

Coalition Politics and Role of Regional Parties in North India

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is considered as one of the best form of government because it ensure liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision making. It is a form of government which is brought into existence by the people, of the people, for the people. One cannot ignore the role of Political parties at state as well as at regional level in the formation of government. The rise of regional parties has contributed to the break-down of the one-party dominant at the Centre and a total reversal of the authoritarian and centralized politics of one part system in Indian politics. The new role of regional parties has transformed Indian federalism significantly.

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INTRODUCTION

“A coalition government is a combination of heterogeneous socio-political elements which are susceptible to political turmoil and storms emerging from changing socio-political conditions and compulsions.”¹

India is the world's largest democracy having a multi-party system with a large number of political parties at state and regional levels. In the present day democratic countries, political parties are considered as essential components for the formation and working of the government. Although in countries like Libya,

Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, there are governments without parties as political parties are banned there, so these countries are not the democratic one. We can, therefore, infer that democracies function successfully in countries which have competitive party systems. Political parties actually help the institutions and framework of a democratic government. They enable people to participate in elections and other processes of governance, educate them and facilitate them to make policy choices.²

Political parties are organized bodies and are primarily concerned with the acquisition and retention of power, cherish certain common goals regarding the political system and bring out policies into practice.

Gilchrist defines a political party as **“an organized group of citizens who profess or share the same political views and who by acting as a political unit, try to control the government”**.

According to Gettell, **“a political party consists of a group of citizens, more or less organized, who act as a political unit and who, by the use of their voting power, aim**

to control the government and carry out their general policies”³.

The rise of regional parties has contributed to the break-down of the one-party dominant at the Centre and a total reversal of the authoritarian and centralized politics of one part system in Indian politics. The new role of regional parties has transformed Indian federalism significantly. Since 1990s have seen the emergence of the state as the epic-Centre of Indian Politics. The regional parties came to play major roles at the national level and also the key players in coalition government. This kind of change in political parties in India, reflect the drastic change in politics of federalism, shifting from dominant federalism to co-operative Federalism.⁴

Political power in India has shifted since 1996, as the grand encompassing parties which had once dominated, have been replaced by diverse multiparty coalitions which results into profound shift in the organization of political power.⁵ Coalition has become an indispensable necessity of Indian political arena. India has seen many coalition governments with both positive and negative consequences of it in the last few decades. The Indian regional politics has saw a world of change in it that helped many regional parties to grow in prominence, both in the state and in the centre, seeking to play an important role in shaping India's future.

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

This paper focuses on analyzing the current relationship between political parties and democracy in India, their role to facilitate or impede the work of democratic politics in electoral performance and the emergence of coalition politics as a standard feature of current Indian politics. The paper will further focus on a reflection on key issues and challenges that arise from the survey of coalition politics and role of regional political parties in North India.

WHAT IS COALITION?

Coalition is a phenomenon of a multi-party government where a number of minority parties join hands for the purpose of running the government which is otherwise not possible. A coalition is formed when many groups come into common terms with each other and define a common programme or agenda on which they work. A coalition government always remains in pulls and pressures particularly in a multinational country like India.

The term 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word 'coalition' which is the verbal substantive of *Coalescere*. "Co" means together and "alescere" means to go or to grow together. According to the dictionary meaning, coalition means **an act of coalescing, or uniting into one body, a union of persons, states or an alliance**. It is a combination of a body or parts into one whole. In the strict political sense, the word 'coalition' is used for an alliance or temporary union for joint action of various powers or States and also of the union into a single government of distinct parties or members of distinct parties.⁶

EARLY HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA

Stable Central governments based on parliamentary majorities have given way to Coalition governments that must depend on constellations of regional parties. India has become in this regard like Italy or Israel, both places where small parties can make or break governments and thereby affect the whole nation.⁷

Coalition Politics in India started with the elections of 1989. But the truth is that coalition politics is much older than the Indian constitution itself.⁸ Undivided India had its first experiment with coalitions in 1937 when elections to the provincial legislatures under the Government of India Act, 1935, were held in 1937. The Congress had a tacit electoral understanding with the Muslim League when it was not fully confident of a decisive majority in the United Provinces' Legislature. In the Interim government of 1946, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were broadly given representation in governance. The credit for having the first ever coalition under the present Constitution goes to what was then Patiala and the East Punjab States Union (PEPSU).⁹

Political transformations which started from 1967 were significant in so far as one-party dominant system is concerned. It led to the polarisation of the Indian party system into two blocks with anti-Congressism being the only unifying factor for the opposition parties.¹⁰ After 1967, power transferred to non-congress parties or coalitions which occurred in more than half of the Indian states. The process became evident from 1969 onwards when Nehru's successor Indira Gandhi faced the strong opposition "rejected the principle of consensus in favour of the majoritarian principles".¹¹ From 1989 onwards, the Congress party's hegemony of being an umbrella party became questioned and the space thus vacated was appropriated by regional political parties like Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Janata Dal (U), Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Samajwadi Party (SP), DMK, and the AIDMK.¹²

Congress government ruled India for almost 30 years by winning five consecutive Lok Sabha elections in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967 and in 1971 which leads to a sort of monopoly as a single party system in India. But in 1975, when emergency was imposed in India by Mrs. Indira Gandhi it gave an

opportunity to other political forces to assert their influence and come at the forefront of Indian national politics. So, as a consequence all the anti-congress parties formed the coalition to fight against the Congress in the sixth Lok Sabha elections in 1977, under the leadership of Morarji Desai and came to power as the first non-Congress government at the centre. This was India's first experiment with the Coalition government. The Janata Party was in fact a coalition of various factions like the Congress O, the Jana Sangh, the Socialists, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, and the Congress for Democracy.

Unfortunately, non-Congress government could not complete its first term more than 2 years 3 months and 22 days. The inner party politics and differences among the top leaders of the party resulted in the collapse of first coalition government in India. Congress regained power in 1980 and remained there until 1989. During this period a number of regional movements took the form of terrorism in Kashmir, Punjab and in several parts of the north-eastern states. The political system failed to cope with such issues.¹³

During the 1970's, many regional parties have started gaining importance in many states of India. In Tamil Nadu, many regional parties came into existence due to movement against the Hindi as a national language. Regional leaders started to gain prominence due to their acquaintance with the regional issues more closely, as a result regional parties come to power by promising to solve state issues which were usually ignored by the central government.

Further, Dalit and other oppressed classes which were considered as the traditional supporters of Congress party revolted against the treatment given to them and wanted to change their condition which was as it is since centuries. As a result many regional Dalit leaders and parties also come to forefront of Indian politics in the form of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) founded by Kanshi Ram and afterwards led by Ms. Mayawati.

The need of decentralization of power led to the precedence of local issues over the national issues to look for alternative to Congress party. As a result, plethora of parties comes into existence to deal with the issues related to community, caste and linguistic needs.¹⁴

A CHRONOLOGY OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA¹⁵

- ✓ The first coalition was formed under the experience of Morarji Desai. He was the oldest man to become prime minister of India. The four-party Janta Government remained in power for about two years i.e., 1977-1979.
- ✓ Second coalition was formed with Mr. Charan Singh as the prime minister in October 1979 with the support of CPI (M) and the CPI. He was the only prime minister who didn't face the parliament.
- ✓ Third coalition under the name National Front was formed under the leadership of V.P. Singh in December 1989. This government was supported by BJP and the then single largest party Congress and also with the support of CPI, CPI (M), RSP and the Forward Block.

- ✓ Fourth coalition was formed under Chandra Shekhar government with the help of the Congress (I), AIADMK, BSP, Muslim League, J & K National Conference, Kerala Congress (M), Shiromni Akali Dal (panthic) and a few independent members. Chandra Shekhar formed the government on November 11, 1990.
- ✓ Fifth coalition was formed under the leadership of H.D. Deve Gowda under the name United Front government. The United Front was a coalition government of 13 political parties including outside support of Congress, CPI, Other members of the front included the Samajwadi Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Asom Gana Parishad, Tamil Maanila Congress, Communist Party of India and Telugu Desam Party.
- ✓ Sixth coalition was headed by I.K.Gujral from 21st April 1997 to 19th March 1998, as a consensus candidate between others that included Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, INC, left parties and others.
- ✓ Seventh coalition was led by A.B.Vajpayee from 19th March 1998 to 10th October 1999. The BJP led coalition was supported by AIADMK, BJD, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, PMK, TRC and others.
- ✓ Eighth coalition was formed after the 13th Lok Sabha elections under the Prime Minister ship of A.B. Vajpayee from 11th October 1999 to 21st May 2004 under the flag of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by BJP and supported by 24 political parties including AIADMK, Telgu Desam Party, NC, Trinimool Congress, Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal and others.
- ✓ Ninth coalition was formed in May 2004 under the leadership of a stalwart economist Dr. Manmohan Singh in the name of United Progressive Alliance supported by Nationalist Congress Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Jammu & Kashmir National Conference, Indian Union Muslim League, Kerala Congress (Mani) and others including left parties. Outside support was given by Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal.
- ✓ Tenth coalition was formed by UPA (2nd) in May 2009, headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister for 2nd term after 15th Lok Sabha elections.
- ✓ After the elections in May 2014, National Democratic Alliance again came into power, with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister.

EMERGENCE AND ROLE OF REGIONAL PARTIES IN NORTH INDIA

Political parties have an utmost important role in any democratic system. Political parties make democracy possible; elections possible educate people and make government responsive.

Though popularly referred to as regional parties, Election Commission of India (ECI) recognizes three categories of parties – National parties, State parties and registered

unrecognized parties. As per its criteria a political party will be recognized as a **State party if**

- a) Its candidates have secured at least six per cent (6%) of total valid votes and it has returned at least two members to the Legislative Assembly; or
- b) If it wins at least three per cent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Assembly.

A National party is recognized if

- a) the candidates set up by it in any four or more states at the election to the Lok Sabha or to the Assembly concerned have secured at least six per cent (6%) of total votes and it has returned at least four members to the Lok Sabha from any state or states; or
- b) Its candidates have been elected to the Lok Sabha from at least two per cent (2%) of the total seats (i.e. 11 seats in the House having 543 members), and these candidates have been elected from at least three different states.

Registered (unrecognized) Parties a large number of political parties are registered at the Election Commission, without having been recognized as National or State parties.¹⁶

In the early years of Indian independence, the role of regional parties in the active politics of India was nominal. They were not considered as much important as in the present scenario. In general parlance, state parties are termed as the regional parties.

In our country, Samajwadi Party of Uttar Pradesh, Shiv Sena of Maharashtra, Nationalist Congress Party of Maharashtra, the Trinamool Congress of Bengal, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) of Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal of Punjab, The National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir, The Telgu Desham Party of Andhra Pradesh, The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) of Jharkhand, Assom Gana Parishad (AGP) of Assom, Nagaland People's Council of Nagaland etc. are some of the regional parties which are working neck to neck in the mainstream with the national parties.

Many factors are collectively responsible for the mushroom growth of regional parties in Indian Politics. Emergence of strong regional parties has made it difficult for the national parties to win majority of seats in the parliament during the National elections. The inability of a single party to win majority of seats in the Parliament elections has forced two or more political parties to come together in forming a government, leading to the emergence of Coalition Era in Indian politics.¹⁷

The post-election alliance for forming the coalition government has finally led to the emergence of an era of pre-poll alliance. Now, in spite of only post-poll alliances, there is an increasing trend of forming pre-poll alliance between political parties during the Lok Sabha General elections.¹⁸ The breakdown of the national party system into distinct state party systems, led to the formation of alliances with parties commanding a significant state-level vote share which helps in aggregate constituency-level votes shares in states, where one's own party is not strong enough to win the elections. Pre-electoral coalitions have the potential to increase the number of seats won, although at the expense of conceding a certain

number of seats to allies, and also including such allies in a post-election government.¹⁹

Over the years, UPA has lost the backing of some of its previous allies like Trinamool Congress of West Bengal & DMK of Tamil Nadu. The other is BJP led NDA that lost JD (U)'s support. If one compares the pre-electoral coalitions for 2009 with 2014 for both alliances, NDA and UPA, the BJP struck a range of new alliances, most of them on more favourable terms than in the past, while retaining its key old alliances (Shiv Sena, Akali Dal) on the same terms. Thus, in 2014 the BJP had pre-electoral alliances in 10 states compared with six alliances in 2009 in which both BJP and its partners contested seats, of which seven were new alliances- Bihar, former Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Kerala, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh (UP)—and on more favourable

terms, contesting more seats than in earlier alliances in Bihar, former Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Haryana.²⁰

In Punjab too, we can see the coalitions between the Congress and the Communists and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) moulded itself to join any group as per its needs.

The dynamic change in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections could be seen with the increasing influence of older, smaller or new regional parties. Nobody can ignore the grand success of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which come into forefront from a protest movement against corruption and captured power in Delhi by defeating the two mainstream parties, Indian National Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party.²¹

Representation of National and Regional Parties in the General Elections

Party	Party-wise representation amongst elected members					Percentage votes				
	2009	2004	1999	1998	1984- 85	2009	2004	1999	1998	1984-85
National parties	69.24	67.03	67.96	71.27	85.40	63.58	62.89	67.11	67.98	77.86
Regional Parties	29.10	32.04	30.94	27.62	12.20	31.23	32.87	30.15	29.66	12.73
Independents	1.66	0.92	1.10	1.10	2.40	5.19	4.25	2.74	2.37	9.41
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: (i) Statistical Reports on General Elections from 1984 to 2004, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.²²
 (ii) (For 2009) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/results_of_the_2009_Indian_general_election_by_part²³

MAIN POINTS: COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA

- ❖ Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was the first to support the idea of Coalition government and for that he encouraged the opposition to unite to form a non-Congress government.
- ❖ India's first Coalition government at the centre was headed by Janata Party under the Prime Ministership of Morarji Desai from 24 March 1977 to 15 July 1979.
- ❖ The first state level Coalition government under the Chief Ministership of Jyoti Basu was an alliance between Left parties comprising of Communist Party of India (CPI), CPI (M) and others.
- ❖ India has continuously been governed by different coalition governments since 1989 with four coalition governments during 1996-1999 periods alone.
- ❖ The first coalition government in India to successfully finish its five-year term at the centre was Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister from 1999-2004.
- ❖ The next central government was a coalition government of Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The UPA which consists of 13 separate parties.
- ❖ The three major alliances that have come to forefront are UPA, NDA and the Left Front alliance.
- ❖ The recent coalition governance phenomenon is set by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which was lacking 8 seats and hence, formed an alliance with Congress party that offered outside support to the AAP.

CONCLUSION

Coalition governments have become an abiding feature of Indian politics. Coalition government's significance over Indian politics has grown by leaps and bounds over the years.

Over the last few decades, India has seen many coalition governments and has faced both positive and negative consequences of it. The Indian regional politics have helped many regional parties to grow in prominence, both in the state and in the centre, and they have played a huge role in shaping India's future.

From 1989 onwards, the decline of one-party dominance and the emergence of a large number of smaller or regional parties represent political empowerment by including smaller parties in power.

The regional political parties have come to play a vital role in the formation of governments at the Centre. These regional parties support one national political party or the other at the Centre and seek substantive favours, ministerial berths and other financial package for their respective States. Administration is run through Common Minimum Programme. The regional parties in many states started making suggestions for re-structuring of centre-State relations so as to ensure greater autonomy of their respective states.

Political parties have contributed to the society in electing their representatives. Increasing number of political parties has made it possible for the people from socially and economically backward classes to come to the forefront of the mainstream political process.

In the end, one can conclude that Coalition is the present need of Indian Politics and for that role of regional parties cannot be ignored. These are becoming stronger day by day.

The regional parties could not remain silent and raised their voices for their state interest and to fulfill the aspirations of the people. This is a positive growth which is a very much part and parcel of the process of democratization in a federal polity.

These are the key players in the formation of coalition politics in India. Although further progress is yet to be made, the results so far are beyond the words.

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