CHAPTER-III

REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIAN FEDERAL SYSTEM:
A DEMAND FOR GREATER AUTONOMY

Ever since the independence many regional political parties have emerged in India and gained significant influence in some regions. Some political observers have hailed the resurgence of regionalism on the ground that the more regional parties come to power; the less will be the imbalance between the centre and states. It is claimed that regional parties would be better able to understand regional hopes and aspirations. India is a multi-lingual and a multi-cultural nation. The linguistics and cultural diversities give rise to separatist tendencies. The people living in a particular linguistic region tend to identify and attach themselves with that region. Political parties also try to exploit the ethnic and cultural factors. In a different sense, uneven development of regions also brings a sense of discrimination and alienation leading to the formation of regional parties. Regional parties were generally formed due to factionalism in the congress or other parties and were dissolved when accommodated in the power circles or absorbed by the parent organizations. Some of them had no particular ideology except to gain power. Most of such parties were headed by disgruntled leaders of the major parties without any cadres of proper organization. Since the first general elections in 1951-1952 the Indian political system has experienced the emergence of several regional and sub regional political parties. In a majority of cases these parties have come into existence because of the excessive centralism and monopolistic politics of the congress.
Particularly after the fourth general elections in 1967, the emergence of regional political parties to power and the crucial role played by these parties in some of the state is noteworthy.

India which is one of the largest countries of the world, after her independence, while recognizing the nature and extent of her social, political, cultural and economic diversities and taking cognizance of the fears, suspicions and prejudices that were subsisting among the different religious, regional, cultural, and linguistic communities consciously opted for a democratic set-up to process. Political parties are prominent feature of such democratic set-ups where in they play a vital role in the effective working of a political system. In fact, they supply the motive power, which keeps in wheel of administration moving. As such the growth and development of political parties are considered as an indispensable part of modern states. And in a parliamentary democracy, their importance need hardly be emphasized.

Keeping in view the importance of political parties in democratic governments, Maclver has said that "without political parties there can be no unified statement of principle nor orderly evolution of policy, no regular resort to the constitutional device of parliamentary elections, nor of course any of the recognized institutions by which a party seeks to gain or to maintain power". ¹ Huntington has gone a step further when he said, "a party less regime is a conservative regime". ² But a modern form of representative democracy increases the need for a party system. India being a no exception to it developed a multi-party system where in a number of national and regional
parties exist because of the regionally concentrated diverse groups found in the country. One of the specified classifications made by the scholars of the Indian polity is the division of Indian political parties into two broad categories national and regional or state parties. The regional parties play an important role in Indian politics but it is very difficult to define what is meant by a regional party.

Maurice Duverger's concept of minor party', he has coined this term referring to those parties which are 'minority minded' and which seemingly include regional, local and such other smaller parties formed on the basis of linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural interest. Regional party is that party which generally and exclusively operate within a limited geographical area with a state or which represents the interests of particular linguistic or cultural groups whose population may be concentrated in an area as small as a single Assembly constituency or as large as an entire state or region. Their programmatic focus is usually restricted towards specific issues of concern to their membership only or at best to their region.

Myron Weiner has observed that the term 'regional' should not be narrowed down to include in its only those parties which function exclusively in a particular state or section of the country but it should be broadened as to include such national parties which although claim a national character, outlook and philosophy, yet are pragmatically concerned primarily with the region in which they function. A regional party, therefore, can be defined precisely as an organized group of people having consciousness of their customs and ideals in set homogenous physical area and thus possesses a sense of
political identity distinct from the rest of the country, endeavours to share power at the national level, and tries to control government at regional level, promotes local and regional interests through militant and agitational approach and articulates a regional identity and particularism based on religion, language and culture etc. in India the rise of different regional parties in different states became harbinger of the politics of regionalism as after her independence the regional parties organized themselves primarily on the basis of four kinds of regionalism viz:

1. Demand of secession of state from the country as demanded by the DMK Party in Tamil Nadu and the regional parties of Nagaland and Assam.

2. Demand for separate statehood as made by master Tara Singh, the leader of the Akali party in Punjab.

3. Demand for more autonomy with regard to financial and administrative matters at local or regional level.

4. Demand for concessions on the basis of language, religion and culture so as to protect the rights and interest of a particular community. For example, the Akali Party stands for the protection of the rights of Sikh community and the DMK for non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. Thus, a regional party confines itself to the problems of its region and try to fulfill the local needs of the people.³

In the light of the above criteria, many parties claim themselves to be called as regional parties in the political scene of India. To
mention a few regional parties of India are, Akali Dal, DMK, AIADMK, All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, Telugu Desam, Karnataka Kranti Ranga, Sikkim Sangram parishad, Assam Gana parishad, APHLC and National Democracy party. All these regional parties are formed in Indian context.

The first criterion must, naturally, be the territorial differential. By its very nature, a regional party restricts its area of action to a single region, which, in the prevailing Indian situation, means a state. A party which extends its organizational network and electoral concerns over more states than one, becomes cross regional and, in proportion to its territorial extension, its regional commitment gets diluted since it may have to sort out the conflicting interests of its various state units. On the contrary, a cross regional party does not have an exclusively, or even predominantly-regional commitment per se though no political party, cross regional or All India, can always be indifferent to regional pressures. At times and particularly in respect of electorally sensitive area-specific issues, every party is prone to swim with the regional tide.

Our best example of a cross regional party is the Communist party of India (Marxist)- CPI (M). At the moment it controls three states, Tripura in the Northeast? West Bengal in the East and Kerala in South. It is particularly well entrenched in West Bengal having won three assembly polls (1977, 1982, 1987) in a row. The party has a noticeable presence in a few other states, such as the Punjab, while in the east, especially those in the Hindi heartland; its electoral support is marginal or non-existent. The communist party of India-CPI falls in
the same category even if it cannot claim a single state as its bastion. It is, nevertheless, a cross regional party since its electoral appeal is thinly but firmly spread over several states. Similarly, some other left parties like Forward Bloc, Revolutionary Socialist party and peasants and workers party, which have achieved some sort of a toe-hold in more states than one, are cross-regional rather than regional parties as they lack regional specificity which, as we have seen, is the hallmark of a genuine regional party.

Before it constitutes fell apart in 1979, the erstwhile Janata conglomerate was an all-India Party. Even though, its electoral strength lay primarily in the states north of the vindhyas it had a varyingly thin sprinkling of support in the four southern states. What remains of the Janata after its fragmentation can only be categorized as a cross-regional party. It is politically effective in only one state- Karnataka-but has a sizeable following in some others, such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. Whether or not its two factions are able to reunite, the Lok Dal remains a cross regional party with a fairly strong base in a number of states, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar. Another Cross-regional party, Bhartiya Janata party is, essentially, a party of the north. It enjoys considerable and committed (almost entirely Hindus) support in several states of the Hindi belt- Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. It has not so far succeeded in this determined endeavor to cut across the north-south divide but it must be noted that it has made a significant beginning in Kerala, where it has been able to put together a workable organizational infrastructure with a growing and dedicated cadre. It may be noted, in passing here, that the proposition that
opposition parties that is, parties other than the Indian National Congress-are, in effect, regional parties because they have regional pockets and, on specific issues, take regionalist positions is hardy tenable. Thus, we are left with the Indian National Congress-Congress (I) as the only archetypal All-India party.4

The second criterion of a regional political party is that it articulates and seeks to defend a regionally based ethnic or regio-cultural identity. Thus Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK) act as the voice and champions of Tamil cultural nationalism, against the inroads of what is perceived as the Aryan imperialism of the north. The shrill and confrontationist idiom in which the two parties conducted their politics until the mid-seventies has been substantially softened in recent years but the concern for Tamil identity and opposition to the imposition of Hindi continue to be the main planks in their platform.

N.T.Rama Rao a former matinee idol like his Tamil counterpart, M.G.Ramachandran, and his Telugu Desam burst into politics under the banner of Telugu gauravam or ‘self-respect’. The Akali Dal, in its various incarnations, has stuck tenaciously to its claim to be the defender of the interests of Sikh panth and the Punjab. Assam Gana Parishad was born out of the fierce popular movement, which sought to stem and reverse the tide of immigration from other state country, such as the West Bengal and from Bangladesh. At stake was the survival of Assamese identity.

The third criterion, it is in the very nature of a regional party to be “primarily concerned with exploiting local sources of discontent or
pressing a variety of primordial demands based on language, caste, community or religion”. 5 This is so because the electoral destiny of these parties is in separately linked with their respective regions. With no hope of capturing power or being able to play a decisive role at the centre, they perceive their essential role as pressure groups for protecting and promoting the interests of regional communities and, to that end, mobilizing local support by playing up real or imagined feelings of discrimination or deprivation. When N.T.Rama Rao opposes a ‘national policy’ on water resources which proposes to treat an entire river basin rather than the territorial limits of a state as a unit, his opposition results from the perception that the principle, if implemented, will trim his freedom to push on with his Telugu Ganga Project, despite the objections raised by neighbouring states like Karnataka. A similar perception characterizes the Akali claims in respect of the distribution of Ravi Beas waters among the Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan and the party’s insistence on the riparian principle. To sum up, a regional political party has a regional support base, a regional perspective and a regional issue-orientation.

Elections in India in 1989, 1991, and 1996 have underlined the rise of regional parties not only in electoral strength but also in political influence. Regional parties in the south have established themselves as powerful political groups not only at state level but also in the parliament. Similarly, the regional parties in the North-East part of the country as well as the parties in the North-West have indicated that none of the major national parties could do to without their active support and participation. It is due to such rise of the parliament has become a repeated feature of the election results for both the parliament and the state assemblies.
The National Parties have lost their political influence in the outlying regions and have generally become unable to gather such support from the electorate as would enable them to form the government on their own. In a general sense, the regional parties have highlighted the weaknesses of the main national parties, particularly of the Indian National Congress. Such weaknesses of the Congress party became first visible in 1967 when the party lost its position considerably in the states and had a reduced position in the parliament. But subsequent victories of the congress party in 1971 and 1972 re-established its position as the dominant party in such a way that it appeared that the regional parties had lost their position of advantage. The situation changed again in 1977 when for the first time a non-congress government was established at the centre by the Janata party coalition. This change again brought the position of the regional parties to forefront indicating the importance of the regional parties for their support to the government at the centre.

But this situation continued only for the couple of years of non-congress coalition, and from 1980 to 1987 again the congress party held sway over the whole country including the regional areas. It was in 1989 that Janata Dal Coalition gave an impetus to the regional parties for the anti-Congress position taken by them. The regional parties got an opportunity to become important contributors in the formation of the government at the centre. But this situation was short-lived and in 1991 the position of the congress party was re-established with a reduced numerical strength in the Lok Sabha. Due to this general ebb and flow of electoral politics, the regional parties at once became aware of their crucial position of advantage for political
bargaining in national politics. This became clearly evident after the 1996 elections when the Congress Party could not secure sufficient number of seats to form the government. It was the B.J.P, which secured the largest number of seats in the Lok Sabha, and the congress became the second party. But neither the B.J.P. nor the congress could muster sufficient support to constitute the government. This made the position of the regional parties inevitably important in the formation of a coalition government with other national parties who also had only a contributory strength.6

Thus, a coalition of thirteen parties was formed and became the United Front establishing a government at the centre with the support of the Congress. This situation establishes the position of strength gained by the regional parties today and it appears that no national party can do without their support at the centre. In the states of their respective regions, their position is clearly established in the formation of state governments.

This growth in the political influence of the regional parties may be assigned to the following factors. Firstly, there is a geo-political factor, which had always existed but had remained more or less dormant for a long time. This was the awareness of an identity borne out of their geographical location on the out-skirts of the area of the country. Being located on the out-skirts of the country they became away from the centre of national politics and could exert only a marginal influence on the government. In the early stages of the congress government in the country, there was an over all hold which the congress party could exercise in the outlying areas also. But this
hold of the party gradually dwindled and from 1967 onwards the influence of the national parties became nominal.

Secondly the outlying areas were constantly in a condition of general neglect due to which the local population became restive. The feeling of secession from the country and the establishment of a separate nation began to grow due to continued neglect by the national parties. This situation was particularly applicable to the regions in the northeast. Thirdly the feeling of neglect by the central government was also present in the areas of the northwest but situation was different in the sense that the feeling of a separate national identity. Separate from the country as a whole had its roots in the last stages of the freedom struggle itself. This condition is applicable to the Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and also to Tamil Nadu in varying degrees. Regional parties in these areas organized their main political movement on centrifugal demands of separation of their areas and establishment of autonomy. Fourth, the fragmentation of the country on the basis of language and cultural diversity also produced the demand for separate states without the demand for autonomy, consequently, some regional parties developed on the basis of their claims for a separate statehood within the Indian union.7

Due to the emergence of regional political parties coalition have become an inevitable and indispensable part of the national and regional politics in the present scenario in India. India has been experimenting with various coalitions at the national level since the last two decades. With the decline of the congress party and one-party dominance system and with the emergence of various new political
parties at various levels, the coalitions have been constructed for the purpose of forming governments and also to oppose and depose the existing governments. Coalitions have been formed before the elections and also after the elections depending on the demands of the circumstances.

All the coalitions that have been formed during the past decade or more, the regional parties have played a very important role. Thus the regional parties have come to stay in the Indian political system and their relevance is not only confined to their respective states but it also extends to the national scene. Infact the role played by the Telugu Desam, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Tamil Manila Congress (TMC), The National Conference (NC) the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) in the formation of the United Front and NDA at the centre was as crucial as that of the National Parties, Viz., Janata Dal, Communist Party of India (CPI), Community Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M), BJP without the active participation of the regional parties the formation of the united Front Government, BJP and its government’s sustenance in the face of various and internal and external problems would have been very difficult if not possible.8

Congress party during its rule at the centre has monopolized the dubious distinction of the invoking the Article 356 of the constitution to dismiss the opposition ministries for political, rather partisan reasons. Not only that the states ruled by the opposition parties and regional parties were consistently starved of central assistance for both developmental purposes and meeting exigencies causes by natural calamities. The case of Telugu Desam under the
leadership of N.T.Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh and DMK under Karunanidhi in Tamil Nadu are classical examples in this regard. The general tendency was for over centralization of power and this undermined the federal system in general. The track record of the coalitions with the participation of the regional parties indicates a new trend in the national politics.

In answering the question regarding the federal balance it is necessary to take into consideration the general attitude of the different regional parties towards the federal balance. This attitude can be discovered by going through the party manifestos issued during the elections and the pronouncements made from time to time. This chapter is mainly concerned with the political and social aspects of the regional parties in the Indian federal system. An attempt is made to examine the attitudes of different regional political parties towards federalism and their structure and ideology and the demand for greater autonomy. The regional parties that will be examined at this juncture are DMK, AIADMK, NC, TDP, AGP, and Akali Dal those are in power.

AKALI DAL IN PUNJAB

A powerful Sikh movement in Punjab was witnessed in the pre-independence, which was called Akali Dal Movement. The Akalis are a part of the Sikh community who established in 1920 the Shiromani Akali Dal to force the government for making suitable legislation for the management of gurudwaras. They emerged as a very powerful religio-political force. Under the Sikh gurudwaras act, 1925, the Shiromani Gurudwaras Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) was
constituted. It is the supreme-religious body of the Sikhs. It is believed that whoever SGPS controls Sikhs politics. The Akali Dal was to raise and train men for action in taking over the gurudwaras from the recalcitrant malitants. The gurudwara reform movement institutionalized the Akali Dal into a political force, under the able leadership of master Tara Singh.⁹

Basically the organization aimed of liberating the gurudwaras from the governments controls later with passage of time, it became an highly organized political party with branches in the gurudwaras known as the Akali jatha all over the country. The SGPS represent the 1920 great achievement of the Akali Dal that brought the gurudwaras under the Sikh community centralized control. The SGPS with its large funds and vast patronage constitutes the backbone of the Akali Dal. Besides, All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), which was established in 1943 by groups of Akali leaders, to bring the Sikh intelligentsia closer to the Akali Dal also generously contributes to the party. The AISSF has been a source of tremendous strength to the Akali Dal not only in being a recruiting ground for educated leadership for the party, but also in providing active assistance at time of election and agitations, and further in being an effective instrument for the political indoctrination of Sikh youth in the ideology of the Akali Dal the independent political entity of the Sikhs.¹⁰

The Akali Dal is a religio-political organization of Sikhs. It has been spearheaded of all political demands made on behalf of the Sikhs for the last half century. Its membership is open only to the Sikhs. The Sikhs are mainly concentrated in their homeland, the Punjab.
Therefore, the Akali Dal's main area of operation is confined to Punjab. Its headquarters is situated in the golden temple in Amritsar. The Akali Dal stands for inextricable mixture of religion and politics, in repudiation of the ideal of secular state. The aim of the Akali Dal is the protection of the panth, or more precisely, the protection of the Sikh rights and ensuring the Sikhs continued existence as an independent entity. According to Baldev Raj Nayar, 'not only does the Akali Dal proclaims itself as the only representative body of the panth but it goes further and equates itself with the panth.11

The Sikh community, under the leadership of Master Tara Singh, demanded during the freedom struggle, an independent state of Khalistan. After the independence, Tara Singh demanded a Sikh state consisting of the Gurgaon district of Punjab, Patiala and the east Punjab state union. However, the extreme demand of Khalistan was modified, and instead a demand was made for a separate Punjabi speaking state within the Indian union.

This demand of Punjab Suba was conceded by the centre on 1st November 1966. Thus the former East Punjab was divided into two states Punjab and Haryana. However, the Akali leadership was not free from factional groups. A section of Akalis owing allegiances to Sant Fateh Singh revived the idea of a Sikh homeland. One of the central secretaries Dr. Jagjit Singh, toured several countries to mobilize Sikh opinion in favour of Sikhistan. However, this attempt did not receive much support and favour from the Sikhs. Then the Akali Dal leadership like the DMK started a demanding decentralization of political power and granting of greater state
autonomy. The president of SGPC, Guru Charan Singh Tohra, said on the March 1975 “powers should be transferred to the states except subjects like external affairs, Defence and Communications. He alleged that the centre was discriminating against the people of Punjab.12

The election manifesto of the Akali Dal released in 1980. The Shiromani Akali Dal to be a political party pledged to the establishment of a society based on economic, political, social and cultural justice according to the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Govind Singh. The Akali Dal is therefore committed to secular, democratic and socialist society. The party is determined to fight for imparting a federal character to the Indian constitution.

The Akali Dal has remained an important regional party due to its ability to support coalition governments. In 1969 election it secured 41 percent of the seats in the assembly due to which it could establish a non-congress coalition government with support of other parties. Its support base has been the Sikh Jat Community. But the scheduled castes and urbanized Sikhs have generally voted for the congress party. Its general electoral strength has varied between 20 to 30 percent of the popular vote and it has generally been the second largest party in Punjab. In 1981, however, the Akalis became cut off from political power due to their defeat in 1980. Their electoral support in the population became much smaller than before. As a result the party split in factions one faction became militant and sought to establish a separate khalistan for the Sikhs. By 1983, the pro-khalistan Sikhs had increased their militancy and continued
disturbances occurred throughout the state. It was also found that the militants had made the golden temple of Amritsar their stronghold where militants stored their arms and also took refuge. The government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi decided to send armed forces into the temple action led to increased militancy and a large number of people were killed. Mrs. Gandhi herself was assassinated by some of the Sikh guards posted at her residence. It was only after Rajiv Gandhi took steps to win back the moderates among the Sikhs that in 1985 elections were held in Punjab, which brought back the Akali Dal to power.

In 1980 Akali Dal under went internal factionalism, which showed marked indecisiveness and defensive behaviour. It could win only one parliamentary seat and 37 seats in 1980 assembly election. There was a decline in the strength of the Akali Dal from 31.43% in 1977 to 26.9% in 1980. The 1980 election threw the Akali Dal out of power. Lack of vision direction and clarity of purpose perhaps led to the downfall of the Akali Dal. Having lost power, it went back to agitational politics and in April 1980 it launched the ‘Dharma Yudh; and further intensified its agitation through such techniques as Rasta Roko, Rail Roko and en-masses resignation of Akali Legislators etc. the Anandpur Sahib Resolution which was lying dormant for years was brought to the limelight. It revived its old theory that Sikhs are a separate nation. The extremists in the Akali Dal raised the bogey of Khalistan to liberate the Sikhs from the Hindu domination.13

However by 1983, the Akali Dal reduced its long list of demands from what it was until the seventies and beginning of the eighties. The
Akali Dal president, H.S. Longowal, in a letter written to members of parliament in 1983, supporting the Anandpur Sahib Resolution demanded.\textsuperscript{14}

1. Autonomous status for Punjab state.

2. Restoration of Chandigarh and remaining Punjabi-speaking areas to Punjab.


4. Allocation of due share of finance to Punjab from the central pool.

5. Granting of holy status to Amritsar on the line of Kurukshetra-Varanasi and Haridwar.

6. Installation of high power transmitter at the golden temple for broadcasting of holy gurbani.

These demands of the Akali Dal, however, couldn't get any positive response from the central government but the Akali Dal continued to pursue their demands on different occasions without any basic change. In the opposition parties (non-congress parties) conclave held in 1983 at Srinagar to discuss centre-state relations, Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab, vehemently attacked the existing centre-state relations. He alleged that systematic encroachment of the enter upon the financial and constitutional powers of the states has been taking place for the last three decades. The Akali Dal in this conclave demanded that only four subjects such
as Defence, communication, foreign affairs and currency should remain with the centre in order to restructure centre-state relations. All the remaining subjects should vest with the states.

However, with the increasing demand for restructuring centre-state relations by opposition parties and more particularly in the wake of Punjab problem, Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister, announced the appointments of Sarkaria commission in 1983 headed by retired Justice R.S. Sarkaria Commission with two members to look into the issue of centre-state relations. The Akali Dal welcomed the decision of Central government and in its reply to Sarkaria Commission reaffirmed its views envisaged in the historic Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The Akali Dal favoured restructuring of centre-state relations on federal basis and pleaded that decentralization of power is imperative, if the national political system is to realize the directive principles of state policy in an effective way. A basic change in the organization of political power is a must if the nation is to resolve the crisis in which it finds itself today. It is in this context that real essence and significance of the historic Anandpur Sahib Resolution becomes manifest, pleading for really autonomous states characterized by decentralization of power, with, the centre, retaining the federal functions in respect of defence, communication, foreign affairs and currency.

The anti Sikh riots that followed in Delhi and other parts of India further led to the alienation of the Sikh community. The Akali Dal 14 Leaders, most of whom were released on march 1985, during the post bluster period made an attempt to save Punjab from rise of
religious fundamentalism and militancy in the form of the Rajiv Longowal on July 24, 1985. In the face of stiff opposition from Harayana and the assassination of Longowal, the accord proved to be a failure. As a result, the Akali s who had an absolute majority in the state legislature, witnessed growing militancy and increasing communal polarization. These developments led to heightened acrimony between the moderates and the extremists within Akali Dal. The continued efforts to create divisions within the different factions of the Akali Dal by the centre further weakened the support base of the moderates leading to the subsequent dismissal of Barnala government in 1987. Akali Dal came under the firm control of the extremists and the elements supportive of militancy.

The situation remained the same even after the victory of Akali Dal by Simranjit Singh Mann in 1989 parliamentary election on 6 out of 8 seats the marginalisation of the two moderates factions of Akali Dal led by Prakash Singh Badal and Surjit Singh Barnala was evident as the two put together managed to win only 6.65 percent of votes.

In 1992 both Akali Dal factions led by simranjit Singh Mann and Prakash Singh Badal boycotted the parliamentary as well as the assembly elections that took place one year after the 1991 general elections under presidents rule there by undermining the legitimacy of the victory of congress. It was only when there were elections for the panchayat raj institutions and municipalities that witnessed the massive 82 percent voting that competitive politics returned with Akali Dal fighting elections to the panchayat smithies and zilla parishads. The resurrection of traditional Akali Dal under the leadership of
Prakash Singh Badal was also helped by the fact that by the end of 1993 militancy had been wipeout; Shiromani Akali Dal came into existence in 1994.

The election manifestos of 1997 Akali Dal to maintain peace, brotherhood, communal harmony, socio economic welfare, all round developments and sustainable and profitable agriculture through diversification. The communal harmony theme is reminiscent of the common programme of the Akali Daljan Sangh coalition government way back in 1967. The Shiromani Akali Dal since the 1997 Assembly has continued to underplay its identity politics in tenor with the party's moga declaration of 1995.

In 1999 parliamentary elections as Gurucharan Singh Tohara the president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak committee SGPC for close to two decades raised banner of revolt against prakash Singh Badal with the help of the Akal Takat Jathedar. The Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal was formed under the leadership of Tohra on May 30 1990. It was formed an electoral alliance with Akali Dal Simaranjit Singh Mann, Akali Dal Panthic Akali Dal Democratic. These different factions fought both the lok sabha and the assembly elections separately in 1999 to 2002.

If we look at the support base of the political parties interims of the level of urbanity, we find that the shiromani Akali Dal BJP draws greater support among the rural voters, while the congress draws greater support from the urban voters. The voting pattern of the rural voters suggest that despite the defeat of the shiromani Akali Dal BJP alliance, the majority of them had voted for the alliance, during the
2002 elections. Compared to the 1997 assembly elections, the congress alliance did manage to increase its support base among the rural voters, but still majority of the rural voters voted for the Shiromani Akali Dal and BJP alliance. The victory of the congress alliance during the 2002 assembly elections was largely credited to increasing presences of alliance among the urban voters.

The defeat of Akali Dal in the Assembly elections preceded by the Lok Sabha elections was largely attributed to its poor performance in 2002. However the congress government led by Amrinder Singh has been victim of factional fights in the form of personality clashes between the chief minister and deputy chief minister Raginder Kumari Bhattal. The fight against corruption has been essentially in the form of filing cases against Prakash Singh Badal and his family members rather than bringing reforms at the institutional level. Ironically the deputy chief minister herself is facing corruption charges in 2003. As against the internal fight within the congress the Akali Dal has been witness to panthic unity in the form of joining hands of factions led by late Gurucharan Singh Tohara and Prakash Singh Badal after a stand off since 1999. Gurucharan Singh Tohara was made the president of SGPC on July 27 1998 replacing Kirpal Singh Badungar; a close associate of Prakash Singh Badal remained the president of SGPC for 25 years. Based on past experience this is nothing unusual as being out of power Akali s have always come together in the name of panthic unity. What goes against the Akali Dal is the public perception about the relative lack of initiative on the part of the party while in power to pursue vigorously wat for them have been the three core issue since 1966 the status of Chandigarh, territorial adjustment along the
linguistic issue and the sharing of river waters. Now United Akalis have also been raising the emotive issues of excesses committed by the congress government on the Akali workers on read leadership on 2004.

These developments pose critical questions about the ability of the Akali Dal to seize the initiative and bring into sharp relief the issue of developments. It is interesting to note that while the Akali Dal is now in a better position to take on the congress, it may not be able to force an effective shift from the more traditional versions of emotive and identity based politics. And curiously enough, with all its failings and limitations, it is Akali Dal alone that has the potential of actually affecting a shift in the political agenda of Punjab.

In brief, it can be argued that there are two different urges that Akali Dal’s are simultaneously fighting the urge to preserve the Punjabi identity as a distinct socio-cultural group in a definite territory and the urge for Sikh identity as a distinct religious group. The first is a regional urge and the second a religious one which the Akali Dal had blended in its political demand for more power to the state.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR (NC)

The concept is one of a united single state of Jammu and Kashmir, which would be neither sovereign nor independent but would enjoy maximum autonomy in internal affairs and may have the power to open economic relations with outside India, although it may not need independent foreign policy. The demand for greater autonomy of Kashmir has been a live issue in the state in the context
of centre-state relations for the last five decades. The state had the experience of autonomy under the instrument of accession followed by the brief interlude under the Delhi agreement of 1952, between Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah. However they feel that Delhi has betrayed their cause by playing party politics in Kashmir and encouraging one faction after another to rule there. Thus the alienation of Kashmir people is the result of more than fifty years of mal-administration denial of democracy, slow development and gradual erosion of autonomy promised in 1952.

The National Conference wants restoration of pre-1953 status. The state congress is opposed to this, while the left which has little role to play in the valley, feels that the autonomy provided under Article 370 of the constitution provides the way out.

The state, consisting of three regions, Kashmir valley, Jammu and Ladakh, was brought under one administrative unit in 1846. After the fall of the Sikh kingdom, the British Government sold Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu signed a treaty of Amritsar. While the treaty transferred the state to Gulab Singh, “and independent possession”, it unambiguously specified British Supremacy over his rule. Article 4 of the treaty committed the Maharaja not to change the limits of his territories without the concurrence of the British government and refer to the arbitration of the British Government any dispute or question that may arise between himself and the Government of Lahore or any other neighbouring state and to abide by the decision of the British Government. Thus Kashmir, despite being the princely state of India had a semi-autonomous status.
On 15th August 1947, in the sub-continent two independent sovereign states were born out of what till then was called the British India. Their independent sovereign character was recognized by an act of British Parliament, Known as Independence India Act 1947. Outside British India in the sub-continent there was another category of territory known as Indian states, which were ruled by princes, Maharajas, with the sovereign power of the British. In regard to princely states, section 7 of the Independence of India Act laid down on 1947, British Sovereignty shall lapse and that with it all treaties and engagements which the British had with the ruling princes would terminate. Paramountacy would thus come to an end.

Article 370 enhances Kashmir's importance in Indian politics from several interrelated features of its history and status in Indian union. After the execution of the instrument of accession on 1947, and adoption of the Indian constitution on 26 January 1950, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was irrevocably brought under the territorial and constitutional jurisdiction of India, Article 370 gives it a special status. The instrument of accession, envisaged the transfer of three subjects to the Dominion government. These three subjects were foreign affairs, defence and communication. Thus after the accession, the relationship between the state and the union has been governed by the provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution of India. The constitution of India granted to Jammu and Kashmir greater autonomy to the state. Instead what has happened over the years is that whatever autonomy is granted under Article 370 even that gets eroded due to the unhelpful stand of the centre. This has helped the anti national forces to try to rally some sections behind them. When
Jammu and Kashmir joined Indian Union, certain solemn assurances were made. Every effort should be made to see that the promise is kept. If we backtrack on those words, it would only fuel the disruptive forces which are bent on channel sing the sentiments against the unity and integrity of our country. The issue of autonomy and more rights for the states has been a predominant concern of all democratic forces. Greater autonomy within the ambit of Article 370 of the constitution and ladakh within the state.

It was against this backdrop that Kashmir was given a separate constituent assembly, special status under Article 230, and autonomy. Kashmir recognizing the separate and distinct identity to the people of state and the circumstances under which they had joined the Indian union. Farooq Abdullah going to the extent of demanding the restoration of the pre 1953 status. The autonomy resolution adopted by Jammu and Kashmir amount to this. He should not have gone to this extent, for trying to win back the mass base, which gets eroded day by day. National Conference continues in the alliance, which out rightly rejected the resolution.

The centre-state relations were discussed between the National Conference and Indian leaders. The National Conference leaders were much keen to secure for the state fullest autonomy and pleaded for limited application of Indian constitution to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The National Conference leadership did not want an instrument of accession that would obliterate their regional cultural pride. Thus they favoured accession but with autonomy. They demanded special status because they were afraid that the cultural
glory of Kashmir would not be secure if they did not have the full freedom for their cultural prosperity in every respect. Sheikh Abdullah said, “Indian political system can function more efficiently at a regional and trans-regional level of federal units than at All India Level under unitary form of government. The actual function of an all India centre should be weaving nationalist task and should not force its values and ideas on local cultures in such a way that they feel threatened and in secure.\textsuperscript{17}

By mid 1952, the Hindus in Jammu region started a powerful movement against the government headed by Sheikh Abdullah. The movement was directed against the idea of separate constitution for the state or any other special status different from the rest of status of the Indian union. The parishad wanted a full merger of the state of Jammu and Kashmir at par with other states of union. When the constituent assembly of the state was elected on 15th October 1951 and started functioning. The movement was intensified under the slogan “Ek Pradhan, Ek Vidhan Ek Nishan”(one president, one constitution and one flag). The Parishad did not approve the 1952 agreement between Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah, which intended to accord the state a special treatment. During the movement, the parishad leaders proclaimed, our way is not with Kashmir. The Sheikh is not acceptable to us.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1957 the National Conference party faced a split when many top leaders including G.M. Sadiq, Sayed Mirquasim, G.L.Dogra, and D.P. Dhar left it and formed another party called Democratic National Conference. The merger of the two parties did not lead to complete
reconciliation between the two factions and they functioned within the National Conference with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed and his supporters dominating both the party organization and the legislative wing of the party the National Conference contested the 1967 elections as a unit of the congress party.

During this time, Mrs. Indira Gandhi entered into negotiation with Sheikh Abdullah on 1975, Accord did not give any extra constitutional power to the state, however it led to Sheikh Abdullah return to power after long years of detention. The National Conference won handsomely even though Sheikh Abdullah had agreed to drop the demand for plebiscite in return for the assurance that Article 370 of the constitution guaranteeing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir would remain, that residuary powers would remain with the state Assembly. But inspite of this accord, the areas of tension between the state and centre still persisted.

After the death of Sheikh Abdullah in 1982 his son Farooq Abdullah became the Chief Minister. He held fresh elections in 1983 and won a handsome majority. To this, unfortunately the centre could not reconcile itself. Defections were manipulated and G.M. Shah was installed as chief Minister of the state. Farooq Abdullah was not allowed to prove his majority on the floor of the House. The people of the Kashmir once again felt cheated. Farooq Abdullah like his father reiterated his party's resolve to review the post 1953 central law and seek to remove those, which went against the state autonomy. It is a fact that despite its special status and its peculiar form of regional autonomy, the central government and political leaders have
intervened independence than in any other state of Indian union. All this greatly alienated the people of Kashmir valley.

In 1986 Dr. Abdullah surrendered before the centre and compromised Kashmir's interest. In March 1987 elections the National Conference-Congress combine made an all out attempt to thwart the Muslim United Front from winning any seats. The Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah alliance did not appeal to the people, they felt that his alliance would bring nothing but dishonour to Kashmir. The elections were said to have been rigged massively which further destroyed Kashmir's faith in the Indian democracy. To add insult to injury the state was put under central rule on 1990 first under the governor's rule for a period of six months lasting up to 1990 and then till the election in 1996 under Presidents rule extended every six months. A frontal attack was made on. Farooq and his National Conference was dubbed as a group of communities and right reactionaries.

It is imperative for the union government to grant autonomy to all her states especially Kashmir. The restoration of autonomy to Kashmir within the framework of Delhi Agreement of 1952 would instill a sense of involvement among the people of Kashmir. It has to be assured that no erosion of state's autonomy in terms of Article 370 will take place. The people must be reassured that their democratic aspirations and identity will be respected in full measures. Autonomy will restore the confidence of the people. So rudely shaken by militancy on the one hand and insensitivity of New Delhi on the vital issue on the other. This holds the key between peace and continued turmoil within the state and the sub-continent.
The measures required Jammu and Kashmir might be summed up as below.

1. Article 370 should continue.

2. The Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah agreement of 1975 should be implemented.

3. The government must show willingness to provide maximum autonomy to the states within the framework of the Indian union.

Autonomy should not be equated with separatism. This is pressurizing both India and Pakistan to conduct a dialogue on Kashmir. The recent Hizbul Mujahideen announcement of a 3-month ceasefire as a prelude to talks must be seen in those light. A dangerous proposal has been mooted for trifurcating the state into three the Kashmir valley, Jammu and ladakh. This has the backing of the united state establishment. The Farooq Abdullah government has lent support to this game plan through a second report, which is the regional autonomy committee's report. This has advocated the carrying of seven districts in Jammu and Kashmir while supporting the demand for greater autonomy.19

Faroq Abdullah after winning the assembly elections in the state in 1996 cautioned the central government against maltreating the people of Jammu and Kashmir while firmly reiterating, “We are Indians and our destiny lies with India”. Making his first ever appearance at the National Conference rally in Srinagar after seven years since the beginning of militancy. During 1990, Abdullah pleaded
for the restoration of autonomy in the state and ridiculed the criticism that needles of clock could not be reversed. Abdullah and autonomy, and election promise and it was a major issue before the electorate. He reiterated many a time that the autonomy issue would not be diluted. The slogan of autonomy and proclaimed its massive victory in this election as a mandate for restoration of the pre 1953 constitutional position of the state. Soon after forming the government, it constituted the State Autonomy Committee SAC to examine and recommend measures for the restoration of autonomy to the state of Jammu and Kashmir consistent with the instrument of accession, the constitution application order 1950 and the Delhi agreement of 1952. The report of the SAC made public in April 1999 was discussed in a state legislative assembly. Autonomy resolution demanding that the union and the state government take positive and effective steps for implementing the report. The autonomy resolution triggered a controversy with many apprehensions expressed against its pre 1953 stance. while force is like the RSS and the BJP saw sinister designs of secessionism in the report, others deeded its consequences for the national integration with similar demands pouring in from other states. The National Conference has decided to start a national awareness campaign on the report and the government of Jammu and Kashmir has constituted a group of minister's discusses the issue on state autonomy. Two basic presumptions of state autonomy committee report are

1. Autonomy representing the aspiration of the people of Kashmir is a specific demand. Its specificity is advocated in the history of freedom movement of Kashmir. The federal context of India is
basic to the issue of autonomy, yet this federal context is quite different from the context in which other states are placed. It is a symmetrical nature of the federal structure of India where a different status is guaranteed to this state. The constitution of India treats the state differently from other constituent units in the distribution of sovereign power.

2. The state relationship with the union is a negotiated relationship. The state joined the union on voluntary basis and negotiated the terms of its relationship. The state that exercised the right given to all princely status to exercise their voluntary acceptance of the federal structure of authority in some fields of governance. Whereas other princely status signed the instrument of accession to India and subsequently the instruments of merger, the accession of Jammu and Kashmir was limited only to the areas of defence, external affairs and communication. While other status gave up their right to their separate constitution and agreed to what the constituent assembly of the union, the government of this state did not accept the constitution of India as an instrument for the governance of the state.

The State Autonomy Committee referred to earlier. Its report was tabled in the state legislative assembly on 13 April 1999. On 26 June 2000 the assembly recorded approval of the report and its acceptance of the recommendations made there in and further, demands that the union government and the government of Jammu and Kashmir take positive and effective steps for implementing the same. The salient recommendations of the State Autonomy Committee have been mentioned as the following

79
1. For abrogation or amendment of article 370, the recommendation of the states constituent assembly is necessary before issue of presidential notification to that effect, as per clause 3 there of. Following the dispersal of that states constituent assembly consequent on finalization in 1957 of its task, there is no provision for abrogation or amendment of article 370. Hence the word temporary be diluted from the title of part and heading of article 370 of the Indian constitution.

2. The imposition of a state emergency shall be subject to the state governments concurrence provided that this request or concurrence of the state government shall be further subject to whatever decision the state legislative assembly shall take within two months failing which the proclamation of emergency shall be deemed to have been revoked.

The manifesto of the National Conference demanded sovereign independent state, looking after its own defence and external affairs but also contained a radical socio economic programme. While the congress leaders continued to encourage the autonomous urges of Kashmir is, the Muslim league alienated them by its own conduct.

Farooq Abdullah further suggested that the working of the constitution in any country was to be a kind and quality that should guarantee the achievement of aims and objectives of state policy as distinguished from party policy. It can be forgotten that the objectives of national integration and of quicker peace of economic development are two primary necessities of the country today. The states have to unite equally the responsibilities and duties of the constitution. Infact
sets a pattern of division of executive and legislative powers with a view to enacting the states to discharge its duties and responsibilities which should mean that its working should be along within the parameters laid down by the constitution. Its working should be unhampered and independent and not capable of bringing the influence by partisan or party outlook of the union government. This division of powers or devolution of authority as at present is not completely such it can ensure freedom of action within the given parameters.

Thus Farooq Abdullah stressed the need for strengthening the autonomy of the states. So as to strike a proper balance between their powers and those of the centre.

In the decades of nineties a notable player in the game has been the All-Party Hurriyat Conference. According to Syed Ali Sha Geelani chairman of APHC is a conglomeration of 23 political, religious and social parties formed to resolve the Kashmir dispute. The leader of the Hurriyat Conference, Abdul ghani lone one if interviewed on 8th April 2000 may be summarized thus the Kashmir dispute can be settled once and for all with the concurrence of the three parties, namely India and Pakistan in whose possession bifurcated portions of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir lie and who challenge each other's de jure and de facto positions, and the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the sons of the soil. All Party Hurriyat Conference claims third party status in Jammu and Kashmir on the other hand, some organizations of the Jammu and Ladakh regions, recalling the unfair treatment received by these regions at the hands of rulers from the
Kashmir valley, desire autonomy. The All Party Hurriyat Conference is mainly valley centred. The Kashmir pandits have demanded Azad Kashmir.  

While the subject of autonomy A. V. S. Namboodiri has cogently analyzed the genesis and rationale of the autonomy demand. He has pointed out that the political motivations of Abdullah, like the much-bruited centers ventures to the secessionist Hurriyat Conference, do not lessen the importance of the autonomy proposal. According to Namboodiri greater autonomy does not mean secession the special historical or other circumstances of a state might call for special constitutional treatment for it. The readiness of the centre to accept the special demands and unique situations of different states would only enhance the ability of the nation state to unify the diverse states and strengthen political and emotional integration among them.

The Jammu and Kashmir state has been rocked by violence; peace, progress and development have been elusively far away. The lessons of history have not been forgotten nor any learnt. The Indian agenda for Jammu and Kashmir should be pro active oriented towards a permanent solution. It should be drawn up in the light of recent developments and those likely to take place. Elections to the State Assembly are scheduled for October 2002. The National Conference has declared its intention to contest all the seats. The All India Political Parties may similarly announce their plans. It looks that the 22 party coalition of Hurriyat has yet to determine its stand. The militant groups appear opposed to participation and have warned Hurriyat to stay away. A piquant situation can arise if separatist’s
groups take hold as a result of elections. Barring that eventuality, qualitatively the post election scenario may not violently differ from that obtaining today. The crucial pre condition is that the society does not permit fanatic fringe elements to hijack it off course. Bruising the national secular credentials will irrevocably damage. India's Kashmir case besides creating enormous internal weakness. The National Conference is a part of the National Democratic Alliance that came to power at the center in 1999. National Conference stands for real autonomy to the states. It wants to retain Kashmir's special status. As defined under Article 370 of the constitution.

The Assembly Election of 2002 the electoral process in the state of Jammu and Kashmir highlights the character of the state as a microcosm of the pluralistic country with widest possible diversity that is the basis of Indian unity. The elections results in the state of Jammu and Kashmir reflect the multi ethnic, lingual and religious character and this may provide as a valuable input for framing a comprehensive Kashmir Policy by the new government at the centre. The results of the three political units namely, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have clearly underscored the need for a greater understanding of the plurality existing in the state and the need to reconcile it in a harmonious manner. In the Kashmir valley, the National Conference staged an electoral comeback and the party won two parliamentary seats, while the People Democratic Party (PDP) won a lone seat from Anantanag Pulwama segment. This time in Kashmir valley, a bipolar competitive political strengthening the democratic ethos, which provides space to both the political formulations. This was a rare occasion when in the parliamentary elections in Kashmir
valley, a political outfit in the opposition was able to win more seat than the ruling party at the state level. This categorically brushes aside allegations that a ruling party in the state has a monopoly of political power. In 2002 Assembly elections, when National Conference won in five out of seven assembly segments. The National Conference got 41.5 percent of the total votes polled, whereas the congress secured only 31.1 percent votes. This development is important in the multi ethnic state of Jammu and Kashmir, where the electorate yet again proved that religion cannot be the sole criteria for the voting pattern of any community. Studying the parliamentary results in the three culturally distinct regions of the state gives a vital clue to the assertion of ethnic identities, which need to be recognized to celebrate diversity. Whatever be the percentage of polling, the democratic experiment in the state has yielded some positive results, which need to be carried forward by the new government in order to build a stable and harmonious state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The All Parties Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) was unrelenting in its demand for the separation of the hill areas from the state of Assam. This demand acquired a new pitch since 1960 when the Assam Legislative Assembly put on the statute the Assam official language Act, making Assamese the states official Language.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the then prime-Minister, reacted to the hill leader’s demand by announcing that the elected members of the legislative assembly from the autonomous districts could form a committee which would especially deal with legislation and like matters relating to the hill districts, which came up before the assembly, and their decisions should prevail after the pattern of the committee for Scotland in the British House of Commons. The Assam government plans for the autonomous districts. However, the Scottish pattern for the autonomous districts of Assam, visualized in the Prime Minister’s letter was not acceptable to APHLC.

The All Parties Hill Leaders Conference, known as the committee on reorganization of Assam, was expressly directed to make an effort to reach an agreed solution. The scheme outlined by this committee did not concede a full-fledged federation of the hill areas and plains of Assam. Nevertheless, it did conceive of a sub-state for the hill districts of Assam. It observed: “federal structure should not be the basis of reorganization of the present state of Assam. While the Committee considered the unity and integrity of the present state of Assam as essential for the interest of the plains and hills, it recommends maximum autonomy to the hill areas.”

85
On 11 September 1968, the central government announced the reorganization of Assam. It decides to enact legislation to constitute an autonomous state within the state of Assam, comprising the districts of Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Jowai. The other autonomous district of Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills figured out of the scheme but were to be given an option to join the proposed autonomous state.

Meghalaya, a state within the state of Assam, came into existence in April 1970 and consisted to two revenue districts of Assam namely (1) united Dhasi, Jaintia Hills, and Garo Hills. It needs to be pointed out that Meghalaya aid does not cover all the hill districts of Assam. For only less than two years did meghalaya remain as a sub state within the state of Assam. It became a full-fledged state on 20 January 1972. This should not look surprising. The status of a sub-state for this region appeared to be a necessary prelude to its full statehood, for the parent state, Assam, evidently needed time to prepare itself psychologically and emotionally to let one of its parts go out of it. The area of union between Meghalaya and Assam was kept so delicate and small that separation became both easy and imminent.

In 1980s the movement launched by Ali Assam student union against foreigners in Assam shaped the politics of Assam, instability led to the imposition of president s rule three times during this period. Anowara ministry was dissolved on 29 June 1981. On 13 January 1982 the congress I formed the government again under a new leader, Keshab Chaunndra Gagoi. On March 18th 1982 with the declaration of emergency in Assam, the Gagoi ministry was also dissolved. Elections
to the state assembly were held in 1983 in the modest of heavy political tensions and protests from almost all the corners and at a heavy loss of lives and property. In this election also congress I could form the government under the chief-minister ship of Hiteswar Saikia on 27th February 1983. This ministry lasted for about thirty months. The most notable feature of the politics of Assam waste election to the State Assembly held immediately after the historic Assam accord of 15 August 1985, the election was held. The newly constituted regional political party viz, Assam Gana Parishad contested the election along with other parties in Assam. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the former president of party led the Assam Gana Parishad to a landslide victory and formed the government. Before this election, the plains tribal council contested the elections to the state assembly held in 1972. So far the first time a regional party came to power. Besides, its inducted young blood into the politics of the state. In the elections to the state assembly, held in June 1991, the congress I secured majority seats and formed the government under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia former governor of Mizoram. From the above it is clear that the congress I has been dominating Assam politics till to date. The Assam Gana Parishad under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has established its position by forming the state government and by contributing its strength of five members of the lok sabha to the united front government at the centre. Assam Gana Parishad for a long time there had been a constant influx of the Bangladesh nation into Assam. This caused apprehensions that the ethnic and linguistic character of Assam would be considerably changed. People of assume, under the leadership of the student leader, waged a relentless
agitation against the inroads into the states economy and cultural identity. After many years of turmoil an agreement could be reached in August 1985. Assam Gana Parishad fortunes fluctuated between 1985 to 2001. In May 2001 once again congress formed government in Assam. Congress returning to power at the head of a coalition government, political equations will take a new turn in Assam. To retain its minority support base, the congress will have to reach out to the Assam United Democratic Front as well as find ways to assuage the increased ambitions of diverse organizations such as the Bodo Progressive People's Front, claiming to represent the interests of narrow identity groups. Concomitantly, the question of who truly represents the Asomiya groups such as the Assam United Democratic Front the AGP or even the BJP will continue to simmer and influence the course of politics in the state.

An analyses of the Assam election results have thrown up two apparently contradictory views one is that the voting pattern has shown that the state is witnessing a clear fragmentation along ethnic, lines with the Assam Gana Parishad retaining its ethnic Assamese votes, the BJP strengthening its hold among the Bengalis Hindus, the Bodo People's Progressive Front depending exclusively on bodo support and the Bengali speaking immigrant Muslims unequivocally supporting the new party, the Assam United Democratic Front. According to this view, it is the congress, alone which has been able to cut across the ethnic divide and garner support of all sections of the electorate. The other view shared by a large section of the regional press seems to assert that the congress, by distancing itself from the communal configuration led by Badruddin Ajmal, has finally
succeeded in shedding its pro minority image and come closer to the ethnic Assamites community which has otherwise been siding with the Assam Gana Parishad. The party’s performance in the assumes dominated upper Assam districts where it secured 30 of the 56 seats has been cited as indication of this change of heart of the congress. The same view attributes the Assam Gana Parishad rejection by its traditional assumes voters to its refusal to rule out any post poll alliance with the Assam United Democratic Front, while at the same time relating much of the congress success to Tarun Gagoi’s rejection of the Assam United Democratic Front and his pre poll alliance with the Hgrama faction of the Bodo Land People’s Progressive Front. Both these views have some truth in them but they are certainly not too helpful in getting a fuller picture of the actual scenario and the new equation that are emerging in the state’s politics.

Anti incumbency, the sudden emergence of the Assam United Democratic Front, the rumblings of discontent in the tea belt and the general anti congress mood drummed up by the Assam Gana Parishad and its leftists allies, the CPI and the CPM, it is somewhat surprising that the congress managed to emerge as the largest single party with 53 seats in a house of 126. There were several factors that contributed towards preventing a further downslide for the congress. Naturally, the congress profited from a divided opposition, an uncertain poll alliance between the Assam Gana Parishad and the left parties and above all, from the Assam Gana Parishad vacillating position regarding the Assam United Democratic Front. But there were several other deeper factors which helped the return of the congress, albeit as
the leading partner of a coalition government. United Liberation Front of Assam and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland although during the assembly polls the United Liberation Front had adopted a neutral stance, yet this neutrality was heavily weighed in favour of the congress. These two groups being sharply critical of the Assam Gana Parishad. Expressed its appreciation of the forces, which were help in the peace process, without, of course naming the congress. On the surface, this was clear indication enough that the United Liberation Front was in favour of the congress return its power because if felt that this would accelerate the peace process. Congress politics in Assam during the post Gopinath Bordello period, his increasingly veered around the minorities and it is a known fact that the party's electoral fortunes have been largely dependent on its equations with the immigrant Muslim population and the tea garden tribes. Indeed, one is reminded of a much-quoted statement of an Assam congress leader who finally became the president of the congress party.

A marked development in recent years has been the emergence of new student and youth organizations within the tea tribes, who have focused on the abysmal conditions of their community and are helping them gear up the struggle for better wages, educational and medical facilities. The time, therefore. May be for off when the elect orally powerful tea garden community would finally free itself from the grip of vote bank politics and chart out its own independent course in the states politics. Thus given all these developments, Assam is gradually moving into a new phase of new political equations and uneasy alliances.
The central government, too on its part, appeared only too anxious to placate the hill people and the motivation for this measure, by strategic needs and compulsions.

**MIZO NATIONAL FRONT**

This demand for secession from the Indian union was that of the people of Mizo hill districts of Assam. They wanted to form an independent state consisting of Mizo hill districts of Assam and contiguous areas of districts of East Pakistan and Burma. They formed an organization known as Mizo National Front to carry out struggle against the government.

As the struggle was of a violent nature, the government adopted a tough attitude towards the Mizo National Front in 1962. However, the Mizo's continued their activities from cachar Hills and tribes, in view of the policy of repression adopted by the government of India a section of the Mizo leaders abandoned their demand for independent and sovereign states and indicated their willingness to come to terms with the government. In 1971 the president of Mizo National Front (Chunga) submitted a memorandum to the government of India highlighting the injustice done to their demanded a separate state within the Indian union. But the government of India continued to operate against the rebel Mizo’s. In view of the tough attitude of the Government of India, Laldenga indicated his intention to settle the Mizo problem within the framework of the Indian constitution. After prolonged negotiations an agreement was reached between the central government and the Mizo’s under Laldenga in 1976. As per this agreement the problem was to be solved peacefully the Mizo’s were to
abjure violence, and deposit their weapons. However, Laldenga did not abide by this agreement and soon started insisting his followers to scuttle its implementation.

1980, the Mizo rebel leaders reached an agreement with Mrs. Indira Gandhi for a permanent political solution of the Mizo problem. The two parties agreed to suspend armed action and find out a solution by mutual consultation within the framework of the Indian constitution. As a result peace once again returned to the peace-torn state of Mizoram.

The Mizo National Front amended its Constitution to make it conform to the provisions of the law. On 21 August 1986 a nine-member coalition government of congress (I) and National Front was installed in Mizoram under Laldenga. Subsequently elections were held in the state and Mizo National Front Party formed the Government. Laldenga came forward with the demand of a greater Mizoram state containing, some parts of Tripura, Manipur and Assam as well. He also insisted on grant of some sort of autonomy through constitutional amendment. The formation of a government under Laldenga was a great landmark and marked the culmination of the slow process of transformation of the Mizo National Front from an outlawed separatist party into a law abiding political party operating within the framework of the Indian Constitute.

WEST BENGAL UNITED FRONT PARTY

The friction between the center and the states in India is not a new phenomenon. Until 1967, they were resolved at the personal and party level as and when they occurred. The most serious confrontation
between the centre and the states arose with the formation of the united front government in West Bengal in 1967. Since then there has been an ongoing debate in the country on the nature of inter-governmental relationship and the controversy has developed more political overtones than constitutional. The founding fathers of the constitution has not realized fully the possible strains and stresses that might crop up in future.

Till 1977, the C.P.I (M) was demanding an amendment to the constitution for a greater devolution of powers, whereas the congress was taking exactly the opposite stand of further strengthening the centre. From 1977 onwards, there was a wide spread demand for devolution of powers to the states. The centre-state relations suffered another jolt in the year 1977 when the Janata party came to power at the centre. A qualitative change in the working of our federal polity was expected with a non-congress party in power at the centre for the first time. But to the utter dismay of observers, the Janata party also went the same way as the congress and dismissed congress ministries in nine states, without much of justification. The dismissal was politically motivated. The janata Prime minister Mr. Morarji Desai, who had once declared, “a strong centre with weak states would lead to dictatorship”, did precious little to strengthen the position of the estates. He on the other hand, rejected the demand by a number of states for a greater share in the national resources. With the return of the congress (I) to power at the centre in 1980 and the non-congress ministries in some states, the debate on centre-state relations continued to occupy an important place. The coming to power of the non-congress ministries in Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura, West
Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka has provided a fresh momentum and a new dimension to the centre-state controversy. The chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have been essentially pragmatic and assertive and not at all confrontationist in their approach. Their strategy has been to grasp the nettle from the end of concrete and solvable questions unlike their West Bengal and Tripura counterparts, who attach considerable importance to theory and seeking formal amendments to the constitution.

In 1977 the West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu submitted a document on the central state relations to the central government for initiating dialogue between the Prime Minister and the state chief Minister on the question of giving more autonomy to the states in political, legislative and financial spheres. In his news conference in Bangalore in February, Mr. Morarji Desai turned down the demand for more state autonomy branding it as an attempt to break up the country. He contended that more state autonomy at that juncture might encourage breaking away of certain states from the Indian union. How this would come about was never spelt out in detail by him. He continued to resist all attempts to involve himself in the proposed dialogue on centre-state relations as is evident from his statements in parliament.25

Lastly to conclude, “the decentralization of the two party system is sufficient to prevent national leaders from controlling their partisans by either organizational or ideological devices. As such this decentralized party system is the main protector of the integrity of states in our federalism.”26 The Indian experience, which consists in
the emergence of the regional parties to maintain the federal balance, is not unique. The growing dictatorial nature of the congress (I) which is the only one real national party (as illustrated in its policy of making and unmaking state ministries) may result in the emergence of more regional parties. Leaders in the states who became dissatisfied with the top leadership organized regional parties. It will not be surprising if similar parties come up in other states, as regionalism is a very strong force everywhere today. So the Indian experience is a part of an universal experience in countries where federalism is alive and it is from this point of view that the analysis made in this study has its real significance.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid.


5. Ibid.


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.


16. Ibid.

17. Ibid, p.132.

18. Ibid.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

♦ ♦ ♦