

# COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA

## Abstract

The study reveals the concept of coalition government and its inevitability in the contemporary world of parliamentary democracy. It also reveals the reasons and circumstances in which coalition governments in India have become regular feature both at federal level as well as in the states. Furthermore, the study explores the nature, character and dominance of Indian National Congress (INC) and its replacement by non-Congress coalitions both at centre and in the states. This study delineates a brief survey of coalition governments in India and highlights the coalition culture or norm which has become an inevitable feature of contemporary Indian Politics. It highlights brief working of minority coalitions at federal level which no doubt proved short-lived and instable, however opened a new coalition chapter in Indian political history. However, Indian politics experienced durable, mature and stable coalitions in the form of National Democratic Alliance-I and United Progressive Alliance-I at Union Level. Both these coalition governments though experienced tough political weather but successfully steered the coalition wagon to a predetermined destination. The study concludes that those coalition governments survive without any hiccups which followed a path of compromise, consensus and cooperation in place of strict ideological adherence of coalition partners.

**Keywords:** Coalition, Indian National Congress, India, General Election, Political Parties

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of parliamentary democracy, coalition government has become a norm as the modern trend is that no single party gets a majority. Then there is a rising trend of regional parties dominating the scene. In multiparty system, regional parties usually steal the limelight and have become dominant forces. Besides this political parties have also learnt how to accommodate in case of a hung parliament. For instance, in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's government, several leaders across religious sects and regions of the country were brought together and formed coalition government in Iraq. If a coalition collapses, unless the government itself quits, a confidence vote is held or a motion of no confidence is taken to test whether the government can survive or not. Therefore, a coalition government is an alliance where several political parties must cooperate in order to run a country, region, state or province.

Several countries of the world experimented coalition governments like Germany, Australia, Switzerland, Israel, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Netherland, Japan, Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, India etc. After independence, India experienced its first coalition government on 25th October 1946 when Indian National Congress (INC) – Muslim League formed an interim government in New Delhi under the shadow of the last British Governor General of India, Lord Mountbatten, with the imperial partition of India hovering overhead. This coalition government worked for a brief period of nine months. After independence, the Indian National Congress was the only party which commanded popularity, respect, and mass support of the people in India. From 1947 to 1967, the Congress party remained a dominant player in Indian politics, and had monolithic character both at the centre as well as in the states. After fourth general elections, India witnessed a series of coalition governments in more than half of the Indian states. However, INC remained a dominant actor at the centre till 1977 elections when it was ousted from power by non – Congress coalition known as Janata government.

The Congress dominance and its decline in the history of Indian politics, paved way for the evolution of coalition politics in India.

**1. Politics of congress dominance (1947-1967):** After India got independence from the clutches of British imperialism, the Indian National Congress remained a dominant party for the first two decades of the Indian politics. In the same period, the dominance of Congress was mostly due to the legacy it inherited from the nationalist movement in which it was the dominant force. Moreover, the political sustainability of the Congress and its pluralistic organizational structure got legitimacy due to its nationalist legacy. The dominance of Congress was also reflected from its strong leadership, and had been representative of social interests and groups of the society. There were several reasons which supported electoral victory of Congress (INC) and its dominance. Firstly, INC not only had command and control over resources but it had also judiciously distributes these resources among existing and potential clients in exchange for their political support. Secondly, in first three general elections, India's political processes were neither found competitive nor mature and even political parties were not found organized and assertive. Thirdly, the dominance of the Congress party was helped by its wide social base that connected the electorate at different levels (Table 2.0).

**Table 1.0: Lok sabha seats won by congress in 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1971, and 1977 general elections in India.**

Year of Election	Total Number of Seats	Seats Won	Total Voter Turnout in %	Percentage of Vote Share
1952	489	364	45.7	44.99
1957	494	371	55.42	47.78
1962	494	361	55.42	44.72
1967	520	283	61.04	40.78
1971	518	352	55.27	43.68
1977	542	153	60.49	34.52

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India

- 2. Decline of the congress system (1967 – 1977):** In the subsequent decades, the coalitional nature of the support and internal organizational arrangement of the Congress no longer remained stable. Challenges which hampered the apparent stability of the Congress came from diversity of sources. While oppositional movement, especially the socialist movement in the Hindi belt played a very important role in awakening the social and political consciousness among the people, particularly in catalysing the rise of leadership from the lower sections; the exhaustion of the nationalist legacy led to the ideological diffusion of the Congress and the blurring of the image carefully nurtured in the early decades after independence. After the fourth general elections, India witnessed a visible change in its politics particularly at the state level. Since then the Congress began to gradually lose its electoral base in the states to be replaced by the non – Congress parties either purely regional in character or nominally national. The decline of the Congress became visible when it not only failed to address popular aspirations of the people in India, but also lacked its internal democratic functioning. This in fact provoked a situation which demanded alternative modes of political expression.

Several political developments were responsible for the decline of Congress dominance in Indian politics. The first dramatic change took place in 1969 when Congress got split into two; one was led by Moraji Desai (leader of the Congress) and other led by Indira Gandhi. Nonetheless, the 1971 Midterm Parliamentary elections witnessed formal split of Congress i.e., Congress (Organization, O) led by Moraji Desai, and Congress (Requisition, R) led by Indra Gandhi. Though opposition parties united in giving setback to Congress (R) in the 1971 elections, however, it successfully secured 2/3rd majority in the elections, and also gained popularity in those state assembly elections where Congress resigned. Moreover, the internal emergency in India, imposed by Indra Gandhi on 25th June 1975, provided an opportunity for the opposition parties which started grand agitation under the leadership of Jay Prakash Narayan in many parts of the country, forcing the union government to dissolve duly elected government in the states. Even during the emergency, all the activities of the opposition parties were suppressed and their leaders were arrested and put behind the bars. Such authoritarian nature of Congress weakened its base both at the centre as well as in the states. Thus, aftermath of 1967, it becomes clear that the formations of non Congress governments shown fluidity in support of the Congress and shifted their loyalty to other political parties. Further, the same period saw for the first time participation of large sections of the people who were not part of the electoral process. Such massive increase in the electoral participation could be gauged from the rise in the voter

turnout. The intense competition emerging from the popular participation and the populist radicalism of Indira Gandhi led to the drawing in of hitherto immobilized sections.

- 3. Non – congress coalition experiments:** The fourth general elections proved to be a landmark experiment in Indian politics as it paved way for a chain of coalition governments at state level in the form of Samyukta Vidayak Dal (SVD) like Bihar, U.P., West Bengal, Kerala, Punjab etc. Except West Bengal and Kerala, all these coalition governments had ideological heterogeneity. These coalition governments proved short-lived and collapsed one after another in due course of time, as a result of their inner contradictions in the realm of ideology and political orientations of the constituents. Furthermore, these coalition governments could not survive as they were neither ideologically unified nor programmatically identical. The only factor that cemented the bond among those heterogeneous constituents was their anti – Congress sentiments (Table 2.1).

**Table 1.1: Performance of Non – Congress Parties in 1967 Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar, Haryana, Etc.**

State	Total Number of Seats	Seats Won by Non-Congress Parties	Seats Won by Congress (INC)
Uttar Pradesh	425	266	199
West Bengal	280	153	127
Kerala	133	124	9
Bihar	318	190	128
Haryana	81	33	48
Madhya Pradesh	320	153	167

Source: Reports of Election Commission of India

- 4. Experiment of coalition politics at the centre:** After 1977 general elections, India experienced a series of coalition governments at federal level.

- First coalition government at the union level (March 24, 1977 – March 28, 1979):** After independence, India witnessed first coalition experiment at the union level in 1977 in the form of Janata party led government. Janata party was not a single entity but was a conglomeration of several like-minded parties (Congress (O), the Jan Sangh, the Socialist Party and the Bharatiya Lok Dal) who decided to fight national election in 1977 under the banner of Janata Party. In this election, Congress was pulled down from power as it was blamed to be authoritarian during emergency (1977 – 77). The leaders of Janata party met in Delhi on 20th January 1977, to chalk out their strategy for the elections. Moraji Desai who became leader of the party announced the decision to go to the polls under the banner of Janata party. The Swatantra Party became its constituent on 24th January; other constituents were Congress for Democracy (CFD) led by Jagjivan Ram, H. N. Bahuguna, Nandini Satpathy, etc. The CFD and the Janata mobilized all anti-emergency forces in the country and ensured the election of a non-Congress government for the first time at the centre.

1977 general elections were held in March, and the non-Congress opposition could sweep the polls. The elections gave surprise to the country by defeating the Congress as well as its tall leader Mrs. Gandhi. The Janata party secured 271 and the CFD 28 seats respectively. Among the Janata party constituents, the breakdown

followed: Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) – 93, Bharatiya Lok Dal – 71; Congress (O) – 51; Socialists – 28; Chandrasekhar Group – 6 and others – 25. The formal constitution of the Janata by merging the constituents took place only on 1st May, 1977, i.e. after the formation of the government. However the constituent groups were fighting the elections with a common symbol- the symbol of Haldhar – previously allotted to the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). So the first coalition was formed under the Prime Ministership of Moraji Desai. The Janata-led government remained in power for about two years i.e. 1977 – 1979. .

The seeds of factionalism within the Janata party cropped up since the formation of government at the centre. It was observed first when the party was faced with the task of electing its leader who was to take over the role of the Prime Minister. Jagjivan Ram of CFD, Charan Singh of BLD and Moraji Desai of Congress (O) were serious contenders of the post. When Moraji Desai was elected leader and was sworn in as Prime Minister on 24th March, 1977, the other two felt betrayed. And factionalism continued even after the formation of the government. The dissenting voice within the government aggravated further, when the Janata government dissolved nine Congress-led State governments and hold fresh elections. The distribution of tickets for State Assembly seats added fuel to the fire, as seven states – Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (MP) Orissa, Haryana, and Himachal - were won by the Janata party in the elections of June 1977, and the Chief Ministerships were shared by the two constituents- the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and the BLD. The other constituents were disappointed.

Soon after formation, Janata led government witnessed several conflicts and confrontations among its constituents. The contention was found not only between Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram but other constituents were also involved. With the result, the Charan Singh and his followers left the Janata party and established a new party Janata Secular (S). Some other leaders and constituents deserted the Janata Party. It was in these circumstances, that a vote of no confidence was moved in the Lok Sabha against the government. With the result Moraji Desai tendered his resignation to the President as he lost his majority in the Lok Sabha.

- **Second coalition government at the union level (July 28, 1979 – Jan. 14, 1980):** India experienced another coalition government which was formed at the centre in October 1979 with Charan Singh as the Prime Minister. The Charan Singh government which succeeded Moraji government for a while was a pure coalition government. It was a conglomeration of several political parties like Janata (Secular, (S)) and Congress (Urs, (U)), while the Congress (Indira (I)) extended external support to this coalition government. This coalition government proved short-lived and fell as soon as Congress (I) withdrew its support.
- **Third coalition government at the union level (December 2, 1989 – November 10, 1990):** Next coalition government was formed at the centre in 1988 under the banner of National Front. The Front was led by V.P. Singh, then Defence Minister in Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet who had resigned in protest. The Seven party – National Front formally launched on 17th September, 1988 consisted of a conglomeration of ideologically desperate, regionally based political parties and groups committed to

ousting the Congress from power. The seven parties included: the Jan Morcha, the Janata Party, the Lok Dal, the Congress (S), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and the Assam Gana Parishad. The new found unity was the result of the continuous efforts on the part of V.P. Singh and of N.T. Rama Rao, the Telugu Desam leader and Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. V. P. Singh, after his resignation from the Rajiv Gandhi cabinet and subsequent suspension from the Congress (I), carried out a campaign against corruption in high levels and formed the Jan Morcha as a forum to voice his views. Opposition parties and groups welcomed the Jan Morcha and voluntarily shared platforms with V. P. Singh and organise joint campaigns to root out corruption and tackle other pressing problems facing the people. This sense of cooperation among the opposition parties led to the formation of a common national platform for the Jan Morcha, the Janata Party, the Congress (S) and the Lok Dal (Ajit) led by Ajit Singh.

Several like- minded parties such as Jan Morcha, Lok Dal, Janata Party made efforts that led to formation of the Janata Dal. Subsequently, N. T. Rama Rao made similar efforts to forge unity in the opposition ranks, which also led to the formation of the National Front on 17th September, 1988. The National Front was conglomeration of five political parties - the Janata Dal, the Congress (S), the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the DMK, and the TDP. However, the N. T. Rama Rao was made chairman of the Front.

The National Front leaders successfully convinced both BJP and Left parties to join the Front; despite they had ideological differences with each other. Consequently 9th general elections were held on November, 1989. Although Congress emerged as the largest party in the elections, however did not claim for forming a government at the centre. Subsequently, President invited National Front to form government under the leadership of V. P. Singh. The President also gave thirty days to V. P. Singh to prove his majority in the Lok Sabha, which he did successfully with the help of the BJP and the Communists.

Though the National Front was considered to be a wider forum, but proved short-lived because of major upheavals. Firstly, the Front did not adopt Common Minimum Programme which could have yielded substantial results in uniting ideologically diverse parties. The National Front could have survived for a long time had it adopted coordination mechanisms for ironing out differences among coalition partners. Secondly, no doubt coalition government took historic decision in implementing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report under which 52% of the government jobs had to be reserved for the SCs and OBCs. But such decision was taken without consulting coalition partners. Even such decision was considered by BJP an inimical their electoral. Other like incidents forced BJP to withdraw its support from the Front, and with the result, the National Front government fell on November 7, 1990.

- **Fourth Coalition Government at the Union Level (November 11, 1990 – July 21, 1991):** After V. P. Singh government collapsed, Chandrasekhar led Janata Dal along with 55 members formed Janata Dal (Samajwadi, S). The Janata Dal(S), Congress (I), AIADMK, BSP, Muslim League, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), Kerala Congress (Mani), Shiromani Akali Dal and a few independent members staked

his claim to form the government. Subsequently, another coalition government was formed at the centre on November 10, 1990 with the Chandrasekhar as the Prime Minister. This coalition government also proved short-lived and unstable as it was solely dependent on the outside support of the Congress. Soon after formation, Chandrasekhar led government came under mounted pressure from its alliance partners Congress and AIADMK. Both of these parties demanded dismissal of the DMK government on the plea of breakdown of law and order in Tamil Nadu. Despite of governor of Tamil Nadu received clear cut recommendations from Union government over dismissal of the DMK. However, governor turned down such recommendations and finally resigned. Other differences between the government and the Congress (I) were on various issues relating to Punjab, Kashmir, rising prices and the question of permitting US planes to refuel in India, etc. All such circumstances forced Chandrasekhar to submit his resignation on March 6, 1991 and advise the president to dissolve the Lok Sabha. Consequently, President dissolved 9th Lok Sabha on 13th March 1991 and ordered fresh elections. Accordingly, the next elections were held in May – June, 1991, where the Congress (I) emerged as the single largest party with 224 seats, but without majority. However, P. V. Narasimaha Rao emerged as the leader of the largest party and formed the government at the centre, and successfully completed its five year term.

- **Fifth coalition government at the union level (June 1, 1996 – April 20, 1997):** 1996 Lok Sabha Elections witnessed a severely fractured verdict with no one party or alliance was able to muster an absolute majority. In this election, the BJP emerged as the single largest party with 160 seats as against 139 seats won by the Congress (I). Atal Behari Vajpayee was unanimously elected leader of the BJP. He was invited by the President to form the government at the centre on 15th May, 1996, and was directed to seek vote of confidence in the House by 31 May, 1996. But BJP could not prove its majority in the House, with the result, BJP fell after 13 days. This short – lived government was followed by the United Front government headed by the H. D. Deve Gowda, and supported by the Congress from outside. The United Front was post election formation and consisted of 13 parties, among which nine parties were from the National Front (JD, TDP, DMK, Trinamol Congress (TMC), AGP, Samajwadi Party (SP), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress (MPVC), Congress (T) and four Left Front parties (Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M), Communist Party of India (CPI), Forward Bloc, Revolutionary Socialist.

United Front successfully won the vote of confidence on 12th June, 1996 with the support of the Congress (I). Hence a genuine coalition government consisting of 13 parties committed to a common action programme and propped up by a larger party without participation, came to be established for the first time at the centre.

To run smooth and efficient government, United Front forged a common platform, called the Common Approach and Minimum Programme (CAMP). CAMP reflected a fine balance between the social democratic and working class preferences of the Left – Wing parties, the agrarianism with an Other Backward Classes (OBC) bias of the Janata Dal, and the regionalism with augmented federalism articulated by the regional parties in the United Front (Singh, 2001, p. 346). The United Front government could not complete one year, and collapsed like a house of cards. The government

finally lost the vote of confidence on April 11, 1997, as the Congress withdrew its support.

- **Sixth coalition government at the union level (April 21, 1997 – March 19, 1998):** On 19th April, 1997, I. K. Gujral was elected as leader of the United Front. He was sworn in as Prime Minister on 21 April, 1997, and he also won the confidence vote in the Lok Sabha on 22nd April, 1997. I. K. Gujral led United Front came under political strain within six months when the Jain Commission Report was submitted. The report pointed out that the Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) could not have killed Rajiv Gandhi without support and assistance from the DMK government and a section of DMK leaders of Tamil Nadu. This report infuriated Congress (I) and asked the United Front Government to drop the DMK Ministers. However, I. K. Gujral rejected the demand of the Congress to dismiss the DMK Ministers and the whole United Front stood united on this issue. In order to exert pressure on government, the Congress decided to withdraw support from the Gujral Ministry on 28th November, 1997, to withdraw support from the Gujral Ministry with immediate effect. The decision was communicated to the President of India and on 28th November, 1997, the Gujral Ministry resigned. Consequently President of India finally took the decision to dissolve the Lok Sabha and hold fresh elections. However, Gujral was asked to continue until alternative arrangements were made.
- **Seventh coalition government at the union level (March 19, 1998 – October 10, 1999):** In the 1998 general elections, BJP made alliance with several regional parties almost sixteen in number like Shiv Sena, Akali Dal, Haryana Vikas Party etc., however, total strength of the BJP and its alliance reduced from sixteen to thirteen after the results of 1998 elections. BJP successfully made its alliance with regional parties only when it sidelined its core ideological issues like Article 370, Ram Mandir and Uniform Civil Code. (Table 2.2).

**Table 1.2: Result of Inter – Party Allies in 1998 General Elections in India**

Party- Alliance	Seats Won
BJP – led National Democratic Alliance (NDA-I)	254
United Front	64
Congress and Allies	144
Others	81
Total	543

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India.

Consequently, the President of India invited Vajpayee on 15th March, 1998 to form government and prove its majority on the floor of the House within ten days. The Vajpayee – led coalition was supported by AIADMK, BJD, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRC) etc. This minority coalition government did not last long, as the demands of All India

Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) were not met including the demand of Jayalalitha (leader of AIADMK) to sack former Defence Minister George Fernandez. Soon, the government lost confidence by one vote in the House, as the



AIADMK pulled its support from the government. Hence Vajpayee tendered his resignation to the President of India and came to an end what was a shaky coalition.

- **Eighth coalition government at the union level (October 11, 1999 – May 21, 2004):** In contrast to the past experiences of national coalition governments in New Delhi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)- led National Democratic Alliance (NDA-I) that formed the national government at centre in 1999 is a remarkable experiment with no parallel in India's political history. Not only was the NDA-I government stable, it also ushered in an era of coalition in probably the best possible way of governance in a multi-dimensional society like India.

BJP – led NDA-I government was formed after the 13th Lok Sabha elections which took place in 1999. The electoral verdict of 13th Lok Sabha election was decisively in favour of the BJP led NDA, as it successfully won 299 seats with 38.83 shares of percentage votes. On ground, NDA-I was formed on 15th May 1999. NDA-I was an alliance of 24 regional parties coalesced together in 1999 general election (Table 2.3).

**Table 1.3: 1999 Lok Sabha Election Results of Inter – Party Alliance**

<b>NDA-I</b>	<b>Seats Contested</b>	<b>Seats Won</b>	<b>Share of % Votes</b>	<b>Congress and Allies</b>	<b>Seats contested</b>	<b>Seats Won</b>	<b>Share of % Votes</b>	<b>Left Front</b>	<b>Seats Contested</b>	<b>Seats Won</b>	<b>Share of % Vote</b>
BJP	339	182	23.75	INC	453	114	28.30	CPI	54	4	1.48
JD(U)	60	21	3.10	RJD	60	7	2.79	CPI(M)	72	33	5.40
BJD	12	10	1.20	AIADMK	29	10	1.93	Forward Bloc	15	2	0.35
Akali Dal	9	2	0.69	Kerala Congress	1	1	0.10	RSP	5	3	0.41
JKNC	6	4	0.12	KCM	1	1	0.10				
TDP	34	29	3.65	M.L. Kerala	12	2	0.23				
INLD	5	5	0.55								
DMK	19	12	1.73								
MDMK	5	4	0.44								
PMK	8	5	0.65								
Shiv Sena	63	15	1.56								
Lok Shakti		0	0.01								
RLD	15	2	0.37								
Trinamol Congress	29	8	2.57								

Source: Compiled from the reports of election commission of India.

The NDA's national agenda had to be mellowed down by sidelining core issues like the Ram Temple, the Uniform Civil Code and Article 370 in order to soften the non-saffron parties. Still we found contradictions within the NDA-I at the national level. The NDA-I remained a loose and amorphous organization without any clear control mechanism or norms of admission to membership.

On 13th October, 1999, a 70 member coalition government led by Shri Vajpayee was sworn in New Delhi. Vajpayee faced lot of difficulties while constituting his Council of Ministers. Vajpayee – led coalition government was a constituent of 24 parties in National Democratic Alliance. In this coalition government, the biggest coalition partner was N. Chander Babu Naidu's TDP with 29 Members of Parliament. Since most of the constituents in the NDA-I were state based, any problem in their voices of influence could cast its shadow at times disproportionately dark over the centre. Several factors were responsible for the instability of the NDA-I-led coalition government at the union level:

NDA-I government worked smoothly in its first year of governance, although not without occasional turmoils. Differences of opinion had cropped up between the coalition partners on national issues like increase in the price of petroleum products, revival of Ayodhya issue by the Sangh Parivar and attack on Christian Missionaries by the militant communal elements. The situation further aggravated when Vajpayee made a statement that the demand for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya was an expression of national sentiments was vehemently criticised by the coalition partners like DMK, TDP, Trinamul Congress as well as by the opposition parties.

The position of Vajpayee was estimated and observed by some of the constituents of NDA-I, as favourable to the hidden agenda of the BJP and of the Sangh Parivar, and was appealing to the Hindu voters of the UP in the context of the forthcoming elections of April 2001. The regional parties in the coalition, particularly the Trinamul Congress, DMK and TDP had always been constrained by their state based interests and their political vision shortened by the State Assembly elections. Mamata's historic role played in the wake of a hike in petrol and LPG prices and her threatened withdrawal from the cabinet on the basis of this issue were meant to humour the electorate of West Bengal. Her continued demand for the dismissal of the Marxist - led government of West Bengal, despite of the Centre's rejection of the proposition to apply Article 356 in West Bengal, was a part of the poll – oriented political tactics. Despite this kind of political gains played by the coalition partners to strengthen their bargaining positions within the Ministry and by the Sangh Parivar to tighten its hold inch by inch into the BJP power, there seems to have developed a consensus among them to pull on together.

Though NDA-I adopted Coordination Committee (CC) mechanism to govern smoothly and efficiently. The concept of a Co-ordination Council to ensure the smooth cooperation of coalition allies was accepted rather late at the centre.

Needless to say that no concrete efforts were made by the alliance partners of the NDA-I including the BJP to make the coordination committee an effective body. The BJP leaders often talked about the coalition dharma, but failed to practice what

they preached. Many allies of the NDA–I government often complained that they were not being consulted on major issues and that the CC meetings were held only to get decisions rubber-stamped. Trinamul Congress, one of the constituent parts of NDA-I initially neither joined the Ministry nor CC. Although they joined the CC later on but they spared no chance to criticize the government and finally withdrew membership of the body in protest against some of the policies of the government. Even Jayalalitha, a leader of AIADMK also withdrew membership before resigning from the cabinet. Thus the CC failed to meet its purpose as a forum for effective co –ordination of allies during the first BJP –led coalition government. It became an object of contempt for the coalition partners, some of who had not even liked to remain its members.

In contrast to earlier coalitions, the NDA-I experiment was successful in a variety of ways. It not only completed the tenure for which it was elected in 1999, the alliance it had forged was relatively stable and posed no threat to the continuity of the government in power. The role of the NDA-I leadership was significant, especially of its convener, George Fernandes, who steered the coalition despite occasional rough and tough political weather in the country to a pre-set goal. Finally, the NDA-I completed its full five-year term because of the well performance of its leader Vajpayee who managed his coalition government very efficiently.

- **Ninth coalition government at the union level (May 2004 – May 21, 2009):** The 14th Lok Sabha elections, which took place in April – May, 2004, have led to the formation of United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I) government at the centre on May 22, 2004. The UPA- I replaced NDA-I- I which successfully completed its full five-year term in office. In 2004 general elections, the Congress won 145 seats while the UPA- I won 225 seats; the BJP won 138 seats while the NDA-I won 189 seats (Table 2.4).

**Table 1.4: Performance of party allies in 2004 general elections of India**

Congress – UPA-I	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Share of vote %	NDA-I	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Share of vote %	Left Front	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Share of vote%
Congress	414	145	26.44	BJP	364	138	22.16	CPI	33	9	1.32
TRS	6	5	0.60	TDP	33	5	3.04	CPI(M)	69	43	5.66
IND Cong	6	1	0.16	JD (U)	33	8	1.94	JDS(Left)	1	1	0.09
RJD	28	24	2.39	IND (BJP)	1	1	0.18	KEC	1	1	0.09
LJNS	11	4	0.66	IFDP	1	1	0.07	IND(Left)	1	1	0.08
NCP	22	9	1.78	SHS	22	12	1.77	RSP	4	3	0.43
JMM	7	4	0.41	BJD	12	11	1.30	FBL	3	3	0.35
PDP	3	1	0.07	SAD	10	8	0.90				
MUL	2	1	0.19	AIADMK	33	0	2.19				
KCM	1	0	0.05	TRMC	31	2	2.06				
JDS	1	0	0.05	MNF	1	1	0.05				
RPI	2	0	0.04	SDF	1	1	0.04				
RPI (A)	1	1	0.09	NPF	1	1	0.18				
PRBP	1	0	0.06								
DMK	16	16	1.81								
MDMK	4	4	0.43								
PMK	6	6	0.56								
PDS	2	0	0.02								
AC	1	0	0.62								
Total	534	221	37.33		543	189	35.88		112	61	8.02

Source: Compiled from Election Commission of India, E. Sridharan, “ Electoral Coalition in 2004: Theory and Evidence Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 39, No. 51 (Dec. 18-24, 2004), p. 5419.

After the verdict of 2004 elections, Congress – led coalition was formed at the centre under the leadership of a stalwart economist Dr. Manmohan Singh in the name of United Progressive Alliance-I (UPA-I) supported by Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) with 9 Members of Parliament (MPs), Rashtriya Lok Dal (RJD) with 5 MPs, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) with 3 MPs, Indian Union Muslim League with 3 MPs, Kerala Congress (Mani) with 1 MP,. Outside support was given by Samajwadi Party with 22 MPs, BSP with 21 MPs, and RJD with 4 MPs and others including Left Parties.

The Congress – led UPA-I government at the centre followed and implemented secular agenda because Congress has been ideologically committed to secularism and had replaced the BJP-led government which was firmly committed to the ideology of Hindu Rashtravad. The only significance of the Lok Sabha elections of 2004 is that a party with an agenda of religion based politics had vacated the office for a party which has been practitioner of secular based politics. A government in power cannot be analysed and evaluated on the basis of just one agenda because multiple and diverse social groups look towards a government for the satisfaction of their specific demands. Even coalition government at the centre has to accommodate diverse demands of different groups because partners in a coalition government represent the interests and demands of different social constituencies. So UPA–I faced several difficulties in order to harmonise the conflicting interests of 14 groups which were represented in the government along with the demands of the Communist parties which provided outside support to the government at the centre. Since its inception, Congress – led UPA-I was alleged that it would not succeed in managing a coalition government at the centre because it did not have any experience of working with diverse coalition groups at the centre. However, UPA–I shattered such hopes of opponents who were extremely sceptical about the survival of a coalition government led by Congress, but Congress has belied the expectations of its critics and opponents, and the UPA-I government has continued to remain in power at the centre. The UPA-I government worked on the basis of a National Common Minimum Programme (CMP) which had been agreed by all the coalition partners including the communists, who were the outside supporters of the government.

The implementation of the NCMP by the UPA- I was not a smooth affair because despite of agreements on the CMP, different coalition partners have different priorities of their own and different groups will like to push their agenda through the government. Further, the government also evolved a mechanism of Coordination Committee (CC) for dealing with the issues raised by the communists who are its outside supporters. Despite UPA-I adopted several conventional mechanisms in order to run the coalition government smoothly and efficiently, still, it faced various challenges to complete its full term in office:

- The Left Parties had extended its support to the Congress led UPA-I government with a view to keep the communal BJP out of power, but still contradictions existed between them on economic policy stances, although they had tried to reconcile and reduce these policy differences through NCMP but the differences continued to persist.
- Another irritant between Left and UPA- I emerged on the issue of Indo – US relationship. The Left Front always had criticised the NDA-I government on the ground that it had made our country an inferior partner of USA in her imperialist

design, and it also had sacrificed the India's commitment to NAM and multilateralism. However when UPA-I entered various agreements with USA like Indo – US Nuclear deal, paved way for Left Front to raise its concern against the government.

The above analysis of coalition governments at the centre clearly reflects that the hung parliaments have become norm in India, because of fragmentation in political parties. Political parties have demonstrated lack of ability to create enduring coalitions. Indian democratic politics so far has been lacking in the talent and culture of coalition making and coalition maintaining. Nonetheless, NDA-I and UPA-I experience in coalition governance with two major national parties BJP and Congress leading it alternatively has gradually helped in building up a coalition culture. Thus coalitions have still a long road to go in so far as India is concerned (Table 2.5).

**Table 1.5: Growth and Durability of Coalition Alliances in India**

Year of Coalition	Alliance	No. Of Partners in Alliance	Period of Alliance
1977	Janata Party	5	March 24, 1977 – March 28, 1979
1979	Janata (S)	2	July 28, 1979 – January 14, 1980
1989	National Front	7	December 2, 1989–November 10, 1990
1990	Janata Dal (S)	8	November 11, 1990 – July 21, 1991
1996	United Front	13	June 1, 1996 – April 20, 1997
1999	NDA-I	24	October 11, 1999 – May 21, 2004
2004	UPA- I	19	May, 2004 – May 21, 2009

Source: Compiled from the reports of election commission of India

- Coalition politics in the Indian States, 1967 – 1969:** From 1952 to 1967 general elections, India experienced Congress dominance both at Union as well as at state levels. However, 1967 general election was considered to be landmark in the political history of India as it paved way for non-congress parties to forge an alliance in the form of Samyukta Vidayak Dal (SVD) against Congress dominance. The immediate outcome of the election was formation of non-Congress coalition governments in more than half of the Indian states. Furthermore, the electoral results jolted not only the dominance of Congress but also questioned the credibility of the party in the state politics. Several factors were responsible for decline of Congress in politics; (a) corruption charges were levied against some prominent leaders of Congress which had tarnished its public image. (b) Lack of intraparty democracy paved way for factionalism and conflicts within the Congress which later resulted in huge defections and fragmentations in the form of Janata Congress in West Bengal, M. P., Orissa; Jana Kranti Dal in Bihar; Jana Prakasha in Mysore; and the Janata Party in Rajasthan. These fragmented parts of Congress later united on the basis of regional interests and anti-Congress sentiments. All such splinter groups created conducive environment for coalition and competitive multi-party system. So the fourth general elections put the Congress system on trail and marked the end of one party dominant system in India.

Therefore, in the states of Kerala, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh Haryana, Punjab etc, experiments of coalition politics began with a variation, in as much as it was preceded by the politics of defection. The Congress party that formed governments in these states after the fourth general elections replaced very soon by the non- congress coalition governments following large scale defection in the Congress. The United Front government in each of the states was headed by a Congress defector. The politics of defection thus became the intrinsic part of the politics of United Front in these states. Though the coalition governments in these states proved short-lived and could not sustain long time, but ushered a new phase in India’s political history. It was not only considered to be a significant departure from the past, but it also created possibilities of a political alternative to the Congress (Table 2.6 ).

**Table 1.6: 1967 Legislative Assembly Election Results of West Bengal, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh.**

West Bengal		Uttar Pradesh		Kerla	
Parties	Seats Won	Parties	Seats Won	Parties	Seats Won
Indian National Congress	127	Bhartiya Jan Sang	98	Bharatiya Jana Sangh	0
<b>PULF</b>		Communist Party of India	13	Communist Party of India	19
Bangla Congress	34	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	1	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	52
Communist Party of India	16	Indian National Congress	199	Indian National Congress	9
Communist Party India (Marxist)	43	Praja Socialist Party	11	Praja Socialist Party	0
All India Forward Block	13	Revolutionary Party of India	10	Samyukta Socialist Party	19
Praja Socialist Party	7	Samyukta Socialist Party	44	Swatantra Party	0
<b>ULF</b>		Sawtantra Party	12	Kerala Congress	5
Samyukta Socialist Party	7	Independents	37	Indian Union Muslim League	14
Bharatiya Jan Sangh	1	Total	425	Independent	15
Swatantra Party	1				
Independents	31				

Source: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India. \* PULF: People’s United Left Front; ULF: United Left Front.

## II. CONCLUSION

Indian politics was dominated by the Indian National Congress both at the centre till 1977 as well as in the states till 1967. The 1967 elections provided a space for non Congress parties to form coalition government though proved short-lived in several states of India. The fourth general elections not only removed one party dominant system, but also provided a platform to diverse political parties to form governments. Although they were ideologically incompatible, but had a lone desire to push the Congress party out of power. This further pushed the Indian politics into the coalition culture or coalition Dharma which is now a day’s an inevitable feature of the Indian political system. Since 1989, India experienced multi-party coalition governments which can be regarded as a kind of accommodative politics with all



varieties of political parties ideologically poles apart ranging from regional to national coming together in broad coalitions. Although India witnessed short – lived rather minority coalition governments, but the successful completion of the tenure of NDA-I and UPA-I made the coalition system appear as the only alternative available to Indian democracy. It also further strengthened the federal structure of the Indian Political system.