

## POLITICS IN INDIA: THE DYNAMICS OF FORMATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

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### **ABSTRACT**

*India of 21<sup>st</sup> century has ushered into an era of coalition politics. The fractured mandate and proliferation of political parties have made coalitions a necessity to attain the required majority and form the government. Thus, the study of the formation and breaking of coalitions becomes imperative to understand the contemporary discourse of politics in India. This paper seeks to understand the dynamics of the formation of a coalition government in India. This paper is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the rise and growth of the coalition government in India. Part two deals with the theories related to coalition formation and types of coalition government prevalent in India. Part three deals with the dynamics of formation of the coalition government in India and part four deals with a conclusion.*

**KEYWORDS:** Bihar, Coalition, Government

### **INTRODUCTION**

The formation of the coalition government has become a norm in India not only at the national level but also at the level of states. The heterogeneous fabric of Indian society in terms of caste, culture, religion, region, language etc. has acted as a catalyst in the development of different dimensions of the coalition politics in the country. After the fall of “one-party system”, the formation of government in India by a single party has become a distant dream. In the classical paradigm of parliamentary democracy consisting of elected representatives, it was assumed that the majority will form the government and minority will lead the opposition. The problem arose when no party was able to garner the majority of seats in parliament to form the single -party government, ushering in the era of coalition formations and coalition politics. This phenomenon is very common in a country where diversification on different basis exists in a society. The size and plurality of India make it all the more important to understand the dynamics of coalition formation, non –formation, and breaking of coalitions in India.

The term coalition is derived from the Latin word “coalition” means to grow together. Etymologically coalition means a combination of bodies or parts into one body. In the political system, it means that some political Parties or groups will come together and form an alliance in order to exercise control over political power. According to prof. Ogg “coalition is a cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unites to form a government or ministry.” Roger Scruton defines coalition in ‘A Dictionary of Political Thought’ as “Political alliance of distinct parties or persons who preserve their political identities”. Thus, a coalition is an activity of growing together on the principle of cooperation & coordination. It is an alliance on a temporary basis for a joint action.

Coalition politics centers on political parties to play the game of politics to capture power which results in the formation of a coalition government. Although nature, composition, stability etc. of coalition differ from country to country according to the socio-political fabric of the country, the reasons for their emergence remains the same. The main reasons for the emergence of coalition politics are

- Contrary to popular belief, a coalition government is a result rather than the cause of political unrest. The electorate resort to alternatives when they are dissatisfied with the single majority rule and the party fails to fulfill the changing needs of the people. Some the single party gets split and forms an alternative to the present regime adopting a different approach. In such circumstance coalitions become inevitable.

- The emergence of coalition politics can also be traced to the fundamental changes in the structure of society. Depending on socio-cultural and economic divisions of society, the needs and interests of the masses vary. In such a situation, it becomes difficult for a single party to cater to the variegated and heterogeneous needs of the people. This leads to mushrooming of small parties and a fractured verdict which necessitates the formation of the coalition.

#### Rise and Growth of Coalition Government in India

The advent of Britishers led to unprecedented political unification of modern India. It ushered in the concept of “Unity in diversity” in modern India. The historical background of Indian national movement led to and Congress dominated politics and government in India after independence. India has been a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-cultural society, the colonial precedents made India a “single party dominated system” (Yadav, 1993) or “Congress system” (Kothari, 1962). After independence Indian National Congress was the only national party which commanded popularity and respect of the people. This party undoubtedly had a mass base and grass root base in India. It continuously ruled unfettered for the first three general elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) in 1952, 1957 and 1962.

But, gradually the needs and aspirations of different fractions like caste, religion, language, region, etc. started finding refuge in alternatives to Congress party in different states of India. Thus, the mushrooming of political parties and fractured election results made coalition government inevitable.

The weakening of Congress party as a system and as a party (leaders leaving Congress party framing their own local & regional party at the state level.) an its failure to cater to needs and aspirations of people of different communities or region and to realize the dream shown at the time of independence (made people not only to look out for alternative to Congress but also to form one to render the greatest service to the people of their region. This led to mushrooming of political parties at the state level.

The Presence of these small parties and their participation in the LOK Sabha led to the fractured mandate where no party gained majority and coalition (alliance formation) became necessary to form the government. In this alliances sometimes the small parties with higher bargaining power became instrumental information, non-formation & breaking of the coalition & hence the government.

Today, the coalition is regarded as thing of past as one party dominant coalition) is emerging. But, the coalitions are not just meant to form or break the government. Nowadays, they are also regarded as a means to make the government more democratic catering to needs & aspirations of all sections of the society.

### **Theories and Types of Coalition Government in India**

There are two set of theories on coalition politics. One set consists of a) Power Maximization and b) Policy Based Theories. These are concerned with coalition experiments and trace their nature. The second set consists of a) Electoral System Theory and b) The social cleavage Theory. The second set of theory deals with the theories of the party system. The inclusion of the electoral system and social cleavage theory becomes important to understand coalition politics in India as the limited western theorization is insufficient to explain and analyze the complexity, dynamics, and pluralism of Indian Coalitions.

Power Maximization theory holds that in the coalition formed under compulsion of power each party is important for the formation/ survival of coalition and the lesser the number of parties, the larger is the payoff that is guaranteed to each party. But, in Policy -Based Theories coalition are formed by like-minded parties which lie adjacent on the ideological scale and are not incompatible on major issues. This reduces the number of coalition partners. Thus, Power Maximization theories predict the formation of Minimum Winning Coalition system and Policy Based Theories, on the other hand, predict the formation of Minimum Connected Winning Coalition. However, there is also a third situation where a small party may be insignificant in number but has large bargaining power and its presence in the coalition is imperative for its survival.

In plurality electoral system like India, the political parties try to better its share of votes and seats. It makes a coalition to move from long -term electoral gains to short -term Power Maximization. In such a system competition and suspicion is quite high as one swing in the political support can increase or decimate a party. The social cleavage theory holds that the party system reflects the principle cleavages in society.

Coalitions found in India are generally of four types. (Narain, 1972)

- The first type is one in which there are a dominant party and one or more small parties who cannot harm the government even if they move out of the coalition. The left front coalition in West Bengal was an example of this type of coalition.

- The second type is one of that of equal partners, practiced in Kerala as socioeconomic forces are polarised almost equally between Congress and CPI (M).

- A united front of several like-minded parties forged mainly to keep at bay a perceived fearful common enemy. The non-congress governments after the 1967 general election in states are an example of this.

- A national government formed to face an overriding national crisis such as war or invasion by an enemy. For instance, Churchill government in Britain during the Second World War. When after the 1989 elections 'hung parliament' plagued Indian democracy, Atal Bihari Vajpayee gave the idea of national government including Congress to override the crisis.

A coalition formed in India is generally a cocktail all the four types.

### **The Dynamics of Formation of Coalition Government in India**

India of initial years after independence has been a Congress dominated the political system. The Congress system worked uninterrupted mainly because Congress forged patronage links with regional and local influential leaders thus creating a chain of authority that stretched from the capital city to villages. The internal democracy of the party created a healthy

environment for the party to flourish and create a social base for itself. The Congress party dominated in almost all the states with few exceptions like Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala. Congress was although making its presence felt in the Indian mainland, it was unable to cater to the needs and aspirations of fringe communities which found realization in the form of state and regional formations. This view was manifested through the fact that the dominance of Congress was vehemently opposed in state assembly elections than in Lok Sabha.

There also emerged dissenting patterns simultaneously within the state politics challenging the dominant pattern of politics. The parties with different ideological persuasions from that of the Congress mobilized people on different issues. Apart from this, the faction leaders within Congress created their respective social bases resulting in the formation of non-congress government in 1967. The dominance of the Congress started to decline from the mid of the 1960s. The party system that emerged in the 1960s and continued till 1989 in the states was a bipolarized one where a depleting congress party was confronted with a united opposition in most of the state. The post -1967 election saw the emergence of anti-congress alliances in state after state

It witnessed the rise of rural rich or the “Kulaks” especially in the areas which reaped the fruit of Green Revolution like Yadavs and Kurmis in Bihar and eastern U.P, Jats in U.P, Haryana, and Punjab. They mainly focused on agrarian agenda, regional issues and demanded a revamping of centre-state relations. These leaders in due course graduated to be the national level leaders but continued to draw their strength from regional/state politics. The appointment of “Mandal Commission” and reservation for the backward caste by Janata Party set a new trend for national and state politics.

This phase started with the revamping of Indian Politics around religion and Caste. Three “M” contributed to the change of electoral competition in Indian Politics (Yadav, 1999). These three “M” were Mandal, Mandir, and Market. “. all the three offered the possibility of creating new cleavages that cut across the established cleavage structure and thus engaging in a new kind of political mobilization. Eventually, not all the three cleavages could be activated in politics, at least not in the same degree. But the simultaneity of this change did result in a transition of the electoral system and allowed several latent forces to surface in “electoral politics” (Yadav, 1999). The Mandal led to the interaction between caste and electoral politics resulting in traditionalisation of politics on one hand and politicization of caste on the other. (Brass, 1965). The electoral process became a route to social mobility and awakened to the political weight of numbers and community, caste dominated the political scene in Bihar from the mid-1980s. Dalit’s and Backward caste thus added a new dimension to the state politics. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kin groups, got a chance to assert their identity and to strive for positions.

This phase also saw the rise of BJP as a major political force. The expansion of BJP has mainly been due to the decline of Congress, the aggressive mobilization strategy based on the ideology of Hindutva which it adopted from the late 1980s and its strategy of alliance formation. Along with it, the Mandir issue brought religion to the forefront of Indian Politics. Both these politics thrive in a situation of the religio-cultural plurality on the one hand and uneven economic development on the other. Caste and religion dominated also because they had sound vote base (electoral issue) and it was easy to mobilize people around them other identities like language, region, ethnicity, tribes often dominated the politics of India. But because of their less electoral mileage and numerical strength, could not get politicized.

A direct corollary of the expansion of representation of OBC, Dalit, Women and regional identity groups is that the number of political parties or groups which have emerged as claimants fighting for the representation of these newly socially empowered and assertive identity groups has also multiplied around identity -based sectional interests. This rise of regional parties is also attributed to the decline of Congress which on one hand increased their bargaining power and made them significant coalition partners on the other.

In today's politics, where development is the agenda of political parties, the elections are still fought on identities (caste & religion especially). India is still to witness political mobilization based on development agenda. Identity-based political mobilization are major electoral aims and thus, it provide a fertile ground for the rise of new identities and social stratification (New Jatis, Mahadalit within Dalit, Muslim women, increase in list of minorities and list of SCs. STs and OBCs, demand of various castes for SC/ST status, stratification of OBCs) has further strengthened coalition-based government formation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The dynamics of the formation of coalition government leads us to the conclusion that "caste and religion" as identities have played a major role in the formation of coalitions. This was manifested through the weakening of Congress as the major leader in national and state government, political mobilization around caste and religious identities and proliferation of political parties around these identities which provided political alternatives to people to choose their government. The renewed focus on identity -based politics reinforces the importance of coalition -based government formation.

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