**Coalition Politics in India**

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**1.0 Introduction**

The coalitions are product of politics in a parliamentary democracy.[[1]](#footnote-2) Democratic politics in multicultural societies is essentially an exercise in coalition. The term coalition as it is generally used in political science is a direct descendant of the exigencies of a multi-party system in a democratic set up. Coalition is a phenomenon of multi-party government where a number of minority parties join hands for the purpose of running the government, which is otherwise not possible in a democracy based on one party system. A coalition is formed when many splinter groups in a house condensed to come together on a common platform sinking their differences and thereby form a majority in the house.[[2]](#footnote-3)

In the contemporary world, coalition government has become norm in parliamentary democracy. Coalition government can be called as cabinet of a parliamentary government in which many political parties cooperate. The obvious reason (could be) for this arrangement is that no party on its own can achieve a majority in parliament. Coalition government can be created in a time of national difficulty or crisis, for example during war time, to give a government the high degree of perceived political legitimacy it desires whilst also playing a role in diminishing internal political strife. In such circumstances, parties have formed all party coalitions. For instance, in Iraq, a coalition government was created in 2004 in an effort to bring the country together after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government when various leaders from different religious sects and regions of the country were brought together in an attempt to form policy that would be regarded as a benefit not only one particular group but to the people of Iraq as a whole.[[3]](#footnote-4) 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.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The coalitions are product of politics in a parliamentary democracy. The term as it is generally used in political science is a direct descendent of the exigencies of a multiparty system in a democratic set up.[[5]](#footnote-6) It is a phenomenon of multiparty government where a number of minority parties join hands for the purpose of running the government, which is otherwise not possible in a democracy based on one party system.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Several countries of the world experimented coalition governments like Germany, Australia, Switzerland, Israel, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Netherland, Japan, Bangladesh, Sri-lanka, India etc. Coalition governments have become a regular feature in India both at the centre as also in some states. India witnessed its first coalition government on 25th October 1946 when Jawaharlal Nehru formed the Indian National Congress (INC) – Muslim League 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.[[7]](#footnote-8) 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.[[8]](#footnote-9) After 1967 general elections, India witnessed a new era in its politics that signified the process of transferring the power, previously concentrated in the Congress system to diverse parties and party coalitions in more than half of the Indian states. However Congress continued to be a dominant player at the Union level till 1977 elections when it was voted out of 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.

**1.1 Politics ofCongress Dominance (1947-1967)**

After independence, 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 and its dominance. Firstly, in its initial years, Congress had command over resources and it was the organization of the party which judiciously distributes these resources among existing and potential clients in exchange for their political support. Secondly, in the first three elections, India’s political processes were neither found competitive nor mature and even political parties till then had not became well organized and assertive. Thirdly, the dominance of the Congress party was helped by its wide social base and networking at different levels connected the electorate to Congress party (Table 2.0).[[9]](#footnote-10)

**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*

**2.2 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 significant 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.[[10]](#footnote-11) After 1967 general elections, India witnessed a new era in Indian politics that signified process of transferring the power, previously concentrated in the Congress system to diverse parties and party coalitions in more than half of the Indian states. 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.[[11]](#footnote-12) 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.[[12]](#footnote-13)

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.[[13]](#footnote-14) 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.[[14]](#footnote-15)

**1.3 Non – Congress Coalition Experiments**

The most significant feature of the 1967 elections was, therefore, the coming together of non – Congress parties when the Congress system seemed to have developed serious cracks due to a complex unfolding of socio – economic circumstances. The year 1967 turned out to be a remarkable event in Indian politics ridding on the crest of mounting non – Congressism, non-Congress coalitions in the form of Samyukta Vidayak Dal (SVD) governments were formed in several states. They had ideological heterogeneity. The exceptions were coalitions in West Bengal and Kerala. The coalitions in West Bengal was an alliance of Left parties where as in Kerala, there was a coalition government of Left and Democratic Front. The SVD coalitions in states collapsed in due course of time, as a result of their inner contradictions in the realm of ideology and political orientations of the constituents. These coalition governments were not stable, presumably because they were neither ideologically cohesive nor programmatically uniform. The only factor that cemented the bond among those heterogeneous constituents was their anti – Congress sentiments (Table 2.1).[[15]](#footnote-16)

**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: Compiled from the Reports of Election Commission of India*

**1.4 Experiment of Coalition Politics at the Centre**

Emergence of strong regional parties, politicization of various social groups and their struggle for share in power that characterise the political transition and churning in contemporary India have made coalition government inevitable at the federal level.[[16]](#footnote-17)

***1.4.1: First Coalition Government at the Union Level (March 24, 1977 – March28,1979)***

After independence, India experienced its first coalition government at the centre in 1977 led by the Janata Party. It was the offspring of the continuous struggles made by the opposition parties to pull down the Congress from power. Frustrated by the authoritarianism of the Congress during the Emergency (1975 -77), certain opposition parties and groups decided to fight the next general elections under a common banner and thus provide an alternative to the Congress. On the initiative given by Jayprakash Narayan who provided moral leadership to Indian politics at the time, the Congress (O), the Jan Sangh, the Socialist Party and the Bharatiya Lok Dal came together to undertake the challenge. The leaders of those parties 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 name of the 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.[[17]](#footnote-18)

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 leader Mrs. Gandhi at the hustings. 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).[[18]](#footnote-19) So the first coalition was formed under the Prime Minstership of Moraji Desai. The Janata-led government remained in power for about two years i.e. 1977 – 1979.[[19]](#footnote-20) Technically, it was not a coalition because its five constituents had agreed to merge and fought the election on a single manifesto and on a shared symbol.

The seeds of factionalism within the Janata paty 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 Cheif Ministerships were shared by the two constituents- the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and the BLD. The other constituents were disappointed.[[20]](#footnote-21)

The struggle between the Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram on the one hand and infighting between the BLD and the Jana Sangh on the other hand led to conflicts and confrontation with each other.[[21]](#footnote-22) The differences widened between various constituent groups of Janata government, with the result, the followers of Mr. Charan Singh left the party and formed a new party Janata Secular (S). Bahuguna, S. N. Mishra and others also deserted the Janata Party. It was in these circumstances, a no confidence motion was moved in the Lok Sabha by the leaders of the opposition against the Janata government. While the no confidence motion was being discussed in the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister, Moraji Desai having lost his majority due to defection tendered his resignation to the President[[22]](#footnote-23).

***1.4.2 Second Coalition Government at the Union Level (July 28, 1979 – January 14, 1980)***

Another coalition government was formed at the centre with Charan Singh as the Prime Minister in October 1979. The Charan Singh government which succeeded Moraji government for a while was a pure coalition government. It was a conglomeration of parties like Janata (Secular, S) and Congress (Urs, U), while the Congress (Indira (I)) extended external support to this coalition government. On the ground that Mr. Charan Singh had the support of larger number of members than that of Mr. Desai, the President invited him to form an alternative government. But since the President knew that Mr. Charan Singh had no absolute majority he asked him to seek a vote of confidence in the house within three weeks time.[[23]](#footnote-24) This coalition government proved short-lived and fell as soon as Congress (I) withdrew its support.[[24]](#footnote-25)

***1.4.3 Third Coalition Government at the Union Level (December 2, 1989 – November 10, 1990)***

India experienced another coalition government in 1988 with the National Front under the leadership of V.P. Singh, the 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 Janata Party, Jan Morcha and the Lok Dal made efforts that led to formation of the Janata Dal. Subsequently, similar efforts were being made under the leadership of N. T. Rama Rao 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 leaders of the Front turned to the right and left quarters for support. They successfully convinced both BJP and Left parties to join the National Front, despite they had ideological differences with each other. Accordingly 9th general elections were held on 22nd and 24th November, 1989. The election proclamation brought about the occasion for a rare display of unity among the opposition. Seat adjustment talks with the BJP and the Left parties got under way. Even the BJP softened its stand towards the Janata Dal and the National Front. The left parties too agreed to make seat adjustments with parties allied to the BJP. [[25]](#footnote-26)In the 9th general elections that followed, the Congress (I) decided not to stake claim for forming a government at the centre, though it had emerged as the single largest party in the elections. On December 1, 1989, the National Front met to elect V. P. Singh for leadership. V. P. Singh was declared elected unanimously amidst scenes wild enthusiasm. While extending the invitation to V. P. Singh, President R. Venkataraman observed that since the largest party in the Lok Sabha, the Congress had not staked its claim to form the government, he asked V. P. Singh, leader of the second largest party to form the Ministry. The President stipulated that V. P. Singh would have to take a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha within thirty days

of his assuming office, which he did successfully with the help of the BJP and the Communists.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Though the National Front was considered to be a wider forum, but proved short-lived because of major upheavals. Firstly, the Front did not have a Common Minimum Programme to unite themselves and the ideologically distant supporting parties. It also did not think of evolving any mechanism for the effective coordination and monitoring of the government, not to speak of nurturing a new political culture. Secondly, The V. P. Singh government’s decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report under which 52% of the government jobs had to be reserved for the scheduled castes and Other Backward Classes. The government took the decision without consulting the supporting parties. The decision antagonised the BJP as such a move would adversely affect the electoral interests of the party. 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.[[27]](#footnote-28)

***1.4.4 Fourth Coalition Government at the Union Level (November 11, 1990 – July 21, 1991)***

With the fall of V. P. Singh government, the Janata Dal (JD) was split by Chandrasekhar who with the support of 55 members formed the Janata Dal (Samajwadi, S). Chandrasekhar had already staked his claim to form the government with the help of the Congress (I), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Muslim League, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), Kerala Congress (Mani), Shiromani Akali Dal and a few independent members.[[28]](#footnote-29) Consequently, another coalition government was formed at the centre on November 10, 1990 with the Chandrasekhar as the Prime Minister. This was another minority government, not a coalition, solely dependent on the outside support of the Congress and was bound to repeat the fate of the earlier minority led by Charan Singh.[[29]](#footnote-30)

Soon after the formation of Chandra Shekhar government, the Congress and the AIADMK mounted pressure for dismissal of the DMK government on the plea of breakdown of law and order in Tamil Nadu. As the governor of Tamil Nadu, Mr. S. S. Barnala had declined to recommend dismissal of the DMK, the Union government had ordered the transfer of Mr. Barnala, Governor of Tamil Nadu to Bihar as its Governor. But Barnala had declined to accept the transfer and sent his resignation to the Union Government. 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.[[30]](#footnote-31)

***1.4.5 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.[[31]](#footnote-32) 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), Kangliepak 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.[[32]](#footnote-33)

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.[[33]](#footnote-34)

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.[[34]](#footnote-35)

***1.4.6 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 stress within six months when the Jain Commission Report was submitted. The report pointed out that the Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) was operating with the help of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu (State of India) and that the Liberation (LTTE) could not have killed Rajiv Gandhi without support and assistance from the DMK government and a section of DMK leaders. This infuriated Congress (I) and asked the United Front Government to drop the DMK Ministers. However, Congress was ready for any talk with the Front only after the dismissal of the DMK Ministers. Prime Minister I. K. Gujral rejected the demand of the Congress to dismiss the DMK Ministers and the whole United Front stood united on this issue. The Congress decided on 28th November, 1997, to withdraw support from the Gujaral Ministry with immediate effect. The decision was communicated to the President of India and on the same day, 28th November, 1997, the Gujaral Ministry resigned. Accordingly President of India finally took the decision to dissolve the Lok Sabha and hold fresh elections. However, Gujaral was asked to continue until alternative arrangements were made.[[35]](#footnote-36)

***1.4.7 Seventh Coalition Government at the Union Level (March 19, 1998 – October 10, 1999)***

In the 1998 general elections, BJP took realistic approach of shelving the fundamentalist issues like Ram Mandir, Uniform Civil Code, and Article 370, and had thus made itself acceptable to other parties who had so far treated the BJP as unacceptable. The common interests brought the BJP and the regional parties together. Hence, the BJP retained the relationship with the former allies – Samata Party, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, and Haryana Vikas Party – and entered into new alliance with regional parties in Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal and UP. Therefore, the total strength of the BJP and its alliance reduced from sixteen to thirteen after the results of 1998 elections. (Table 2.2).[[36]](#footnote-37)

**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 Fernandis. 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.[[37]](#footnote-38)

***1.4.8 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 in Delhi 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.[[38]](#footnote-39)

BJP – led NDA-I government was formed after the 13th Lok Sabha elections which took place in September – October 1999. In this election, electoral confrontation was found mainly between the BJP – led NDA-I on the one hand and the Congress (I) on the other, the third front failing to fructify as a united force. The BJP – led NDA-I facing the 1999 elections was different in character from the BJP – led alliance of 1998 elections, with some of the allies replaced and the total strength rising to form a grand coalition of 24 parties. The NDA-I was electorally a pre-poll alliance which lacked necessary cohesion and ideological and programmatic fusion or agreement that genuine coalitions were characterised to have. Several allies of the NDA-I were conditionally aligned, like the Trinamul Congress, Telugu Desam Party ( TDP) and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), having their vital interests rooted in state politics. The Biju Janata Dal and the Janata Dal (U) also had similarly strong regional interests underpinning their alliance with the BJP at the national level. The INLD, TDP and DMK were new entrants into the NDA-I, having left their earlier secular allies of the United Front under regional compulsions[[39]](#footnote-40) (Table 2.3).

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NDA-I** | **Seats Contested** | **Seats Won** | **Share of %Votes** | **Congress and Allies** | **Seats contested** | **Seats Won** | **Share of %Votes** | **Left Front** | **Seats Contested** | **Seats Won** | **Share of %Vote** |
| 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.*

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party; JDU: Janata Dal (United); DMK: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; KCM: Kerala Congress Mani; RJD: Rashtriya Janata Dal; MDMK: Marumalarcha Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; PMK: Pattali Makkal Katchi; TDP: Telugu Desam Party; INLD: Indian National Lok Dal; RLD: Rashtriya Lok Dal; INC: Indian National Congress; AIADMK: All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; CPI: Communist Party of India; CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist); RSP: Revolutionary Socilaist Party

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.[[40]](#footnote-41)

However, the constituents of NDA-I though retained their separate identities but decided to contest 13th Lok Sabha Elections (which held on September – October 1999) using a common manifesto under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee. The NDA-I still remained a confederal inter – party formation. But then, the composition of the NDA-I was much more diverse in regional and cultural terms than the Janata party and which was essentially a North Indian phenomenon.[[41]](#footnote-42)

In 1999 general elections, Vajpayee’s bandwangon had since grown from 18 parties of BJP – led coalition allies to 24, and the BJP’s share in the coalition both in terms of seats and votes stood further reduced. In this election NDA-I won 305 seats, the allies account for 123, and even of the BJP’s 182, only 100 odd have been won on its own strength, the rest coming via alliance.[[42]](#footnote-43)

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 wasN. 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 caste 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 Sang 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.[[43]](#footnote-44)
* 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.[[44]](#footnote-45)

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.[[45]](#footnote-46)

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.[[46]](#footnote-47) 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.[[47]](#footnote-48)

***1.4.9 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).[[48]](#footnote-49)

**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.*

Abbreviations: DMK: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; NCP: Nationalist Congress Party; MUL: Muslim League; JMM: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha; IND: Independent; KCM: Kerala Congress Mani; RPI: Republican Party of India; PDS: Party for Democratic Socialism; AC: Arunachal Congress; RPI (A): Republican Party of India (Athwale); TRS: Telangana Rashtra Samithi; PDP: People’s Democratic Party; RJD: Rashtriya Janata Dal; JDS: Janata Dal Secular; MDMK: Marumalarcha Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; PMK: Pattali Makkal Katchi; LJNS: Lok Jan Shakti; PRBP: People Republican Part

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.[[49]](#footnote-50)

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 shuttered 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.[[50]](#footnote-51)

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.[[51]](#footnote-52)
* 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.[[52]](#footnote-53)

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*

***2.5 Coalition Politics in the Indian States, 1967 – 1969***

Since its independence, India’s electoral history of 1967, 1977, and 1989 are the turning points in the nature of the party system.[[53]](#footnote-54) The Fourth General Elections of 1967 can be considered one of the most important events in Indian politics. Riding on the crest of mounting non – Congressism, non Congress coalitions in the form of Samyukta Vidayak Dal (SVD) governments were formed in several states. The 1967 elections had created a situation in which Congress dominance was strikingly diminished, because its performance in the art of governance was subjected to harsh judgement by supporters and opposition alike. The public image of the Congress had been tarnished owing to the charges of corruption against some of its leaders and also on account of growing economic crisis in the country. Intra-party factionalism and conflicts resulted in massive defections and splinter groups 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. Emergence of splinter groups and their reconciliation with opposition parties created a situation conducive to coalition and competitive multi – party system. The 1967 elections put the Congress system on trail and marked the end of

one party dominance system in India.[[54]](#footnote-55) However Congress continued to be a single dominant party at the centre till the ninth general elections with the short interval of 1977 – 1979 when Janata –led coalition ruled at the centre.

1967 experiments draws our attention to two-fold process- on the one side, this election indicates a clear crack in the Congress base in the regions, on the other side, the poll outcomes also reflects the beginning of a significant process whereby the splintered regional parties were united on the basis of distinctly regional interests, which the Congress failed to adequately represent.

Even 1967 Assembly Elections had radically altered India’s political landscape. The Congress lost its hegemony in as many as nine states. The prominent factor that brought the ideologically discrete parties together was an anti- Congress sentiment that was an expression of the mood of the times and the pattern appeared to have come to stay. The most significant characteristic of the 1967 elections was the conglomeration of non-Congress parties seemed to have developed massive cracks due to the complex unfolding of socio- economic circumstances. However the coalition did not appear to be stable, presumably because they were neither ideologically cohesive nor programmatically uniform. Nevertheless, a fresh beginning was made in which the non- Congress government was an apparent possibility.[[55]](#footnote-56)

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.[[56]](#footnote-57) 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.[[57]](#footnote-58)

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 ).[[58]](#footnote-59)

**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 |
| **PULF** |  | 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 |
| **ULF** |  | 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.*

**1.6 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.

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