

**ROLE OF OPPOSITION: A STUDY OF COALITION
GOVERNMENTS AT THE CENTRE, 1996-99**

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "**ROLE OF OPPOSITION : A STUDY OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS AT THE CENTRE, 1996-99,**" Submitted by **MAHESWAR DURIYA** is in partial fulfilment of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** degree of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree to any other University and is his own work.

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In Loving Memory Of

My Sister-in-Law,

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ABBREVIATION

AGP	-	Asom Gana Parishad
AIADMK	-	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
ASDC	-	Autonomous State Demand Committee
BJD	-	Biju Janata Dal
BJP	-	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	-	Bharatiya Jan Sangh
BLD	-	Bharatiya Lok Dal
BSP	-	Bahujan Samaj Party
CBI	-	Central Bureau of Investigation
CMP	-	Common Minimum Programme
Congress (s)	-	Congress Socialist
CPI	-	Communist Party of India
CPM	-	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DMK	-	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
FB	-	Forward Bloc
HLD	-	Haryana Lok Dal
HVP	-	Haryana Vikas Party
INC	-	Indian National Congress
IND	-	Independent
INLD	-	Indian National Lok Dal
IRA	-	Insurance Regulatory Authority
IUML	-	Indian Union of Muslim League
JD	-	Janata Dal
JMM	-	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
JPC	-	Joint Parliamentary Committee
Kerala Congress-M	-	Kerala Congress Mani
LF	-	Left Front
MDMK	-	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
MGD	-	Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party
MPs	-	Members of Parliament
MSCP	-	Manipur Socialist Congress Party
NF	-	National Front
PMK	-	Pattali Makkal Katchi
PMO	-	Prime Ministers Office
PWP	-	Peasants & Workers Party
RJD	-	Rastriya Janata Dal
RLM	-	Rashtriya Loktartrik Morcha
RPI	-	Republican Party of India
RSP	-	Revolutionary Socialist Party
RSS	-	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
SAD	-	Shiromani Akali Dal
SDF	-	Sikkim Democratic Front

SJP	-	Samajawadi Janata Party
SP	-	Samajawadi Party
TDP	-	Telugu Desam Party
TMC	-	Tamil Mannila Congress
TRC	-	Tamil Rajiv Congress
UF	-	United Front
UGDP	-	United Goans Democratic Party
VHP	-	Viswa Hindu Parishad

Introduction

The main features of democracy are elections, political participation, competition and responsiveness. Political parties are the lifeline of democracy. These interests and opinions are articulated and aggregated by political parties.

Political parties articulate these interests by mediating between the government and the mass and lessen the gap between them to maintain the democratic form of government. In every political system whether it is parliamentary or presidential, one party or bi-party or multi-party, political parties are essential and so is a strong and effective opposition. Any party or government might become dictatorial without proper check and balances and any external or oppositional factors, even in the democratic set up. The need of opposition in democracy is to check the party in power from monopoly.

A.L. Lowell felt that “the constant presence of a recognized opposition is a primary condition for successful party system. On the other hand Illbert found that parliament neither governs nor intends to govern. A strong government controlled by strong, vigilant and representative opposition is the ideal at which parliamentary institutions works”.¹

India opted for parliamentary democracy with multi-party system. The presence of opposition was not felt very much till the Congress was a dominant party-Dissidents in the Congress, emergence of regional parties and

¹ D. Sundar Ram, (1996), *Parliamentary Opposition in India: An overview* in his own (ed), *Readings in the Parliamentary opposition*, Vol. 1, Kanishka, New Delhi, p. 20.

rise in the public awareness reduced the Congress Party to a minority and replaced it by the present form of *Coalition Politics*.

This dissertation examines the role of the opposition during coalition period. The focus is basically on the role played by opposition during the functioning of United Front government of 1996-98 and the BJP-led government 1998-99. It analyses the differences in the role of opposition between the above two governments. It also carries a brief sketch of the emergence opposition and its role in general and opposition in coalition politics in particular.

Statement of The Problem

Opposition in Indian politics has maintained the democratic culture through out, but in terms of functioning it has not remained same all the time. The nature and composition of opposition in coalition government, differs from one party government. In coalition government there will be large number of parties on the government side and a single national party with small parties in the side of the opposition. Where as in single party government only one party weilds power all the other parties work on the opposition. In a coalition government these are several parties weilding power; the opposition often plays spoilsport by trying to wean away some of the members of the ruling coalition.

A coalition government faces opposition not just from the parliamentary opposition, but also from constituents within the coalition. There are also

instances when the ruling coalition tried to co. opt the opposition by offering it posts like that of the deputy speaker.

The present study look at the aforesaid issues in a detailed manner. Confined as the study is to a specific period, 1996-99 the study is able to give a focused attention to the dynamics of the role of the opposition during this period.

Objectives of The Study

The research has been undertaken to understand the opposition and its role in a multi-party system, particularly during coalition government. The objectives of the present study is to find out the following points:-

1. To study the role of opposition in Indian political system.
2. To study the effectiveness of opposition's role in coalition politics in general and above two coalition governments in particular.
3. To find out the difference in the role of the opposition in a single party government and in a coalition government.
4. To find out the influence of opposition on the small and weak coalition partners during the said period, if any.
5. To find out the extent and nature of cooperation between opposition and the government and the response of the government towards opposition's demands.
6. To find out the viability of outside support, its merit and demerit.

Methodology

The methods adopted for this study is analytical and exploratory in nature. The sources of data collection comprises of primary and secondary.

The primary sources include first hand information in different forms like government reports, parliamentary debates and discussion and other related government documents.

This work depended more on secondary sources like books, journals, articles, newspapers and other related material.

Chapterisation

The present study on the "Role of opposition in coalition politics: with special reference to UF government and the BJP-led coalition government" has been divided into six chapters including Introduction and Conclusion.

Besides, the need and purpose of opposition, the introductory chapter deals with the relevance and objective of the study, statement of the problems, methodology and a brief summary of chapters.

The first chapter deals with the role of the opposition in Indian politics from independence till date in a systematic manner.

Chapter two is all about the role of the opposition in coalition politics. It gives a clear picture of the coalition governments of 1977-79 and 1989-91. It is all about role of the opposition particularly the Congress party, how it behaved when it remained out of power. The role played by the Congress to topple down the governments have been described.

Chapter three has an account of the 13-days BJP government, the UF government first led by H.D. Deve Gowda and later by I.K. Gujral. The formation of UF government and the composition and role of opposition has been focused here. The opposition from outside and opposition within has been defined clearly. The role of Congress as outside supporter and opposition to some extent occupy a place in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is about the coalition government led by BJP and the role of the opposition led by the Congress, during 1998-99. The opposition was very strong during this period. The BJP-led government of 18 parties was riven by internal strife and won vulnerable to the maneuverings of the opposition. However, the opposition parties, barring the RLM, supported the government on issues like Women's Reservation Bill. On the other hand the opposition joined hands with the ill-fitted coalition partner i.e. AIADMK on a corruption issue which brought down the government.

The concluding chapter is a brief summery of the entire study, an account of the findings and suggestions to improve the performance of the opposition in India.

The present study also contains a rich albeit brief, bibliography, for future studies.

Chapter- I

Opposition in India's Parliamentary Democracy

Opposition's importance in a parliamentary democracy cannot be over emphasized. In fact the existence of opposition is regarded to be the most distinctive feature of democracy itself. Democracy involves, discussions, deliberations, debates, dissent and conflict. So, opposition is a natural corollary and a very important feature of this system.

"The idea of organized political opposition as a normal and beneficial component of a policy is a modern phenomenon", writes R. Barver.¹ However, traces of some sort of opposition can be found even in ancient and medieaval periods. In ancient Greece and Rome where a limited form of democratic system prevailed, we find many indications of the working of a separate organized group. During the whole 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century, opposition in Britain was recognized more in terms of parliamentary practices and conventions. The opposition, though of historic lineage and recognized in parliamentary practices by conventions, was unknown till 1937 to the law in Britain. The Ministers of the Crown Act, 1937 prescribed an annual salary of £ 2000 to the leader of the opposition, who was defined as that members of the House of Commons who for the time being was the Leader of the party in opposition to "His Majesty's Government" In case of doubt as to the numerical strength of the parties in opposition or their

¹ Umesh Kumar, Jha (1997), "*Opposition Politics, in India*" Radha Publications, New Delhi, p. 1.

leader, the speaker gives the formal decision.² Likewise, Canada, Australia and the Union of South Africa had also recognized to the leader of the opposition in 1905, 1920 and 1946 respectively. Today there are several countries with a parliamentary form of government where the institution of opposition is legally recognized.

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF OPPOSITION IN INDIAN POLITICS

The history of opposition in India is as old as the Indian National Congress, which was in a sense founded as an opposition to the British government. After independence, during Nehru's days the opposition hardly mattered and that was one reason why Pandit Nehru used to help the election of such national figures from the opposition camp as Acharya Kripalini and Ashoka Mehta. The Indian National Congress used to win a comfortable two thirds majority in Lok Sabha elections and the party in power was thus in a position to carry on, not only the day-to-day business of the House but also get the Constitutional amendment bills passed, on its own strength. The ruling party, therefore, never felt the necessity of depending upon the support of one or two opposition parties.

But the multiplicity of political parties in India did not obstruct the coming into existence of a vibrant opposition in the Indian Parliament. Thus, the first opposition in independent India was formed in 1950 under the

² D. Sundar Ram(1996), "Parliamentary Opposition in India:- An Over View" in his own (ed) *Readings in The Parliamentary Opposition*, Vol. 1, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, p-1.

leadership of Prof. K. T. Shah. It had only 14 members. Its purpose was mainly corrective as it had no basic differences with the Congress Party, though it tended towards the left. But the real opposition came in 1952 after the first general election under the new Constitution. In the face of the personal charisma of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, opposition parties like the Socialist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party could not get many seats, even though they secured 16% of the total votes cast in the 1952 elections. The socialists had expected success in the very first elections but the results shocked them. They had hoped for the second position in the Parliament, but they got only third place with just 12 seats. The Communist Party of India with a strength of 16 members was the largest party on the opposition benches and recognized as a parliamentary group in the House. Another important result of the 1952 elections was that almost all principal leaders of the opposition parties were defeated; only Shyama Prasad Mukherjee of the Jan Sangh could win. However, the first Lok Sabha consisted of some of the most distinguished men and outstanding parliamentarians- all adept in parliamentary procedures and skilled in the art of parliamentary debates. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, N.C. Chatterji, Meghnad Shah, H.V. Kamath, Dr. Lanka Sundaram, and Renu Chakravarthi adorned the opposition benches. After the first general elections, the leaders of major opposition parties realised that unless like minded parties were consolidated, they would not be able to establish themselves as a major political force.

The growing political consciousness among the people, the expansion of the organisation of opposition parties, the growing regional grievances ranging from the urge for linguistic states to communal tension, economic conflicts and territorial disputes, failure of the Congress Party to alleviate poverty, disease, unemployment etc. affected the fortunes of all the political parties. The period between the third and fourth general election in the 1960's also witnessed the weakening of the Congress and the rise of opposition groups. This happened after the death of Pandit Nehru and Lalbahadur Shastri and also the Chinese aggression and Pakistan invasion.

In the fourth general election of 1967, the Congress Party came to power but with a thin majority and Mrs. Indira Gandhi asserted her authority as the Prime Minister. After the election, the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh emerged as the main opposition parties as they won 80 seats (Swatantra - 45 and Jana Sangh - 35) in the Lok Sabha and secured more than 18% votes.³ They were recognized as parliamentary groups. The Congress also lost in the assembly elections of eight states to the United Front or Samyukta Vidhayak Dal of non-Congress parties.

During this period of Congress rule a serious issue of difference arose among the Congress members over the Presidential election held after the death of Dr. Zakir Husain. Mrs. Indira Gandhi supported the candidature of V.V. Giri and some members of Indian National Congress showed their differences over the nomination. It in the later stage affected the rank and file

³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

of the Congress Party and some members of the Congress went away from the parliamentary wing. An important development took place in this situation. On November 16, 1969 on the eve of the commencement of the Ninth Session of the Lok Sabha, some members of the Congress in Parliament dissociated themselves from the ruling party and elected Ram Subhag Singh as the leader of their group. They elected Morarji Desai as the chairman for both the Houses of the Parliament.

Next day, Ram Subhag Singh forwarded to the speaker, a list of 60 members belonging to his party. Subsequently, in his letter dated 25th November 1969 addressed to the speaker, he requested that as his party fulfilled the conditions laid down in direction 121 of the recognition of parties, the party be accorded recognition as the Congress Party (Organization). He also enclosed a copy of the 'statement of policy' and the grounds on which he sought recognition. The then Minister of Parliamentary affairs, K. Raghuramaiah in a letter addressed to the speaker objected to the name "Congress Party in Parliament (Organization)" being given to the party led by Dr. Ram Subhag Singh and suggested that the party might be called by some other name. On December 17, 1969 Prof. N.G. Ranga, Rabi Roy and a few other opposition members raised the question of recognition of Dr. Ram Subhag Singh as the leader of the opposition. The Speaker, thereupon, announced: "... I have no objection if Dr. Ram Subhag Singh is accepted as the leader of the Opposition". He also announced that Dr Ram Subhag Singh's party in Parliament would be called Congress Party (Opposition). With this

announcement, for the first time since independence the Lok Sabha had recognized an opposition party and a leader of the opposition.⁴ From the first Lok Sabha election of 1952, till the fourth Lok Sabha election, no party was eligible to be recognized as the opposition according to the rules of procedures. Recognition under these rules is conditional upon membership of up to at least 52 or 10% of the total strength of the Lok Sabha.⁵ Simultaneous development of the opposition has taken place in the Rajya Sabha as well. Shyam Nandan Mishra was elected as the leader of the (opposition) group with 46 members in the Rajya Sabha. Dr. D.S. Raju and S. Gurupadaswamy were elected as the Deputy Leaders of the opposition group in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha respectively.⁶ The recognition of that opposition in the Parliament lasted till the dissolution of the Lok Sabha in December 1970. But from that day onwards Lok Sabha has maintained this parliamentary democratic feature of a recognized opposition. In the 1977 general election, a combination of opposition parties opposed the Congress and they became successful to removing the Congress from power. In this election the combined opposition groups secured majority seats in the Lok Sabha and installed a non-Congress government at the centre for the first time. The same rule of procedures was applied here and the Congress Party was recognized as the opposition party to the government, as it secured 153 seats, with Y.B. Chavan as the leader of the opposition. The same "rules of

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp-31-32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p-32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p-32.

procedure” for the recognition of the opposition party and the leader of the opposition have continued after every general election and the formation of new government in the Parliament till today.

The presence of opposition in Indian politics was hardly felt until 1967, when the Congress Party was dominant. Afterwards a group came forward to challenge the Congress Party and the real opposition was realized in 1977 when Morarji Desai of the Janata Party formed the government. The Congress Party was recognised as the opposition. A significant development took place in the Parliament when a legislation in the name “Salary and Allowances of Leaders of the Opposition” was passed. Under this act, not only statutory recognition was given to the leader of the opposition and salaries and allowances for them ordained at par with Cabinet Ministers, but the leader of the opposition was also specifically defined as one who is leader in either House of the party in opposition to the government, having the largest numerical strength, and recognized as such by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha or the Speaker of the Lok Sabha as the case may be (Section – 2).⁷

Thus, here the law reinforced the principle that numerical strength was not enough for recognition as the leader of the opposition in as much as it was conclusively laid down that he/she must be leader of the party “in opposition to the government”. He/She cannot be the leader of a party which is supporting the government.⁸ This Act of salaries and allowances to the leader

⁷ Subhash C, Kashyap(1996) “Leader of The Opposition in Parliamentary System” in D. Sunder Ram, (ed), *Readings in the Parliamentary Opposition*, Vol-1, op. cit., pp-71-72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p-72.

of the opposition was passed in order to protect the rights of those who are in opposition to the government, to criticize it and not to support it blindly. In the traditional system, one of the responsibilities of the leader of the opposition was to move a vote of no – confidence in the government, where necessary.

In the 1977 election, when the Congress Party was defeated and sat in the opposition under the Janata Party coalition government, it successfully tried to create antagonism among the top leaders of the Janata Party. The Congress Party in a sense, was never out of power, when it tried to capture power at the centre. It played its politics upon Charan Singh, the dissident leader in the Janata Party government. Observing this conflicting situation in the Janata Party leaders, the leader of the opposition at that time Y.B. Chavan of the Congress Party, introduced a no-confidence motion against the Janata government. The BLD party, led by Charan Singh defected from the Janata Party, which led to the resignation of Morarji Desai's government on July 15, 1979. Consequently, the leader of the opposition, Y.B. Chavan of the Congress Party, was invited by the President, to form a government on July 18th 1979. But due to the lack of required majority in the Lok Sabha, Y.B. Chavan declined to form a government. In the mean time, Charan Singh and his supporters who had defected from the Janata Party, with the unconditional support of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Congress Party, formed a government at the centre. But Charan Singh could not face the Lok Sabha and resigned on August 20th 1979 and recommended a fresh poll.⁹ Here the presence of the

⁹ Sunder Ram D.,(1996) vol. 1, op. cit, p-38.

opposition i.e. the Congress was very much felt as it played its role for its own benefit. Subsequently the seventh Lok Sabha elections were held and it saw the emergence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi once again as the Prime Minister. In this election the Congress Party won 351 seats as the majority party in the Lok Sabha and the Lok Dal emerged as the second largest party with 41 seats. The left front had a strength of 53 seats, it comprised of CPI (M) – (35) Forward Block – (3) RSP – (4) and Kerala Congress (Mani) group – (1).¹⁰ During this period of 1980-84, the Janata Dal was the main opposition party apart from the Left Front and Janata Party. In the year 1980, a new development had taken place i.e. the emergence of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from the erstwhile Jana Sangh. It was a group that split from the Janata Party and was led by Atal Behari Vajpayee.

After the emergence of the BJP in Indian politics, the Congress Party faced strong opposition from it. Earlier the left parties and few other parties challenged the Congress Party at the national level and were in the opposition. But the BJP's emergence in Indian politics was a significant change for the one party dominant role of the Congress. Though it did not perform well in the 1984 elections; it made significant progress in the 1989 general elections. In the 1989 general elections the BJP won 90 seats including 4 Shiv Sena to the Lok Sabha. It was the second largest party after the Janata Dal which won 141 seats. The Congress maintained its two third

¹⁰ S. L. Shakher, (1996), "Conventions of the Parliamentary Procedure in India: The Case of the Lok Sabha Speaker G. V. Mavalankar's Independence and Integrity", in D. Sundar Ram, (ed), *Readings in the Parliamentary Opposition in India*, Vol.. 1. Kanishka, New Delhi, op. cit. p.79.

majority in the two consecutive elections of 1980 and 1984, but it lost in the 1989 elections and could not maintain the status of being the single largest majority party. This election resulted in a situation where no party secured the absolute majority and a coalition government was formed in the name of the National Front = Left Front (NF-LF) government which was supported by the BJP from outside. The Congress Party had to sit in the opposition benches in the second coalition government at the Centre. It was recognized as the opposition party with its leader Rajiv Gandhi as the leader of the opposition to the NF-LF coalition government. After his election as leader of the Congress parliamentary party, Rajiv Gandhi offered constructive co-operation to the National Front government. Further he added. "The party would sit in the opposition and try to play the role of a watch dog".¹¹

The events of 1989 led to a situation very similar to the one in 1979 when Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister. The BJP withdrew its support to the V.P. Singh government over the Ayodhya issue and the N. F. government fell after eleven months. The Congress Party expressed its willingness to support the dissident leader Chandra Sekhar to form the government, but this government also did not last long, as it collapsed when the Congress Party withdrew support.

In this type of short term government formation, the role of the opposition becomes peculiar. It can not perform effectively as an opposition due to the short spans of time available to it. Neither the Congress Party in

¹¹ D. Sundar Ram, (1996) Parliamentary opposition in India: An over view in his own (ed)., *Readings in The Parliamentary Opposition*, Kanishka, New Delhi, Vol. 1. op. cit. p.41.

the V.P. Singh government nor the BJP in the Chandra Sekhar government played their role effectively as an opposition for the full term of 5 years. When the Congress Party came into power again after the 1991 election, the BJP became the main opposition party along with the left parties and some other regional parties. The Congress and its electoral allies-secured 240 seats (47.62 per cent) and the National Front – Left combine comprising Janata Dal, Telugu Desam Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Congress(s), Haryana Vikas Manch, CPI, CPI(M), Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Block – Secured 129 seats (25.6 percent). As the single largest party in the tenth Lok Sabha, the Congress party formed the government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao. Consequently, with a strength of 120 members, the Bharatiya Janta Party was recognized as the opposition party in the Lok Sabha and its leader L.K. Advani as the leader of the opposition in the Lower House. In addition to this, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha recognized that the Janata Dal and CPI-M were opposition groups in the Lok Sabha, and its leaders V.P. Singh and Somnath Chatterjee as the floor leaders of their respective parties. In the wake of the Ayodhya tragedy, L.K. Advani resigned as leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha on 7th December 1992. Subsequently, A.B. Vajpayee, senior BJP leader was elected as the parliamentary party leader of the BJP and as the leader of the opposition. Ironically, most of the members of the ruling and opposition parties were new comers. However, Indrajit Gupta, A.B. Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Chandra Sekhar, George Fernandes, Rabi Ray, Chitta Basu, Somnath Chatterjee,

Chandrajit Yadav, Kaswant Singh and others were active members in the opposition benches of the tenth Lok Sabha.¹²

In the general election of 1996, no party got a majority to stake the claim to form the government at the centre. Atal Behari Vajpayee, the leader of the BJP, the single largest party, was invited by the President to form the government, but he had to resign after 13 days as he could not prove his majority. Then the United Front headed by H.D. Deve Gowda was invited by the President which was a combination of Left Front and National Front. The Congress Party unconditionally supported the UF government from outside to keep the BJP out of power. The BJP assumed the place of the main opposition in the Lok Sabha. The BJP as an opposition did not perform its role effectively, as the UF government did not last long and collapsed after a short span of less than two years. And the BJP emerged as the largest party again in the 1998 election. The BJP formed the government with the help of 13 political parties and a coalition government was formed under the leadership of A.B. Vajpayee. The Congress Party, the Left parties and some other national and regional parties remained in the opposition group. The Congress Party emerged as the main opposition party and it was able to function as the opposition till march 1999, when the BJP-led coalition government was dissolved after the withdrawal of Ms. Jayalalitha of AIADMK, an ally of the BJP-led coalition government.

¹² *Ibid.*, p-45.

Role and Functions of Opposition

In a parliamentary democracy, the role and functions of the opposition are considered an essential feature to continue the functioning of the political system. It plays an important role, almost equal with that of the government in power. In all the democratic governments, says Ivore Jennings, "the opposition is at once the alternative government and focus for the discontent of the people. Its functions are almost as important as that of the government. If there is no opposition, there is no democracy".¹³

From its meaning, the primary function of Opposition is to oppose and expose the wrong policies of the government in a parliamentary democracy. An opposition is called effective only when it restrains the party in power from violating its functional limits, constantly reminds it of its responsibility, keeps it responsive to popular demands and poses a challenge to the position of the party in power by promising a better performance.

In a parliamentary democracy, there is more than one party and all sections of the people are represented in the Parliament. The multi-party system in India represents people from many parties in the Parliament. In the Parliament, the opposition's role and function is highly essential to expose the government's omissions and oppose the measures which are contrary to the public interest. The presence of the opposition in the Parliament makes the government bound to maintain political peace and stability in the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p-20.

administration. The constant scrutiny and criticism by the opposition, makes the government a more useful instrument of democracy. The opposition highlights the weaknesses of the government in the administration and the government in that case tries to rectify and improve its administration.

The forum of Parliament provides the opposition with the instrument to keep the government under constant Surveillance. The opposition initiates Parliamentary debates, which is the only instrument, on issues that agitate the popular mind and tries to get more support from the people. It ventilates public grievances through parliamentary methods such as- asking questions, raising urgent matters of public importance through adjournment motions, half-an-hour discussions, calling attention motions, short duration discussion, censure motions etc. In its functioning through these methods the opposition compels the government to admit its mistakes and adopt appropriate remedies.

Obstructions, walkouts, dharnas etc. are the best strategies for the opposition to oppose the government. However, these methods are misused sometimes to deliberately put the party in power in trouble, which is not a healthy sign for a Parliamentary democracy. If the opposition is weak, divided and not in a position to come to power, it uses such tactics. As India a federal set-up, the opposition is active at each level. Opposition plays such role not only to mobilise the members in Parliament but also the voters outside the Parliament.

In fact the function of the opposition is not only to discredit the government in the eyes of the floating voters, but also to induce it to modify its

policy. While criticizing the policies of the government, the opposition should adopt a rational approach and extend its co-operation in carrying out those policies which are dictated by national interest, and particularly those which involve the principle of continuity of policies.¹⁴

The effect of the Opposition's criticism is therefore to maintain a close relation between government policy and public opinion. The opposition action is one of enlightened self interest. In seeing its support for itself it compels the government to rest its policy on public opinion. Far from for being unpatriotic it criticises even the foreign policy. In fact it is intensely patriotic as it insists that public opinion and not a group of civil servants shall determine national policy.¹⁵ Opposition, exposition and criticism are not only the creditable features of an effective opposition but it must also present the credible alternative government programmes and policies differing from those of the party in power. It must show its capacity to win the office from the party in power and govern in the parliamentary arena. When the party in power fails to carry out the policies in its course of time, its government is discredited and it is forced to resign. In any such eventuality the opposition should be prepared to form an alternative government and save the country from the risk of chaos and disorder.

Thus, a parliamentary opposition is expected to act as the responsible outlet for criticism as the existing corruption, scandal, criminalisation of politics nepotism and such other example of mal-administration of the government

¹⁴ Umesh Kumar Jha(1997), *op. cit.*, pp-67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p-7.

should be exposed. "The opposition parties also play a necessary role in a democracy by providing a training ground for politicians who may at any moment be called upon to discharge the functions of government".¹⁶

The government and opposition are not always hostile to each other. While dealing with the issues of national and international importance the former has to consult the latter. However, on the demand of the opposition the government arranges for a debate on some specific aspects of policy and the opposition in turn agrees for suspension of some items in order to complete the government business.¹⁷

In the enactment of legislation the relationship between the government and the opposition is that the majority proposes legislative proposals and the opposition generally opposes them and proposes alternatives. But it would be a mistake, if the government without considering the merits, assumes that every amendment moved by the opposition on a bill or other proposal is wrong. The wise ministers consider fairly the opposition's arguments and do not reject them unless they are quite inconsistent with the plans to which the government is committed. The opposition on its part also considers fairly the arguments advanced by the government. When the laws are enacted with the cooperation of both the sides they become more effective than those which are enacted with the sole force of majority.¹⁸

¹⁶ C.P., Bhambhri (1996). *The Role of opposition in the House of the People (1952-1956)* in D. Sundar Ram(ed) vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p-86.

¹⁷ H.S., Fartyal (1971), *Role of the Opposition in The Parliament*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad. P-1

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp-207-208.

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In performing its role the opposition should be rational in nature. It can perform its role well and effectively only if it is alert, vigilant, responsible, organized and well informed about the day to day activities of the government. It must establish continuous political communication with the people to keep them well-informed as to what the government has been doing and what are the omissions of the government.

Chapter - II

Coalition politics and opposition in India

A major development in Indian politics since independence is the emergence of coalition politics, which is an outcome of multiparty system marked by the decline of Congress. India has now entered the phase of coalition politics. The pre-eminent position once enjoyed by the Congress in national politics is now in jeopardy due to the erosion of its social and political base on the one hand, and proliferation of political parties (mostly regional) on the other. However, the collapse of one party dominance has left a big vacuum in the political life of the country. One party dominance has been replaced by a multi-party system with no party winning a majority to form a government. Thus has given rise to the country's experiment with coalition government at the centre.

Before the general elections in 1967, there was no need for coalition government in India because in the centre and in almost all the states, the Congress was the ruling party. But after the fourth general election a different pattern of political power had emerged. The Congress retained its majority in Parliament, but did not secure absolute majority in the legislatures of Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In those states no other single party had succeeded in securing majority except in Tamil Nadu; even where the Congress was the single largest party is kept aside leading to the formation of coalition governments. The states where non-Congress coalition governments had come into being then were Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab,

Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. These coalition governments were variously described as United Front governments, United Leftist Front governments, Samyukta Vidhayak Dal governments and so on.¹

However there is now a rich variety of coalitions in India. While it is not possible to go into the details of coalitions in the states, a general feature may be analysed in the central level coalition politics.

Coalition politics in India can be divided into three phases. In the first phase there were two governments, one headed by Morarji Desai and other by Charan Singh, from 1977-1979. The second phase of coalition government also experienced two governments during 1989 and 1991. The first eleven months was headed by V.P. Singh of Janata Dal and, after the fall of his government, Chandra Sekhar took over as the Prime Minister. The third phase of coalition government experienced five governments and signaled the end of one-party dominance. This is only because of the decline of Congress, emergence of regional aspirations and growing political awareness among the voters. Of course, the Narasimha Rao government of 1991 was a minority for a period of two and half years, but the latter half was supported by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. This minority government completed its five year term without any hurdle.

The first general election took place in 1952. From the first general election it is almost 49 years, out of which the Congress has ruled for more

¹ Raman, K. Pillai, 2000. "Coalition Politics in India – A Review" in D. Sundar Ram (ed) *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability*, National Publishing House, Jaipur/New Delhi, p. 205.

than 41 years and rest of the period was ruled by the non-Congress or the coalitions. Congress has had five Prime Ministers in 41 years where as in a brief period of 8 years the coalition governments (including the present government) was headed by seven Prime Ministers. This shows the stability of the government. When the ruling government is not stable, the opposition becomes strong. The role of opposition vis-à-vis the coalition government needs to be discussed below.

Coalition Government Vis-à-vis Opposition

First Phase (1977-79)

Political parties opposed to the Congress and the emergency of Indira Gandhi united under the banner of Janata Party. Janata Party fought the 1977 election, basically under the ideology of Jan Sangh and the general anti-Congress flow was the main issue, which kept the Congress for the first time out of power. Morarji Desai, the leader of Janata Party led the government, but within his coalition differences and dissidence arose. Of course they compromised their ideologies to fight the election, but later on they could not co-operate with the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the Janata Party.

The Congress Party which was used to staying in power, was impatient to sit in the opposition. Taking advantage of the dissidents and dissatisfaction of the coalition partners, the Congress instigated the dissident partners. Interestingly, the concept of opposition in Indian politics emerged only after

the 1977 election and Congress party occupied that status. Not only was the party leader recognized as the leader of the opposition, but the Parliament went on to pass the "Act of Salary and Allowance" that accorded the status of a cabinet minister to the leader of opposition. Congress as an opposition became successful in its role by creating antagonism among the top leaders of Janata Party. It became successful in dethroning the Morarji Desai's government by instigating the dissident leader Charan Singh. Congress offered support to Choudhury Charan Singh to form the government. However, this was abandoned after few days.

The Janata Party came into power with the promise of bringing about a drastic change in existing Congress policies. The Congress thus took advantage of the confrontation within the Janata Party to check its growing popularity of being saviour of the people. By the virtue of its dominant position in the Rajya Sabha, the Congress was successful in rejecting and amending many policies of Janata government. It had to drop some of its important proposals like Anti Defection Laws, Industrial Relation Bill, Criminal Procedure Amendment Bill.²

The Congress also succeeded in amending some bills such as the Forty Fifth Constitutional Amendment Bill and Special Court Bill. After the resignation of Desai government and the Congress decision to support Charan Singh faction, President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy invited Charan Singh to form a government and face the confidence motion within a month.

² Umesh Kumar, Jha (1997), *Opposition Politics in India*, Rodha Publications, New Delhi, p. 31.

However, he had to resign from the Prime Ministership before facing the confidence motion when Congress withdrew its support. The promise of Congress to support Charan Singh and changing its stand from opposition to extending outside support was a deliberate game plan of the Congress to dethrone the Janata Party government.

The Congress succeeded in preventing the Janata government from projecting an image of the saviour of democracy. The Janata Party not only split into different groups but it popularly stood at the lowest ebb. Here the role of opposition was very effective in dethroning the government, but not in maintaining healthy parliamentary democratic procedure.

Second Phase (1989-91)

The second phase of coalition government saw two Prime Ministers. The first phase was led by V.P. Singh for eleven months and the second by Chandra Sekhar who continued for four months and subsequently as caretaker Prime Minister till a new government was formed. The Congress, which sat on the opposition benches in the first phase, extended outside support in the second.

Issues like the Bofors deal kept the ruling Congress out of power for the second time. It secured the largest number of seats at 193 but chose to remain in the opposition as it did not get support from any other party. The Janata Dal which polled the second largest number of votes in the Lok Sabha with 141 members staked its claim to form the government under the

leadership of V.P. Singh who headed the National Front government, comprising Janata Dal, Congress (S), Telugu Desam, DMK and AGP, with outside support extended by the two extremes – the BJP and the Left Parties.

Congress as an opposition repeated its performance of 1977-79. In 1977-79, the Congress took the position of opposition against Morarji Desai and after toppling this government extended its support to Charan Singh and withdrew before he could face the confidence motion. The same thing happened in 1989-91 when Congress sat in the opposition during V.P. Singh's time and supported the Chandra Sekhar government for four months and then withdrew support. The Congress was not responsible in toppling V.P. Singh's government, instead it was due to the outside support by two extreme ideologies. Rather, the Congress supported the government in some important issues like the crucial Constitutional Amendment relating to President's rule in Punjab. The government faced strong opposition from Congress and others on the issue of Mandal Commission. The arrest of the then BJP President L.K. Advani while on his Ayodhya "Rath Yatra" contributed to the BJP withdrawing its support to National Front government. Devi Lal's dismissal from the post of Deputy Prime Minister and dissidents within the Janata Dal were also some of the reasons contributing to the defeat of V.P. Singh on the floor of the House.

Immediately after the fall of V.P. Singh government, a split occurred in the Janata Dal. One faction was headed by V.P. Singh and the other by Chandra Sekhar, popularly known as Janata Dal (Socialist). Taking this

advantage, which was also quite sure that it could not form the government, Congress extended outside support to the Chandra Sekhar government. Congress shifted its position of opposition to the partner of coalition. However, the government did not last long as the Congress withdrew its support. The BJP and other Left parties who had once extended their support to V.P. Singh government remained in opposition during the Chandra Sekhar government. The role of opposition was never effective, as there were internal dissidents and blackmailing by the supporting partners. Chandra Sekhar had to resign after four months, recommending the dissolution of Lok Sabha to the President.

The second phase of coalition which kept the Congress away from power came to an end after a period of little more than eighteen months. The nation had no other option except going for another election.

The Third Phase (1996-99)

After the fall of the V.P. Singh and Chandra Sekhar governments, India went for another election. In the 1991 election, Congress stood first, but could not obtain sufficient seats to form the government. Another speculation left to the public about the survival of the government, when no party secured the absolute majority in the House. The able leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao proved its majority on the floor of House with the help of breakaway Janata Dal led by Ajit Singh and JMM. The government was unstable for two and half years, but in the latter half it strengthened itself when Ajit Singh's group

merged with the Congress with the JMM supporting. The BJP, Left parties and Janata Dal formed the opposition. Although, it was minority government for some time, but there was no such problem to complete its full five year term.

The 1996 Lok Sabha election again produced a fractured mandate and Hung-Parliament. None of the parties could get comfortable majority to stake their claim. Interestingly the Congress, once the dominant party in Indian Political system, was reduced to second position for the first time with 141 seats. The BJP with its pre-election allies came first with 187 seats, also failed to get the requisite numbers. There was no other option for the President than to invite the leader of the single largest party i.e. A. B. Vajpayee of BJP. Mr Vajpayee accepted the invitation of Dr. S. D. Sharma and took the oath of office and secrecy along with the eleven members on 16th May, 1996. This government could not gather the required number and had to resign before facing the confidence motion on the floor of House. Thereafter the President called upon H. D. Deve Gowda to form the government as the leader of the United Front- a combination of National Front and Left Front, a coalition of 13 parties and the outside support of Congress.

The BJP preferred to take the seat of opposition. The government faced strong opposition from within the Coalition partners than from the BJP. Although the government was committed to the Common Minimum Programme, but the partners did not allow the government to function smoothly. If Mulayam Singh Yadav was manipulating on one side, on the

other Ram Krishna Hegde was expelled for criticizing and levelling personal charges against Deve Gowda.

H. D. Deve Gowda did not avail the support of the Congress any more as the leadership went to Sitaram Kesri. In a dramatic development, Mr. Kesri withdrew its support to the UF government on 30th March 1997 and also staked its claim to form the alternative government. As a result Deve Gowda had to face the vote of confidence on 11 April 1997, bringing the eleven month old UF government to an end.

After this development, efforts were made to avoid the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. The Congress leadership agreed to continue with the earlier support to the UF provided it changed their Prime Minister. Accordingly, I. K. Gujral was made Prime Minister.

The opposition did not play any crucial role as the internal opposition was making the government all the time unstable. The Congress asked the government to maintain a close coordination and routine consultation on issues and day-to-day affairs of the government. The formation of Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar again weakened the UF government. Meantime the Jain Commission Report tabled in Parliament created a political void in the centre. The Congress MPs remained adamant about dropping the DMK from the UF government because of its indictment in the Jain Commission Report. Above all, internal problems like the raising of voice by Agriculture Minister Chaturanan Mishra against the Finance Minister brought embarrassing situation to the Gujral government. As he could not meet with the demands of

Congress, decided to tender the resignation of self and his Council to the President of India. He did so without recommending the dissolution of Lok Sabha. Thus, another Coalition government came to an end after eighteen months.

After the fall of the Gujral government, the Congress and the BJP staked their claim to form an alternative government but could not do so, as President K. R. Narayanan wanted the required number in writing the President took a rational decision to avoid any kind of horse-trading in Parliament. Finally, the only option left was to dissolve the Lok Sabha and push the country for another election.

The election held in 1998 also produced a truncated Lok Sabha, and 18 party Coalition led by Bharatiya Janata Party's Atal Behari Vajpayee came into power on 19th March, 1998.³ Since the formation of BJP-led Coalition in March, 1998, the AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha remains a headache for A. B. Vajpayee. Jayalalitha's one point-programme is the ouster of DMK government-a tall order that the Prime Minister finds difficult to follow in the absence of any substantive proof of a breakdown of law and order in Tamil Nadu. Instead of spending much time and gestures of appeasing the coalition partners for a bagful of demands for accommodation, adjustment, compromise and quick delivery, the BJP stalwarts are facing threats from their

³ D. Sundar, Ram, (2000) "Coalition Experiments in India: In Search for Political Stability", in D. Sundar Ram, (ed.) "Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability", National Publishing House, Jaipur/New Delhi, p. 279.

own party people and comrades in Sangh 'Parivar' have shattered the myth about the BJP being a highly disciplined party.⁴

The BJP-led coalition government had to pass through a critical phase from the opposition of both the opposition to the government by the Congress, Left Parties, and RLM, on one hand, the coalition partners on the other. In the opposition the three group Congress, Left parties and RLM played their role effectively. They constantly criticized and opposed the Vajpayee government's wrong policies and became successful in overthrowing the government. Here the opposition, though succeeded in overthrowing the government, but it is the critical work of one of its allies, AIADMK which led to the fall the government. As expected AIADMK chief first declared her withdrawal. From the coordination Committee and later on 14 April 1999, she met the President and handed over letter withdrawing support from the Vajpayee government.

The President, K. R. Narayanan, meanwhile asked the BJP-led coalition government to seek a vote of confidence from the Lok Sabha. After hectic drama in the capital of India, the motion of confidence in his government was moved by A. B. Vajpayee but was rejected by the Lok Sabha by the narrowest margin of one vote, the tally being 269 in favour and 270 against the motion. Thus this development put an end to the 13 month old BJP-led coalition government at the centre. The opposition though played their role strategically but it was not successful in forming an alternative after

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.

the fall of government. It is well known that the Congress was the AIADMK'S withdrawal from the government.

Overall in India we have had nine coalition governments barring the P. V. Narasimha Rao minority government (1991-96), which proved to be stable for five years and got majority in the latter two and half year period. All nine coalitions are mostly headed by non- congress parties and the Congress has supported from outside in some governments. Table No. 2.1 clearly shows in detail the history of non-Congress/Coalition governments at the centre along with the Prime Ministers and causes for the down fall of governments.

Table - 3.1

History of Non-Congress/Coalition Governments at the Centre

Prime Minister/ Party	Term (Including Care-Taker Period)	Partners Outside Support	Reason for Downfall
Morarji Desai/ Janata Party	24.3.77-28.7.79	Majority Government	Split in the Janta Party on the issue of dual membership of erstwhile BJS and RSS.
Charan Singh/ Janata Party	28.7.79-14.1.80	Split in JP, JPS 74, Congress 71 and independents out side support	Withdrawal of support by Congress
V.P. Singh/ Janata Dal	2.12.89-07.11.90	Janta Dal 141, TDP 2 Cong. S 1, Left, BJP 94	Withdrawal of support by BJP
Chandra Shekhar/ Janata Dal (s)	10-11-90-21-6- 91	Spilt in JD, JD (S) 55, Cong. 193 and independents	Withdrawal of support by Congress
A.B. Vajpayee/ BJP	16.5.96-1.6.96	BJP 194 and Allies	Unable to prove majority
H.D. Deve Gowda/ Janata Dal	1.6.96-21.4.97	United Front 194 (incl. 13 parties) Congress outside support 140	Unfriendly relation with New Congress Chief Sita Ram Kesri
I.K. Gujral/ Janata Dal	21.4.97-18.3.98	United Front 194 (incl. 13 parties) Congress outside support 140	Withdrawal of Cong. support on the issue of Jain Commission Report and insistence on the removal of DMK Ministers form the Cabinet
A.B. Vajpayee/ BJP	19.3.98-16.10-99	BJP 179 and Allies	Withdrawal of AIADMK on the issue of ouster of DMK government in Tamil Nadu
A.B. Vajpayee/ BJP	16.10.99	BJP and allies	Continuing

* P.V. Narasimha Rao government of 1991-96 was a Congress government and was a minority status for half and majority in the next half. So it is not included here.

Source : 1. J.C. Aggarwal, N.K. Aggarwal (1998), Election in India-1998, With Comparative Data since 1952, Shipra Publications, Delhi, p-17.

Elections in India – Major Events and New Initiatives 1996-2000, Published by Election Commission of India, Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi, 2000.

Chapter – III

Opposition and the United-Front Coalition Government, 1996-98

The verdict of the electorate in 1996 Lok Sabha elections was both unclear and confused as it produced a fragmented and fractured mandate and a “Hung Parliament”. Interestingly, the Congress, once the dominant party in Indian Political system, for the first time was reduced to the second place with only 140 seats in a House of 543 members. Gradually and particularly its hold became precarious. However, the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies as an alternative force gained the first position with 187 seats inclusive of its own 161 and of its pre-election allies i.e. Shiva Sena, Samata Party and the Haryana Vikas Party.¹

None of the parties were able to form the government on its own. As BJP was the single largest party, the President invited to form the government, however, the A.B. Vajpayee government had to resign after 13 days before facing the confidence motion. Then the Left-Front and National Front formed the government with the outside support of Congress. BJP took the position of opposition for name sake, as there was no unity among the 13 coalition partners within the UF and push and pull policy of Congress.

¹ D. Sundar, Ram (2000) “Coalition Experiments in India: In Search for Political Stability” in D. Sundar, Ram, (ed.), *Coalition Politics in India – Search for Political Stability*, National Publishing House, Jaipur/New Delhi, 2000, p. 273.

A 13 Day Government of Vajpayee

As 1996 election had produced a fragmented verdict, the single largest party BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Atal Behari Vajpayee staked his claim to form the government. On May 15, 1996, the president Shankar Dayal Sharma, invited Vajpayee to form the government, asking him to probe the majority in the floor of Lok Sabha by May 31, 1996, as the Vajpayee government was in minority (194 MP's, 160 of its own and 34 of its allies.)²

The President addressed the joint session of parliament on 23 May and the debate on the motion of confidence was held on 27 and 28 May, 1996. The BJP failed to get the required support, as a result, A.B. Vajpayee has to resign from the office of Prime Minister without facing a vote on his motion.³ His government lasted for only 13 days. Therefore, the President called upon H.D. Deve Gowda the consensus leader of the United Front, i.e. a combination of National Front and Left Front a coalition of 13 parties.

Formation of UF Government and Composition of Opposition

The United Front government consisting of 13 parties was supported by Congress-I, from outside. The UF government had two phases. In the first phase H.D. Deve Gowda headed the government from June 1996 to April 1997 and the second phase was headed by I.K. Gujral from April, 1997 to

² Meenu Roy, (1999), *Elections 1998: A Continuity in Coalition*, National Publishing House, Jaipur/New Delhi p-3.

³ D. Sundar Ram (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 274.

November, 1997 but continued till March 1998 as care taker government. The UF had 179 seats and the Congress-I had 141 seats in the Lok Sabha.

The UF government, a coalition of 13 (National and Regional) Parties, were - the Janata Dal (46 seats), CPI-M (32), CPI (12), TMC (20), SP (17), TDP (17), DMK (17), AGP (5), RSP(5), AIFB (2), Congress (Towari), (4), MGP (1), BKPP (1).

In the opposition group BJP was the largest party with 161 seats (later it's tally increased to 162). The other parties in the opposition side are the allies of BJP such as the Shiv Sena, Samata Party, Haryana Vikas Party and Akali Dal and some other parties like the Janata Party, BSP and several other small and regional parties. But the BJP with it's allies occupied the place of main opposition. BJP was recognized as the official opposition party and it's leader A.B. Vajpayee, as the leader of the opposition party in the Lower House of the parliament.

So, altogether the UF government has produced three groups in the Lok Sabha, - the United Front, the Congress and it's allies and the BJP and it's allies. From all these three groups, the United Front and Congress remained in the government and the BJP and allies remained in the opposition.

The composition of opposition was peculiar in this government, as most of the national parties were in the government and only the BJP remained in the opposition alongwith some other small parties. It was only BJP and it's allies who played the main opposition role unlike opposition

parties in a single party government. BJP had sufficient space to play an opposition role but the result was very effective. Because, it had neither any strong supporter to go with it to make the opposition group more effective, except its allies, nor sufficient time to go on playing its role either constructive or destructive. However, the opposition during United Front government denotes the role played by the BJP. There were no other political parties to criticize and oppose the government policies except the BJP and its allies, as all the big parties were in the government. However, BJP with some other parties has played its role to some extent effectively and gained a lot in its subsequent periods.

Role of BJP as an Opposition to the UF Government

The decline of the Congress Party, the stagnation of the Left Parties and the instability in Indian politics at the hands of multi-party system have contributed to the growth of BJP as a national party. Since its inception in 1980 it has played the "Hindutva card" to woo the voters; though its support base was not high during the two elections (1980 and 1984) but, it proved successful since the ninth Lok Sabha election of 1989.

It emerged as the single largest party in the 1996 general elections by securing 162 seats in the Lok Sabha. For the first time BJP ascended to the power at the centre on 15th May 1996. But it failed to secure the support 57 regional parties necessary to gain the required majority in the Lower House of

the Parliament. As a result, it resigned from the government after 13 days on May 28, 1996.

Afterwards the BJP sat in the main opposition benches as the, when the UF government was formed. It was recognized as the official opposition to the government and Atal Behari Vajpayee as the leader of the opposition in the House. In the two phases of the UF government, the BJP had to play the role of opposition strategically. From the beginning, BJP criticized the alliance between the National Front, Left Front and the outside support of the Congress (I). Being highly critical of the role of the CPI (M), and other left parties, Mr. Vajpayee, the leader of the opposition party said "it is surprising that CPI (M) and other left parties, who do not tire of flaunting their ideologies, should continue to be members of UF. By now it is clear that the CPI (M) has virtually no say in the running of the government at the centre and it also pathetic to see CPI (M) being snubbed time and again".⁴ A. B. Vajpayee not only criticized the CPI (M) and other left parties for their ties with the NF and Congress but also criticized the Congress party and termed the alliance as "Pseudo Secularism".

In fact the alliance against the BJP was a compromise of ideologies between the extreme left and secular parties. The coalition's viability depended not on government performance, but on the interests of the parties in keeping it at loat because it suited them. The UF government was dependant on the Congress for its survival. Thus, it is the compromise of the

⁴ *The Statesman*, (1997), Calcutta, March 24.

Congress-I which supported the UF from outside without being involved in the government. Hence the government has a common platform for the parties in the government for their further progress. The Congress as a critical supporter of the government was criticized by the BJP. The threat which arose from the Congress-I president Sitaram Kesri was a sign of dissatisfaction with Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda. But the BJP did not take it in faith as both the UF and the Congress (I) had to depend on the governments success for their gain in future. The leader of the opposition in the Lower House of Parliament, Vajpayee said on March 24, 1997 that "the threat given by the Congress President Sitaram Kesri, to withdraw support towards the United Front government is nothing but a bluff".⁵ Since both Congress and the UF are surviving on the same platform:

The budget passed by the UF government was severely criticized by the BJP and also it's allies terming it as "inflationary populist" and "election oriented".⁶ The BJP also criticized the UF constituents and it's outside prop that is the Congress for their support to the UF budget. Warning the UF government on it's budget proposal, A. B. Vajpayee said that "it would not help development but would only create inflation". He raised the voice against the hike in Railway, Postal sectors and overall increase in prices. Pointing out the slowdown of the economy of industrial sector the BJP attacked the government for the sluggish growth of economy despite the steps taken by the RBI and the government to improve liquidity and provide sufficient

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *The Hindustan Times*, (1997), New Delhi, March, 1.

incentives for growth. The BJP also criticized the government over the dispute of Patents Bill saying that it appeared to be going against the interests of the country.

BJP's criticism was not only for the sake of doing its duty as an opposition, but it went one step ahead of asserting in some of the issues of national importance. The BJP expressed its strong reaction to the UF government's move to amend the 'anti-defection law' where it ensured the automatic disqualification of any member violating the party whip. BJP parliamentary party leader A.B. Vajpayee questioned the government's intention behind the move and pointed out that "the loyalty of legislators can not be taken for granted".⁷

The much debated issue during the period of UF government was the corruption case where the Chief Minister of Bihar Laloo Prasad Yadav was involved in the fodder scam. Laloo Prasad Yadav's (RJD) was a constituent in the UF government. Hence the government's inaction on the scam was suspicious in the minds of opposition.

On the other hand, the UF government under I.K. Gujral was attacked by the opposition leader A.B. Vajpayee for removing Joginder Singh as the CBI Chief, instead of removing the Bihar Chief Minister for this alleged involvement in the fodder scam. The opposition not only criticized the UF but also criticized the Congress (I), for its "mutual protection racket" along with the government for its inaction in the fodder scam. The BJP as principal

⁷ *The Times of India*, (1997), New Delhi, November 5.

opposition party demanded a probe into the fodder scam and dismissal of the govt. headed by the accused. But the BJP's demands and opposition to the government were remained merely an effort without strong action.

It criticized the UF governments non-governance policies, economic slowdown, political instability etc. But it failed to create a situation where the government will accept it's demand. On the other hand the UF government was much too busy in trying to manage it's support and hardly bothered about the opposition. It has problems within it and was busy in tackling the situations created by the Congress (I). The BJP, however, tried to create support in it's favour for the next election, in case the I.K. Gujral government was defeated on the floor of the House. The then BJP president L.K. Advani through his Swarna Jayanti Rath Yatra to expose the failure of UF government lambasted the Congress and UF. The BJP though did not succeed in putting the government in trouble, but it had little difficulty in finding defects within the UF and Congress.

The Congress party criticized some of the policies of government. At the time, there was no unity among the coalition partners on certain issues, for instance the CPI-(M), the UF's ally criticized the government's budget proposal saying that it is the pro-rich bias of the government and failure to depart from the liberalization policy initiated by P.V. Narasimha Rao government in 1991. Moreover, the Congress party's criticism of the UF government was seen as helpful for the opposition. The BJP also saw some symptoms of weaknesses within the organization of the Congress. The BJP

alleged the UF and Congress in the move to get the anti-defection Bill amended said that they did not trust their own MPs. The BJP also tried to create a split in the Congress by approaching some of the MPs to form a government at the centre but could not succeed in their mission. Also it lost its credibility following the UP experiment over the role of the then governor Romesh Bhandari. It also had its own organizational problems within the party in the state Units like the Gujrat unit split in 1996. The Himachal Unit Chief's election has put a fierce fighting between former Chief Minister Shanta Kumar and Prem Kumar Dhumal. The power struggle in Delhi between the then Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma and Madan Lal Khurana leading to Mr. Khurana's resignation as BJP vice-President in August 97. although later he withdrew, but the above situations have undermined the image of the party in the national level.⁸ The Bihar unit had also been riven by long internal feuds. In more the BJP was also undergoing trouble for the UP situation and feared that its own members may question the wisdom of remaining in the party.

Despite, the BJP's problems in the state units in various cases, it explored possible moves to form the government if the UF government falls. Immediately after the withdrawal of support by Congress, the BJP parliamentary party leader A.B. Vajpayee called on the president K.R. Narayanan on November 19, 1997 to press him to explore options other than dissolution of parliament. The BJP tried desperately to form an alternative

⁸ *The Hindustan Times*, (1997), New Delhi, Nov. 13.

government in case the I.K. Gujral government fails to prove its majority. However, the BJP and its allies did not see any increase in their support.

Even after the resignation of I.K. Gujral from the Prime Ministership and his recommendation for dissolution of eleventh Lok Sabha, the BJP and its allies had discussion with the president K.R.Narayanan to form an alternative government, but the president assured them that he would not take any decision in haste and told them that holding a mid-term poll would be the last resort.

However, during its tenure as the main opposition party, BJP did not perform its role effectively. It lacked the attention of government and could not keep the government on its toes, it was the lone major party in the opposition. However it was successful in criticizing several policies of government and pointed out the weaknesses of UF government, on especially its non-governance policies and government's failure in various cases as the main opposition party.

The BJP argued that the differences among the UJ partners, which led to mis-governance of the country. It said that because of the infighting of the constituents of UF, the much trumpeted promises of a Lok Pal Bill, Electoral Reforms, Women's Reservation Bill and an amendment to article 350 of the Constitution to bring about accountability and transparency in governance did not materialize. The UF government also failed in many cases like doing little in the inquiries into the Fodder, Bofors or the Indian Bank Scam, alleged by the opposition party. This was largely because of the presence of numerous

constituents in the coalition pulling in different directions. In the oil sector, for instance, it took at least six months for a decision to be taken on raising price, because of the different opinions over this issue. Similarly the IRA Bill fell through at the last minute largely because of opposition from within the UF. The move to revive Patents Bill also met with the same fate and it has only been possible to set up an expert group to evolve a consensus on this issue. The Common Minimum Programme which supposed to be the prime issue also been thrown into the dustbin.

However, there infighting within the UF constituents was less than the fight between UF and the Congress (I). It was not the opposition, whether it was not effective or successful, to topple down the government but it was the Congress party which has been responsible for the UF governments fall. Congress the initial support of UF became opposition in later stage.

Role of Congress Party as an Outside Supporter of UF Government

The United Front (UF) Government of 1996-1998 remained in power for a period of 18 months with the outside support of the Congress (I). The Congress (I) had to concede the leadership of the non-BJP coalition to H.D. Deve Gowda for three reasons.

“First, the Congress had been defeated at the polls and had lost the moral right to lead the successor Government. Secondly, P.V. Narasimha

Rao, the then President of the Congress (I) and leader of the Congress (I) parliamentary party, had fought the elections more against the UF than against the BJP. Thirdly, the Congress preferred H.D. Deve Gowda to Jyoti Basu, who was the United Front's first choice for the top job but was prevented from taking it by majority of his own party's, central committee".⁹

Although, Congress (I) gave outside support to the government in terms of the prevailing "secular logic", its electoral perspective was very much in contradiction to the UF's electoral base. The Congress (I) and the 13 political parties in the United Front depended upon the same vote base and in many states they were the principal political parties contending for state power. Therefore, the inherent contradictions involved in the ground level compelled the Congress (I) to play the role of a cautious and critical supporter of the UF Government.

Deve Gowda, once he was catapulted to the exalted office of Prime Minister, had been straining from day one to create a system of policy-making and administration under his personal control. Besides assembling those, he considered personally loyal to him to run the Prime Ministers office as well as other sensitive posts, he had no hesitation in looking for new allies outside the UF framework. "His meeting with Bal Thackeray in Mumbai, the distribution of largesse to woo farmers in UP and shady deals with multinational corporations among them cogentric in Karnatak and Star TV, have raised

⁹ D. Sundar Ram, (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 274.

many eyesores".¹⁰ Moreover, the United Front constituents were haggling even on issues which had been decided upon in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP). Decisions on a number of issues have been deferred only because they do not suit the political interests of some partner or the other. Above all, " the United Front was an extraordinary conglomeration of political personalities who had nothing in common no shared memories, no shared collective association, no sense of joint struggles – except burning desire to share power."¹¹

In these circumstances of indecisiveness, the Congress (I) became more assertive under the leadership of Sitaram Kesri. The president of the party Kesri accused the UF government failing to contain the communal forces. The success of the BJP Bharatiya Janata Party in the UP Assembly Election of 1996 and marginalisation of Congress (I) prompted Kesri to accuse UF of anti- Congressism. He observed that "it appears that the efforts of the United Front Government headed by Deve Gowda are determined to marginalise the Congress and to allow the urgent national issues to take back seat".¹² Therefore, the Congress (I) party led by Sitaram Kesri withdrew its support to the UF government on 30 March, 1997. As expected, H.D. Deve Gowda resigned as Prime Minister, following the defeat of confidence vote in the Lok Sabha on 11th April, 1997.

¹⁰ Quick Decline of UF Government, (1996), Economic and Political Weekly, September 21, p. 2584.

¹¹ D. Sundar Ram (2000) op. cit., p. 275.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 276.

After making efforts to words the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, the Congress (I) leadership chose to continue with the earlier support to the UF under a new Prime Minister I.K. Gujral. But, this time Congress (I) ensured a louder say in governance by keeping constant pressure upon the Prime Minister. It demanded a mechanism for close co-ordination between the Congress (I) and the government, and also consultation on issues which were of any importance to the Congress party of course. The infighting in the Janata Dal, a major constituent of the United Front aggravated the destabilization of the government. The formation of Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar strengthened those within the Congress (I) who wanted a recasting of the political equations in North India. No more willing to sit at the wings of power, the Congress leadership saw a possible 'Congress – Government' at the centre, as all other parties had got discredited for instability and inter-fighting.

Consequently, the Jain commission Report tabled in Parliament created a political controversy at the centre. And finally, the Congress (I) party MPs were firm on ouster of the DMK from the UF Government because of the Jain Commissions indictment'. But, the, United Front maintained its unity in the face of the then Congress (I) president ultimatum to either drop the DMK nominees in the Union Council of Ministers or forfeit it's support. As the UF government did not oblige the Congress (I) demand, Congress committee and leader of the Congress parliamentary party, informed the president on 28th November, 1997 that the Congress Working Committee had unanimously

decided to withdraw support from the UF Government headed by Inder Kumar Gujral".¹³ Following the Congress (I) party's decision to withdraw support I.K. Gujral submitted his resignation and that of his council of Ministers to the President of India. Thus, Congress (I) caused the fall of two successive council of Ministers of the United Front and exposed the contradiction of interests among the UF constituents and its own.

From the very beginning, the outside support of Congress (I) was shaky, because it was compelled to support the UF Government only to be seen at the right side of the secular communal divide. Otherwise the Communist political parties and other UF constituents accused the Congress of being communal and responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Therefore, to reestablish its credential as a formidable anti-BJP force, it was only a matter of time for the Congress (I) to get back its vote base at the cost of the UF. As the stability and success of a coalitional government denies the very basis of Congress argument of one-party-stable government, it was logical to expect the course of Congress – UF confrontation. Of course, the event of Jain commission inquiry only speeded up the eventual happening.

Concluding this chapter, we may say that the opposition to the UF government was not that much effective in weakening the government's position. As an opposition the BJP was not able get it's demands fulfilled and had to remain as a mere spectator. Even it could not create any situation or find any time to allure the constituents in the UF coalition. It did not even get

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

any attention from the government to support in such issues where the constituents were weak. Such situation did not occur during the whole 18 months period. Because, it was the Congress which kept the government on its toes. The Congress party was playing its role not just as a supporter from outside but it was supporting on the basis of issues and remained a critical supporter of UF. But the UF and Congress (I) also did not co-operative on any major issue. The Congress (I) tried its best to turn all the problems of UF government to its favour but failed to do so in all the cases. It could succeed in changing the leader in UF from Deve Gowda to Gujral, but was not successful in its demand of dropping of DMK ministers from the government. Prime Minister I.K. Gujral refused to drop the DMK ministers from the government after the submission of the Jain Commission Report, rather he resigned from the office of Prime Minister on November 28, 1997. Subsequently, the Congress party's withdrawal of support resulted in the fall of 18 month old UF government and dissolution of eleventh Lok Sabha.

Chapter IV

Opposition under the BJP-led Coalition Government, 1998-99

The opposition's role during the BJP-led coalition government is something different from that of the UF-government in terms of its composition of the government and also the ideology of the previous government. The political scenario, the party alliance and the election result brought distinctive advantage to the opposition this time. As the government formation at the centre is changed, it is obvious the opposition also changed on the basis of composition, ideologies, rôle perceptions and so on. This coalition government was also short-lived and did not last for it's full term. But this government has a few different features, unlike the previous government. The opposition to BJP-led coalition was stronger than before.

Composition of Government and Opposition

The general elections to the twelfth Lok Sabha were held on March 1998. The election results again produced a "hung parliament" where no party secured the required majority in the Lower House of the Parliament. The BJP again emerged as the largest party by winning 182 seats comprising 25.59% of the total votes polled. The Congress party was again relegated to the second place with 141 seats polling 25.82% of votes polled in the election. This time the BJP had made it's pre-poll alliance and this infact became a positive sign for the BJP to come to power. The president K.R. Narayanan

invited the largest party i.e. the BJP to form the government at the centre. Being the leader of the BJP's parliamentary party A.B. Vajpayee claimed to form the government.

An important feature in this election was the presence of large number of regional parties. They dominated the election and won many seats barring the seven national parties. The BJP had a pre-poll alliance with some regional as well as national parties. The BJP and its allies got 252 seats in total, 20 less than the magic figure of 272 which was required to form the government. The BJP managed to get a working majority but not an absolute majority. Just after the election when the chances of BJP government formation at the centre were bright, some regional parties and some independents extended their support to the BJP and thus, its tally finally went to 273. Besides its pre-poll allies, BJP was supported by Haryana Lok Dal (later Changed into Indian National Lok Dal), two independents (Maneka Gandhi and Satnam Singh Kaenth), two MPs of Arunachal Pradesh Congress and former Congress Minister Buta Singh. N. Chandra Babu Naidu's TDP voted in favour of the BJP. However, the AIADMK put the BJP in confusion as it delayed to give the letter to the President confirming its support to the BJP. Other alliance partners like PMK, Rajiv Congress and Janata Party also left the matter of consent with Jayalalitha the AIADMK Chief. Infact Jayalalitha was trying to underline her importance in the alliance by deliberately delaying the letter. At last on 14 March, the AIADMK and its allies of Tamil Nadu handed over the much awaited and important letter to the president K.R. Narayanan.

On the question of Congress forming government with the support of UF from outside, many of the UF constituents, particularly the regional parties were sharply divided on outside support keeping in mind the previous experiment of UF government when Congress pulled down the UF government. The parties like TDP, DMK and AGP decided not to support Congress led government. Finally the UF also decided not to support Congress. On the other hand, the Congress was also sharply divided on this issue, whether it should stake claim or not as one section of the party wanted to sit in the opposition and fight the BJP on principles and ideology. The alternative endeavour of Congress failed, as they did not have the support of 272.

After receiving a support letter from Jayalalitha, the President had no choice but to give an opportunity to Vajpayee to form the government on March 15 and prove its majority on the floor. The BJP-led coalition government comprising of 18 parties won the vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha on March 28, 1998, by a proportion of 274 and 261 votes.

On the other side, the Congress party, United Front and other regional and state parties remained in the opposition. The table number 4.1 shows the formation of BJP-led coalition government and opposition groups with details of the party's seats in the Lok Sabha.

Table 4.1

Ruling Coalition			Opposition		
Sr. No.	Party	Seats	Sr. No.	Party	Seats
1	BJP	182	1	Congress	142
2	AIADMK	18	2	CPI (M)	32
3	Samata Party	12	3	Samajwadi Party	20
4	TDP (Supporting from outside)	12	4	RJD	17
5	BJD	9	5	CPI	9
6	Akali Dal	8	6	DMK	6
7	Trinamul Congress	7	7	TMC	3
8	Shiv Senā	6	8	BSP	5
9	PMK	4	9	National Conference	3
10	MDMK	3	10	IUML	2
11	Lok Shakti	3	11	Forward Bloc	2
12	Arunanchal Congress	2	12	RPI	4
13	TRC	1	13	Kerala Congress-M	1
14	Janata Party	1	14	UMF (Assam)	1
15	HLD	4	15	Congress (S)	1
16	Maneka Gandhi (Ind.)	1	16	SJP	1
17	Satnam Singh (Ind.)	1	17	ASDC	1
18	Buta Singh (Ind.)	1	18	PWD	1
19	SDF	1	19	RSP	5
20	MSCP	1	20	Janata Dal	6
			21	Independent and Others	4
	Total	277		Total	266

- elections held for total 543 parliamentary constituencies.

Sources : 1. S.D. Singh, (1998), "The Fragmented party system. A study of the viability of Indian political parties". Catholic Press, Ranchi, pp-270-82.

2. "Elections in India: Major Events and New Initiatives", 1996-2000" (2000) published by Election Commission of India, Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi.

In the opposition the largest party was the Congress (I) which was the second largest party in the Lok Sabha. The CPI(M) emerged as the second largest party in the opposition benches. The RJD and SP combined Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha came in the next place after the left bloc. In the opposition these three have played the dominating role. The Congress party was the main opposition, as it was officially recognized. So altogether the composition of the opposition was heterogeneously divided into the above three groups and other small regional and state parties which did not take part in government.

Role of Opposition Outside BJP-Led Coalition Government

There were five national parties – INC, CPI, CPI (M), BSP and JD and several regional parties having their different ideologies and strategies. Although they all were against the BJP-led government ideological differences were there as they comprised moderate, extremist, socialist, secularist and centrist. From the day one Vajpayee government was attacked on principles and ideologies.

The opposition group has a dominant role in the Lower House as well as in the Upper House of Parliament. In the Lower House most of the national parties and major regional parties occupied the opposition bench and in the Upper House the Congress party had the majority.

So, for the BJP it was a difficult situation to tackle the opposition in both Houses of Parliament as well as outside. It has been observed that a

government commanding a majority in the Lower House may become irresponsible without an effective opposition holding the executive in check. Although Congress was having majority in Upper House, the BJP-led government bypassed the opposition while taking some important decisions. Not only it neglected the opposition, but also refused to allot the time for discussion. It went to the extent of preventing the opposition from performing their duties, by violating the parliamentary procedures.

In spite of government's negative attitude to the opposition, it has played its role effectively. The opposition group attacked the government's foreign policy, severely. On August 3, 1998 the opposition launched an attack in the Lok Sabha on the government's handling of the foreign policy, saying that it is a complete failure in the part of the government which is the total isolation of the country in the United Nations after the nuclear tests. Initiating a special discussion on the development occurred after the Pokhran-II, senior Congress-I leader P.A. Sangma said the country is facing isolation internationally". Rupchand Pal (CPI-M) also charged the BJP of damaging the country's foreign affairs by isolating it from the international community and destroying the earlier trend of friendly relations with its neighbours. On August 3, 1998 that the 98 Pokhran-II was only to cover up for the failures of the government on several fronts and prop up RSS brand of nationalism and this misadventure will ultimately ruin many of the good things of nation".¹

¹ "Opposition Attacks Government's Foreign Policy", (1998), *The Hindu*, Madras, August 4.

The Samajwadi Party Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav also termed the government's post-Pokhran foreign policy as a policy of "bending backward" to appease the U.S. and warned that any surrender or succumbing to U.S. pressure would only result in alienating India's well-wishers in the comity of Nations. Former speaker and Congress-I leader Shivraj Patil also criticised the government for not being prepared to meet the consequences of Pokhran-II. Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav of RJD, Bir Singh Mahoto of FB, former Union Minister Natwar Singh and several other opposition leaders charged the government of its Pokhran-test and country's isolation from international community. The Congress-I President Sonia Gandhi as the leader of the main opposition party criticised the government's decision to conduct nuclear tests without "critical reasons".

Besides this, a severe attack came out from the opposition parties on the happenings of Kargil war and the intelligence failure in detecting infiltration between May 6 to July 14 of 1999 at the Line of Control around the Kargil area of Kashmir. The opposition parties alleged that an "unaccountable government" is mishandling the situation of Kargil.² The opposition demanded a proper debate between the "stop-gap" Prime Minister and other major parties on an issue of great national concern; but the BJP-led government declined to do so as the Lok Sabha had been dissolved at that time (it was a care taker government). It also refused Rajya Sabha's demand for convening a debate on "government's handling of the Kargil dispute" thinking that it

² C.P. Bhambhri, (2000), *BJP-led Government and Elections 1999*, Shipra Publications, Delhi, p. 154.

would bring a situation of competitive motivation of the ruling alliance and opposition.

However, the opposition did not keep quiet on the domestic politics of BJP-led government. Apart from the attack on foreign policy, Pokhran-II and Kargil war, they went ahead and attacked the government for its Hindutva ideology and other controversial issues like the "Constitution Review". Keeping in mind the sanctity and basic structure of the Constitution, the opposition demanded that the government had not consulted the opposition before announcing the constitution review. The demand of the opposition was that a constitution is not what is contained in a document; it is how it works in practice.³ Some times the coalition partners also helped the opposition to know the weaknesses of the coalition government. For instance, the AIADMK supremo Ms. Jayalalitha (an ally of the government) accused the government on the issue of corruption charges or transfer of chief of the 'Enforcement Directorate', M.K. Bezbaruah and other officials. As a result, the opposition parties became aware of it and criticised it tooth and nail.

The main opposition party Congress-I demanded a high level probe into the corruption charges leveled by Jayalalitha against the PMO in the transfer of officials. The RLM, the CPI-M and CPI demanded a thorough probe into the allegations against the PMO. CPI General Secretary A.B. Bardhan said that the transfer of several senior bureaucrats including Mr.

³ *The Pioneer*, (1998) New Delhi, August, 10.

Bezbaruah, "were made to cover up cases against some powerful vested interests".⁴

The BJP-led government's move to impose Art. 356 in Bihar and the dismissal of the Rabri Devi Government, backfired, as it was confronted with a strong resistance from the opposition side. On the opening day of the winter session of the parliament i.e. on November 30, 1998 the RLM blocked the proceedings of the Lok Sabha by demanding the resignation of the government for assuming the role of "the guardian of hoarders and black marketeers".⁵ The RLM's demand for resignation of Vajpayee government on the issue of price rise and rout in assembly elections was not supported by Congress either in the Lok Sabha or in the Rajya Sabha. All the opposition leaders walked out in the Rajya Sabha when a brief discussion in the winter session was started on this issue. The left, the JD and BSP restricted themselves to an occasional shout.

The attitude of the opposition parties towards the government varies depending upon the policies of the government. The BJP-led government managed to introduce the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha despite the opposition from various parties. However, other opposition parties, the Congress and the Left parties lent their support.⁶ Also the Congress supported the BJP-led government in introducing the 'Patient Bill, 1998' in the Rajya Sabha and it support to get the Bill promised to do the same favour in

⁴ *The Times of India*, (1998) New Delhi, August, 18.

⁵ Ram Nath Sharma, et al., (2000). *India Votes Again: Manouvering Millenium Mandate*, Subhi Publications, Delhi, p. 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Lok Sabha also. However, the other opposition parties and BJP member Madanlal Khurana wanted to refer the Bill to a Joint Select Committee for further discussion and scrutiny.

Despite, differences among the opposition parties, they came together against the BJP-led coalition government on issues of attack on Christians in Gujrat (27 December 1998), killing of Graham Staines and his two sons in Orissa (23 January 1999), and close linkage of Hindu fundamentalist organizations like RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal etc. with the government. They also unitedly attacked the government for its hike in Rail fares Fair rise of price on mustard oil and other products, diesel price, postal charges etc. Despite few differences on some particular issues the opposition has stood united and played an effective rôle against the misdeed and wrong policies of BJP-led coalition government.

Opposition within the Coalition from the Alliance Partners

The major party which leads the government in a coalition has to face the opposition from outside as well from within the coalition. The small and regional parties want their regional demands to be fulfilled and the major party has to satisfy their demands. If it fails to do so, then there is the threat of being reduced to a minority position in case some of the coalition partners withdraw support. In such cases the lead party has to mobilise support from outside or has to step down.

Jayalalitha's AIADMK kept the BJP-led coalition government in check. The first pressure tactic was that she sent the letter of support to President quite late. She alarmed the BJP government not to go to the extremes of its ideology. This episode was a message for Vajpayee to treat the other allies cautiously if he wanted his government to remain stable. After this alarming message, the BJP drastically reframed its Common Minimum Programme (CMP) to National Agenda and none of the three controversial issues of the BJP manifesto the repeal of Article 370, the construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the enactment of the Uniform Civil Code found a place in the National Agenda.⁷

From the beginning the multi-party coalition led by BJP ran into difficulties in the numbers game and received threats from parties with sizeable members within the coalition partners, particularly from the AIADMK, Trinamul Congress and Samata. Since the beginning the AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha remained a constant headache for A.B. Vajpayee. Jayalalitha's demand for the ouster of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu and more than that she wanted corruption cases against her and other party members to be dropped or at least to be soft pedaled.⁸

On the other side Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal's Trinamul Congress with seven member supporting from outside, demanded special treatment for West Bengal. The Samata party also support the BJP in the

⁷ Meenu Roy, (1998), *A Continuity in Coalition*, National Publishing House, Jaipur/New Delhi, pp. 216-217.

⁸ J.C. Aggarwal & N.K. Chowdhury, (2000), *Lok Sabha Elections 1999*, Shipra Publications, Delhi, p. 1.

hope of securing the dismissal of Rabri Devi government in Bihar. But it is not in the interest of the BJP, to dismiss the DMK and Rabri Devi governments. Because, afterwards a similar yardstick will have to be used in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, where the ruling party suffered reverses.⁹

The Vajpayee government could meet the demands of Mamata Banerjee, but Jayalalitha stuck to her demands, as a result, the Vajpayee government had to pay the price. Also it faced trouble from BJD, INLD and Janata Party of Subramanian Swamy. Because of the withdrawal of support by AIADMK the coalition government came to an end.

Role Of AIADMK in the Fall of Vajpayee government

Being the second largest party in the BJP-led coalition government, AIADMK had a greater bargaining power. The major demands were – ouster of DMK government, dropping of corruption cases against her and party members, JPC probe on dismissal of Naval Chief Vishnu Bhawat and removal of Defence Minister George Fernandes in this case. The party also reacted strongly on the remarks of Kumar Mangalam who demanded the ouster of AIADMK from Vajpayee government. The BJP infact rejected all demands of AIADMK in April 99. Apart from these she attacked the Vajpayee government by alleging that certain persons close to the PM have accepted bribes to have Mr. M. K. Bezbaruah transferred from the Enforcement Directorate. This was a great jolt for the government to be criticised by the opposition in this way

⁹ Meenu, Roy, (1998), *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216.

and this was followed by AIADMK chief Jayalalitha's decision to withdraw her party's support from the Vajpayee government and the resignation of two AIADMK Ministers M. Thambi Durai and K. R. Janarthanam.¹⁰ After the resignation drama, the AIADMK withdrew from the coordination committee of the BJP-led government on 9 April, 1999. The AIADMK chief Jayalalitha met the President K. R. Narayanan, on 14th April 99 and withdrew support to the Vajpayee government. Along with AIADMK the other parties were the INLD of Om Prakash Chautala with four MPs and Subramanian Swamy of Janata Party already pulled the plug. The strength of the 13 month old Vajpayee government shrunk to a minority which has been reduced to 260 in the Lok Sabha.

Failure of Opposition's Effort for Alternative Government

Following the withdrawal of support by the AIADMK, the 13-month-old Atal Behari Vajpayee Government was reduced to a minority. After the withdrawal of AIADMK, an opposition delegation comprising the Congress, Left, RLM and JD requested the President to direct Mr. Vajpayee to step down or seek a trust vote. The President K. R. Narayanan advised the government to move a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha after the delegations meet.

In the opposition camp, there was hectic activity. A confident Congress said there would be no problem to form a government.¹¹ On the other hand, the RLM of two Yadavs claimed to form an alternative government if

¹⁰ *The Pioneer*, (1999), New Delhi, April, 9.

¹¹ *Statesman*, (1999), Calcutta, April, 15.

Congress failed to do so. DMK indicated it would support extend to any group minus AIADMK. INLD declined to support either BJP or Congress led government. On 15th April 99, the meeting between Congress president Sonia Gandhi and AIADMK supremo J.Jayalalitha failed to bring about a consensus about the nature of an-alternative government. While Jayalalitha wanted the Congress to take the initiative for an alternative government the Congress asked the non BJP parties to evolve a consensus among themselves on whether there should be a Congress minority government or a coalition government.¹²

Following the defeat of Vajpayee government on the no-confidence motion, Sonia Gandhi met the President. She was followed by other leaders who met the President to explore the possibility of forming the alternative government. On 21st April, the BJP and it's allies submitted a list of 270 MPs to the president, urging him to stop the opposition from adopting anti-parliamentary practices to gather the support of MPs.¹³

Before the fall of the Vajpayee government the third front was ready to support the Congress, but later they changed their stand. The CPI, CPM and TMC agreed to support Congress from outside, however, the Samajawadi Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav refused, on the other hand Janata Dal was divided over this issue and Forward Block and RSP reiterated their position to maintain equal distance from BJP and Congress.

¹² Ram Nath Sharma, et al (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

When a Congress-led coalition of all the opposition parties was proposed, the RLM and AIADMK were strongly contesting this line, they insisted that an alternative arrangement has to be a coalition with representatives from their parties as well.¹⁴ But Congress president Sonia Gandhi opposed this type of coalition government at the centre as the Congress was reluctant to head an unhealthy, coalition.

The proposal of the Third Front government supported by the Congress also failed as the National Conference and INLD, the former allies of BJP, also wanted to join. On the other side DMK reused to go with AIADMK and BSP with SP, CPI (M) Politburo also disagreed with this proposal. The Congress president Mrs. Sonia called on the president on April 23, 99 with a list of 233 MP's belonging to the Congress and their parties and individuals, who promised support for a Congress government.¹⁵ However, this could not materialised as she failed to mobilis the required number. Finally the President dissolved the Lok Sabha on 26th April, 1999, on the advice of Union Cabinet and asked to go for a poll in next six months.

Role of the Congress As The "Recognised Opposition Party" in Parliament

After the election of 1998, the BJP emerged as the largest party and staked the claim to form the government with it's allies. The Congress party

¹⁴ Alok Sharma, (1999), "Opposition Group for a Government", *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, April, 19.

¹⁵ J.C. Aggarwal, N.K. Chaudhury, (2000), op. cit., p. 7.

has the second largest party and it was the largest party in the opposition group, recognized officially as the main opposition group in the lower House of the parliament. The Congress is not just a political party. It encompasses the diverse interest of every section of India's polity. The Congress party has the policies of secular, strong and self-reliant India with political democracy, social justice and economic growth. With that vision Congress party started playing its role in the Parliament as an opposition party. On the whole the BJP-led coalition government's tenure, the Congress party played its role slowly and steadily.

Although Congress was prepared to form a government if the Vajpayee government falls, it did not use any unparliamentary methods to destabilise the government as an opposition. Initially the parties like RJD, SP and Left Parties were in favour of forming the Congress government, but later changed their mind.

As an opposition leader Sonia Gandhi was very rational and even after the fall of Vajpayee government she did not take hasty decision to form the alternative government. Keeping in mind the differences of United Front, she took the decision to form a government of its own or else sit in the opposition instead of going for an minority unstable government

However the Congress party as an opposition party did not remain silent on the BJP-led government's wrong doings. It did not remain just as an opposition, but it played its role strategically to maintain the parliamentary ethos and values. Performing it's role well, it criticised the government on

several issues such as the issue of corruption charges initiated by Ms. Jayalalitha on PMO in relation to the transfer of M.K. Bezbaruah, the chief of Enforcement Directorate and demanded a probe into this case. It also criticized the government over the controversial issue of dismissal of Naval Chief Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat and demanded an inquiry. Apart from these, the Congress party criticized the government for its failure to control price hikes, anti-Christian and Hindu fundamentalists on the attacks of Christians in Gujrat and murder of Australian Christian missionary in Orissa. It also criticised the government's foreign policy and the happenings of Pokhran-II and India's isolation from the international community after the tests and the government's failure to tackle the post-Pokhran socio- economic situation. The Congress party condemned the government for its failure in India's security which resulted the war like situation between India and Pakistan in the Kargil area of Kashmir. The Congress also gave hand to the other opposition group in the case of governments decision on Rabri Devi Government and sharply protested against the use of Art. 356.

In spite of much criticism and opposition to the BJP-led government it also supported the government in many important welfare measures, Congress supported the government in introducing the Women's Reservation Bill, Patent Bill and IRA Bill. It stood with the government in welfare policies, without indulging in unnecessary criticism. It did not support the move of RLM on Women's Reservation Bill.

In order to capture power, Congress never tried to destabilize the government, nor created any antagonism among the coalition partners and lure the loose-fitted coalition partners. Of course it managed to get the post of Deputy Speaker with the help of some of the coalition partners like Trinamul Congress, AIADMK and INLD. However, the Congress as an opposition has been successful in its role without not taking such extreme steps to topple down the government. It was the AIADMK, the second largest ally, of the government, that pulled down the plug.

It is not that the opposition only criticizes the government, but the opposition parties have been also criticized by the public, when they do not apply the parliamentary methods within the limit. The government also criticizes the opposition when the opposition parties do not agree to sit in the session or do not allow to function the day to day affairs of the government. For instance, Vajpayee charged the opposition of polling down his government even though his government agreed upon the JPC probe on the issue of dismissal of Admiral Bhagwat only after the opposition had studied a detailed booklet brought out on the issue and still felt need for further investigations.¹⁶ Vajpayee also criticised the Congress party for its hand in the AIADMK pullout. There are many others who believed that the Congress carefully planned the strategy to create situation of instability in the coalition. But it may not be true in this government, because now a days, regional and

¹⁶ *The Pioneer*, 1999, New Delhi, April, 18.

state parties are playing their role not only in their area but they are conscious of their power to influence the shape of the government at the centre.

In the concluding part of this chapter we may say that opposition parties in this coalition were to some extent divided for the sake power of. Some were extreme in overthrowing the government like the RLM, some others also wanted the collapse of the government, but they were not in hurry. On the other hand, Congress as an opposition party did not want the immediate fall of the government rather it wanted the government to fall by the weight of its own contradictions within the coalition. As for the opposition's critical role was concerned, the Congress was not very much extreme unlike the RLM and Left parties. The Congress has supported in many cases by ignoring other opposition parties. It was not the opposition which destabilised the government, but it was one of it's allies, which pulled down the government.

Conclusion

Edward Shills has opined that "the effective and continuous existence of political democracy requires a fairly coherent and responsible opposition to the ruling party working within the rules of parliamentary game. This opposition should not simply interest itself in the obstruction and depreciation of the majority. It should be capable of criticizing the majority's measures on the basis of detailed and realistic information about the situation in the country and the performance of the executive".

Shill's views on the role of the opposition is extremely vibrant. But its meaning has not yet been applied properly in the largest democracy in the world. In India we have parliamentary democracy in a multi-party system. The multi party system by very nature creates extreme divisiveness on any issue. However in the early years of the Indian polity, the Congress part was so dominant there was little roomy any opposition, even disruption opposition.

Congress dominance has given way to coalition politics at the centre. Technically this should mean that the opposition has more room. But in fact, in the coalition era the opposition has played an opportunistic role.

Historically, the opposition parties in India have been weak in terms of their strength in legislature and outside it. No party or combination of parties was able to get official recognition as opposition in parliament since no party had the strength of ten percent of the total strength of the Lok Sabha until 1969. Though the Congress (O) was officially recognized as the opposition in

parliament but it was short lived and heavily lost in the 1971 parliamentary election. A united opposition came to challenge the Congress party in the sixth general elections of 1977. They were successful in overthrowing the Congress party dominance. The Janata coalition, the first non Congress government at the centre fell apart because of infighting within the coalition. This group which was a coalition of four parties also seem weak and fragmented. A significant change came about in Indian politics with the birth of BJP in 1980 and it's subsequent popularity, which challenged the Congress party. However, the advent of BJP as a strong opposition to the Congress has not brought any positive change in the way opposition functions.

The opposition has been so fragmented that it has failed to play any constructive role. The various opposition parties often resort to one upmanship and indulge in unparliamentary activities. The parties in the opposition also try to sow seeds of antagonism within the ruling coalition in order to does not lend its support discredit it. Even after knowing the incapability of it's strength to form an alternative, the Congress Party pulled down the BJP-led coalition government.

The present study also shows that the opposition in a coalition government is not only from outside, but also from within the coalition i.e. from the coalition nuclei and also from the party which supports a government from outside. During the Vajpayee government in 1998-99, the government was facing a strong opposition from the Congress, Left parties, RLM and other parties outside the government but it had also to face opposition from it's

allies like, AIADMK, Trinamul Congress and INLD. The UF government though it did not face a strong opposition from BJP and its allies, faced problems created by the outside supporter, the Congress (I). The outside opposition for a coalition has not been so much harmful for a coalition government. But the intra-coalitional opposition is much more dangerous for the major party in the coalition, which ultimately leads to the fall of the government. The intra-coalitional opposition takes place where a party in the coalition wants to enhance its dominance and bargaining capacity. But it need not be negative all the time. It checks the monopoly of the major party in coalition. But so far the present study is concerned the intra-coalitional opposition during the BJP-led government of 1998-99 is for the interest of the parties. Ms. Jayalalitha of AIADMK stuck to her demands to drop the corruption charges against her and her party members and demanded the overthrow of DMK government in Tamil Nadu. When her demands were not fulfilled she withdrew her support to the Vajpayee government. This is a clear case of personal and party interest prevailing over larger interests.

The party providing outside support often does it to pursue its own interests rather than any larger ideological goals. During the UF Government period the Congress party president Sitaram Kesri first withdrew support from the Deve Gowda government because of his dissatisfaction with Deve Gowda's style of functioning as well as pressing ahead with his various moves and manoeuvres to marginalize the Congress. Secondly, Kesri withdrew support from the I.K. Gujral government on the issue of Jain Commission

Report where it demanded the dropping of DMK ministers from the government because of their alleged role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. In both the cases governments suffered from the intra-coalitional opposition and the parties withdrew support to the governments for their own interest.

It is not that the opposition party outside has not played any role in the overthrow of the governments during the period between 1996 to 99. It was alleged by the BJP during the Vajpayee rule in 1998-99, that the Congress Party provided the helping hand to overthrow the government. The AIADMK broke with the BJP merely because the party felt that it would have greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the Congress than the BJP. As a result AIADMK Chief Jayalalitha met Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the Congress-I president and declared her willingness to support a Congress government at the centre. It was not the only case where the opposition engineered antagonism among the coalition partners. Congress had resorted to similar tactics even earlier also. The Janata government of Morarji Desai fell after Indira Gandhi extended support to the dissident leader Charan Singh. When the NF-LF government was in power in 1989, the leader of the opposition party, Rajiv Gandhi assured his support to the dissident leader Chandra Sekhar. This resulted in the fall of the V.P. Singh government. But the Congress in both the cases did not support the dissidents for the full term. In the first case Mrs. Indira Gandhi withdrew her support on the very day of Charan Singh's entry into the office of Prime Minister. In the second case Rajiv Gandhi the

opposition leader withdrew support from the Chandra Sekhar government just after a period of six months and 14 days.

So, the opposition outside has also caused hurdles in the path of coalition governments. Therefore the opposition both within the coalition and outside it, have not proven constructive and positive in pursuing national interests, rather have played a negative and opportunistic role.

Overall we may say that opposition during the coalition period has not been constructive and co-operative. Particularly during these two coalition governments the opposition has not played any constructive role. The coalition faced two way opposition during this period. First, the opposition within the coalition constituents and the criticism from the parties supporting from outside. Secondly, a fragmented opposition outside, which created problems in the governance by its day to day criticism and by creating antagonism among the coalition partners.

Moreover, the role of the opposition during the coalition period is more opportunistic and problematic than where there is a single party government in power. When there is a governing coalition, opposition usually consists of a number of small parties. They always create problems to overthrow the government because they know that the coalition is a weak formation based on agreement. Some times, issue based coalitions are formed. On the other hand, the opposition during the single party government comprises a large number of parties, as one party forms the government. Here the opposition hardly bothers about dislodging the government because it knows the

strength and stability of the government. In such cases, it criticizes the government for the sake of merely performing its duty. In single party government the Prime Minister does not suffer any type of no-confidence move, as he is the unanimous leader of the party in power. Except for few dissident members in the party, the Prime Minister does not face any type of opposition within the party unlike the Prime Minister in a coalition government.

One advantage for the opposition during the coalition rule is that, some of its demands are satisfied by the government to prevent it from unnecessary criticism and hurdles in governance. This feature is hardly seen in one party government. Here the opposition's importance has been neglected. But during coalition rule the large scale defection from the opposition to the government and vice versa is a peculiar feature, which occurs regularly. It is also difficult to find a party in opposition and government, as one party in the government today, joins the opposition tomorrow and vice versa. This feature is uncommon in a single party government.

Some of the findings from the dissertation as a whole are given below:-

- Opposition has played a reactive rather than proactive role. It has not adhered to its positive policies and has unnecessarily criticized the policies of the government.
- United oppositions seldom exist in India. An opposition emerged during the 1960's and 70's but did not last long to challenge the Congress due to its fragmented nature.

- The attempts at a united opposition led to the birth of coalition politics. The coalition politics has proved to be unstable.
- Opposition during coalition periods has created more disturbances than the opposition in one party government.
- Line of demarcation between opposition and government is not clear in coalition politics, as a party which is in the coalition today, may join the hands of opposition tomorrow.
- Opposition during the coalition hardly bothers about the democratic norms and values and creates problem for the government directly or indirectly through putting pressure on weak coalition partners.
- Opposition though divided, cannot aspire for power and yet tries to destabilise the government and causes its' downfall by attracting the weak constituents.
- Opposition to coalition is from both inside and outside the government i.e. within the coalition constituents as well as the opposition.
- The rebel coalition partners some times support the opposition parties and criticize the government or the majority party in the government.
- The outside support has been a problem for coalition government, as happened to the UF government of 1996-97. The Congress party caused the downfall of UF government. It emerged as an opposition rather a supporter of government.

The findings of the dissertation show the limitations of opposition's role in Indian parliamentary democracy. From the aforesaid findings of

opposition's role in Indian coalition politics, I suggest the following remedial measures to strengthen the opposition so as to make a constructive factor in the policy.

Opposition should have a proper role perception of its role and must select its issues accordingly. It should have its own positive policy, which it may place before the government and get its support. There should be unity among the opposition parties with proper organization and programme. The image of the leader of the opposition should be bright in the minds of the electorate that he/she should have the capacity to convince the parties and public. The opposition should be more vigilant, responsible and well informed about the government's activities. The outside support for a coalition government must end and all coalition partners should join in the government. All the constituents should get a share in the government and all should have their say in the government. It would mean equal importance of to every constituent. Members of the coalition should not look for their own interest rather they should think of the interest of the coalition. Coalition should be based on a strict adherence to Common Minimum Programme. Coalition formation should be also based on pre-poll alliance and with the like minded parties. Legal safeguards should be adopted to prevent members of a ruling coalition from moving away from the government. The Anti-Defection law should be made stronger. So that the large scale defection from both side can be checked. If all the above principles are applied strictly, the opposition as well as the coalition will function smoothly and there won't be any instability

syndrome afflicting the government and viability will be ensured as a permanent feature to parliamentary democracy.

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