

# Coalition Politics in Contemporary India: Development and Dimensions

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## ABSTRACT

On 11 April 2019 to 19 May 2019, seven phases of a general election will be conducted in India to select the State's 17th Lok Sabha. Before the general election, the law prohibits passing judgments to avoid inducement to voters. This provision, however, dissents from the mandate during the 1977 general election that showed that cultural homogeneity is not a reward for political stability and integration. Democratic stability is enhanced through group cross-cutting and politically relevant affiliations. This involves 1. application of power, in the sense of joint use of resources to determine outcomes; 2. a 'mixed motive situation' means the existence of both conflict and cooperation; and 3. collective activity, which involves the interaction of more than two units. In the Indian context, it can be argued that coalition politics has come to settle at the Indian federal level and that it cannot be viewed as a sudden and unexpected development. On a deeper analysis, it is reflective of a societal metamorphosis - wherein day by day a larger number of hitherto latent groups of Indian society are getting mobilized and politicized day by day. In this new coalition phase, what is under challenge are the status-quo and the unequal and unjust division of rewards and benefits. In today's society, especially having multi-layered caste and religion background, it is entirely possible to have a fractured mandate in which government is formed on "Common Minimum Programme." Evaluation of coalition politics in India will help many same countries to set coalitional patterns in the present and the future.

**Keywords:** Coalition politics, Political party, Pressure Politics, Common Welfare and State System

## ABSTRAK

Pada 11 April 2019 hingga 19 Mei 2019, tujuh fase pemilihan umum akan dilakukan di India untuk memilih Lok Sabha ke-17 Negara. Sebelum pemilihan umum, undang-undang melarang pengesahan keputusan untuk menghindari bujukan kepada pemilih. Namun ketentuan ini, berbeda pendapat dari mandat selama pemilihan umum 1977 yang menunjukkan bahwa homogenitas budaya bukan hadiah untuk stabilitas dan integrasi politik. Stabilitas demokrasi ditingkatkan melalui lintas sektoral dan afiliasi yang relevan secara politik. Ini melibatkan 1. penerapan kekuasaan, dalam arti penggunaan bersama sumber daya untuk menentukan hasil; 2. situasi motif campuran yang merupakan keberadaan konflik dan kerja sama; dan 3. kegiatan kolektif, yang melibatkan interaksi lebih dari dua unit. Dalam konteks India, telah dikemukakan bahwa politik koalisi telah diselesaikan di tingkat federal India dan tidak dapat dilihat sebagai perkembangan yang tiba-tiba dan tidak terduga. Pada analisis yang lebih dalam, ini mencerminkan metamorfosis sosial - di mana hari demi hari sejumlah besar kelompok laten masyarakat India dimobilisasi dan dipolitisasi hari demi hari. Dalam fase koalisi baru ini, apa status quo dan pembagian imbalan dan manfaat yang tidak memenuhi syarat dan adil. Dalam masyarakat saat ini, terutama yang memiliki latar belakang kasta dan agama berlatar belakang ganda, Program Minimum Biasa. Evaluasi politik koalisi di India akan membantu banyak negara untuk menetapkan pola koalisi. di masa kini dan masa depan.

## INTRODUCTION

The term 'coalition' is a Latin word which means to grow together. In the political system, it implies that some political parties will come together and form an alliance or temporary union to exercise political control. The Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences Professor A. Ogg defines coalition as a 'co-operative arrangement under which distinct political parties and members of such parties unite to form a government or Ministry. The formation of the coalition government takes place as a sequel to the inability of a single party to command the majority in the legislature. A combination of some political groups or parties is essential to control the majority. These political parties or groups join together to form a government without losing their respective identity. They agree to a joint political, economic, and social programme and when differences arise, any group or party is free to withdraw from the coalition.

Alike 1977, in 1989 election, the Congress (I) failed to retain majority and V.P. Singh-led National Front government was formed with the support from the Left Front and the BJP. Earlier in April 1987 V.P. Singh, the defense minister in Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet resigned from the government and started a single-minded crusade against corruption which had touched a sensitive chord. Apart from choosing an emotive issue, he selected a burning topic of the time and succeeded in isolating the then ruling party. Gradually, V.P. Singh courted and won the support of a wide range of forces, which includes Sarvodaya workers, trade unionists, the farmers' movement, and some sections of radical anti-Congress intellectuals. On October 2, 1987, V. P. Singh along with other Congress dissidents-Arif Mohammad Khan, Arun Nehru, Ram Dhan, V.C. Shukla and Satpal Malik formed a common front; after that, a larger alliance of anti-Congress factions came under one umbrella to support V.P. Singh ([Chandra, 2002](#)). However, in the whole process, more than V.P. Singh's strategy, it was the inherent anti-Congressism of the left and BJP that brought them to support the V.P. Singh. The broad alliance formed in 1989 was one of the factors responsible for the rise of BJP ([Mustafa, 1995](#)).

The results of November 1989 elections for the Lok Sabha was a rejection of Rajiv Gandhi and his Congress, but no clear verdict in favor of any other leader or his party or the five parties' National Front was released. It was a blow to Congress even if it was still the only large party with 197 seats, which is equivalent to the 39.5 percent vote share. The National Front had won 146 seats and after declaring that Congress was not interested into form a government, the second non-Congress government was supported by the BJP with 86 and left parties with 52 seats. The party which won such a massive mandate barely five years ago frittered away people's faith, and confidence and the election held in 1989 threw up a hung parliament. In 1989 the formation of other non-Congress government took place, but it was a small affair with little to no significant changes. It was, in fact, a culmination of the struggle waged by a section of India's political elite against what it perceived to be the force of authoritarianism, which, allegedly destroyed democratic institutions and severely undermined democratic rights of the people ([Singh, 2010](#)). Internationally, it was the year of the triumph of the forces which had continued their campaign against what they perceived as anti-democratic, corrupt, and oppressive regime form of Congress (I) coincided with the euphoric upsurge of democratic forces in the socialist world. Moreover, Glasnost and Perestroika rose through which ideological distortions and socio-political and economic bureaucratization of society and polity are sought to be put to an end. Amid these national and international developments, a minority government of National Front took the reins of administration on December 1, 1989.

Although the formation of the government was completed, the differences among top ruling leaders/ ministers continued and caused harm to the functions of the administration. Also, a significant instability rose as the two supporting parties had crucial roles without the responsibility of running the administration. National Front government was not only an internal coalition within

the National Front, but also, and more importantly, an external alliance was made among the National Front, the Left Front, and the BJP. The one dominant Party system that generally characterized the Indian political scene for nearly three decades came under severe strain. However, this phenomenon did not pave the way for the apparent emergence of the two-party system (Swain, 2008). The delicate triangular balance upon which the viability of the National Front government rested was finally upset to the BJP when it pressed its viewpoints on Ramjanmabhoomi Babri Masjid controversy beyond the tolerance limits of the National Front and the Left Front.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In the current study, it is safe to say that coalition politics has settled in the Indian federal systems. On a deeper analysis, it is reflective of a societal metamorphosis; where a larger number of hitherto latent groups of Indian society are getting mobilised and politicised. In the situation, once again, several factors need to be examined. In this aspect, this study focused on the following:

01. To examine the history of coalition politics in India;
02. To analyse the different aspects of social engineering essential for coalition;
03. To narrate the challenges of a coalition in Indian context;
04. How and why coalition became a deciding factor;
05. To indicate the recent trends in Indian coalition politics

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology in this study aims to explain the contexts of Indian polity particularly the period of the coalition. In the history of Independent India, the first coalition of non-Congress was formed in early 1977, also known as Janata Party, which the present BJP is in partnership with a certain Jana Sangh. The second phase of coalition began in the federal level around 1990 without BJP leadership, but the latter emerged as the single largest party in May 1996 election, and it took power for only 13 days with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister. The study period is mainly focused between 1990 and 2004 in which maximum experiments were done with the Indian coalition. Although, the governments in the post-2004 era were also an alliance of political parties having no match in programme and ideology, and they were united against the BJP, which again returned in May 2014 with Narendra Modi as their party leader and Prime Minister of the country.

As the valuable materials on aspects of Indian coalition such as Indian polity, society, and party system are mostly descriptive, analytical, and theoretically ambiguous, the research used secondary sources such as books, journals, and newspapers to explain and analyze events leading to the phase of a coalition. In the course of the study, the main focus remained on different aspects and dimensions of the work, and therefore, excluding unsupported narrations.

## **RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Social Engineering of Political Parties**

India is fortunate in the sense that its linguistic, religious, and caste do not reinforce one another as they do in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Israel, and Sudan. However, the salience of divided religion is present in society and is capable of creating fissures not only between the majority and minority religions but also within the majority. The faction within the Hindu faith is mainly due to castes and languages. In Western democracies, religion has no significant influence on politics; in a country like India, robust religious culture dominates democratic politics. Since our politicians have no direct access to the knowledge of Western Parliamentary styles of governance, they translate

these unfamiliar to rural India. All these alterations began to reflect in Indian politics in the form of fashion, language, and modes of behavior (Singh, 2009). In the post-Mandal phase, which was announced by the National Front government, the BJP got an opportunity to complete its agenda. Seeing the strong popular reaction to Mandal BJP, noises of withdrawal of support started.

Meanwhile, on September 25, 1990, L.K Advani embarked on his 6000-mile-long rath yatra from Somnath in Gujrat to Ayodhya. It resulted in Advani's arrest but at the same time aroused communal passions in the country. The developments paved the way for the fall of V.P. Singh's government and a Janata Dal split which took place on the 5th of November, electing Chandra Shekhar as their leader who headed a short-lived government with the support of the Congress.

All the major political parties of India have its respective political agenda, which includes cultural democracy. The uneven and unjust distribution of developments and social discrimination proved to have a fatal consequence to the political health of the country. Excessive dependence of the State and decreasing accountable bureaucrats are among the many factors that forced the Hindu majoritarianism to reclaim the dignity of cultural self-assertion against a dispensation in which individuals are penalized for speaking their mother tongue and evincing interest in their own culture (Kaviraj, 1995). This cultural indigenize is likely a consequence of democracy, and the unwillingness of liberal and left politics in India to allow expression to these impulses has enabled Hindu communal and Hindi chauvinist politicians to appropriate the considerable power of such cultural democracy. Bharatiya Janata Party took advantage of this situation. In the seventies when communal propaganda seemed to bring a few dividends, and the destiny of the then Jana Sangh seemed irreversibly on the decline, some elements inside the party suggested that the party should subtly shift its appeal to the middle class. They also advise that instead of the traditional call to Hindu Chauvinism, it should try to project itself as a substitute for the Congress offering a cleaner, more efficient, and less corrupt government.

The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Indira Gandhi began to adopt a more Hindu-oriented strategy in early 1982. Upon the death of Mrs. Gandhi by her Sikh guards, a communally surcharged atmosphere that resulted in the victory of the party in the 1984 general elections. From then on, the Party had sought the support of the Hindu communal in a manner it had not done earlier. Encountering implacable opposition from an array of regional forces, the political center gave Hindu majoritarian communalism a leader (Jalal, 1995). In 1986 the Congress under its policy of appeasement allowed the opening of Babri Masjid and the Hindu shrine for worship which were kept locked since December 22, 1949. It then created the setting for a sustained mobilization of the Hindus that led to the Shilanyas for a new temple in November 1989.

The Bharatiya Janata Party from the seventies onwards sincerely executed its two-pronged policy. Especially after the dramatic success of the Rathayatras, its agenda was rewritten in a retrograde direction, but it also adhered to its more secular constituency. From advertising tactics, it continued to appeal to the electorate of modernist groups, but on the other, it persisted with its blatantly communal propaganda aimed at the more traditional Hindu groups. Now within the context of democratic politics, it seeks to turn numerical majority into political majoritarianism, thereby subverting democracy itself. While democracy is based on the majority-minority dichotomy, it is also given strength by the existence of pluralism. A person may think in one context that he belongs to a majority community, but he may also be part of a minority in terms of caste, region, language, or political persuasion. It is the moderates majority rule within a democracy (Das, 1991). The danger of Hindutva as the defining principle of Indian nationhood is that it seeks to create and perpetuate a permanent majority, one based on an artificial and homogenized Hinduism. On the other, the apprehensions and reservations about democracy have also increased with the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, and the demolition of Babri Masjid



in 1992 preceded by an intense communal chauvinist campaign proved landmarks in Indian political and social life.

### **Challenges of the Time**

For the last two decades, the Indian State has been facing severe challenges. It went through a process of rapid centralization of power since the split in the Congress Party caused by Indira Gandhi in 1969 that significantly increased with sharp authoritarian measures. It set in motion a process of realignment of sentiments and preferences, and the general outlook among the articulate sections of society such as the elite in its entirety, barring the critical intelligentsia in academia, and the political activists. It paved the way for a rapid and famous reversal of moods. Gradually, the electoral process and the outcomes of elections, as well as the structuring of political responses between them, were breached. The same people who voted the governments in with huge mandates soon turned against their government, and the Indian State was under famous constant assault ([Alam, 2012](#)). The Janata government which followed the defeat of the Emergency regime and which restored democracy faced the same situation of popular agitation. The same was the case in 1980 and 1984. This was an important indicator of the unresponsive nature of the ruling class vis-à-vis the problems of the people and the lack of adequate accountability of the government of the day. These swings came to an end after the 1989 elections which ushered in the era of coalition or minority governments. This is inferred as the phase of politics devalued the leaders, political parties and certain institutions which lost their autonomy and were converted into mere instruments of powers - a condition imposed during Emergency. It is therefore understandable that people have lost faith in them. People experienced government by the Congress and rebuffed it, the replacements led by Janata Party or Janata Dal tried to rule with good intentions but could not sustain themselves for long.

The contemporary revival of Hinduism and implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendation cast a profound impact on the social equations that exist in Indian society. The disturbances in social equations do not just indicate the sharp changes in the relations between the upper castes, and the OBCs and Dalits. It also affected the comparisons of power and domination, which kept people subservient. The subjects to drastic upheaval in the Indo-Gangetic belt in varying degrees in the rest of the country. Especially after 1977, with the formation of the first non-Congress government, the Jana Sangh acquired a certain degree of respectability among the varied sections of society, and have functioned as part of a larger platform fighting for democratic restoration. However, in the wake of the anti-Mandal agitations and its aggressive campaign for the Ram Mandir, its position improved significantly. While the BJP remained an upper caste party drawing overwhelming support in the areas where its presence was active before the anti-Mandal agitation, its support steadily increases in every caste. The increase is related to the income level of the various strata within these caste groups. The 1990s have witnessed the phenomenal growth of the BJP. The figures cutting across had shown that the preference for the BJP is not limited to the upper castes. The relatively well-off sections among the oppressed castes have also expressed the choice for the BJP. These are the mobile sections and aspire to success and privilege. They perceive in the BJP, the political force which is best positioned to further and protect their interests. Such a bloc has emerged in Indian society and politics for the first time since independence.

It was in this socio-political milieu, the general elections for the tenth Lok Sabha were held in May-June 1991, and the Congress (I) emerged as the single largest party getting 245 seats and formed the government under the premiership of P.V. Narasimha Rao. Like 1984, the Congress (I) got sympathy vote to emerge as the single largest party as Rajiv Gandhi, the ex-Prime Minister and star campaigner of the party was assassinated after the first round of voting by an LTTE human bomb in Sriperumbudur, forty kilometers from Madras. On the other, the failure of two successive

coalition governments at the center indirectly benefited BJP to emerge as an alternative to Congress. The splintered constituents of the National Front and the Left Front lagged far behind the Congress (I) and the BJP. A two-party plus multi-party system had come to the fore in these elections. In this election, while the left parties maintained their position, the Janata Dal under V.P. Singh suffered a decline with around 55 seats, but significantly, the BJP emerged with flying colors as the second largest party with 119 seats. It provided a stable and active opposition to the party in power at the center. At the juncture what bedeviled the opposition's efforts for unity was the want of a credible long-term strategy with clear cut policies and programmes. A patchwork of parties fighting their familiar political foe and one another cannot hope to make considerable headway. Distribution of opposition votes among several parties naturally gave Congress a clear advantage in getting seats. Although P.V. Narasimha Rao after forming the government was able to manipulate the majority by engineering splits and purchasing supports, he could not revive the dominance of the Party. Instead, he weakened it further by his failure to prevent the demolition of Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992. The backward classes and scheduled castes, which had drifted away from the Congress before these elections, too, could not be won over by him. Also, a large number of scandals during his regime caused the alienation of a segment of the middle class. All these cleared the desks for the rise of the conservative political pragmatism of BJP and alliance in next coming elections.

### **Deepening of the Crisis**

Between 1996 and 1999 the general elections for the 11th 12th and 13th Lok Sabha were held which marked a significant departure from the earlier trends of Indian politics and society. The 1996 elections brought back the situation that prevailed in 1977 and 1989. Between 1996 and 1998 three coalition governments were formed, and one of them lasted only for thirteen days. The support promised by the Congress created by Deve Gowda and I.K Gujral fell when Congress pulled the carpet from under their feet ([Mathur, 2002](#)). The 1996 parliamentary elections witnessed the strengthening of the multi-party system. The electoral battle of 1996 occurred mostly among three politico-electoral formations: one was the Congress (I) and its Tamil Nadu ally All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) along with specific minor partners in a few states like Kerala. The second was the Bharatiya Janata Party, its ally Shiv Sena (SS) along with the emerged Samata Party and the Haryana Vikas Party (HPV). The third force was the United Front a combination of National Front, Left Front, Samajwadi Party (SP) and a few other regional parties like Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC).

Even at the general level, the changes were most visible in the distribution of votes between the national and regional parties. In 1971 the percentage of the vote for the national parties was 78; even in 1967, which saw the first territorial assertion, the ballot for the national parties was quite high at 76 percent. It had then steadily risen to 85 percent for the national parties in 1980; erratically moved between 78 and 81 percent between 1984 and 1991. Interestingly there has been a sharp decline in the proportion of votes for the national parties, by 12 percent in 1996; the percentage was down to 69. The crucial difference, unlike earlier, was that most of the various assertions of the regional identities have now become part of the very definition of the 'national.' The antagonism between the national and the regional, in a stroke, seemed to have evaporated. Even the nature of the government formed at the Centre, after the 1996 elections, could be defined as co-governance of the nation and the various regions. This was distinct from a current coalition. Political parties have talked of 'cooperative federalism,' but what we are witnessing is a co-federal government.' The coalitions since 1996 are a manifestation of this phenomenon. This is the fusion of the nation and the regions, named as expressed through political parties.

In the general elections of 1996 again, no party got the absolute majority, but the BJP emerged as the single largest party and the Congress (I) had been relegated to the second position. As a result,

a coalition government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee was formed in the center in which BJP was a significant partner. Some regional parties like the Akali Dal and Shiv Sena but this government could not prove its majority in Lok Sabha as the post-election coalition remained narrow and most of the regional parties decided to stay away from it. After its fall, in less than a fortnight, a United Front (UF) coalition government came to power under the leadership of H.D. Deve Gowda which included Janata Dal, CPI and some regional parties with Congress support. On March 30, 1997, the Congress withdrew its support but having failed to form the government again supported a United Front government with I.K. Gujral as prime minister. The withdrawal of support by the Congress paved the way for general elections to the 12th Lok Sabha in February 1998 which led to the formation of BJP-led government with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as prime minister. The BJP got only 182 seats but managed to secure the support of secular parties like Telegu Desam Party (TDP), AIADMK and Trinamool Congress (TC), but a little later, unfortunately, Jayalalitha withdrew her AIADMK support from alliance leading to the government losing the vote of confidence in April 1999. The BJP government continued as a caretaker, and fresh elections to the 13th Lok Sabha was held in September and October 1999. Earlier again before the 1998 Parliamentary polls a two-party plus multi-party system emerged. The BJP and the Congress (I) retained their position as the largest and the second largest parties, but due to AIADMK's decision to withdraw support, it lost the majority in the Lok Sabha and had to quit. The BJP-led alliance under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was able to secure a clear majority in the 13th Lok Sabha which was the third mid-term poll within four years.

By the time the general elections in the year 1999 held many political analysts had conceded that regional parties have become more important than the national parties in these elections because both the formation and survival depended on the support of the local parties. Such type of political developments allowed chaos to prevail at the center (Alappatukunnel, 2001) and political observers considered a coalition, not a luxury but a necessity for India. It also proved the political opportunism, irresponsible behavior and greed for power of the various opposition parties on the one hand and the failure of the ruling alliance to effectively manage the floor as well as govern the nation on the other. However, this time the BJP restored to socio-political engineering a coalition with 23 smaller/regional political parties of a diversified character. It was a pre-electoral alliance led by BJP which crossed the magic number to form the government. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) captured 299 seats sharing 40.48 percent of the popular votes. The NDA government proved to be more stable and completed its term. A coalition of parties, factions, and groups had formed the government, and every constituent unit was bent upon drawing maximum political mileage by threatening to withdraw support, but there was a national agenda, no doubt, which was followed more in the breach than in the observance. In the circumstances, there was no cohesiveness, not the faintest shadow of it, and each one was pulling in the designed to keep it in power and the coalition government on tenterhooks. Although the coalition government remained in doldrums, the Vajpayee government took some momentous decisions notably about the second Pokharan tests to make India a nuclear power station.

## **FINDINGS**

The continuing coalition phase of Indian politics has been considered by many analysts including Paul Wallace as the period of 'catch-all' coalition. As a result of these elections, the party system in India has entered an era whose important features are i. the two political parties, the BJP and the Congress (I) competed for the leadership of the alliances; ii. The third front lost relevance; iii. Regional parties assumed great importance; iv. Parties represent small segments of the electorate became a feature of the party system, and v. leadership became more important than the institutions. In the light of these developments in Indian party system the BJP-led coalition government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee proved to be a stable national-level coalition and almost completed its five

year term only because Vajpayee himself was a skillful manager for conflict resolution among the partners and practiced what is known as 'coalition Dharma (Economic and Political Weekly, 1998). In line, the other partners in the coalition were keen to retain power and were able to adjust even with those decisions which appeared to be ideologically opposed to the instance of their parties. In other words, power had become more critical for them than the ideologies of their parties. However, a sense of uncertainty prevails, and an impression was being extensively created that the government is not only inept, unskilful and largely dysfunctional but being so disparate and widely distanced from each other ideologically and politically that they cannot function as a team and give the country a semblance of good government.

Along with the frequent practice of coalition government in the recent decade, there is and should be a strong tradition of Common Minimum Programme (CMP) which not only outlines the minimum objectives of a coalition but also reflects the political give and take in such an arrangement. It is for the parties that are part of the agreement to form the government and not for the entire political system. In India the history of coalition politics can be traced back to the year 1967 but much later George Fernandes, former Defence Minister in the NDA government, in an interview to the Rediff on January 13, 1998, said, 'In 1967, it was after the election that we went in for a common minimum programme. It was known as the Samyuktha Vidhayak Dal programme. In each State, the parties concerned sat together and formulated a programme and formed a government. So it is my conviction that, when a party goes to the people, it should go with its programme because each party has an entity. The election is a time when the people are exposed to the various aspects of the policies, programmes, and leaders of political parties. So a common minimum programme should emerge only when we reach a point when a coalition government is inevitable' ([Devi and Lakshmi, 2007](#)).

The last time a single party got an absolute majority in Parliament was in 1984. The governments formed in 1989 and 1991 were minority ones. From 1996 to 1999 four different prime ministers have led six different governments, and all these have been coalition arrangements. All political parties prepare a manifesto before the elections to seek popular support for their respective agenda. In the case of the 11th, 12th, 13th, and even 14th held in 2004, the governments had to design a CMP, as the coalition partners were not able to share a common manifesto before going to the polls. Although the Vajpayee government known as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition did not have a CMP, the alliance which consisted of some 23 parties, had a joint election manifesto known as the Agenda for Development, Good Governance, and Peace. The fractured mandates received in coalition carry with them an element of 'checks and balances' required for the sound functioning of any democracy. For this reason, coalition governments often have a common minimum programme of policies to be implemented while in office.

#### Major experiments in Coalition Politics (1996-2004)\*

1996:

Party	Seat Won	Seat won by Alliance	Vote share percentage
BJP+	161	NA	20.29 %
INC	140	NA	28.80 %
UNITED FRONT (UF)	46	NA	8.08 %

1998:

Party	Seat Won	Seat won by Alliance	Vote share percentage
BJP + 13 Parties	182	254	25.59 %
INC +	141	144	26.14 %
UNITED FRONT (UF)	06	64	3.24 %



1999:

Party	Seat Won	Seat won by Alliance	Vote share percentage
<b>BJP + 24 Parties</b>	182	299	23.75 %
<b>INC</b>	114	134	28.30 %
<b>Others</b>	33	104	5.40 %

2004:

Party	Seat Won	Seat won by Alliance	Vote share percentage
<b>BJP+</b>	138	186	22.16 %
<b>INC</b>	145	218	26.70 %
<b>Others</b>	95	NA	4.3 %

\*Source: *Election Commission of India*

The general elections of May 2004 were more or less the same as that of 1996, 1998 and 1999 elections which saw coalition politics and large scale defection in action. It also retained the party system that had emerged in earlier elections-the 'catch all ([Mishra, 2004](#))' coalition system or two-party dominated multi-party system. Another distinctive feature of party system which has emerged as a result of the 2004 Parliamentary election was the strategic importance of the Leftist Front which had improved its earlier position. However, the general election of 2004 saw a new set of power equations which had no clear precedent in our political history. The NDA which had brought the poll date forward fell far short of the required number, and for the first time since 1996, the BJP slipped to the second slot in the House of the People. The Congress which secured just 145 seats in comparison to BJP's 138, was able to form the government followed by strong bloc Left, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Lok Jana Shaki Party (LJSP) and few other regional parties (Pandey, 1992). The election witnessed the battle between two dominant coalitions of the political parties viz: bjp-led NDA and Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The Congress-led UPA was a pre-election alliance of 19 political parties which became victorious. This alliance secured victory in 220 seats and with the outside support of 63 members of left parties, formed the government with Dr. Manmohan. Singh as prime minister of India.

Moreover, the UPA experiment in coalition politics carried certain new features; i. Sonia Gandhi is the chairperson of United Progressive Alliance and has more power than Manmohan Singh; ii. The Left Front has considerable influence but no responsibilities as it has not joined the UPA government; and iii. The UPA has a secular image. Although in later development, the left parties with its 63 members withdrew the support to the UPA government on 23rd July 2008. This was when serious differences arose on the nuclear agreement with the United States of America, yet Dr. Manmohan Singh, playing like a seasoned politician, saved the government with the support of Samajwadi Party (SP) led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and other parties (The Times of India, 2008). It again proved that coalition government could survive to its full term in India.

The general elections for the 15th Lok Sabha were held in May 2009 in which the UPA secured 262, NDA 159, left 24 and others 98 seats. Once again the UPA-led coalition government was formed with Dr. Manmohan Singh as the Prime Minister of India on 22 May 2009. The results of the election were an indication of the fact that Indians are politically matured. However, it exhibited several new features of our party system. First, it universally accepted the inevitability of coalition politics along with ongoing policies of the government including the administration of economic liberalization adopted in 1991. Second, it also showed that the emotive factors are losing grounds in Indian politics as elections were fought on ordinary policy course similar to the other mature political systems. It highlighted the importance of the State system in society and paved the way for further state-centric politics among all related stakeholders. Thus, as long as the States remain the principal arena of politics, State-specific parties will be relevant. Till 15th general election the NDA

and UPA experience in coalition governance with two major national parties BJP and Congress leading it alternatively has gradually helped in building up a coalition culture ([Kumar and Lone, 2013](#)). However, these coalitions have still a long way to go in as far as India is concerned.

Electoral politics in India before independence and after independence witnessed significant changes in forming a government, its running and completing of its tenure ([Veena, 2016](#)). Under it, alliances either pre-or-post are the features of today's politics. In the general election of 16th Lok Sabha held in April - May 2014 the BJP won 282 seats, a majority of the 543 elected, in the Lok Sabha; it formed a surplus majority NDA government with its pre-electoral coalition partners, the principal ones being the Shiv Sena, LJP, TDP and SAD taking its majority in the Lok Sabha to 334. However, despite this one-sided favorable position of BJP in 2014 Lok Sabha election followed by assembly elections in several states, the party system of India remains a multi-party system, and it is not like the party system that prevailed in the era of Congress hegemony from 1952 to 1984 ([Farooque and Sridharan, 2014](#).) Thus, in India's case, it is premature to conclude that the age of coalition politics is over or that a new one-party hegemonic system dominated by BJP is now in place. Coalition politics, in government at the Centre and in many states and for party strategies in coming state assembly elections and the next general election, will remain central to Indian Politics.

## CONCLUSIONS

The last decades and contemporary politico-electoral developments reveal that the way to power in a pluralist society like India lies in the creation of political, regional and social alliances. The vastness and diversity of the country and the enormity and variegated nature of the problems confronting the state will make it unlikely for the emergence of two well-organized parties even in the foreseeable future. The Congress and the BJP are the two political parties which have advanced two contradictory but monolithic definitions of the Indian nationhood. They contend that India has existed as a nation since time immemorial. For Congress, it is a nation on the model of countries in Western Europe, where, as a pattern, nationality and state are coterminous. The Congress conception is the secular version which emerged after the French Revolution, except for the aspect of immemorial existence. For the BJP India is quintessentially Hindu. For them, a nation is first and foremost the culture of its first continuation; in the case of India, it is the Hindu religion. In their notion, the secular is both alien and fake. However, the unity of India is not dependent on anyone monolithic conception derived from the secular or the Hindutva models of the nation. Both these in different ways have been rejected by an overwhelming majority of Indians in varied regions of the country. Developments, following the 1996 Parliamentary elections, have drastically altered the nature of relations between the Indian nation and the various linguistic - cultural communities, many of which form the constituent states of India.

In the circumstances, it would not be wrong to say that it is natural for India's plural society to have a multi-party system and coalition government. The term 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word 'coalition' meaning to grow together. In the political system, it implies that some political parties or groups will come together and form an alliance or temporary union to exercise control over political power. In the Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences Professor A. Ogg defines coalition as a 'co-operative arrangement under which distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or Ministry (Kothari, 1970). The formation of a coalition government takes place as a sequel to the inability of a single party to command a majority in the legislature. A combination of some political groups or parties is essential to control the majority. These political parties or groups join together to form a government. They do not lose their separate identity. They agree to a common minimum political, economic and social programme and when differences arise, any group or party is free to withdraw from the coalition. The first UPA

government of Dr. Manmohan Singh, after protracted negotiations released Common Minimum Programme (CMP) which spelled out the broad agenda agreed upon between the coalition partners.

In India, the coalition system of government is the outcome of the failure of the Parliamentary system to satisfy the norms of getting an absolute majority of seats in the Lower House to form the government. It is an alliance between two or more hitherto separate or even hostile groups or parties built to carry on the government and share the important affairs of the State. A coalition government is created when more than one political party or group come together by common understanding or agenda (Kumar, 2009). The sizeable social plurality in India will reflect itself in its polity. It is only natural that under these conditions various parties may garner the confidence of sections of this vast social diversity and thus no single party may acquire the requisite majority to form its government. However, such fractured mandates carry with them an essential element of 'checks and balances' required for the sound functioning of any democracy. For this reason, coalition governments of today should have a common minimum programme of policies to be implemented while in office.

Coalition governments all over Western Europe have worked very successfully because of broad-based consensus and the underlying willingness to function together for good governance. However, in India's case, the scenario is drastically different, and there is no early prospect of strong and effective unity at the national level. The BJP has little or nothing in common with the other political parties-Right, Left or Centre. For good or ill the party is looked upon a fundamentalist organization wedded to Hindu revivalist policy or Hindutva. In it, the question of who is an Indian is determined by the person's religious denomination. The worth of human beings should be defined in terms of features, abstract and general, such as dignity, respect, and concern. The use of specific criteria like religion, culture or prefixed history can result in inequality and cause serious trouble. For the BJP being a Hindu makes a person more of a human being. Humanness is determined by religious denomination. Even the socio-economic programmes of the BJP are entirely different from the plans of other parties. The communists have been following an improvised socio-economic plan designed to suit the circumstances more than to conform to Marxism. Other political parties including the Congress, have no distinct socio-economic programme. As a result, 'the process of polarisation will remain a far-off thing so long as factionalism. Rivalry is chronic in the major political parties; bases of political action lie in such irrational factors like caste, community, region, language, creed, personality, and charisma; the fight for power is not imbued with some altruistic motive and does not reflect the social and economic urges of the masses (Hazary, 1980). The realignment of political parties remains an uncertain factor in Indian politics.

At present, the sole objective of political parties is to stay afloat and capture or share power with other political parties wherever and whenever possible. They are not averse to entering into an alliance or electoral understanding or even shake hands with the devil himself if that gesture can help them capture power. There are casteist outfits, ethnic organizations, regional parties, each operating within the given parameters and without any qualms of conscience ready to hitch their wagon to the rising star. The Congress, the Communists, and Socialists have nothing to do for the time being, with the BJP. Others were not so firmly opposed to the BJP would get along with it merrily. In the situation, horse-trading has become part of the political system. A Prime Minister or Chief Minister heading a coalition government dare not drop a corrupt minister so long as he commands the support of a coalition partner unless he is prepared to risk the fall of his government. Integrity and ability are no longer the main criteria for the appointment of a minister. However, on the other, the contemporary scenario of politics has also contributed to a definite change in the level of political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication. In every polity, there is a period of political stagnation, uncertainty, and instability. India is a developing democracy where democratic traditions are evolving. Likewise, it will take time for the political parties to mature and come to the level of general expectations.

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