

Rajiv Gandhi Memorial RGI-NERC-ICSSR Lectures

COALITION POLITICS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

B. Pakem



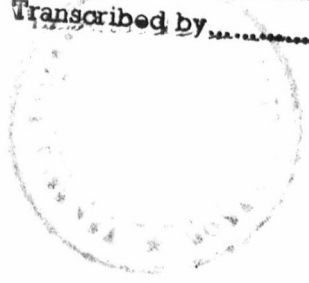
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**Dedicated to My Mother
Ka Kwinsibon Pakem (1912–1998)**

When I was invited by Prof. R. Bhatnagar, Honorary Director of the North Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research to deliver the first Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture under the auspices of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, I felt very much obliged for the honour bestowed upon me. I had accepted the assignment with an immediate consent. My mind is to speak on coalition politics in North-East India. I feel that it is important to know the political situation in the region in the context of the national

PREFACE

political situation which has led to so many coalition experiments in regional and sub-regional spheres. The death of some material, however, has hindered my lecture only to State Legislative Assembly level. Hence

In recent years, coalition politics has attracted the attention of public leaders, policy-makers, administrators, social scientists and the citizens at large. This attention is due mainly to the anxiety arising out of the instability of coalition governments in our country. The people, in general, would welcome any governmental set up provided political stability is ensured. But, of late, public leaders have almost lost their credibility, in the eyes of the people, precisely because of their failures to bring back stable governments. The public leaders, on their part, try to defend themselves by shifting the responsibility to the fractured verdict of the people at the hustings.

It may be true that both the people and their leaders are equally responsible for such a political situation. However, public leaders have more responsibility in respecting the verdict of the people at the polls by trying to experiment with coalition politics on a sound basis. But, it so happened that, more often than not, the public leaders taking advantage of the hung parliament and the hung State Assemblies have resorted to unhealthy practices of horse-trading and floor crossing, notwithstanding the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution of India. It is indeed a very sad commentary on the current state of political affairs in our country in general and in North-East India in particular.

When I was invited by Prof. J.P. Singh, Honorary Director of the North-Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research to deliver the first Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lectures under the auspices of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, I felt very much highly privileged for the honour bestowed upon me. Having accepted the assignment what has immediately come to my mind is to speak on coalition politics in North East India. I feel that it is important to know about the political situation in the region in the context of recent highly competitive politics which has led to so many coalition experiments in regional and sub-regional statecraft. The dearth of source materials, however, has limited my lectures only to State Legislative Assembly level. Hence, in these lectures, I have left out of consideration on the processes of coalition politics at the other levels like the municipalities, other local self-government institutions, panchayats, autonomous district councils, autonomous regional councils, and village councils. Even at the State Assembly level, more primary sources are yet to be tapped. Due to the time constraint within which I have to complete the preparation for these lectures, I cannot but heavily depend on secondary sources. But, all the same, these sources would indicate the trend towards the continuation of coalition politics at the State level given the present system of representative government under the Indian Constitution.

The three lectures have been organised to cover: (1) A theoretical consideration on coalition politics, (2) coalition politics during the British period, and (3) coalition politics since India's Independence. My main finding through these lectures is that what has been so far experimented on coalition politics in the region is not so much successful due to a number of problems. These problems cover a wider range of issues like insurgency activities, ethnic movements, student movements, community consideration rather than consideration of political ideology in coalition politics, and an entrenched regionalism leading to the regionalisation of Indian Government and politics. Over and above these issues it

must be stressed that at the national level there has been no institutionalisation of coalition politics in North-East India either. I do believe that through the process of such institutionalisation, coalition politics in the region may become stable and successful in future.

I must acknowledge my gratefulness to the authorities of the North Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research and of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation for having given me this opportunity to delve into this important aspect of the political activities in the seven sister States of North East India. In the preparation of these lectures, I must put on record my appreciation of the help and assistance extended to me by Dr. L. Pathak, Librarian of the North-Eastern Hill University and the members of his staff for sparing no pain in providing me with the source materials from the NEHU, Central Library. My thanks also go to Sarvasri Dhiraj Chakravorty, Fullmoon Kharmihpen and Ashish Kumar Dhar as well as to the Staff of the Publication wing of NEHU for their generous secretarial assistance.

Shillong
November 26, 1998

B. Pakem

CONTENTS

Preface

v

1. Theoretical Consideration

1

2. During the British Period

38

3. Coalition Politics in North-East India since Independence

62

Notes and References

134

Bibliography

152

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

SECTION 1: GENESIS OF COALITIONS

In ancient time, coalitions were practised by States and Governments both in war and politics. Consider the Peloponnesian war among the Greek City States under the Athenian Ionic League and the Spartan Doric League during 431–404 B.C.¹ or the Roman Triumvirate under Antony, Cicero and Octavian after Julius Caesar's assassination in 44. B.C.² In ancient India (3100 B.C., or 1400 B.C., or 900 B.C.) too, there were coalitions during the Mahabharata, an epic war where a number of *Janapadas* were aligning themselves either with the Kauravas or with the Pandavas.³ Even ancient Assam or Pragjyotishpur (Kamrup) of North-East India was joining that Great Epic War with its King, Bhagadatta who was killed by the Pandavas at Kurukshetra.⁴ Not only in war but also in politics the principle of coalition was involved in the Peloponnesian War. The Greek City States joining the Ionian League was essentially due to their love for the Athenian democracy while those States under the Doric League were supporting the political ideology of oligarchy of Sparta.⁵

To cut the story short, in our own century we have witnessed the two Great World Wars. The First World War (1914–18) was fought between the Allied Powers coali-

2 Coalition Politics in North-East India

tion and the Central Powers coalition. Similarly, the Second World War (1939–45) was fought between the Allied Powers coalition and the Axis Powers coalition. Finally, the Cold War (1945–90) was a war between the Western Bloc coalition under the leadership of the United States and the Communist Bloc coalition under the leadership of the Soviet Union. And today in the general economic competition we have a sort of a coalition among the G-7 of the Developed North and of the G-15 of the Developing South; or in the Nuclear Club we also have the coalition partners of the pro-Non-Proliferation and the coalition partners of the anti-Non-Proliferation. In one word, we may perhaps apply the concept of coalition of any game of power struggle whether at the international, national, regional or sub-regional levels.

In India, the national political situation today is facing a period of instability arising out of no single party getting a clear majority in forming the government. At the regional level also many States are facing similar situations. One may like it or not, coalition politics has become an essential feature of present day Indian democracy. Subhas C. Kashyap in his *The Politics of Power: Defections and State Politics in India* (1975) comments in the context of the political scenario ever since 1967 that, "there could be little escape from an era of coalition governments".⁶ He also refers to the views of many political leaders about the inevitability of coalition politics in the country. Excepting the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi and Nijalingappa, President of the Indian National Congress who were not in favour of coalition governments at that time, many leaders accepted it as a *fait accompli*. Sri. N.G. Ranga of the Swatantra Party was of the view that there should be "coalition governments by non-communist democratic parties".⁷ Ram Gopal, Vice-President of the Bhartiya Kranti Dal considered coalition as "inevitable at the present stage of Indian democracy"⁸ S.N. Dwivedi of the Praja Socialist Party called the political situation of the day as "a decade of coalition governments".⁹

The Jan Sangh President, Atal Behari Vajpayee was of the opinion that the formation of coalition governments was a political necessity or "compulsion".¹⁰ The Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai did not rule out the possibility of other parties entering into a coalition government with the Congress Party provided the other parties in such a coalition should be prepared to accept and fall in line substantially with the Congress Programmes.¹¹ Contrary to popular beliefs, however, Dayabhai Patel of the Swatantra Party while participating in the Parliamentary Committee for Curbing Defection thought that "the growth of more and more coalitions may help check defection."¹²

These were some of the political views and opinions of the representative cross-sections of the different political parties during the early period of coalition politics in the country. Now, before we proceed further in our consideration of the theoretical aspects of the subject matter let us briefly discuss on what is actually meant by coalition.

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS OF COALITION

But what do we really mean when using the term coalition or coalition politics anyway? It is indeed a very difficult task to have a direct and simple response to such a query. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1961) gives the meaning of a coalition as a "union, combination, fusion of parties, principles, interests, etc"; and especially in politics it means: "An alliance for combined action of distinct parties, persons, or states, without permanent incorporation into one body".¹³ The *Random House of English Language* (1970) defines coalition as "a continuation or alliance, especially a temporary one between persons, factions, states, etc".¹⁴ But dictionary meanings are quite limited in scope when we use the term "coalition" in its technical sense. The *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* (1972) has made an attempt to give a technical meaning through social scientists like William H. Riker and William A. Gamson.

4 *Coalition Politics in North-East India*

Riker writes that: "The word 'coalition' has long been used in ordinary English to refer to a group of people who come together (usually on a temporary basis) to attain some end. Typically, a coalition has been regarded as a parliamentary or political grouping less permanent than a party or faction or an interest group".¹⁵ As differentiated from the ordinary or dictionary meaning of the term coalition, Riker has also added a technical definition of coalition when he says: "Recently, however, the word has acquired a technical significance in social science theories with the elaboration (in the last two decades) of the theory of n-person games",¹⁶ and that the notion of coalition formation is central to this theory, since "coalitions are the characteristic form of social organisation by which the outcomes of such games are determined".¹⁷ Coalition, he asserts, provides a model for the study of decision making ranging from elections, parliaments, committees, cabinets, etc. at the national level; and decision making in wars, diplomatic maneuvers, and internal organisations at the international level. He, therefore, reiterates that: "coalitions are the characteristic form of social organization for political decision making generally".¹⁸

On the other hand, Gamson uses the word "coalition" to "mean the *joint use of resources to determine the outcome of a decision*, where a resource is some weight such that some critical quantity of it in the control of two or more parties to the decision is both necessary and sufficient to determine its outcome. Participants will be said to be using their resources jointly only if they co-ordinate their deployment of resources with respect to some decision. That is what is meant by saying that they have formed a coalition".¹⁹ These two authors have agreed in their definitions of coalition, at least, in two important aspects, that is, on decision making and games. After a discussion on these two aspects, Gamson comes to a greater precision in his definition of a coalition as "the joint use of resources to determine the outcome of a decision in a mixed-motive situation involving more than two units"²⁰ Regarding the

detailed discussion on decision making and games theories by Riker and Gamson will be separately dealt with in Section 5 below.

Other writers, both Western and Eastern, have more or less agreed with the definitions given by Riker and Gamson. For example, Arend Lijphart in his *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (1989)²¹ talks about a "plural society" which is a society divided by what Harry Eckstein calls "segmental cleavages" based on religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, or ethnic nature.²² This definition implies that segmental cleavages in a plural society are mobilised or organised by political parties, interest groups, media of communication, schools and voluntary associations. But segmental cleavages in plural societies as in the Third World countries are quite different from segmental cleavages in homogenous societies like Britain and France. This finding is based on what is known as the Lewis model where in his *Politics in West Africa* (1965)²³ observes that "plural societies are divided by tribal, religious, linguistic, cultural, economic, and regional differences. Class societies are the essentially homogenous societies but is not a deep cleavage".²⁴ Hence, "What is good for a class society is bad for a plural society" he concluded.²⁵ We may recall at this juncture what Ambedkar had said in the Constituent Assembly: "Democracy in India is only top dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic".²⁶

It is in this context that Lijphart is speaking about "the consociational model . . . as an alternative to the British model of democracy in the plural societies of the Third World".²⁷ However, such a consociational model for the Third World countries may not really bridge the differences between the various segments in their respective countries. In fact, "the chances of bridging them by consociational methods are nil or infinitesimally small"²⁸ It is quite interesting to note that Lijphart while talking about consociational democracy in the plural societies he also refers to the concept of a grand coalition by applying Riker's games theory. But this type of

coalition, according to Lijphart "is not realistic . . . except in the most extreme case of a plural society".²⁹ A more detailed discussion on this aspect will be dealt with in Section 5 below. Here, suffice it to say that Lijphart looks at the possible definition of a coalition on the basis of segmental cleavages in the plural societies.

Among the Indian theoreticians, Rajni Kothari, in 1970, writing on *Politics in India* is more or less convinced that "the country is set on a period of coalitional governments, not only in the States but also at the Centre".³⁰ But throughout his writing in the book, there was no definition of what coalition is about. True, he uses the terms like the Congress Party being a "grand coalition",³¹ or the historical character of the Congress Party "as a coalitional arena",³² "The coalitional arena of Indian Politics",³³ "coalition of protests" and the traditional style of "coalition-making",³⁴ yet we have to look for his definition of a coalition. Perhaps, we may surmise about such a definition from his comments on the "powerful built-in resistance to a zero-(sum) game",³⁵ and his view that: "Demands can be muted by implicit pressures for consensus".³⁶ In other words, his implicit definition of a coalition refers more to an intra-party coalition rather than on an inter-party coalition, though it also involves the question of governmental coalition as differentiated from a party (intra-party or inter-party) coalition.

It is in the above context that we may appreciate Kothari's comment that while there is a degree of "confrontation" between opposing groups in the Congress Party, yet he is of the opinion that: "A better alternative may be for the formation of a viable coalition of proximate groups, a coalition that provides both governmental stability and the necessary strength for making and enforcing critical decisions".³⁷ It is also because of this fact that he came to the conclusion: "Democratic Politics are everywhere the politics of coalition making"³⁸ both at the intra-party and inter-party levels as well as at the governmental level. The ramification of intra-party and inter-party coalitions will be dealt with separately in Sections 3 and 4 respectively.

Other Indian scholars working on the definitions of coalition politics a mention may be made of Harish Khare and E. Sridharan. According to Khare, "coalition politics by definition is a temporary arrangement and sustains itself only if each partner feels, or is made to feel, that its long term interest would not necessarily be compromised, while it also enjoys some temporary benefits".³⁹ Sridharan, on the other hand, while not referring to the minority—nor oversized—coalitions emphasises the importance of minimum winning coalitions" based on power maximisation theories as against policy based theories. The minimum winning coalition is defined by him "as a coalition in which each party is indispensable to the coalition's winning a simple majority of seats, because in such coalitions each member's share of the pay off is maximized".⁴⁰ Thus, any definition of a coalition is somehow connected with theories of coalition. Theories of coalition will be examined in detail in Section 5 below.

Earlier, there was an attempt to indirectly define coalition by some writers like A.R. Desai. In *States and Society in India: Essays in Dissent* (1975), Desai observed that, "the alliances, united fronts and coalitions made upto now basically do not reveal any principled stand by any party. All the parties exhibit cross-opportunism in making alliances, associating with any party or group subserving vote catching and enabling maximum seats in the bargain".⁴¹ Similarly, Raghuveer Singh says that: "In its ordinary usage coalition refers to a group of people who come together to achieve some end, usually or a temporary basis. In politics, it signifies a parliamentary or political grouping of different parties, interest groups or factions formed for making and/or influencing policy-decisions or securing power",⁴² Singh's definition seems to have been based on the definition of Riker as reflected in *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*.

With the ever increasing number of coalition making and coalition breaking in India, the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi had organised its Fortieth Annual Conference on October 27, 1996 on the theme of "Coalition Government: Experience and Pros-

pects". In his theme paper in the conference, O.P. Minocha also subscribed to the definition of a coalition in these words: "The word 'coalition' generally refers to a group of people who come together (usually on a temporary basis) to obtain some end. Typically, a coalition has been regarded as a parliamentary or political grouping, less permanent than a party or faction or an interest group. Coalition implies co-operation between political parties" ⁴³

A cursory glance over the above definitions of coalition does not really give us a very satisfactory connotation of what coalition is in the context of North-East Indian Government and politics. The subject matter of this lecture being on coalition politics in North-East politics in North-East India, it is always our quest to find out, from the historical perspective, about the genesis, growth and greening of coalition in the North-East Indian context. Yes, coalition politics remains ever green ever since modern parliamentary democracy was introduced in the region, and there is no sign of its decaying as yet.

But what is coalition in the North-East India perspective? So far, we have no definition. However, our assessment of the political situation in the region is that, historically, coalition is part and parcel of its political processes whether under medieval monarchy, traditional indigenous political system, or modern parliamentary democracy. In a land with so many warring clans, autonomous villages, independent tribes and communities living side by side in a small geographical area, it is but natural that the principle of coalition is inherent in the political system itself. Neither by divine intervention nor by human design, coalition just evolves in the fertile political soil of North-East India.

While in modern parlance, we may talk about intra-party or inter-party coalitions, or segmental cleavages in the political society, simultaneously we may also talk about intra-clan/inter-clan, intra-village/inter-village, and intra-tribal/inter-tribal coalitions while discussing about coalition politics in North-East India. Hence, in this lecture, rather than laying an emphasis of political rivalries

as hitherto emphasised by many writers, an emphasis is laid more on political coalitions among different clans, villages, tribes and communities of the region. In this connection, it is worthwhile to ponder over the definition of coalition by Amintore Fanfani, the Former Prime Minister of Italy. While closely perceiving the processes of coalitions in his country, the land of so many coalitions in recent years his definition of coalition "is like marriage in which jealousy is greater than love".⁴⁴ Perhaps, presently we can say this much for political coalitions in North-East India too.

SECTION 3: INTRA-PARTY COALITION

When Rajni Kothari expresses himself that the Congress Party in India is a "grand-coalition" he has in mind about the nature of an intra-party coalition of the Congress. The Congress was then leading the opposition movement against the British authorities. He says: "Like any broad oppositional movement it contained within its fold several splint groups ranged over a wide span of ideological and policy perspectives. Thus the Communist Party, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Socialist Party were all at one time part of the Congress movement. Dissidents from the ruling leadership also often pulled out of the Congress, set up other parties, and often returned to the Congress when the situation had crystallized in their favour".⁴⁵ This pattern was inherent in the Congress Party until 1969 when, in the words of Kothari, "there now developed an emphasis on Unity of purpose and a more cohesive team, with a willingness to allow opposing groups to leave the party, and there was less anxiety about party defections".⁴⁶

But the gradual erosion of the Congress since then in the form of Congress (O), Congress (S), Congress (J), etc. made its leaders to think in terms of stopping the exodus from the party by adopting a parliamentary legislation to prevent defection in the Indian legislatures. This only indicates that the Congress cannot afford to remain a mere "Centre" Party but have also to include

the rightists and the leftists within its fold. In other words, the Congress is to remain a coalition party, if it has to retain governmental power both at the Centre and in the States. In the words of Riker, the Congress Party was in fact "a coalition of the whole by 1948"⁴⁷ and after the 1969 split tried to retain that status.

Prior to 1947 the Congress Party was at the centre stage comprising almost all sections of the Indian society including those from among the minorities and backward castes. But then there were exclusive separate political parties also like the Muslim League, the Scheduled Castes Federation, the Communist Party, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Indian Princes. In 1948, however, the Congress found itself to be "a coalition of the whole".⁴⁸ However, this position was not what the Congress had planned. So, when it found its new power status, the Congress started "increasing the value of their coalition by expelling members and thereby creating a losing side".⁴⁹ The Congress started expelling the Hindu Mahasabha after Gandhi's assassination, and eliminated the Communists through police action as in Hyderabad and Manipur.

In spite of this attempt at eliminating the rightists and the leftists from the Congress fold, factionalism in the party continued. There were then two clearly defined factions in the party. One faction was led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Jaya Prakash Narayan, and the other by Sardar Vallabhai Patel. The former was broadened as a Socialist group within the Congress and the latter as the Conservative Group. There was also a tussle between the two groups during the life time of Sardar Patel.⁵⁰

The tussle was like a fight to the finish between the two groups. During the period 1948-50 there was the question of who would expel whom. It was said that Sardar Patel being an organisational man had certain advantages. His dislike of the Socialist Group was to the extent that he forbade the use of the word "Congress" from the phrase "Congress Socialist group". Because of this, many socialists left the Congress in 1948 itself.⁵¹

When a large number of socialists left the Congress, it appeared as if the intra-party coalition was over. In fact, Patel was to take over the Party in 1950 when he got Purushottamdas Tandon from his faction elected as President of the Congress. As a result of this election more followers of Nehru's Socialist Group left the party. The process could not, however, be completed as meanwhile Patel passed away. Nehru though belonging to the Socialist Group and who did not part company with Patel took over the party organisation and forced Tandon to resign. After Tandon's resignation, Nehru took upon himself the Presidentship of the Party as well as running as Head of the Government.⁵²

It was from this dual position that Nehru could pursue his secular and socialist objectives and put down the conservative elements in the party. While very few socialists came back to the Congress fold, a large number of the Conservatives left the organisation. The factional struggle reflected the fortune of the party in the First General Elections of 1952 when the Congress secured only 45 per cent of the popular votes. It was reported that the Conservatives had voted for the independent candidates rather than for the Congress candidates. Though the popular votes secured by the Congress won a minority of votes, yet it secured 74 per cent of the parliamentary seats on the basis of the winning candidates "first passing the post." Because of this, the Congress as a party during the First General Elections, on the basis of the popular votes, had been a minimal winning coalition.⁵³ This pattern continued in subsequent General Elections too through the working of the "multiplier principle" arising out of the division of the opposition votes, until it failed to get a majority of parliamentary seats in the 1977, 1989 and subsequent General Elections thereafter.

It is not only the Congress Party which is having an intra-party coalition but also other parties like the Janata Party and the Communist Party. According to Madhu Dandavate: "The Janata Party was apparently a single party, but in reality it was a combination of the Socialist

Party, Bharatiya Jan Sangh, Congress (O), BLD, and other group dissident Congressmen led by Jagjivan Ram and H.N. Bahuguna".⁵⁴ The Congress for Democracy (CFD) of Jagjivan Ram, of course, merged with the Janata Party after the General Elections.⁵⁵ The Janata Government itself was a coalition with its allies consisting of heterogeneous elements. The point sought to be raised in this section is that the Janata Party like the Congress Party had an intra-party coalition because of the structure and nature of its composition.

Much earlier, in 1964, the Indian Communist Party also indicated that there was an intra-party coalition when it broke into two parts, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). While both of them ideologically belong to the left the former is tilting towards the centre while the latter swings into the extreme left. There are many other splinter groups of the Indian Communist Party ranging from the Marxist-Leninist brand to the revolutionary groups. All these developments in the Communist Camp show that there exists an intra-party coalition in the party which ultimately paves the way to disunity in the party. Of course, in recent years there is an attempt to bring the CPI and CP(M) together in that the former has started a unity move with the latter. It is yet to be seen how far this policy of reapproachment can work out in the near future among the communists particularly when there are ideological differences among them.⁵⁶

This kind of an exercise in political futurology has also been made in 1984 through a symposium on the issue of *A Coalition Future* in the July issue of the *Seminar*. While stating presumably on the problem of inter-party coalition the symposium refers to "the old consensus culture of the Indian National Congress",⁵⁷ and added that: "Actually, coalition politics merely reflect the earlier consensus-making politics of the Indian National Congress, but in a more institutionalised form".⁵⁸ The key word here is on the institutionalisation of coalition, intra-party or otherwise. In the past, there was practically no institutionalisation of coalition as such. Today,

however, it has become more increasingly necessary to have such an institutionalisation if we are interested in a stable coalition. Indeed Harold Wilson, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom had pointed out to the possibility of an institutionalised inter-party coalition. He said: "In any case, every party leader who forms a party-based government is the head of a coalition. Every major party is itself a coalition".⁵⁹

The problem in India is that we have yet to institutionalise an intra-party coalition and not to speak about the inter-party coalition. At the inter-party coalition we used to hear about the Common Needs Programme, the National Agenda and the like. But where is the head of the coalition excepting the Steering Committee where there are so many heads. The situation is much worse in the case of an inter-party coalition where the regional satraps are gaining more power due to regionalisation of politics and the head of the party organisation at the national level has all the time to keep tapping on the possible toppling game by these regional satraps. Ash Narain Roy has aptly remarked in his "Stress on Consensus" in the governance of our country that: "Surprisingly in India, it is the intra-party and not so much inter-party divisions that have rocked the coalition governments."⁶⁰

SECTION 4: INTER-PARTY COALITION

Starting from the Interim Government of 1946, the pattern of governance in India was basically coalitional in nature. There were the Socialists like Nehru, Conservatives like Patel, Scheduled Castes like Ambedkar, minorities like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Baldev Singh. Most of them, no doubt belonged to the Indian National Congress. But the Interim Government was not entirely under the Congress. A sort of a coalition representing different shades of opinion in the country was tried in order to include the proper political representation of able leaders from all sections of the Indian society. Shanmukham Chetty was another Cabinet Minister who did not belong to the Congress Party. Some others like

John Mathai, C.H. Bhaba, Gopalaswamy Ayangar and C.D. Deshmukh did not belong to any political party. They "were brought into the Cabinet because of their ability and experience in other fields".⁶¹ Or as late as 1980 Hazrat Abdul Shah Bukhari a strong critic of the Congress during the 1977 Elections became a supporter of the Congress during the 1977 Elections became a supporter of the Congress Party in the 1980 Elections.⁶²

There was a historical background leading to such an arrangement. In the beginning, the Congress movement itself was composed of the Communist Party, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Socialist Party.⁶³ Later on, they pushed out of the Congress and at times some of them came back to it. But right from the First General Elections of 1952, the Congress as a political party which had liberated India from foreign rule could not secure a majority in the States of Madras, Orissa, Patiala and East Punjab States Union, and Travancore-Cochin. The Congress, however, could manage to avoid non Congress Governments in these states barring for sometimes in PEPSU. Mohit Sen observes that: "In fact coalitions began with the First General Elections in 1952 itself. In the Madras Presidency, a broad non Congress United Front with T. Prakasam as the leader and undivided CPI as the main component won a majority in the Assembly Elections".⁶⁴ However, "C. Rajagopalachari on the instruction of Pt. Nehru was sent to break up the united front and restore the Congress monopoly of power".⁶⁵

A similar account was given by E.M.S. Namboodripad that in each of the States of Travancore-Cochin, Madras, and PEPSU there was a United Front of parties which jointly fought the elections. They had even secured an absolute majority of seats. But the United Fronts in Travancore-Cochin and Madras were prevented from forming coalition Governments because the Congress using the Heads of States and through defections could form the governments. Only in PEPSU the United Front of parties was allowed to form a non-Congress coalition government but fell after a few months.⁶⁶ Thus, PEPSU had the distinction of being the first State in the Indian

Union, after independence, to form a non-Congress government with the inter-party coalition.

The Congress Party was not at all happy to have allowed the non-Congress coalition to come into existence. If any coalition government has to be formed the Congress should have been one of the parties. That was why after the PEPSU non-Congress coalition fell from power, the Congress could form a minority government with the support of other parties but had to go for a fresh poll in 1954. The same was the case in Andhra Pradesh when the Congress had to go for a fresh poll in 1955. Only in Travancore-Cochin the Congress had to accept a minority government formed by the Praja Socialist Party ostensibly with the support of the Congress.⁶⁷ In Orissa, the Congress entered into a coalition government with the Ganatantra Party from 1957 to 1961; and in Kerala with the PSP and the Muslim League in 1960.⁶⁸ In the 1962 Elections, the Congress could form the governments in Rajasthan (88 out of 176 seats), Madhya Pradesh (142 out of 288 seats) with the support of independents.⁶⁹

Similarly, the non-Congress parties over since 1962 had entered into coalitions among themselves as well as with some Congress defectors. Some of these coalitions were called United Fronts. But Kothari has rightly questioned whether such types of coalition are really "coalitionable".⁷⁰ Its nomenclature of anti-Congress United Fronts coalitions, however, varies from State to State. In some States they were called Left Fronts. In this connection, it has been observed by Kothari that these non-Congress multi-party coalitions differ from their Western counterparts. This difference arises mainly due to the fact that in India, unlike in the West, there has been a constant "shifting support structure" in the constituencies and "a legislative patch work resulting from it."⁷¹

Sometimes the same party, like the Congress, splits into two parts. Either the dominant party like one led by Indira Gandhi or the subordinate one led by the traditional leaders of the party called the organisational Congress were always seeking allies from among the non-

Congress parties. This situation often leads to the emergence of "rival coalitions".⁷² For example, after the Congress split in 1969, while the Congress (O) was seeking allies to topple the Congress (I) government, the latter had managed to form a majority government with the outside support of the Dravidra Munnetra Kazakham and the C.P.I.⁷³

In view of the changing political situation in the country, both the Congress and non-Congress parties have to adjust themselves with the changing times by entering into coalitions of one form or another whichever suits them at a particular period of time. After the 1977 Elections the Morarji's ministry was "a coalition of several parties" though he assumed office as "a leader of a single party".⁷⁴ But the Janata coalition came to power only to be replaced by the Choudhury Charan Singh's coalition government with the support of the Congress (I) in 1979. However, within a few months that coalition government also fell from power.⁷⁵

The Congress played the same role after the 1989 Elections. After the Election, the National Front coalition government was formed by V.P. Singh with the outside support of the newly constituted party of the Bharatiya Janata Party out of the earlier Jana Sangh. But after eleven months in power, the BJP withdrew its support. This paved the way for another coalition government headed by Chandrashekhar with the support of the Congress (I) from outside. This government also fell within a couple of months with the resignation of Chandrashekhar.⁷⁶ The resignation of Chandrashekhar was essentially due to the plan of the Congress Party in the game of coalition-making and coalition-breaking.

After the fall of the Janata coalition government we have witnessed other inter-party coalitions. The Janata Party and the allies formed the United Democratic Front; and the BJP and the Lok Dal formed the National Democratic Alliance. Perhaps the Lok Dal or the Janata (Secular) had realised that there was nothing wrong in forging an alliance on coalition with the BJP which was secular as per its constitution.⁷⁷

The other examples of groupings of parties for forming a coalition can be found in the States including those in North-East India. Sometimes, it is rather strange to find parties with different ideologies had to form a coalition for the purpose of Government formation. After the 1967 Elections in Bihar, "disparate" parties like the CPI, Jana Sangh with the support from outside of the CPI (M) and Swatantra Party came together for the purpose of coalition government making.⁷⁸ Or in West Bengal there were 14 political parties in the first coalition. Then in the next government with the Leftists and the splintered Congress joined hands in a coalition government, in 1969, which according to its leader Ajoy Mukherjee there was "No civilized government in West Bengal" and started launching "a civil resistance movement against his own government and went on a fast".⁷⁹ The case of inter-party coalitions in North-East India will be dealt with separately.

A word about the inter-party coalitions among the Communists would be in order. In the beginning the Communists would like to base their coalition politics on "electoral considerations". But the "electoral front" is not the role arena of struggle. It is not a means "to attain power in the States or at the Centre", but "to strengthen the unity of the people".⁸⁰ For example, the CPI (M) in its Party Programme adopted in 1964 pledged itself to "unite with all the patriotic forces of the nation, i.e., those who are interested in sweeping away all the remnants of pre-capitalist society; in carrying out the agrarian revolution in a thorough manner and in the interests of the peasantry; in eliminating all traces of foreign capital; and in removing all obstacles in the path of radical culture."⁸¹ In other words, the need for inter-party coalition among the Leftists is not only for an electoral front before the elections nor a United Front coalition after the election but also to develop "other forms of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggles to mobilise the people around the programme of Left and democratic Front."⁸²

Namboodripad has succinctly summed up the inter party coalitions among the Left and democratic forces in these words: "The politics of coalition or United Front which our party has worked out is therefore different from that of several other parties, ruling and opposition, which are interested in coalitions with the sole intention of winning such electoral victories as enable them either to remain in power or secure it through parliamentary maneuvers. Ours is in fact a coalition of political forces with the objective of changing the correlation of national and international forces, electoral struggle being the means to obtain this objective."⁸⁵

An attempt has been made in this section to find out the attitudes of the Congress, non-Congress and Communist parties to the issue of inter-party coalitions in India. Till 1952, inter-party coalitions, by and large, had been based on the consideration for the good of the country, society and its people. The main consideration was on the merits of political leaders irrespective of party affiliations. Even if political ideologies were sometimes in conflict with one another these were sorted out and the same had been mutually resolved. There was then no rigid categorisation between a centrist, a leftist or a rightist. It was only after the 1952 Elections that the non-Congress and Communist parties had become anti-Congress and the Congress in turn would like to monopolise political power. But it was not that easy for both the groups.

By 1969 it was amply clear that an inter-party coalition was quite necessary if the political parties were to survive. While continuing to play the game of power struggle, political parties have, of late, realised that the era of coalition, whether one likes it or not, has come to stay. Even the BJP, once an untouchable, has become respectable as its party Constitution is secular and not communal. What remains to be done as in the case of intra-party coalition is the institutionalisation of inter-party coalition. The institutionalisation of inter-party coalition does require the review of the Anti-Defection Law under the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution of India. It is our

considered opinion that in view of the fact that inter-party coalition is a necessity we have to make it a stable one. To ensure the stability of inter-party coalition the Tenth Schedule has to be suitably amended so as to make room for the institutionalisation of coalition politics both at the national and the State Levels.

SECTION 5: THEORIES OF COALITION

Here, we propose to discuss the two main theories of coalition: (a) maximisation theory of winning coalitions of the Zero-sum games of William H. Riker; and (b) policy-based winning coalitions of Abram de Swaan along with the policy-based theories of coalition formation and coalition behaviour of Robert Axelrod.⁸⁴ The first theory is associated with decision-making theories as already mentioned in Section 2 above; and the second theory with the theory of consociational democracy of grand proportional autonomy and mutual veto coalitions of Arend Lijphart.

William H. Riker in his *Theory of Political Coalitions* (1962) based his study of coalitions more on the political theory of behaviour rather than on the study of political behaviour itself, particularly on the mathematical theory of games.⁸⁵ In this theory he is greatly influenced by the writings of economists like John Von Neuman and Oskar Morgenstern's *The Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (1944). While agreeing with the economists on the model of Zero-sum games in economics, he pointed out that in politics and war it is the model of non-zero-sum games which predominates.⁸⁶ The Zero-sum games theory follows the minimax theorem where one side gains and the other side loses in the economic games for authoritative allocation of resources.⁸⁷ But in the political non-Zero-sum games for authoritative allocation of values, like power, the maximisation of power theorem with the help of a coalition sometimes makes the gainers to become the losers.⁸⁸ However, there are exceptions in the case of the Indian National Congress

immediately after independence, when it perceived itself in a Zero-sum game fashion.⁸⁹

Apart from the Zero-sum and the non-zero-sum games, Riker also refers to "n-person-sum game" when side-payments are a consideration for joining a coalition.⁹⁰ Further, any such coalition may be described as a "winning", "losing", "blocking", or "grand" coalition.⁹¹ While winning and losing coalitions have been referred to above, the grand coalition or a coalition of the whole is exemplified by Riker in the form of the Indian National Congress in 1947-48.⁹² The blocking coalition, on the other hand, refers to a position when no further moves are possible in coalition-making. This usually happens when the unattached members are absorbed into two coalitions.⁹³ When a coalition is neither winning, losing or blocking, it is no coalition at all. At most, it may be simply called a "protocoalition" in which a member merely moves within a sub-set of decision-making where he has no weight nor can impose his will on the main decision-making body.⁹⁴ It is in such a situation that unlike the dynamic model of coalition-making, a position of a static model of coalition-making has been reached.⁹⁵

From the discussions of the theories of political coalitions, Riker is firmly of the view that a general theory has greater advantage over adhoc or "inductive" theories.⁹⁶ In his n-person games theory which falls under the category of a general theory he develops the three propositions of the size principle, the strategic principle, and the disequilibrium principle.⁹⁷ The size principle refers to the winning coalitions which tend toward the minimal winning size. In the strategic principle it is the assertion that "in systems or bodies in which the size principle is operative, participants in the final stages of coalition-formation should and do more toward a minimum winning coalition".⁹⁸ It is the disequilibrium principle which combines the first two principles of size and strategy. The disequilibrium principle is the assertion that when the size and strategic principles are unstable it leads toward "the elimination of participants" arising out of decisions without regard to stakes.⁹⁹

After discussing the three main principles of political coalitions Riker refers to the study of politics, in the words of Aristotle as "a practical science" in the sense that people study it not only to discover reality but also to manipulate it.¹⁰⁰ The problem of manipulation is not so much in a two-person-sum game relating to the authoritative allocation of resources as in economics which follows the minimax theorem but in the n-person-sum game relating to the authoritative allocation of values in politics. In the latter game, while trying to research the equilibrium point the standard of "good" and "rational" play may not be reached through the art of manipulation. The reality is that n-person games as in politics are concerned with coalitions directly rather than strategies. Indeed as Riker observes: "The absolute end product of coalition-formation is, however, a two-person game"¹⁰¹ where political reality outweighs the political manipulation.

But whether the games theory is a Zero-sum or non-zero-sum, a two-person or n-person game has some correlation with the second theory mentioned in this lecture on the policy-based winning coalition theory of Abram de Swaan in his *Coalition Theories and Cabinet Formations* (1973). His theory is based on power maximisation through pay-offs as well as through ideological and policy affinities but with minimum winning coalition.¹⁰² While discussing this theory, a reference may also be made to the concept of consociational democracy of grand, proportional, autonomy, and mutual veto coalitions of Arend Lijphart. Here, it may be mentioned that though the theory of coalitions "to serve as a theory of politics has not yet been developed",¹⁰³ we cannot avoid discussing part of political theory in trying to understand the theory of coalitions. Lijphart, while taking into consideration the political aspect of coalition is of the opinion that since democracy, as a concept, can not be explicitly defined, the term "polyarchy" used by Robert A. Dahl may perhaps be applied for the democratic system in a pluralistic society.¹⁰⁴ Polyarchy is not a system of government which may contain all democratic ideals

but it only approximates them to a reasonable degree.¹⁰⁵ Further, in a plural society, a society is divided into what Harry Eckstein calls "segmental cleavages".¹⁰⁶ These cleavages may be based on religious, ideological, linguistics, regional, social or ethnic nature.¹⁰⁷

With this observation, Lijphart comes to the question of his concept of consociational democracy in relation to the policy-based winning coalition theory. According to him, consociational government consists of four characteristics:

- (a) In a parliamentary system consociational democracy can be defined as a government by a grand coalition of all the significant political segments of the plural society;
- (b) In such a Government there is what is called a mutual veto or "concurrent majority" rule which protects the minority interests as well;
- (c) The grand coalition government provides a proportionality of political representation, appointment of civil services, and allocation of public funds; and
- (d) It also provides a high degree of autonomy for each segment in running its own internal affairs.¹⁰⁸

If we apply the above four characteristics, we may say that the practice of coalition politics in the Indian parliamentary system has more or less included the first three characteristics. But so far as the fourth characteristic is concerned, till the time of writing, it does not appear to have been achieved in the Indian political scene. The experiments under the V.P. Singh's National Front, and the H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral's United Front coalition governments are quite illustrative. The lack of internal autonomy of the various segments of the coalition government is one of the reasons for the short tenures of these coalition governments which would not be fully consociational in form and content.

The central features of consociational governments would, therefore, include a "segmented pluralism" broadened by "segmental cleavages" in a plural society and combined with "concordant democracy"¹⁰⁹ The term

segmental cleavage has already been discussed above. So far as segmented pluralism, it refers to segmental cleavages of a religious and ideological nature accompanied by political co-operation. Concordant democracy, on the other hand, refers to a strategy of conflict management by co-operation and agreement among the leaders of different segments instead of conflict management by competition and majority decision.¹¹⁰ Here again, India does not seem to have the above features in its experiments on coalition politics. The segmental cleavages of a religious and ideological nature in the Janata coalition government was not accompanied by political cooperation. Similarly, all the coalition governments at the national level have followed the strategy of conflict management by competition and majority decision rather than by co-operation and agreement.

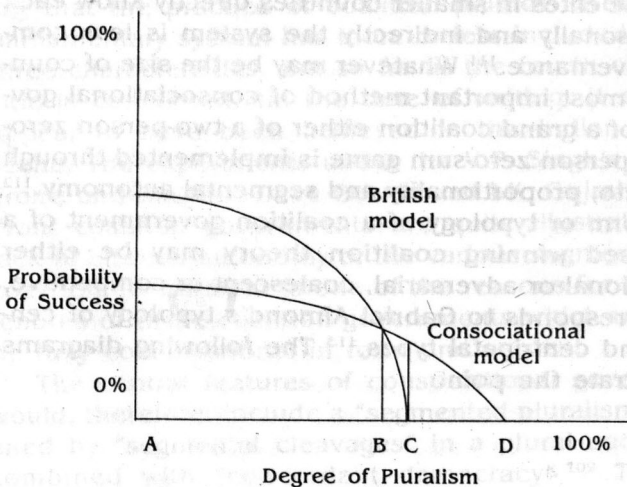
While commenting on the Indian experience, it does not mean that India does not fit in with the concept of the grand coalition of consociational democracy. It is only that a grand coalition is "inherently oversized". The fact is that Lijphart while pointing out to the disadvantages of consociational government, among other things, he said that such a government is more successful in smaller countries because of direct and indirect effects. That is, the elites in smaller countries directly know each other personally and indirectly the system is less complex in governance.¹¹¹ Whatever may be the size of countries, the most important method of consociational government of a grand coalition either of a two-person zero-sum or n-person zero-sum game is implemented through mutual veto, proportionality and segmental autonomy.¹¹²

The form or typology of a coalition government of a policy-based winning coalition theory may be either consociational or adversarial, coalescent or competitive, which corresponds to Gabriel Almond's typology of centrifugal and centripetal types.¹¹³ The following diagrams may illustrate the point:

Structure of Society

	Homogenous	Plural
Coalescent Elite Behaviour	Depoliticised Democracy	Consociational Democracy
Adversarial	Centripetal Democracy	Centrifugal Democracy

Thus, in a plural society like India, the elite behaviour tends to be adversarial rather than coalescent. That is, centrifugal democracy is more pronounced than consociational democracy. This is one of the reasons why we have yet to have a stable coalition politics in the country. Lijphart has cautioned that: "For many of the plural societies of the non-Western world, therefore, the realistic choice is not between the British model of democracy and the consociational democracy but between consociational democracy and no democracy at all."¹¹⁴ "It is also assumed" he said, "that the consociational and British models are the ideal-type alternatives and that there is no as yet undiscovered third alternative".¹¹⁵ The comparative success of coalition politics in these two models may be graphically illustrated thus:¹¹⁶



The success of consociational model again depends on which kind of coalition a political society fits in. There are generally four principles which we have already described above. In summing up, we may again refer to these principles of a grand coalition, a proportional coalition, an autonomy coalition, and a mutual veto coalition.¹¹⁷ In case India finds that the British model is no longer applicable and opts for a consociational model, it may either adopt any or a combination of the above four principles of coalition.

So far we have discussed only the two main theories of coalition in the context of parliamentary system of government and politics. These two theories are more or less applicable in the Indian political situation. That is why we have not made any attempt to find out the other theories of coalition pertaining to other political systems prevailing in other parts of the world. The political experiences in single party communist or non-communist countries or governments run by military leaders may, of course, require a different set of theories of coalition. The theories of coalition in the presidential system of government and politics also have not been explored in this lecture. However, we firmly believe that some of the basic tenets of the above theories may be appropriately applicable in the other political systems as well. For the purpose of North-East Indian government and politics, we have assumed that both the games theory and the policy-based theory of coalitions are in operation either separately or in a combination of the two, depending on the political circumstances prevailing in the particular political unit of the region. The theoretical aspect of coalition in North-East India will be further discussed and highlighted along with the study of coalition politics in the region in the two subsequent lectures below.

SECTION 6: PATTERNS OF COALITION

Iqbal Narain and Mohan Lal in their "Coalitional Politics, National Building and Administration: From Myths to Reality"¹¹⁸ while referring to Rajni Kothari's work on the

intra-Congress party coalition-making in our country express that their work would be on inter-party coalitional politics in India rather than on intra-party coalition.¹¹⁹ The various aspects of intra-party and inter-party coalition have already been discussed in Section 4 above. Here we propose to give a brief outline of the several patterns of coalition politics from the writings of Narain and Lal.

The first pattern refers to an electoral alliance-turned governmental coalition. This has been the pattern that we witness in the case of State Elections ever since 1967. In this pattern there is a pre-poll alliance which alliance when achieving a majority formed itself into a coalition government. The cases of Kerala in 1967 and 1970; Orissa in 1967, Punjab in 1970; and West Bengal in 1969 elections may be cited as examples of such a pattern of electoral alliances turned government coalitions.¹²⁰

The other pattern is the one in which there is no pre-poll alliance, but after the elections, there is an arrangement among the different counterparts to forge ahead for forming a coalition government. This happened after the Fourth General Elections in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.¹²¹

The third pattern of coalition is the case of an ideologically homogeneous governmental coalition like the Janata Congress-Swatantra coalition in Orissa.¹²²

The next pattern unlike the ideologically homogenous coalition is the kind of coalition with the ideologically heterogeneous elements as in the case of Samyukta Vidhayak Dal governments in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.¹²³

Fifthly, there is the coalition as among the Leftists of West Bengal.¹²⁴ The United Front of West Bengal with pre-poll arrangements and the formation of a coalition government has been experimenting with coalitional politics quite successfully for almost three decades now.

As compared to the Leftists, we also have coalition politics among the Rightists. Orissa and Punjab have given us the examples of such coalitions in the forms of

the Janata Congress-Swatantra coalition in Orissa and the Akali Dal-Jan Sangh coalition in Punjab.¹²⁵

The last of the patterns given by Narain and Lal is the coalition between the Leftists and the Rightists which is called the Centrist governmental coalition. Such a coalition may be found in Uttar Pradesh where at one time the Congress (O) and the Congress (R) joined hands together in forming the government or at another time between the Bharatiya Kranti Dal and the Congress (R).¹²⁶

The list of patterns of coalition is in fact not exhaustive. The contributors themselves have admitted that: "we are still travelling on the road to coalition making and there are several patterns of coalitional politics in the country."¹²⁷ Indeed, there is "need of empirical enquiry into the dynamics of coalitional politics to replace normative myths with realistic formulations in regard to the efficacy of coalitional experiments in India."¹²⁸

That is one reason why some other writers like Mahendra Prasad talks of levels of coalition-building instead of patterns of coalition.¹²⁹ According to Prasad there are four such levels in which some of these levels of coalition overlap with the patterns of coalition discussed above. The first level of coalition is called the "Electoral Coalition" in which "a Front" is "formed prior to the election" as in the case of the Janata Coalition and the National Front Coalition.¹³⁰ The second level of coalition is the "Legislative Coalition" which is "a Front between two sets of parties, one forming the government (by one or more parties), and the other extending legislative support to it without joining the Cabinet," like the United Front Government at the Centre and the early part of the P.V. Narasimha Rao government.¹³¹

Thirdly, there is the "Executive Coalition" when a group of parties formed a coalition government like the Janata government or the United Front government at the Centre.¹³² The fourth and the last level of coalition-building is the "Federal Coalition" when the same political parties are simultaneously forming a coalition both at the national and State levels as during the Janata regime.¹³³ Thus, in this classification, there is a subtle

difference between the Executive and Legislative coalitions. As Kaare Strom commented: "Minority governments violate the expectation that executive and legislative coalitions are identical."¹³⁴

Unlike Narain and Lal, and Prasad, who write about patterns and levels of coalitions, O.P. Minocha discusses about the type of coalitions which are similar to levels of coalitions.¹³⁵ According to him there are three types or levels of coalitions-parliamentary, electoral and governmental. A parliamentary coalition takes place when there is a minority government supported by different political parties or with an arrangement with these parties for support from outside. It may also happen that a minority government survives because of the tactical reasons adopted by opposition parties. Sometimes, such a minority government is also known as a government by "jumping majorities".¹³⁶ Whatever may be the name either a minority government or a government by jumping majorities such a government falls under the category of a parliamentary coalition.

The electoral coalition of Minocha is the pre-poll alliance or a coalition in which two or more parties have mutual co-operation during the electoral battle. It may take the form of not setting up candidates excepting the party having a chance to win. There may also be mutual withdrawal of candidates from different constituencies to avoid splitting of votes. This type of coalition is known as an electoral coalition.

In the governmental coalition other types or sub-types of coalitions may be noted. There is governmental coalition in the form of a National Government where most, if not all, of the parties join together to meet a national emergency arising out of war or economic crisis. This type of coalition does not generally take place during peace time conditions. The other type of governmental coalition which may be called a "responsive coalition" is the fusion of political parties in the government arising out of contemporary national issues. We have yet to have a perfect example of such a coalition. The Janata

Government is the nearest example of this type of coalition.¹³⁷

The common type of governmental coalition in India is the "power-sharing coalition" where two or more political parties who can not each gain a majority combine to form a majority government. The National Front Government, the United Front Government, and the present BJP-led coalition government at the Centre are examples of power-sharing coalition who continue to compete electorally with coalition partners while they are in the same government.¹³⁸

Thus, in post-independence India, excepting the coalition in the form of a National Government, we have the examples of almost every other pattern, level or type of coalition discussed above or in the words of Blackwell, "kinds of coalition governments" whether at the national or State levels. During the post Twelfth General Elections to the Indian Lok Sabha in 1998 there were indications that a national government may be formed in view of the fact that none of the major national parties could form a government on its own. There were doubts also that any coalition government, be it the BJP-led, Congress-led or United Front-led coalition government would be able to provide a stable government. However, the idea of a national coalition government does not seem to be acceptable to the political parties during the period of peaceful conditions in the country.

In the foregoing paragraphs we have discussed about the various patterns, levels, types and kinds of coalition politics and governments. We have also cited examples from the Indian experience both at the national and State levels. But we have yet to have a more detailed literature on the coalition politics and governments in North-East India. While discussing about the coalition politics and governments in North-East India in the Second and Third Lectures in this series, we propose to simultaneously analyse the processes of coalition-making and coalition-breaking in the region bearing in mind the above patterns, levels and types of coalitions. But it is very significant to note at this juncture that while we may

give any of the above labels to any coalition in North-East India, the fact remains that by and large, coalitions in North-East India during the British period were quite different from the coalitions in the post-independence period. We shall give a more detailed discussion when we pass on to the respective Lectures on coalition politics in North-East India.

SECTION 7: SUMMING UP

After discussing the various aspects of coalition politics, Nikhil Chakravarty, comments that in the case of India, "there is not a ghost of a chance to go in for one party rule. Coalition politics has just become inescapable".¹³⁹ It is also very interesting to note the observations made by Rajni Kothari on the 1998 Lok Sabha Elections. In his "Messages in Ballots" he says that: "The era of coalitions had arrived but the parties and the groups that were coalescing were unable to provide a credible and stable framework of governance".¹⁴⁰ More than that there has been a change in the coalition politics at the national level due to the fact that: "There had taken place a growing regionalization of politics".¹⁴¹

This regionalisation of politics brings about a change in the coalition politics of India. As Kothari has rightly remarked: "The coalitional model was still operating but now as a more moderating force than before, one in which large national parties were being forced to accept the need for alliances and accommodations with a variety of both old and new parties and individuals. And above all with regional parties whom they were earlier prone to brush aside".¹⁴² According to him, the net result of the 1998 Lok Sabha Elections "was that whereas national politics was moving toward a coalitional model, at the State level it was moving away from it and towards some kind of a two party model" excepting the States of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.¹⁴³ Thus, the present Indian coalition framework has forced both "the Hindutva framework of BJP" and "the dynastic framework of the Congress" towards moderate position because of the new

political compulsions of carrying various allies with them. This moderating force also keeps "the Congress from total collapse" and "the BJP from its earlier extremist stance".¹⁴⁴

The question now is whether the coalition framework in the context of Indian politics is good or bad for the country. It is indeed a very difficult question with no definite answer to it. At one extreme, there is always "the pride about majority governments" and at the other extreme, "the prejudice against coalitional politics".¹⁴⁵ The balanced view, however, seems to have been the argument that, "it should not be taken for granted that, coalitional governments, whatever their type and stage of growth, are *per se* dysfunctional to nation-building and effective administration, all the more because we are still travelling on the way to coalition making and there are several patterns of coalitional politics in the country".¹⁴⁶ Hence, the question is not that "coalitional governments are superior to majority governments or vice-versa".¹⁴⁷ What is to be done instead is to have an "empirical enquiry into the dynamics of coalitional politics to replace normative myths with realistic formulations in regard to the efficiency of coalitional experiments in India".¹⁴⁸ Till then we should not come to any conclusion whether coalitional politics is good or bad, and that "coalitional politics and political development go ill together"¹⁴⁹

The problem faced by coalition politics and governments in India is mainly on the issue of their stability. The observations made by A.R. Desai in 1975 are still relevant today. He says that: "with the prospect of coalition ministries . . . the bourgeois parliamentary government will confront an epoch of tremendous instability".¹⁵⁰ The second issue raised by Desai is on the efficacy of the common minimum programmes of coalition ministries. Today, apart from the common minimum programmes, coalition partners are also talking about the national agenda. Whatever the term used by coalition partners, the fact remains that they continue to get the members involved in competitive politics.

Such being the present political situation it is very difficult to expect the parties to bring about a stable coalition on the basis of mere common minimum programmes on national agenda. That is why Desai raises his doubts on the effectiveness of such attempts. He also goes on to say that: "Efforts are being made to discover whether a stable democratic government based on a common programme of political action and founded on principled alliances of parties with similar perspectives and programmes could evolve or not."¹⁵¹ Our Indian experience tells us that we still keep our finger crossed when it comes to the question of stability of a coalition politics or government in the country.

Assuming that we have a sound common minimum programme or national agenda it is not guaranteed that we would have successful governments. It all depends on the nature and character of each coalition. We may not be able to generalise that each and every coalition would be successful. Even a one-party government sometimes proves to be a failure due to intra-party coalition. And the rate of failures in inter-party coalition would be much more as borne out by experiences in our country and elsewhere. This is perhaps due to the fact that the one-party government like the Congress Party has been regarded as the "Great Tradition" while the non-Congress coalitions are regarded as "Little Traditions".¹⁵² Besides these two traditions have also followed two different theories in explaining the relationship between society and polity. The Great traditions tend to follow the "instrumentalist" theory of the Centrists and the Leftists while the Little Traditions are Rightists in nature and follow the "primordialist" theory.¹⁵³

J.S. Bali in his "The New Coalition Experiment: India Metamorphosis"¹⁵⁴ has referred to the examples of such failures in France and Italy. He cited the findings of Geffory Sack, the Washington economist, on the experience of coalition governments. According to Sack, "a coalition of two or three parties on a fixed agreed programme has been a resounding success in Germany and to a certain extent in France"¹⁵⁵ The rate of failures are

very high where a coalition is formed by "more than six or seven parties" and such a coalition "has led to instability, lack of economic progress, etc".¹⁵⁶ Because of the existence of innumerable parties in the French and Italian coalitions there have been many coalition governments within a short span of time. For example, Italy has seen 55 coalition governments in 50 years and in France the average life span of coalition governments would be about nine months.¹⁵⁷ Desai has very neatly summed up about the success of any coalition government when he says: "The success of the coalition governments depends upon the nature and character of parties, which form alliances for forming such governments."¹⁵⁸

In India too we have had many coalitions both at the Centre and in the States. At the national level there are twelve coalitions ever since independence including the Interim Government; one one-party majority coalition (Janata); four one-party minority coalitions (Indira Gandhi's government during the Congress split as well as in the latter part of the government, P.V. Narasimha Rao's government during the early part, and the BJP 13-day coalition); six multi-party minority coalitions (three National Fronts, two United Fronts and the BJP—led coalition of 18 parties). Here, it is not possible to give the whole list of coalitions in the States as there are too many of them. All the same, when one examines the tenure of these coalitions, the longest would be about 2½ years as in the case of the Janata coalition. In most cases they are less than a year. Mahendra Prasad while studying the tenure of these coalitions refers to what has been opined in Blackwell's *Encyclopaedia of Political Institutions* (1987) that: "Recent studies have shown considerable variation in durability between different kinds of coalition governments. Minimal winning coalitions exhibit substantially greater stability than minority coalitions and oversized governments, and can prove as stable as single party governments".¹⁵⁹

Whether the coalition is good or bad, stable or unstable, there is definitely a certain amount of stress and

strain in a coalition government compared to a one-party government. To reduce such stresses and strains it is incumbent upon the coalition partners to make necessary adjustments and compromises. The leading article on "Coalition Politics under Strain" has rightly pointed out that "coalition politics and the running of a coalition government require delicate adjustments and compromises".¹⁶⁰

These adjustments and compromises are usually in the form of mutual co-operation if the coalition is to become successful. Riker has already hinted that such "Co-operation will benefit the players".¹⁶¹ In case such co-operation is not forth-coming the game is called "inessential" in which the players are still trying "to form coalitions and act through these in order to secure their advantage".¹⁶² The inessential game suggests that there are different patterns, levels, types, or kinds of coalitions. "Different coalitions", says Riker "may have different strength".¹⁶³ But the only successful coalition is a winning coalition. The prescription for such a coalition is that: "A winning coalition will have to divide its proceeds among its members, and each member must be satisfied with the division in order that a stable solution obtains".¹⁶⁴

In the Indian context we do also need such a winning coalition through co-operation, adjustments and compromises. Our political analysts have fully grasped about the need for a stable and successful coalition in view of the fact that we can no longer avoid the era of coalition. Balraj Mehta in his "Coalition Politics: Meaningful and Responsive" has commented that: "The conflict of interest in the economy and society, can not be contained under a flimsy political-power sharing arrangement . . . It is time for political alignment to the policy rather than personality based. This is the only basis for coalition politics to become meaningful and responsive to the will and aspiration of the people".¹⁶⁵ Another leading article on "Party Alignment Sans Ideology" also expresses the same sentiment when it says: "The need is for a coalition of parties committed to pro-people socio-economic

development and preservation and strengthening of the sovereign status of India in the World Order".¹⁶⁶

At the same time there are indications already about the alarming political situation in the country when coalition governments can not run the governance of the nation and the States. But inspite of this pessimistic outlook on the present political instability in the country there are also optimistic options about the stability of coalition governments in the absence of an alternative one-party government. Writing on "Coalition Governments: Perspective from Culture History", S.C. Malik has pointed out that throughout our Indian civilisation we have the experiences of successful coalitions. He says that "the formation of explicit governments either at the Centre or in the States seems to indicate instability. Similar alarmist opinions are expressed when coalition governments were formed in the States from 1967 onwards. But have we thought that perhaps we ought to give this system a chance since it may well suit over socio-cultural system? A true final policy for the Indian civilization is this".¹⁶⁷

Malik further contends that the current political situation is in fact following the pattern of political behaviour that we have inherited from our own history. He confirms his observation by referring to historical events taking place in our country. He says: "different groups have learnt to reconcile and coalesce its functional groups or form associations historically, alliances and counter-alliances at the political level, based on multi-caste or multi-group associations have also been a common feature. These have been formed successfully through the skill of negotiations Co-existence, the middle path, moderation, consensus and coalition have been the behavioural patterns".¹⁶⁸

All the above summary is only to indicate that whether one likes it or not we have to contend ourselves with the present era of coalition in India. What is needed is only the institutionalisation of coalition as among some European nations. The present writer in his "Party Government is a vital principle of a Representative Government" has opined that: "It is now quite clear that in the

case of India both national fragmentation and regionalism have brought about an era of coalitional politics at the Centre and in some States. But . . . this regionalisation of national level politics with its coalitional politics may not at all bring about political stability as among many European countries".¹⁶⁹ He further states that: "In European countries, their cultural systems provide proportional representation and thereby institutionalised coalitional politics. Such kind of coalitional politics are quite stable because there are stable regional political parties with distinct social bases and clear stable political programmes. There is a clear division of Right and Left programmes and ideology from which a clear choice can be made".¹⁷⁰

The role of bureaucracy in coalition government and politics has also been highlighted. Comparing the Indian experience with the European practices he is of the view that: "This is not so in the present context in our country. Coalitional politics here is in a fluid state as yet. In addition, the bureaucracy in European democracies have been to further cement the administrative foundation and thereby strengthening the stability of governmental programmes in a coalitional government as in France and Italy. But in India, in the changing political scenario, the bureaucracy has yet to be tested and may instead be another source of political instability due to regional influences and loyalties".¹⁷¹ Hence, while commenting on the 1996 Lok Sabha Elections he is of the opinion that: "Coalitional politics in India after 1996 elections based mainly on regionalism may not, therefore, be a mechanism for bringing order and stability at least in the near future".¹⁷²

Today after witnessing the 1998 Lok Sabha Elections and some State Assembly Elections the present writer has not changed his view. He is convinced that perhaps we have learnt very little from our experiments with coalition politics in the country. Whatever knowledge our political leaders have gained through coalition politics is mainly for coalition-making and coalition-breaking. We have yet to gain the knowledge of coalition-management

for the purpose of a sustainable and stable coalition. Perhaps Alfred Tennyson in his poem "Locksley Hall" (1837-38) in a different context had already foreseen our present political conditions. He writes: "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore, And the individual withers, and the world is more and more".¹⁷³

North-East India is no exception to the points raised in the above summary. The region has been experiencing coalition politics and governments for a very long time. It is not merely the product of post-independence era nor of the post-1967 State or regional coalitions in the country. Historically, coalition-making and coalition-breaking has been the usual behavioural pattern of the various communities of North East India both in war and politics. In the following two Lectures while bearing in mind the above theoretical considerations, we propose to discuss about coalition politics in North-East India. The Second Lecture will pay a special attention to coalition politics in the region during the British period. When we use the term North East India during that period we refer essentially to coalition politics in Assam which covered all the territories of the existing States barring the Native States of Khasi Hills, Manipur and Tripura; and the Frontier Tracts, and Controlled and Unadministered Areas. In the Third Lecture, we will cover the coalition politics in the seven States of the region ever since India's independence.