State Level Coalition Governments and Federal Calculations:

Is State Politics an Autonomous Domain?

Kailash K.K.

Department of Political Science
Panjab University
Chandigarh

Center for Advanced Studies

Department of Politics & Public Administration

University of Pune

March 2010

Preface

We are happy to bring out this Occasional Paper under the series of Occasional Papers under the Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) of this Department. The purpose of this series is to make available to students, researchers, college teachers and colleagues the 'work-in-progress' that has benefited from the resources of the CAS.

The Department is currently running the first phase of the CAS after successful completion of three phases of Special Assistance Programme of the UGC from 1991 onwards. During those fifteen years, the Department initiated the practice of publishing Occasional papers and many have been subsequently revised and published separately or as part of edited books. We hope that this series will also help in disseminating the research work of the Department and benefit students and researchers.

The CAS was inaugurated in January 2009. This scheme has been granted by the UGC for the period 2008-13. The thrust area of research is Indian Politics with the theme of State of Democracy in India in Global Context.

This paper by Dr K.K. Kailash of Panjab University, Chandigarh is based on his presentation at the Department when he was a Visiting Fellow under CAS during February, 2009. We are thankful to him for visiting the Department and giving this manuscript to be brought out as an Occasional Paper under Center for Advanced Studies. We are also thankful to the reviewer who did a peer review of the earlier draft.

Coordinator,

CAS

State Level Coalition Governments and Federal Calculations: Is State Politics an Autonomous Domain?

Is state politics an autonomous domain? Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar (YY-SP) in their "Ten thesis on state politics in India" while making a convincing case for a comparative study of state politics open their essay with the proposition that state politics in India has become an autonomous domain. [1] This paper does not deny that with the transformation to a more competitive multi-party system, state politics has indeed acquired a second wind. However, at the same time it argues that the autonomy claim needs to be nuanced as it underplays the federal dimension in India's political canvas.

The focus of this paper is on the experience of coalition politics at the state level. Though coalition politics in India is being increasingly deliberated upon, comparatively less attention has been paid to coalition experiments in different states. This lack of attention is not necessarily merited as coalition arrangements at the national level are primarily marriages tailored to state specifics.[2] So while there is attention to this dimension in relation to states, coalition processes in the states themselves has surprisingly received inadequate attention.

Through a comparative study of coalition experiments in Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka the paper will examine the proposition whether state politics is indeed 'freer of the control of national politics'. This will enable us to make a controlled comparison, to test how the impact of the federal organisational logic on the strategies of political parties impinges on the autonomy of states. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. The first section begins with a review of the study of state politics in India and then examines the issue of autonomy of state politics. It also lays down the framework for analysis and delineates the scope of the study. An empirical enquiry focussing on the three states, informed by the framework follows in the second part of the essay. The final part summarises and concludes.

I

State Politics in India and Autonomy of State Politics

Writings on Indian politics for a long time revolved around the national political arena with state politics and state-based parties being reduced to small paragraphs and notes, as the latter did not appear to be critical players on the national political scene. With the Congress dominance under challenge, state politics began to receive greater attention.[3] Subsequently,

[1] Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, "Ten Theses on State Politics in India", *Seminar*, November 2008, pp. 14-22.
[2] E Sridharan, Coalitions and Party Strategies in India's Parliamentary Federation, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 33:4 (Fall 2003), pp. 135-152; "Electoral Commissions in 2004 General Elections: Theory and Evidence", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 December, 2004, pp. 5418-25.
[3] John R Wood, *State Politics in Contemporary India: Crisis or Continuity?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), p. xi

not only did state politics receive greater consideration, but politics in states began to be studied systematically with increasing methodological sophistication.[4]

YY-SP build their case for autonomy on the rise of state politics to the centre-stage of Indian politics in the last two decades. State politics, they note has broken free from national politics and has acquired a rhythm and logic of its own. Their seven dimensions of the manifestation of autonomy of state politics revolve around the electoral sphere and the role of "regional" parties. While it may be true that state politics has begun singing a different tune unshackled from the national domain especially with reference to the two factors, the autonomy and 'freeness' may not necessarily hold good when we consider other elements.

Political competition at the state level is nested in a multilevel framework. In this context the character of the federal system in terms of the powers and competencies of different levels is crucial. If the states are dependent on the federal government or if the latter has powers to overrule the former, then states are less likely to be autonomous. The greater the degree of centralisation and higher the leverage the central government has the lesser the scope for autonomous state politics. Under these conditions, despite states playing a more prominent and independent role, they might not actually have a carved an independent domain for themselves.

Our focus however, will not be on the constitutional provisions, but on the interface between federal dynamics and political parties. It is not surprising that when it comes to state politics the focus is more on state-based parties given the prominent role they play driving hard bargains with "national" parties. But the question is whether focussing on them will give us the complete story about autonomy? What about polity-wide parties? Will state politics be similarly "autonomous" when polity-wide parties are involved?

Party organisations are also shaped by the multilevel nature of the system. Consequently, different levels in the system besides the constitutional provisions could also be linked by party organisations. On one hand, this means that vertical and horizontal relations in a federation become closely intertwined with party politics. [5] On the other hand, in the context of this paper it also means that strategic calculations at the state level are guided not simply by the politics of the state but by political considerations often beyond its boundaries. The autonomy and the degree of freedom of state politics from national politics the paper concludes is therefore dependent on the organisation, goals and strategies of political parties.

---

[4] For a review of literature on state politics, see Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, 'From Hegemony to Convergence: Party system and Electoral Politics in the Indian States', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, XV (1&2), 2003, January-June, pp. 5-45; Rob Jenkins, 'Introduction', in Rob Jenkins (ed.), *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across India's States*, (New Delhi: Oxford, 2004), pp.1-25; Ashutosh Kumar, Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions within Regions, *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 9, 2009, pp.14-19.

[5] For instance, when the Congress was dominant federal relations were managed through party organization channels. See Balveer Arora, 'India's Federal System and the Demands of Pluralism: Crisis and Reform in the Eighties', Jyotpaul Chaudhuri (ed.), *India's Beleaguered Federalism: The Pluralist Challenge* (Temple, Arizona: State University Centre for Asian Studies, 1992), pp. 5-25.

Political parties, party systems and multiple levels of government

Very often federalism is seen in plain institutional terms with attention on the constitutional division of powers. Consequently, the interaction between the institutional setting and political parties is missed out. In comparative federalism however, the linkage between party organisation and the structure of a federation is a core component. The current trend of decentralisation in Western Europe has led to the issue of organisation of political parties and multi-level settings receiving greater attention.[6] However, even before this one of most influential writings has been that of Riker, who used the nature of the party system to measure federalism.[7] In the same direction, others too have showed how party organisation and party system can influence the relationship between different levels of government in a federation.[8] However, much of contemporary literature takes a different turn.

Reversing Riker, it is now often argued that the institutional structure of the federation has an impact on political party organisation. Chhibber and Kollman's cross national study showed that changes in party systems could be ascribed to the changing role of the state. Similarly Thorlakson who has systematically worked on this particular aspect notes that the form of federation is the key to explaining the nature of party systems.[9] On the Indian experience, Balveer Arora posits a dialectical relationship between institutions and processes leading to significant changes in both elements.[10] Hopkin's study of the United Kingdom and Spain takes a similar turn, when he notes that the organisational inertia of parties can put breaks on decentralising tendencies.[11] To sum up comparative federalism literature shows us that there can be several dimensions to the relationship between the institutional environment and the nature and organisation of political parties.

Kris Deschouwer's typology of political parties in multi-level systems provides us a useful handle to understand the interaction between political parties and structural features of a federation.[12] For reasons of lucidity, the typology assumes a simple two-level structure of decision making. The two dimensions that construct the typology are 'presence' and

---

[6] Jonathan Hopkin and Pieter van Houten (ed.), special issue on "Decentralization and State-Wide parties" *Party Politics* 15(2), March, 2009, pp. 131-240.
[7] William H Riker, 'Federalism' in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (ed.) *Handbook of Political Science: Governmental Institutions and Processes*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 131-141
[8] K. C. Wheare, *Federal government*. 4th edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Mikhail Filippov, Peter C. Ordeshook, Olga V. Shvetsova, *Designing Federalism: A Theory of Self-Sustainable Federal Institutions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
[9] Lori Thorlakson, 'An Institutional Explanation of Party System Congruence: Evidence from Six Federations', *European Journal of Political Research*, 46 (1), 2007, pp. 69–95; Patterns of Party Integration: Influence and Autonomy in Seven Federations, *Party Politics*, 15(2), 2009, pp. 157–177.
[10] He analysed the functioning of federal structures and institutions in terms of the changes that have taken place in the party system, especially, the internal functioning of the its major components. Balveer Arora, 'Party System and Federal Structures in India: Linkages and Issues', in T C Bose (ed.) *Indian Federalism: Problems and Issues*, (Calcutta: Bagchi, 1986), pp.174-186.
[11] Jonathan Hopkin, Party Matters: Devolution and Party Politics in Britain and Spain, *Party Politics*, 15 (2), March, 2009, pp.179-198.
[12] Kris Deschouwer, 'Political Parties as Multi-Level Organizations' in Richard S Katz and William Crotty, *Handbook of Party Politics,* (London: Sage, 2006), pp.291-300

'territorial pervasiveness'. Presence revolves around the choices parties make with regard to participation in elections at different levels of the political system. The three possible positions are that parties could participate either only at the regional level, the national level or at both levels. The other dimension territorial pervasiveness focuses on the location of the party. Here again there could be three positions; parties could be located in one region, some regions or in all regions. Deschouwer combines these different positions to construct a nine-point typology of political parties in multi-level systems.

The advantage with Deschouwer's comprehensive typology is that it implicitly acknowledges the sociological dimension. It recognises that the territorial demarcation of societal cleavages can play a key role in the way parties organise themselves. Parties have the option of spreading themselves across the polity or concentrating on particular units. The participation dimension however needs to be qualified. It is possible that a party may participate in all regions and at all levels and yet win from only one region. Surely, this party is very different from a party that participates and actually wins from all regions. Therefore, if we modify participation to include winning, it may serve our purpose of classification better.

For analytical purposes we could collapse Deschouwer's model into two distinct classes using the participation and winning criteria, polity-wide and non polity-wide parties. Parties participating and winning across the country both at the national and state level could be called polity-wide and those doing so in some states or a single state can be called non polity-wide parties. Polity-wide parties not only spread themselves but also win across the polity, in contrast non polity-wide parties concentrate on particular regions or units or identify themselves with a particular linguistic, religious or ethnic identity and usually win only from specific units. While polity-wide parties aim to represent people throughout the country, the representative sweep of non polity-wide parties is limited. This categorisation into polity-wide and non polity-wide parties which takes into account winning therefore measures success of a strategy not aspirations of political parties.

It follows that a party is not necessarily a polity-wide party even if it seeks to and claims to be one by contesting in different units or appeals to broader sections of the population. It might actually receive a majority of its seats-votes from a particular state or a few units in the federation. What matters is winning. Polity-wide parties are likely to not only contest but also win from different parts of the country. The main difference is that the strategy of the polity-wide parties is geared to winning power independently at the national level, whereas non polity-wide parties can realistically only aspire to govern at the national level as part of a coalition given the actual number of seats that they contest.

It must however be acknowledged that this two-fold division is not very neat given that it only distinguishes most clearly between two ends. In reality most parties would actually be placed somewhere in between the two ends. The terms polity-wide and non polity-wide therefore only serve as heuristic devices intended to capture the relatively differential spread of parties and are not descriptive markers. Furthermore, this distinction privileges the federal and does not tell us much about the party system at the state level. It is to this aspect that we now turn our attention to.

Comparative literature informs us that the nature of the party system greatly influences government formation, policy programmes and the legislative process among many other things. If the party system as Duverger put it reflects the 'forms and modes of their coexistence', then the relative size and strength of parties becomes crucial. All parties are not equally placed but which parties should we count? As Sartori noted the 'tactics of party competition and opposition appear related to the number of parties; and this has, in turn, an important bearing on how governmental coalitions are formed and are able to perform.'[13] His criterion for counting parties is fairly simple; what is the party's effect on party competition? Based on which, he formulated two criteria 'coalition potential' and 'blackmail potential' for counting parties. For Sartori, all parties that have 'either a governmental relevance in the coalition-forming arena, or a competitive relevance in the oppositional arena' are to be counted.[14] This criterion provides us a starting point to make sense of the position of political parties in a party system.

Using Sartori's logic of relevance, within a state party system a party could be in either of the following positions, a dominant player, one-among the other players, or simply a bit player. To keep it simple, we limit our focus to government. A dominant player not only wins a substantial number of the seats-votes but could also be serious contestant for government independently at the state level or could be a coalition-maker at the state level. A one-among the other players party wins seats and votes but is not in a position to take a lead role independently in government formation. It can still however, be a coalition maker depending on the nature of party competition. A bit player in the best scenario is a coalitionable party at the state level.

Parties in a federal system cannot ignore the connection between and across different levels. However, as compared to non polity-wide parties, the lives of polity-wide parties are more complicated when it comes to linkages. Polity-wide parties live different lives across the polity. Given that their support base is spread and they have to balance multiple demands, they could have differentiated strategies across units. At the same time, multiple interests not only across units but also between different levels have to be mediated, reconciled and integrated within the party. The branches of polity-wide parties will not therefore be in a position to act as independent operating units and with the same freedom as a non polity-wide party.[15] While state units may carry the advantages of the spread, weight and influence of being a polity-wide party, the priorities and calculations of the central leadership will intervene reducing their independence.

In contrast, non polity-wide parties have a much simpler strategy as organisational issues to be confronted are limited. However, this is only relatively so as the multi-level system can impact the way a non polity-wide party behaves, especially since some of its opponents in the

---

[13] Giovanni. Sartori, *Parties and Party systems: A Framework for Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.120
[14] ibid., p.123
[15] See then Andhra Chief Minister, Y S Rajasekhara Reddy's interview with Shekar Gupta in which he mentioned that 'we keep Delhi informed of anything important'. *Indian Express*, May 25, 2005

state level party system may be competing at different levels.[16] This becomes crucial if we account for the power distribution between levels. If states are relatively dependent on the centre, then even if parties have their primary interest at the state level they would have an incentive to play a role at the central as well, if only to function effectively in the state.

We are now in a position to state our propositions. Given the multiple interests that need to be reconciled, the central leadership of polity-wide parties constrains the functioning of state units. The autonomy of state politics is most discernible when the players are non polity-wide parties whose primary interest lies at the state level. In the case of polity-wide parties since external concerns are almost always involved, the scope for the autonomy of state politics is reduced. The autonomy of state politics is also constrained in case of an alliance between non polity-wide parties and polity-wide parties, besides also if non polity-wide parties seek to play a more active role at the national level. Our focus will be on polity-wide parties.

Our point is that the organisation of a polity-wide party is such that decisions are often taken away from the site of action. When state units of polity-wide parties cede power to the central leadership with regard to state level matters, it reduces autonomy in two possible ways. First, this brings external considerations to the issue at hand. Second, even if the central unit takes a decision or uses its leverage to the advantage of the state unit, it nevertheless compromises the autonomy of the state, as an external force changes the play of the game. The same applies when a non-polity wide party aligns with a polity-wide party.

We already know that the nature of the party system is a crucial explanatory factor. Consequently, the degree of freedom of state units of polity-wide parties should depend on the position of a party in a particular state party system. This position could influence intra-party relations, between the state unit and the central party apparatus. If the party is a dominant player at the state level, the writ of the central leadership may be constrained, while it may increase if the polity-wide party is only a bit player. The location of a party in the state party system is probably the toughest test of our proposition that polity-wide parties necessarily compromise the autonomy of the state.

Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka

As a methodological tool, comparison of sub-national political units has been used to make sense of Indian politics.[17] There has however been very scanty attention to coalition politics in states and almost nothing on a comparative basis.[18] Given the current prominence of state politics, meaningful comparative analysis may help arrive at more reasoned and reliable generalisations about Indian politics in general and coalition politics in particular.

---

[16] Deschouwer, 2006, op.cit., p.292

[17] Myron Weiner*, State Politics in India,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); Iqbal Narain, (ed.), *State Politics in India*, (Jaipur: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1976); Wood, 1984, op. cit., Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jenkins, 2004, op.cit.

[18] Paul R Brass, Coalition Politics in North India, *American Political Science Review*, 62 (4), December, 1968, pp. 1174-1191; M P Singh and Anil Mishra (ed.), *Coalition Politics in India: Problems and Prospects,* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004).

The first question is why focus on Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka. Compared to some of the other states, these states have received generous attention in studies on Indian politics. We focus on these states not for the reason that they have always interested observers, but because their experiments with coalition politics in the last two decades have not received as much attention. However, our choice is not guided simply by the issue of neglect.

Although the two polity-wide parties, the BJP and the Congress are key players at the national level, their position differs widely in state party systems. We have already made a distinction between the various positions a party can occupy in a party system. It has also been stated that the position of the polity-wide party in the state party system could influence the leverage the state unit has with the central leadership of the party. Our choice of states should enable controlled comparisons, by varying the position of the polity-wide party in the state party system. Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir offer the possibility of comparing the role of polity-wide parties in coalition governments under different positions in the party system. At the same time, the other "countable" parties are very different in each of the three states.

In Karnataka, the Congress has traditionally been a strong player but the BJP in the recent past has acquired some muscle. Karnataka is therefore a state where both the Congress and the BJP are currently dominant players. Uttar Pradesh is a state where the BJP has been dominant and the Congress a bit player. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress is a dominant player and the BJP is a bit or is in the one-among the players position. The other players are distinctly different in each of the states. While the JD (S) is active in Karnataka, the BSP is in a similar position in Uttar Pradesh. In Jammu and Kashmir, the PDP and the NC are the other main players. Given that the other parties are stakeholders only in their respective states it controls for limiting the possibility of intervening cross-connections.

The location within a party system identified is dynamic and is determined not only by the performance of the polity-wide party but depends on others as well. The BJP for instance has slipped to being one among the other players in Uttar Pradesh. The positioning identified above therefore pertains to the particular period in which coalition politics in a state is being studied. Our focus on these three states in which the polity-wide parties are in differential positions, should be a robust test as to whether the position in a state party system matters or has an impact on its functioning.

II

In this section, we map the coalition experiences in Uttar Pradesh, and Jammu Kashmir and Karnataka. The focus is on coalition governments at the state level but in the backdrop of a wider canvas. These experiences will demonstrate how the involvement of polity-wide parties brings in federal calculations. In our analysis, we attempt to understand how numerous external factors, like the central government, centre-state relations, governor, intra-party dynamics, electoral cycles and critical events among other aspects impinge on the coalition processes in the state.

Uttar Pradesh

From the end of 1989 to almost the middle of 2007, barring a one and a half year period in the early '90s, Uttar Pradesh (UP) alternated between coalition and/or minority governments and President's Rule. In the early phase, the fortunes of governments in UP were decided by power shifts in Delhi more than anything else. As at the centre, after the 1989 elections, a JD coalition was followed by a SJP coalition. The life of both governments was determined by the interests of the BJP and the Congress respectively at the national level. After the 1991 election, the BJP formed a government on its own but after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, the government was dismissed and President's rule was imposed. The pre-electoral SP-BSP coalition that came to power in the subsequent election lasted only for around one and a half years. Our focus here on the series of BSP-BJP coalitions that would subsequently form.

After the fall of the SP-BSP government in June 1995, a BSP-BJP government was formed. The BJP then had this vision of replacing the Congress as the dominant polity-wide player and was in the process of putting into action its grand plan.This centrally directed alliance with the BSP which attempted to take advantage of the latter's support base did not find many takers in the BJP state unit. However, the BJP was forced to withdraw support within four and half months as its own reports suggested that it would lose its own core voters if the alliance continued.[19] The legislative assembly was initially kept in suspended animation and subsequently President's rule was imposed. This suited the Congress then ruling at the centre as it could now run the state through the backdoor.

With the second phase of federal coalitions at the centre, other autonomy reductionist elements came into play more sharply. In the elections of September 1996, no party had the numbers to form a government on its own and consequently President's Rule continued.[20] In these elections, the Congress had electorally allied with the BSP and was supporting the United Front (UF) government at the centre. The Congress wanted the SP, a constituent of the UF to support a BSP government in UP. The SP however did not acquiesce to this proposition, preferring President's rule instead, as it gave the party a better leverage.

While the Congress-SP parleys were on, the BJP managed to pursue the BSP into a one-year time-sharing coalition.[21] This again was thrust upon an unwilling state unit by the central leadership.[22] This reluctance would hurt the alliance since the partnership had to be worked at

---

[19] The BSP's actions were deemed to be detrimental to the BJP's core support base. Ramashish Rai, a BJP worker for instance said "How long could we keep silent in the face of the BSP'S excesses? We were losing support and finding it difficult to explain how the BSP could abuse Ram and Gandhi without a chirp out of us. The sins of the BSP government were being visited on the BJP". *Outlook*, November 01, 1995

[20] The BJP which emerged as the single largest party did not even make a claim given its short experience in Delhi. The Assembly was not constituted. *Outlook* October 23, 1996

[21] The BSP would lead the government for the first six months and the BJP in the latter half.

[22] The national leadership BSP-Congress alliance in 1996 had helped the Congress win thirty-three seats and, demonstrated that BSP votes were transferrable. Kalyan Singh was against a BJP-BSP alliance and was kept out of the loop during the negotiations. He was sent on a series of Kisan Sansad sponsored padayatras and it was after one such march, he was informed about the proposed coalition with the BSP. It is also reported that in a

the state level. The BSP aware that it was cohabiting with a reluctant partner often used the BJP national leadership to coerce the state unit.

After the BSP's rule, though the transfer took place, it withdrew support less than a month later.[23] The withdrawal converted the BJP- BSP government to a BJP plus government, as the BJP engineered defections and proved its majority. The Governor recommended President's rule and the Union Cabinet under pressure from the SP approved it, but the then President in a historic move send it back for reconsideration. The Cabinet decided not to push its case further, despite the SP's demands. In February 1998, in a sudden move the Governor dismissed Kalyan Singh and installed a Loktantrik Congress Party (LCP) government.[24] What the SP could not achieve was now done by the Governor. However, a judiciary directed floor test brought the BJP plus government back. Though Kalyan Singh himself did not continue long, the alliance completed its term.

The 2002 assembly elections did not throw up any clear winner. The SP being the largest party staked its claim. All parties had clearly defined positions which prevented any workable combination.[25] Their stands can be understood only in the light of past events and experiences across different levels.[26] In March 2002, the BSP leader Mayawati had resigned from the Lok Sabha to form a government with BJP support. However, given the reluctance of the state unit the BJP did not take it up. Subsequently, the Governor recommended President's rule and the assembly was not called. This suited the BJP at the centre.

Events outside the state in a federal system can have multiple effects across levels. While the Gujarat riots shook the NDA at the centre it ironically aided government formation in UP.

---

closed-door meeting Vajpayee asked BJP MLA's, not to treat the coalition as a climb down and asked them to go back to their constituencies with their 'heads held high' and say that the mandate given to the BJP in UP had finally been put into effect through this experiment. *Outlook*, April 02, 1997. Mayawati herself said that the agreement on the alliance was reached by Advani, Vajpayee and Kanshi Ram and consequently any decision for the BSP would also be taken by its leader Kanshi Ram.

[23]The BSP began to find fault with some decisions of the government and functioning style despite being part of the government. Kalyan Singh's first government order instructed prevention of the misuse of the SC-ST Act, as there was a general perception in the state that the Mayawati government had misused the Act for partisan purposes. The previous government had also renamed some districts after dalit leaders. The BSP specifically charged the government as being "anti-dalit" and even held demonstrations against it. It was also critical of the chief minister visiting the disputed religious site in Ayodhya immediately after taking over.

[24] The LCP comprised of defectors from the Congress who had been supporting the Kalyan Singh government headed by Jagadimbika Pal.

[25] The BSP had given a written statement that it would not support either the SP or the BJP. The BJP had announced that it would sit in the opposition. The RLD announced that it was in the NDA and could not support a SP led government. The Congress which returned with 25 members was unwilling to give an undertaking to support the SP until the SP demonstrated it had the additional numbers to make up a majority. *The Hindu*, March 07, 2002

[26] The BSP was adamant that it had nothing to do with the SP after its 1995 experience. The BJP was a pariah to the major players. The Congress remained non-committed repaying the SP for its unsupportive stand in 1996 and 1999 at the state and national level respectively. When the BJP-led alliance at the national level fell, the Congress had claimed that it had the numbers to form an alternative government. However, the SP's unclear position put serious doubts on the "numbers" claim.

The BJP's national level aims soon overrode its initial reluctance and local concerns.[27] On the short-term agenda was the priority of padding support at the centre. In the period after the Gujarat crisis, there were changes in the NDA with some partners leaving and others taking a more distanced position. The BSP with thirteen MPs could therefore be very useful to the NDA.[28] This pushed the BJP to support a BSP government in UP, in return for support at the centre.[29] This however, was only part of a plan.

On the long-term agenda were assembly elections in some key states besides the 2004 parliamentary elections. Besides this, the BJP wanted to get over the anti-dalit taint of 1997. Furthermore, the BJP's poor performance in UP in the 1999 parliamentary elections not only caused great internal trouble but had also necessitated a rethinking of party strategy. The central leadership believed an agreement with the BSP will help it in 2004 and also prevent the BSP from reaching an agreement with the Congress in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh where the BSP was making inroads.

A BSP plus alliance was sworn in May 2002.[30] The Governor's partisan actions often favoured the government and kept it afloat.[31] The BSP aware that the BJP was the desperate party functioned as if it were ruling alone. The state BJP though constrained by the national leadership continued to be critical of Mayawati and did not make any effort to reach any understanding.[32] To check the state unit Mayawati often bypassed them and spoke directly to the BJP national leadership.[33] In February 2003 for instance, she met some of the top functionaries of the BJP and as per her wishes during these meetings, it is reported that the state BJP leaders were present. After the Delhi meetings, an informal three-member BJP

---

[27] A senior BJP leader is said to have remarked "We realise that we may not reap any long-term political advantage from this alliance. But the aim was not long-term, but a very short-term one: to save the Vajpayee government in Delhi on the eve of the vote in the Lok Sabha on Gujarat." *Frontline*, 19(10), May 11-24, 2002; Rajnath Singh like Kalyan Singh earlier was overruled when the decision to tie-up with the BSP was taken. The Prime Minister is reported to have called up Rajnath Singh and asked him to ensure that the government won the vote respectively enough. *Frontline*, 19 (11), May 25-June 07, 2002.

[28] The BSP also agreed to support the BJP nominees for the post of President and Vice-President. *Outlook* May 13, 2002

[29] *Frontline*, 19 (09), April 27 - May 10, 2002

[30] This alliance included Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), JD (U), Loktantrik Congress Party (LCP) and a few independents. Ministerial posts were distributed in proportion to their respective strengths. While the BJP got the Speaker's post, its demand for the post of deputy chief minister was not met. There was no clear programme or coordination mechanism. The BSP avoided it as it did not want to give all the coalition partners equal representation in the coordination committee as that would mean that the BJP and its allies would have a majority, which could tie it down. *The Hindu* April 27, 2002

[31] For instance, he refused to look into reports of loss of confidence and alternate claims that were put forward. While this was disadvantageous to the SP, it suited the BJP.

[32] Vinay Katiyar, the new state BJP president had been touring the state and was using quotes from Ambedkar's writings to show that Ambedkar was against both partition and the "appeasement" policy of the Congress. *Frontline*, 20 (3), February 1-14, 2003

[33] For instance, on the Katiyar yatra the BSP took up this issue with the central leadership of the BJP, who in turn wanted the yatra to stop. However, under pressure from the state level leadership the yatra was allowed to continue, but Katiyar was asked to cool down the rhetoric. *Frontline*, 20 (3), February 1-14, 2003; On the POTA issue, Mayawati directly met the then Home Minister L K Advani and presented him with evidence, so much so that he later noted in the Rajya Sabha that the Act was not being misused in Uttar Pradesh. *Frontline*, 20(5), March 01-14, 2003

committee was asked to meet once every fortnight to sort out issues.[34] However, this was ineffective and unsatisfactory as the chief minister continued to act even more audaciously.[35] An alliance partner, RLD withdrew support in May 2003.

What finally got the central leadership to rethink was when the BSP accused the Union Tourism and Cultural Minister in the Taj Corridor scandal.[36] It wanted the minister sacked and even raised the issue in parliament.[37] The Supreme Court's order of a Central Bureau of Investigation into the details of the deal was the final nail.[38] Subsequently, Mayawati resigned and recommended dissolution of the assembly. A helpful Governor guided by the BJP which had now switched strategies facilitated the formation of a SP led government.[39] The new minority coalition government led by Mulayam Singh, survived till the next legislative assembly election in 2007.

Our study of UP showed that a polity-wide party's centralised calculations and strategies often went beyond the state boundaries and were not necessarily in sync with that of the state unit. The BSP tie-up came at a time when the BJP was its peak and against wishes of the state unit. The state unit was restrained from routine mobilisation programmes and criticising the BSP. It is therefore not surprising that the UP BJP unit split. Kalyan Singh, breaking away was evidence that the central leadership mattered and its preferences had priority. Managing alliances took priority over overseeing internal party affairs.[40] The central leadership had the last say and in the resolution of the tension between different levels, national calculations were privileged.

The UP experience brought out the federal dimension most clearly in terms of the influential role of the central government and national leadership of political parties. First, the BJP's pull-out to the JD was connected with its withdrawal at the centre. Then the Congress had the state under President's rule for an inordinately long period. This was then followed by the SP calling shots as part of the UF government. The Governor almost always acted in a manner advantageous to the ruling party at the centre. Finally, whenever a polity-wide party was

---

[34] She met the Prime Minister, Union Home and Human Resources ministers' and also the BJP president, M. Venkaiah Naidu in February, 2003. A informal three-member committee comprising Vinay Katiyar, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon was set up to liaison with Mayawati, *Frontline*, 20(5), March 01-14, 2003.

[35] Surya Pratap Shahi, accused Mayawati of land grabbing. *Frontline*, 20(5), March 01-14, 2003; Ram Iqbal, a BJP MLA sat on dharna protesting that his supporters had been beaten up by the BSP. The chief minister responded with counter cases against him and his family members under the Gangster Act. *Frontline*, 20 (17), August 16-29, 2003.

[36] *Frontline*, 20 (19), September 13 - 26, 2003

[37] The BSP actually stalled the Lok Sabha on the issue on July 29, 2003. The BJP MP's from Uttar Pradesh wanted immediate withdrawal of support. The Prime Minister finally intervened to inform the chief minister that it was his prerogative to decide on his ministers and even supposedly threatened to pull out if needed.

[38] The BSP interpreted it as an attempt by the BJP to gain political advantage. Mayawati is to have written a 30 page letter to the Prime Minister on August 25, 2003 where she spelled out why the alliance was not working and why she was ending it. She wrote that the Taj controversy was being used by the BJP to pressurise the BSP into giving it more seats in the Lok Sabha elections. *Frontline*, 20 (19), September 13 - 26, 2003

[39] The SP and the BJP wanted to prevent the Congress from forming a government with the BSP. The SP and the BJP wanted to prevent the Congress from forming a government with the BSP. See Sudha Pai, 'Choices before the BJP', *Seminar*, 534, February, 2004, pp. 41-45.

[40] *Frontline*, 19 (13), June 22 - July 5, 2002

involved, even in the case when the BJP was a dominant player in the state it was the central leadership which directed the show, reducing the state unit to minor players.

Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir's tryst with coalitions came after the "landmark" 2002 elections. The incumbent National Conference (JKN) returned with the largest number of seats and percentage of votes amongst the competing parties in the new assembly. Post elections, seven independent and two CPI (M) MLA's formed the Democratic People's Forum and decided to support any non-JKN alternative. The Congress and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) began negotiations towards formation of a new government. The alliance was basically between these two and the other parties/groups were supporting them.

Federal Dimension and Coalition Strategy

The agreement came after nearly two weeks of deliberations in which multiple players were involved at different levels.[41] This PDP-Congress agreement was centre-driven.[42] The two parties agreed to a time-sharing arrangement along with a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) and staked their claim. The two demands of the PDP, that they have the first chance of holding the office of chief minister and for half the term of the legislature was unacceptable to the state unit of the Congress. As was the case with the BJP in UP, there was near revolt by the Congress state unit and they had to be pacified by the central leadership. The state Congress argued that there was no guarantee that the PDP would keep its word after its term of office. [43] Central direction as in UP constrained the local Congress aspirations for the time being but this never actually turned the state unit to the national leadership's point of view.

It was Sonia Gandhi, the party president who overrode the objections and pushed for accommodating the PDP.[44] The Congress was playing a double game in which the state of Jammu and Kashmir was a tool to further its larger agenda. Being a sensitive state, the Congress leadership chose the high moral ground of being accommodative arguing that it was willing to sacrifice its interests "in the larger interest of the nation". Having been out of power at the centre for nearly six years, it had to take up positions that would attract attention and put it in a favourable position compared to the more hawkish stand of the BJP.

---

[41] The Congress and the PDP came together after hard bargaining and posturing. At one stage it appeared that the Congress would form a government with a splinter faction of the PDP.

[42] Manmohan Singh was the chief Congress negotiator. Others involved included Arjun Singh and V P Singh. There were direct talks between the Party Presidents in Delhi. The PCC chief Ghulam Nabi Azad was not invited to the initial round of talks and was also absent when the CMP was being discussed. *The Hindu*, October 26, 2002.

[43] The sub-unit of the state Congress from the Jammu region nearly revolted.. Valley based Congress leaders argued that accepting Sayeed's claim to represent the Valley amounted to political suicide. *Frontline*, 19 (23), November 09-22, 2002.

[44] Speaking to journalists, Sonia Gandhi is reported to have said that it was made "in the larger interests of the people of the Valley". *Frontline*, 19 (23), November 09-22, 2002

At the same time it was preparing for 2004. The Congress general secretary's statement that "we want to give out the signal that we treat our junior partners with equal respect, that we treat them as equals," showed that the arrangement was pregnant with possibilities and ramifications beyond the state.[45] The Congress was experimenting with alliances and fishing in larger waters. This is especially significant when it had been spurning the efforts by the SP to have an alliance in UP around the same time. This agreement with the PDP helped the Congress in 2004 as the PDP joined the UPA as a supporting partner.

Unlike in UP and Karnataka as we shall see, the turnover of power between the two partners was comparatively smooth. During the course of coalition government, there were numerous issues of friction between the Congress and the PDP.[46] Most of these tensions were based on local issues, yet under the central direction, the state Congress continued to pull on with the PDP. In 2007, almost as if it were preparing for the next assembly elections, the PDP began to raise old issues like the pull-out of troops.[47] The chief minister and state Congress leaders became increasingly critical of the PDP and its demands forcing the PDP to boycott cabinet meetings.[48] Once again it was discussion between the Congress central leadership and the PDP that brought things under control.[49] The central leadership decided that it was in the best interests of the state to continue with the alliance and instructed the state leadership to iron out its differences with the PDP.[50] One of the main irritants for the PDP was the closeness of the chief minister with the NC and the fact that the government had overturned many of the earlier decisions by the PDP aimed to hurt the NC politically.[51] The chief minister in fact had assured the Congress central leadership that the government would survive despite the withdrawal of the PDP, but the leadership once again taking a moral stand did not entertain

[45] Statement made by Oscar Fernandes, Congress General Secretary . Another Congress leader Motilal Vohra is reported to have remarked that "with this move we have shown that we are the only truly national alternative to the NDA government. We have proved that we believe in carrying all sections of people along". *Frontline*, 19 (23), November 09-22, 2002.

[46] The Congress and the PDP voted differently on the issue of the reintroduction of the controversial Permanent Resident (Disqualification) Bill, 2004. The PDP was critical of the chief minister divesting PDP minister Qazi Mohd Afzal of the forest portfolio and inducting former chief secretary B.R. Kundal into the cabinet without consultation. Differences also existed as to who would replace Kundal as chief secretary. In April 2008, Sayeed raised the issue of dual currency and earlier Mehbooba Mufti suggested dual control at a Pugwash conference. Both parties had different ideas about self rule. The Kundal report also created a mini crisis for the coalition.

[47] The PDP leader wrote to the prime minister in March 2007 after the chief minister refused to agree to the demands, which included, reduction of troops in Jammu and Kashmir, quashing the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and vacation of civilian properties by security forces.

[48] The state congress chief Perzada Mohammad Sayeed threatened to throw the PDP out of the alliance. March 13, 2007, the chief minister asked the those making demands to first forego the security given to them.

[49] The PDP leadership met Sonia Gandhi, Pranab Mukherjee and the prime minister with their concerns. The prime minister constituted two committees to review the withdrawal of troops and the AFSPA and then on the basis of the recommendations replied to the PDP demands.. Regarding the vacation of the properties, the prime minister directed the state government to speed up matters. It was only after the prime minister's assurance that the PDP began to attend cabinet meetings.

[50] A high level meeting of the Congress late on March 10 2007 made this decision.

[51] *Financial Express*, March 12, 2007

this proposal.[52] The state Congress continually felt that it was not being treated respectfully despite having more seats than the PDP.

The PDP withdrew from the coalition on the Amarnath shrine issue even though it was a party to the government decision. Within days of the withdrawal, the floodgates of criticism which had been bolted came out.[53] The outbursts by the state Congress leaders brought out the deep differences between the two parties which had not been bridged by more than five years of cohabitation. The pivotal role that the central leadership played in the maintenance of the alliance was evident in the July 2008, confidence motion in the Lok Sabha when the PDP supported the Congress led-UPA despite having withdrawn from the coalition in the state.

In the elections that followed, the JKN was again returned with the largest number of seats. The Congress decided to support the JKN at the state level something that the state Congress unit had been demanding. By now, the priorities of the central leadership had also changed. With the Left withdrawal, support from every quarter was vital to the survival of the UPA government. Subsequently, the PDP withdrew support to the UPA at the centre. The letter withdrawing support explicitly brings out the crucial role the central leadership of the Congress had played in maintaining the alliance.[54] Significantly, it made no mention of the state-level Congress leadership.

The pattern of functioning of the Congress in Jammu and Kashmir was similar to the case of the BJP in UP. The Congress central leadership pulled the strings to suit its calculations. The leadership kept the state unit under strict control to satisfy the PDP. When the state unit wanted to break with the PDP and align with the JKN, the leadership disagreed. Ironically after the 2008 election, the Congress joined hands with the JKN. The involvement of polity-wide parties in state politics not only makes politics more complicated but also takes it beyond the state level.

Karnataka

Karnataka presents a slightly different case from the other two states. Interestingly, both the Congress and the BJP the dominant players were involved in cohabitation arrangements with the JD (S). In both UP and Jammu and Kashmir we saw polity-wide parties going out of the way to accommodate non-polity wide parties. In Karnataka, though the centralised control

---

[52] *Indian Express*, March 14, 2007

[53] Mangat Ram Sharma alleged that that PDP ministers spoke the language of Pakistan, Ghulam Nabi Azad accused Pakistan and Saudi Arabia of funding the protestors. In July 2008, Azad said that the Congress would be going to elections alone and alleged that after the three year term of the PDP they had not being cooperating with the Congress.

[54] The letter heaped substantial praise on the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi for bringing and keeping the alliance together. It recalled "the consideration that you and your government showed to our point of view and the historic contribution you made to Kashmir's fortunes in 2002." It went on to say that, "My father and my party feel we have done a duty towards our state, which could not have been achieved without the support of your party and the government". *Business Standard*, January 05, 2009

and direction in polity-wide parties continued, the polity-wide parties did not yield too much space to the JD (S).

Federal Calculations and Coalition Strategies in Karnataka

The elections to the twelfth legislative assembly in Karnataka were held along with the Lok Sabha elections in 2004. The incumbent Congress government's early election plan came undone when the BJP returned with the highest number of seats. The formation of the first coalition government in Karnataka was a direct result of the emergence of the BJP as a key player in the state with the Congress and the JD (S) joining hands to keep the BJP out.[55] As the Congress was involved, the centre of action whether it was alliance formation, ministerial selection and expansion or even plain coordination between partners, took place in Delhi. The JD (S) also preferred to deal directly with the Congress central leadership rather than state leaders.[56] The main architects of the alliance were the JD (S) president H D Deva Gowda and the Congress central leadership, besides the NCP president, Sharad Pawar.[57] Given the number of outside actors, the coalition building calculations could not have been limited to Karnataka alone.

The negotiations between the JD (S) and the Congress took a little more than two weeks. The Congress observably had its own priorities; it was engaged in government formation at the centre.[58] The formation of the government in Karnataka was also linked to central government formation in another way. The Congress was looking to enlarge the UPA. During the negotiations the Congress even offered the JD (S) a cabinet post to cajole it to give up its claim over the chief minister's post. The formation of the UPA government increased the bargaining power of the Congress and wiped out the JD (S) option of a tie-up with the BJP. [59]

The long drawn out negotiations, most of it happening outside the state increased the unease among the second rung leadership, especially in the JD (S). There was tension in some districts as the two parties were traditional rivals.[60] The incumbent Congress government and its policies had been the main target of attack in the elections and this naturally led to

---

[55] H D Deva Gowda speaking to the press said, "I met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, several times over the past fortnight at her invitation to constitute a secular government in the state. Both of us were keen to check the growth of the BJP." *The Hindu*, May 30, 2004. Even after a year, he said the same thing, "The Janata Dal (S) aligned with the Congress to form the government not because it is power hungry. It did so to keep the BJP out." *The Hindu*, June 10, 2005, see also Political Resolution of BJP at its National Executive Meeting, Mumbai, June 22-24, 2004, < http://www.bjp.org/content/view/2123/394/> (accessed April 9, 2009)

[56] Deva Gowda along with senior JD (S) leaders left for Delhi immediately after the results were declared. *The Hindu*, May 15, 2004.

[57] *The Hindu*, May 26, 2004.

[58] *The Hindu*, May 16, 2004

[59] Deva Gowda would say that the JD (S) wanted to prevent another election and hence aligned with the Congress. *The Hindu*, May 17, 2005

[60] In Hasan for instance, there was a straight fight between the JD (S) and the Congress in all the eight constituencies and the former had won six seats while losing one seat each to the Congress and the BJP. *The Hindu*, June 3, 2004. Some of the second-rung leaders of the JD (S) were of the opinion that they should only give outside support to the Congress or the Congress should let the JD (S) lead the government. See also *The Hindu*, May 27, 2004

confusion. For the Congress, while the alliance with the JD (S) was important it did not play second fiddle. The state Congress unit was determined to keep pressure on the JD (S) and prevent it from dictating terms. The state unit president always held that the two parties had distinct interests beyond the commonality of shutting out the BJP. The JD (S) demands for the post of chief minister, a Jammu and Kashmir-type time-sharing model, specific portfolios among others were not acceded to. It instead agreed to give the post of deputy chief minister, have a Maharashtra-type agreement and chose ministers who were acceptable to the partner. Besides delaying the expansion of the ministry for nearly six months, the Congress also held up reconstitution of boards and corporations which the JD (S) was asking for as part of the agreement until near the end.

The central influence on state issues was most visible in common minimum programme (CMP). Though based on the election manifestoes of the two parties it had the imprint of the national CMP guiding the UPA at the centre. For the Congress, then in the "*aam admi*" spirit, it was an attempt to go beyond the urban centric focus of its previous government in the state. The first budget of the alliance also went in the same direction.

The state unit of the Congress, despite the party's dominant position in the state was highly dependent on the central leadership. All decisions were routed through the centre and it is not surprising that the JD (S) preferred to deal directly with the central leadership. [61] Some Congress MLA's also favoured the Delhi channel to press their case for inclusion in the ministry.[62] For alliance management, H D Deva Gowda often met the Congress president to resolve contentious issues and even refused to be drawn into arguments with state leaders.[63] For instance, tensions between the parties in the middle of 2005 were resolved through deliberations between Gowda and the central leadership of the Congress.[64] This worked fine as long as the going was good.

The centralised coordination and control which gave the Congress-JD (S) coalition stability also made it unstable and perishable. It was not possible to deepen the alliance beyond a certain level. Between the two levels, the gap was huge. While the alliance makers had a particular interpretation of the coalition agreement, the state Congress and JD (S) leaders had

---

[61] Deputy Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah for instance noted that the delay was because of the procedures that had to be followed by the Congress as decisions were taken after consulting the party High Command. *The Hindu*, June 14, 2004

[62] It was reported that D.K. Shivakumar, A. Krishnappa and R. Roshan Baig, whom the Janata Dal (S) had insisted on being, kept out camped in Delhi for three days to push their case. *The Hindu,* June 5, 2004

[63] Gowda said that, "It is an understanding between me and the Congress President, and I am not interested in revealing the details of the understanding nor in talking to any of the state-level Congress leaders on such matters. It is for them to talk to their party high command. The whole matter pertaining to government formation in Karnataka has been thrashed out at the highest level and to the last detail." *The Hindu*, May 30, 2005

[64] The JD (S) suspected that the Congress was attempting to break it. It was facing an internal crisis with differences between Siddaramaiah and Gowda.. Siddaramaiah had attended a convention of the backward classes, Dalits and minorities in which he was projected as the chief ministerial candidate. The JD (S) had asked its party members to stay away from the convention. It also threatened to withdraw support if the Congress did not dissociate itself from the convention. *The Hindu*, July 27, 2005

their own specific notions.[65] For instance, while the JD (S) leadership saw the alliance as a secular coming together to keep the BJP out, the local leaders did not share the same understanding.[66] The overdependence on centralised coordination proved to be the major undoing. For instance, though the Congress leadership in the state was apparently aware of the growing JD (S)-BJP ties, they assumed that the central leadership would act on the JD (S).[67] Similarly, the JD (S) also assumed that the Congress leadership would prevent the state unit from joining with the Siddaramaiah led All India Progressive Janata Dal (AIPJD) at the local level. In the absence of a functioning coordination mechanism at the state level and dependence on the central leadership, it is not surprising that the alliance gave way.

The BJP-JD (S) coalition or the Karnataka Development Front (KDF) as it called itself that followed the Congress-JD (S) had its own CMP and followed a similar pattern. The KDF was a time-sharing coalition.[68] According to some reports, the JD (S) was continually in touch with the BJP since 2004 and that Kumaraswamy was even willing to split the party to become the Chief Minister.[69] However, the JD (S) president was apparently against this alliance primarily because of its implications at the national level. Consequently, the JD (S) would reiterate that the tie-up was a "state-level arrangement".[70] The JD (S) again preferred to interact with the central BJP leadership rather than with the state unit, though the alliance formation was done at the local level.[71] However, like the Congress, it was the central leadership which directed functioning and selection of ministers.[72] Similarly, the disgruntled party members preferred to take their grievances to the central leadership.[73] Factionalism within the BJP state unit was one of the reasons which gave the central leadership space at the local level.[74] The state unit consequently worked on the instructions and advice of the national unit.[75]Despite the BJP's relatively strong position in Karnataka, the central leadership is able to intervene in state affairs primarily because of the divisions at the state level.

---

[65] The JD (S) leaders wanted an equal share in all nominations and appointments to the various boards, corporations, and committees at the taluk and district level. *The Hindu*, June 28, 2004.The state Congress president held that the Maharashtra model of coalition would apply only to the offices of the chief minister and the deputy chief minister. *The Hindu*, May 31, 2004.

[66] H. Ekanthaiah, a state JD (S) leader wanted the party to strengthen itself by keeping a distance from both the Congress and the BJP and even needed to organise itself against the Congress, even if it was part of the coalition government. *The Hindu*, June 28, 2004.

[67] The chief minister reportedly had intelligence reports that Kumaraswamy with the help of the BJP was plotting the fall of the coalition for nearly two months prior to the actual withdrawal of support. These reports were supposedly forwarded to the central leadership of the Congress. *Frontline*, 23 (02), January 28 - February 10, 2006

[68] The JD (S) was to lead the government for the first twenty months and the BJP for the last twenty months of the remaining term of the twelfth assembly.

[69] The Times of India, January 30, 2006

[70] *The Telegraph*, October 7, 2007; See also interview with H.D. Deve Gowda "I am true to a secular philosophy", in *Frontline*, 24 (21), October 20-November 02, 2007.

[71] *The Hindu*, February 01, 2006

[72] *The Hindu*, February 10, 2006

[73] *The Hindu*, February 20, 2006

[74] The Times of India, January 30, 2006

[75] Yeddiyruppa was for instance rushed to Delhi in May on speculations in the state that there was a new coalition in the offing. There were apparently some rumours that the JD (S) was to ally with the Congress. *The Hindu*, May 01, 2007.

The tensions between the partners began very early in the life of the government.[76] Though there was a state-level coordination mechanism, it is unlikely that meetings were regularly held and there is very little evidence to the fact that it actually worked. For instance, in July 2006, there were reports that the central leadership advised the local BJP to hold the coordination meetings more frequently so as avoid tensions.[77] As in Uttar Pradesh, the national leadership asked the state unit to behave in a restrained manner so as not to harm the alliance.

As the time to transfer power got closer, the tensions in the alliance increased and even came out in the open.[78] Like the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, the JD (S) developed cold feet with respect to honouring the power-sharing agreement.[79] The follow-up talks were held between the party presidents. It was only after an agreement was reached in Delhi, did the state units act enabling the BJP led government to be sworn in. Subsequently, the BJP did not accept the JD (S) terms and conditions, forcing the latter to withdraw support and effectively ending Karnataka's first brush with coalition politics.[80]

For the BJP coming to power in Karnataka was important to make a loud statement that it was not a North Indian party.[81] It thought that it had been denied a right to form the government in 2004 by the JD (S)-Congress post-electoral alliance. 2004 was important as it's ascendance to power in Karnataka would have dented some of the sheen that the Congress had by forming the UPA government at the centre. In 2008, when it went on to form the government on its own, it again harped on the same theme of having won in Karnataka and how it was a lesson for the other Southern states.[82] Here again we see that the national leadership's concerns, of Karnataka being an exemplar,hinged beyond the contours of the state.

Unlike UP where the BJP local unit played a secondary role in its relationship with the BSP, in Karnataka both polity-wide parties refused to play second fiddle. In the 2008 assembly elections when the BJP central leadership wanted a tie-up with the JD (U), the state

---

[76] The JD (S) was unhappy with the budget proposals and the attempt to project it as a BJP budget. *The Hindu*, May 26, 2007.

[77] For instance, BJP MLC, Janardhana Reddy was chastised for making allegations against the chief minister. *The Hindu*, July 17, 2006

[78] In August, 2007 the BJP ministers boycotted a scheduled cabinet meeting alleging that they were not being informed about various actions. *Deccan Herald*, August 24, 2007

[79] In May 2007, Gowda spoke of the "rajdharma of coalition" and said that the alliance "would continue as long as the other side stuck to the CMP and not indulge in any contentious issues". *The Financial Express*, May 2 2007.

[80] President's rule was imposed immediately afterwards and the Assembly was placed under suspended animation and at the end of November it was dissolved.

[81] Yeddiyruppa remarked that our national leaders are extremely happy about this. *Frontline* 23 (02), January 28 - February 10, 2006, see also Presidential Address by Rajnath Singh at the National Executive Meeting, Bangalore in September, 2008. <http://bjpkarnataka.org/2008/09/> (accessed April 8, 2009)

[82] See L K Advani's speech at *Vijay Sankalp* Rally in Kozhikode (Kerala) on October 13, 2008 <http://www.bjp.org/content/view/483/395/> (accessed April 9, 2009), Press Statement by Rajnath Singh, January 27, 2009, <http://www.bjp.org/content/view/751/394/> (accessed April 9, 2009),

leadership put it down.[83] Similarly, the Congress delay in ministerial expansion and appointments put the JD (S) in an uncomfortable position. This differential treatment has to do with both the state and the alliance partner. UP matters when it comes to numbers and secondly, the BSP's support constituency extends to other states as well, where it could play spoiler. The same does not apply to Karnataka, neither the state nor the JD (S) has the same leverage. Similarly in Jammu and Kashmir the alliance with the PDP was handled very carefully given the sensitivity of the state. Consequently, we can see that though the autonomy of the state unit increases when the polity-wide party is a dominant player, it is highly dependent on the calculations of the central leadership. In the case of the BJP we saw that factionalism in the state unit increased the say of the centralised leadership.

III

This paper concurs with the suggestion that comparative studies of state politics in India would enrich the study of Indian politics, but it believes that the contention that state politics has acquired an autonomous platform from national politics needs to be toned down. This comparative study revealed a similarity in patterns of coalition politics in the states. The autonomy of state politics was compromised whenever a polity-wide party was involved or when a non polity-wide party chose to play an active role at the national level. Our explanation for this lay in the distribution of powers between different levels and its interplay with the organisation of political parties.

We saw in nested and intertwined political systems, it is near impossible for state politics to become autonomous. State politics is bound to be influenced not only by the politics and calculations of other states but more importantly by the politics at the national level itself. In the case of single-state parties whose interest lies only at the state level, state politics may be autonomous to a certain extent. However, even then with a strong centre framework, it may pay to have a voice at the centre. Therefore, even to control power the state level, it may require the pursuit of a strategy, which enables parties to have a say or influence at the national level.

Our study showed that the control and influence at the national level gave political parties greater leverage at the state level. All parties, both polity-wide and single-state parties used all available mechanisms to influence state level politics. The use of President's rule and a governor, who acts at the behest of the power at the centre, has greatly determined the direction and flow of state politics. Despite, the decline of the use of these two central intervention mechanisms over the last decade or so, it was seen that they have been used strategically by political parties. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance the Congress, SP and the BJP used President's rule to control affairs in the state.

[83] Neena Vyas, BJP-JD(U) alliance in tatters, *The Hindu*, April 23, 2008

The point that state politics is freer of the control of national politics is hazy. States have become assertive, non polity-wide parties dictate terms in national politics, yet it is not one-way traffic. States may be freer, but the degree of freedom is not as much as it is made out to be. States dictating and polity-wide parties capitulating may be very visible, but the influence of external considerations in state politics is missed primarily because it takes place through party channels.

Focussing on the institutional terrain and its interface with party organisations showed that politics in states are susceptible to outside influences. For instance, In UP the BSP dictating to the central leadership of the BJP may be reflective of the assertiveness of state politics, yet the central leadership might be capitulating to the BSP for reasons unconnected with the state. Similarly, the PDP getting the Prime Minister involved with regard to state level issues may again be interpreted as state politics dictating. Yet this again may be an instance of the Congress trying to build its image as an alliance manager, especially since it needed the support of the PDP at the central level. In Karnataka, the Congress state unit was able to hold its end with the JD (S), yet it may be seen that the CMP of the alliance was shaped by the national CMP of the UPA at the centre.

Our limited focus on these three states has enabled us to state more firmly our hypothesis that polity-wide parties compromise the autonomy of state politics. However, to move to the next step it may be necessary to include the study of more states where polity-wide parties have played an important role. Space constraints did not allow us to include Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Kerala, states where the BJP and the Congress have been extensively involved in state coalition governments.

Understanding the nature of the role of the polity-wide parties and their relationship with non-polity wide parties may also partly explain the closure of the transformative potential of the third electoral system.[84] To be a coalition maker or become coalitionable, parties compromise on their stated agenda. A non polity-wide party may have an agenda particular to a state, in a coalition with a polity-wide party its goals are constrained by the objectives of the coalition, especially when the polity-wide party is in power at the federal level. Similarly, a non polity-wide party may want to have a say at the national level even if its objectives are limited to only wants to focus on the sub-national level given the huge power differential between the two levels of government, may be forced to compromise. Given this can state politics in India be an autonomous domain?

Acknowledgements

This is a substantially revised version of a presentation at the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Pune in February 2009 under its UGC-CAS programme. Some parts of this were earlier presented at a workshop on "The Fifteenth

[84] Yogendra Yadav, 'Open Contest Closed Options', *Seminar*, 534, February, 2004, pp. 62-69.

general elections and the Emerging Trends in the Indian Politics" organised by the Heinrich Boll Stiftung and the Centre for Public Affairs in November 2008. I received many valuable suggestions from the participants on both occasions. I would also like to thank Prof Suhas Palshikar and Abhay Datar for their advice and helpful comments on an earlier draft. I am grateful Prof Sandeep Shastri for sharing his insights on the politics in Karnataka, specifically on the period under discussion in this paper during an extended dinner discussion in Shimla in June 2009. All shortcomings that remain are however mine alone. I also gratefully acknowledge the encouragement, kindness and support of my colleagues in, and the facilities provided by the Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh under its UGC-SAP and ASIHSS programmes.

References

Arora, Balveer. (1986), 'Party System and Federal Structures in India: Linkages and Issues', in T C Bose (ed.) *Indian Federalism: Problems and Issues*, (Calcutta: Bagchi):74-186.

_____ (1992), "India's Federal System and the Demands of Pluralism: Crisis and Reform in the Eighties" Jyotpaul Chaudhuri (ed.), *India's Beleaguered Federalism: The Pluralist Challenge* (Temple, Arizona: State University Centre for Asian Studies): 5-25.

Brass, Paul R. (1968),Coalition Politics in North India, *American Political Science Review*, 62 (4), December: 1174-1191.

Deschouwer, Kris. (2006), 'Political Parties as Multi-Level Organizations' in Richard S Katz and William Crotty, *Handbook of Party Politics*, (London: Sage):291-300

Duverger, Maurice. (1964), *Political parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. 3d ed., rev., 1964, reprinted 1972, (London: Methuen)

Filippov, Mikhail, Peter C. Ordeshook, Olga V. Shvetsova. (2004), Designing Federalism: A Theory of Self-Sustainable Federal Institutions, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Hopkin, Jonathan and Pieter van Houten (ed.), (2009), special issue on "Decentralization and State-Wide parties" *Party Politics* 15(2), March:131-240.

Hopkin, Jonathan, (2009), Party Matters: Devolution and Party Politics in Britain and Spain, *Party Politics*, 15 (2), March:179-198.

Jenkins Rob. (ed.), (2004), *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across India's States*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press):1-25;

Kohli, Atul. (1987), *The State and Poverty in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Kumar, Ashutosh. (2009), Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions within Regions, *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 9:14-19.

Manor James. (2004), "Explaining Political Trajectories in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka" in *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics across India's States*, (New Delhi: Oxford): 255-284.

Narain, Iqbal. (ed.), (1976). *State Politics in India*, (Jaipur: Meenakshi Prakashan).

Pai, Sudha. (2004). 'Choices before the BJP', *Seminar*, 534, February, pp. 41-45.
Riker William H. (1975), 'Federalism' in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (ed.) *Handbook of Political Science: Governmental Institutions and Processes*, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley): 93-172.

Sartori, Giovanni. (1976), *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Singh M P and Anil Mishra (ed.), (2004), *Coalition Politics in India: Problems and Prospects*, (New Delhi: Manohar).

Sridharan E, (2003), Coalitions and Party Strategies in India's Parliamentary Federation, *Publius*, 33:4, (Fall):135-152;

_____ (2004), "Electoral Commissions in 2004 General Elections: Theory and Evidence", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 December: 5418-25.

Thorlakson, Lori, (2007), 'An Institutional Explanation of Party System Congruence: Evidence from Six Federations', *European Journal of Political Research*, 46 (1):69-75.
Weiner, Myron. (1968). *State Politics in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

_____ (2009), Patterns of Party Integration: Influence and Autonomy in Seven Federations, *Party Politics*, 15(2), March: 157–177.

Wheare, K. C. (1967), *Federal government*. 4th edition, (London: Oxford University Press).

Wood, John R. (1984), *State Politics in Contemporary India: Crisis or Continuity?* (Boulder: Westview Press).

Yadav, Yogendra and Suhas Palshikar. (2003), 'From Hegemony to Convergence: Party system and Electoral Politics in the Indian States', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, XV (1&2), January-June: 5-45.

_____ (2008). "Ten Theses on State Politics in India", *Seminar*, November: 14-22.

Yadav, Yogendra. (2004), 'Open Contest Closed Options', *Seminar*, 534, February, 2004:62-69.