

Adverse Effects of Coalitional Politics in India

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ABSTRACT :

There are some words like 'coalition', 'coalitional system', 'coalitional politics' which are synonymous with today's governing patterns in our country. They have found a prominent place in Indian administration. Now - a - days a change has come in the way a country is governed. The word 'Governance' has emerged as a very fashionable term in the recent years and covers numerous organisations both in public and private domains. And Good Governance is a dream which every responsible government wishes to achieve. Different state governments in Punjab, Gujrat, Bihar have made a comeback over the issue of better governance. Coalitional system is in vogue since 1967 in India and is expected to continue in near future. It has influenced the administration and governance of the country. There is a paradigm shift in the ideological context of the national as well as regional political parties. Major political parties like Indian National Congress and BJP have failed to form governments on their own. They have taken in confidence other political parties-big or small, known or unknown, old or new-in order to form governments at different levels. At the central level, National Democratic Alliance and United Progressive Alliance are the result of this shift in ideological tendency. At the state level also, there are various coalitions like Akali-BJP alliance in Punjab. The governance of the country has been influenced by this coalitional system and hence needs to be

studied from this point of view. This paper focuses on the positive effects of the prevalent coalitional system on the governing patterns of the country and also highlights the shortcoming of this system. The present paper also brings out a few suggestions to improve upon the coalitional system and in turn the governance of the country.

Key-Words : Political Parties, Good Governance, Coalitional Politics, Administration.

Introduction :

The Coalitional system is synonymous with the governing patterns in India.

These days, 'coalitionalisation of politics' is very pivotal political phenomenon in India. And this fact in Indian political system is now accepted, though willy-nilly, by all the major or minor political parties. Even the most optimist cannot escape the reality that India is destined to be a coalition-run country for many years to come. Even the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh has repeatedly said that his government has to follow the 'Coalition Dharma' while giving up important projects for fulfilling the wishes of its supporters. The two national parties Congress and BJP which have been revolving around the 200-plus mark for a long time, may add their tally by a few more members or lose some in the upcoming 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Yet neither of the two looks like reaching the dream figure of 272 to rule the country by itself.

The very word 'alliance' suggests that it is a combination of parties which have chosen to stay with one or the other in its own interest. The Congress heads the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), while the BJP has constituted the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Central level. The give and take policy is inherent in such an arrangement. So

the result of such a combination is a hotchpotch of different interests that may serve purpose for the time being.

The general meaning of the term 'coalition' is temporary alliance of groups or individuals formed to pursue specific objectives through joint action. The term coalition is most often used in connection with political parties. Coalition government, which are frequently found in multiparty countries like India, France, Italy, and many other countries of the world, are formed when no single party is strong enough to achieve an electoral majority. In order to oblige the representatives of all coalition members, the resulting government usually distributes political posts among them.

For Indian Politics, the coalitional politics is not a new concept. Long before Independence, India got its first experience of coalition government in 1937, when the Government of India Act, 1935 became operative. At that time Jinnah asked for a coalition consisting of Congress and Muslim League in U.P., but Congress, the party holding majority, did not entertain this demand. Mohammad Ali Jinnah at that time argued that in India, coalition was the only respectable device to give to the Muslims a fair share in governance. Congress formed coalitions with other regional parties in other states like NWFP and Punjab. The Interim Government of 1937 under the Prime-ministership of Nehru was the first formal coalition consisting the congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, etc.

After 1947, the electoral history of India and the record Union Government can be divided into two phases-first upto 1989, a period of eight elections resulting in electoral majority for one party and relatively stable Union Governments except for a few years of coalition exercise and the second, the decade since 1989 marked by fractured verdicts in 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 1999, resulting in the formation of coalition

governments. Various coalition governments have functioned in Indian polity since 1967 but these governments could last for only a few months. However, the communist coalition government in West Bengal has run and lasted for more than 25 years. In the light of the decline of Congress Dominance, the fragmentation of the National Party System and the emergence of party systems at the regional level have turned India into a new political battleground.

Why is the need of Coalitions ?

The following are the reasons for the so-called alliances or coalitions :

When any single political party becomes unable to form government by commanding a working majority in the lower house of parliament there is a definite need of coalition. Owing to the fractured mandate at the polls, India has in recent years increasingly been confronted with such a situation.

Coalition politics also thrives because of the inability of national parties to continue to give a feeling to the diverse population in India that they are able to adequately represent their disparate interests.

In the beginning, the Congress party was able to accommodate regional/local interests and reflect their aspirations. It was also possible to maintain a large single party identity. But with the passage of time, regional and caste identities have begun to increasingly assert themselves in the political space.

Growth of Regional Political Parties has provided credible alternatives to the Congress party in the states, which in turn led to situation, where 'horse trading' became relatively common in unsettling state governments.

Shortcomings of Coalition System :

- (i) So far as democracy concerned, coalition government is less democratic as the balance of power is held by the small parties who can barter their support for concessions from the main groups within the coalition. As a result, a party with little popular support is able to impose its policies upon the majority by a process of political blackmail.
- (ii) Unstability is one of the hallmarks of Coalitions Governments. In India all non-Congress coalitions except last Vajpayee's and Narendra Modi's Ministry didn't complete its full term and the first Vajpayee Ministry lasted for only thirteen days. This greatly restrict the ability of governments to deal with major reforms and means that politicians never stay in any particular ministerial post for long enough to get to grips with its demands.
- (iii) Many critics of the coalition experiment are of the opinion that it affects relations between the Centre and the States negatively. So it's pretty clear that in terms of its relation with the Central Government a state government will be at an advantage if formed by a party which supports the Central Government. On the other hand, a state government formed by parties, which are in the opposition in the parliament, will have a difficult passage. However, this is not only true of coalition governments.
- (iv) The coalition governments as compared to the governments formed by any one party with a definite ideology and principles are definitely far less effective, not durable and non-dependable
- (v) MLAs and MPs from all the parties in coalition governments are given portfolios/ministries and appointed as Ministers. These ministers are appointed on the recommendations of the parent

party, without taking the qualification, character and criminal/clean record of the MLAs and MPs

- (vi) Often it is seen that the numbers of ministers are so very large that the leaders run out of portfolios to be given to the incumbents. It does mean there is no office existing and some MLAs and MPs become Ministers. We have even found Ministers without portfolios or Minister with some meaningless portfolios. Such Ministers are asked to run their office without portfolios from their residences, with hardly any officials working under them. The appointment of Chief Parliamentary Secretaries by the different states is a step towards this direction. Recently the Punjab coalition government has appointed record 21 CPS to please the coalition partner.

Lord Bryce once opined :

"Administration formed by coalition of parties is usually weak, not merely because the combination is unstable but because men whose professed principles differ are likely to be entangled in inconsistencies or drive to unsatisfactory compromises."

Strengths of the Coalition System :

- (A) Coalition politics, when even in small groups, regional groups, etc. have say in politics, best represents India's diversity and plurality. This is not possible in single party dominance. The coalition government in Kerala had many achievements to its credit, the most important being land reforms. The coalition, in West Bengal was equally successful.
- (B) Coalition politics best achieved the dramatic accountability. As a result of the pressure experienced by the various partners within the coalition the policies, which finally emerge, are in the nature of a consensus, avoiding extreme positions. For instance, in order to

- successfully forge a coalition and form the government, the BJP had to drop Mandir Plans.
- (C) The coalition government addresses the regional disparity more than the single party rule. Of course, it may not perform at its full throttle but it is always good for inclusive growth of all the regions, of all the people of a country than the high growth of only selected people and region. Hence, coalition government is more democratic, and hence fairer, because it represents a much broader spectrum of public opinion than government by one party alone.
- (D) The principal regarding the politics of consensus is functioned by such governments. Such government functions on principal of politics of consensus. In addition to it, states are given more powers, and the base of concept of federalism is strengthened. I am of the firm opinion that stronger the states of any nation, stronger will be government at the Centre.
- (E) Instability apart, coalition governments have been effective in enhancing democratic legitimacy, representativeness, and national unity. Major policy shifts like neo-liberal economic reforms, federal decentralization, and grass roots decentralization, in theory or practice, are largely responsible for the beginning of federal coalitional governance. The idea of coalition politics have these days been accepted by the same major national parties which earlier rejected it.

Suggestions Regarding the Coalition System :

- (I) The pivotal challenge pertaining coalition politics is that since in India, it is inevitable the focus should be on how to make sure that basic issue of good governance, clean politics and administration

are not neglected. It is but a reality that coalition politics has come to stay in the Indian political scenario. Gone are the days of one party majority system or single party system. Therefore, our major national parties need to focus on social and cultural ecosystems, linking them together across regions and communities.

- (II) The matter of established fact in India is that no single party will be in a position to dominate the political scenario. Politics of consensus should be achieved. Politicians have to rise above parochial and narrow considerations and think in terms of national interest. At the time of formation of the coalition, the number game should not be followed. Abilities, capabilities and merits of the legislators/parliamentarians concerned should be taken into account.
- (III) The preference or choice of the leader of the coalition also should be dealt with utmost care. The obvious choice of leader will be the leader of the largest party of the coalition of parties. Ideally this person should be one with a vision, with a capacity to shoulder responsibilities and pressures and an ability to strike a chord among different constituents of coalition.
- (IV) The basic common program which may guide the future course of action as necessary. This would ensure that at least basic administration and governance would not come to a standstill.
- (V) It has also been found that coalitions are sometimes formed after the electoral process is over i.e. post-poll alliances. This sometimes leads to politics of horse-trading.
- (VI) For coalition politics has come to stay and all parties have come to realise the inevitability of coalition and political alliances, they should aim at compatibility. If there are two or three major parties

which might act as the anchor or pillars of the system, coalition will probably work better. The other parties can co-operate with them in an endeavour to provide a stable government.

- (VII) Without an ethical base which is a pre-condition for the kind of growth that strengthens the roots of the new politics. The foundations of the new politics cannot be built. A new drive towards the politics of service will provide moral authority to enforce discipline on men and institutions.

Conclusion :

To come to any definite point about the coalition system is no doubt very difficult. Though it is very difficult to make any definite conceptualisation of the Indian political party system, one thing is clear-some of the earlier concepts are no longer valid. Rajni Kothari's "Congress party system" have lost their importance in the Indian context.

In the recent past India has passed through coalition-building at the national level. The NDA completed its full term of five years in 2004 and the UPA completed its full term of five years in 2009 and 2014, and again the NDA completed its full term in 2019. Both the governments have been highly dependent upon their alliances with various regional political parties. This proves the point that coalition-building is taking roots in Indian society and the party system is getting federalised with increasing role and power share of the regional parties in national coalition politics.

As a matter of fact one must understand that under the prevalent circumstances, coalition politics has become inevitable and it can lead to the establishment of good governance as different social groups get opportunities to reshape the agenda of good life. It ensures more and more participation of diverse groups. It also makes possible the

reconciliation of regional interests with national interests, something that was not there in earlier times.

Since it is a fact known universally that India is a diverse country with different ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities, it also has diverse ideologies. And because of this reason, the benefit that a coalition has is that it leads to more consensus based politics and reflects the popular opinion of the electorate. In order to have stable coalitions, it is necessary that political parties moderate their ideologies and programmes. They should be more open to take others point of view as well. They must accommodate each other's interests and concerns. Various parties in India do not always agree on the correct path for government policy. Different parties have different interests and beliefs, and it is difficult to sustain a consensus on issues when disagreement arises.

The sum up we can say that 'coalescing of minds' should be the mantra to sustain and strengthen the present coalitional system which is here to stay in times to come and to better the governance of the country.

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