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CHAPTER-II

TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING COALITION GOVERNMENT

2.1: DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALIZING COALITION GOVERNMENT

A coalition government is a cabinet of a parliamentary government in which several parties cooperate. The usual reason given for this arrangement is that no party on its own can achieve a majority in the parliament. A coalition government might also be created in a time of national difficulty or crisis, for example during wartime, to give a government the high degree of perceived political legitimacy it desires whilst also playing a role in diminishing internal political strife. In such times, parties have formed all-party coalitions (national unity governments, grand coalitions). If a coalition collapses a confidence vote is held or a motion of no confidence is taken.

Thus a Coalition government is one in which several political parties must cooperate in order to run a country or region. A coalition government is often times considered a very weak form of government because there is no majority party. In such cases, the only way policy gets approved is by making concessions, hence the forming of a coalition.

A coalition government, also known as a coalition cabinet, can be one of the most entertaining, and volatile, forms of government. Often, it may be hard to know how an issue is going to turn out, unlike countries where there are only two major political parties. In these cases, it is rare that a majority party does not have its way.

Well-known countries run by coalition governments include Germany, Italy, India, Ireland, and Israel, among others. Once a parliament is seated in these countries, the difficult work of bridging gaps begins. In some cases, these gaps are bridged easier than others, as multiple
parties may be in agreement on some issues. In other cases, where there is little agreement, building such a coalition government takes time.

Some feel that a coalition government is a very inefficient way to govern. Also, it may, in some cases, increase the risk of underhanded deals and increase corruption, as more politicians are willing to make deals in order to get things accomplished. A coalition government can also have members that are very argumentative, even more so than other forms of government, simply because so much is at stake.

However, despite the concerns, some feel that a coalition government has the best opportunity to promote real issues and solve everyday problems. This is because the coalition government is seen by some as the most accurate representation of the people’s will. Also, proponents believe a coalition government can actually lead to greater unity because members of varying backgrounds and ideologies must come together and agree to create policy in the best interest of all.

In addition to the regular, long-standing coalitions, a coalition government can also be created at times of national transition or crisis. In Iraq, for example, a coalition government was created in 2004 in an effort to bring the country together after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government. In this example, various leaders from different religious sects and regions of the country were brought together in an attempt to form policy that would be regarded as a benefit to the Iraqi people as a whole, not just one particular group.

To deal with a situation in which no clear majorities appear through general elections, parties either form coalition cabinets, supported by a parliamentary majority, or minority cabinets which may consist of one or more parties. Cabinets based on a coalition with majority in a parliament, ideally, are more stable and long-lived than minority cabinets. While the former are prone to internal struggles, they have less reason to fear votes of non-confidence. Majority governments based on a single party are typically even more stable, as long as their majority can be maintained.

Coalition cabinets are common in countries in which a parliament is proportionally representative, with several organized political parties represented. It usually does not appear
in countries in which the cabinet is chosen by the executive rather than by a lower house, such as in the United States (however, coalition cabinets are common in Brazil). In semi-presidential systems such as France, where the president formally appoints a prime minister but the government itself must still maintain the confidence of parliament, coalition governments occur quite regularly.

"With the replacement of the Dominant Party System of India, minority and/or coalition governments in New Delhi have become the order of the day. Except for the Congress Minority Government of P.V. Narsimha Rao and National Democratic Alliance Government of Atal Behari Vajpayee, all such governments since 1989 have been unstable. Yet instability apart, coalition governments have been effective in enhancing democratic legitimacy, representativeness and national unity. Major policy shifts like neo-liberal economic reforms, federal decentring, and grass roots decentralization, in theory or practice, are largely attributable to the onset of federal coalitional governance. Coalition governments in states and at the centre have also facilitated gradual transition of the Marxist-left and the Hindu-right into the political establishment, and thus contributed to the integration of the party system as well as the nation. The same major national parties which initially rejected the idea of coalition politics have today accepted it and are maturing into skilled and virtuoso performers at the game.

In a rather short span of over a decade, India has witnessed coalition governments of three major muted hues: (a) middle-of-the-road Centrist Congress Minority Government of P.V. Narsimha Rao, going against its Left Centre of reputation, initiated neo-liberal economic reforms in 1991; (b) three Left-of-centre governments formed by the Janata-Dal-led National/United Front; and (c) two Right-of-Centre coalition governments formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance under Atal Behari Vajpayee, a votary of secular version of Hindu nationalism.

In the wake of the decline of Congress Dominance, the fragmentation of the National Party System and the emergence of party systems at the regional level have turned India into a chequered federal chessboard. The past and likely future patterns of coalition governments in New Delhi are suggestive of at least three models of power sharing: (a) coalition of more
or less equal partners, e.g. the National Front and the United Front, (b) coalition of relatively smaller parties led by a major party, e.g. National Democratic Alliance; and (c) coalition of relatively smaller parties facilitated but not necessarily led by a prime minister from the major party, e.g. the coalition of parties formed in 2004 around the Indian National Congress, avowing secular Indian Nationalism.

2.2: Types of Coalition Government Highlighting its Nature

There are two types of Coalition Government which are generally found in existence in the Global Scenario. These two are generally known as

i. Coalition Composed of few parties

ii. Coalition composed of many parties. A detailed study of both of these have been made below:

2.2.1: Coalitions Composed of Few Parties

In Germany, for instance, coalition government is the norm, as it is rare for either the Christian-Democratic Union of Germany and Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CDU/CSU) or the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to win an unqualified majority in a national election. Thus, at the federal level, governments are formed with at least one of the smaller parties. For example, Helmut Kohl's CDU governed for years in coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP), from 1998 to 2005 Gerhard Schröder's SPD was in power with the Greens and from 2009 Angela Merkel, CDU/CSU was in power with the FDP.

In both countries, grand coalitions of the two large parties also occur, but these are relatively rare and large parties usually prefer to associate with small ones. However, if none of the larger parties can receive enough votes to form their preferred coalition, a grand coalition might be their only choice for forming a government. This was the situation in Germany in 2005 when Angela Merkel became Chancellor: in early elections, the CDU/CSU did not garner enough votes to form a majority coalition with the FDP; similarly the SPD and Greens did not have enough votes to continue on with their formerly ruling coalition. A grand coalition government was subsequently forged between the CDU/CSU and the SPD.
Partnerships like these typically involve carefully structured cabinets. The CDU/CSU ended up holding the Chancellory while, the SPD took the majority of cabinet posts.

In Ireland, coalition governments are quite common with a single party not having ruled since 1989. Coalitions are typically formed of two or more parties always consisting of one of the two biggest parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and one or more smaller parties or independent members of parliament. The current government consists of Fianna Fáil and the Green Party, supported by independents.

2.2.2: Coalitions Composed of Many Parties

A coalition government may consist of any number of parties. In Germany, the coalitions rarely consist of more than two parties (where CDU and CSU, two non-competing parties which always form a single caucus, are in this regard considered a single party), while in Belgium, where there are separate Dutch speaking and French speaking parties for each political grouping, coalition cabinets of up to six parties are quite common.

India's present governing coalition, the United Progressive Alliance, consists of 13 separate parties. In Finland, no party has had an absolute majority in the parliament since independence, and multi-party coalitions have been the norm. Finland experienced its most stable government (Lipponen I and II) since independence with a five-party governing coalition, so called "rainbow government". The Lipponen cabinets set the stability record, and were unusual in the respect that both moderate (SDP) and extreme left wing (Left Alliance) sat in the government with the major right-wing party (National Coalition). The current government (Vanhanen II) is a four-party coalition.

A similar situation exists in Israel, which has dozens of different parties with representation in the Knesset. The only faction to ever gain a majority of Knesset seats was Alignment, an alliance of the Labor Party and Mapam that held an absolute majority for a brief period from 1968-1969. Historically, control of the Israeli government has alternated between periods of rule by the center-right Likud in coalition with several right-wing and religious parties and periods of rule by the center-left Labor in coalition with several left-wing parties. Arial
Sharon's formation of the centrist Kadima party in 2006 drew support from former Labor and Kadima members, and Kadima ruled in coalition with Labor and several other parties.

Post-World War II Japan has historically been dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party but there was a brief coalition government formed after the 1993 election following LDP's first and only loss of its overall House of Representatives majority since 1955.

In Australia, the conservative Liberal and National parties are united in an effectively permanent coalition. This coalition has become so stable, at least at the federal level, that the lower house of parliament has become a two-party house.

In the United Kingdom, coalition governments (sometimes known as national governments) have been appointed only in times of national crisis. The most prominent was the National Government of 1931 to 1940. There were multi-party coalitions during both world wars. Apart from this, when no party has had a majority, minority governments have been formed with one or more opposition parties agreeing to vote for the legislation governments need to function. At the start of 2010 with a General Election due in June amid speculation over a 'hung' parliament [1], interest in coalitions formed from multi-party negotiations is intense.

The only time Canada has had something like a coalition government was during World War I to broaden support for controversial conscription legislation. Known as the Unionist Party, it was really a new party created out of the governing Conservative Party with some Opposition members crossing the floor. It was disbanded after the end of the war.[2] Great Coalition existed from 1864-1867, the year of Canada's Confederation. It consisted of the Clear Grits, Parti bleu, and Liberal-Conservative Party. During the 2008 Canadian parliamentary dispute, three of Canada's opposition parties announced they had signed an agreement to form what would become the country's second coalition government since confederation if they defeat the Conservative minority government in a vote of non-confidence[3]; unseating Stephen Harper as Prime Minister. The agreement outlined a formal coalition consisting of two opposition parties, the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party. The Bloc Québécois agreed to support the proposed coalition on confidence matters for 18 months.
2.3: REASONS FOR FORMATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

Generally the coalitions are formed on account of one of the following three reasons:

1. No single political party is able to secure a working majority in the popular house on account of the presence of multiparty system. Under the circumstances a number of like minded political parties from the coalition to provide workable majority and run the government France provide a typical example of this type of coalitions.

2. Secondly, in a bi-party system a dead lock may be created due of even balance between two political parties. This may lead to one of the two parties allying itself with a minor group such as neutrals or defectors to till the majority in its favour.

3. Thirdly, a coalition may be necessitated by a national crisis when the various political groups may suspend their political strife and collaborate in the general cause of protecting and promoting their national interests. In Britain coalition government was formed to deal with the abnormal conditions during the First World War. The various political parties sunk their differences to give a united fight to the enemies of Britain.

In India the coalition governments have mainly been the result of multi-party system. As sometimes no single political party was able to muster clear-cut majority in the Legislative Assembly the parties were obliged to seek support and cooperation of other groups to from the government. Sometimes coalitions are also formed before the elections and a number of political parties chalk out an agreed programme and contest election on the basis of the programme from a common platform. This type of arrangement “has an obvious advantage in so far as it smoothenes the radicalism the parties joining the coalition without in any way effecting image.

2.4: ARGUMENTS/ LOGIC BEHIND COALITION GOVERNMENT

Advocates of proportional representation suggest that a coalition government leads to more consensus-based politics, in that a government comprising differing parties (often based on
different ideologies) would need to concur in regard to governmental policy. Another stated advantage is that a coalition government better reflects the popular opinion of the electorate within a country.

Those who disapprove of coalition governments believe that such governments have a tendency to be fractious and prone to disharmony. This is because coalitions would necessarily include different parties with differing beliefs and who, therefore, may not always agree on the correct path for governmental policy. Sometimes the results of an election are such that the coalitions which are mathematically most probable are ideologically infeasible, such as in Flanders or Northern Ireland. A second difficulty might be the ability of minor parties to play "kingmaker" and, particularly in close elections, gain far more for their support than their vote would otherwise indicate.

Coalition governments have also been criticized for sustaining a consensus on issues when disagreement and the consequent discussion would be more fruitful. To forge a consensus, the leaders of ruling coalition parties can agree to silence their disagreements on an issue to unify the coalition against the opposition. The coalition partners, if they control the parliamentary majority, can collude to make the parliamentary discussion on the issue irrelevant by consistently disregarding the arguments of the opposition and voting against the opposition's proposals — even if there is disagreement within the ruling parties about the issue.

Powerful parties can also act in an oligocratic way to form an alliance to stifle the growth of emerging parties. Of course, such an event is rare in coalition governments when compared to two-party systems, which typically exists because of stifling the growth of emerging parties, often through discriminatory nomination rules regulations and plurality voting systems, etc.

A single, more powerful party can shape the policies of the coalition disproportionately. Smaller or less powerful parties can be intimidated to not openly disagree. In order to maintain the coalition, they will have to vote against the party's platform in the parliament. If they do not, the party has to leave the government and loses executive power.
2.5: POLITICAL SYSTEM IN INDIA

The progress that India has made in the fifty years after Independence does not meet India’s needs or match its capacity and potential. The massive poverty, illiteracy and backwardness of our people can only be called a massive failure of government. This failure has had an impact on all aspects of our national life, in some cases directly, as in the high crime rate or the huge black economy, and in other cases indirectly, as in the many internal upheavals and secessionist movements. In sectors where the situation is less immediately visible, it is no better; the steady deterioration of national institutions like the bureaucracy, the police, the public utilities, the environment and our permanent natural resources, and arising from all these, the downturn in our defense and international status, and, worst of all, the people’s loss of faith in our institutions, our government, and probably in democracy itself. The policies of the government have not been geared to achieving results to meet our requirements or to realizing the high potential of this country. If the policies have been inadequate or misconceived, the people who made them, viz. those who have held power, have to be held responsible. Either they were incapable of the vision and action required, or they were under pressures that prevented them from functioning as they should have done, or both.¹

We cannot drift along in the hope that a great leader like Gandhiji might arise and lead this country out of its travails, as there is no guarantee that such a leader will arise. Equally, we cannot wait for a revolution to happen. It might not happen, and even if it does, it will destroy a great deal, and might turn our to be a remedy worse than the disease; or alternatively, we might just go on in a downward spiral until the country disintegrates without a revolution.

It is necessary that the intelligentsia alerts itself to come up with solutions to arrest the general decline and turn the country around. In this age, we have a larger body of educated, self-aware and articulate people than ever before, and in this country they are still free to speak and act without undue constraints. The Country’s objectives are stated in the Constitution freedom and equality of all citizens, universal literacy, abolition of

¹ Khanna, S.K, Coalition Politics in India, P. 50
untouchability and much else. None of this has been achieved. Obviously the instrumentalities have been deficient. Our political system (as distinct from the Constitution) is such that it favours antinational functioning and for that reason, favours the rise to power of people who function in anti-national ways. Here true a couple of random examples to illustrate this point.

In our driers country a multiplicity of parties is normal. But the first-past-the-post electoral system makes it possible for a candidate or party to get elected on a minority of the votes cast. This favours candidates and parties which appeal to a sectoral vote-bank as against the totality of the electorate as, for instance, the Hindu, Muslim, backward or untouchable votes; or linguistic votes on issues like river waters etc. The parties thus break up the population into rival, even hostile, groups, instead of welding them into a united people, who can cooperate for mutual benefit, and ensure for our progress a speed which makes that progress meaningful. Candidates and parties maintain and cultivate permanent vote-banks on these divisive bases, and when they get elected, cater to their vote-banks which are the bases of their political power, rather than to national objectives as a whole. Thus the country is in a continuing state of internecine conflict, wasting its resources and energies and time, which does it no good.

A second example is the system of party governments, based on a legislative majority. Since the party is the vehicle of political power, and a majority in the legislature the indispensable instrument of such power, they will do anything and everything to get into power. Thus money is collected through legal or illegal means, putting the potential government under obligation to the donors, which can include smugglers and blackmarketeers. They will accept the help of criminal gangs to help them to win power through fair or foul means, including the general phenomenon of vote rigging, intimidation of rivals etc. These methods and their results have now begun to come out in the open, in the criminalization of politics and the politicization of criminals and in the endless list of scams and scandals reaching up to the highest levels of government, whether at the Centre or in the States. Once in power, the parties will do anything and everything to stay in power. Thus we have the phenomenon of Chief Ministers or would-be Chief Ministers bribing or kidnapping each other’s supporters,
in order to win the all-important majority, or either of them incarcerating their own supporters to put them out of reach of rivals.\textsuperscript{2} We have the common phenomenon of outsize cabinets the sizes of which depend, not on the needs of government but on the needs of the Chief Minister to prevent dissenterers from deserting. We also have the case of the allegations against a Prime Minister to the effect that he bribed members of the opposition to vote for him to help him win a confidence vote, That is to say, the tyranny of the legislative majority.

All the above factors will remain valid whether there is a one-party government or a coalition. Constant maneuvering is an inherent part of the system because of the pursuit of power. In this game of political rivalry, between parties and between individuals, issues are decided, not on considerations of national interest but of party or personal advantage.

Fifty years of Independence and our slow and our slow and inadequate progress should persuade people that a change in our manner of functioning- that is to say, a change in our political system is called for A relevant and appropriate system is of crucial importance. This is so because people in the mass cannot be turned into saints, and the purpose of having a system is to give people the incentive to function along desired lines, and to leave no incentive or scope to function along unacceptable, anti-national and antisocial lines. Such an inbuilt dynamics is more effective and dependable than laws and rules, as these can always be circumvented.

There are those who justify the present system on the conscious or subconscious assumption that it had worked in the past. This is a fallacy. Before Independence it worked under the colonial control of the British, not as the system of an independent India. In the initial years after Independence the country functioned under the leadership of Nehru and the Indian National Congress, the prestige and status of both being the result of the freedom movement. But even then the inherent unsuitability of the system was visible. It was unable to produce an alternative leadership to Nehru, which resulted in India installing a family succession as long as this was possible. Even so, Nehru and the Congress had to carefully cultivate their vote-banks the Muslims and the untouchables.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, P. 52
In pursuit of Muslim votes, illegal immigration of Muslims from the then East Pakistan into Assam was acquiesced in, thus building up later ethnic conflicts. The Nehru government was not accountable, as was demonstrated in this policy of not defending the China border, policy on Kashmir, and on nuclear weaponisation. In these matters, decisions could be made by the Prime Minister backed with his captive legislative majority and the party whip. This gave the P.M. dictatorial powers, thought the potential threat to suavity remained in case of a P.M. who was not seen as a vote-catcher, which fact could move his flock to desert his party. What little debate there has been on the subject of our system in the past has been on the basis of parliamentary versus presidential systems. Though there are several models in either category, the Parliamentary system envisaged is the British system, and the American model is envisaged as the Presidential model. The central point is that we cannot copy any system because India is not a copy of any country.³

India is not like Britain, a country less than a tenth the size of India, with one language, one religion, one race, whose constitution has grown out of its history over centuries and is such a natural growth that it is not even written. America is, on the other hand, a new country largely made up of immigrants, which has been described as a melting-pot, all elements being subsumed under the dominant Anglo-Saxon ethos and culture. India is not a melting pot, but has been described as a salad bowl or a mosaic, in which every constituent unit has its own distinct entity as also its place and role in a harmonious whole. As against America’s short history, India and its multitude of constituent elements have long histories and traditions and institutions of communal and private life. The language issue illustrates the differences, as also the historic regional and religious identities for which the U.S.A. has no parallel. There is no language problem in America, whereas India, with its huge diversity of languages, earth with its history and, traditions, has to find a different solution. It is to be noted that the USA has tried several times to start am third political party and failed. India has tired to reduce the plethora of parties. National and regional, and failed.Rather than Britain or the U.S. A., the only possibly comparison with India (but only up to a point) is the newly evolving and still expanding European Union, where each constituent unit retains its

³ Ibid, P.-54
identity. Even so, this evolving Europe will not have the racial, religious, or linguistic diversities of India.

What is required, in short, is to analyse the Indian situation and facts on the ground, and to evolve a solution to suit our needs. Whether the ultimate formula is similar is of no importance, so long as it meets our requirements. The central and most important fact is that the long history and ethos of our people is democratic, independently of any legal and constitutional framework and changing political boundaries of kingdoms within India. This ethos consists in India’s famed tolerance, and its acceptance of diversity of peoples has in fact been an enriching factor. This is seen on the ground in facts like the thousands of Hindu pilgrims who flock to Ajmer Sharif even as politicians of Muslim or Hindu Parties preach their divisive creeds. We have a Roman Catholic priest who dances the Bharat Natyam, and a Hindu film director who chose a Muslim scrip-writer to write a script for a monumental serial on the Mahabharata. The Muslim in question wrote a superlative script with a fine understanding of the Hindu ethos and vision of life and divinity. He also described himself as a “Hindu Muslim”. The serial was widely acclaimed by a multi-religious audience across the country.

The second most important factor, which in fact is a facet of the first, is India’s enormous diversity. We need a system which accepts this diversity, and allows all the diverse elements in this country to be themselves and to be so in harmony and amity, and in mutual enrichment, with each other. This is not possible with a system that is based on rivalry and conflict as we now have, especially when the pectoral parties have a vested interest in keeping backward communities backward in order to ensure their support, and thus working against progress. This is what explains the continued existence of unsociability and massive illiteracy and backwardness after 50 years of independence. Nor is it possible if a government sitting in distant Delhi, exercises centralized colonial style control over areas as far away as Assam and Kerala, trying to impose uniformity, mistaking it for unity. This overgeneralization is the nature both of our Central and State governments, and of the party-political functioning. Centralization is a poor substitute for harmonization. An extreme example is the old Hindi language policy of the Congress and the hostile response in
Tamilnadu. Even today, though we have so-called panchayat Raj in many States, the Panchayats are under the control of the Central and State governments and of the political parties. If a State government decides to lease out a piece of village common land or forest to an industrialist, the village has no say in the matter. All too frequently, the industrial vision of the Central and State governments is either linked to party advantage or the interests of individual politicians in power, or at best, an idea of progress linked to money invested and profits made, even if it involves the destruction of prosperous communities and fertile agricultural land which is a permanent national resource. The non industrial prosperity of the many is being sacrificed to the industrial growth of large corporate houses. Thus the people of a rich agricultural area in the Karwar region of Karnataka are in confrontation with the State government’s plans to dispossess them to build up a hotel and tourist industry there. People will recall a plan a few years ago in Haryana to compulsorily take over rich agricultural lands to build a Disneyland. It was only a public outcry that stopped it.

An acceptance of India’s size and diversity requires that people be given the power to make their decisions in matters of direct concern to them. As in the example given above, the State government should not be in a position to order prosperous farm land to be alienated in order to give it to a hotel or factory builders. At the very least, the people of the area should have a say; the better solution is to leave the decision to them. Much forestland has been alienated and the forests destroyed because the traditional rights of resident tribes were not recognized. Decentralization would include acceptance of local traditional dispute-settling mechanisms. These should be linked with the national system of the delivery of justice. Tribal and non-tribal communities across the country would be able to build on their traditions and modernize, with education and the growth of communications, and harmonies with the rest of the country voluntarily and willingly. This would be a stable situation and a far stronger position than we now have.

Acceptance of diversity thus involves a decentralized government structure, not merely geographically but institutionally. This requires that the control now exercised over the people by the governments and political parties should be reversed, so that the voting populace has a direct control over governments and legislators at various levels. Those who
have exercised power at the top and distributed political and financial patronage to suit their own individual or party schemes have functioned undemocratically and have demonstrably failed the country. The alternative is to mobilize the people in a democratic structure and hand over power to them and enable them to function in people-oriented ways One way to achieve this is to have governmental organization at several levels and to have the heads of governments at the different levels to be elected directly by an over 5% of the votes cast, This would make the heads of government more accountable and more representative. It also means that both the candidates and the electorate will have to think non-sect orally, because under this system it will be impossible to form a sector-oriented government. Over the years, parties which formulated their programmers on the basis that the backward castes formed the majority or that the Hindus formed the majority of the population, have ended up with minority votes, because in this country every community is, for all practical purposes, a minority. What is more, the distinctions on various fronts, viz. fall into different patterns. Thus a Kerala man identifies with other Kerala people on language, with a non-kerala grouping, on religion or on caste or social issues. Whatever the grouping, there are further sub-groupings and divisions, as for instance, amongst the so-called O.B.C. s. or amongst the Hindus. Neither of them is one consolidated vote-bank. In voting for a single candidate to be the head of government at a given level, the entire diverse electorate has a say in the outcome. The parties and candidates that appeal to sect oral vote banks usually depend on the backwardness or bigotry of their vote banks and for that reason, have a vested interest in the continuation of backwardness or bigotry. It will be recalled that at the time of the Deorala sati, no party was prepared to denounce the sati, not even the Congress government in Delhi. It was the women’s organizations which loudly protested and it was under pressure that the Union government reacted, reacted, slowly and unwillingly, a good three weeks later. Whereas, if the political parties in Rajasthan (and therefore in the country) did not have to compete with each other for the votes of the practitioners of Sati, the practice would have been attacked immediately and decisively, and in fact the sati might not have taken place at all in the first place. This is because, in this land of diversities, where every community (e.g. the Sati-practicing Hindu Community) is a minority, there is a constructive majority on every issue, and the sati-practitioners would have had to face a government backed by the non-sati majority. Thus, in this country, on almost any issue linguistic, religious, developmental,
society etc., there would be a constructive majority, but a different majority on every issue. On an issue like the Muslim Women’s protection bill, which was the joint product of a Muslim vote seeking Congress on the one hand and orthodox muslim sections on the other, in this alternative scenario, the legislators would have discussed the issue of Mulin personal law on the merits of the case, and since there would be no government party, (the head of the govt. being directly elected) the legislators would arrive at a consensus, considering the issue on merits, ensuring the essence of the women’s rights, either within the framework of the personal law or that of the civil law. Whatever agreement is arrived at would be implemented with the weight of the majority in the legislature and the government to back it, and dissident elements would have to scquiesce as there would be no vot-bank-seeking political party to be pressured through agitationism.

The State Structures: We have, at present many large States which are larger than the majority of the sovereign states in the world. They are unwieldy and ungovernable and out of reach of the citizen. The governments have no capacity to control or monitor what goes on in their territory, e.g. if long-distance express trains are routinely stopped at small way wide stations, or private armies of this or that caste terrorize the populace or there is growing crime and mafia style terror. The linguistic States have added to previously existing sources of conflict, without necessary improving the status of Indian languages. The states have changed several times since Independence and there is no constitutional objection to changing them again. There should be smaller states with populations of about ten million. The linguistic nature of these smaller states will not be altered by their size, and the local language will continue to have its role and status as it did even before linguistic States. It is of interest that the States Reorganization Commission had expressed the view that economic consideration would be a better basis for drawing state boundaries rather than language. The change would mean that the Stat government is more easily within reach of its citizens. Having ninety or more states and state capitals would create growth centers, assuming, of course, that these governments are allowed to function with the requisite degree of autonomy and ability to mobilize their people and natural and financial resources. The smaller states and direct election of the heads of government would of grandeur that some of our C.M. suffers from.
Below the state level, there would be a district level administration, and below that, a panchayat level of one or more village, both levels also with adequate levels of autonomy and allotment of functions, with the power to raise taxes. Above the level of the states it might be appropriate to have original groupings of states to consider matters like water resources etc. All levels of government, other than the regional groupings would have the heads of government directly elected by a majority of over 50% of the votes cast thus making them directly accountable to the populace, and also more truly representative than the political parties that now form the government, which are based on sectoral or minority votes, with candidates selected by and answerable to the political parties. The regional groupings could be constituted of technical experts nominated in equal numbers by the member states and the centre. It is not envisaged that any of the units in this structure from the Central Government down to the Panchayat level would function independently of the rest. The centre would naturally be the policy-making body, but its powers would not be restricted to Foreign Affairs, Defense and Currency. Policy making would include land-use policy for the country, so that fertile agricultural land is not wasted on industrial development or human settlements or barren land left neglected; Manpower policy, so that education would be both employment and value oriented and there is a clear plan of universal education with equal opportunities, at the basic level, with merit prevailing at the higher levels, and specialized education limited to the assessed needs of the country in any given discipline. There would have to be a national water policy, and ecological and environmental and natural resource policies, which would have to decide on issues like whether a particular rain forest should be destroyed to build tourist hotels or to exploit the mineral wealth therein there in or fertile land should be sacrificed in favour of a factory. These policies would require meaningful interaction between the Central government and the various governments lower down the line. Thus there would have, to be a symbiotic relationship between the various levels of government, with amachinery for monitoring the implementation of policies finally by the Centre.

Taking the example of education, the policy would be formulated by the Centre, and compulsory school level education could be implemented at the district levels by the regional
bodies, The Centre’s policy formulation would have to take into account the need of districts to teach school children local history and geography, or their need to decide on language choices bearing in mind the employment needs of the children including higher and professional education targeting a wider field, or vocational education, whether geared, to a wider field or to local resources and local needs etc. The logic of the State civil service and police should be carried to lower levels where, barring the heads of the police and civil service at district level, the rest are local recruits. The geographical devolution would have to be supplemented and supported by an institutional devolution and decentralization. The party government selects its candidates and gets them elected by money support, organizational support and. Often mafia style support, the candidates are obviously not appealing to the electorate ca their own merits, What is more, they ate answerable, not to the people but to the party. The party, as we have seen, functions on “Vote-banks” i.e. sect oral support, and has a vested interest in fostering conflicts in society. In many respects, the interests of the parties are not in tune with the interests of the country.

The direct election of the heads of governments at every level, in addition to making the governments more representative and accountable, would give the diverse electorate a sense of involvement and participation in the formation of the governments and in the policies and activation of the governments. It would also mean that, having to elect the heads of government at different levels by over 50% of the votes would make the electorate think and act non-sect orally, and the candidates for the head of government would not be appeal to a sect oral vote.

The Political System (as distinct from the Constitution and its objectives) is broad outline, as follows:

**The Prime Minister:** We have a P.M. elected by the majority party or a combination of parties together cobbbling majority support in the Lok Sabha, not by the people voting directly. All the government at the Centre, without exception, were based on minority of the electoral votes cast. A party or united front of parties representing a minority of the electorate, elects its leader to suit Its own agenda, Unless there is personality seen as a vote-
getter (like Nehru, Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi) the party is likely to elect a weak person, seen (rightly or wrongly) as malleable. A strong personality is likely to be unacceptable to one or other faction.

This motion of electing P.M. can also produce P.M. s who cannot command even a respectable minority of the electoral votes; e.g. Mr. Chandrasekhar became P.M. wholly and solely by virtue of defecting from his party. He had only five M.O. s with him and when he later faced the electorate, his party could only get the same number of legislators. Recently we have also had two P.M. s who were Rajya Sabha members. Mr. Deve Gowda Dared not face a Lok Sabha by-election in his own State. Mr. I.K. Gujral had not won a ‘Lok Sabha was from Bihar, courtesy, Laloo Prasad Yadav. P.M.s have more or less dictatorial power while holding office by virtue of the fact that the party in government is controlled by a party whip. Is more than a formal institution because if the government should fall, not only the P.M. but all the government party legislators fall and might not get back into power and the party majority from the P.M.’s position by the P.M. should be neither with the party nor with the President. This would mean that the party legislators either jointly or singly, can consider issues on merits and vote down unacceptable policies without voting down the P.M. and his government. The P.M. and his government will thus be stable, representative and accountable.

The President: He is the republican substitute for a constitutional monarchy which evolved naturally in West European Kingdoms. He represents a duality of authority in our conflict ridden system, and much has been written about the confrontations between different Presidents and Prime Ministers over national issues. These issues should not be decided by the difference of opinion (sometimes rancours of reveries) between these two top-level functionaries but by the entire parliament and country debating these issues. The position of a constitutional president is an irrelevance that should be done away with, and other methods instituted for ensuring responsible and accountable functioning by the P.M. The exercise of deciding which party should be asked to form a government would be irrelevant if the P.M. in office dies or other such contingency arises, there should be an automatic line of
succession laid down e.g. the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha or the Speaker to take over until an election can be held.

**Holding Office without Election:** There should be no scope for a P.M. or C.M. or Ministers to take office without being elected by the electorate to the post. We have had cabinet ministers who were elected after assuming office, notably, in recent times, Mr. Manmohan Singh, who became Finance Minister in Narasima Rao’s Cabinet. We have had the well-known case of Mr Chautala who was elected leader of his party and became Chief Minister of Haryana and with the powers of the Chief Minister in his hank, proceeded to rig the bye election by which he sought to be elected to the legislature. The alternative system envisaged, namely one in which the cabinet ministers would be technical people and specialists and are not permitted be members of legislators, would take care of cases like that of Manmohan Singh.

**The Cabinet:** This is currently an exercise unsatisfying various shades of opinion in the party or in the country or in the legislature, the person for the minister ship in question being of very little consequence. The sizes of the cabinet are dictated by how many potential dissidents have to be kept satisfied. Cabinet Ministers should be chosen on the grounds of their qualifications and knowledge and experience in respect of the subject they are required to handle. In order to keep political pressures and irrelevant considerations out members of Legislatures should be ineligible for ministerial posts.

The Prime Minister’s nominees for cabinet posts should be subject to endorsement by the legislature, so that he is not tempted to nominate his son : or son-in-law or otherwise use his powers of appointment to distribute patronage.

**The Legislators:** These are now selected by the parties, to whom they are answerable, and who “get” them elected by monetary and organizational support. But if the head of government is directly elected, and the party has no prospect of forming a government and then handing out patronage to those who supported them with money power and muscle power, there will be no such support for the parties and the parties have no incentive to
concentrate all they have on getting their nominees elected. The legislators then have to be acceptable to the electorate, not to the parties. The parties can continue to exist and be ideological (or even sect oral) platforms, and function accordingly in the legislatures, having their say in the formulation of policies. But even this will have to be on the merits of the issues as perceived by them on the basis of their ideologies or sect oral moorings, rather than on considerations of party advantage. On the other hand, even individual party members will be able to vote on the merits of the question, since their party’s defection, and loud and acrimonious and unruly debates. No acrimony is necessary as each legislator has the power of his vote to be able to influence decisions.

**Chief Minister:** The governmental structure in the States is more or less the same as in the Union government with some inbuilt differences. The Government, with some inbuilt differences. The Governor is appointed by the Centre, and not elected by the legislatures. He has increasingly become the representative of the party in power at the centre Also, if there is a failure of constitutional machinery in the State, there can be President’s rule which in effect is rule by the Union government viz. the party in power. This has led to much controversy. But if the Chief Minister is elected directly by the State electorate, the Chief Minister and his government, would be subject to the control of his legislature and through it, his electorate, and the governor would become redundant. Given the clearly defined powers of the State government, the question of a so-called “Constitutional Head” who would call upon this or that party to form a government, etc. would be redundant. The excesses that we saw rot long ago in a State like. Tamilnadu would be difficult or impossible in small States functioning under the proposed alternative system. Article 356 will become redundant.

**The State Government:** The present situation is one of the instability of the government even when a single party has a majority, because of the desire of a large number of the government party legislators to hold office, backed by the threat of dissidence and defection. So we have the fairly normal procedure of outsize cabinets, and where necessary, Chairmanships of Public Sector Corporations etc. with their status and perks, being doled out by the Chief Minister in order to keep his flock together. All this is paid for by the tax payer, including the damage done by these worthies building their own personal empires or by their
incompetence in handling their charges. The C.M. while in office is a combination of
dictatorial powers (the excesses of Jayalalitha are of recent memory) and instability, with the
constant threat of dissidence or defection hangingover his head. Both will be done away with
under the proposed alternative, with the CM (like the PM) under the continuous monitoring
by the legislature, and the termination of party challenges to the stability of his post. The
objective is to change unacceptable policies, not governments.

The arguments apply to all levels of government, the government at the lower levels would,
like the higher levels, be cleared of distortions arising from party rivalries and party pursuit
of power. There will certainty be problems, such as the protection of weaker sections of the
populace against the oppression of privileged sections. But that problem has not been solved
under the present dispensation and it is more than possible that the vote-bank political
orientation plus the interference with police functioning are preventing a just and peaceable
solution. In many cases like the private “Senas” the problem seems to have grown worse in
recent years. The new system would also be the problem of developing very backward areas
which are short of resources. Naturally the present principle of the joint support to such areas
by the centre and the more prosperous States would continue. The proposed system would,
on the one hand, be much be much cheaper than the present one, making savings for the
country, and on the other, would ensure more efficient use of national resources. Both money
and political power would not be centralized by the Union Government and then distributed
downwards (with extensive “leakages” on the way down), but utilized from bottom upwards,
giving to the upper echelons and the Centre only as much political power and money as their
roles justify. This would have no scope for the interception at lower levels of the
appropriation at political levels in the normal implementation of policies down the line, for
instance the allotment of jobs or contracts or village common lands to those enjoying
political favour. When both functional autonomy and tax raising powers are devolved, money
is locally appropriated and accounted for.

The savings will arise on many fronts. There will be no midterm elections, with their huge
costs. There will be no outsize cabinets eating up the taxpayer’s money or the “purchasing”
of legislative votes. Corruption and kickbacks at the central or State level become difficult
because there will be no government party holding a majority in the legislature which will have a vested interest in covering up for the government. There will be no losses caused by incompetent ministers or chairmen of statutory corporations holding jobs as party political gifts. There will be no recurring and extensive “leakage” on the way down of funds appropriated for developmental expenditure by the Central and State Governments, since the implementation will be at the lower levels which have the powers to raise funds. There will be no huge expenditures by parties in promoting and publicizing themselves, as they will have neither the incentive nor the nations to make it possible. There will be no agitations, strikes and bandhs mounted by political parties bringing the people’s normal functioning and production to a stop. There will be no normal opportunity cost, the cost to the country of unsuitable and non-functional governments and legislatures which neglect or hold up the progress of the country while they pursue their individual or party agendas. There will be no distortion of the functioning of schools and universities, trade unions and other national institutions by the political conflicts inducted into them by party political rivalries. It will become possible to institute government funding of elections, since, under the new dispensation, candidates cannot get illegal donations under cover, since there will be no incentive for such donations. In human affairs, there is no such thing as perfection. But with the alternatives system, we can have hope of a generally peaceful, harmonious, orderly and progressive and national life, under the aegis of representative and accountable institutions with the full participation of the people at all levels.

A political system is not the same as the Constitution on which it is based. It involves the day today working of the administration. It rests on conventions and on the political culture accepted by the society in which it operates. It is possible therefore to change the Constitution but retain the system. It is possible to retain the Constitution but change the system.

The original Constitution of India has been has been amended nearly eighty times. On several occasions it has been interpreted in dubious fashion to create precedents which negate its spirit. No doubt there are constitutional amendments or changes which are desirable. No
doubt many policy formulations can be, and indeed have been, suggested to improve the present system of governance.

To improve the system our prime need is not better policies. What we need first of all is a political instrument capable of translating an agenda into action. To formulate a practical, consensual agenda is the least of our problems. Our real problem is to find a suitable political instrument to implement the agenda.

The decline in Indian politics has reached a critical stage. Consider the current situation. Official investigative agencies have charge-sheeted top political leaders cutting across all the national parties for corruption and other crimes that are worse. The intellectual integrity of judges heading judicial commissions has been called into question. Judicial commissions in turn have made thinly veiled accusations against leading politicians of having conspired in political assassinations. Politicians of different parties have accepted or rejected these accusations on the basis of their political affiliations. Due to political exigencies, politicians today are vociferous about the grave allegations which for over a decade earned only defining silence.

Two conclusions are inescapable. First, that the existing political parties are concerned solely with their respective political fortunes and not at all with public interest. Secondly, no existing political party shows sufficient promise of reform to emerge as an appropriate instrument for implementing any policy agenda formulated for public good.

To create a suitable political system for India the first need therefore is to create a new national party capable of obtaining a parliamentary mandate. Till that is achieved the rest is irrelevant. Is this objective practical. Is it possible? The short answer to that is that it is not only possible but inevitable if India is to survive as a democracy, perhaps even as a nation. To create such a party would involve an effort nothing short of a revolution. As our honorable MPs so glibly propagated during the recent special session of Parliament, India needs its second freedom struggle. One wonders if the authors of this brave declaration realize that the first victims of the proposed second freedom struggle would be honorable
MPs themselves. Let us consider the prospects of creating an alternative to all the present political parties. At present, Indian politics has degenerated to a naked power struggle in the service of economic and criminal mafias for the spoils of organized corruption. There are no real political or economic issues under debate. Consequently electoral politics has been reduced to a tribal war among castes and communities. But to conclude from this, as most media experts and political pundits have, that our electorate is swayed only by considerations of caste or community, is facile and fallacious. In the absence of a genuine alternative to the prevailing political culture, what choice do voters have? Only caste and community distinguish Tweedledum from Tweedledee.

The strength of the caste is greatly exaggerated. The latest caste group are the davits, constitution a little over 20%. In that group the largest caste are the Chimers, about 8%. Other dalit castes, such as the Balmikhis for example, are by no means committed to any Chamar leader. The largest OBC caste are the Yadavs, around 6% the much trumpeted Mandal card has never delivered relivered results because no political leader, after the later Ram Manohar Lohia and Karpoori Thakur, succeeded in converting caste into class. At the height of the Mandal fever, VP Singh failed miserably at the polls, reducing his strength by more than half. Today Yadav fight the Kurmis in Bihar while the Gujjars battle the Chamars in uttar Pradesh. The stunting of its growth for all future time is the price paid for the instant success of any party relying on caste politics.

The largest and most influential electoral group is then middle class. If by the middle class one means people sufficiently motivated to seek the enlargement of their consumer comforts, it would con stature not less than 25% of the population. All the combined forward castes add up to only 14% of the population. So even if only 2% forward castes are considered poor, more than half the middle class would consist of OBCs and dalits.

It is this class which holds the key to India’s future. Rajiv Gandhi, VP Singh and the BJP, before it demolished the Babri Masjid, roade to power on the shoulders of the middle class. The fortunes of each declined when it offended the middle class either through corruption, through castelsm or through communal violence.
The middle class, which watches TV and constitutes the market, is methodically wooed and won over by the corporate world. The corporate world wins over the middle class through its skills in organization, production of goods and services, communication and marketing. The corporate world is manned and led by the middle class itself so why cannot the same middle class woo and win members in electoral politics? After all politics is nothing but organization, communication, marketing and production, not of goods and services, but of policies? This does not happen because the middle class, first due to an accident of history, an dater due to an obsession with narrow self-interest, abdicated its responsibility to lead and rule the country. But now it is not only the safety of the middle class which is at stake. The future of India is at stake. Criminals have subverted and hijacked democracy. Will the middle class rise to organize, communicate, produce ideas of good governance, and market them among the voters? The future of India depends on this. Let decent people challenge the professional politicians. The masses are sure to respond.

2.6: EVALUATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

It appears somewhat ironic to describe the success of the Indian experiment of parliamentary democracy during the last fifty years of its independence especially when one looks at the proliferation of its independence especially when one looks at the proliferation of seams involving the high and mighty.

The hawala episode, with its widespread ramifications, taking a heavy ministerial toll during the previous Congress (I) regime, the Bihar case, in which corers of of rupees were siphoned off by officials from the government exchequer without let or hindrance by none else but officials themselves and perpetuation of fraud on the constitutional system by running a proxy government from the jail by Lazlo Yadav, climax the decades of mismanagement of the country’s affairs and continued collapse of the value system. Lest there should by undue despondency, attention also needs to be drawn the positive—the achievements in political, economic and science and technology areas.
India embarked on the most challenging political adventure when it opted for a full-fledged democratic system in a country of such magnitude, with a bewildering variety of languages, creeds, cultures and races. The task of integrating a people of such diversity within the framework of democracy, with all its pulls and pressures and its built-in tendency towards corruption and indiscipline combined with traumas of partition and external hostility, is a baffling one in best of circumstances. But it is almost hopeless when it has to be accomplished in the context of mass poverty, illiteracy and a growing population.

Considering all these formidable challenges, the very unbroken continuance of the operation of Indian democracy with all its frailties, is no mean achievement. The salience of this fact becomes clear when one looks at the collapse of the mighty Soviet state along with its vast alliance system, the balkanization of Europe, West Asia (where Arab countries are broken into fifteen different states despite sharing a single culture) or partition of Pakistan. The Indian Constitution is the oldest one among the constitutions of the Third World. There is no indication of a significant breakdown of the constitutional arrangement in the foreseeable future. India’s modestly cohesive armed forces, its communication and transport network, functioning national market, cross cutting ethnic loyalties and the accommodations of ethnic identities in a federal framework are likely to ensure India’s survival at least as a rudimentary nation state.

More significantly, the Indian political system has shown its inherent capability of smooth and peaceful transition of power. Transfers of political power at the federal level in 1964, 1979, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1990, 1996, 1997, 2002, 2006 and 2011 have been peaceful and in accordance with the Constitution. This has accorded operational legitimacy to the Indian constitutional arrangement as against military takeovers in many Third World countries in general and South Asian countries in particular. In fact, no matter what fears the media, the politicians, and even members of the armed forces may express privately before the elections, electoral verdicts are hardly challenged.

The Indian electoral system has thus performed an admirable role in system maintenance and support building. Moreover, the Indian electorates have, at least at the federal level,
demonstrated that they gladly respond to secular and rational issues. They, for instance, favorably responded to Mrs. Gandhi’s call for “garibi hatao” (remove poverty) in 1971, the Janata Party’s call against authoritarian rule in 1977, plea for restoration of stability in 1980, Rajiv Gandhi’s appeal for a strong government to defeat secessionist movement in Punjab in 1984 and the National Front’s slogan against corruption in 1989. It was only in the 1990s that caste and religion emerged as significant issues in federal elections. Most significant of all, in the last three decades the turnout has been lower when the people have been more or less content, but as much as 15 per cent higher when they have wanted to throw the Government out. One thus finds that even though Indian electorates appear to be duck partner in the democratic process, yet they have shown political literacy and capability, not merely to amass, but also to diffuse charisma. Indian electorates have thus moved for candidate orientation to party and issue orientation in their voting behavior.

Another bulwark of democracy in India is its federal system. No doubt, the constitutional structure is somewhat tilted in favour of the Union. In practice also, the Union, including the present ‘truly federal’ Government has misused Art. 356 of the Constitution that empowers the President to proclaim federal rule in a state on the ground of constitutional breakdown. However, usually ignored is the fact that apart from defence, communication, foreign policy and till now industrial development (which should have been the States, but was taken by the responsibility of the States, but was taken by the Union in the interests of the now mercifully moribund economy), every thing else of importance, from agriculture, to law and order, education and culture, is the responsibility of the State. Federalism has also been consciously used as device for preserving the identities, and therefore freedoms of diverse ethnic groups within a larger nation state.

The protection of ethnic identities is, moreover, an ongoing concern. When it became clear, around 1985, that the redrawing of State boundaries in 1956 to bring them in line with ethnic ones. Had turned several smaller groups into ethnic minorities within the new ethnic States, there emerged a third tier of decentralization, the Autonomous Development Councils within each State, which took over those functions on which the protection of ethnic identity most depended.
This is not to deny certain blunders committed by the ruling elite in New Delhi. Indira Gandhi, for instance, encouraged militancy in Punjab for defeating her Akali rivals there. She also arranged the dismissal of popularly elected government of Farooq Abdullah in Kashmir in the eighties. India had to pay heavy price for these faults. One cannot also deny that security forces have committed certain excesses while defending Indian integration. One should not however forget that since 1990 the Indian security forces have not bombed Srinagar or any other town in Kashmir as the Russians and Serbs did. The preventive detention measure, known as TADA has been impugned by the Government’s own Human Rights Commission. New Delhi permitted greater transparency, allowed foreign diplomats to visit Kashmir and finally succeeded in holding first Lok Sabha and then State Assembly elections in that State like Punjab and Assam, now Kashmir too is returning towards normalcy under the elected leadership of Farooq Abdullah. Though New Delhi has to go a long way in search of a lasting peace in these and other troubled spots, the Indian democracy has remarkably shown its resilience and survival instincts.

It is also important to point out that the Supreme Court ruling on the dismissal of the Madhya Pradesh Government has now made it very difficult for the Centre to use article 356 of the Constitution against any State Government without any very grave cause. The judiciary has played even more significant role in safeguarding of the life and liberty of the people in India. The Indian Supreme Court has vastly expanded the scope of judicial review through its various rulings. Gone are the days when the Supreme Court confined its scope of judicial review to scrutinizing executive excesses alone in accordance with art. 21 of the Constitution. Since the landmark judgment of Maneka Gandhi Case the Supreme Court can now examine the legal validity of any state action also on the implied basis of principles of natural justice. Moreover, even an unaffected or a third party, who had earlier no locus standi, can now approach the courts for protection of fundamental rights of the affected party. This is widely known as public interest litigation. Besides, by proclaiming the doctrine of the “Basic structure” of the Constitution, which cannot be amended by Parliament, the Supreme Court successfully, prevented Mrs. Indira Gandhi from curtailing the scope of judicial review through her brute parliamentary majority. As the people defeated Mrs. Gandhi in 1977
elections partly for her attempt to abridge judicial review through the ……Amendment Act, no leader has again dared to confront the Judiciary. To cap it all, the apex court has expanded the sphere of several fundamental rights. The right to life, for instance, has been interpreted to include right to primary education. Similarly, the right to freedom of speech and expression has been extended by including under their scope implied right of the freedom of the press. Now public servants and busybodies have only a limited right to privacy and a paper or journalist cannot be sued for violation of privacy merely for wrong news or comments.

On its part, the mainstream of press in India has proved to be an important channel of airing popular grievances and thus a significant source of feedback for the authorities. As a great champion of democracy, President Jefferson of US, once remarked, “Between a free press without democracy and a democracy without a free press, I would prefer the former. The Indian press has grown enormously in these five decades. After the emergency, no government at the Centre has ever dared to muzzle the press. A few attempts to bulldoze the press in States like Bihar and U.P., have been frustrated by the collective efforts of vigilant intellectuals. It is heartening to note that the quality of writing both on reporting and editorial sides, has maintained, if not improved on, the standards of the pre-independence era.

One may dismiss this as an “elitist control over Indian democracy,” but the empowerment of the people has continued. Panchyati Raj, the mandatory third tier of democracy, has finally been enshrined in the Constitution. Panchyats will now not only suggest (which used to mean beg the State administration for) development projects but will also plan and execute them, with money devolved to them for the State. Even more epoch making event has been the coming in to power of the Bahujan Samaj Party (a party championing the cause of the lower castes and minorities) in the largest and most populous State, U.P. though it has lesser members in the State Assembly as compared to its coalition partner the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

At the village level this signals that the days of oppressing the lower caste peoples, extracting labour from them and abducting their women are largely over. While one can hardly condone
almost abusive language used against the upper caste people by leaders of this party, the rise of this party shows that the Poor in India are making full use of the caste basis of the peculiar hierarchical order found in India for changing the nature of the inherited social order by resorting more and more to the politics of identity and self-determination.

As we look at the situation at the end of the fifty years of independence, it is becoming increasingly clear that what has saved the poor from the eclipse is the poor people’s own struggle against the system, their own strategies of survival and gradually, their own growth in confidence and sense of dignity and self-esteem. India has, of course, not succeeded in fulfilling the dreams of the founding fathers in the matters of removing poverty, backwardness or even providing drinking water to all people. But these weaknesses such as lethargy, inefficiencies, a convoluted administration and less than honest political practices are traditional. What is new is the economic vigor which has doubled the GDP growth rate from the 3.5 per cent average for the first three decades of independence to nearly 7 per cent of the past three years. And it has been doubled through wholly sustainable policies, not through the short-sighted borrowings during the fourth decade which pushed up the rate a little but by the end of the decade brought India to the brink of bankruptcy and default in foreign obligations. Besides, inflation now below four percent and a fiscal deficit about to slip below five per cent are at 50 years’ record level.

When a decline in industrial growth this year threatened to bring down the overall growth rate as well, it was lifted back to almost 7 per cent by agricultural growth rising to an all-time record of 5.7 per cent, or about 50 per cent more than what a “good” year used to record in earlier decades. Few countries, developed or developing, have been able to combine a growth rate higher than 7 per cent with an inflation rate below 5 per cent, and fiscal deficit dipping to 5 per cent or less.

Equally credible are the speed and politics of India’s transition from a more or less planned, regulated and controlled economy to a more or less market-oriented one in less than four ears, with little economic dislocation, and on the crest of a wide consensus, achieved in the midst of a vigorous and assertive adult franchise democracy in which many more
governments have been overthrown during the past decade than have been confirmed in power.

The economic transition has been accomplished simultaneously with an equally difficult diplomatic transition. For almost four decades the challenge to Indian diplomacy had been how to tread a carefully nonaligned path between the Soviet and Western power blocs. But then India, like many other countries, suddenly faced and entirely new challenge; how to find a way in a world now dominated by a single superpower, and that too one which had looked at this country for long with an unfriendly eye as having been too close to the other superpower.

But India could meet the challenge without surrendering its long cherished independence of judgment and action as shown in its firm stand against the NPT and CTBT. The process of improvement in Indo-American relations, which began in the eighties, has nonetheless continued. Now the US shows much better appreciation of India’s concern on issues of importance to it such as Pakistan’s games in Kashmir and in Afghanistan.

One of the reasons for this success is the successful economic transition. This has also been contributed by India’s success in other fields. Apart from containing militancy in Punjab and Kashmir, India has been able to improve its ties with China and immediate neighbors such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka. As for Pakistan, only madness would now induce it to go to war, as miscalculation invited it to do so earlier. In addition, India no longer faces a hostile phalanx among the Islamic countries, thanks most notably to a rapid and many sided improvement of relations with Iran, the most powerful resource-rich and fervently Islamic country among them, whose relations with Pakistan have sharply deteriorated in the meanwhile. Undoubtedly, this success story of the Indian Republic is not intended to induce ourselves to slip in to an optimistic stance. We can ignore the erosion in the four major pillars of our democracy, namely, the party system, electoral system, parliamentary system and the administrative system only at the cost of our peril. It would also be foolhardy to deny the need of urgent reforms in our Constitution, electoral and other relevant laws as advocated by eminent constitutional experts such as Subhash C. Kashyap. On the whole, however, our
record is not as poor as projected by lopsided media coverage’s of events in and outside India. As such, there is no cause for despair. We, as a nation, have every reason to have full faith in our future. Indeed, the accumulation of certain grievances and disappointments should not unduly cloud our vision of achievements, and to chart a course for fulfillment of the unfinished agenda of our nation and state building.