

RGF-NERC-ICSSR Lectures—1

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# COALITION POLITICS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA



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B. PAKEM

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

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

The book divided into three chapters discusses the trend towards the continuation of coalition politics at the State level given the present system of representative government under the Indian Constitution.

**B. Pakem** had his education in St. Anthony's College, Shillong; Gauhati University, Assam; and Indian School of International Studies (now Jawaharlal Nehru University), New Delhi. He was the former Cabinet Minister of Meghalaya for five years, a State Legislator for ten years, and member Autonomous District Council for five years. He taught Political Science in the Union Christian College and St. Edmund's College, Shillong, and at Dibrugarh University. He was the Honorary Director of the North Eastern Regional Centre of the ICSSR and the Honorary Secretary of the Shillong Branch of the Indian Institute of Public Administration. He is at present the Vice-Chancellor of the North Eastern Hill University, (NEHU) for the second term. He has written half a dozen books and scores of articles related to North Eastern Region of India both in regional and national journals.

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Rajiv Gandhi Memorial RGI-NERC-ICSSR Lectures

# COALITION POLITICS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA



*B. Pakem*



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PRE

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

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## PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shillong  
November 26, 1998

**B. Pakem**

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