

Coalition governments and politics in India

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Abstract

A coalition government is formed when more than one political party or group comes together on the basis of common understanding or agenda. In India after 1989 multi-party coalitional model has emerged at the national level. Since then coalitional governments formed in India under the leadership of different parties. Some proved successful and some failed because of the growing importance of regional or state parties in formation of coalition governments. Federal practices of the Indian constitution have become more effective, the coalition is dominated by the regional parties, and centralized tendencies are becoming weak. Centralized nature of Indian federal polity moved towards cooperative federalism.

Keywords: Coalition, politics, India

Introduction

In India after independence Congress was the dominant party at the national and states level till 1967. At the national level Congress as ruling party formulated policies and states implemented those without contention. Due to its national character, vast area and multiplicity of diversities in the country. The dominant party system proved unable to fulfill the desires of the different region. Thus, the centralized nature of the government created a gap between the local aspirations and national policies. This is evident from the State Assembly Election of 1967, when regional parties became shareholders in the states. Hence, the "One Dominant" party system is responsible for the emergence and growth of regional parties in India.

The term 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word "Coalition" meaning to grow together. In the political system it implies that some political parties or groups will come together and form alliance or temporary union in order to exercise control over political power. In the encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Prof. Ogg defines coalition as a "co-operative arrangement under which distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or ministry (Chander, 2004) [1].

A coalition is thus an alliance between two or more hitherto separate or even hostile groups or parties formed in order to carry on the government and share the principle affairs of the state. A coalition government is formed when more than one political party or group comes together on the basis of common understanding or agenda. They do not lose their separate identity. They agree to a common minimum political economic and social programme and when difference arises any group or party is free to withdraw from the coalition.

A coalition can take place in two phases: pre-election alliance as adjustments between the parties distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to a coalition can take place in two phases: pre-election alliance as adjustments between the parties and post-election union to share power and run the government. The former type of coalition has two additional advantages than the latter. A pre-poll understanding provides a common platform to the parties in order to attract

the electorate on the basis of a joint manifesto. Moreover, the radicalism of such parties is softened to a great extent in the process of mutual concession without causing the slightest damage to the image of either of them.... Sometimes there can be a coalition of Leftist parties alone and at times of the Rightist parties only. However, there is no dearth of such coalition which represents curious affiliations between the groups of both Left and Right. Sometimes coalition is based primarily on racial community, sometimes on religious alignments, sometimes on economic interests. Coalition provides an easy framework for binding diverse ideas and ideologies (Shani, 1971: 22-23) [2].

In India after 1989 multi-party coalitional model has emerged at the national level. Since then coalitional governments formed in India under the leadership of different parties. Some proved successful and some failed because of the growing importance of regional or state parties in formation of coalition governments. At the national level coalition politics emerged after 1969 partially when the Congress lost majority after split in the party and Congress (R) supported by the DMK at the centre. From 1977 to 1979 it was a period when the Congress lost power at the centre. Government was formed by the Janata Party. It was coalition of various parties. But the coalition failed to complete its tenure. In 1980 Congress regained power at the centre and remained party with majority in the Lok Sabha till 1989. 1989 was the benchmark year when the one party dominance system shattered and the Congress lost power at the centre. It was the year that changed the fate of Indian politics. Multi-party system developed and coalition politics became inevitable for Indian political. Coalition politics and governance has distinct importance in the Indian polity. Emergence of 'coalition' phenomena reflects the federalized tendencies of Indian society.

The coalition governments of 1989, 1991, and 1996 indicated that there should be pre-poll alliances among the partners and there should be an alliance on the ideological base otherwise there is always a fear of losing the support of coalition partners. The period also shows that the third force (National Front) proved unsuccessful for holding government for full term.

National parties BJP and the Congress were responsible for the instability in 1990 and 1997.

Aims and Objectives

- To understand the organization and nature of coalition government at centre.
- To understand the role of regional political parties in coalition governments at centre.
- To understand impact of regional parties on decision making process.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on secondary data. Data has been collected through content analysis such as books, journals, magazines, newspaper records and general election reports also. It is an analytical study various methods have been adopted to conduct the study. As Descriptive, analytical and comparative methods adopted for the study.

Analysis and Interpretation of General Elections since 1989.

In 1989 elections the second non-Congress government had come to power after the 1989 elections. Vishwanath Pratap Singh became the prime minister of the National Front government led by Janata Dal with 143 seats. The vote-share of the Congress and Janata Dal were 39.5 and 17.8 per cents, respectively. The BJP had supported the V.P Singh government from outside (General Election Report: 1989). In 1991 elections the Congress returned to power after a short stint of Chandra Sekhar as the prime minister, but far away from its dominance, it headed a minority government with PV Narasimha Rao as its Prime Minister. The Congress got 244 out of 545 seats and gathered 36.4 per cent of the votes polled. The BJP finished second with 120 seats, the first time ever that it had crossed the three-figure mark while its vote-share was 20 per cent (General Election Report:1991). Narasimha Rao, the first-ever non-Gandhi Prime Minister, saw two important events happening during his stay in office. One was the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the other was the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992. In 1996 elections these elections saw a hung parliament. The BJP, led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was the largest party with 161 seats (vote share 20.3 per cent) but he could not prove majority in the Lok Sabha and resigned after serving just 13 days as the PM. The Congress was the second largest party with a paltry 140 seats (vote-share 28.3 per cent). It instead chose to back a United Front government of the Janata Dal and other parties (192 seats with 28.52 per cent vote-share) and H. D Deve Gowda took over as the Prime Minister (General Election Report: 1996). The Congress, however, withdrew support and the Deve Gowda government collapsed in April 1997. A compromise was made and I.K Gujral was elected the new Janata Dal Prime Minister but his government did not last long much after leaders of the 13-party United Front coalition rejected the Congress' demand to oust the DMK, and its three representatives in Gujral's cabinet, after a report said that it had a good relation with a Sri Lankan guerrilla group suspected of killing Rajiv Gandhi. After Narasimha Rao's tenure ended in 1996, the country had to wait for another three years to see the beginning of next regime that lasted its full term. In 1998 elections the BJP had emerged as the largest party in these elections with 182 seats (25.6 per cent vote-share) while the

Congress had managed just 141 seats (25.8 per cent vote-share). The BJP-led alliance called the National Democratic Alliance with 256 seats (out of 545 seats) and 37.5 per cent vote-share formed the government at the Centre under Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Congress-led UPA got 164 seats (30.8 per cent vote) while the Third Front got 74 seats (General Election Report: 1998). But the government fell short by a single ballot in the confidence vote in April 1999 after one of the NDA allies, AIADMK pulled out P.M lasted for 13 months. In 1999 elections the BJP had emerged as the largest party again with 182 seats while the Congress's tally got reduced to 114. The BJP's vote-share this time was 23.8 per cent while that of the Congress was 28.3 percent. Out of 543 seats, the NDA got 299 (41.1 per cent) while the UPA got 139 seats (35 per cent). The Third Front accumulated just 41 seats. Vajpayee returned as the PM for the third term and completed his term (General Election Report: 1999). In 2004 elections the Congress-led UPA came to power after these elections and Manmohan Singh took over as the second non-Gandhi prime minister. The Congress won 145 seats (26.5 per cent) in this election while the UPA won 225 seats (vote-share 36.8 per cent) while the BJP won 138 seats (22.2 per cent vote-share) while the NDA won 189 seats (35.9 per cent) (General Election Report:2004).

In 2009 elections United Progressive Alliance (UPA-II) came to power under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh. It was also a coalition government, no party could gain majority. Large section of the electorate across the country voted to bring back the regime of the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and brought it within striking distance of the simple majority mark of 272. Though the number thrown up by the results would, technically, imply a hung parliament, there is little doubt about the mandate given to the Manmohan Singh led government to run its course for five years.

In 1989, 1991, 1996 and 1999 elections coalition governments formed at the centre. In these elections the regional parties also formed government at the centre and national parties provided them out-side support. It also affected the nature of Indian federalism. Stability of the regional parties, vote share and seat share in these elections increases it indicates that the regional parties are supplementary to the national parties. Electoral politics also indicates that the masses accepted the alliance strategy of national and regional parties. In different regions people voted according to the alliance combinations.

Developments from 1989-99 provide evidence that coalition governments have an element of vanity built into them. Any hard policy decision is almost ruled out in a coalition government. At best, a coalition can just hang on. This is particularly true of coalition where the government has to cope up with countervailing pressures. Along with it, it has often been observed that the functioning of a coalition becomes a battle of nerves as various constituents scramble for greater say in the decision making and grater share of the national cake. Moreover, the phenomenon of coalition governments hampers the process of political polarization, since the national level political parties seek to ride to power by leaning on the support of regional and state level parties and groups, it is not only multiplies the bargaining power of the later but also adds to their over-all electoral strength. The situation has reached a point where anyone and everyone is not only ready to join hands with anyone else but also to split the party merely at the drop of a hat or merely to stay in power. The only exceptions to

this emerging pattern are the cadre based parties—the BJP (Vaghela notwithstanding) and the communists (Sharma, 2000: 33-34) ^[3]. In the earlier period regional parties bargain only for their personal benefits but after 1999 elections the parties actively participating in the nation building process along bargain for their states welfare, TDP is a big example of this. Now these regional parties tried to do best for the development of their own states.

Coalition dharma demands an ethos of 'give and take' by both the major and minor partners. Just as the major partner is duty bound to accommodate the interest of all partners, the junior partners, on their part should not blackmail the major partner into submitting unjustifiable demands (Niloferop, 2009: 758) ^[4]. So the similar situation was faced by the UPA after the formation of the government. Soon after the government was formed, it faced the threat of withdrawal from the DMK for not getting plum posts. UPA government faced all problems which are obvious in a coalition government. In 2008 UPA government faced another problem. When the left parties withdrew the support to the UPA government on 23rd July 2008. Serious differences arose on nuclear agreement with United State of America. But Dr. Manmohan Singh played as reasoned politician and saved his government when confidence motion was passed by 275 votes against 256 votes with the support of Samajwadi party (SP) led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and other parties. However, BJP has tried all its best to defeat the motion of confidence moved by Dr. Manmohan Singh, but it was in vain (Ibid). UPA government completed its full term with ups and downs. The UPA coalition proved a successful coalition. The NDA (1999) and UPA (2004) both proved that coalition can be stable (Sharda, 2010:37) ^[5].

The success and failure of the coalition was not merely a matter of alliance arithmetic, but also reflective of a significant change in electoral behaviour. The coalitions involved in the elections relate to far deeper alignment of social and political power than earlier. The loose, pre-electoral alliance formed by the Congress worked well, presumably because it happened to coincide and express a deeper head within the political system, the need to create an alternative to the BJP's social block. Constituted by parties holding views opposed to the NDA, the pre-poll Congress alliance sought to articulate a political vice that tragedy remained peripheral in the erstwhile regime. In this sense, the 2004 election is a watershed. On the one hand, it has brought about radical changes in the party system by redefining its nature primarily in terms of coalition of parties holding comparable political views, on the other, with the crystallization of these two competing coalition, this election also seems to have compartmentalized the contending social blocks with allegiance to either the BJP or the Congress led amalgamation (Chakrabarty, 2006. cit: 213) ^[6].

One thing seems certain the coalition system will not fade away soon despite the two major parties wishes in which they have the support of the county's corporate industry. The two largest parties with national way have to shed their emotional antagonism of regional parties. This election is tending to show prospects for further fragmentation of the mandate in terms not of the percentage of vote share and winning candidates but also the number of parties trying for a share in the central power pie. It may foreshadow a more trying period for organizing and running a coalition. Will the trend of disintegrating coalition instead of consolidating coalition be further reinforced. It looks like. This is a natural outgrowth from the centralizing tendency

in politics among political formations of all denominations. They are becoming leader-based parties rather than the other way round. Politics of ego and vanity can only generate fissiparous tendencies. There has been no leader after Gandhi who could overcome this phenomenon. This large country needs a large number of local leaders for mobilization and growth of healthy democratic political traditions (Prasad, 2009:9) ^[7]. In fact there is a need for a new culture of politics not based on predatory competition but on qualities of character, vision and foresight suited to the area and population and the cultural segment it is working for. This task continues to be neglected.

Despite the inherent tensions of coalition governance, the Indian experiments, especially that of the NDA and UPA, add new theoretical twists to the phenomena. As the regional parties, regardless of their individual numerical strength in the ruling coalition are crucial, the nature of political administration is likely to undergo dramatic changes in two ways. First, given their importance in the coalition government, the leaders are correspondingly entrusted with responsibilities at the national level. They cannot therefore think only of the region to which they belong rather, they need to take into account the problems and issues which are relevant at the national level. The growing importance of Despite the inherent tensions of coalition governance, the Indian experiments, especially that of the NDA and UPA, add new theoretical twists to the phenomena. As the regional parties, regardless of their individual numerical strength in the ruling coalition are crucial, the nature of political administration is likely to undergo dramatic changes in two ways. First, given their importance in the coalition government, the leaders are correspondingly entrusted with responsibilities at the national level. They cannot therefore think only of the region to which they belong rather, they need to take into account the problems and issues which are relevant at the national level. The growing importance of regional parties in the government is therefore a positive development from the point of view of governance as well. With their involvement in the administration, the regional parties gain a national perspective while articulating their responses to issues that may or not have regional underpinnings. Second, the inevitability of coalition governments is also indicative of significant changes in the conceptualization of politics in India. It is now clear that the failure of the pan-Indian parties to deal with regional issues largely contributed to the rise and growing importance of regional and state based parties. The notion that the regions are neglected or bypassed for the national gains remains ground at the root of the formation and the gradual electoral strength for these parties in contemporary Indian politics (Chakrabarty, op.cit: 215-216) ^[8].

Findings and Conclusion

- Coalition politics in India gave space to the regional parties in politics.
- The federal principles followed by national parties due to coalition compulsions.

Thus, in India after 1989 multi-party coalition model has emerged at the national level. Since 1989, seven national governments formed all were the coalition governments formed with the help of the regional parties at the centre. No national party was able to form government at its own. In all the coalitions regional parties had dominant position. Thus at

the centre level regional parties articulated the plurality of the country. It is evident from the electoral politics and role of regional parties in running the coalition governments. The local forces in the coalitions have become dominant. Federal practices of the Indian constitution have become more effective, the coalition is dominated by the regional parties, and centralized tendencies are becoming weak. Centralized nature of Indian federal polity moved towards cooperative federalism. Practically in the coalitions regional parties performed the function of cheques and balances. Now the centre cannot behave arbitrarily and as colonizer in the case of the states. The centre has to be very conscious in using and misusing the various. Thus, after 1989, the coalition government resulted in the democratic decentralization in Indian polity and evolution of healthy federalism in the country.

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