

Chapter III

The Fragmentation of the Indian Party System Since 1957

The Indian Party System provides a framework where multiple political parties coexist for a single nation. This multiplicity of political parties offered a vast array of choices to the Indian population who have exercised their universal suffrage in such a pattern that it has made the Indian Party System messy in nature. The multi-ethnic characters of the Indian society have provided impetus to the process of proliferation of political parties. The availability of countless options to vote for has made the Indian Party System highly disarrayed in nature. The Indian party system as it exhibits is multiparty in nature since its origin, although the Indian Party System kept reconfiguring structurally with every election. As discernible it was never uniform and defined in character and became more fragmented with each election. Since its inception it showed some signs of uniformity and solidarity at both the levels but with each successive election it lost its cohesion and stability. With the 1951 state election Congress won a majority of seats in all the states except in Travancore, Cochin and Madras where it failed to secure absolute majority (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). With the 1954 assembly polls Congress again failed to win absolute majority in Travancore-Cochin. Jammu and Kashmir was under the rule of National Conference Party which bagged 70 out of the 75 contested seats since its first assembly polls in 1962 since independence. In 1957 Kerala voted for a non-Congress alternative with its first assembly polls. With the 1960 assembly polls, Congress Party formed a government in coalition with Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Muslim League (MUL). Nagaland too had a non-Congress government headed by Naga National Organization (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). However, since 1967 general election and state assembly elections the party system lost its uniformity and became intensely fragmented and since 1989 Lok Sabha election and the subsequent assembly polls the trend became more acute, i.e.; the party system became multiple and more multi-party in nature and continued to remain inconsistent at both the levels.

E.Sridharan (2002, 2011) has discussed about the process of the fragmentation of the Indian party system in his article “*The Fragmentation of the Indian Party system*” and has explained the entire phenomenon by classifying into various phases from

1952 onwards. Although he has not dealt in detail the factors that perpetuated the process of the fragmentation of the Indian party system. Balveer Arora (2002) as well has strongly argued in his article *“Political Parties and the Party System: The Emergence of New Coalitions”* that emergence of state-based parties had actually accentuated the process of the fragmentation of the Indian party system. Although there are numerous other factors which has contributed towards the process of fragmentation of the party system and rise of multiple state party system and heterogeneous composition of the union government. Balveer Arora (2003) in his article *“Federalization of India’s Party system”* has emphatically pointed towards the trend of bifurcation of the Indian party system into national level party system and state party systems. Through his concept of federalization he has emphasized upon the phenomenon of the fragmentation of the Indian party system. His writing solely highlighted the role of state-based parties in facilitating the process of fragmentation and has not taken into account the various other factors that have extensively contributed towards the process of bifurcation of the Indian party system which has stabilized the process of fragmentation of the party system. The Indian party system has always been in a state of flux. The party system is said to have evolved from a competitive multi-party system with Congress predominance as a majority party to a coalition system, from a period of social and ideological cohesive coalitions to factionalism and hence fragmentation, from stability to fluctuations and instability. Hence, the chapter tries to portray how the party system of a country stands fragmented in nature by getting bifurcated into national and state level with the focus on the electoral trajectory of the political parties and their evolution in the party system with the Lok sabha elections and the numerous assembly polls. There is no uniformity in the nature and composition of the party system at the national level; neither does all the state possess a uniform and homogeneous party system. It is then followed by a discussion on some of the important features of the vibrant Indian party system. The chapter will also discuss the political reasons for the fragmentation of the party system at both the levels. It also contains discussion about the most significant reasons for rise of BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the regional parties at both the levels of the Indian party system. The chapter will also discuss about how time and again Congress has tried to resurrect its position in the party system since 1998. Attempt has been made to show how with each successive assembly polls each state have voted incoherently thereby bestowing each state with a different state party

system that produced a fragmented¹ picture of the Indian party system as a whole by using electoral verdicts which best expresses the spirit of democracy. Anindya Saha (1999) stated that principle of federalism, the electoral law and politics based on social cleavage has contributed towards the process of fragmentation of the Indian party system. Balveer Arora (2002) has further stated that growth of state specific interests and subsequently the growth of state based parties has led to fragmentation of the Indian party system. E. Sridharan (2002 & 2011) has provided seven explanations that explain fragmentation of the Indian party system. According to Sridharan, reasons like delinking between parliamentary and state assembly elections, growing politicization of social cleavages, growth of political consciousness, mobilization of new classes, growing centralization within the Congress Party, growing politicization of communal and caste cleavages since 1990s, the systematic properties of the FPTP electoral system have contributed towards the fragmentation of the Indian party system. However, the scattered voting pattern of the Indian electorates has also contributed towards the fragmentation of the Indian party system. Lack of any strong allegiance to any particular political party and the rising aspirations of the common masses for a better tomorrow led to a scattered electoral verdict by the electorates. The electorates had at their disposal a large number of political parties at any given time (during national and state level elections). They tend to choose the best option that can maximize their benefits which they can extract from the policies and programmes offered in the form of manifestoes. As this choices increases the electoral verdicts gets scattered and contributes towards the fragmentation of the Indian party system.

¹ By the term fragmentation I refer to the disintegrated composition of the Indian party system which stands bifurcated into two levels-the national party system and the state party systems. Each state vote distinctively keeping in view numerous considerations ranging from caste affiliations, tribe, community, religion, language, and most significantly socio-economic development policies and visions which would ensure social, political and economic upward mobility unleashed by the contending political parties competing to come to power. The Indian Party System is so fragmented in nature that it gives an impression that amidst unity, India stands divided with multiple state party systems where one is so dissimilar from the other. A single country producing such a diversified party system that stands bifurcated into two levels, the government that are formed in these levels have complex composition or at times are singularly formed with absolute majority and is marked by not only coalitions but also by new formations, mergers, breakup, splits and absorption.

Features of the Indian Party System

The Indian party system has made a long journey from Congress predominated system to a coalitional era for several decades.² At this juncture it becomes pertinent to talk about some of the glaring features of the vibrant Indian party system as it exists today.

Firstly, India has a competitive multi-party system with numerous political parties contending for power to rule. The state level party system is characterized by a blending of bipolarity and multipolarity contest for power. The Indian party system has no defined nature or structure and stands bifurcated between national and state level party systems. Several state-based and regional parties play significant roles, sometime as coalition partners and sometime as independent power. Secondly, the chief feature of the party system has been fragmentation. Thirdly, politics based on social welfare programmes or on 'populism' been another unconventional feature of the party system. Politics now is more pragmatic than ideological. Fourthly, fronts and alliance building has remained a common phenomenon and has weakened the party system. The political parties in several instances stands largely deviated from the role which they should perform and hence have failed to earn compliance from the masses. Hence, people tend to vote inconsistently for varied options offered by the vast menu of choices provided by the Indian Party System. Fourthly, coalitional politics had become a very significant phenomenon and has remained as an unchanged phenomenon. This has, in fact, stabilized the multi-party system. Lot many coalitional partners were state-based or regional parties who had helped to form governments at the centre and this has lead to federalization of the party system. However with the recently concluded Lok Sabha and assembly elections the electorates have voted in favour of political parties with absolute majorities. BJP acquired power and came to form the government at the national level with absolute majorities. This has rendered some stability to the national level party system and has done away with compromises, bargains, persuasions and dissensions that can be

² The ninth general election of 1989 produced a 'hung' parliament when not a single political party was able to secure absolute majority in the parliament. It was then when a conglomeration of seven parties under the name of National Front government came to power. However, the 2014 Lok Sabha election has rendered some stability to the party system at the national level with the rise of BJP as the 'majority party' which was able to cross the half-way mark on its own after almost after two decades. However, the trend of fragmentation of the Indian party system as a whole still continues as numerous states with the recent assembly polls have given verdict in favour of non-BJP parties.

designated as some of the messy features of the coalitional form of government. Similarly states like Tamil Nadu and West Bengal too have voted in favour of AIADMK and TMC respectively and bestowed them with absolute majorities. Fifthly, oppositions are no more ‘parties of pressure’. They have acquired a robust role in the political system and leave no leaf unturned to criticize and uphold the drawbacks of the ruling government and make every possible attempt through campaign and populist policies to come power. Regionalism, growth of sub-regional parties and rise in political mobilization on the basis of ethnic identities has become characteristics of the party system. Sixthly, issues like ethnicity, nationalism, right of self-determination keeps moulding the process of Indian politics and subsequently affecting the party system.³ This led to the growth of serious disruptive tendencies and mushrooming of parties and groups, which has lead to realignments and reconfiguration of the party system. Seventhly, Factionalism and splintering of parties (mostly at the state level) has been an important feature of the party system. This results in qualitative and quantitative changes in the party system. Presently what has emerged is a fragmented competitive multi-party system with multi-dimensional polarization in the structure of political competition for power.

Some prominent reasons for the bifurcation of the Indian Party System

With the decline of “one party pre-dominated system” in the Indian politics or with the demise of the Indian National Congress (INC) as the “majority party”, the Indian party system has become bifurcated between a national level party system and state level party systems, more particularly since 1967. The current situation is characterized by the multiplicity of parties which continues to grow. Decline of mediated politics and dissidents within the Congress party was the prime reason behind the frequent realignment and reconfiguration of the Indian party system. The general decline of public faith upon ruling government and erosion of loyalty of the people towards the veteran Congress Party can be considered as the other reason for the frequent realignment and reconfiguration of the party system. The mismatch between proclamations of policies and populist programmes and the actual

³ The demand for separate statehood has been the result of this and these demands have tend to affect the state politics at large.

performance and accomplishments of the government has gradually become a serious reason for the frequent realignment and reconfiguration the Indian party system.

Corruption has been rejected repeatedly by the masses but the government in power easily became a prey to it and taints its public image, so people fail to repose faith in the parties which lead to downfall of government and the rise of another power thereby making the party system largely volatile in nature. It can be discerned that coalition politics has remain an inevitable phenomenon of the Indian political system, both at the centre and in the state level. The only difference being that the party which had reservation towards had been the creator of it. The Indian National Congress from 2004 till 2014 had been the leading partner of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government at the centre.

The Fragmentation of Indian Party System: Some Specific Reasons

It was only since 2004 general election that the Indian National Congress (INC) was able to revive its lost grounds and its position in the Indian party system which remained in disarray since 1967. Since 1989 its position relegated in the party system which enabled few developments such as rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)⁴ and the soaring assertiveness and importance of the regional parties at both the levels of the Indian party system and unprecedented rise in the formation of alliances and fronts.

Rise of regional political outfits have time and again thwarted the electoral fortunes of INC⁵. Anti-Congressism has facilitated the growth of alternatives in the party system and this development led to transformation and reconfiguration in the party system. 1967 is a hall mark year that started producing serious changes in the Indian party system that also saw bifurcation between the central and state level party system because with the fourth general election and assembly polls it was seen that nine states had non-congress governments, each different from the other in respect of ideology, nature and character. Hence it can be said the party system became

⁴ BJP since its inception in 1980 has made its biggest achievement in the Indian party system by emerging as the ruling party at the national level by bagging absolute majority of seats and it has now replaced INC as the 'majority party' in the Indian party system.

⁵ The process of emergence of alternative political party that could replace the "Majority party", i.e.; the Congress party began in 1967 in several states of India and a similar second round of emergence of the state parties began since the 1980s.

fragmented in nature since 1967. Growing mobilization based on the line of identity and state-specific interest, distorted policies of over centralization by the Congress party and the then Congress-led central government, the insensitivity of the then Congress-led government towards the needs of the units (states) of a diversified country like India, uneven economic development after independence that led to regional disparity, growth of new classes in a multi-identity society like India, birth of new aspirants for political power due to circulation of political elites from lower to higher levels, growth of regionalism in lesser developed areas to combat the truncated economic, agricultural, industrial and growth policies of the then Congress-led central government⁶ are some of the reasons that facilitated the growth of regional parties. These developments contributed towards the fragmentation of the party system by producing 'alternatives' to the Congress party which since independence had occupied the position of the 'majority party' in the Indian party system. States like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras and Kerala produced non-congress governments. The Indian National Congress headed the central government with the 1967 Lok Sabha election. In fact, lot many states like Maharashtra, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Tripura had Congress-ruled governments.

Thus it is pretty well discernible that the Indian party system stood bifurcated at two levels- centre and states. The state level party systems had remained under the rule of various political hues although Congress continued to rule with some drop in its share of votes and seats at the centre and in some states⁷. According to my opinion, due to the absence of affinity or irreconcilability between the primordial ethnic affiliations and the feeling of nationality in a diversified and heterogeneous country like India coupled with the inefficiency of the then Congress- ruled government at the centre to assimilate the two are the most important factors that acted as a catalyst towards the fragmentation of the society that is characterized by diversified language, religion,

⁶ See Sudha Pai, "*Regional Parties and the Emerging Pattern of Politics in India*", The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 51, No. 3 (July - Sept. 1990) (pp. 393-415).

⁷ This period was marked with grave discontent towards the congress-ruled central government because of economic crisis, repeated failure of monsoons, widespread drought, decline in agricultural production, serious food shortage, rise in price of essential commodities, growing unemployment, bandhs and hartals, depletion of foreign exchange reserves, devaluation of Indian rupee, lack of agrarian strategy for development of agricultural sector, rate of savings dropped drastically instead of increasing, non-implementation of community development programmes and land reform measures, rise in rural poverty.

caste, community, etc. Hence this led to rise of apathy towards the ruling government or anti-Congressism in the country that further contributed towards the bifurcation between the two levels of party system and subsequently led to the fragmentation of the Indian party system and emergence of multiple state party systems.

The Pattern of Fragmentation of the Indian Party System

Signs of fragmentation of the Indian Party System emerged very prominently with the rise of discontent in the state of Tamil Nadu (Madras was renamed as Tamil Nadu). Two events led to such reconfiguration in the structure of the Indian party system. It was when in 1964 after the death of Nehru, Gulzarilal Nanda as Home Minister asked to report all other Union Ministers about the progress of usage of Hindi as official language among the non-Hindi speaking states. It was then a serious violence broke out in the state of Tamil Nadu. The Tamils took this as serious assault on their ethnic identity despite of assurance from the Nehru government that no forceful imposition for adopting Hindi as official language of a state will be made on the non- Hindi speaking states. As soon as the directive was issued the state got engulfed in massive demonstrations, riots, and self immolations by students and agitators. Anti-Hindi campaign was organised throughout the state. Police had to resort to firing to curb the agitators. This made Congress party unpopular in the state and at its expense the Dravida Munnetra Party (DMK)⁸ came up to fill the vacuum (Kohli, 2009, pp. 53-56). Moreover, the issue of food crisis⁹ due to drought during the period of 1965-1966 also jeopardized the position of the Congress party in the state. In Madras (now Tamil Nadu) the DMK, the state-based party, came to power in the state with absolute majority. Congress was just wiped out of the state's political scenario. In the State Election to the Legislative Assembly of Madras, 1967, DMK bagged 137 seats out of

⁸ DMK (and AIADMK) are regional parties of Tamil Nadu and both have sprung from the Dravidian movement of the forties. DMK was founded by Annadurai in 1949. Both are ethnic parties and have committed themselves in reviving Tamil language and culture. DMKs are socialistic in nature and attract the poor and the downtrodden as their base for political support with its populist and socialistic measures like grant of subsidies to farmers, removal of land ceilings, mid-day meals, old age pension, etc. in the era when the country was passing through serious economic challenges and social transformations.

⁹ DMK pledged to provide rice at Re. 1 per kg. if voted to power as well as promised to preserve English as the official language and ensure more autonomy for the state in the wake of over centralization drive by Indira Gandhi government.

174 seats with 40.69 percent of votes and 54.32 percent of seats whereas INC could manage just 51 seats out of the 232 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

DMK became popular with its anti-Hindi, anti-North and pro-Tamil campaigns in the state. Since then DMK had remained a significant component of the state politics. Similarly eight other states also witnessed similar developments, coalition governments¹⁰ consisting of different non-Congress parties were formed in these states. The wave of anti-Congressism actually facilitated the process of fragmentation of the Indian party system. The sole aim of all the anti-congress parties to keep the Congress away from the helm of power resulted in formation of such coalitions or non-congress governments under the name of Samyukt Vidhayak Dal (SVD). West Bengal too witnessed a similar phenomenon. The strategy of unity of opposition for dislodging Congress paid off. A United Front of the entire major non- Congress parties in West Bengal was forged that came to power with the 1969 assembly polls. Orissa too had a non-Congress government because Congress could not muster the required majority in the assembly polls. Jana Congress allied with Swatantra party to oust the Congress from the helm of power in the state. Bihar too had a SVD government. Kerala too voted for a non-Congress government in the state. Congress was reduced to an opposition party in the legislature because it did not win even one-tenth of the seats in the assembly. Out of the 133 seats in the assembly Congress could secure only 9 seats and United Front and its allies was graced with 117 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Economic crisis, food scarcity, rising prices of essential commodities such as rice maligned the electoral fortune of the Congress government in the state of Kerala. Small landowners deserted Congress because of the agrarian strategy that was adopted by INC had uneven consequences for the large section of the peasantry. Moreover, they desired to have 'stable government' and were distressed with such quick succession of Ministries and President's rule in the state in the previous years. Therefore, they opted for an 'alternative' in the form of United Front ministry which promised to provide 'basic changes' and 'stable government' in their manifesto. In the state of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh defection (by its own members) kept Congress out of power. So it can be fairly concluded that the states were having their own system and the party system as a whole exhibited a

¹⁰ In the bid to keep the Congress party out of power all the non-congress parties united under one banner and formed in most instances ideologically incongruent government giving rise to the trend of forming coalitions at the state level since 1967.

fragmented character. Although the central party system remained consistent as a competitive multi-party system with Congress predominance as a majority party but the states started to possess their own party systems.

Congress slipped into crisis with its split in 1969. However, socialism or the slogan of '*Garibi hatao*' (remove poverty) and certain pro-poor strategies saved Congress from absolute decline in the centre with the next general election of 1971. INC secured 352 seats out of 441 seats (79.82 percent of seats) polling 43.68 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Her party swept all the assembly polls post 1971 general election. However, the fragmented nature of the party system persisted. The State of Tamil Nadu consecutively voted for a non-Congress alternative, namely, the Dravida Munnetra Party (DMK). It occupied the state helm with the 1971 assembly election by securing 184 seats out of the 203 seats that it had contested for. Indian National Congress (Organisation) could bag just 15 seats of the 201 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

The assembly polls following the 1977 general election also created a messy picture of the Indian party system. The party system remained fragmented and what emerged were multiple state party systems. In Tamil Nadu, it was the DMK which left its mark with 48 seats out of the 230 seats, polling 24.89 percent of votes whereas the Janata Party could win just 10 seats and INC could win just 27 seats only. In West Bengal, the CPI (M) could win the state Assembly election with 178 seats out of 224 seats with 35.46 percent of votes. Janata Party and the INC could manage to get just 29 seats and 20 seats respectively (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The Janata Party emerged victorious in the state of Uttar Pradesh with 352 seats polling 47.76 percent of votes, whereas INC could secure just 47 seats out of the 395 seats that it had contested for polling 31.94 percent of votes. The Janata Party even managed to capture the state of Bihar by occupying 214 seats out of the 311 seats that it had contested for polling 42.68 percent of votes. However, INC could secure just 57 seats out of the 286 seats, polling 23.58 percent of votes. The Janata Party could even manage to win in the State of Rajasthan by winning 152 seats with 50.39 percent of votes. INC could manage to win just 41 seats out of the 186 seats that it had contested for with 31.49 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

Janata Party even swept the Assembly Elections to the State of Madhya Pradesh by securing 230 seats out of the 319 seats with 47.28 percent of votes. The INC could

bag just 84 seats out of the 320 seats, polling 35.88 percent of votes. In the State of Orissa, the Janata Party won 110 seats out of the 147 seats with 49.17 percent of votes. Whereas INC could win just 26 seats out of the 146 seats that it had contested for with 31.02 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In the state of Assam, Janata Party swept the polls by winning 53 seats whereas INC could secure just 26 seats and INC (I) 26 seats. In Delhi, too Janata Party emerged victorious by winning 46 of the 56 seats, polling 52.58 percent of votes, whereas the INC could win just 10 seats out of 52 seats that it had contested for (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

However, in the state of Andhra Pradesh it was the INC (I) which emerged victorious with 175 seats out of the 290 seats polling 39.25 percent of votes. The Janata Party could win just 60 seats and INC could manage to get just 30 seats only. In Karnataka, too INC (I) emerged victorious with 149 seats with 44.25 percent of votes. Janata Party could manage to win just 59 seats with 37.95 percent of votes whereas INC could win just 2 seats, polling 7.99 percent of votes. In Kerala, too it was the INC which emerged victorious with 38 seats out of the 54 seats that it had contested for with 20.02 percent of votes. CPI and the CPI (M) could win 23 seats and 17 seats respectively (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence we see a fragmented sketch of the party system where each state was not under the rule of any single political party.

The Congress (I) contested the 1980 Lok Sabha election. Congress (I) of Mrs. Indira Gandhi came back to power at the centre by securing 353 seats out of the 492 seats that it had contested for polling 42.69 percent of votes as compared to the 352 seats and nearly 44 percent of popular votes in 1971. Whereas the Janata Party (JNP) could bag only 31 seats and Janata Party (Secular) could secure just 41 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Congress swept the assembly election in Andhra Pradesh by securing 60 seats whereas JNP could secure just 1 seat. Congress even won in the election to the state legislative Assembly of Bihar by winning 169 seats out of the 311 seats that it had contested for, polling 34.20 percent of votes. JNP drew a blank and BJP could win just 21 seats polling 8.41 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Even in Maharashtra the INC (I) won the state Assembly election by securing 186 seats out of 286 seats with 44.50 percent of votes. In the state of Rajasthan too the INC (I) emerged victorious and won 133 seats polling 42.96 percent of votes. BJP could secure 32 seats with 18.60 percent of votes. The Janata Party (JP) could manage to win just 8 seats and JNP (SC) won 7 seats and JNP (SR) drew a blank. The

Congress was able to win from Uttar Pradesh as well by bagging 309 seats out of 424 seats with 37.65 percent of the popular votes. BJP could win just 11 seats and Janata Party drew a blank (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In West Bengal INC (I) of Mrs. Indira Gandhi could not do enough to maintain its electoral performance. It was the CPI (M) which continued with its dominance in the state with 174 seats and 38.49 percent of popular votes in alliance with other Left parties. Whereas the INC could win just 49 seats polling 35.73 percent of votes. In the state of Tamil Nadu too it was the ADMK which swept the assembly election by securing 129 seats with 38.75 percent of votes. DMK and INC (I) was able to win 37 and 31 seats respectively (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence despite of some traces of consistency in opting for political parties to power, the trend of fragmentation still persisted with West Bengal and Tamil Nadu opting for a different alternative.

In many of the states non-Congress governments came to power. The principle of federalism, as alleged, was getting violated due to the acting of the central government in an authoritarian manner. Gradually, this led to a growing sense of regionalism and demand for separate states gained momentum in many of the states during the period of the 1980s. In the North-East¹¹ such as in Nagaland and Mizoram there was resentment over the rule of Congress and new regional parties came to power. Regional opposition took the form of insurgencies in many of the states such as in Assam and in Punjab. In Punjab the extremist wing of Akali Dal demanded a sovereign state of Khalistan.

In December 1984 the Eighth General elections took place. The mandate went in favour of the Congress (I) and was against all disruptive forces which threatened integrity, peace, unity and progress of the country. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, son of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was elected as the Prime Ministerial candidate on the advice of some senior Congress leaders after Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh guards. Congress (I) won the 1984 election with an overwhelming majority of 404 seats, polling 49.10 percent of votes. BJP¹² could win just 2 seats and Janata Party could bag just 10 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

¹¹ At the time of Independence the entire North- East region except Manipur and Tripura comprised of Assam. The reorganisation of Assam was completed by 1972. Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were carved out of Assam.

¹² BJP was successor of the Janata Party. In 1977 Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was formed by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in 1951, joined number of other parties to form Janata party in 1977 in response to

In the State Assembly Election of 1985 to the state of Arunachal Pradesh the INC emerged victorious with 21 seats polling 43.07 percent of votes. JNP drew a blank. In Assam too the INC emerged victorious with 25 seats and 23.23 percent of the popular votes. JNP and the BJP drew a blank and the CPI (M) could win just two seats. In Bihar the INC could win 196 seats out of 323 seats with 39.30 percent of votes in the State Assembly election of 1985. In Gujarat too it was INC which won in the Assembly election by winning 149 seats out of the 182 seats that it had contested for, polling 55.55 percent of votes. BJP could win just 11 seats and JNP bagged 14 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Uttar Pradesh, the INC was able to retain its base with 269 seats and 39.25 percent of the popular votes. BJP secured only 16 seats and the Janata Party could win just 20 seats. In Rajasthan too the INC was able to perform well and won the assembly polls of 1985. It won 113 seats out of the 199 seats that it had contested for polling 46.57 percent of votes. BJP secured 39 seats and JNP bagged just 10 seats. Even Madhya Pradesh INC did well and secured 48.87 percent of votes with 250 seats. In Maharashtra, INC emerged victorious in the 1985 assembly polls with 43.41 percent of votes and 161 seats out of the 287 seats that it had contested for (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

However, it was seen that in many of the States the Congress was not able to retain its bases thereby ensuring continuity in the trend of fragmentation of the party system. In the 1985 State Assembly Election to the State of Andhra Pradesh it was the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) which had emerged victorious with 202 seats with 46.21 percent of popular votes; INC could secure just 50 seats with 37.25 percent of votes. The CPI and the CPI (M) both secured 11 seats. JNP secured 3 seats and the BJP could win just 8 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).¹³ The drive of over-centralization by Mrs. Indira

the wave of anti-Congressism in the country during the late 1960s. Janata party formed government in the centre and in many states but due to various loopholes it started to lose its appeal among the masses. Eventually in 1980 few members of Janata party broke away to give shape to another party namely Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which in due course of time emerged as the most staunch opponent of the Congress party and even came to head a coalitional government in the centre and formed governments in many states on its own or in alliance with regional parties. See Bruce D. Graham, *The Challenge of Hindu Nationalism: The Bharatiya Janata Party in Contemporary Politics*, pp.155-171. 1987.

¹³ Based on populist themes such as holding up of Telegu nationalism and Telegu pride, selling rice at subsidizes rates, free lunch for school children, removal of capitation fees in school, promising to install a clean corruption free efficient government, restoration of real democracy, protection of the minorities, development of the depressed classes, security to the women and their property rights removal of unemployment, etc. NTR swept the polls and fetched 198 seats alone of the 287 seats and allied with Sanjay Vichar Manch of Maneka Gandhi which contested for five seats. Together it bagged 203 seats polling 46.3 percent of votes. The Congress despite of hectic campaigning bagged just 60

Gandhi and the continuous assault of the autonomy of the state because of the policies of centralization in both party and government matters led to an arousal of dissensions among certain sections of the society. Therefore, the Congress party which continued to occupy the state mantle for more than three decades suffered a nose dive. The attitude of the central leader(s) wounded the self-respect of the Telegus. The Party High Command encouraged factionalism at the state level to keep the state units into disarray so that no one emerges as strong leader and the Congress High Command made the state leaders dance to their tune. To make the matter worse it was seen that the Congress High Command changed Chief Ministers (four times) at its will frequently during 1978-1982 (Suri, 2004, p. 285). These chief ministers were weak and inefficient and could earn their position only because they were loyal to the Gandhi's (Suri, 2004, p.285). The common people revolted against this inefficient administration which became a mere puppet in the hands of the central leader(s). Development became secondary and factionalism disrupted the smooth functioning of the state government as well as the state unit of the Congress party. The state of Andhra Pradesh also witnessed a wave of anti-Congressism. Hence, a vacuum was created which was filled in by Telegu Desam party (TDP). NTR captivated the fancies of the common people with his mythological roles where he mostly played characters of 'saviours' of the common man from evils. NTR was popular among the common masses of Andhra Pradesh because of this affinity with the Telegu film industry where he was very popular as a star and has acted in more than 100 films in numerous roles as god, good king or common man. He portrayed himself as a god who was sent on earth to serve the people of Andhra Pradesh. He played the roles of personality who stood for good and noble things and fought against anything that is bad, mean and corrupt (Narayan, 1983, p. 5). Hence, Telegu Desam Party under the chief ministership of NTR came to power in the state.

In Punjab, too, the Shiromani Akali Dal won 73 seats out of the 100 seats polling 38.01 percent of votes whereas INC could win just 32 seats, JNP managed to get just one seat and BJP won some six seats (<http://www.eci.nic>). With the ascendancy of Indira Gandhi to power she resorted to the drive for over centralization of power. The

seats and 36 percent of votes. However, TDP had to prove its popularity and its mettle in a short span with a mid-term poll of 1985 when the former assembly got dissolved following a coup which was launched by N.Bhaskar Rao supported by Congress (I) for deserting NTR because of his autocratic way of running the party. Bhaskar Rao created Democratic Telegu Desam party after it broke away from TDP in 1984. (Suri, 2004, pp. 289-290).

autonomy of the states as per the constitutional norms became irrelevant as she personalized and nationalized state issues and curbed the powers of the state leaders and initiated central intervention. The political and economic centralizing tendencies of the Indira-led Congress (I) and its highly interventionist policies retarded the economic growth and prosperity of the state. This aggravated the Punjab crisis as the central leader(s) refused to see to their terms and demands and adopted repressive measures to curb the demands by the state. At the expense of the Congress (I) Shiromani Akali Dal gained prominence. Moreover, the anti-Sikh riot in the spring of 1984 further maligned the electoral fortune of the Congress (I) in the state (Kohli, 2009, p.56). Similarly, in Tamil Nadu it was the ADMK which swept the assembly polls by securing 132 seats out of 155 seats that it had contested for polling 37.03 percent of votes. The INC secured just 61 seats and DMK won 24 seats and Janata Party could bag just three seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence it was evident that the Congress could not emerge victorious in all the states. In fact, regionalization of Indian politics had already become a dominant phenomenon which contributed towards the fragmentation of the Indian Party system.

The trend of fragmentation continued even with the 1989 election as well. The 1989 polls saw stabilization in the trend of coalition politics at both the levels. The 1989 Lok Sabha election produced a 'Hung Parliament' with no one party from the right, left or centre was able to secure an absolute majority. The National Front under the leadership of V.P Singh comprising of seven parties which was formed since 17th September, 1988, came to power with the 1989 Lok Sabha election which comprised of ideologically disparate, regionally based political parties. The seven parties included: the Jan Morcha, the Janata Party, the Lok Dal, the Congress (S), the Telegu Desam, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and the Assam Gana Parishad (Chander, 2004, p.34). National Front secured just 142 seats despite of its crusade against corruption at high levels of the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress (I) government of 1984-1989. Scandals like Bofors had actually jeopardized the prospect of his government. It was alleged that a huge amount of bribes were paid to the close associates of Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 by the Swedish manufacturer Bofors in order to obtain a contract for the sale of artillery to the Indian army. National Front came to form the government with the outside support of BJP and the Left parties. The latter extended support to the minority National Front government on the issue of anti-corruption drive led by V.P

Singh, a former cabinet member of Rajiv Gandhi led government who after his resignation and subsequent suspension from the Congress (I) formed the Jan Morcha as a platform to express his views and protest against the corruption at high levels. Other groups and parties joined the Jan Morcha in the crusade and designed an alternative strategy with new agendas to produce a better social order. These conglomerations of parties expressed their intentions to introduce electoral reforms, decentralization of political and economic power, and elimination of corruption at all levels as well as produce a stable economy marked by balanced development both in the rural and urban areas (Chander, 2004, p. 34). It had also promised to usher national unity, democracy, socialism, secularism and federalism. The loss of credibility of the Congress (I) government of 1984-1989 led to the defeat of the party in the election of 1989. The Congress (I) in the 1989 Lok Sabha election could secure just 197 seats out of 510 seats with 39.53 percent of votes in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The Congress's share of popular vote dropped from almost 50 percent in 1984 to just below 40 percent in 1989 and its number of seats in Lok Sabha tumbled down from more than 400 to 197.¹⁴ Janata Dal (JD) contested 244 seats and won 143 seats with 17.79 percent of votes. BJP improved its position from 2 to 85 with 11.36 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).¹⁵

The state assembly election accentuated the fragmented character of the party system. In Uttar Pradesh, the heartland of India it was seen that the Janata Dal secured the highest number of seats in the state. It bagged 208 seats with 29.71 percent of votes out of 356 seats polling 29.71 of votes. INC was not able to perform well in the state Assembly Election of 1989. It secured just 94 seats with 27.90 percent of votes whereas the same party was able to secure 296 seats polling 39.25 percent of votes in the state assembly election of 1985.¹⁶ BJP won 57 seats with 11.61 percent of votes. Hence the party was gradually improving its performance. However BSP was able to secure just 13 seats only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In Madhya Pradesh, BJP surpassed the other political parties contesting the assembly poll by fetching 220 seats out of the 269 seats that it had contested for with 39.14

¹⁴ The Congress party has never won more than 49.10 percent of total votes polled in any of the India's nine general elections. It had formed government in seven of these nine elections at the centre.

¹⁵ All the parties in the 1989 election had performed miserably, the only exception being the BJP who was found to have improved its electoral performance.

¹⁶ The erosion of the support base among the Muslims and the Scheduled Caste led to the decline in the Congress's share of votes and seats in the state.

percent of votes and formed the government in the state. Indian National Congress secured only 56 seats out of the 318 seats polling 33.38 percent of votes whereas the Janata Dal was able to grab only 28 seats with 7.71 percent of vote (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Therefore, the North as well reflected a fragmented pattern of voting.

In the state assembly election to the state of Karnataka held in 1989 INC won 178 seats polling 43.76 percent of votes. BJP secured only 4 of the 118 assembly seats. Janata Dal won 24 seats with 27.08 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). To the State Assembly Election of 1989 for the state of Andhra Pradesh it was seen that INC had surpassed Janata Dal and had secured 181 seats polling 47.09 percent of votes whereas JD was able to secure just one seat. TDP was able to bag just 74 seats polling 36.54 percent of votes. In Tamil Nadu too the INC secured just 26 seats and it was DMK, the state based party which had bagged 150 seats with 33.18 percent of votes. However in Kerala, INC had contested 91 seats and had won 55 seats with 32.07 percent of votes. CPI (M) had contested 64 seats and won only 28 seats with 21.74 percent of votes whereas in 1987 assembly election it was the CPI (M) which had secured 38 seats followed by INC with 33 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). There was a revival for the Congress party in the state of Kerala. In south we see that each state had voted for different political hues making the party system fragmented in nature.

In Rajasthan following the state assembly elections of 1990 it was seen that the state had voted for an alternative to the Congress party. BJP had won 85 seats, polling 25.25 percent of votes whereas Congress won only 50 seats out of 200 seats with 33.64 percent of votes followed by Janata Dal with 55 seats and 21.58 percent of votes. In Maharashtra, INC won 141 seats out of the 276 seats in the state Assembly election of 1990. However, it had secured 20 more seats in the 1985 Assembly Election. In Gujarat, the Congress party had suffered a setback. It won 33 seats in the Assembly election of 1990. In the Assembly election of 1990 the state had voted mostly for a non- Congress alternative- the Janata Dal which had won 70 seats out of 147 seats polling 29.36 percent of votes. BJP secured 67 seats with 26.69 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Therefore, the West too presents a messy picture of the party system thereby not voting for just any single party but for different political force thereby stabilizing the fragmented nature of the Indian party system.

In the state of West Bengal, INC was almost wiped out of the state as it was seen that it was not able to secure a good number of seats. In 1991 the INC had secured just 43 seats out of the 284 seats with 35.12 percent of votes. The state became a bastion for the left party. CPI (M) had emerged victorious in the Assembly election of 1991. It had bagged 189 seats out of the 213 seats with 36.87 percent of votes. In the state election of 1990 to the legislative assembly of Orissa, INC had secured 10 seats and 29.78 percent of votes in 1991 compared to above 50 percent votes in 1985 assembly election whereas JD won 123 seats out of 139 seats polling 53.69 percent of votes. In Bihar as well a trend of decline was noticed in the performance of INC. It was able to win just 71 seats out of the 323 seats, with 24.78 percent of votes. It was Janata Dal which secured 122 seats with 25.61 percent of votes. BJP was able to bag just 39 seats and JMM was able to win just 19 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Assam voted for INC and it bagged 66 seats out of the 125 seats polling 29.35% of votes whereas Assam Gono Parishad (AGP) secured 19 seats out of the 121 seats BJP secured 10 seats only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The East as well produced a fragmented picture of the party system by placing different political party in power in each state.

The North-Eastern region was seen to be almost under the reign of a single political party, i.e.; the Indian National Congress (INC). In the State election of 1990 the State of Arunachal Pradesh voted for INC. It had secured the highest number of seats with 37 seats, polling 44.25 percent of votes whereas the Janata Dal was able to secure only 11 seats with 33.34 percent of votes. In Manipur too INC had come to power and fetched for itself 24 seats with 33.71 percent of votes in comparison to 11 seats of Janata Dal with 19.82 percent of votes in the Assembly election of 1990 (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In the Nagaland state legislative assembly election of 1989, INC formed the government and had secured 36 seats and Nagaland People's Conference was able to manage 24 seats only. The situation was similar in the state of Mizoram too. In the 1989 Assembly election the Indian National Congress surpassed all the other parties with 23 seats whereas the Mizo National Front was able to secure 14 seats only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Despite of intensive attempt to provide India with a non-Congress government it was seen that the North-Eastern region voted in favour of the Congress party. However, in the North- Eastern region, Tripura was an aberration. The CPI (M) emerged victorious by securing 44 seats. In the assembly

election of 1993, INC secured only 10 seats which was fifteen less than 1988 assembly election (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

The trend of fragmentation persisted even after the 10th Lok Sabha election, 1991.¹⁷ In Uttar Pradesh, BJP gave a remarkable performance in the Hindi Heartland and came to power by securing 221 seats out of the 415 seats with 31.45 percent of votes. INC could not do well. It could bag just 46 seats out of the 413 seats that it had contested for with 17.32 percent of votes. Similarly, the 1993 state election to the National Capital Territory of Delhi also saw BJP emerging victorious with 49 seats out of the 70 seats polling 42.82 percent of votes and INC could bag just 14 seats with 34.48 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). However, Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh had INC-led governments in power with their respective state elections to their legislative assemblies. Although, north voted consistently to a great extent, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh remained an aberration.

On the other hand, in Tamil Nadu it was ADMK, the regional party of the state, which had emerged victorious. It had secured 164 seats out of 168 seats with 44.39 percent of votes. INC had contested 65 seats and won 60 seats with 15.19 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Kerala voted in favour of INC with the 1991 assembly election and it secured 55 seats of the 91 seats polling 32.07% of votes whereas CPM bagged only 28 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Karnataka with the state election of 1994 brought Janata Dal in power with 115 seats polling 33.54% of seats and BJP could fetch only 40 seats for itself (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). With the State Election of 1994 to the Legislative Assembly of Andhra Pradesh the people of the state voted in favour of Telegu Desam Party, a state-based party to power with an overwhelming number of 216 seats of the 251 seats that it had contested for polling 44.46 percent of votes and INC could bag just 26 seats of the 294 seats with 23.85 % of seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The South voted in a highly fragmented manner by choosing different party for each of its state.

Rajasthan following the 1993 assembly polls placed BJP at the state helm with 95 seats of 196 seats with 38.60 percent of votes whereas INC could bag just 76 seats of

¹⁷ In the 10th Lok Sabha election, 1991 the Congress (I) had secured 232 seats out of the 487 seats that it had contested for with 36.26 percent of votes. JD was able to win 59 seats out of 308 seats with 11.84 percent of votes. Janata Party could bag just 5 seats (www.eci.nic.in). However, with each successive election it was seen that BJP was improving its position. With 10th general election, 1991 it had increased its number of seats from 85 to 120 seats with 20.11 percent of votes (www.eci.nic.in).

the 199 seats polling 38.27 percent of votes and Janata Dal could fetch for itself abysmally low number of just 6 seats and 6.99 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Similarly, Gujarat with the 1995 assembly polls too voted BJP to power in the state with 121 seats of the 182 seats with 42.51% of votes. INC stood distant second with 45 seats polling 32.86 percent of votes. The state of Maharashtra with the 1995 assembly polls however opted for INC which secured 80 seats with 31.00 percent of votes and BJP had secured 65 seats of the 286 seats polling 12.86 percent of votes. Madhya Pradesh with its 1993 assembly polls saw INC emerging victorious with 174 seats of the 318 seats polling 40.67 percent of seats and BJP could bag just 117 seats of the 318 seats polling 38.82 percent of seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence, it can be fairly concluded that West voted in a fragmented pattern.

In West Bengal State Assembly polls of 1991 the CPI (M) had emerged victorious with 189 seats out of 213 seats with 36.87 percent of votes in contrast to the 43 seats of the Congress (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Orissa following its 1995 state election placed INC at the state helm with 80 seats polling 39.08 percent of seats. Bihar voted in favour of Janata Dal by bestowing 167 seats of the 264 seats polling 27.98 percent of votes whereas BJP could bag just 41 seats and INC won only 29 seats in the 1995 State Election to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Similarly, east too portrays a trend of fragmentation in its voting pattern thereby creating a fragmented party system.

With the Eleventh Lok Sabha general election the Congress (I) was again ousted out from power. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with 161 seats and 20.29 percent of votes failed to muster a majority in the hung Parliament (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). BJP and its allies could manage to accumulate 194 seats which were far away from the 272 seats needed to prove its majority (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). BJP failed to enter into any coalitional arrangement required to come to power. Based on its performance during the last three elections BJP has established itself as a formidable political formation. BJP was then increasingly emerging as an alternative to Congress (I) as the latter was not able to project itself as a performing and pro-people government. The image of the Congress party and its leaders were getting tainted with charges of

corruption and scandals¹⁸. The BJP was in power for two weeks after which the President had offered the Janata Dal-led United Front (UF) to form a government at the centre. The formation of UF was a post election development. The Janata Dal bagged only 46 seats in the election but it with its various allies such as Samajwadi Party, Asom Gana Parishad, DMK, etc. came to form a coalitional government at the centre under the Prime Ministership of Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda. The Congress party extended legislative support to the UF government from outside. The Congress with just 140 seats out of the 529 seats and with 28.80 percent of votes could not form a government on its own at the centre (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

Coalitional politics had by then already cemented its base along with some other developments such as there was a shrink in the support base of the Congress party accompanied by continuous improvement of BJP in terms of support base and electoral gains. BJP was able to secure its support base in the Hindi speaking states, Maharashtra, Bihar, Karnataka and Gujarat.

In the meantime the regional parties had already expanded their bases in their respective states and were in fact allying with national parties to enable them to form government at the centre. The UF were a pact of several parties comprising of centrist, leftist and several other regional parties. The UF parties despite of their heterogeneous composition were able to maintain their solidarity and togetherness. It even successfully progressed ahead along with the forces of economic liberalization and political federalization of the system of governance. The UF parties, unlike the National Front or the Janata Party, were able to deal efficiently with internal dissensions and personality clashes and it never came in the way of the functioning of the government (Singh, 2001, p.347).¹⁹ It was the role of the Congress party which had created disruption in the functioning of the government; firstly, with regard to change of Prime Ministership from Deve Gowda to I. K. Gujral by using its veto power in April 1977. Secondly, by withdrawing its support from the government

¹⁸ A series of corruption charges against the cabinet minister of the Rao-led government such as the sugar scam, the urea scandal and the alleged bribing of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MPs by the Congress Party to gain support to manage majority in the Lok Sabha.

¹⁹ Weak coordination squabbles and fragmented way of functioning had weakened the National Front coalition government.

which led to the collapse of the United Front government in November 1997, precipitating fresh elections in February – March 1998²⁰.

The 1998 general election was held in a different context – the essence of the Congress party had already lost its vigor and vitality, BJP was gradually emerging as a political force to reckon in a period when no single party was able to consolidate its base and offer a stable, performance-oriented government. Since the nineties some other significant changes have occurred in Indian Politics which has led to glaring transformations in the Indian party system. The changes are; rise and stabilization of coalition politics, growth of regionalization of Indian politics and politics based on identity i.e. along the lines of caste, class, community or religion. Though since the late 1960s and more particularly since late nineties the main flank of politics in India has been ‘opposition to the dominant Congress party’ but the policies and plan of actions of all the parties were similar i.e. it had to respond to the socio-economic and cultural demands.

As several crises such as food crisis, droughts, inflation had hardly jeopardized the life of the people of an already underdeveloped nation during the late 1960s, therefore the ability of the government, ruling both at the Centre as well as in the states, to deliver governance to the people in terms of health, nutrition, education, national security etc. become the major criteria for survival. There was gradual awakening of Indian masses. They were becoming conscious of their rightful claims and became more articulate and demanding. The political parties coming to power and the political institutions succumbed to these increasing pressures from society. They in most cases failed to deliver as promised or was expected. The Janata Party could not continue to be in power and was ousted from power. Congress (I) replaced it because it could not contribute anything significant towards the development of the nation. On the contrary it was found to be riddled with inner rivalries and factionalism (Dasgupta, 1979). Gradually all the political parties were losing credibility in the eyes of these conscious masses. Hence with every election the people started giving fractured verdict when no party gained absolute majority in the Parliament leading to the crystallization of coalition politics where several parties forged post electoral or pre-electoral alliances to come to power. Even at the state level we saw that no party

²⁰ Congress withdrew support to the UF cabinet because the Jain Commission reported that DMK was quiet alive about the conspiracy to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi.

was able to provide a stable rule in a state for a long period. In Andhra Pradesh, Telegu Desam Party could not perform as was expected well on the contrary it had slipped into huge fiscal deficit and therefore had to bring moderation in its welfare programmes. Neither was Assam Gana Parishad able to prove itself a success in the state of Assam. In many of the state's two party coalitions came to power such as during the 1990s BJP and Janata Dal Coalition came to power in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Hence no party received absolute vote of the Indian electorate which proves the incompetence of these political parties and the growing consciousness of the Indian masses towards the logic of electoral politics. They reminded the politicians that they exist to serve the interest of the people and not their self-interest.

Meanwhile, it was the Bharatiya Janata Party which was trying to fill up the vacuum by trying to win over the masses by resorting to various strategies.²¹ It embarked upon the notion of Hindutva to win over the heart of Hindu community, proposed to construct a Rama Temple on the site of the Babri Masjid, promised to repeal Art. 370 (special autonomous status for Kashmir) and assured to promulgate a common civil code, promised to impose ban on cow slaughter and such various other promises (Roy, 1999, p.203).²² BJP went into alliances with various other state-based parties, and contested election with pre-election allies including two Independents.

Reasons for the Demise of Congress (I) and Rise of alternatives (1984-2004)

The Hindu card that was first played by the Congress (I) to save itself from demise following the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom was cashed in by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that facilitated its rise to power through several instances or fallout of Congress which includes the *Shah Bano case* of 1986 where Congress was accused of minority appeasement. Rajiv Gandhi's decision to reverse the Supreme Court order to ensure maintenance to Muslim divorced women by their estranged husband and allow to abide by the Muslim custom of remaining devoid of such maintenances by enacting

²¹ BJP had a Hindu nationalist character. The basic tenet of Hindu nationalism is that India is basically a Hindu nation. It was anti-Muslim and treated Christians as aliens. It believed in Gandhian socialism, democracy, nationalism, positive secularism, national integration and value-based politics. The Jana Sangh was the predecessor of BJP.

²² To BJP promulgation of a uniform civil code for all Indians is the only way to restore integrity and achieve equality.

the Muslim Women's Act, 1986 maligned the image of the Congress party (Hindu, 2003). This decision invited criticism from women organisation for being gender insensitive²³ as well as from the Hindus, the majority community of the nation for getting over indulged with the minority politics as well as compromising with its secular image by pampering the conservative Muslim laws, its leaders and clerics. Rajiv Gandhi during his tenure as the Prime Minister had faltered in all his efforts to deliver 'able governance'; the most significant was his initiative to meddle with the issues relating to the religious minority communities. Another such political blunder was reopening the gates of the *Babri Masjid* (mosque) in Ayodhya to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) members for laying the foundation stone for the Rama temple on the disputed site in Ayodhya²⁴. Rajiv Gandhi government (which was earlier accused of minority appeasement) expected to garner the Hindu support with this decision because Lord Rama was a Hindu god. However, the decision proved to be a boomerang because BJP and VHP took the credit for forcing the central and the state government to bend to their wishes of opening the gates of the disputed site for the

²³ All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) organised demonstrations by Muslims women for reversing the Supreme order by the Rajiv Gandhi led central government. See 1985: Shah Bano Case, www.indiatoday.intoday.in. (Accessed on 19 June, 2016 at 09:45 pm).

²⁴ Ayodha dispute is thus a politically, socio-religiously and historically relevant issue. The issue is centered on the plot in a city called Ayodhya in the Faizabad district, Uttar Pradesh. The main issue revolves around access to a site traditionally regarded as the birthplace of Hindu god Rama or called as the Ramjanambhoomi. It is 2.77 acres of land. But it is held that on this site originally existed the Babri Mosque which was built in 1528 by Mir Baqi Khan, general of Babur who had occupied a substantial part of Northern India. Mir Baqi named the mosque Babri Masjid. It is the largest mosque in U.P with 31 million Muslims. However the Hindu claimed the site was the birthplace of Ram. The mosque remained unused for a very long period till the middle of the 20th century. An idol of Ram was placed inside the mosque silently at night of 22/23 December, 1949. Vishwa Hindu Parishad made a claim over the land in 1984 who wanted to erect a temple dedicated to Lord Rama. Some Hindus believed that the mosque was built after a temple was demolished. In the late 1940s the mosque was locked up as the matter was with the court. But in 1986 it was unlocked by an order by the Faizabad district court so that the Hindus could offer prayer at the site. As soon as the lock was opened mobilisation started on both sides. Many Hindus and Muslim organisation tried to mobilise their communities over this issue. Gradually this issue took an accentuated form and became a national issue. As the site was restored to the Hindus with full effect with the 1989 Allahabad High Court Order this galvanized the Hindu-Muslim tensions. This gave birth to the Ayodhya dispute. Archeological Survey of India in 1970, 1992, 2003 found that the disputed site have evidence indicating that a large Hindu complex existed on the site. Beneath the mosque ASI found that after the excavations remains of stone, decorated bricks, lotus motifs, pillars built in the style of Indian architecture were found. The judgment was based on faith, belief, the two unconventional medium adopted by judiciary to give its verdict. Verdict was given by Justice Dharam Veer Sharma, Sudhir Agarwal and Sibghat Ullah Khan. On 6th Dec. 1992 at the disputed site a Karseva was organised at the site (a voluntary service by the devotees for building the Ram temple). The situation in Ayodhya became tensed and thousands gathered on the site to demolish the mosque and a make shift temple was placed there. This incident was followed by clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims in many parts of the country. Riots broke out in Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad. On 16 Dec., 1992 the Liberhan Commission was set up by the GOI to probe the circumstances that led to the demolition of the Babri masjid.

ceremony of laying the foundation stone for the construction of Lord Rama temple. BJP made it a major electoral and political issue to create its vote bank among the Hindus. RSS and VHP too were part of this process. The BJP in order to generate a public support for itself over this issue took out a massive march called *Rathayatra* from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh during the 1990s. This surged the popularity of the party among the Hindu electoral base. BJP henceforth gained substantially in the Lok Sabha and assembly polls. The Muslims too deserted the Congress for its inaction for not being able to impose President's rule in the state to prevent the demolition of *Babri* mosque by the *Karsevaks*. The *Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid* massacre led to absolute downfall of the Congress party in the state of Uttar Pradesh coupled with the charges of inaction on the part of the Narshima Rao-led Congress (I) government at the union level (Jafferlot, 2007, p.296). Earlier, Rajiv Gandhi was criticized as a political novice who came to power due to sympathy but had no potential for leadership for he lacked political insights, vision and intellect.

Following the demolition of *Babri Masjid* (mosque) on December 6th, 1992 riots broke out in Mumbai during December 1992 and January 1993 due to communal inciting propaganda by Hindu communal organisations for flaring up the 'Being Hindu' feeling. This incident further invited danger for the Congress party and added as another reason for inviting public wrath and disapproval. The Srikrishna Commission was constituted to investigate the Bombay Riot and it revealed that the then ruling Congress(I) led state government headed by Sudhakar Naik acted very inactively to control the riot and was accused of giving insufficient orders to police forces for controlling the raging mobs and the fanatic communal violence. The report even suggested that the Congress (I)-led Naik government had even made the mistake of doing undue delay in using Army for controlling the communal riot (Padmanabhan, Frontline, 1998). Besides, the hawala scam that involved receiving large sum of money by politicians through four hawala brokers, the Jain Brothers disclosed names of national level leaders like Madhavrao Scindia, V.C Shukla, Kamalnath and Arvind Netam who were associated with the Congress party further jeopardized the electoral fortune of the party and contributed positively towards BJP's electoral fate.

Further, with the rise in lower caste mobilization with the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report by the V.P Singh government BJP-RSS-VHP combine could intensify its strategy to play the *Hindu* card to gain electorally and widen its

support base. The report of the Mandal Commission recommended 27 percent reservation of posts for non-creamy layer of the *OBCs* (Other backward castes) in central government jobs. The Report invited serious protests from the upper caste section of the society as it affected their prospect in the job market where the politics through reservation was outweighing merit. The upper caste section of the society resorted to various forms of outrages which included self-immolation, road blockade, shut down of schools, colleges, government offices, business and transport services. They even constituted new organisations such as Arakshan Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti or the Mandal Ayog Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti, etc. to voice their opinion on the trend of caste politics (Jaffrelot, 2000, p.97). This galvanized a *process*, i.e.; politics based on caste that set upper or forward caste against the lower caste. BJP traditionally derived its support from the upper-caste, urban Hindus, small and middle businessmen and Hindu traders, cultivators, etc (Hansen & Jaffrelot, 2001, p.4.) This led to the creation of a new vote bank comprising of upwardly mobile backward castes, Dalits, Yadavs, Kurmis, Koeris, etc. and also enabled rise of many other identity-based parties such as Samajwadi party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), etc. that had also facilitated erosion of Congress support base in the Hindi Heartland states such as in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Congress was not able to come up with or promise any policies or packages for the otherwise deprived regions or for the ethnic minorities (Hasan, 2007, p.87). Hence, since 1989 we saw there was rise of BJP and regional as well as caste based anti-Congress parties which were mostly representing the backward and the Scheduled Castes. The parties have garnered support for themselves by exploiting their sentiments and at the expense of the Congress. The Bahujan Samaj party, a dalit based party in Uttar Pradesh claimed itself to be the representative of the socially, economically and politically undermined Dalits. As says Hasan, “The heightened caste and communal competition provoked by the combined effect of Hindutva and Mandal, has radically changed the social map of politics” (Hasan, 2007, p.86).

Congresses’ Populist Measures to Retain Bases

The Congress too did not fall behind. To be a part of the race it prepared itself to face the Twelfth General Lok Sabha election. It started with its election campaign and published its election manifesto. The Indian National Congress through its manifesto

appealed to the people of India to vote for Congress. It described BJP's attempt to form the government at the centre in May 1996 as a 'pathetic attempt' and as a sheer 'political adventurism'. To it the United Front was just an alliance of some opportunistic political parties which had failed to provide a stable rule, sustained governance and had subverted Indian democracy (AICC:1998).

Hence the Congress had expressed its intention to bring back stability which would mean improvement in the living condition of all, growth and social harmony. It had also promised to uphold and sustain secularism to save plurality of Indian society and democracy. It emphatically declared to ensure economic, political and social justice once brought back to power. It had assured to revive the agricultural sector and give it a status of industry. A massive programme for creating rural infrastructure was to be launched once in power along with emphasis on land reforms, increased flow of credit to farmers, improving irrigational facilities, etc (AICC:1998).

Congress had also vowed to generate employment opportunities by creating new jobs and providing vocational training. It had expressed its desire to solve all the problems of insurgency and militancy in the North east region and equip them with greater funds and financial powers. The party had rigidly declared that illegal infiltration into the region will be dealt with heavy hand. Efforts to ensure development of the regions were assured by the party. It had promised to ensure that all needy and poor would have access to the public distribution system and had vowed to implement poverty alleviation programmes to eradicate poverty (AICC: 1998).

The special groups too found a mention in the manifesto of 1998. The Congress continued to provide a special space to the minorities and had vowed to ensure their social, economic advancement and ensure that their personal law remains untouched. The Congress had univocally announced that the party had decided to abide by the decision and ruling of the Supreme Court on Ayodhya Dispute Case. It had even claimed to ensure that the existing policy on reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in jobs and education will be implemented fully. The Congress had also stated its intention to be in the forefront of every campaign to combat atrocities on women, like sati, dowry deaths and every other social evil and initiate programmes of education, empowerment and provision of legal rights for them (AICC:1998).

Amidst severe charges of corruption upon several important Congress leaders the party unleashed its intention to make the administration responsive and accountable and take up measures to clean the administration and restore the pro-people image of the administration. It had also decided to herald remarkable changes with the implementation of Fifth Pay Commission. The Congress had also promised to revive the existing policy with regard to Official Secrets' Act and make administration more transparent. It had even decided to gear up and better up centre-state relations and ensure that the Inter State Council and National Development Council function properly to sort out issues (AICC, 1998, pp.16-54). Through its several plan of action and programmes, it appealed to the people of India to vote for the party for stability and development.

However, nothing could save the party from the wrath of the common masses and it failed to emerge victorious in the twelfth general election. It had secured just 141 seats out of 477 seats with 25.82 percent of votes. On the contrary, the Bharatiya Janata Party emerged as an alternative and a viable option for the people of India. It won 182 seats out of the 388 that it had contested for with 25.59 percent of votes whereas Janata Dal secured only 6 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The allies of BJP secured 76 seats, amounting to 258 seats as a whole polling 37.1 percent of votes for the alliance (Hasan, 2003, p.488).

State wise too BJP fared well. It won large number of seats in almost all the states except in Haryana (where Congress secured 21 seats in comparison of 6 seats of BJP), Maharashtra (Congress won 75 seats and BJP won 56 seats only) and Rajasthan (Congress won 153 seats and BJP secured 33 seats only). BJP gave its best ever performance in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Karnataka and Punjab and also with the state Assembly election for West Bengal BJP secured its first ever seat in the state. BJP marginalized Congress even in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

However, Congress retained its position in Andhra Pradesh as in the Assembly election following the 1998 Lok Sabha election it bagged 91 seats, polling 40.61 percent of votes in comparison to the 12 seats secured by BJP. Even in Assam it was seen that Congress came back to power with 71 seats whereas AGP, the prime regional party of the state secured only 20 seats and BJP bagged only 8 seats. Even in Delhi, Congress could hold on to the reign of power with 52 seats in comparison to

the 15 seats of the BJP. In Madhya Pradesh too Congress emerged victorious with 172 seats polling 40.59 percent of votes whereas BJP won only 119 seats with 39.28 percent (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence it was evident that the dominance of Congress had already declined by then as it was ousted out from power at the centre. Even in almost all the states BJP fared remarkably in terms of seats and in certain cases in terms of votes too. Moreover, in most of the states it was seen that the regional parties were gaining prominence and were coming to acquire power in their respective states as was seen in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and some such other states of India. The party system did not shed its fragmented nature. The 1998 Lok Sabha exhibited pronounced regionalization. Moreover, with the 1998 Lok Sabha election the breakdown of Congress system became more evident and pronounced and provided an opportunity for the BJP to emerge as a possible alternative and the staunchest opponent to the Indian National Congress in the centre.

The BJP-led alliance under the Prime Ministership of Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee assumed office on 19th March, 1998. It accommodated within its fold some important state-based political parties like the Telegu Desam Party, the Trinamul Congress, the AIADMK, the Shiv Sena, Samata Party in Bihar, Haryana Vikas Party, Biju Janata Dal, Akali Dal (Badal), Lok Shakti Party etc. All the parties provided their support to the BJP led minority government. However, it was Jayalalitha of AIADMK who was a constant threat for the government. BJP had to cope up with the tantrums thrown by the autocratic AIADMK supreme. Dissensions also were seen to have existed with other alliance partners like Samata Party and Akali Dal who expressed their grievances over the 'Big brother' attitude of the BJP and they also complained of not being consulted on major issues like creation of new states like Uttaranchal, Women Reservation Bill etc. There was dispute between Lok Shakti Party and the BJP over seat sharing for the legislative assembly election. Moreover, the debacle of BJP in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan increased the rift within and invited criticism from the coalitional partners (Chander, 2004, p.55). But the biggest blow came from the AIADMK when it joined hands with the Congress and deserted the BJP-led coalition government on various issues of differences. The BJP-led government lost the confidence motion by one vote and this sealed the fate of the government. The Thirteenth Lok Sabha election was declared which was to be held in September-

October 1999 until then the BJP-led government continued as a caretaker government (Chander, 2004, pp.61-62).

Three national elections between the period 1996 till 1999 and five votes of 'no confidence' indicate a high level of political instability. Indian political system was marked by a series of political crises and elections. Growth of regional parties and breakdown of a dominant party system followed by inability on the part of any political party to secure absolute majority in the Parliament and 'deliver as promised' were the prime reasons behind the frequent toppling of government and the unstable political system.

The Reconfiguration in the Map of Indian Politics since 1999

A BJP-led alliance of twenty four parties based on a broad coalitional strategy was constructed in the form of an alliance system known as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) headed by Vajpayee. It was a conglomeration of 'catch-all' political parties (Wallace & Roy, 2003, p.1). The NDA comprised of regional parties based on caste, language, religion, geography such as the Telegu Desam Party, the Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), and the National Conference from Kashmir, All India Trinamool Congress, the Indian National Lok Dal, the Biju Janata Dal and the Janata Dal (U). The DMK was a new entrant into the NDA. Hence, it is evident that the NDA was an alliance of ideologically disparate political parties. The inability on the part of any political party to gain absolute majority in the parliament led to the formation of such an alliance and this ultimately cemented the base of coalitional politics in India.

The Congress (I) did not form an alliance and hence there was no Congress-led alliance at the national level.²⁵ However, at the state level it entered into few electoral alliances. Congress was of the opinion that coalition will not work at the centre. With the hope to provide a cohesive government at the centre Congress initiated its campaign for the 1999 election and published its 100 page manifesto on August 13, 1999. It appealed to the people of India to vote for a 'stable' and 'able' government.

²⁵ The Congress party then did not approved on the idea of allying with other political parties because of its inhibitions and reservation about coalition politics and perhaps because of its inexplicable predominant role in Indian politics. However in the long run due to its downfall it was compelled to endorse coalitional support.

To it the coalitional government of BJP was a disaster for the country because it was ideologically and principally an incoherent government which was a complete failure with the task of governance.

The BJP-led government was accused of not being able to ensure faster economic growth, redress the problem of fiscal deficit, and enhance and ensure social justice to the people. Neither during its rule was it able to provide a secure and stable government nor was it able to generate employment opportunities. Congress vociferously had accused the government for conducting nuclear explosion without considering the dire consequences for it. It criticized the government for the Kargil War and its inability to provide a secured environment.

The prime issue on which the Congress emphasized was the issue of ‘political stability and experience’. They were the old repetitive promises of Congress which casted almost no impact on people’s minds. The manifesto had promised to promote secularism, rejected and had condemned the strategy of mobilization by stirring up religious passions and sentiments. It had promised to continue to be sensitive towards the underprivileged and deprived sections of the society and provide them with access to education, health and employment facilities. It expressed its commitment towards its policies of reservation to end discrimination and hence lay the foundation of an egalitarian society (AICC: 1999).

The manifesto had also reflected the intention to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions to bring the government closer to the people and make it more responsive and accountable. It had also promised to double the annual expenditure on poverty alleviation and social development as well as take the nation out from the perils of economic downfall owing to the series of unstable government which have retarded the economic growth of the country. It had pledged to make the country self-reliant during its tenure in office and had promised to invest more in primary education, agriculture, irrigation, public health, water supply, sanitation and in infrastructure building. It had also promised to create a hundred lakh jobs per year and aimed at having at least one member of every family to be in regular employment. New jobs in other areas of rural development will also be encouraged followed by thrust on growth of labour intensive industries (AICC: 1999).

To usher economic growth and social transformation, Congress had promised to resort to 'planning' for promoting balanced regional development as well as mobilize resources for poorer regions. The problem of insurgency and militancy in the North Eastern region will be dealt with heavy hands including speedy all round development of the region, vowed the party. Illegal infiltration would also be checked were some of the other promises of the party. They had expressed its intention to ensure peace and development for the Jammu and Kashmir region through the process of dialogue and discussion. It had vowed to go for administrative reforms to make public administration more effective as well as take up initiatives to pass the Lok Pal bill as early as possible. It had also promised to initiate a crusade against corruption and also ensure to cleanse the entire process of election to reduce the influence of money and muscle power and check criminalization of politics at all levels (AICC, 1999, pp.1-100). Hence it presented a plethora of policies programmes and plan of action before the nation through the manifesto with the hope and desire to serve the people for a full term.

Even the National Democratic Alliance did not lag behind and chalked out its promises and plan of action and released its manifesto on August 16, 1999. The BJP led- NDA came up with the National Agenda for Governance which would become the basis of its governance and vowed to ensure if voted to power national security, national reconstruction, federal harmony, economic modernization, secularism, social justice through empowerment of weaker sections and gender rights, probity through transparency and corruption free governance. It also vowed to provide stable and able government and rejuvenate national economy, eradicate unemployment, ensure food security for all, improve infrastructure, eradicate illiteracy, ensure housing for all, ensure 33 percent reservation of seats for women in Parliament and state assemblies, enact Lok Pal Bill, etc (<http://www.bjp.org/en/documents/manifesto/nda-agenda-for-a-proud-prosperous-india-lok-sabha-1999>) .

The NDA emerged victorious and Congress was reduced to the position of opposition party with the 13th Lok Sabha, 1999. BJP alone won 182 seats out of the 339 seats with 23.75 percent of votes. On the other hand Congress (I) bagged only 114 seats out of the 453 seats that it had contested for polling 28.30 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The number of seats secured by Congress (I) in fact had suffered a decline by 27 seats but there was an increase of 3 percent in the voting

percentage. The Congress with its allies could secure just 137 seats which was very low from the required number of seats. The NDA won 305 seats of the 537 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The NDA won a more comprehensive victory. The verdict for 1999 general election was precise and prominent. The nation voted in favour of a non-Congress alternative. Hence the thirteenth Lok Sabha election was largely a contest between fronts and alliances when no party singularly was able to secure an absolute majority. The endeavor of the Bharatiya Janata Party to emerge as the alternative to Congress (I) actually got materialized with the thirteenth Lok Sabha election in 1999 when the BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power. It had several regional parties as its allies namely the Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal, DMK, etc. signifying the growing trend of fragmentation of the Indian party system. This resulted towards growth of incoherent government at the central level as well. Thus, the era of coalition politics remained the order of the day and a significant component of the Indian party system.

Despite of its earlier failed attempts the BJP-led alliance was able to come back to power. It appeared that the people of India were not able to forgive the Congress party for its insincerity and its inability to provide proper governance to its people in the former years. The allegation of frequent involvement in cases of corruption and series of scandals has actually jeopardized the electoral fate of Congress party. The Congress party lost the 1999 general election to the then rising BJP. It in fact, won the lowest number of seats (114 MPs only). It emerged victorious only in Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra assembly elections in 1999.

Even at the State level the trend of fragmentation remained undisturbed. In the state assembly election to the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1999 it was seen that Congress stood distant second. The Bharatiya Janata Party had secured only 12 seats. Congress won 91 seats. It was the Telegu Desam Party, a state based political party of Andhra Pradesh which had emerged victorious in the state. It bagged 180 seats polling 43.87 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). It is the increasing neglect and insensitivity to regional demands relating to language and cultural identity, political autonomy, economic development and the issue of religion led to the rise and consolidation of the regional parties such as the DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab, National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam Gana Parishad in Assam

and various other parties in the North– Eastern regions as such as the Mizo National Front in Mizoram, Nagaland Peoples’ Conference in Nagaland.

Following the 2002 Assembly Election to the state of Uttar Pradesh, it was seen that Congress won 25 seats out of 402 seats contested polling only 8.96 percent of votes. BJP won 88 seats and BSP 98 seats. It was Samajwadi Party (SP), a state based party which emerged victorious in the state with 143 seats out of 390 seats with 25.37 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Punjab in 2002 state assembly polls the story was different. Here INC won the largest number of seats. It won 62 seats out of 105 seats polling 35.81 percent of votes whereas Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) won only 41 seats out of the 92 seats with 31.08 percent of votes. BJP won only three seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Bihar, 2000 Assembly election it was the state based political party, RJD had emerged victorious with 124 seats and 28.34 percent. INC secured a very low number of seats in the state. It secured 23 seats with 11.06 percent of votes whereas BJP bagged only 67 seats for itself. Hence, it is pretty well discernible that the North voted in a fragmented pattern by not opting for any single political party (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In the South, Congress had emerged victorious only in Kerala and Karnataka. In the 1999 Assembly election to the state of Karnataka, Congress won 132 seats out of 222 seats polling 40.84 percent of votes whereas BJP secured only 44 seats out of 146 with 20.69 percent of votes. In Kerala too INC won 62 seats, BJP drew a blank and CPI (M) bagged just 23 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Tamil Nadu, 2001 Assembly Election it was AIADMK which surpassed all the other parties in the state. It won 132 seats out of 141 seats polling 31.44 percent. Congress contested only for 14 seats and won 7 seats with 2.48 percent of votes. The state of Congress in Tamil Nadu was precarious. BJP won only 4 seats and DMK a long time ruling party of the state won only 31 seats with 30.92 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Andhra Pradesh Telegu Desam party emerged victorious with 180 seats of the 269 seats polling 43.87 percent of votes. Congress bagged 91 seats and BJP 12 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). South as well produced a picture of fragmented state party system.

Even in Rajasthan Congress could not emerge victorious and stood defeated in the hands of BJP which secured 120 seats polling 39.20 percent of votes. INC secured only 56 seats with 35.65 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Gujarat too the BJP won the assembly election of 2002 by bagging 127 seats with 49.85 percent of

votes. INC could secure just 51 seats and 39.28 percent of votes. However, in Maharashtra INC retained its base with assembly election of 1999. INC won 75 seats and 27.20 percent of votes and BJP secured 56 seats out of 117 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Madhya Pradesh similarly voted for INC bestowing it with 172 seats of the 316 seats and 40.59 percent of votes. Hence, signs of fragmentation can be as well traced in the West.

In the East trend of fragmentation was evident. INC won only 26 seats. It was BJD which had emerged victorious following the 2000 Assembly election in Orissa with 68 seats polling 29.40 percent of votes. BJP could win only 38 seats. Even in West Bengal, INC won only 26 seats with 7.98 percent of votes. CPI (M) won the 2001 Assembly election with 143 seats out of 211 seats polling 36.59 percent of votes. AITC won only 60 seats whereas BJP drew a blank. Even in Tripura CPI (M) surpassed INC by winning 25 more seats than it. CPI (M) secured 38 seats and INC 13 seats only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

However, in the North Eastern region the performance of INC was far better as it had emerged victorious in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur by securing 21 seats, 53 seats and 20 seats respectively (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Thus, at the centre the Congress was ousted out from power by a non-Congress alternative. The states too voted in a fragmented pattern considering into account their own state-specific interests.

The BJP-led NDA government which was in power at the centre since 1999 by dislodging the Rao-led Congress (I) government was able to continue for a little over four years. BJP had successfully executed the task of governance in several areas while leading the coalitional government at the centre during 1999-2004. It had implemented and continued with the economic policies of globalization, privatization, and liberalization. The government had also made new laws to attract foreign investors (Bhambri, 2007, p.197). During Vajpayee's tenure the economy was seen to have been reviving with Gross Domestic Product rising at the rate of 8.4 percent (Sharma, 2004, p.33). The government had claimed that its policies had stirred up a 'feel good' factor in the country. Moreover, to add one more feather to its cap it had highlighted to competence in completing its term. It claimed that it was able to prove that coalitional government can survive and sustain at the centre. Besides it had even claimed to have ushered a connective revolution throughout India and undertake a

second round of green revolution throughout the rural India (Sharma, 2004, p.35). Major initiatives had been taken to ensure food security through ‘concessional ration facility, expansion of Antyodaya Anaj Yojana, at subsidized rates food grains were provided to the poor children and for mid-day meals (Sharma, 2004, pp.53-53). Mr. Vajpayee even dreamt of making India a ‘developed’ nation by 2020. It even took measures to ensure facilities for drinking water, irrigation, better sanitation facilities along with its initiatives to provide ‘housing for all’ by 2010. Despite of all these efforts (of which only few have been discussed) the BJP-led NDA alliance was not able to repeat its term.

Reasons of Debacle of the 1999-2004 BJP-led NDA Combine

The main reason for the debacle of the BJP-led NDA combine can be attributed to the reason that ‘India shining’ and the ‘feel good factor’ did not pay any dividends for BJP. In reality, the employment has not increased but had decreased; panchayati raj had failed to realize its real meaning during NDA rule. It was accused of spreading violence and hatred among various communities by organization like Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) wrecking the social harmony. The Godhra massacre²⁶ of Gujarat in 2002 became the most important reason for its debacle which left a deep scare in people’s mind. It had made gross violation of human rights. It had weakened its bases by inciting violence against missionaries and had instigated the common masses to wage communal riots in the country and had thus destabilized the social harmony of the nation. Its link with RSS further maligned its position (Sharma, 2004, pp.90-91). It failed to tread the path of secularism. Besides, in 2001 the image of NDA government got tainted with numerous scandals such as *Tehelka.com* which revealed Defence officials and BJP party chairman, Bangaru Lakshman accepted a bribe of Rs.100,000 crore from a Defence supply company following which George Fernandes, the then Defence Minister had to resign. The Opposition moved no-confidence motion over the Tehelka.com scam. Mr. Fernandes was re-inducted into the cabinet even before he was exonerated by Tehelka Commission of Inquiry by the

²⁶ In 27th Feb-March 2002 large scale violence took place in Gujarat at a station called Godhra. This incident was known as the Godhra massacre. A bogey of train of Sabarmati express carrying the *Karsevaks* returning from Ayodhya was set on fire .N early about 60 people died. Violence continued for a month.

Prime Minister. The BJP-led NDA government won the no-confidence motion by 312 votes. Bahujan Samaj Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Telegu Desam Party, Shiv Sena voted in favour of the NDA coalition government²⁷. In addition to it, the Coffingate scandal and the Pumpgate scandal in 2002 further tainted its image which had come to power by promising to ensure through its governance “probity” through transparency and corruption free governance. The NDA partners often alleged BJP of violating the commitments of the National Agenda for Governance (Singh, 2004, pp. 143-146). In 2001 the BJP who vowed by the name of *swadeshi* was witnessed to drastically drift away from the path of *swadeshi* and adopt a pro-liberalized agenda by creating the ministry for Disinvestment (McMillan, 2004, p. 28). During its tenure the Parliament was attacked by terrorists. The National Agenda was violated in the case of education policy as well and instead attempts were made to saffronize the curricular content of education (Lall, 2004, pp.153-168). The Opposition accused it of subverting the secular character of the educational system.

The BJP-led NDA coalition was replaced by the Congress led-UPA regime. The Congress party was able to resurge from its state of decline. However, it did not ensure an absolute rejuvenation or revival of one party dominance by the veteran Congress Party because the Congress came back to head a coalitional form of government at the centre. This marked a virtual end in decline of the dominance by the Indian National Congress. However, the party system remained multi-party in nature with burgeoning influence of the regional parties. Neither did it neither shed off its bipolarized structure nor got the trend of fragmentation reversed.

Congress left no leaf unturned to revive itself from its state of decline. The strategy of ‘*aam admi*’ or its pro-poor policies did the wonder for the party and it was able to resurge from the state of decline. The pro-rich policies of the NDA and the irrelevant ‘India Shining’ campaign of the NDA and its inability to comply diligently with its poll promises made in the form of the National Agenda for Governance wrested the chance of BJP-led NDA coalition to repeat a term. Sonia Gandhi toiled hard to take the messages of the party across the length and breadth of the country which included some of the prime states such as Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh.

²⁷ “Government defeats no-confidence motion by a big margin”, The Hindu, August 20, 2003.

A Competitive Fragmented Multi-Party System with the Resurgence of Congress Party (2004-2009)

With the 2004 election a new coalition known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with Indian National Congress (INC) as the leading partner came up to acquire the position of the ruling party at the centre along with the outside support of the leftist parties, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samajwadi Party by its side. Bharatiya Janata Party bagged 138 seats out of 364 seats with 22.16 percent of votes. On the other hand, the Indian National Congress emerged victorious by securing seven more seats. INC bagged 145 seats out of the 417 seats with 26.53 percent of votes in the 2004 Lok Sabha election (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Congress and its allies together could muster 219 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The assembly elections conducted after the 2004 Lok Sabha polls testifies to the fact that the party system still stood fragmented in nature with numerous state voting distinctively.

In the Southern part of the country the Indian National Congress could emerge victorious only in Andhra Pradesh. With the 2004 Assembly Election to the State of Andhra Pradesh Congress emerged victorious by winning 185 seats out of 234 seats with 38.56 percent of votes. Telegu Desam Party, the state based party could bag just 47 seats out of the 267 seats that it had contested for, polling 37.59 percent of votes whereas BJP secured only two seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In 2004 State Election to the State Legislature of Karnataka BJP won the election by securing 79 seats out of 198 seats polling 28.33 percent of votes. Indian National Congress could secure 65 seats out of 224 seats with 35.27 percent of votes whereas In Kerala we saw that with the 2006 State Assembly election CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front came back to power with 61 seats in comparison to the 23 seats with 30.45 percent of votes. In Tamil Nadu too DMK emerged victorious with 96 seats out of the 132 seats that it had contested for with 26.46 percent of votes whereas INC won only 34 seats with 8.38 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Thus the South retained the trend of producing fragmented electoral verdict.

In the North the trend of fragmentation persisted. In the State of Uttar Pradesh following the 2007 assembly election, Bahujan Samaj Party emerged victorious by defeating the then ruling Samajwadi Party (SP) with 206 seats out of 403 polling 30.43 percent of votes. In Punjab, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) came to power by

winning 48 seats with 37.09 percent of votes. INC secured 44 seats with 40.90 percent of votes. BJP could win just 19 seats. In Haryana 2005 Assembly election Congress emerged victorious by winning 67 assembly seats out of the 90 contested seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In the West too the trend of fragmentation was evident with the subsequent assembly polls following the 2004 general election. In Maharashtra INC could secure 69 seats with 21.06 percent of votes in the 2004 assembly election. NCP secured the highest number of seats 71 and the NCP-Congress combine formed coalition government to rule the state. In the 2007 State Assembly election to the state of Gujarat BJP swept the polls by securing 117 seats out of the 182 seats polling 49.12 percent of votes. INC won 59 seats out of 173 seats with 38.00 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

The Eastern part of the country maintained the trend of voting in a fragmented pattern. Although the centre had a Congress-led coalition government but still the East passed a fragmented electoral verdict. In the state of West Bengal the CPI (M) swept the 2006 assembly polls with 176 seats, polling 37.13 percent of votes and INC could win 21 seats and BJP drew a blank. With the 2004 Assembly Election to the State of Orissa, the Biju Janata Dal, the state based party of Navin Patnaik, emerged victorious with 61 seats out of the 84 seats polling 27.36 percent of votes. (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Bihar JD (U)-BJP combine came to power by winning 88 seats with 20.46 percent of votes in October 2005 Assembly polls by displacing RJD which had won 75 seats earlier in the February, 2005 Assembly election. BJP secured 55 seats in October 2005 assembly polls (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). With the 2006 Assembly Election in Assam Congress emerged victorious by winning 53 seats out of the contested 120 seats polling 31.08 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In Arunachal Pradesh the Congress emerged victorious in the 2004 assembly polls by winning 34 seats out of the 60 contested seats with 44.41 percent of votes. In the State Assembly Election 2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur, Congress emerged victorious and won 30 seats out of the 59 seats that it had contested for (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence it was again Congress which swept the assembly polls in Manipur. The Congress emerged as the leading party of a coalitional government at the centre but could not restore uniformity of the Indian party system. The Indian party system remained bifurcated into two levels. The government at the centre

remained heterogeneous in terms of composition. No single party was able to fetch absolute majority for itself due to the fragmented pattern of voting by the electorates. Thus, the majority of the states had non-Congress governments. With the conclusion of 2004 Lok Sabha election the Indian party system largely remained unaltered marked by a competitive fragmented multi-party system. Coalition governments remained as the indispensable form of government in Indian politics but with burgeoning influence and presence of regional and state-based parties at the Centre.

2009 Lok Sabha Election and the Indian Party System

During 2004-2009 the Congress was ruling at the centre as the leading partner of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Since the demise of United Front Government, the Bharatiya Janata Party has remained the main competitor to the Congress (I) for acquiring power at the centre. But with the dawn of 2009 general election the game of politics witnessed some significant reconfiguration. Apart from the BJP-led NDA there emerged two other forces who were equally potential contenders for power and a major political competitor to the then ruling Congress-led UPA. These forces in the form of 'Third Front' which was a motley crowd of the Leftist parties and the 'Fourth Front' which comprised Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal of Lalu Prasad Yadav and some other important political forces became serious contender for power and they expected to emerge victorious as an alternative non-Congress, non-BJP government. Hence the contest for power was four-dimensional in nature. But the election results were full of surprises. The Congress party surpassed all the other parties and emerged as the 'largest party' (though it could not regain the status of a 'Majority party' neither did the party system at the centre reacquired the feature of pre-dominated system) with the 2009 Lok Sabha election. Although INC was short of absolute majority and secured 206 seats of the 440 seats polling 28.55 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Congress was able to secure some sixty one more seats than it had secured in the 2004 election. The UPA captured 262 seats just 11 seats short of absolute majority. BJP led NDA stood distant second with 159. The third front could bag just 80 seats and the fourth front secured 27 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). It came back to power with the 2009 Lok Sabha election as the leading party of a coalition government for adhering to its pro-people image and also because of its ability to sincerely implement some of its proposed flagship

schemes and populists policies. However, the nation still failed to repose trust on a single party and ended passing fractured verdict that kept the party system fragmented, incoherent and scattered in nature at both the levels.

Even in the assembly polls, following the 2009 general election, the Congress party could leave its mark but the party system still did not achieve a uniform nature and remained bifurcated into two levels with distinct state party systems. In Andhra Pradesh the Congress party got the mandate to rule the state again with the assembly polls of 2009. It won 33 out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats and 157 out of 294 seats in the assembly polls of 2009 (Frontline, Vol. 26. Issue 11; May 23 – Jun. 05, 2009). In Karnataka too INC emerged victorious with the assembly polls of 2013 by bagging 122 seats of the 224 seats polling 36.59 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Tamil Nadu following the 2011 state election AIADMK emerged victorious with 150 seats of the 165 seats polling 38.40 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Kerala with the 2011 assembly polls the Left Democratic Front was displaced by the Congress-led United Democratic Front combine. CPI bagged 13 seats and CPM secured 45 seats whereas INC won only 38 seats. MUL managed to win 20 seats only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence, the trend of fragmentation continued and South had chosen different political outfits for each of its state.

The eastern part of the country as well voted in a fragmented manner. Following the state election of 2011, the state of West Bengal voted for a change and ousted 34 years of Left rule from power and coroneted All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) the opportunity to come to power with a massive mandate of 184 seats of the 226 seats with 38.93 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Assam, INC came to power with 78 seats with 39.39 percent of votes. (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Orissa placed Biju Janata Dal, state-based party to power by bestowing it with 103 seats of the 129 seats polling 38.86 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Bihar got swayed away by Nitish wave and installed Janata Dal (United) - BJP combine in power with 115 seats with 22.58 percent of votes. BJP bagged 91 seats and INC secured only 4 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In Gujarat, following the 2013 assembly election, BJP returned to power with 115 seats polling 47.85 percent of votes. In Maharashtra, following the 2009 state election, the Congress secured 82 seats of the 288 assembly seats and has formed the government with its old ally NCP. The latter has bagged 62 seats (The Hindu, Oct.23,

2009). In Madhya Pradesh BJP came back to power for the third consecutive term by fetching 164 seats of the 230 assembly seats and INC could secure just 59 seats (The Hindu, Dec. 9, 2013). BJP thundered the state of Rajasthan with 2013 state election by winning a resounding mandate of 162 seats of the 200 assembly seats (The Hindu, Dec.9, 2013). West displayed some consistency or uniformity in delivering electoral verdict however Maharashtra emerged as an aberration.

In Haryana too the Congress remained the single largest party by winning 40 of the 90 assembly seats (The Hindu, Oct.23, 2009). The Sheila Dixit-led Congress government could not repeat its past glorious performance in the state of Delhi. Besides, being charged with the allegations of corruption following the 2010 commonwealth games, the Congress government also failed to bring in control the rising prices, high power (Sheila Dixit, the former chief minister of Delhi privatized electricity distribution in Delhi) and water rates. Though it was credited with the development of infrastructure, bringing in Delhi Metro, setting up educational institutions, the Congress Party was wiped out with the craze for Aam Admi Party (AAP), the crusader against corruption and evil government and aspirations of the young voters, a majority being first-timers, who turned out in large numbers to cast their votes. Congress had to remain satisfied only with 8 seats with the assembly polls of 2013 whereas BJP bagged 31seats and AAP scored 28 seats. BJP failed to garner required support and refused to form government in a Hung assembly and hence AAP came to form the government in the state with the outside support of Congress party (The Hindu, Dec. 9, 2013). In Uttar Pradesh following the 2012 assembly polls Samajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav came to power with 224 seats of the 401 seats it had contested for polling 29.13 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence, the North as well voted in a fragmented manner thereby producing a messy picture of the Indian party system which stood bifurcated into two levels - the central and state level.

In Arunachal Pradesh state election, Congress swept the assembly polls and came to power for a second consecutive term. It bagged 42 of the 60 seats with improvement in its performance (The Hindu, Oct. 23, 2009). In Manipur and Meghalaya, INC had a clear sweep over other parties with 42 seats and 29 seats respectively (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Tripura with the state election of 2013 CPI (M) came back to rule the state with 49 seats polling 48.11 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In

Nagaland following the 2013 state election Naga Peoples Front (NPF) swept the polls bagging 38 seats of the 60 seats polling 47.04 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Therefore, the North Eastern rim as well voted in a fragmented pattern.

Hence with the conclusion of 2009 Lok Sabha polls the bipolar competition for power still kept the national party system messy and undefined and the state voted in a fragmented pattern keeping into account local or state issues thereby sustaining the trend of multiple state party systems.

However, a severe jolt was dealt to the position of the Congress party in the party system with the recent 2014 Lok Sabha polls which saw the Congress-led UPA government getting dislodged from power for being getting engulfed into numerous corruption charges. BJP replaced it with its most remarkable performance since its inception. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the largest party by securing an absolute majority on its own with 282 seats polling 31.0 percent of votes and 66.04 percent of seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). BJP along with its allies like Akali Dal, Telegu Desam, Assam Gono Parishad secured 336 seats and Congress with its allies secured only 59 seats. Left Front has bagged 11 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In the subsequent assembly election, states like Odisha, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and Telangana have voted for non-BJP alternative thereby retaining the fragmented nature of the party system. Hence, the party system still stands fragmented at two levels, namely, national and state.

Conclusion:

The Indian party system exhibits quite a two different messy pictures for itself. Performance of the government in power, ability to ensure social justice, pro-people governance are some of the evident criterions that in present times determine the electoral fate of a political party. These parameters largely determine the nature of the party system as well. Due to the existence of multiplicity of parties the menu of choices widens and hence this deepens the fragmented nature of the party system to a great extent. In a country with so much of its diversity in terms of choices, cultures, languages, preferences, caste, etc. the probability of the party system exhibiting a uniform nature decreases. Hence, the Indian party system too exhibited a multi-party fragmented nature.