



## COALITION GOVERNMENT IN KARNATAKA

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### ABSTRACT

India is one of the biggest democracies in the world with 29 states and a diverse population in terms of language, culture, and religion. In such circumstances, it is almost impossible to expect any one political party to represent the whole country. For the first few decades after independence, the Congress party could represent the country politically because the same party was instrumental in bringing freedom for the country from the British rule. After the latter half of the 1980s coalition governments became inevitable. This paper discusses the factors responsible for the formation of coalition governments especially in the state of Karnataka.

**KEYWORDS:** Coalition Government, Direct Democracy, Indirect Democracy, Ideology, Poll Alliance.

### INTRODUCTION:

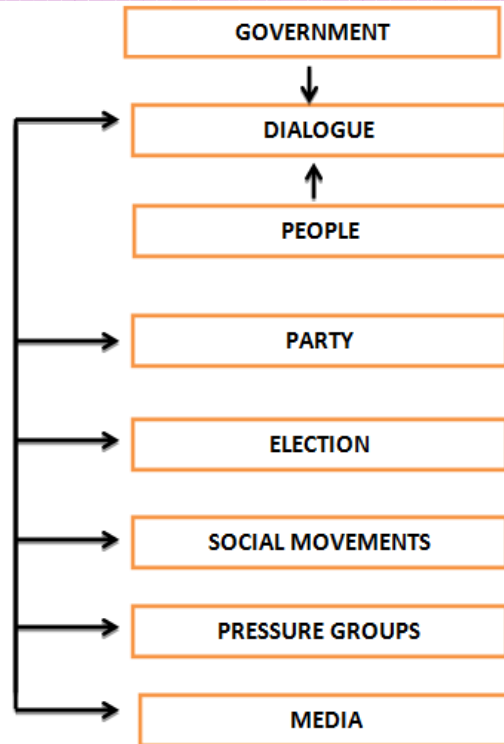
Industrialisation has led to the growth of the concept of rights and representation, in turn leading to the formation of nation-states and democratic governments. Further, the growth of identity politics based on religion, caste, region, culture, language, etc. are connected to the birth of coalition politics across the world. This concept of coalition government needs an overall understanding. But before we get to that, we need to answer a more fundamental question: what is democracy?

#### 1. What is Democracy?

Democracy is rule by the people. We find two types of democracies:

- a. **Direct Democracy:** - Where people participate directly in one of the three organs of the government.
- b. **Indirect Democracy:** - People elect their representatives to represent them in the three organs of the government.

In indirect democracies, the political party becomes an instrument which gives opportunity to the people to choose their representatives. In a democracy there is continuous dialogue between people and government through various channels like party, election, media etc.



## 2. What is a coalition government?

A coalition government is one where many parties come together and form the government where no single party gets the majority to form the government. Coalition governments can be formed in two ways:

- a. **Pre-poll alliance** - when parties come together on the basis of the ideology and contest elections on the basis of seat sharing and form of government after election.
- b. **Post-poll alliance** –When a single party does not get the majority, two or more parties come together to form the government.

## 3. COALITION GOVERNMENTS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

During independence movement, the Congress Party attempted to represent the interests of all sections of people under the umbrella of the freedom movement. After freedom, due to the lack of a strong alternative, the Congress Party stood for nation building, development, and national integrity. Till 1977, because of the dominance of the Congress party, coalition governments were never more than a theoretical possibility. After emergency, however, under the leadership of Morarji Desai, the Janata Party government was formed including Congress (D), Bharatiya JanSangh, BharatiyaLokdal, etc. This was the first coalition government formed in the country at the national level. But, in 1979, this government collapsed as Charan Singh was assured of outside support by the Congress Party. Shortly after becoming the Prime Minister, he resigned without even proving the majority in the Parliament.

In 1989, V.P.Singh formed the National Front government with the help of Telugu Desam Party. DMK, AsomGanaParishad, BJP, and CPI (M) gave outside support to the government. V.P.Singh was from Jan Morcha Party, which was founded by him in 1987 which he merged with the Janata Dal in 1989. In 1990, BJP withdrew the support given to the National Front government as V.P.Singh ordered the arrest of L.K.Advani over the AyodhyaRathYatra issue. As a result, the V.P.Singh government lost its power.

In 1990, June 21, Chandrashekar became Prime Minister. He was from Janata Dal (Socialist) party and with the support of Congress (I) he formed the government. In 1991 March 6th Chandrashekar resigned to

his post because Congress (I) withdrew its support to Chandrashekar government over the allegation of Chandrashekar spying on the activities of Rajiv Gandhi.

After the 1991 general elections, P V Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister of India with a strength of 242 seats in the Lok Sabha, and proved to be successful against vote of no-confidence three times during his tenure, with the support of National Front of Ajit Singh faction, Jharkhad Mukti Morcha and secular parties (which stood with him during BJP moved vote of no-confidence after 1992 Babri Masjid incident). He completed a full five-year term with the credit of being the first person from the non-Gandhi-Nehru family to do so and the leader of the first coalition which could complete five year term.

In 1996 general elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party formed a short-lived government of 13 days. After the collapse of the BJP government, Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party, DMK, AGP, Left Parties, Maharashtra Gomantak Party among others formed a United Front government and H.D. Deve Gowda became Prime Minister from 1996 to 1997. Later Congress withdrew its support to the government, citing communication gap between government and the Congress Party.

In 1997, I.K. Gujral became Prime Minister. In 1998, Congress asked Gujral to drop DMK party members from the cabinet as they were seen as linked to the Rajiv Gandhi murder case and he declined to do so. As a result, the Congress Party withdrew its support given to I.K. Gujral and the government lost its power.

In 1998, general elections were held where Vajpayee formed government with the support of AIADMK (286 seats). AIADMK subsequently withdrew support to Vajpayee government.

In the 1999 general elections NDA formed government with the help of 24 parties including TDP, Janata Dal (U), Shiv Sena, DMK, etc. Atal Bihari Vajpayee became Prime Minister and completed the term of five years till 2004.

In 2004 general elections, UPA formed the government. Manmohan Singh became Prime Minister with the external support of left front, BSP, etc. This government also completed five years term and was in power till 2009.

In 2009 general election UPA formed government once again and Manmohan Singh became Prime Minister for the second term. His government was supported by the coalition partners namely BSP, SP, Janata Dal (Secular), RJD, etc. This Government was in power till 2014.

In 2014 general elections BJP alone won 282 seats, and yet formed a coalition government with the help of parties like Shiv Sena, TDP, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Lok Janshakti Party, etc. with a total seat tally of 336 seats and Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister.

This was the scenario at the national level, at the state level especially in the state of Karnataka, the history of coalition governments started during the Ramakrishna Hegde period.

#### **4. COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN KARNATAKA:**

In 1983 election, Ramakrishna Hegde formed the government with outside support from BJP, the Left parties and 16 independents. In 1984 Lok Sabha elections, Janata party did not fare well for which he had to resign. In 1985 Karnataka state elections Ramakrishna Hegde won with a majority and formed the government.

In 2004, BJP became the largest party but did not have the sufficient numbers to form the government. Thus, JDS and Congress formed the government by making Dharam Singh the Chief Minister. In 2006, JDS party leader Kumaraswamy moved away from the coalition with 46 members. JDS and BJP coalition formed the government and Kumaraswamy became Chief Minister. According to the agreed contract, Kumaraswamy would be the Chief Minister for the first twenty months and the next twenty months, Yedyurappa, the BJP leader, was supposed to take over as the Chief Minister. But, after twenty months of chief ministership, JDS did not agree to step down. BJP withdrew support and staked claim to form the government. Its leader Yedyurappa resigned to the post of Chief Minister after serving for a week, because of lack of majority to form the government.

In 2008 election BJP won 110 seats and garnering the support of six independents formed the government and Yeddyurappa became Chief Minister of this coalition government.

In 2018 state election, BJP won 104 seats but was short of nine seats for majority to form the government. So, JDS and Congress combined to form the coalition government and Kumaraswamy became the Chief Minister.

## 5. WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR COALITION?

**1) Caste:** Congress party was supported by all castes in Karnataka till 1969, when there was a split in the Congress party. Congress (O) consisting of the old guard of the congress party and Congress (R) consisting of the Indira Gandhi faction. As a result of the split, Congress (R) got the support of the upper castes. Indira Gandhi decided to garner the support of SC/ST and OBC section. As part of this plan, Devaraj Urs introduced reservations and land reforms to garner the support of the lower castes in Karnataka. During the Devaraj Urs period, the Congress Party made inroads into the lowest base of the society in Karnataka. Lingayats, Vokkaligas, and Brahmins were well organised before independence. Now was the chance for the lower castes to organise and gain power.

After the formation of Janata Party in 1977, in 1983 Ramakrishna Hegde formed Janata Party government in Karnataka and became the Chief Minister. Later, during the V.P. Singh government at the centre in 1989, Ramakrishna Hegde became Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission. In 1996 when H.D. Deve Gowda became Prime Minister, Ramakrishna Hegde was the natural contender for the post of Prime Minister. This resulted in a rift between Deve Gowda and Ramakrishna Hegde. So, H.D. Deve Gowda requested Laloo Prasad Yadav, who was the then national president of the party to remove Ramakrishna Hegde from the party. This development made Brahmins move towards BJP. In 1999 when Janata Party was split as JD (United) and JD (S), the JD (U) faction was headed by S.R. Bommai in Karnataka. After his death, Lingayats shifted their support to BJP under the leadership of Yeddyurappa.

In 1999 there was a split in Janata Party because the then chief minister of Karnataka J.H. Patel gave support to NDA government at the central level. This development was not accepted by former Prime Minister Deve Gowda and he formed JD(Secular) party. So, JD(S) became a party of Vokkaligas, who have a strong social base in old Mysore region.

**2) Region:** Karnataka is divided into Mumbai Karnataka, Old Madras region (Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada), Old Mysore region, Central Karnataka, Hyderabad Karnataka. These regions are physically, economically and politically different with a very different configuration of caste divisions.

JDS is very strong in Old Mysore region as Vokkaligas are dominant in this region but presence of JDS is very negligent in other regions of Karnataka. BJP has strong presence in Old Madras region, Central Karnataka region and Mumbai Karnataka region. The Congress party has strong hold in Hyderabad Karnataka region because UPA government introduced 371 J article which provides special provision for the people of this region in education and employment. The Congress Party is also powerful in certain other parts of Karnataka. Caste-wise, the Old Mysore region is dominated by Vokkaliga Caste. Whereas, Hyderabad Karnataka region and Mumbai Karnataka region has strong presence of Lingayat caste.

**3) Ideology:** a) **Centrist Ideology:** After independence, for few decades it was the nation building and centrist ideology that dominated Karnataka State. The Congress party which follows a centrist ideology, instrumental in bringing independence to the country, won elections till 1984 in Karnataka.

b) **Socialist Ideology:** 1970s and 80s saw the emergence of socialism, especially under the influence of Ram Manohar Lohia's ideas in Kagodu movement, farmers' agitation and Dalit movement. Even the rise of Janata Party, and later the JD (S) was the result of Lohite ideas.

c) **Rightist Ideology:** 1980s saw the rejuvenated form of rightist ideology through BJP. BJP gave outside support to Ramakrishna Hegde government carving a foothold in Karnataka politics for itself.

d) **Capitalist Ideology:** After 2000, when globalisation established its deep roots in Karnataka through IT and BT, coal mining, Industries, etc. businessmen wanted to enter politics so that it helps their business. This has resulted in two things:

- a) Politicians develop individual relationship with the voter. Where, voter has loyalty to the individual and not to the party which the politician belongs to. It gives freedom for the politician to change the party according to his convenience.
- b) Politician is not attached to any ideology. He is interested in power and his own business interest. This forces other traditional politicians to think in terms of business and not in the traditional way of social movements and ideology.

**4) Socio-economic profile:** Till 1972 SC/ST and Other Backward Castes had no major role in politics. It was dominated by Brahmin, Lingayats and Vokkaligas, because they were organised politically and they were also strong economically.

After 1972, when Devaraj Urs introduced land reforms movement, and reservations and made policies for the upliftment of backward castes, these castes also started getting politically organised in Karnataka.

After 1991, when globalization was introduced in India, many of the lower communities got access to economic resources. They wanted their share in political power. That is why after the late 90s the power bargain became more complex in India as well as Karnataka politics.

**5) Vote-distribution:** A caste might be numerically large, but may not be congregated in a single geographical area but distributed across the state. Under such circumstances, the numbers will not be converted into congregated votes. For eg- in 2018 Karnataka assembly election BSP has won just one seat.

Congress Party has support of Kurubas, OBC, and SC (Right) but they are spread across the state. So, turning them into a vote block is a difficult task for the party. Whereas, BJP has support of Brahmins, Lingayats, Dalit (Left), Billava, Idiga, etc. They are congregated in 120 constituencies. So, it is easy for BJP to convert them into votes and win seats. JD(S) has support of Vokkaligas who are congregated in Old Mysore region and this helps them win 25 to 35 seats usually in Karnataka state assembly elections.

**In conclusion,** coalition governments in Karnataka are formed out of a complex role of Ideology, Caste, Socio-economic profile, etc. Moreover, modern day globalization process is changing the nature of electoral politics and the relation between representatives and the voters.

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