
Coalition Politics in India: An Analysis

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Abstract

The research paper wants to highlight the evolution of coalition politics in India. The evaluation of coalition politics and an analysis of how far coalition remains dynamic yet stable. How difficult it is to make policy decisions when coalition of ideologies forms the government. More often coalitions are formed to prevent a common enemy from the government and capturing the power. Equally interesting is the fact a coalition devoid of ideological moorings survives till the enemy is humbled. While making political adjustments, principles may have to be set aside and in this process ideology becomes the first victim. Once the euphoria victory is over, differences come to the surface and the structure collapses like a pack of cards.

Keywords: Government, coalition, ideology, partner, alliance, politics.

Introduction

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 coalition partners always go for bargaining in the given situation and never give up unless it breaks or makes. Hence, coalitions often remain on tender hooks unless every partner is taken on board. No partner comes on board unless given a fair share from the cake. The term 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word 'coalition' which is the verbal substantive 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.¹

"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".² After independence, The largest democracy has largely been ruled or governed by the single largest party that is, of course, Indian national congress. Congress party since its inception in 1885 has evolved as the most organized and vibrant force through every nook and corner of India. Since congress party has faced a lot of music during India's freedom struggle from the White men not to exclude an ordinary Indian who might have faced the British axe and not just music. Needless, to say the very existence of congress goes to the the British account. The organized congress party ruled India with no parallel or competition. The charisma of Nehru, Patel, and Azad had given congress the yield that congress enjoyed until 1977. Unlike general perception, coalition in politics is not a new concept for Indian politics coalitionism as a form of government is common and widely practiced in Europe.³ First experience of coalition in free India at the union level goes back to 1977 when non congress forces united under the leadership of Morarji Desai in the name of janta government. Ram Monhar Lohia In 1963 had propounded the strategy of Anti-Congressism or non congressism. He was of the opinion that since in the past three general elections the Congress had won with a thumping majority, there was a feeling among the masses that the Congress could not be defeated and it had come to stay in power for ever. Lohia

invited all the Opposition parties to field a single candidate against Congress candidates so that the non congress votes won't get divided and common masses could come out of the illusion that congress can't be defeated.

This formula of Dr. Lohia saw success in the 1967 general elections with the Congress party defeated in seven States and Samyuktha Vidhayak Dal governments formed by the Opposition parties of the time. Lohia's formula sowed the seeds for coalition politics in India. 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. The power struggle in the government did not allow Desai to continue anymore. Once the no confidence motion against Desai was discussed in the lower house. Mr. Desai tendered his resignation. The Janta government collapsed like a house of cards in July 1979 when floodgates of defections opened with the departure of various group leaders like George Fernandes, H.N.Bahuguna, Biju Patnaik and Mudhu Limaye.⁴ Second coalition, a new coalition was formed with Mr. Charan Singh as the prime minister in October 1979.⁵ He was the only prime minister who didn't face the parliament. This coalition had the support of CPI(M) and the CPI. On paper Charan Singh had the absolute majority.

But, once President asked him to seek a vote of confidence in the house within three weeks time. Mr. Charan Singh tendered his resignation before facing the house. Hence became the first Indian prime minister who did not face the house. Third coalition was formed in the name of national front under the leadership of V.P. Singh in December 1989. V.P. Singh government was supported by BJP and the then single largest party Congress which did not form the govt. as a political strategy. National front government had also the support of CPI, CPI(M), The RSP and the Forward Block. But, the honeymoon period was short lived when BJP withdrew its support to V.P. Singh on the eve of Advani's arrest on the backdrop of his Rath Yatra from Somnath to Gujarat despite BJP's warning to withdraw support if Advani is arrested. Though national front government remained in power only for 11 months. The Indian president R. Venkatarman observes, "it is my impression that if V.P. Singh had headed a government with a clear majority instead of depending on a conglomeration of parties mutually destructive to each other, he would have given a good administration to the country. Being dependent on parties with different objectives and ideologies, he could not withstand pressures from discordant groups"⁶ Fourth coalition, V.P. Singh's coalition government was defeated by 142 votes for and 346 against the confidence motion on Nov. 7, 1990 in the Lok Sabha. By Nov. 8, all major political parties declined to shoulder the responsibility for administration. Chandra Shekhar had already staked his claim to form the government with the help of the Congress(I), the AIADMK, BSP, Muslim League, J&K National Conference, Kerala Congress(M), Shiromni Akali Dal (Panthic) and a few independent members.⁷ Chandra Shekhar formed the government on November 11, 1990 despite the criticism that defectors should not have been invited to form government. Chandra Shekhar offered his resignation on 6th March 1991 and advised for dissolution of house on the issue of maintaining surveillance of Rajiv Gandhi by some Haryana policemen. The President R. Venkatarman's take on the leadership of Chandra Shekhar government "during his few months in office, he had handled parliament competently and was responsive to suggestions from the opposition. He was under constant strain from the pressures of the Congress party, which I am afraid, assumed that it was the real government and Chandra Shekhar only a proxy."⁸

Fifth coalition was formed under the leadership of H.D. Deve Gowda in the banner of 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. The United Front government headed by H.D. Deve Gowda was like a chariot being pulled at times in different directions by 13 horses.⁹ The Congress revoked its support to Gowda amidst discontent over communication between the coalition and the Congress. Hence, the

united front government lost the vote of confidence with 190 in favour and 338 against. 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'. The INC finally withdrew support from his government on 28 November after Gujral sent Kesri a letter saying he would not dismiss any DMK leaders. Gujral resigned following the withdrawal and sent a letter to President K. R. Narayanan that read: "My government has lost its majority and does not want to continue in office on moral grounds" .¹⁰

The president accepted the resignation, but asked for Gujral to stay on in an interim capacity. The president finally dissolved parliament on 4 December once formation of government by any party did not materialize. Seventh coalition was led by A.B.Vajpayee from 19 March 1998 to 10th Oct.1999. The BJP led coalition was supported by AIADMK, BJD, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, PMK, TRC and others. This coalition of two many parties did not last long since the demands of AIADMK were not met including the demand of Jayalalitha to sack defence minister George Fernandes. It was but natural that she would withdraw her support and of course she did not surprise anyone. Once Mr.Vajpayee moved confidence motion it was lost by one vote i.e., 269 in favour and 270 against. Hence, Mr.Vajpayee tendered his resignation to the president of India and came to an end what was a shaky coalition. The BJP won 182 seats to retain its status as the single largest party in the 12th Lok Sabha....if President K.R.Narayana invites Vajpayee to head the next government, the BJP leader will be a prisoner of his 13 disparate pre-poll allies who hold 73 seats and a score of post-poll friends who will inevitably extract a steep price for their support."¹¹. India appears to have entered a long season of coalition governments.¹² "if the purpose of forming a coalition is to topple the existing government without any common programme of action or approach, the Coalition, however, broad based or cohesive it may be, would not provide for stability and would in its turn be the victim of the same process of defections".

Eighth coalition was formed after the 13th Lok Sabha elections under the prime ministership 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, Telugu Desam Party, NC, Trinamool Congress, Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal and others. The coalition led by Mr.Vajpayee had the support of different shades of opinion. It was a coalition of ideologies, cultures, social fabrics, religions and above all coalition of regions yet NDA was dominated by the upper and middle castes. "the presence of the BJP as the strong pillar in the coalition, the charismatic leadership of A.B.Vajpayee and the skilful way in which diverse interests were accommodated ensured the stability of the coalition government".¹³

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 with 9 MPs, Rashtriya Lok Dal with 5 MPs, Jammu & Kashmir National Conference with 3 MPs, Indian Union Muslim League with 3 MPs, Kerala Congress (Mani) with 1 MP and others including left parties. Outside support was given by Samajwadi Party with 22 MPs, Bahujan Samaj Party with 21 MPs, Rashtriya Janata Dal with 4 MPs. On 8 July 2008, the national media had the breaking news that Prakash Karat, the general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI), announced that the Left Front would be withdrawing support over Indo-U.S. nuclear deal. Despite many things the government survived amid controversies over "vote for cash" scam which is never a bombshell in coalitions.

The 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 chaired by Shri Sonia Gandhi as was done in 2004. India held general elections to the 15th Lok Sabha in five phases between 16 April 2009 and 13 May 2009. With an electorate of 714 million.¹⁴ (larger than the electorate of the European Union and United States combined).¹⁵ UPA 2nd was short of 10 seats to reach the magical number of 272 as required under rules to form government. UPA 2nd had the outside support of Samajwadi Party with 23 MPs, Bahujan Samaj Party with 21, Rashtriya Janta Dal with 4 MPs, Janta

Dal secular with 3 mps, others with 3mps and others. Due to the fact that UPA was able to get 262 seats — just short of 10 seats for a majority — all the external support came from parties who gave unconditional support to Manmohan Singh and the UPA. The Janata Dal (Secular), the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party all decided to do so to keep out any possibility of a BJP government in the next 5 years.¹⁶

Coalition of Criminals

The 15th Lok Sabha saw many MPs with pending criminal charges. At least 150 MPs have criminal cases against them, with 73 serious cases ranging from rape to murder.¹⁷ While BJP has 42 MPs with criminal charges, Congress has 41. From UP, out of 80 seats, 31 have criminal cases.¹⁸ The previous Lok Sabha had 128 MPs with criminal cases. "UP keeps its shame record: 31 MPs accused of crimes".¹⁹ An Analysis on 2009 elections for better understanding of 2014 elections for the relevance of coalition: How india voted This election defied the predictions made by pre-poll predictions and exit polls and gave a clear mandate to the incumbent Congress government. According to many analysts after the election, many factors can be attributed for a landslide. According to the National Election Study 2009, published in the The Hindu newspaper after the election, the victory to the UPA government is attributed to saturation of caste-based identity politics, the focus on good governance and BJP's limitations, gave Congress the edge.²⁰ 8 Journal of Power, Politics & Governance, Vol. 2(1), March 2014 The tenth coalition was more often in the news headlines for wrong reasons for past and present sins that includes 2G scam, coal mines scam, MGNREGA scam, common wealth games scam and what not !!.Notwithstanding the scams and withdrawal of support by the allies UPA 2 still managed to complete the term. An analysis of how coalition partners withdrew the support to UPA 2.

On 18 September 2012, TMC Chief Mamta Banerjee, announced her decision to withdraw support to the UPA after the TMC's demands of rollback of reforms including FDI in retail, increase in the price of diesel and limiting the number of subsidized cooking gas cylinders for households, were not met²¹. Likewise The DMK pulled out of the UPA government on 19 March 2013 over the issue of a draft resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council of the alleged human rights' violations of Sri Lankan Tamils²². Others who left the yoke of UPA include people democratic party, Jharkhand Vikas Morcha, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, Pattali Makkal Katchi and others on many issues needless to delineate upon. The UPA 2nd played its full innings despite BJP's criticism that 'UPA is 100 not out in scams'. What makes these coalitions work is the established fact that there are no permanent enemies or friends in politics, if there is anything permanent that is interest.

Relevance of Coalition in 2014

The billion dollar question stands who would be on the throne after 16th Lok Sabha elections? The answer depends upon how India votes in 2014? How political forces and parties motivate electorate? How people take on the leading issues that almost engulfs the country in. There is almost an open secret that next government shall also be the coalition one .The options could be NDA, UPA, THIRD FRONT OR what others call FIRST FRONT. The issues that hit the canvassing are corruption, communal riots, secularism, development, national security etc. one can say "politics is like weather. Everyone talks about it ,but few understand it". The established unfortunate fact with Indian polity is the intellectuals or so called intellectuals do not caste vote! As Robert Dahl has rightly said "in politics, refusing to decide 'is simply deciding to allow others to decide for you". Since article 326 of Indian constitution gives every adult Indian or 18 years Indian adult franchise to decide for him/her and the country. Those eligible voters are more than 81 crore ,should not they decide before others decide for them! Despite all this the perennial truth if the 11th coalition will unfold in may 2014 in India.

Conclusion

India finally seems to have made a perennial entry in the world of coalitions. The above analysis clearly depicts how hung parliaments become norm in the largest democracy with fragile or

enduring impact. The crumbling of political parties creates gloomy electoral circumstances in which hung parliaments become rule rather than an exception. Nevertheless, Indian democratic politics so far has been lacking in the aptitude and the culture of coalition forming and coalition maintaining succession of unhinged coalitions or minority governments has made its own contribution to the crisis of the State as the state is inextricably mixed with the webs of government.

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