it can be called as salient cue for decision making in a coalition situation, where the cue is some set of information about the players. Similarly, game theories try to quantify human preferences on the basis of parlour games; however, the suggested analogies have little scope for alliance politics of political parties. This is due to the very nature of alliance politics that is a dynamic process, quite out of reach for a rather static nature of almost all game theoretic ideas. Also, such perfect conditions like the rationality condition and the availability of complete information condition are difficult to


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
achieve in a real life situation. Similarly, the empirical political studies have their limitation too. They have been applied mainly to the formation of coalition cabinets. They have generated a lot of data on the subject but are not able to explain why two governments differ in their durability under similar situation.\textsuperscript{15}

After having discussed the primary approaches to the phenomenon and politics of coalition; it is necessary to discuss the two widely prevalent theories for understanding the nature of Indian coalition experiences.

**THEORIES OF COALITION POLITICS**

The first set of theories on coalition politics like the Power Maximization and the Policy Based theories are specifically concerned with coalition experiments and traces their nature. The second set of theories viz. the Electoral Systems theory and The Social Cleavage theory primarily deals with theories of the party system. The inclusion of the second set is pertinent because it is insufficient to analyze the complexity, dynamism and plurality of Indian coalition era singularly rather restrictive Western theorization. Since the scope of the present study extends to the broad study of the impact upon the federal nature of Indian polity, the resultant theoretical vastness is unavoidable.

The two theoretical sets adopt different approaches to coalitions and within each set the two theories present opposing perspectives on coalitions as discussed in the following text.

**Power Maximization and Policy Based Theories**

Power maximization theories predict minimum winning coalitions; while policy based theories predict minimum connected winning coalitions. The basic underlying idea is that in coalitions formed under compulsions of power, each party within the coalition would be

indispensable to the formation/survival of coalition. This is because lesser the number of parties sharing the coalition, larger the payoffs guaranteed to each member. On the other hand, policy based coalitions celebrate the coming together of like minded political parties - which lie adjacent on the ideological scale and are at least not incompatible on major issues. This reduces the number of coalition partners and hence, restricts the number of total coalition partners in the government.

The basic assumption of these two sets of theories that the rational choice of any actor should support minimum winning coalitions, however on the contrary empirical evidence around the world points to the extensive presence of coalitions that have not been minimum winning. While it is documented that around the globe, only 33 per cent of all non-single party majority coalition governments, and only 42 per cent of all coalition governments formed in twenty long-standing democracies in the period from 1945-95 have been minimally winning. Secondly, the simplistic assumptions made by these two theories fail to rationalize the extensive presence of minority governments including minority coalitions in hung parliament situations or also another extreme of this size factor, that is, surplus majority coalitions, which have coalition partners redundant for a majority number.

Thus, one of the most intriguing questions in theoretical analysis of coalition situation remains as to why do hung parliament situations across the globe, fail to produce minimum winning power theory or minimum connected winning policy theory coalitions. This is an anomaly which requires us to discuss the two set of theories in detail in order to derive a deeper understanding of the reasons behind such aberrations or to disqualify the non existence of (the limited set of) predicted patterns as aberrations.

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Power Theory

The major theorists in this tradition are those of Riker,\textsuperscript{17} Gamson,\textsuperscript{18} and Dodd\textsuperscript{19}. According to Riker ‘\textit{minimum winning coalitions}’ may be defined as a coalition in which each party is indispensable to the coalition's prospect of winning a simple majority of seats. In such coalitions, each member's share of the pay off is maximized. This is called the \textit{size principle}. Size principle theories can have variants because there can be more than one minimum winning coalition in many distributions of seats. Therefore, one can have variants of \textit{minimum winning coalitions} such as \textit{minimum size coalitions} in which the number of legislators of the winning coalition is minimized to a number just enough to win a majority, or \textit{minimum- number- of parties’ coalition} in which the number of coalescing parties necessary to win a majority is minimized.\textsuperscript{20}

An important corollary of size principle theories is that pivotal parties are especially strongly placed to extract rewards disproportionate to their size, particularly those that can threaten to leave and enable the formation of an alternative coalition in which they are also pivotal. Thus, in certain circumstances, very small parties which are pivotal to coalitions can extract disproportionate rewards and hold much larger partner and parties to ransom.\textsuperscript{21}

Varying from case to case extraneous criteria and considerations may be weighed to form minimum winning coalitions such as seeking parties that have similar agenda and programme perspectives. However, an

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
implicit rule is that Cabinet formation cannot last indefinitely. Therefore, the longer the coalition bargaining process lasts, the more is the pressure for a Cabinet to be formed. In Riker's system, a *generalized a-priori willingness of parties'* to bargain pertains to selling of parliamentary systems where all parties are willing to consider entering a Cabinet coalition with any other party.\textsuperscript{22} Lawrence Dodd however upstages Riker and states that the type of coalition that forms the cabinet will depend on the bargaining conditions. According to him, if the parliamentary conditions were highly constrained in their willingness to bargain among themselves, there would be a tendency towards minority cabinets. Also, the availability of a set of parliamentary parties that are willing to bargain would be a factor crucial to the entire exercise. Thus, this willingness shall determine whether it will be a minimum winning coalition or an over sized coalition.\textsuperscript{23}

Riker adds the important factor of *information certainty uncertainty*, which determines the precise size of coalition. Simply put it means, the more the information uncertainty, the more will be the desire of parties to seek compensation and thus, the greater would be the number and size of extra parties in the coalition.\textsuperscript{24} However, Dodd points out that increase in information certainty can give rise to both oversized and undersized coalitions because in such situations where there is an information that undesirable parties can bargain and mutually find maneuverability and acceptance, calculations and negotiations would take more time and under constraints that exist in parliamentary bargaining, parties would be forced to settle for smaller coalitions than the best one possible, rather than enter coalitions that may be undesirable.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Lawrence Dodd, *Op.cit.*, n.19, p.44.
Riker-Dodd theory is generally applicable to multi-party parliaments because the important constituents of this theory - the bargaining conditions and cabinet coalition status can be perceived more clearly. It may also be applied to the parliaments which have dominant one party majority rule, in which case the single party formed cabinet can be considered as essentially a minimum winning cabinet. It has both a low level of bargaining constraints and high information certainty and is also more durable.

**Policy Based Theories**

Policy-based theories, on the other hand, predict minimum connected winning coalitions, i.e., coalitions that are composed of member parties adjacent on the ideological scale and at least are not incompatible on major issues, thus, minimizing the coalitions ideological span, and within this limiting condition, the minimum number of parties needed for a majority.26 As the table shows

<table>
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<th>Parties</th>
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<th>Right</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table: 2.1**

**Cabinet Coalition Predicted by Five Coalition Theories for a Hypothetical Distribution of Parliamentary Seats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal winning Coalition</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>ADE</td>
<td>BCD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal size Coalition</td>
<td>ADE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal no. of parties Coalition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum connected winning Coalition</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>BCD</td>
<td>CDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal policy range Coalition</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>BCD</td>
<td>CE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As the table illustrates, there are five given parties on the left to

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right ideological scale with party ‘A’ on the extreme left and party ‘E’ on the extreme right. Policy based theories predict coalitions which are ideologically stable, i.e. they are what is called as *minimum connected winning coalitions*. Thus coalitions between parties ABC and BCD and CDE will be the coalitions between parties that are ideologically similar to one another. On the other hand *minimum size coalitions* are more concerned with restricting the number of coalition partners to a minimum, in order to increase the share for each partner. All the other theories are more or less variants of these two theories.

Policy based theories were developed by later game theory proponents. This theory assumes that parties that are congenial in policy terms can only make coalitions. They need to share elements of ideological similarity or what Robert Axelrod stated - successful coalition should consist of parties that are *spatially connected*, i.e., ideologically similar\(^{27}\). The empirical evidence available on comparative literature on coalition politics stands to support policy based theories, not merely for the sake of compatibility of coalition formation, but also far more importantly, for coalition longevity.\(^{28}\)

Robert Axelrod,\(^{29}\) Abram De Swaan,\(^{30}\) Michael Leiseison\(^{31}\) and Seven Groennings\(^{32}\) are some of the theorists belonging to this school of thought. In short, policy based theory postulates that coalition cabinets, realistically speaking, must agree on a package of proposed government policies. This is so because policy is an intrinsic end value for itself rather


\(^{29}\) Rober Axelrod, *Conflict of Interest*, Chicago: Markham, 1970.


than as an instrument used by the politicians to gain office. Thus, through this theory the role of cleavage conflict in coalition formation is highlighted. Also, it is suggested that parties must seek to minimize the policy range between themselves and their partners. A variant of this is the minimal policy range coalition, one that minimizes the policy distance between the coalition’s extremes.33

Indeed, policy based theories of coalitions have been extended to see coalition formation not as an episodic event but as a stage in a continuous cycle of elections, government formation, policy implementation and all such activities in which party competition takes place.

Empirical evidence from the comparative literature on coalition politics tends to weigh in favour of policy based theories. Hence, often the stress is on the element of compatibility for coalition formation and even more for coalition.

Longevity landed there has been instances of coalition governments in Western Europe, which have contributed to general success of democracies.34 Many scholars support this view. For example, E. Sridharan states that about two thirds of the majority coalitions in developed countries in the post-war period have been ideologically connected. This is true especially in the politics of Israel where clear ideological and social division contribute to fairly stable support based for political parties. However, it is equally important to keep in mind that within these

constraints, pay off maximization plays a very powerful behavioural role.\textsuperscript{35}

Another way of looking at power maximization and policy-based theories is the one which divides the motivations of politicians and the political cultures of societies into \textit{opportunist} and \textit{partisan} politics. A society's politics is said to be opportunistic if the pursuit of political office is primarily for the fruits of power of the office for one's own sake. Partisan politics, on the other hand, is the one where the pursuit of office is for changing public policy in the direction desired by the contestant party's ideology and social constituency.\textsuperscript{36} Likewise, manipulation of policy whilst in office to serve the purpose of getting reelected (the ultimate goal of a political party) is the characteristic feature of opportunistic parties and politicians.

\textbf{Coalitions and Electoral Systems Theory}

As the name suggests this theory postulates that there are different implications for the likelihood as well as the behavioural characteristics of coalition governments under the proportional representation and plurality ruled electoral systems. Accordingly, this is termed as a regime level attribute of coalition government. In brief, the main argument is as follows: In PR systems, parties get seats in proportion to their votes so these systems are more prone to throw up coalition governments. This is so because in general, no single party gets half the votes necessary for half the seats. At the same time it highlights a reality absolutely critical to coalition behavior and stability, \textit{i.e.}, any coalition at the best is only second best situation for every major political party. Thus, each party during the coalition’s lifetime will seek to position itself to improve its vote and seat share in the next election. As a result, conflict is built into coalition. Thus,


\textsuperscript{36} E. Sridharan, "Coalition Politics", \textit{Seminar}, p.54.
in every coalition there is jockeying for long-term electoral gains along with short-term maximization of power among its members.

The implications of electoral system theory for the plurality rule electoral system are quite different. In these systems coalitions tend to be rare due to seat-vote disproportionality in which plurality suffices for a legislative majority. Therefore, the dynamics prevailing is quite different from the one operative under the PR systems. Thus, there is the inevitable competition for long term electoral gains (increased vote share) as well as short term power maximization. Competition and suspicion among the coalition partners is likely to be much more intense because a small swing in popular support can hugely increase or alternatively decimate a party in terms of seats, potentially either putting it in power on its own or destroying any chance of it being in the government.37

The electoral systems theory as a result predicts coalitions in PR systems to be fairly stable. This is because at least partly, in the inevitable jockeying for increased vote share in the next election, the member parties are not under the fear that a swing will dramatically reduce their seat strength due to the proportionality rule and also because there is an improbability of huge swings in this system.

For the Plurality Rule system the Electoral Systems theory however has some important implications which are applicable to India as well. Some of those are being mentioned here. Firstly, the instability and short-lived character of coalitions in plurality rule systems like those of India is due to the incentives created by the structural characteristics of such systems. Where politics is substantially about access to state resources (power for power's sake), the possibility of being politically wiped out would matter much more. In such a situation, coalitions and minority governments tend to be unstable, with strong incentives for members or

external supporters, who perceive themselves as losing strength to terminate the arrangement or constantly blackmail the government about withdrawing support.\textsuperscript{38}

Secondly, the plurality-rule system tends to encourage minority governments rather than majority coalitions. This is so because the seat-vote disproportionality causes greater electoral volatility in terms of seats. As a result, there is a greater incentive for major opposition parties keeping the longer time horizon in mind to stay in the opposition or at best be external supporters of a minority government or a coalition government. By this, they hope to remain unaffected by this policy record (of failure) to present themselves as a credible alternative in the next election.

Thus, the regime-level attribute of the plurality system sharply differentiates coalition formation and behaviour in the Indian case from cases based on P.R systems and provides powerful support to the extension of coalition theory to 'party competition as a whole' looking at the impact of elections on the politics of coalition and on future elections. It also looks at the impact of the politics of coalitions on elections and future government formations.\textsuperscript{39}

Thirdly, in the plurality rule system aggregation imperatives tend to give incentives to politicians to form indiscriminate, non-programmatic, purely power-oriented, pre-electoral coalitions or even seat adjustments. These arrangements are criticized for being only partial and not true coalitions. This occurrence is explained because of an imperative of winning the single largest number of votes under the plurality rule at the constituency level as well as at more aggregated levels. As a result, this leads to indiscriminate pre-electoral coalitions as well as government formation, which are many a times ideologically incoherent and conflict ridden, hence, unstable coalitions or minority governments. Another moot

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, pp. 279-280.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
point is when party identity and organization is weak and client-oriented, there are strong incentives to split parties and engineer defections.  

The electoral systems theory despite being very elaborate and comprehensive is however not able to explain all the peculiarities of the Indian scenario. The non-suitability of the Duverger’s law can be cited as an example. According to this law, Plurality System tends to favour a two-party system. To explain the law in short: two factors are suggested for the emergence of a two-party system, viz., first, a mechanical reason where parties exploit electoral voting system to their advantage and second, a psychological reason where voters do not ‘waste’ their votes on candidates of those parties which are unlikely to win. This law is however not sufficient to explain the case of economically backward and yet politically highly mobilized regions of India such as the States of U.P. and Bihar. In these two states the preferences of the elite section of society does not influence rest of the society. The recent elections in Bihar present the reality of multi-party system and fractured verdicts.

**Social Cleavage Theory**

Social cleavages theory helps to explain few features of the Indian complexity. It implies that the party system reflects the principal cleavages in society, e.g., those in ‘ethno-culturally homogeneous industrialized societies’ and that the cleavages between the labour and capital are reflected through parties being positioned on a *Left-Right spectrum*. In brief, this theory predicts a high cognizance relation between political parties and social cleavages in deeply segmented societies. This theory shall be useful in the explanation of the ‘social essence’ of the Indian

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coalitional reality because it underlines the belief that politics is a mirror reflection of the society. Since the coalition era has come to stay Indian political arena, it is essential to understand the nature of this political development which has deep socio-cultural and economic implications.

Having discussed the various approaches and theories of coalition politics it would be appropriate to look into international experience which follows.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Regarding international experience there are aberrations in the simplistic assumptions of the two set of theories power and policy that while the rational choice of any actor (that should) support(s) minimum winning coalitions, empirical evidence around the world points to the extensive presence of coalitions that do not have minimum winning numbers. While, it is documented that around the globe, only 33 percent of all non-single party majority governments, and only 42 percent of all coalition governments formed in twenty long-standing democracies in the period from 1945-95 have been minimally winning. 44 International experience further throws up compelling figures with 21 percent of governments in western parliamentary democracies within the time span of 1945-99 have been minority governments, including well over half the governments in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden 45. Between 1945 and 1985 this figure rose to 43 percent where there were minority governments with no clear majority to any single party. 46 Obviously, the simplistic assumption made by these two theories fails to rationalize the extensive presence of minority governments (including minority coalitions) where the members of the parliament are large. Another extreme of this size factor is surplus majority coalitions having coalition partners redundant for

a majority number (see Table 2.2)

Table 2.2
World Democracies: Type and Duration of Governments
(1945-1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>SPM</th>
<th>MWC</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>SPMG</th>
<th>MC</th>
<th>CARETAKER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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1. C - Care taker
2. MWC - Minimal Winning Coalition
3. SC - Surplus Coalition
4. SPM - Single Party Majority Government
5. SPMG - Single Party Minority Government
6. OC - Oversized Coalition
7. MC - Minority Coalition
8. SMC - Surplus Majority Coalition
9. The 3 numbers in each cell depict No. of Governments, Total duration (in days) and average duration, respectively.

It is evident that minority governments appear to be a rational solution from the standpoint of both the party and parties in minority (single party or coalition) government. Some of the theoretical postulates that try and capture these aberrations in the power and policy coalition can be enlisted here as the following:

The two variables of: (a) size or dominance; and (b) centrality or ideological locations are determining factors.

- It can be explained that if a political party is dominant in size and ideologically more in the centre, it will form a minority government.47
- In its diametrically opposite pole lies the reason for surplus majority coalitions which accordingly suggests a smaller and more off-centre plurality party.
- This theoretical postulate detects minimum winning coalitions somewhere in the middle of this continuum.
- Further, each minority government situation can predict the presence

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or absence of more variables. For example, minority government can also be suggestive of an influential opposition. Minority governments appear to be rational solutions for opposition parties because in such circumstances parties in opposition have considerable effect on governmental policy due to the often-vulnerable nature of such governments.

- Minority coalitions appear to be rational solution if ideological differences militate against external supporters participating in the government as is the case in India. The existence of regionalized multi-partism in a federal system and the seat-vote disproportionality caused due to the FPTP system, a small swing in popular support can hugely increase or decimate the chances of a party in elections. This obviously tends to increase the chances of minority governments rather than majority coalitions as most parties are wary of greater electoral validity of Indian elections. A small anti strategy move can influence voter's opinion and many parties would prefer to preserve their chances of making it to the next elections than to go along with a coalition that could ‘taint’ its ideological stand.

- Similarly, on the other extreme, presence of a surplus majority coalition can be suggestive of hard bargains for the maintenance of coalition.

- In certain situations, surplus coalitions may result from situations when the expected utility of government is greater than the expected utility of the opposition.

- Surplus coalitions, including oversized coalitions are rational choice

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when (a) the effectiveness of policy is enhanced by taking on board redundant parties (not needed for a majority), i.e. when power is not a fixed pay off but a function of policy effectiveness and hence, greater power–sharing for consensus enables policy effectiveness. For example, when the government has to carry out major economic reforms or foreign policy initiative affecting national security; (b) for surplus majority coalitions alone, as a political insurance policy so as to reduce the pivotal power of smaller parties for a majority, as in certain coalitions where parties to the left or right of the dominant coalition partner are kept on board for this reason, and for surplus majority and oversized coalitions, as a political insurance policy against defection or political blackmail by factions within the leading party: and (c) for oversized coalitions, when in plurality-rule, electoral system, the seat majority of the dominant partners depends on the vote transfer of the supporters of the minor partners though their seats may not be numerically critical in the legislature elected.

- Difference between oversized coalition and the surplus majority coalition being the majority position of the largest party. While in former a single party spearheading the coalition has a majority on its own, in the latter although there are redundant partners but no single party has a majority on its own.

- Empirical experiences of coalitions set up on partisan lines predict coalitions organized around a dominant party of either Right or Left. Such coalition tends to be set up within the broader division between

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the Right and the Left, when either the Right or the Left is further divided into number of parties.\textsuperscript{52} At the international level, there have been liberal democratic coalitions set up in Norway, Sweden and France between 1958 and 1981. Sri Lanka also has witnessed the left-wing coalition.\textsuperscript{53}

Thus, one conclusion which we can draw at this stage is that there exists not a single rational solution for all given situations and the compulsions of various situations would create different necessities. Hence, there are different rational solutions for different political situations.

**COALITION THEORIES AND THEIR SUITABILITY TO THE CASE OF INDIA**

A political system has many complexities especially when it pertains to a country like that of India with her sub continental dimensions in a third world setting. Thus, in India, apart from the usual criteria that needs to be recognized and as laid down by the accepted theories on the subject theorization on political coalitions calls for slightly different perspective than it is usually seen within the West.

Coalitions are viewed as important mechanism through which caste, class, religious cleavages, regional or territorial based identities are put in a cohesive framework even in the absence of shared ideologies. So, apart from the general criteria, the importance of local or the regional factors drew attention in the game of coalitional power. In India, for instance, the issues of caste affiliation, regional group religious groups, linguistic and minority or majority affiliation, matter a great deal in the political arena. These criteria not only intervene and govern the coalition formation, but also their operation as well.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. 36-38.
In a traditional country like India, coalitions are necessary mechanism to rectify historical wrongs such as caste-class inequalities and discrimination. Thus coalitions apart from offering a representation or manifestation of the usual fractiousness that human associations are associated with to provide a recourse through political modalities such as coalition building for the sake of articulation and also at least as a hope for redressal of grievances. A number of scholars have viewed the result of the 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha elections in this light.  

The Indian electoral system is a single-member district, simple-plurality system in which voters cast a single ballot to choose a single representative to the Lower House of the Parliament or the State legislative assembly. The candidate with the largest number of votes, even if only a plurality, is declared elected to represent the constituency. There are at present 543 constituencies that send a single member each to the Lok Sabha with two members being nominated. This is known as the first past the post (FPTP) system. This system was adopted shortly after independence, following debates in the Constituent Assembly and the Parliament just prior to the adoption of the Representation of People Act, 1950 and 1951 and the first general election of 1952. The multi-member constituencies were abolished in 1961 following which the electoral system has been the single member FPTP system.

This electoral system produced a party system (1952 to 1984) in which the single largest party won plurality of the votes and majority of seats, and formed a single-party majority government. In all elections during this phase, the single largest party which formed the majority government was the Congress except in 1977 when Janata Party formed the

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54 How India Voted’ – Special Supplement, The Hindu, N.D. : 2004 and various other articles in various Newspapers and Magazines and Bidyut Chakrabarty, Indian Politics and society.

government supported by almost the entire non-Communist opposition. The single largest party never got a simple majority, the maximum percentage of votes received being 48 per cent by Congress in 1984, but always got a majority even several times a two-thirds or (in 1984) even a 4/5th majority.\(^5^6\)

However the party system changed from 1989. The Lok Sabha election results henceforth, were indicative of two interlinked processes viz. the breakdown of one party system in the 1980s and a parallel process of regionalization of politics through a multi party system so much so that today the all India parties and the regional parties compete for power at the centre. As a result, the seven general elections in India of 1989, 1991 1996, 1998 and 1999, 2004 and 2009\(^5^7\) have resulted in minority coalition governments. This was because of the decline of the Congress votes.

The critical threshold at which a vote plurality translated to a seat majority led to hung Parliaments and coalition politics.\(^5^8\) As a result the coalition governments and their politics have become an unavoidable reality of the Indian political system. It is because of this that the relevance of the study on coalitions and their implications as well as compulsions for the Indian polity have become unavoidable.

The available theories and approaches on coalition politics and their individual relevance shows that it is applicable not only to India but to all coalition governments. Although theoretically speaking it is possible to find coalitions which confirm to the pluralist view in each of these categories. The actual truth may lie somewhere in the middle.\(^5^9\) When there is stress on power maximization in a coalition, some policy arrangements are

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\(^{56}\) *Ibid*, p.341  
\(^{57}\) Lastest 2009 election have also brought forth a Congress dominated UPA coalition government back to power.  
inevitable and power maximization efforts may take place in policy-based coalitions too.

In a coalition era which has come to stay in Indian politics, the polity despite partisan still refutes to be simply characterized by single unilinear left-to-right ideological axis. Instead, today there are multiple-cross cutting axes in Indian politics with varied nature as the secular-communal, centralist-regional autonomy.60

In order to grasp the complex evolution of coalition politics in India, this thesis raises a few questions as to what is the nature of Indian coalition situation at the centre. Are they power oriented or policy oriented? These are some of the questions which will form the part of this study in subsequent chapters.

Having discussed the case of Indian coalition situation from the electoral system level of theorization it is pertinent to discuss and analyze the nature of the Indian case from the empirical point as well. Hence, there will be focus on the evolution of coalition governments at the national level since 1977 in the next chapter. It is important in reconceptualizing the major issues relating to the nature of Indian coalitions.61

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61 Bidyur Chakrabarty, Forging Power: Coalition Politics in India, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006.