

Coalition Government in India: Towards a Multi-Party Democracy

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Abstract – Coalition government, is a body of advisors that is formed when different political parties choose to cooperate in the administration and regulation of a country or community. The paper deal with the creation of coalition government in India. The paper discussed about how coalition government leads to the multi-party democracy in India since 1967-2009.

One of the main advantages of a coalition government is that due to having to share a mandate, this leads to broader representation, as the two or more parties have to compromise on their opposing ideologies in order to create policies that result in legislation.

Key words: Coalition Government, Multi-party Democracy, Power Sharing.

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INTRODUCTION

A coalition government in a parliamentary system is a government in which multiple political parties cooperate, reducing the dominance of any one party within that 'coalition'. The usual reason for this arrangement is that no party on its own can achieve a majority in the parliament. A coalition government might also be created in time of national difficulty or crisis, for more example during wartime, to give a government the high degree of perceived political legitimacy it diminishing interval political strife. In such times, parties have formed all party coalition (national unity government grand coalition) If a coalition collapses, a confidence vote is held or a motion of no confidence is taken.¹

Coalition government has been formed at different time intervals in many in developed and developing countries. Coalitions signify the fragmentation of the popular mandate to an extent that no single party is in a position to secure a majority in the legislature. In this situation a number of smaller parties join hands to form the government. A coalition government thus implies an agreement between two or more parties for sharing power. Coalition are thus based on expediency and ostensible formed for the purpose of sharing power.²

Professor ogg defines coalition in the encyclopedia of social sciences," as a co-operative agreement under which distinct political parties, or at all events members of such parties form a government ministry.

Main reason for formation of coalition in the different countries is:-

No single political party is able to secure a working majority in the popular house on account of the presence of multi-party system. Under which circumstances, a number of like- minded parties from the coalition to provide a workable majority and run the government -3

COALITION GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

A.-First phase – (1952-1967) congress dominance:-

In India, the trend is now towards a politics of coalition. The Indian experience with the coalition government both in the states and center. However suggest a more differentiated and complex set of findings. In India, the parliamentary system has become respective mainly because with the emergence of coalition government. 4

After Independence, the congress continued to enjoy the support of all sections of society for a considerable period of time. The whole period of Jawaharlal Nehru is to be considered as a single party dominance and often to be known as congress system.

The congress won the first Parliamentary general election by a huge margin held in 1952. The congress won 364 seats out of 489. Its nearest rival, the CPI could manage only 16 seats. The result of the first general election did not surprise anyone. The Indian National congress was

expected to win this election. The congress party, as it was popularly known had inherited the legacy of the National Movement. In the second and third general elections, held in 1957 and 1962 respectively. The congress maintained the same position in the Lok Sabha by winning three-fourth of the seats. In the first decade of electoral competition the congress acted both as the ruling party as well as the opposition this is why this period of Indian politics has been described as the 'congress system'

As we have noted above, it is not that India did not have opposition parties during this period. Even then India had a large number of diverse and vibrant opposition parties than many other multi party democracies. All these opposition parties succeeded in gaining only a token representatives in lok sabha and state assemblies during this period. Yet their presence played a crucial role in maintaining the democratic character of the system. This kept the ruling party under check and often changed the balance of power within the congress.

B. Second Phase (1967-1977) towards multi-party system and coalition government : fourth general elections 1967:-

The year 1967 is considered a land mark year in India's political and electoral history. In first three general elections congress party was the dominating party throughout the country from 1952 onwards. This trend was to undergo significant changes with the 1967 elections. Particularly after the fourth general elections of 1967, coalition politics begin to emerge as an alternative political arrangement for democratic government after non congress parties form. Coalition ministers in several states. 5

After 1967, a systematic change involving both societal process and organizational manifestation of this change is the break down of one party dominance at the center and its replacement by a multi-party coalition.

1967 marks a change in Indian politics which led to change in the character of party system then obtaining in India. No particular party claimed absolute majority at any level of political structure with the result that the model of Intra-Party (tacit or implied) coalition was replaced by inter-party (express or formal) coalition system. The congress vote dropped from almost 5 percent and while it had held 74 percent of the seats in the previous parliament, it now managed to win only 54 percent. Even more stunning was the number of seats in which it failed to win a majority (or lost it because of defections soon after the elections), there were as many as nine states – Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala which now had non- congress governments. This brought in a completely new situation in Indian politics whereby opposition parties in some states experimented with coalition politics and government formations.[6]

Opposition parties were in the forefront of organizing public protests and pressurizing the government. Parties opposed to the congress realized that the division of their votes kept the congress in power. Thus parties that were entirely different and disparate in their programs and ideology got together to form anti- congress fronts in some states and entered into electoral adjustments of sharing seats in others. They felt that the inexperience of Indira Gandhi and the internal factionalism within the congress provided them an opportunity to topple the congress. The socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia gave this strategy the name of 'Non- Congressism'. This result jolted the congress at both the national and state level. Many contemporary political observers described the elections result as political earthquake. Half the ministers in Indira Gandhi's cabinet were defeated. The congress lost majority in many states also.

The election of 1967 brought into picture the phenomenon of coalitions. Since no single party had got majority various non-congress parties came together to form joint legislative parties (called Samyukt Vidhayak Dal) that supported non-congress government. The SVD government in Bihar, for instance, included the two socialist parties- SSP and the BSP along with the CPI on the left and the Jana Sangh on the right. In Punjab it was called the "Popular United Front".

C. Third Phase (1977-Continuing): The Beginning of Formal Coalitions at the Center Level:-

The elections of 1977, mark the third phase in the evolution of India's party system and set the stage for the formation of the first coalitional government at the center. At the general elections in 1977, the congress secured only 154 seats (through they had fielded candidates in 492 constituencies of the Lok Sabha)

The Janata experiment:- The turning point in the history of coalition in India can be identified with the Janata party rule(1977 to 1979), which brought for the first time, a group of non-congress parties to power at center. This was a very historic movement for opposition parties which succeeded in providing an alternative to the congress at the national level. This experiment became catalysts in the democratization process – strengthening and multi-party system, policy- making and power-sharing processes. The Janata party captured 295 seats out of 540. Thus the 1977 elections was described as a watershed and political earthquake in Indian politics. The Janata leaders declared victory of democracy. But the inherent contradictions, within the Janata party coalition soon appeared as a warning to the existence of itself. Morarji Desai became the prime minister but that did not bring the power struggle within the party to an end. The Janata party split and the government which was led by Morarji Desai lost its majority in less than 18

months. Another government headed by Charan Singh was formed on the assurance of the support of the congress party. But the congress party later decided withdraw its support with the result that the Charan Singh government could remain in power just about four months.

Failure of the Janata party coalition, ideological differences and defections. The failure of the Janata was though not unexpected significant. It brought into focus the importance of better coordination in coalition government. But the main significance of the 1977 elections was that it introduced for the first time in India the idea of coalitional government.

Post – Janata phase (strengthening of the coalition government 1989-2014):- After experiencing the taste of coalition government during 1977-1979, single party dominance again appeared during 1980-1989. But after the 9th general elections of 1989, situation change dramatically in favour of a coalition government at the center. Since 1987, four coalition government have been formed on democratic principles. They are the following :-

- National front government led by V.P. Singh (1989-1990)
- United front government led by H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral (1996-1998)
- BJP led coalition government headed Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the majority coalition again led by the BJP after the 13th Lok Sabha elections.
- United progressive alliance – (may 2004-2009). United progressive alliance- (2009-2014)

The national front coalition:- The ninth general elections of 1989 witness coalition government which head emergence as third force thus strengthening the multi-party system. In the poll (1989) verdict the congress was defeated by the two emerging political forces- the BJP and National Front. All the opposition parties agreed to get together to form a government under V.P. Singh in 1989. The left parties and the BJP agreed to support the government from the outside.

But the national front government failed to achieve its goal due to its minority status in parliament and internal conflict. Although one of the major advantage of this government experiment was the cultivation of a new hope for a new era of coalition government.

The united front government:-

For the first time, the general election of 1996 resulted in a parliament which truly reflected the

national pluralism. There was not a single party which could claim absolute majority as the basis to form the government. In the 11th Lok Sabha election BJP emerged as the largest party. But after the collapse of 13 days BJP led coalition government in 1996, the united front was invited to form the government. The united front was a coalition of thirteen parties in which TDP, DMK, JD, CPI (M), CPI, TMC, AGP, and SP were the main players. H.D. Deve Gowda became the Prime Minister. But the congress withdrew its support to united front in November 1997. The congress was said to be unhappy over its failure to get share in government. After that I.K. Gujral became the Prime Minister.

BJP –led coalition government: Both '12th and 13th Lok to Sabha elections' results provided opportunities the largest political party –BJP to lead coalition governments at the center. Improved status of BJP in the 12th Lok Sabha election results and the BJP's conciliatory approach to regional parties further strengthened ties between the BJP and many regional parties.

BJP formed The National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The NDA is a coalition of high- learning political parties in India. NDA included several regional parties, including the Samta Party and the AIADMK as well as Shiv Sena with outside support provided by the TDA, the NDA was able to muster a slim majority in the election of 1998, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee returned as Prime Minister. The government collapsed within a year because of (AIADMK) withdrew its support after the entry of a few more regional parties, the NDA proceeded to win the 1999 elections with a large majority, Vajpayee became Prime Minister for a third time, this time for a full five year term.

United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by congress: The UPA is a coalition of center- left political parties in India formed after the 2004 general election. The largest member party of the UPA in the Indian National Congress, whose former National President Sonia Gandhi is chairperson of the UPA. It formed a government with support from some other left – aligned parties in 2004. Manmohan Singh became the Prime Minister (2004-2014).

Thus with the elections of 1989 -2009, a long phase of coalition politics began in India. Since then, there have been eleven governments at the center, all of which have either been coalition governments or minority governments supported by other parties which did not join the government. In this phase, any government could be formed only with the participation or support of many regional parties. This applied to the national front in 1989, the united front in 1996 and 1997, the NDA in 1997, the BJP led coalition in 1998, the NDA in

1999, the UPA in 2004 and 2009. However, this trend change in 2014.

CONCLUSION:-

It is generally understood that in the parliamentary system of government one party get clear majority to form the government. But it is not always so and many of the countries in Europe have been having coalition government most of the time.

A coalition government is generally more sensitive to the problems of the masses and is more responsive to their needs. It has to be noted that the congress could drift away from Gandhi's ideals only because it was in a strong position most of the time. It stopped caring for the poor, and even for the laws of the land. Nehru had once remarked that even a lamp-post would win an election on congress ticket. Similarly most of the disgraceful scams and gery incidents of the past. In a coalition government there are several constituents which act as a check on extreme actions.[7]

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