CHAPTER-IV

INDIAN PARTY SYSTEM IN TRANSITION: 1996 TO 2009

Three general elections were held within a span of three years, 1996 to 1998, reflecting fragility of coalition governments in India and showing continuous shifting of political loyalties of parties. The Indian party system became highly competitive as parties depending on their social base, internal organization and now, ideologies developed complex mode of interaction or co-existence. Therefore, crucial changes are still taking place in parties and party system. The parties, in executive or legislative coalitions are pulling in different directions and holding back the leading pivotal party. The Prime Minister contends within the constraints of coalition or minority governments. Thus, the coalition governments provide unprecedented opening to federal forces and minor parties sharing power in Union Cabinet.


The 11th national elections held in April-May 1996, resulted in the breakdown of one party dominant system and showed gradual transition, towards new “region based multi-party system”, in which all the major national parties such as the BJP, the Congress and Janata Dal (JD) were competing for power at the Centre. None of these parties had wider support base in majority of the regions, as the Congress Party enjoyed in the Nehruvian era. The 1996 parliamentary elections was different from the earlier ones. There was neither nationwide wave for or against any political formations, nor there were national issues, dominating the polls. There were “mini waves”, at local levels, influenced by the local issues, as in Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West

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Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. The absence of major issues in 1996 polls, led to campaigning on lines of caste and community.\(^4\)

### Table 4.1: Tally of Seats of Political Parties and Alliances in 1996 General Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United Front</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>BJP+ Seats</th>
<th>Congress Seats</th>
<th>Others Seats</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janata Dal</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>BSP 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>AIFB 03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>08</td>
<td></td>
<td>IUML 03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMC</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>MGP 01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>UGDP 01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ind. &amp; others 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M PVC</td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>172</strong></td>
<td><strong>195</strong></td>
<td><strong>140</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This was the first time, when Congress Party contested elections without Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to steer it. The Indian National Congress (INC) riven with dissensions and major splits on the eve of elections.\(^5\) The Arjun Singh and N.D. Tiwari faction campaigned to dislodge P.V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister.\(^*\) The banner of revolt was also raised by Moopanar group in Tamil Nadu. Madhava Rao Scindia, the Maharaja of Gwalior, who showed defiance of denial of party ticket, for

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\(^*\) P.V. Narasimha Rao held two the posts. He was President, All India Congress Party, on the one hand and the head of the government (Prime Minister), on the other. The dissidents in the Congress Party proposed the idea of ‘one person one post’ for the smooth functioning of government and the party.
being implicated in the Hawala scandal, brought massive victory (as independent candidate) for him, dented the party performance in 1996 general elections. The voice of dissent continued within the Congress Party. In comparison to this, the dissidence in BJP was almost negligible, and it appeared more cohesive and disciplined party at the time of elections. The BJP in 1995, identified five issues for 1996 Lok Sabha elections; such as building of Ram Mandir (to build Lord Rama temple at Ayodhya), repeal Article 370, infiltrations of foreigners (Bangladeshi), the uniform civil code, and Swadeshi. The BJP was hoping that its two fold strategy would bring solid results in 1996 polls. On the one hand, the Ayodhya and Mathura temple issues based upon cultural nationalism might attract upper and middle class Hindus in the northern states and on the other, its economic nationalism based on scrapping of the Enron Power project in Maharashtra, would appeal to those who, irrespective of ideology, believed in ‘national self-respect.’ Therefore, the BJP campaigning focused mainly on a ‘vote for change’. The Janata Dal led National Front (NF) proposed a secular democratic alternative based on secularism, federalism, and socio-economic justice. However, the partners of National Front mostly campaigned on their own individual agenda in their respective areas of influence and raised local issues. In a way, the Indian voters experienced national elections of 1996, more or less, without communal tension. The issues were generally all secular, the effect of economic reforms, stability versus change and good governance versus scams and corruptions.

Consequently, the party system entered into an era of coalition politics, as a ‘hung House’ emerged once again. The BJP and its allies topped by gaining 195 seats with 25.7 percentage of votes. The National Front/United Front won 181 seats with 30.10 percentage of votes, emerging as second successful formation. The Congress slipped down to the third position, got 173 seats with 29.74 percentage of votes (see table 4.1). The trends showed that people casted their votes either on the

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7 Pai, n.3, pp.1175-1176.
8 Singh and Saxena, n.4, p.104.
basis of region, community or caste or against the establishment in 1996 polls. The BJP emerged as a single largest party in Lok Sabha, but it could taste power under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s, for a brief interlude of thirteen days only, it was unable to muster required support in the popular House, Vajpayee resigned from post of Prime Minister after thirteen days.

Thereafter, H. D. Deve Gowda became the head of United Front government in June 1996, after V.P. Singh declined the offer for the Prime Minister office and Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal, was restrained by his party CPI (M). The United Front (UF) government consisted of thirteen parties (see table 4.1), nine partners participating in government, four parties formally part of the UF coalition, but they did not accept any ministry. The INC provided the outside support to the UF, because the main aim of Congress Party to prevent the BJP from coming into power. Later on, the Congress Party withdrew support from Deve Gowda ministry in April 1997, on the ground that the Union Cabinet failed to check the communal forces and also trying to marginalize the INC. Meanwhile, Sita Ram Kesri, President, AICC continued to back the central government when United Front changed its leadership. Inder Kumar Gujral became the new Prime Minister of UF, under the pressure of outside partner (Congress Party) of the central government. Eventually, the Congress Party again withdrew support to the UF after a short period in November 1997, precipitating fresh elections next year.

It is interesting to note that, the UF became the first Union Cabinet in which Left party, CPI was participating in decision making process and Inderjit Gupta made Union Home Minister. It was also first time, a coalition government, formally adopted a Common Minimum Programme (CMP), acceptable to all its constituents. The CMP model was also adopted by the NDA and the UPA governments. The results of the 1996 parliamentary elections pointed that the transition towards a new party system, was evident and three major changes took place since the mids-1980.

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11 Ibid., pp.5-11.
Firstly, the BJP, the Congress and the UF, reformulated their respective ideologies on fundamental issues such as secularism, state intervention in economic reforms, nationalism and social justice. Secondly, the realignments among parties, state as well national levels took place, the Congress Party and the BJP tried to form alliances with regional/state parties. The BJP tied with SAD (B), Haryana Vikas Manch of Bansi Lal and Shiv Sena etc, while, INC attempted to make an unsuccessful agreement with BSP in Uttar Pradesh. The United Front/Left Front was a divided array of parties, could not constitute a cohesive force in the absence of a strong leadership, who could unite its disparate members. However, the number of strong regional parties did not align with any of three major contenders. Thirdly, a noticeable change occurred, in the social and regional base of political parties, that is, the BJP improved its position in Lok Sabha from two seats in 1984 to 161 in 1996. The Janata Dal/National Front won only forty six in 1996 and enhanced its position in Karnataka. The Congress suffered the worst. It clearly revealed the impact of the process of regionalization. Sudha Pai concluded that the multi-party system at national level was moving towards “federalization”, a process visible in the 1989, 1991, and particularly in 1996 Lok Sabha elections. The balance of power, now tilted towards regional and smaller players with 144 seats and 28.62 percentage of votes, while, five major national parties won only 391 seats with 65.26 percentage of votes.

Consequently, the emergence of distinct state party system at regional level, separated but closely linked to national party system. The regional parties were dominant players at state level, national and state parties competed for power. By and large, with the break down of the dominant party system, Indian polity entered into transitional period, characterized by fluid, fragmented political formation and unstable coalition governments, on one side and the multi-party system at national level, moving towards federalization, on the other.

The results from the 12th Lok Sabha in 1998 confirmed the overall tendency towards “regionalization of Indian politics”, and protracted construction of

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13 Pai, n.3, pp.1174-1180.
14 Ibid., pp.1181-1182.
15 Kumar, n.10, p.27.
16 Pai, n.3, p.1182.
Vajpayee’s thirteen parties’ coalition government in late March 1998, demonstrated that Indian Prime Minister would be made and unmade in state capitals, rather than in Delhi. Most of the political parties recognized the importance of pragmatic electoral alliance, except INC, which subsequently strengthened the range of regional political formations.17

Table 4.2: Tally of Seats of Political Parties and Alliances in 1998 General Elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>UF and others</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJP +</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samata party</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>RJD</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD (B)</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>RPI (M)</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>IUML</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Shakti</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>RJP (Gujarat)</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>JD</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIADMK</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>KC</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVP</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>FB</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv Sena</td>
<td>06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TMC</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJD</td>
<td>08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMK</td>
<td>04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>255</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>170</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The parliamentary elections of 1996, produced as much fragmented and polarize picture, as previous elections in the party system. The complex pattern of inter-party alliance continued as a ‘patchwork’ quilt at the Centre as well as state levels. Three major contenders as the Congress, the BJP, and the UF were in the electoral fray in 1998 national elections.18 The UF lacked cohesive leadership as its leaders, such as Jyoti Basu, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Deve Gowda and G.K. Moopanar etc, were

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18 Singh and Saxena, n.4, p.124.
much busy to strengthen their own regional support base, rather than work for unity and integrity of the United Front. None of them came forward to save the sinking boat of the United Front in 1998 mid-term elections. The BJP vigorously searched for new friends because, party tried to avoid previous humiliation, as no one extended support to the Vajpayee government in 1996 except, pre-poll partners.

The BJP forged number of pre-poll arrangements with various regional parties, such as Samata Party, Lok Shakti Party, AIADMK, Trinamool Congress, Biju Janata Dal etc. and also matured post-poll alignments with TDP. Three regional parties and few independents, added twenty two seats in NDA kitty, which led to slender parliamentary majority to BJP. The BJP moderated its own ideology and tried to accommodate the demands of its allies during and after the elections. Bharatiya Janata Party shelved the core idea of *Hindutva* and turned to a “new softer BJP.” That is, the party was moving towards ‘Ram Mandir’ (Lord Rama Temple) to ‘Rasthra Mandir’ (national temple), meaning thereby, creating a prosperous and secure country for all citizens. In contrast, the Congress failed to learn the importance of alliance politics early in the electoral campaign. The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Kerala Congress (Mani) and few smaller groups allied with INC, as they had in 1996 polls, (see table 4.2).

Paul Wallace summarized the alliance system as a ‘bi-model party system,’ by which, two major or national parties were maneuvering within a larger vortex of smaller regional parties. According to the scholar, bi-model term was accurate, because both the BJP and the Congress were capable of forging a majority coalition or were in a position to bring down the government, given favourable circumstances. Sudha Pai also reiterated same idea as ‘two-polar situation.’ The BJP went to the voters with slogans’ of ‘majboot’, ‘swachcha’ and ‘sthir sarkar’ (strong, clean and stable government), that is, stable regime and good governance. The BJP nominated Atal Bihari Vajpayee as prime ministerial candidate, presumably to capitalize on liberal outlook and national image. The Congress Party

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appeared to be weak under the leadership of Sita Ram Kesri, President, AICC. In 1998 national elections, Sonia Gandhi agreed to campaign for party, boosted the morale of party cadre and restored the fighting spirit in party to face the elections. She, instead of asking for votes on the basis of party’s manifesto or performance, played the sympathy card, which appeared to be of paramount importance.\footnote{Ram Awatar Agnihotri, \textit{Twelfth Parliamentary General Elections}, Delhi: Commonwealth Publisher, 1999, pp. 35-37.} Factually, the presence of Sonia Gandhi at the election rallies attracted the crowd but failed to translate into votes. However, her campaign succeeded in checking further erosion of the INC support base, halting the momentum of the BJP and contributing to the collapse of the UF.\footnote{Pai, n.19, p.844.}

The results of 12th general elections revealed that Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies captured 255 seats in the Lower House, which reflected its extended turf beyond the cow belt\footnote{Cow Belt — It covers nine Hindi speaking states namely Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh, where majority Hindu factor influence the thrust of national politics} (\textit{Hindu belt}) bringing the party into the center of power.\footnote{Ghosh, n.9, p.140.} The Congress and its partners got 170 seats only. The United Front (UF) was totally washed away in the elections and was reduced to just eighty three seats (see table 4.2). The major components of Janata Dal/UF broke away, as Lalu Prasad Yadav made Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, Naveen Patnik left parent party and formed BJD in Orissa, resentment against H.D. Deve Gowda encouraged Ramakrishna Hedge to form Lok Shakti Party. The TDP refused to tie any adjustments with National Front in Andhra Pradesh\footnote{Meenu Roy, \textit{Elections 1998, A Continuity in Coalition}, Jaipur: National Publishing, 1999, pp.69-70.} but later on, extended the hand of friendship towards BJP.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, emerged as a leader of largest party/coalition in the popular House, and he was invited by K.R. Narayana, President of India to form the government and win a ‘vote of confidence’, on the floor of the House. Vajpayee government did it, when TDP accepted the post of Speaker in Lok Sabha and G.M.C. Balayogi was elected for same, on 24 March 1998. The BJP worked hard and succeeded in putting together eighteen parties’ coalition known as the NDA
since then. After coming into power, the Vajpayee ministry conducted ‘Pokharan-II nuclear tests’, in May 1998, which brought unity to fractious coalition and enabled the BJP to avoid substantive debate within the government on economic and political issues that were more divisive and potentially dangerous to the survival of the NDA.\textsuperscript{27} Right from the beginning, the NDA ministry was weak and it faced various constraints. The ‘trident demands’ of NDA allies such as Trinamool Congress, Samata Party and AIADMK wanting to dismissal of West Bengal, Bihar and Tamil Nadu state governments, respectively. The SAD (B) and INLD demanded to roll back in oil prices and certain essential commodities, respectively increased the vulnerability of the central government.\textsuperscript{28} Under the pressure of its allies, the BJP tried to impose ‘President’s rule’ in Bihar and partially rolled back the prices of petroleum products to appease Samata party, INLD and SAD (B), to ensure continued support for government.

The AIADMK leader Jayalalitha wanted dismissal of DMK ministry in Tamil Nadu and also dropping of corruption cases against her. When her demands were not accommodated by NDA, she withdrew its support from the ruling coalition. Even then, the NDA leadership firmly believed to survive, but story changed with a last minute withdrawal of support by the BSP, in apparent revenge for BJP’s machinations in bringing down Mayawati government in Uttar Pradesh when she was the Chief Minister. In a way, Union Cabinet fell by rarest of margins of single vote\textsuperscript{28a} 269 votes in favour of the NDA government and 270 votes against it. It was pyrrhic victory for the Congress Party and the Left parties, preparing to bring down Council of Minister, but they failed to fulfill the complete modalities for forming the next coalition government.\textsuperscript{29}

The 12th Lok Sabha had special features to its credit. (I) BJP tried to transform itself into a ‘responsible national party,’ that is, seen as less untouchable


\textsuperscript{28a} One controversial vote of Giridhar Gamango, CM of Orissa, who neither resigned for Lok Sabha, nor became the member of state assembly, proved crucial for the fall of NDA government in 1999. Secondly, Safodin Soz was not following his own party’s (NC) whip to support the BJP led NDA government. He casted his vote against the BJP, \textit{The Indian Express}, 18 April 1999.

or anti-secular. (II) There was emergence of bi-polar tendency which created a fragile and transitory coaltional government. (III) The changes occurred in state level party system, the regional parties, allied either with the BJP or the INC tried improving their political position, in their respective states and increased their bargaining power with Centre. However, present alliances were neither ideological nor did they have common objective to cement them together. These were merely short term tactical arrangement developed by ambitious politicians that were rooted in the exchange of mutual benefits and the compulsions of power. Therefore, regionalization of politics in state level was important and continuing factor in shaping present national party system. (IV) It is the first time; a government was based on pre-poll adjustments and headed by a larger political party as BJP. (V) Almost all partners shared power with the BJP, unlike previous governments, except, Mamata Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress.

The Indian polity jumped into the ‘post-Congress era.’ It did not mean that Congress ceased to be a major player; indeed, it continued to be a major player in all but in few states. In simple words, it was ‘post-Congress polity’, in the sense that the party ceases to be the pole around which the political competition was structured.

The 1999 mid-term elections marked the continuity of ‘federal-coalition governance’ within the framework of a multi-party system. It was held in the backdrop of ambiguous tendencies and perceptions in the trail of Pokharan-II, Bus Diplomacy to Lahore and Kargil war. A new structural development took place in Indian party system, when a combination of more than twenty parties decided to jointly contest the elections under the platform of the NDA, which was based on the formula of seat sharing arrangements to avoid confrontation and had Common Minimum Programme (CMP). Above all, the partners agreed to project Vajpayee as the prime ministerial candidate during election campaigns in 1999. Paul Wallace

33 Singh and Saxena, n.4, p.190.
pointed out that NDA headed by Vajpayee was a broad “catch-all-spectrum\textsuperscript{34} of parties.” It included major regional parties based on different spectrums, such as TDP in Andhra Pradesh (based on language), SAD in Punjab (non-Hindu), National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir (Muslim), Trinamool Congress from West Bengal (fiery secular) and INLD (non-ideological) etc. (see table 4.3). Of course, NDA government’s demise by one vote in April 1999, resulted in BJP strategy to design to provide a higher degree of political stability for the price entailed by broad accommodation of various parties.\textsuperscript{35}

**Table 4.3: Tally of Seats of Political Parties and Alliances in 1999 General Elections.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NDA (BJP-led)</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Congress Alliance</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Third Front &amp; Others</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv Sena</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>RJD</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD (U)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>AIADMK</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>AIFB</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD (B)</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>JMM</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>KC</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>CPIML (L)</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>ML</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJD</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>RPI (P)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>RPI (A)</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>UMFA</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>JD (S)</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMK</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>HVC</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDMK</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVP</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>MNF</td>
<td>00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Dal</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>SJP</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loktantric Congress</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>JP</td>
<td>00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janatantric BSP</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>TMC</td>
<td>00</td>
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<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>TUJS</td>
<td>00</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UDP</td>
<td>00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>others</td>
<td>04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL**       | 301   | 138               | 104   |                      |       |


\begin{footnotesize} 
\textsuperscript{34} Catch-All-Party is term used for structural changes in post-second world war, political parties in Europe. These changes as transformation from the old style of bourgeois party of individual representation and mass integration party into a “catch all people party.”

\end{footnotesize}
The composition of the NDA was much more diverse in regional and cultural terms than Janata Party, which was essentially as a north-Indian phenomenon. Now, the NDA became an all-India affair.  

At the same time, the Congress, unlike BJP did not commit itself to alliance politics and searched for majority from its own resources. The INC leadership believed that the Indian electorates limited faith in coalition owing to their repeated failures to continue in power. The Congress Party offered a few state specific electoral adjustments with old friends, see table 4.3. The United Front disintegrated, being reduced to the Left Front and rump Janata Dal (Secular) of Deve Gowda. A belated attempt to unite the ‘Third Force’ was made by Sharad Pawar of NCP and Mulayam Singh Yadav of Samajwadi Party, but this idea did not succeed.

The NDA common manifesto (all constituents of NDA agreed to contest elections on single manifesto, but retained their original as well as separate identity), alleged that 1999 general elections was an unnecessary imposition…… by motley combination of Congress plus Lefts which promoted political negativism, narrow personal interest and greed for power, over the national interests. The BJP’s main charge on Sonia Gandhi was on her foreign origin, her property and trusts carved from taxpayer’s money and her inexperience in politics. The slogan coined by BJP was “sarhad par ghusankar nahi, Sansad me videshi nahi” (we would not tolerate infiltrators on the border and a foreigner in Parliament). Another slogan aired during the 1999 election campaigns by the BJP were bomb (nuclear), bus (to Lahore), budget, Bihar and betrayal (of AIADMK), were at best, ‘empty slogans’ which were not going to enthuse the average voter whose needs were two square meals and legitimate ways to earn these.

The Congress main charge against the ruling BJP were abetting criminals and corruption, making convenient deals at the cost of national interest and lack of

36 Singh and Saxena, n.4, p.199.
vigilance on borders. The Congress Party appealed to all the secular forces to unite in order to defeat a communal party and save Indian democracy. The CPI (M) manifesto alleged that BJP and its allies were the ‘swadeshi agents’ (local) of MNCs, whose policies were taking over Indian companies and buying up the Indian partners share in joint ventures. The Left parties promised land reforms and a better deal to the workers, unemployed, dalits and adivasis, women, youth and children.

The issues spelt out in the manifesto did not catch the fancy of campaigners, leaders and voters. Generally, the electorates were interested in local issues like water, electricity and roads. In addition to this, factors such as poor governance, anti-incumbency, personality, regional parties/state politics and local issues were dominating 13th Lok Sabha polls as never before. For example, Jat reservation issue became focal point in Rajasthan, Shiv Sena’s lack luster performance in Maharashtra, it was DMK versus Jayalalitha’s AIADMK, which mattered most in Tamil Nadu and the entire elections scenario, focused on Lalu Prasad Yadav, the husband of incumbent Chief Minister, Rabri Devi etc in Bihar, neither the personality of Vajpayee, nor government performance mattered.

The 1999 national elections showed clear mandate for the BJP led NDA with 301 seats. The BJP once again won 182 Lok Sabha seats on the basis of twenty four percentage of votes, while, Congress got twenty eight percentage of votes but crashed to an ‘all time low’ of 114 seats in the popular House. The CPI (M) was able to maintain its turf by gaining thirty three seats in the House of People, (see table 4.3). The NDA gained comfortable majority to form stable coalition government for the first time in India. It is because; coalition had thirty four surplus seats in Lok Sabha. The description of BJP’s electoral performance in 1999 polls, either as repeated performance or renewal of 1998 mandate, was too simplistic or could be disputed mainly on two counts. Firstly, several parties were not part of NDA coalition in 1998, now allied with BJP in 1999 elections. They were TDP, DMK, JD (U), INLD, Himachal Vikas Congress and four other smaller parties. Secondly, the

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41 Sanghavi and Thakkar, n.38, p.516.
42 Singh and Saxena, n.4, p.207.
BJP repeated its 1998 performance in 1999 polls by winning an almost same number of seats and renewal of the mandate for Vajpayee government.\textsuperscript{45} However, Vajpayee and NDA won, but the BJP lost as a party. No doubt, the party (BJP) retained the same number of seats (182) in the Lower House, but its popular base shrunk from 25.29 percentage in 1998 to 23.7 percentage in 1999, was the dilution of its agenda, that is, Hindutva was put on the back burner.\textsuperscript{46} The BJP led NDA government had negative speculation about capability of such large coalition holding together for full term. But, Vajpayee Cabinet completed more than four years and successfully met various internal and external challenges. This was first coalition in the history of Indian party system, which dissolved legislature earlier, with an optimistic view to regain power on the issues of development and stability. Therefore, the Union Cabinet recommended to dissolve 13\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha before its actual tenure and decided to contest national elections on the issues/slogans, ‘shining India’ and ‘feel good factor.’\textsuperscript{47}

The 1999 parliamentary elections demonstrated that a rival of national party (BJP) was prepared to negotiate with other parties and was able to offer viable alternative to Congress.\textsuperscript{48} The BJP/NDA’s success and Congress failure rested on two critical factors: ‘leadership’ and ‘alliance.’ The BJP’s foresightedness in formulating broad coalition/alliance proved crucial to attain majority in Lok Sabha. Secondly, the differences between winning and losing were hinged to understand a greater acceptability of Vajpayee as well as the rejection of Sonia Gandhi.\textsuperscript{49} Paul Wallace explains that the leadership rather than institutionalization of parties appears to be important; the alliance cohesion depends on the ability of leadership to reach out in a non-ideological manner to its members as well as to maintain its core party support. Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee and Chandrababu Naidu still wild cards in an alliance and needed skillful special handling and countervailing political pressure.

\textsuperscript{45} Naidu, n.43, pp.79-80.
\textsuperscript{48} Sridharan, n.44, p.141.
\textsuperscript{49} Kapur, n.29, p.198.
The regional parties held balance of power, now necessary for the formulation of ruling alliance. The power consideration rather than ideological or specific issue tend to dominate alliance choice.\textsuperscript{50} The Lok Jan Shakti Party, Bharatiya Lok Dal, INDL, TDP, DMK or AIADMK brought classic touch to the balance of power system and functioned as a check on national parties from adopting majority dictatorship.

The five general elections held between 1989 to 1999 outcome demonstrated four facts of life concerned with party politics. Firstly, the Indian National Congress was unable to return to the position it had before 1989. Secondly, there was no viable alternate of party to replace the Congress Party. By 1999, the Janata Dal (JD) turned into a small number of region based parties with various JD offshoots, willing to join BJP coalition government. Thirdly, the BJP was successful in establishing a broader base in the ‘Hindi heartland’ and then extending it to other parts of the country. Fourthly, the results of elections suggested that a national party could only form a government at central level, if it made alliance arrangements with several state or regional parties, that is, coalition/alliance, politics became inevitable in Indian party system. The impulse behind coalition strategies of both national and state parties was needed for bridging votes, to win a plurality of votes for a majority of seats in India’s first-past-the-post-system.\textsuperscript{51}


For the first time, in 14\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha elections in 2004, Indian politics witnessed a contest at national level between two serious coalitions, namely the NDA and the UPA.\textsuperscript{52} The number of political parties in the fray was around 600 in 2004 general elections. But, the horns were locked between NDA and Congress and its allies.\textsuperscript{53} In other words, the first elections of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century turned out to be a ‘battle of alliances,’ between the BJP led NDA and Congress led alliance.\textsuperscript{54a} This is reflected

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[50] Wallace, n.35, p.8.
\item[51] Sridharan, n.44, p.142.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
in the qualitative shift from command to competitive liberal market economy, from one party dominance to alliance/coalition politics, from nation building to representation of polarized socio-cultural reality into politics.\textsuperscript{54}

The elections’ results manifested the division of the polity into two massive, though not united, power blocs (alliance). It was not seen simply as one party replacing another, rather as signaling a fight between two incompatible ideological formations, which concentrated largely in two opposing somewhat equal, ‘political phalanxes’.\textsuperscript{55} Besides, one can talk in terms of two poles in politics, the pole of ‘sectarian politics’ and the pole of ‘inclusive politics.’ The BJP, the caste based parties and regional parties, survived on the basis of sectarian appeal. The INC and Lefts, sought to make a genuinely pan-Indian appeal to voters. Moreover, the alliance/coalition politics could create compulsions for larger party to woo the smaller ones and not the other way round.\textsuperscript{56} Paul Wallace, in this regard, used the term ‘tail wagging the elephant,’ which refers to the emerging importance of regional parties at national and state levels. The electoral politics ensured that compromise was essential for national parties to maintain coalition at both national and state levels. The Congress Party and BJP-led alliances, were not incompatible ideological formation but competitors in India’s federalist, democratic political system.\textsuperscript{57}

The importance of such electoral alliance became increasingly clear over the past fifteen years, a period in which the rise of other regional and caste parties meant that no Indian party was able to win an absolute majority in Parliament.\textsuperscript{58} The parties looked for win or majority, by entering into alliance arrangements because, they had strong incentives to aggregate votes through political formation/alliance, by sharing the total number of contested seats, so as not to split but to pool votes. This is because, a small addition of votes had the potential to increase or decrease the

\textsuperscript{55} Baldev Raj Nayar, “India in 2004: Regime Change in a Divided Democracy”, \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. 45, No.1, January-February 2005, pp.77-78.
\textsuperscript{56} Thakurta and Raghuraman, n.12a, p.17.
\textsuperscript{57} Paul Wallace, “Introduction: India Shining Trumped by Poverty”, in Roy and Wallace, n.54, p.5.
winning chance of party. There are many instances, when political parties in order to maximize their gains, shed away their respective ideologies in conditions of extreme incompatibility.

The alliance formation was turning point in Congress Party’s fortunes, which proved crucial and led to victory in 2004 national elections. While, the BJP succumbed to hubris (very great pride), spurning some key allies such as DMK etc. The BJP played alliance game very badly by choosing unpopular parties’ that controlled the state government and failing to make any tie-up at all in others. The Congress Party lost three state assemblies elections, out of four, to BJP-Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh-winning only in Delhi in December 2003. These assembly elections considered ‘mini-national elections’ and results came as a shock to introspect the electoral strategy of the Indian National Congress in coming Lok Sabha elections of 2004. The party reversed its previous policy of 1998 *Panchmarhi resolution*’s ‘akalo chalo niti’ (move alone policy or acquiring power on its own) in polls, evolved an astute strategy of alliance formation. On 7 January 2004, the Congress high command setup a high level team led by Sonia Gandhi to chalk out a plan for pre-poll alliance with like mined secular parties. The INC now, became ‘coalitionable’ and made poll pacts in number of major states for the first time. The INC was tied-up with TRS, RJD, DMK, NCP, JMM, PDP and others. The alliance formation enabled it to form a ruling coalition under Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister of the country. The BJP electoral performance was much below expectations and its key alliance partners, barring a few expectations, did worse.

The BJP contested 2004 parliamentary elections on development plank (India shining and feel good factor) rather than divisive issues and took pride in its record and leader. The Bharatiya Janata Party argued that India was on a roll, its economy was growing at the rate of 8.5 percentage, industrialization was taking place, low inflation, low interest regime, agriculture was giving good returns and so

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59 Sridharan, n.52, p.5418.
60 Nayar, n.55, p.75.
62 Nayar, n.55, p.75.
64 Nayar, n.55, p.76.
everyone was ‘feeling good’, (feel good factor). In brief, never had Indian economy been in better shape. The BJP/NDA was going to the voters on the slogans ‘India shining’ and ‘feel good factor’ and other issues, as a stable coalition government as well as, the able leadership of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee.\footnote{Syed Ali Mujtaba, “Feeling Good? Feeling Terrible”, Himal, Vol. 17, No.3-4, March-April 2004, pp.14-16.}

The BJP released the ‘vision 2020 document’, on 30 March 2004 which put to place development within a character for governance, while, articulating a new spin on traditional Hindutva issue, the party leadership believed that document would also serve as a new ideological roadmap. However, the RSS cadre felt betrayed. Praveen Togadia, VHP, leader stated that there could be no ‘feel good’ without Ram Mandir at Ayodhya.\footnote{Rajeev Deshpande and Lakshmi Iyer, “Inside the Fog of War”, India Today, Vol. XXIX, No.11, 22 March 2004, p.22.} The BJP electoral campaign started with L.K. Advani’s (Deputy Prime Minister), Bharat Uday Yatra. He travelled nearly 8000 K.M., from Kanyakumari to Amritsar in the first leg and then from Porbandar to Puri, on the other. The main objective of Yatra was to spread the BJP’s ‘India shining’ message to the masses.\footnote{M.G. Radhakrishnan, “Shining Armour”, India Today, Vol. XXIX, No.11, 22 March 2004, pp. 32-33.} Advani’s well equipped and highly luxurious mini-bus (air-conditioned, portable toilet and inbuilt mini-crane, lifted him above the vehicle to address people), certainly widened the gulf between ordinary voters and political leaders.

The Congress canvassing was based on an effective contrast and exposing the ‘feel good façade (false appearance)’. The INC riposte was: “hum ko kya mila” (what have we got?) indicating that the common man gained very little from the so-called economic boom.\footnote{Thakurta and Raghuraman, n.12a, p.75.} Sonia Gandhi, President, All India Congress Committee (AICC), alleged that “the NDA ministry was nothing but government of empty slogans and jokes.”\footnote{India Today, Vol. XXIX, No.6, 10 February 2004, p.35.} Ram Vilas Paswan, President, Lok Jan Shakti Party, accused the NDA government on the ground that “what do ‘eight-lane'/road and cheap air travel means for the poor?”\footnote{India Today, Vol. XXIX, No.5, 3 February 2004, p.32.} The leadership of Congress Party targeted the NDA on different accounts. The eight percentage growth rate of GDP was questionable,
unsustainable and misleading. Besides, they raised issues like growing unemployment, privatization of education, farmer’s plight, discontent among the lower classes and highlighted darker sides of liberalization etc. These were potential issues, which might generate anti-incumbency wave against the ruling NDA. The critics argue that whether it was ‘India shining’ or ‘India cheated.’ As a matter of fact, more than a quarter of the populace live below poverty line and lack basic amenities, price of essential commodities were rocketing, social tension increased and above all, country remained under water and power starved. The Congress Party released 55-pages charge-sheet/broacher under title “a saga of sins, scams and shame” against the NDA which highlighted ground reality and failure of central government. The INC, in its manifesto promised guarantee for 100 days employment to every rural house hold and selective privatization. The Congress Party showed great concern for aam aadmi (ordinary man) by giving the slogan—“Congress ka haath aam aadmi ke saath”, (the hand of Congress was with common man). The Congress Party successfully identified itself with party of the poor, pronouncing the BJP to be party of the rich.

The 2004 electoral campaign appeared battle between two corporate political giants. The focus of the canvassing was on mechanics of ‘electoral management’, on strategies of alliance making, and on psychological warfare and media manipulation through the fine art of spin doctoring. These elections were fought without any serious issues, the only issue mattered the future of secularism that made the polls worthy of attentions.

71 Mishra, n.53, p.22.
72 Mujtaba, n.65, p.16.
75 Nayar, n.55, p.74.
Table 4.4: Tally of Seats of Political Parties and Alliances in 2004 General Elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress (UPA)</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>NDA</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Left Front/Third Front</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJD</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Shiv Sena</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>BJD</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>RLD</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>JD(U)</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>FB</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMK</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>SAD (B)</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>KEC</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>JDS (Left)</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>JMM</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>AITC</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MDMK</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>NPF</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>LJP</td>
<td>04</td>
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<td>01</td>
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<tr>
<td>JKPDP</td>
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<td>IFDP</td>
<td>01</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPI (A)</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MUL</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AIMIN</td>
<td>01</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>222</strong></td>
<td><strong>189</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>


The results of 14th Lok Sabha came as a shock to everyone ‘BJP’ in particular and the NDA in general. On one hand, the underdog Congress turfed out the invincible BJP led NDA, and emerged as a single largest leading alliance in the Lower House, on the other. For the first time, since 1991, a rejuvenated Congress Party surpassed the BJP, by just seven seats. The advantage of seven Lok Sabha seats made a world of differences between Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress Party (see table 4.4). The credit went to Sonia Gandhi’s leadership. The strategic pre-poll alliance, anti-incumbency trend and a Sonia Gandhi wave gave mandate to lead the nation. At the same time, no nationwide upsurge was manifest in favour of the Congress. The party won only 145 seats, just seven more than the defeated BJP’s 138 seats. The Congress percentage of votes reduced from 28.30 percentage in 1999 to 26.21

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percentage in 2004, as against BJP’s decline from 23.75 percentage to 21.48 percentage. The victorious alliance won 222 seats, whereas defeated side finished at 189 seats in the House of People.  

The allies of INC such as DMK, TRS, NCP and RJD, contributed 118 seats in UPA kitty which proved to be biggest assets to Sonia Gandhi (see table 4.4). In contrast, the BJP partners turned out to be the real antagonist; they did not deliver on expectation. The TDP, TC and AIADMK were wiped out in their respective areas. The BJP-AIADMK combined notched helpless zero out of 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, which became a suicide point for the NDA, (see table 4.4). The verdict of 2004 Lok Sabha elections seemed that Sonia Gandhi would succeeded Vajpayee as Prime Minister. Meanwhile, Sharad Pawar, President, NCP, who raised the issue of foreign origin in the Congress Party earlier, now, proposed the name of Sonia Gandhi for the post of Prime Ministership, with other partners, such as DMK. All allies showed their full faith in the leadership of Sonia Gandhi, President, AICC.

The protest started against the possible induction of Sonia Gandhi as head of government. The BJP leader Sushma Swaraj publically declared that she would resign from Parliament, shave her head and sleep on base floor as long as Sonia Gandhi remained Prime Minister. The other BJP leaders also threatened to start ‘anadolan’ (movement), if she would become PM. However, Sonia Gandhi surprised everybody by declining the highest post of the country and nominated the name of Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister, for the same.

As a result, the Congress Party formed government under the leadership of Manmohan Singh, backed by four Left parties. Sonia Gandhi was appointed chairperson of newly created body called National Advisory Council (NCA), which monitored the CMP and performance of central government. Under the compulsion of coalition, Manmohan Singh included several ministers from smaller parties, which had handful of MP’s in Lok Sabha. More importantly, some of them facing

78 Nayar, n.55, p.74.
82 Nayar, n.55, p.76.
serious criminal charges, notable names were Mohammad Taslimuddin, M.A. Fatmi, Jai Prakash Yadav, Lalu Prashad Yadav and Shibu Soren etc. The NDA promptly accused UPA of plugging new depths in Indian politics by inducting “tainted people minister”/tainted minister in Union Cabinet. The presence tainted ministers was testimony to the criminalization of politics increasingly with criminal records.

Right from the beginning, the UPA-I government faced pulls and pressures from the NCP to TRS to RJD. Besides, the Congress faced dilemma of pleasing Left parties (which opposed liberalization) and living up to the reputation of being a party that initiated economic reforms, on one side, the Lefts would not allow Congress Party led UPA-I government, a free hand in the sale of PSUs–profit or loss making companies, on the other. Apart from this, there was huge friction between Lefts and Congress Party over many issues, such as price hike in petrol and diesel, in FDI, caps in telecom, civil aviation and insurance from forty nine percentage to seventy four percentage, forty percentage to forty nine percentage and twenty six percentage to forty nine percentage respectively, and Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal. The Left parties withdrew support from the UPA, on 9 July 2008 on the issue of nuclear deal. However, the UPA managed to win the ‘vote of confidence’ in the Lower House with 275 votes in favour and against 256. The SP, RLD and TRS supported the central government in the battle of survival. Some political parties decided to stay away from the Congress Party and formed Third Front which included Left parties, TDP and a few other regional parties like the Indian National Lok Dal etc.

The parliamentary elections of 2004 produced a government of a “coalition of coalitions”, i.e., there was no pre-poll alliance of any party came close to majority. The Congress Party led alliance, overtook the NDA tally and manufactured a working majority without any corresponding shift for any popular preference. The political parties fought elections via “coalition contingent”, instead of any viable form of electoral mobilization. Their appeal/mobilization was limited only to

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83 Thakurta and Raghuraman, n.12a, pp.80-82.
84 Nayar, n.55, p.77.
88 Yadav, n.76, pp. 5384-5397.
a section of society. However, these coalitions largely opportunistic or office seeking, formed primarily to aggregate votes, regardless of programmatic differences. For example, the NCP shelved its ‘foreign origin issue.’ The Lefts had alliance with the INC in various states despite historic differences with Congress on economic reforms; earlier DMK and its smaller allies, as well as JMM alliance with BJP, now they switched over to the UPA. The last minute character of most of these alliances reinforces this point. The political parties changed the tone and tenor of their political programmes and campaigns. The leaders tended to resort to divisive appeals were increasingly snubbed at the hustling. Likewise, the BJP disowned its own past agenda. Similarly, the BSP, now talk of representing sarva samaj (the whole society), rather than pitching dalits against all other castes.

At present, the trend towards fragmentation of national party system and is accompanying devolution of power to the regions, reinforced subsequently by economic liberalization. What is a seemingly national elections results often no more than a mere summation of regional results, rather than the manifestation of nationwide trend. The format of political competitions came from the state arena, the pattern of political preferences show subtle differences in the national elections. Sometime, there is a transfer of national issues to state politics.

**Emergence of Bi-Polarity and 2009 National Elections**

The general elections to elect 15\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha in 2009, held under the shadow of global recession affecting jobs in the country and a series of terrorist attacks, particularly 26/11 Mumbai attacks being the worst one. Under these circumstances, the Election Commission of India announced poll schedule for

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90 Sridharan, n.52, p.5425.
92 Nayar, n.55, p.74.
Lower House to be conducted in five phases from 16 April to 13 May 2009 and simultaneously elections for state assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Sikkim.

**Lok Sabha Elections’ Schedule 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>16 April</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>23 April</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>30 April</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>07 May</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The BJP welcomed the announcement of general elections, whereas, Congress Party was not happy to conduct elections in the phase system. The regional and smaller parties opposed to holding polls in multiple phase. They stated that it did not provide a level-playing field to smaller parties. The opinion was to hold elections in single phase in smaller states like Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala among others. After the announcement of elections dates, political parties, particularly regional parties, searched for new alliance arrangement/alternative to broaden their support base and tried to make a non-UPA and non-NDA platform, on the one side, the BJP, the INC and Left parties were representing the three alliances-NDA, UPA and Third Front, respectively tried their best to hold on to their existing allies and to win over new ones, as no combine was expected to get a simple majority of 272 seats.

At this juncture, two incidents were very significant, which brought change in Indian politics in general and political formation in particular, one at Bhubaneswar and another in Lucknow on 3 April 2009. Lalu Prasad Yadav-Mulayam Singh Yadav-Ram Vilas Paswan, addressed a joint press conference at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and announced their alliance pact among them. That was indicating the emergence of ‘Fourth Front.’ They argued that it was an alliance

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95 *The Tribune*, 3 March 2009.
96 Ibid., 4 February 2009.
97 *Hindustan Times*, 16 May 2009.
98 *The Indian Express*, 4 April 2009.
within the alliance, which was not contrary to Congress Party. But, it was intended to act as a bulwark against Mayawati’s BSP in Uttar Pradesh and Nitish Kumar’s JD (U) in Bihar. In Orissa, Naveen Patnaik, BJD chief, arranged a rally at Bhubaneswar, with the help of Left parties and NCP on the hope for third straight win in assembly elections. This is why, the BJD, now looked for company with Third Front and NCP, after ending alliance with the BJP. This new alignment might strengthen the support base of Third Front. Meanwhile, Sharad Pawar, President, NCP absented himself from the rally, but addressed the public by mobile phone, stated that;

I have an alliance with BJD, just as the Congress has right to stitch alliance with other parties in different states, the allies (BJD+NCP) too have the right to do so.

Therefore, these parties such as BJD broke up from NDA and RJD, SP and LJP left Congress Party led UPA-I, separated from the two big national parties because they looked out for better bargaining power in the post-poll situation of hung Parliament. The RJD, SP and LJP underscored the fact that their area of operation were Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand-accounting for 134 Lok Sabha seats (eighty in Uttar Pradesh, forty in Bihar and fourteen in Jharkhand), and they expected to emerge as powerful bloc after polls. Yogendra Yadav, psephologist sums up the situation as, “one where both the UPA and the NDA missed their best chance to form the government and Third Front now looked the second most probable outcome of the Lok Sabha race.” Any gains or losses, in this belt, would be crucial for Congress and BJP. The efforts of Fourth Front were obviously in this direction to become most dominant player in the region and thus, call the shot, when Congress or any other secular formation, emerged with sufficient numbers to form the government at the Centre.

Even, Lalu-Mulayam-Paswan were eyeing on the Prime Minister chair (like previous governments of Chandra Shekhar and H.D. Deve Gowda etc, which formed government with outside support of INC, because to stop BJP/non- secular forces

99 Srinand Jha, “Why was Fourth Front Formed”, Hindustan Times, 4 April 2009.
101 The Times of India, 4 April 2009 and The Tribune, 4 April 2009.
coming into power) if, situation arose to form a secular non-UPA and non-NDA government. In this context, Amar Singh, General Secretary SP, on one occasion said that Mulayam Singh would be backing Sharad Pawar for Prime Minister Office and vice versa, should an opportunity present itself to either of them. Similarly, Sharad Pawar states that;

\[ I \text{ am with UPA, but I cannot comment on any alliance after polls,}\] 
\[ \text{he further added that Manmohan Singh is the Prime Ministerial candidate of Congress Party, not of the UPA. An unanimous decision on the UPA’s choice will be taken after elections results.}\]

The RJD chief, Lalu Prasad Yadav and, BSP supremo Mayawati, were also in the race for the Prime Minister post. Mayawati expressed her feeling in an interview to \textit{India Today} that “nothing could stop me to becoming Prime Minister”. Ram Vilas Paswan too was dreaming for this highest post. All these regional leaders were seeking national glory; enjoyed more support and popularity in their respective regions, than the prime ministerial candidates, of both national parties such as L.K. Advani and Manmohan Singh. Factually, when, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and A.B. Vajpayee were in power, there were no regional leaders who could match or come anywhere near their popularity. \[105\] H.D. Deve Gowda and Chandrababu Naidu might be dark horses in the episode. Sonia Gandhi narrating this new situation by stating that it became fashionable to launch such Fronts. She stated that;

\[ \text{Jitney morcha, utney neta, aur jitney neta, utney pradhan mantri. (There are many fronts; each front is headed by a leader, so there is as many as leaders, as many Prime Ministers).}\]

Prakash Karat, General Secretary, CPI (M), was of view that what we were witnessing the steady development of a “cooperative federal alliance”, a kind of federation of parties. Many parties, which came together as a part of this federation

\[ \text{103 Sandeep Bhushan, “One Cook Too Many”, \textit{The Times of India}, 10 April 2009.}\]
\[ \text{104 The \textit{Times of India}, 24 April 2009 and \textit{The Tribune}, 4 April 2009.}\]
\[ \text{105 Prabhu Chawla, “Can She Rule India”, \textit{India Today}, Vol. XXXIII, No.33, 18 August 2008, p.22;}\]
\[ \text{Mayawati’s interviewed by Prabhu Chawla, in \textit{India Today}, 18 August 2008; Amulya Ganguli,}\]
\[ \text{“Ambition is not Enough”, \textit{The Times of India}, 6 April 2009; Ram Vilas Paswan interviewed by Vijay Sanghavi, in \textit{Seminar}, No.596, April 2009 and Prabhu Chawla, “The Great Prime Minister Bazaar”, \textit{India Today}, Vol. XXXIV, No.15, 13 April 2009, p.21.}\]
\[ \text{106 \textit{The Tribune}, 12 and 13 April 2009.}\]
had still not assimilated the idea of Third alternative. Prakash Karat added that the CPI (M) was confident that it would be able to contribute significantly to the emergence of non-Congress, non-BJP alternative. The regional parties were involved in the exercise, which essentially pursued disparate regional politics and regional interests. They aspired to play a significant role at national level by dropping the influence of national parties and ensuring that bi-polar politics could not take root at national level.

The Congress and the BJP were worried about the emerging trends, which upset their alliance calculations in 2009 general elections. Pranab Mukherjee, senior Congress leader and External Affairs Minister, claimed that:

\[
\text{UPA is not disintegrating and is very much intact.} \\
\text{However, the party made clear that Congress does not have any alliance at national level but has seat-sharing arrangement with some UPA partners at state level.}\]

The party already announced on 29 January 2009 that the INC would follow its own election manifesto, which was not common with its partners (UPA), except where party’s allied for longer time. Actually, it was Rahul Gandhi’s long term electoral strategy in which, he wanted to revive the party in cow-belt, which slipped out its fold. Under this strategy, the Congress Party forged specific alliance with state based parties, as with Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in Maharashtra and Goa, DMK, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal-Katchi (VCK) in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, as well as with Trinamool Congress in West Bengal etc. In the similar fashion, BJP’s alliance with Janata Dal (U), limited only to Bihar and later on, JD (U) managed to obtain two seats in Uttar Pradesh. Further, the BJP made alliance arrangements with RLD, AGP, Shiv Sena, INLD and SAD (B), which were restricted to western Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Haryana and Punjab, respectively, and did not spill over even to the adjoining regions.

\[107\] Ramakrishnan, n.102, pp.4-8. 
\[108\] Aurangzeb Naqshbandi, “NDA, not UPA is Falling Apart”, Hindustan Times, 6 April 2009. 
\[109\] The Tribune, 30 January 2009. 
The Third Front was formally launched on 12 April 2009 at Dobbespet, Bangalore, where political rally was organized by regional, Left, democratic and secular forces. The leaders of these parties, as Prakash Karat-CPI (M), A.B. Bardhan-CPI, N. Chandrababu Naidu-TDP, H.D. Deve Gowda JD (S) and representatives of AIADMK as well as BSP addressed over lakhs of people. The crux of the entire event was to form an alternative platform to both the UPA and the NDA. A joint statement issued by Front leaders, stated that:

We shall work together to form an alternative government for the progress and welfare of the people.
We appeal to all secular and democratic forces as well as all sections of the people to support this endeavour.

The Third Front was a group of ten political parties CPI-(M), CPI, RSP, FB, BSP, TDP, TRS, JD (S), HJC and AIADMK, which had strong bastion only in six Indian states, primarily confined to specific geographic territories. None of these parties could really add much to anyone else’s votes. Even seat sharing arrangement among the Third Front normally left to partners to work out on their own. Very soon, the cracks in Third Front became visible, when, TRS chief, Chandrashekhar Rao, who contested elections as part and parcel of Left parties and TDP in Andhra Pradesh, left Third Front and attended ‘maha rally’ (huge) of the NDA at Ludhiana, Punjab. The CPI (M) too softened its stand towards Congress Party and General Secretary, Prakash Karat said;

113 Editorial, “Third Front is Born”, Third Concept, April 2009, p.5.
114 Hindustan Times, 13 March 2009.
115 Maha Rally:- a huge show of strength/rally organized by the NDA, in general and SAD (B), in particular on 10 May 2009 at Ludhiana (Punjab) to mobilize voters. The eight Chief Ministers and leaders of alliance namely Chandrashekkar Rao-TRS, Manohar Joshi-Shiv Sena, Om Prakash Chautala-INLD, Bimal Gurung- Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha, Nitish Kumar-(CM of Bihar) and Sharad Yadav-JD (U), Ajit Singh-RLD, Prakash Singh Badal (CM of Punjab) and Sukhbir Singh Badal- President SAD (B), Rajnath Singh, Sushma Swaraj and L.K. Advani (Prime Minister in waiting)-BJP graced the occasion and addressed the gathering. Narendra Modi-Gujarat, B.S. Yeddyrappa-Karnataka, Shivraj Singh Chauhan-Madhya Pradesh, P.S. Dhumal-HP, Raman Singh-Chhattisgarh and B.C. Khanduri-Uttarkhand-all Chief Ministers of BJP ruled states from different parts of country were present in the rally. It is interesting to note that Nitish Kumar kept distance from Narendra Modi in view of Muslim votes in Bihar, here, shared dais with Narendra Modi along with galaxy of the NDA leaders. Secondly, the rally organized for gains public support, but politicians of the NDA, including Badals and L.K. Advani did not mention the names of local candidates of SAD (B)-Gurcharan Singh Galib and Charanjit Singh Atwal from Ludhiana and Fatehgarh Sahib, respectively. The Times of India, 11 May 2009; The Tribune, 11 May 2009 and The Hindu, 11 May 2009.
Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal and Sitaram Yechury, member of politburo, CPI (M) told media that “there is a pre-poll and post-poll strategy for the party, all depending on the results of elections.” These trends manifested that there were peculiar alliance system in 15th parliamentary elections. The political parties were continuously shifting their stand and loyalty. That is why; the adjustments of the seats in particular region or state were not barrier to their contesting partners or allies in other state or region to forge alliance with contrary groups. For example, the NCP tied up with BJD and Left in Orissa, on the one side, and had alliance with Congress in Maharashtra and Goa on the other. Similarly, the BJD left, the NDA and made seat adjustments with both Left parties and NCP, but refused to join Third Front formally. The TRS contested the electoral battle with support of Left parties and TDP in its region but later on, joined hands with the NDA in the last phase of elections.

The TDP and AIADMK, now, were moving towards Third Front. The AIADMK had an electoral alliance with Third Front, but there was no definite equation of this alliance. The DMK and the UPA lost PMK and MDMK to rival AIADMK. In Jammu and Kashmir, National Conference replaced People Democratic Party (PDP) and in West Bengal, the Congress Party tied knot with Trinamool Congress (TC). The BSP claimed to back the Third Front, but refused to have electoral alliance with it. The Third Front promoted by Left parties failed to take any concrete shape. The JD (S) was with Third Front in Karnataka, but out of its neighboring state Kerala. The parties at different platforms had their own election manifestos and commitments. They did not put out any common political programme. Only the Left parties choose to put forward an alternative economic and foreign policy as a part of Third Front, but did not have a common programme, and failed to project itself as credible and attractive alternative.

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116 Hindustan Times, 10 May 2009.
117 The Indian Express, 12 May 2009.
118 Kailash, n.111, pp.53-54.
Almost, all parties hedged their bet, leaving room for post electoral negotiations. In 2009, unlike previous national elections 2004, both coalition makers as the BJP and the INC, shed ‘baggage primarily’ to the Third Front. Similarly, the CPI (M) looked forward to the post election scenario throughout its campaign. The Congress Party decided to contest polls alone in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, but did not strategically field candidates in some seats, clearly leaving door ajar for communication with Fourth Front (RJD, SP and LJP).\(^\text{119}\)

The smaller parties were following a unique strategy of criticizing the alliance leaders of both, Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress Party, to bargain for greater electoral and political deal, in prevailing political atmosphere. For example, “if Lalu Prasad Yadav or Sharad Pawar, were willing to become Prime Minister, it was called, being power hungry but if, Rahul Gandhi wanted the same, it was in the interest of the country.” Therefore, the option available to smaller parties compelled the bigger national parties to tolerate the same and without rocking the boat.\(^\text{120}\) With this background, the alliance arrangement of political forces was not yet clear. It made electoral scene more complex and confusing. Kailash K.K. referred it as a ‘politics of cohabitation.’\(^\text{121}\) The scholar throws light on the facts that political parties could simultaneously play multiple roles in parliamentary federal system. The parties in government at one level could be in different camp at another level or they could be in same camp at all levels.

The shifting party goals could lead to strange cohabitation situations. For instance, the Trinamool Congress (TC) and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), swung in and out the NDA, depending on their state level calculations. The TC had an alliance with Congress Party against Left Front in West Bengal. The PMK shook hands with AIADMK group in Tamil Nadu. The Left parties supported the UPA-I while, competing with Congress Party in some states; the NCP tied to Congress in Maharashtra and at the Centre, meanwhile joined hands with BJP in Nagaland, Meghalya and even in the Pune Municipal Corporation. The PDP withdrew support

\(^\text{119}\) Ibid.  
\(^\text{121}\) Cohabitation:- It literally means ‘staying together.’ It is commonly used for semi- presidential system of government like France and Sri Lanka. The Prime Minister and President come from different parties and pitted against each other. The President may have to cohabit with Prime Minister from other party when majority in House is different from that of President’s party, in Kailash K.K., “The Emerging Politics of Cohabitation: New Challenges”, in Mehra, n.94, p.87.
from the Congress government in Jammu and Kashmir but continuing with the UPA-I; the PMK and the DMK were being at loggerheads in Tamil Nadu, but part of UPA governing coalition, are more recent instance of cohabitation.\textsuperscript{122}

In 2009, the BSP and the SP, still arch rivals in Uttar Pradesh, contested 15\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha elections with the collaboration of Third Front and Fourth Front, respectively but shared a platform in Lok Sabha on the issue of FDI in multi-brand retail sector and rescued the UPA-II government on the issue of FDI in retail sector. When fifteen members of Parliament (MPs) of BSP casted their votes in favour of ‘treasury benches’ and strategically nine members of Samajwadi Party (SP) walked out from the Upper House just before Chairman Hamid Ansari put to vote on the motion on 7 December 2012. Similarly both BSP and SP walked out from the Lower House to help the government sail through during voting.\textsuperscript{123} Interestingly, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Chief, Samajwadi Party, went one step further, when he supported ‘\textit{Bharat Bandh}’ (all India strike), organized by opposition parties such as Left parties and BJP on 20 September 2012, against the Centre decision to allow FDI in multi brand retail trade.\textsuperscript{124} Therefore, cohabitation arrangements in federation might be territory specific, which influenced by events, activities and happenings in other parts of the country.\textsuperscript{125}

In 15\textsuperscript{th} general elections, there remained three major contenders for power. Each combine/group led by major national party, namely the BJP, the Congress and the CPI (M), which pulled together their respective constituents. These major national parties stressed on different political issues. The BJP’s NDA emphasized on the issue of leadership and personality factor along with criticizing the ruling coalition of the UPA-I. The Congress responded to these, besides trying to seek re-election on the basis of its own programme. The outcome of general elections indicated that the issues raised by the NDA and Third Front during the campaign, did not cut much ice with Indian voters; instead, they gave larger mandate to Congress Party than in 2004. It proved that there is always a possibility of a disjunction between issues projected by parties as important and issues that voter feel crucial. In the context of electoral politics, voters align with party on the basis of

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, p.105.
\textsuperscript{123} The Tribune, 8 December 2012.
\textsuperscript{124} Purnima S. Tripathi, “Friends in Need”, \textit{Frontline}, Vol. 29, No.25, 28 December 2012, p.16.
\textsuperscript{125} K.K., n.121, p.104.
the issues that appeal to them the most. However, it heavily depends on how political parties define issue, which they choose to project.\textsuperscript{126}

In a way, political parties such as CPI (M) led Third Front, Congress Party and BJP released their election manifestos on 10 March, 24 March and 3 April 2009, respectively to attract the electorates. These parties raised various issues, talked about planks and future programmes, and made various promises in their manifestos (see table 4.5 and 4.6). The BJP’s election manifesto woo weaker sections of society by promising to provide thirty five kilogram rice/wheat at the rate of rupees two per kilogram, per month, (see table 4.6) on one hand and the inclusion of the issues Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, Ram Setu, protection of cow, abrogation of Article 370 and formulation of uniform civil code, on the other. It was expecting that the BJP’s commitment to ‘cultural heritage’ might bring benefit in core Hindu constituencies and would keep the Sangh Parivar/RSS in good humour. It was related to the BJP vision of ‘Ram Rajya’ (based on idea of good governance). It appeared that BJP’s Lotus vision basically focused on three themes-Rama Rajya, Ram Mandir and Ram Setu (bridge). However, these issues were not mentioned in the NDA’s ‘Agenda for Governance.’ Further, the BJP document also offered raising the income tax exemption limit up to three lakhs, with additional rupees 50000/- for women and senior citizens. It also promised pension of senior citizens, salaries and perks for armed forces and paramilitary personnel, exempting them completely from income tax; and waiving all existing farm loans and providing fresh loans to farmers at a maximum four percentage rate of interest, as well as extending the Madhya Pradesh government’s ‘Ladli Lakshmi Scheme’ across India (see table 4.5).\textsuperscript{127} By and large, the BJP tried to recapture its support base among poor by offering freebies, urban voters, middle class and employees by promising increase in income tax slab and farmers by waving agriculture loan and offering new loan at low interest rates.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>BJP</th>
<th>CPI (M)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farm Sector</strong></td>
<td>▪ Bank credit at lower interest</td>
<td>▪ Waive agricultural loans</td>
<td>▪ Credit to farmers at 4 percentage of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Interest relief to all farmers who repay loans</td>
<td>▪ Agricultural loans at 4 per cent interest</td>
<td>▪ Expand minimum support price coverage to more crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Crop insurance schemes</td>
<td>▪ Irrigate additional 35 millions hectares</td>
<td>▪ More power to rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Distribute surplus land above ceiling and hand over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cultivable wasteland to landless and poor peasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Downturn dole</strong></td>
<td>▪ Implement goods and service tax so that tax like VAT stand abolished to</td>
<td>▪ Exemption from income tax up to Rs. 3 lakhs per annum</td>
<td>▪ Preventing job cuts and pay cuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bring relief to the aam aadmi</td>
<td>▪ Rs. 3.5 lakhs for women and old</td>
<td>▪ Income tax relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Limiting foreign direct investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security and terror</strong></td>
<td>▪ Zero-tolerance for terror, be it Muslim or Hindu</td>
<td>▪ Revive POTA, have national ID card</td>
<td>▪ Tackling terror, including Hindutva terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Identity card for all citizens</td>
<td>▪ Deport illegal immigrants’, replicate Salwa Judum</td>
<td>▪ Curbing Maoist terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Addressing poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign policy</strong></td>
<td>▪ Good terms with the U.S.</td>
<td>▪ Independent strategic nuclear programme</td>
<td>▪ Will renegotiate the nuclear deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Support for Palestinian state</td>
<td>▪ Parliamentary approval for foreign treaties</td>
<td>▪ No strategic tie-up with the United States, promote a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Sri Lanka: solution compatible with Tamil rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>multi-polar world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>▪ Quality education for all</td>
<td>▪ New law against ragging trial in fast track court</td>
<td>▪ 6 percentage of GDP earmarked for education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Addition of one model school in every development block</td>
<td>▪                                        6 percentage of GDP marked for education</td>
<td>▪ Introduce Right to Education Bill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Comparison of Election Manifestos of Lok Sabha Elections 2009: Major Political Parties
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Security</th>
<th>Enact a National Food Security Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 kg wheat or rice Rs. 3 per Kg to below poverty line families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 kg wheat/rice at Rs. 2 kg for below poverty line families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No fertile land for special economic zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-introduction of the universal public distribution system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subsidized food grains under PDS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Congress Party pledged to enact ‘Right to Food Security Act’ ensuring access to sufficient food for all, establishment of voluntary National Youth Corps,* free education for SC/STs, ‘Rasthriya Swasthya Bima Yojna’ (health insurance for every below poverty line family), broadband in every village, at least 100 days work at rupees 100 per day for everyone, under NREGA, an assurance given to farmers to get market rate for their land, which would be acquired for industrial projects and above all, twenty five kilogram of rice or wheat per month, at the rate of rupees three per kilogram for below poverty line (BPL) families, in its manifesto (see tables 4.5 and 4.6).

Sonia Gandhi, President, AICC, forcefully projected Manmohan Singh as prime ministerial candidate/nominee and stated that security, respect and prosperity of all would be party’s endeavour. Sudheendra Kulkarni evaluates the manifestos of political parties and argues that “it was making nothing but cut-and-paste job.” The Congress Party document was silent on fighting against corruption, on one side and maintained a conspiratorial skip on the issue of massive influx of infiltrators from Bangladesh, on the other. The Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who was member of Rajya Sabha from Assam, might believe that infiltration problem did not exist and his lips were sealed on account of his party’s vote bank politics. In another article, Kulkarni, compares ‘politics populism’ of both the Congress and the BJP (see table 4.6). He states that it honorably enshrined as an indispensable part of

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* It would enable young men and women in the age group of 18-23 to serve up to two years in constructive nation building activities.


'good politics’ by mainstream political parties. Three different political formations were making a bid for power on basis of populist measure in Lok Sabha elections—BJP led NDA, Congress and an amorphous Third Front.\textsuperscript{130}

Table 4.6: Sop Opera for 2009 General Elections 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Offer</th>
<th>Annual Fiscal Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>Rice/Wheat for BPL Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>25 Kg per month at Rs. 3kg</td>
<td>Rs. 9700 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 per month at Rs. 2 kg</td>
<td>Rs. 21000 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>Farm Loan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Higher interest subsidy</td>
<td>Rs. 6500 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loan @ four percentage</td>
<td>Rs. 8500 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>For Youth’s Sake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Scholarship for one Lakh SC/ST students</td>
<td>Rs. 7000 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student skill development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student loan @ 4 percentage of interest, Project for sporting talent</td>
<td>Rs. 4000 crores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>Tax Relief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hike in exemption up to Rs three lakhs</td>
<td>Rs. 52000 crores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Hindustan Times*, 7 April 2009 and Shafi Rahman, “The Sop Story”, *India Today*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 16, 20 April 2009, p.40. It is assumed that if these schemes will be implemented, it would create huge burden on exchequer of the country if any party came to power.

\textsuperscript{130} Sudheendra Kulkarni, “Why India is Turning to Populism”, *Indian Express*, 5 April 2009.
In a similar manner, the TDP supremo Chandrababu Naidu offered a cash dole of rupees 1000-2000 every month to poor, lower middle and middle class families, while, the below poverty line (BPL) family would get TV. The arch rival Chiranjeevi offered free land to SC/ST in rural areas. Whether these were the rising regional parties or the struggling national parties, all offered free power, cheap rice, and health insurance for the poor and much more. By and large, every party was only interested in making its manifesto more than fascinating others by coming up with promises and offers of those freebies that were difficult to keep.\textsuperscript{131} The people continued to be taken for ride election after elections.

The CPI (M)’s manifesto was divided into two parts. The first section reviewed the performance of the UPA-I government under the light of commitments made in Common Minimum Programme (CMP). The second part set out a systematic critique of the ideology and spelled out the role of the Left parties during UPA-I regime.\textsuperscript{132} The CPI (M) document said, the controversial Indo-US Nuclear Deal would be reviewed, reworked and the strategic alliance with USA including the Defence Frame Work Agreement, would be scrapped. The party manifesto also spoke about universalisation of the public distribution system (PDS), cutting of petrol and diesel prices by slashing taxes and duties, strengthening public sector, protecting the domestic industry and prohibiting FDI in retail sector, if party came to power, (see table 4.5).\textsuperscript{133}

On the whole, every party stressed on particular issue and raised key slogans during its election campaigns and rallies. These slogans provided broad indications of their policy thrust. The slogans of the Congress Party were ‘stability’ and ‘inclusive growth’, through inclusive governance, ‘Bharat Nirman’ (India building), ‘aam aadmi ke badhte kadam, har kadam per bharat buland (common man steps towards progress and on the each step of common man India is growing) and above all, during rallies and other occasions, the INC used a song ‘jai ho’ (towards victory) from Oscar winning film Slumdog Millionaries to attract the masses. To counter the opposition, the INC leadership also highlighted the achievements of central government particularly NREGA, the Right to Information Act (RTI), the farmers

\textsuperscript{133} Hindustan Times, 17 March 2009 and \textit{The Indian Express}, 17 March 2009.
loan wavier programme, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and ‘Bharat Nirman’ (Indian growth story in various sectors).\footnote{Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, “Political Perceptions”, \textit{Frontline}, Vol. 26, No.7, 10 April 2009, pp.130-131.} To highlight the manifesto of the party, Sonia Gandhi, President, and Rahul Gandhi, General Secretary, AICC organized rallies at Shillong and Kochi respectively, and Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister also held press conferences at Mumbai. They (Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh) rained barbs on the NDA’s prime ministerial aspirant L.K. Advani on various grounds. Manmohan Singh hit back L.K. Advani (who claimed Manmohan Singh as the weakest Primer ever) by replying that;

\begin{quote}
Mr Advani has the unique ability to combine strength in speech, with weakness in actions. That is why; BJP’s iron man was quick to melt in Kandhar hijack episode in December 1999. He further said “unlike Advani, I would not be found weeping in a corner, while, hoodlums tear down a centuries old mosque (Babri Masjid).\footnote{\textit{The Times of India}, 14 April 2009 and \textit{Hindustan Times}, 14 April 2009.}
\end{quote}

The CPI (M) electoral campaign thrust on ‘secular, pro-people’ non-Congress and non-BJP alternative that would guarantee pro-people economic policies, social justice, consistent secularism, genuine federalism and an independent foreign policy.\footnote{Krishnan, n.134, p.130.} The Third Front/CPI (M) leadership alleged that both Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress Party pursued same kind of neo-liberal policies, which greatly harmed the interests of rural and urban workers, peasants, artisans, small entrepreneurs, women, students and youth. The liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG), helped to create virtually two distinct and different India’s “the shining India and the suffering India.” The Third Front highlighted weaknesses of Indo-US Civil Nuclear deal, made by the UPA-I, which projected as selling out Indian sovereignty to USA. In addition, the Bharatiya Janata Party was rabidly communal, while, Congress Party was inconsistent in communalism.\footnote{Sitaram Yechury, “Shifting Sands of Indian Politics”, \textit{Seminar}, No.596, April 2009 and Athreya, n.132, pp.129-130.}

The BJP promoted key slogans ‘good governance’, development, security and attempted to project the personality of its leader, L.K. Advani by airing slogans
‘majboot neta, nirnayak sarkar’ (strong leader, decisive government). The leadership of BJP spoke against indecisiveness of the UPA-I government, its weak leadership and failure to tackle the issue of terrorism (that is, terrorist attacks in Delhi, Hyderabad, Malegaon, Mumbai and other places). The bring back rupees twenty five lakh crores ($ 500 billions) stashed in Swiss banks to India, promised by L.K. Advani, stroked a chord on the campaign trail. L.K. Advani further slammed Manmohan Singh, by saying that;

You have a situation in which Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh) held office, but has no authority, while; person (Sonia Gandhi) who wields authority has no accountability.

The ‘gudiya’ (baby doll) versus ‘buduya’ (old woman) verbal dual between Narendra Modi, Chief Minister, Gujarat and Priyanka Gandhi, daughter of Sonia Gandhi, made election campaign hot. In a nut shell, the general elections in 2009, was contested on menu of issues, which rose by political parties in general, and three formations, in particular. The National Election Study 2009, by Centre for the Study of Developing Society, indicated that the issues such as nuclear deal, terrorism, Ram Setu, and black money etc. raised by political parties had almost no impact on voting decisions of voters and voters did not consider these as relevant. By and large, it seems that 15th Lok Sabha elections determined by the outcome of many “small battles, fought on local issues”, not on caste and community lines.

Generally, the national issues pushed to the background in 2009 polls, and the local issues dominated the election campaigns of the parties. It is interesting to note that how candidates responded to electoral pulse. In national capital Delhi, arbitrary hike in fees by several public schools kept the attention of the voters. Meanwhile, intense demand to replace Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar, (who was still facing charges for Delhi riots) was in air and in neighbouring region, Punjab. It

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138 Rai, n.126, p.81.
140 The Tribune, 12 April 2009.
141 The Times of India, 13 April 2009.
142 Rai, n.126, p.80.
143 The Times of India, 15 April 2009.
reopened the feuds within the Congress Party as well as in other parties, but later on Congress Party, replaced both of them. Interestingly, most of the advertisements and hoardings of both the Congress and the BJP, did not have picture of their national leaders in Delhi. The focus was on the candidates in the locality and not on the national leaderships.\textsuperscript{144}

In Himachal Pradesh, the battle for Lok Sabha seats was primarily bi-polar. The people voted more on the basis of state government’s performance without focusing on the political formation at the Centre. There was a low campaign for 15\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha elections, which fought without any emotional issue in Uttarakhand, unlike 2004 parliamentary elections. However, caste and party loyalty was playing a bigger role in state politics. This time, the BSP too emerged as major player, which dented the secular votes. The patriarchy versus royalty politics dominated in Punjab. Neither camps, such as Badal led SAD (B) and Capt. Amrinder singh’s Congress, were talking about any significant issue. The focal points of rivalry were Bhatinda and Patiala constituencies, where, Capt. Amrinder’s son, Raninder Singh contested elections against the SAD’s Harsimrat Kaur Badal, the wife of Sukhbir Badal, Deputy Chief Minister. In Patiala, Capt. Amrinder’s wife Preneet Kaur was pitted against staunch loyalist of Badal, Prem Singh Chandumajra. Moreover, religion, vendetta and factional politics took precedence over all the other issues.\textsuperscript{145}

In Uttar Pradesh, there was no overwhelming trend in 2009 general elections. Consequently, local factors yielded a fragmented, foggy picture in the region. In every constituency, had self-contained stories were intriguingly dissimilar from other constituencies or adjoining constituency. There was no uniting of the local issues/problems, personality of candidates. The caste equations and tactical impact of Muslim votes were different in different constituencies.\textsuperscript{146} The key factors as price rise, power cut/electricity, drinking water, rice, and Tamil problem of Sri Lankans determined the results of polls in Tamil Nadu. The people were more eager

to hear what candidates and politicians said on the issues that directly impinge on their lives in the region.\textsuperscript{147}

Narendra Modi’s development agenda as ‘vibrant Gujarat’ helped the BJP, to win good number of seats in Gujarat. Terrorism, resettlement of slum-dwellers and infrastructure development as well as presence of Raj Thackeray’s Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), influenced the voter choice in Mumbai and surrounding areas. Predictably, issues of security and prevention of terrorist activities were high on the agenda of candidates in Maharashtra.\textsuperscript{148} In brief, Naxal issue dominated from Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh through Chattisgarh’s Dantewada and Orissa’s outback to Puruliya in West Bengal. The rehabilitation of Gulf returnees was a matter of concern in northern Kerala. The displacement caused by SEZs mining projects, concerned parts of Orissa and Maharashtra, whereas caste combinations ruled in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.\textsuperscript{149} More or less, the electorates were more interested in ‘bread and butter’ issues, which were still relevant in next elections. In other words, \textit{Aam Aadmi} (common man) were more interested in \textit{BIPASA-bijli, pani and sadak} (electricity, water and roads) than ‘high-falutin’ issues such as black money in Swiss banks and catching words raised by political parties as \textit{Aam Aadmi} (common man) and inclusive governance.\textsuperscript{150} The 2009 parliamentary elections became more of collection of numerous state elections, in which local issues were defining the contest. ‘The localization of national election’ was only a reflection of changing India.

A distinct feature of change was the emergence of regional outfits, coinciding with declining of national parties, which were representing the new social forces.\textsuperscript{151} Interestingly, there were seven national political parties, thirty eight regional parties and more than 1000 registered parties’ which put-up 8070 candidates including 383 independents in 2009 national elections. The six out of every ten candidates secured less than 5000 votes. The national record of voting


\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Hindustan Times}, 14 April 2009.


\textsuperscript{151} Editorial, “Local and National”, \textit{The Times of India}, 11 May 2009.
turnout was 58.8 percentage in the polls, only one percentage of increase from previous Lok Sabha election in 2004, but lower than global average of 69.7 percentage for period from 1996 to 2006, (calculated by International IDEA from data on elections in 214 countries and terrorities).  

The results of the 2009 parliamentary elections, conclusively demonstrated that the Congress’ alliance strategy paid it rich dividends. Consequently, the UPA won 262 seats, with Congress alone getting 206 seats and crossing the 200 mark for the first time since 1991, its share of popular votes also rose to 28.6 percentage, an increase of two percentage of over 2004. On all accounts, the position of the INC in the Parliament was impregnable. On the other hand, the NDA got only 157 seats, BJP’s score as 116 seats, whereas non-Congress, non-BJP formation (Third Front) was reduced to just seventy two Lok Sabha seats. The Fourth Front sought to develop a separate identity in order to enhance its bargaining power with Congress/UPA in post-poll situation brought down to only twenty seven seats (see table 4.7). The LJP was not able to win single seat, even its President Ram Vilas Paswan, lost his Hajipur seat.  

The leaders of the winning coalition (UPA-II) and media projected, the elections results as historic in which Congress Party got massive mandate. However, the verdict of 15th Lok Sabha was neither massive nor clear. The Congress Party received the mandate within the alliance through the strategy of big partners trying to defeat the smaller partners.  

Atul Kohli explains that there was nothing “historic” about Congress’ victory. The party’s victory was just a vote for continuity in the pattern of development as inclusive growth. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar  

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scrutinized the outcome of 15th general elections and concluded that the Congress victory was ambiguous and owed lot to movements that were not of its making.

Table 4.7: Tally of Seats of Political Parties and Alliances in 2009 General Elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UPA</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>NDA</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Left Front/Third Front</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Fourth Front</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>BJP 116</td>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>23</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>JD(U) 20</td>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>RJD</td>
<td>04</td>
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<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Shiv Sena 11</td>
<td>BJD  14</td>
<td>LJP 00</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rashtriya Lok Dal 05</td>
<td>AIADMK 09</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>SAD (B) 04</td>
<td>JD (S) 03</td>
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<td>JMM</td>
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<td>TRS 02</td>
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<td>MLKSC</td>
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<td>AGP 01</td>
<td>RSP</td>
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<td>BPF</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>INDL 00</td>
<td>MDMK  01</td>
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<tr>
<td>KC (Mani)</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>NPF 00</td>
<td>HJC</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIMM</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>SDF 00</td>
<td>JVM (P) 01</td>
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<td>BSP</td>
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<td>TDP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 262 159 80 27


The shifts in the ‘third electoral system’, worked against the politics of identity and made the quality of governance an issue. A shrinking of the NDA, a positive image of the UPA government and its leadership, gave the ruling coalition a decisive lead before the campaign formally began.

The verdict had many firsts to its credit; the first time in last twenty five years that a government that completed its full term, was re-elected; Manmohan Singh became the first Prime Minister reinstalled after completing one full term like
Nehru.\textsuperscript{158} It considered the first general election, which held after the fourth delimitation of constituencies. The new delimitation exercise changed the electoral map of India, redrew the rule of game, removed some established precedents and introduced an element of uncertainty. It erased ‘safe constituencies’ of politicians and backbone of their parties. In other words, many political leaders lost their ‘carefully nurtured constituencies’, as these constituencies fell into the reserved category or merged with other or simply split. The list included Latur-Shivraj Patil, Bulandshahar-Kalyan Singh, Dausa-Sachin Pilot, Bikaner-Dharmendra, Faridkot-Sukhbir Singh Badal etc. These constituencies were either reserved/de-reserved or undergoing major territorial changes. In a way, political parties drove hard bargains not only for seats but also the advantage of location.\textsuperscript{159}

The national elections outcome underline the fact that anti-incumbency was more or less out, only thing that mattered most was the ‘performance’ of the government. The Indian electorates proved that they were not fools, you would deliver results, and then, you could earn votes.\textsuperscript{160} In November-December 2012, assemblies elections held in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, in which Narendra Modi got landslide victory, highlighted the facts that there was ‘pro-incumbency’ in Gujarat. Arun Jaitley, General Secretary, BJP accepted party’s defeated in 15\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha elections and states;

\begin{quote}
We in the BJP failed to read lager central issues in polls, even the Congress Party could not foresee it. This was the desire of Indian voter to ensure politically stable government, which will be free from obstructions and roadblocks.\textsuperscript{161}
\end{quote}

The electoral issues of the party could not much appeal to the public. Projecting Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat as potential candidate for the Prime Minister Office, during election campaigns in 2009, on one side, Varun


\textsuperscript{159} Ashutosh Kumar, “Coping with the Delimitation: New Electoral Strategies”, in Mehra, n.94, pp.29-52, and Kailash, n.111, p.54.


\textsuperscript{161} Arun Jaitley, “Triumph of the Moderate”, \textit{The Indian Express}, 27 May 2009.
Gandhi communal speech in Pillibhit, which condoned by L.K. Advani, on the other, sent mixed signals within the electorates. The combinations of positive image of Manmohan Singh, and suddenly energized Rahul Gandhi did the trick. The Congress leadership was also successful to cash various schemes as enforcement of NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and rupees 60,000 crores loan waiver schemes to farmers’ etc. The NREGA scheme like ‘garibi hatao’ (remove poverty) slogan of 1971 helped to gain support in rural India, on one hand and Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal attracted urban voter, on the other side. That is why; the Congress Party grabbed most of the seats in urban cities particularly national capital Delhi and the financial capital-Mumbai.

The UPA-II constituted government under leadership of Manmohan Singh on 22 May 2009, after the painful exercise/bargaining with tougher allies Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Trinamool Congress (TC). Both allies of UPA-II (DMK and TC) demanded, more berths as well as high profile same portfolio particularly Railway, Transport, Shipping and Telecom etc. and along with adjusting Karunanidhi’s family members in the Council of Ministers. But the larger presence of Congress Party in the Lower House boosted her confidence that it was firmly in the driver’s seat and had fewer allies to deal with. The BSP, SP, RJD offered conditional support to the government. However, the expectations from the ruling party went up. The coalition government of UPA-II was forced to dance to the tune of Mamata Banerjee and K. Karunanidhi and later on, the support of Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mayawati in Parliament to UPA-II government secured its position.

Many instances, the constituents of UPA-II as Trinamool Congress (TC), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), National Conference (NC) and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), embarrassed Congress Party on various issues like hike in

162 Ramakrishnan, n.154, pp.6-7.
167 Anita Katyal and R. Sedhuraman, “Still Made for Each Other”, Ibid.
the prices of petrol and diesel, proposal of National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), hike in railway fares, and FDIs in multi-brand retail sector etc. Ultimately, the DMK and TC quitted Union Cabinet.\textsuperscript{168} The TC compelled the Manmohan Singh government to shelve various important policies both at national and international levels. In a way, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh cancelled Teesta river water treaty with Bangladesh, held Land Acquisition Bill and Pension Bill,\textsuperscript{169} forced the government change its own party (TC) Railway Minister because the TC chief Mamata Banerjee was not satisfied with Railway Budget.\textsuperscript{170} Mamata Banerjee put pressure on the Congress to hold FDI in retail sector in November 2011,\textsuperscript{171} but government passed it with the help of the BSP and the SP.

The 2009 parliamentary elections opened-up some new possibilities for party system. The last two decades (1998 to 2004) witnessed an expansion of Third space (Left and regional parties) in Indian politics, now its support base and strength shirked. This meant that, regional parties were not on their way out. The performance of DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena and NCP in Maharashtra, JD (U) in Bihar, TC in West Bengal, and SAD (B) in Punjab showed that regional players were here to stay. Even though, Narendra Modi, Sheila Dikshit, Bhoopinder Singh Hooda, Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy and Virbhadra Singh, who were shading regional touch to their national parties, did better than others.\textsuperscript{172} The regional aspirations prevailed in assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa, and Manipur. It was assumed that these assembly elections had national importance because, the national parties needed the regionalist to support their government in Delhi, and this regionalism tends to promote sectarian interest at the cost of national goal.\textsuperscript{173}

By and large, the regional and sub-regional parties became deeply entrenched in party system, making the major national parties structurally dependent on them for support. This phenomenon did not allow the coalition system to attain stability. These regional outfits worked mere as coalition of specific ethno-caste and

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{The Tribune}, 6 March 2011.
\textsuperscript{169} Kalyani Shankar, “Allies in New Delhi, Rivals in Kolkata”, \textit{The Pioneer}, 6 January 2012.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{The Tribune}, 18 March 2012.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{The Sunday Guardian}, 4 December 2011.
\textsuperscript{173} C.P. Bhambhri, “Regional Aspirations Prevail in Assembly Polls”, \textit{The Pioneer}, 6 January 2012.
ethno-religious groups rather than political agency, which articulated the collective interest and aspirations of region as a whole.\textsuperscript{174}

Another interesting fact was that, the small and minor parties lost more seats than national parties. The NDA’s gains were at the expense of Fourth Front in Bihar or UPA in Jharkhand. Similarly, the UPA gained seats in many states at the cost of NDA, or Third Front. The Third Front gained merely one seat only in Orissa, where as Fourth Front lost seats in all states.\textsuperscript{175} The Congress Party gained maximum in 2009 polls as compared to other parties. In almost every state, the Congress Party finished at the upper end of the band.

The Congress and the BJP emerged as a reluctant coalition makers, would prefer a single party government, but it was not possible in current situation. There was emergence of ‘multiple-bipolarity’ states by E. Sridharan.\textsuperscript{176} There was growing trend of nepotism and facilitation in party system. Each party either regional or national is still falling behind with daughter, son and wife etc.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{174} D.L. Sheth, “Political Communalization of Religions and the Crisis of Secularism”, \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol. XLIV, No.39, 26 September 2009, p.74.  \\
\textsuperscript{176} Vandita Mishra, “Coalition Cauldron: Action Replay”, \textit{The Indian Express}, 31 March 2009.
\end{flushright}