



COALITION GOVERNMENT IN INDIA: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A coalition government is one in which multiple political parties come together and often reduce the dominance of the party that has won the highest number of seats. Coalition governments are formed as seldom does a political party win the necessary number of seats to form the Government on its own. In India, the first coalition government to complete its full-term was the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance from 1999 to 2004, United Progressive Alliance from 2004 to 2014 and then 2014 onwards again Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance till now. While some say that coalition governments generate more inclusive policies, others believe that coalitions impose constraints on policymaking. Presently the coalition is a fact of life in India. The coalition is a product of Parliamentary democracy, particularly, a result of the exigencies of a competitive multi-party system. Political instability a necessary concomitant of coalition politics. This paper is a conceptual overview of Coalition Government.

KEYWORDS: Alliance, Coalition Government, Democracy, Stable Government.

INTRODUCTION

The various postulates, such as, ‘India has entered into an era of coalition’; ‘the coalition has come to stay in India’; the coalition is a fact of life in India’; ‘Coalition is Yug Dharma’ and so on are gaining ground in the Indian political system these days. A new dogma ‘India is a coalition, socially, economically and politically’ is, of late, being advocated very cogently. So, it is also being pleaded strongly that ‘we should learn to run the coalition’. This idea is based on the premise that ours is a pluralistic society. This concept has been strengthened with the recent ‘Shimla Sankalp’ of the Congress giving good bye to its earlier pronouncements at the Panchmarhi conclave and the Bangalore AICC session. The Congress gave an open call to all secular forces to unite to evolve a strategy to fight the B.J.P. presently, all mainstream political parties in India have accepted coalition as a fact of life in Indian politics.

Conceptually, it is often difficult to define the term ‘coalition’. As Herbert H. Hyman has observed, “Sometimes, it is the odd fate of a concept that it can have too successful a career. After it wins scientific acceptance, it may become so appealing and fashionable that it is applied indeterminately.” The same is the fate of the term ‘coalition’. Though the very meaning of coalition government implies a union of political parties for the formation of a Ministry, yet, the term coalition has been occasionally used interchangeably for an alliance. Sometimes, the words ‘block’ and ‘compromise’ have been also used for a coalition. In our country various coalition governments in the States have been called Grand Alliance or United Front Government. So, it is essential to have the exact connotation of the term coalition for our study.

The term ‘coalition’ is derived from the Latin word ‘Coalition’ which is the verbal substitute of “Coalescere” which means grow together. However, as actually used, it somewhat belies its nominal

meaning, 'for the units or elements' brought into combination by a coalition very seldom grow together in any literal sense. According to the dictionary meaning, coalition signifies a "combination or alliance short of union especially of States or political parties". Let us not get confused: for the use of words like 'alliance' for 'coalition' as the war time unity of the United States, the Soviet Union and the Great Britain is sometimes referred to as a 'coalition' while sometimes as an 'alliance'. The word bloc is also at times called coalition, as it results when certain individuals or groups in a legislative assembly are merged into a formation which intends aggressive political action. In France where the bloc has had its largest and most continuous history it was regarded on several occasions as coalition. The term compromise as a form of accommodation in the political process has, now and again, been placed close to the term coalition. However, it would be inappropriate to conclude that terms like 'alliance', 'bloc' or 'compromise' are synonymous with 'coalition' though they sound to the carry corresponding meaning.

'Alliance' generally denotes the joining together of two or more persons or groups in a cooperative venture which faces active opposition. It has more a military connotation referring to a combination of nation states grouped together for joint action.

'Bloc' connotes, a combination of groups in a legislative body to promote or to prevent a given type of legislation. A bloc is essentially an interest group representation. It is more a parliamentary group intending to have an aggressive political action while 'coalition' is relatively non-aggressive in posture.

So far as 'compromise' is concerned it has a special meaning in social science. It stands strictly for a joint agreement, which has come to signify such a settlement as involves a mutual adjustment, with surrender of part of each party's claim. It also means a settlement by arbitration or by consent reached by mutual concessions, a reciprocal abatement of extreme demands or rights, resulting in agreement. So, 'compromise' is a kind of accommodation in a political process. In a sense 'compromise' seems to be a process of bargaining between the parties helping them in forming a coalition'.

The concept of coalition as applied in politics is meant to 'denote, commonly, a cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties, or at all events members of such parties, unite to Form a government or ministry". It is generally regarded as the product of Parliamentary democratic process and is commonly used in connection with political parties, particularly, in multi-party systems. It may, however refer to an alliance of forces within a party or of groups cutting across party lines. It is applied to the union of two or more parties, or, as generally happens, portion of parties, who agree to sink their differences and act in common. Coalition, thus, denotes a combination of political groups or forces, temporary in nature and for specific objectives. So, it is usually in connection with political parties aligning for Parliamentary or electoral purposes.

Thus we may safely conclude here that coalition is a product of Parliamentary Democracy, particularly, a result of the exigencies of a competitive multi-party system. It is phenomenon where more than two political parties come together to form a government, sinking their basic ideological differences in the event of the inability of any single party to command a workable majority in the Lower House of the legislature. It should be mentioned here that it is not uncommon to have a coalition under a bi-party system where, sometimes, it becomes essential for one party to align itself with any n-or group or party in order to remain in power.

Broadly speaking, coalition governments have been of three types. They may be 'grand coalitions' as existed in Britain during the First and the Second World Wars, in Austria from 1945 to 1966 and in West Germany, particularly, from December 1966 to October 1969. Secondly, they can be stable coalitions as are found in Scandinavian countries, Holland and Belgium, Ceylon and also sometimes in Italy. The third variety is that of 'unstable much-party coalitions' most frequently found in France (under the third and the fourth republic), in contemporary Italy and in majority of Indian states between 1967 and 1972 as also at the central level.

Though the history of coalition government in India may be said to have started from 1946 when Interim Government was formed under the leadership of Mr. Nehru, consisting of the Indian National Congress, the Muslim league and the Hindu Mahasabha. It is also held that the Indian National Congress

itself remained a coalition representing many shades of opinions, divergent groups and personalities. But the period of 1967 has been hailed as the watershed of Indian politics which heralded a phase of politics of the United Front in Indian political system, especially, in state politics giving birth to non-congress governments in many states. It was also called a phase of 'politics of polarisation' and a phase of new 'political realignment making the end of the dominance of one party rule, i.e., Congress.

Since the 1989 Lok Sabha election we had always a hung parliament resulting in a coalition government at the national level, Between 1989 and 1999 we had five elections always having fractured mandate. During this period as many as eight governments were formed — all coalition governments including the last one which is continuing. The voting pattern on the eve of recent no confidence motion indicates that the present government may complete its full term.

Now about the type of coalition government in India we find various types. While in the first phase it was based on anti-congressism and now anti BJP is the main plank. Again, we have witnessed the instable coalition in States between 1967 to 1972 as also at the centre in 1977 and 1989. No doubt we have stable coalition governments in West Bengal and Kerala. Except the present Government, all the coalition Governments at the centre remained unstable.

Many questions are to be analysed and examined in depth regarding the pattern of coalition politics in India. Is political instability a necessary concomitant of coalitional politics? No doubt the strength and stability of coalition governments depend on the pattern of party system. However, a close observation indicates that the stability of coalition governments has depended more on the manner they are forged, the political situation in which they function, the nature and behaviour of their constituent units and the ideological proximity between them, the national character and the political culture of their people and the pattern of social cleavage and consensus. Surely, the personal ambitions and the integrity of political actors are the key factors. It is beyond doubt that the performance of coalition government depends on the stability factor.

It is here we may consider the question of Presidential versus Parliamentary type of Government: which one is suitable for us?

Another question which deserves our attention is the way in which contradictions and incompatibilities are to be managed and maneuvered among the different constituents. It is here each and every political party has to drop some of its militant agenda in order to evolve compromise and consensus.

Yet, another question is whether the coalition is pre-election or post-election. Whether it is on agreed common agenda or whether it establishes common core group for monitoring the performances on common minimum programme.

Besides, is coalition politics being incapable of taking hard decisions paving way for more and more judicial activism or Presidential activism? The way in which the President departed from his scheduled address to the nation on the eve of 1998 Independence Day to an exclusive interview to the Frontline where he expressed his frank views at variance with the BJP Government and also the way in which he returned the proposal of the Vajpayee Government for dismissal of the Kalyan Sirigh Ministry in UP. and the Rabri Devi Government in Bihar speak volumes.

Again, we have to examine whether a regional boss gets more bargaining power for its support to centre. Regional leaders try to play pivotal role in national politics pulling the string of power towards regions.

This paves the way for 'dominance dependence' relationship between centre and states. It is here we have to examine the theory of 'Centre is myth'. This may lead to Balkanisation of the Indian Union by our accepting the theory of self-determination, thereby weakening the power and position of central authority. The question is whether a weak centre is affordable for our national unity and integrity.

Coalitions are invaluable in advocacy because they create structures for organizations and individuals to share ownership of common goals. Advocacy work can be strengthened considerably through the use of coalitions. However, there are both advantages and disadvantages to forming or joining a coalition.

Decisions on joining a coalition should only be taken after careful consideration following research and risk analysis. Decide whether working with the coalition is the best way to solve your problem, and whether your values and approaches can be shared.

Working with coalitions may have the following advantages:

ADVANTAGES:

1. Enlarges your base of support, networks and connections; gives strength in numbers: you can achieve more together than you can alone.
2. Provides safety for advocacy efforts and protection for members who may not be able to take action alone, particularly when operating in a hostile or difficult environment.
3. Magnifies existing financial and human resources by pooling them together and by delegating work to others in the coalition.
4. Reduces duplication of effort and resources.
5. Enhances the credibility and influence of an advocacy campaign, as well as that of individual coalition members.
6. Helps develop new leadership skills amongst members.
7. Assists in individual and organizational networking.
8. Facilitates exchange of information, skills, experience, materials, opportunities for collaboration etc.
9. Brings together a diverse range of people and organizations. Diversity can strengthen a campaign by broadening perspective and understanding of the issue. It can also assist outreach by appealing to a wider population base with differing priorities and interests.
10. Provides peer support, encouragement, motivation and professional recognition.

Some of the disadvantages of forming or joining a coalition are given below:

DISADVANTAGES:

1. Can lack clear objectives, or be difficult to agree common objectives.
2. Forming and managing a coalition can be a very time-consuming and bureaucratic process that can take away time from working directly on campaign issues and organizational tasks.
3. May be dominated by one powerful organization. Power is not always distributed equally among members; larger or richer organizations can have more say in decisions.
4. May require you to compromise your position on issues or tactics.
5. Shared decision-making can be slow and may paralyze progress.
6. Can often be constrained by a lack of resources.
7. Potential for donor interference (e.g. a donor is interested in funding certain activities but there is a danger of planning activities only because you know you can get the funds).
8. You may not always get credit for your work. Sometimes the coalition as a whole gets recognition rather than individual members. Or certain members get or claim more recognition than others, causing conflict and resentment.
9. If the coalition process breaks down it can harm everyone's advocacy by damaging members' credibility.
10. Coalition activities can be difficult to monitor and evaluate.

CONCLUSION

We have to solve the question of hunger and unemployment in this phase of privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation. 'Whether coalition government is at all suitable for all these or it can go with populism for its survival.

Thus, in the end it can be said that though the coalition form of Government provides an opportunity to different Socio-Cultural and Economic parties to participate in the Governance of the Nation, it brings about a lot of turf between the Centre and State. The regional parties at the centre attempt to articulate and aggregate regional interests' irrespective of Nation which in turn affects the overall

development of the Nation. Also the most important office which is necessary for the proper maintenance of centre state relations that is the Office of the Governor is also politicised in order to maintain the stability of the coalition government.

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