

Coalition Governments in Indian Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the political arrangement where multiple parties collaborate to form a government when no single party secures a clear majority in the legislature. Coalition politics is now an integral part of India's democracy, offering both challenges and opportunities. The coalition politics has led to empowerment for regional parties from the states and has added to India's search for true federalism. A Coalition Government is both a necessity and a challenge in a multi-party democracy like India. A coalition government is formed when multiple political parties collaborate to govern, especially when no single party secures a majority.

Keywords: coalition, democracy, politics, party, multi-party, opposition, and formation.

INTRODUCTION

Coalition governments represent India's diversity by including national and regional parties, ensuring wider social and regional representation in governance. A coalition government is formed when no single political party wins an outright majority in the legislature and two or more parties agree to govern together, sharing power on the basis of a negotiated arrangement. After a long spell of almost 50 years of one party Congress rule at the centre, barring a little break on one or two occasions, a sort of coalition politics has now come to stay, creating a need for political adjustments and uneasy accommodation.

In the election of 1977 held after the lifting of emergency, Indira Gandhi and her Congress lost power and combination of several parties knit together by Jayaprakash Narain under the name of Janata Party came power. It was really a coalition arrangement though functioned in the single party. Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister and their leadership tussle in the party brought the fall of the Janata government within two years of its assumption of office. "In June 1975, Indira was found guilty and barred by the High Court from holding public office for six years. In response, a state of emergency was declared under the pretext of national security. The next election resulted in the formation of India's first ever national coalition government under the prime ministership of Morarji Desai, which was also the first non-Congress national government. It existed from 24 March 1977 to 15 July 1979, headed by the Janata Party" (Kuldip Singh 1995:21)

In 1980 Indira Gandhi again came back to power and after her assassination in 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi became prime Minister. After five years in power the congress was defeated, mainly on account of the Bofors scandal and Rajiv Gandhi sat in the house as leader of opposition. V.P. Singh became prime minister and it was a real coalition arrangement of different parties. V.P. Singh government lasted only for nine months and Chandrasekhar, only with 60s MPs supporting him became Prime Minister as the Congress extended to him outside support. This did not last long and Chandrasekhar government fell.

Elections were called to elect a New Lok Sabha in 1991 and halfway through the election Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu while doing election campaign. In the elections the congress did not get a majority of its own to form the government but as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha, congress managed to form the government with P.V. Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister. He managed to survive a full term his government. In the election held in 1996 people gave a fractured verdict as a result of which the United Front comprising of 13 parties formed a government which ruled for 18 months with successive Prime Ministers H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral. The United Front government survived for 18 months on the basis of outside support given by the congress. When congress withdrew support the United Front government fell and the country was to face another general election in 1998.

1998 elections threw up a hung parliament. The Bharatiya Janata Party with its tally of 221 managed a majority with a seventeen party coalition and the congress was to sit in the opposition with 140 members. The coalition experiment under Vajpayee seemed to be working arrangement but soon coalition party's began pulling in different directions and each

minister talking out of turn crating embarrassment for the Prime Minister Joint responsibility of the cabinet was thrown to the winds. the ministry lasted for only 18 months, Jayalalitha suddenly withdrawing the support to the ministry.

For the first five decades after Independence, one party governed at the Centre with little serious challenge. In the election that followed in 1999, there was a realignment of parties, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam becoming a new partner of the BJP alliance. Now it was a 24 party – alliance called National Democratic Alliance and a common agenda was presented as working of governance. The Congress won only 112 seats the BJP won 180 seats. Naturally with alliance partners it was able to form another coalition government under the Prime Ministership of Vajpayee. This government was somewhat stable and credit should go to Vajpayee in managing the disparate elements in his cabinet,. And yet contradictions came to the fore now and then and at some other time the coalition partners even went to the extent of blackmailing the Prime Minister with their own pet personal agendas. Mamata Banerjee of Trinamul Congress came into the cabinet and went out of cabinet as her whims and fancies demanded. Every coalition partners demanded his proud of flesh and got it since the Prime Minister could not lose the support of the concerned party.

Though the BJP the major party of the alliance agreed to put the contentious issues like Article 370, building Ram Temple, common civil code at the back burner and in order to satisfy its own cadres and to keep its communal constituency in good humour, the Vajpayee government and then pandered to the demand s of the hordcore Sangh Parivar outfits. The so called secular parties supporting the Vajpayee government to retain power compromised their secularist principles and sailed along. This coalition arrangement proved another important point. The Prime Minister's authority came to be eroded as he could not exercise his power freely, hamstrung by the demand of his coalition partners. The Prime Minister was always on tender hooks, not sure how to proceeds or what direction to take. The efficiency of the cabinet was put a premium by the so called coalition dharna, which really meant trying to satisfy every coalition partner even if public interest was at peril.

Whatever may be the drawbacks of coalition politics, no national party, either the Congress or the BJP is in a position to win an absolute majority to the Lok Sabha to from a government on its own. "The government collapsed within a year because J. Jayalalithaa's AIADMK withdrew its support. After the entry of a few more regional parties, the NDA proceeded to win the 1999 elections with a larger majority. Vajpayee became Prime Minister for a third time, and this time served a full five-year term" (Sen, Amartya 2005). Even in the 2004 elections the Congress cobbled an alliance being called United Progressive Alliance.

The National Democratic Alliance under the leadership of BJP was also in the fray. Since the UPA combine had a majority it formed the government with Dr. Manmohan Singh as the Prime minister. The stability of Dr. Manmohan Singh's government depends upon the out side support given by the left parties. Dr. Manmohan Singh is a strong believer in the reform process and the Left parties have their reservations about it. As a result Dr. Manmohan Singh government is unable to frame its economic policies as desire by it but has accommodates the views of the left parties and so much so, firmness but flexibility has become the guiding principle of governance in a coalition arrangement .the coalition arrangement for the past decade for so has created a situation of perpetually unstable government through it manages to continue a full term with unprincipled adjustments and inconvenient cohabitation. The efficiency of the government is put at the receiving end of coalition compulsions.

It is time to examine why Indian Policy has reached the stage. While the Congress ruled with a single party with all India spread grew in influence to challenges the rulling Congress as an alternative party became less and less in several states where regional outfits successfully challenged the Congress hegemony. With the result Congress lost its national pre-eminence, loosing power at the centre. As an alternative to the Congress the BJP grew strength with the Hindutva agenda and the people disillusioned with the Congress looked up to BJP as an alternative party of governance. In the 1999 elections because of its manipulation of coalition of arrangement, the BJP won 180 seats to the Lok Sabha polling 29 percentage of the popular vote; the Congress polled 34 percentage of the votes and got only 112 seats. The victory BJP won was proof of the succession of coalition politics and the congress learnt its lessons a little late, minded its strategy and entered the election fray with an alternative coalition arrangement which gave it rich electoral evidence and helped it to capture power after a lapse of eight year.

It looks as though coalition politics have come to stay for a few more years. In this situation UPA government of Dr Manomohan Singh should scrupulously adhere to common Minimum Programme agreed to not only by party's participation in the government but also by the left parties giving support form out side. Stability is the key factor for government to deliver on its promises. "The main aim of the NDA was to form an anti-Indian National Congress coalition. It was led by the BJP, and included several regional parties, including the Samata Party and the AIADMK, as well as Shiv Sena, but Shiv Sena broke away from the alliance in 2019 to join the Maha Vikas Aghadi with Congress and the NCP.

Samata Party also broke away from the alliance in 2003 after formation of Janta Dal (United). The Shiv Sena was the only member which shared the Hindutva ideology of the BJP” (Keith Jones 2020).

Coalition dharma is not just accommodation of inconvenient and unreasonable demands of coalition partner, but pulling together with a common and laudable purpose of doing well to the people, especially fulfilling longstanding demands of the weaker sections of the society. “The NDA suffered a defeat, winning only a 186 seats in the lower house, the Lok Sabha, compared to 222 of the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress. Manmohan Singh thus succeeded Vajpayee as prime minister, serving for ten years 2004–14. Commentators have argued that the NDA's defeat was due to a failure to reach out to the rural masses” (Ramesh, Randeep 2004) Coalition governments become a defining feature of Indian politics, reflecting the country's diverse and pluralistic society.

“Narendra Modi, was sworn in as Prime Minister of India on 26 May 2014, his party having won 282 of the 520 seats in the lower house. In the 2019 general election, the alliance further increased its tally to 353 seats with a combined vote share of 45.43%” (Ramani, Srinivasan 2019) The success of coalition governments depends on the ability of political leaders to negotiate, cooperation, and work collaboratively towards common goals.

CONCLUSION

A coalition government is formed when multiple political parties collaborate to govern, especially when no single party secures a majority. Coalition governments distribute power among various parties, preventing any single party from dominating. In a Parliamentary democracy, coalitions occur mainly as a result of political compulsion and conflicts. It may also be formed due to emergency. Coalition politics strengthens India's federal system by being more attentive to regional needs than a single-party government. The coalition politics has led to empowerment for regional parties from the states and has added to India's search for true federalism.

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