

Coalition politics in India: Cultural Synergy or Political Expediency

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Abstract

Coalition building is a continuous process. Coalition building is an integral part of democratic structure, governance and politics. Coalition building refers to starting of steps to get consensus amongst different communities, groups and individuals for the achievement of common minimum programme. It's become the need of the hours to secure consensus in the competitive and complex democratic environment from different groups and communities towards a common goal; various agencies, groups, political parties, mass movements are continuously involved in coalitions building. Coalition is the formation of group in which different political parties coming together to capture power. Coalition is the reflection of fragmentation of social interest at the grassroots level. Coalition government's evolves from the failure of single political party to secure a clear majority in the legislature. In the absence of clear majority, coalition government becomes the alternate mode of power to govern. Coalition government gets the power by winning the key votes in the legislature. Multi-party coalition governments and coalition politics have matured and stabilized options in different European countries. Coalition building has to become an integral part of Indian political system. This research paper evaluates the historical perspectives/roots of coalition and underlying the critical role of socio-political processes in shaping its nature. This research paper trying to seek out the answer of two questions: (a) Whether coalition is the height of a process that might have begun once the Congress Party ceased to become an umbrella organization, and (b) Whether coalition is the easiest mode of coagulation of parties for capturing power regardless of ideology.

Key words: Coalition, Politics, Congress, Political Parties, Government

Coalition historical roots can be taken from the nationalist movement and specifically in the Swaraj concept of Gandhi philosophy. European Nationalist ideas on liberation struggle greatly influenced Non-western leaders. These leaders knew the limitation of these ideas in Non-European socio-economic context. Firstly, in the beginning of twentieth century they started to speak in their native language for mobilization of community. Secondly, they indigenized these ideas by discovering indigenous equivalents and addition of meanings and nuances in prevailing social context. Gandhi started anti-British movements preferred Swadeshi to nationalism. Gandhi attracted all classes, peoples, religion, and communities, race culture to participate in the national movement. India freedom struggle had drawn its own value system different from the west. The Great Divide of Indian sub-continent in 1947 articulated on the basis of religion. Swaraj is the national articulation of nationalist movement and growing democratization of the political processes bringing together all sections of people. Swaraj is political strategies to mobilize people despite have socio-economic and cultural differences. Swaraj provided ideological glue in which Gandhi brought together coalition forces to the nationalist movement. It shows a pattern of ideology of bringing together multicultural socio-economic environment.

Coalition is a multicultural phenomenon with different manifestations in various Indian historical phases.

Institutional Framework of Indian Coalition Politics:

Coalition roots are found within institutional framework in India. Multicultural Indian reality has been found in 1935 Imperial Constitution. The constitution illustrates devices, norms, values, practices, examples incorporating Indian reality of multiculturalism. This had been seen

in the transfer of power at the time of independence after 1947. Socio-economic scenario is also important in this respect. Constitution itself provides structure to flourish social and political development; an institutional base of political dimensions. Electoral system borrowed from the British Raj is core of coalition. Under British Raj, there were some parties had widespread base and some were confined in narrowly. Regional parties had lots of votes in small number of seats perform well in comparison to those whose votes are widely scattered in various constituencies. In this structure, a candidates or a party wins by securing largest number of votes. Those parties win majority at union level had ever majority at the lower level. Congress party under Rajiv Gandhi obtained 44 percent of the popular vote in 1984. NDA obtained 35.5 percent and UPA obtained 36.5 percent just 1% more than NDA in 2004, despite NDA formed the government. It can be inferred that ruling party in power is not true representative because of lack of support of majority. Coalition becomes critical in the formation of governments and defined the democratic process differently. Regional parties perform better and succeed because of their concentration in specific region and parties based on ideology with widespread base may not get success. Regionalism forms the basis of coalition governments. A system of proportional representation on the basis of overall popular support has presence in the legislature, irrespective of largest number of votes. Regional parties have advantage with concentration and profound base in comparison to national parties. Coalition culture is based on two tenets: (a) building of consensus, (b) the principle of accommodation. The first relates to unanimous decisions and second relates to harmonizing the interest of all. It is based on attitude and belief. Evolution of Indian constitutional practices demonstrates these two principles of consensus and accommodation.

The institutional framework of coalition was suitable for congress as it remained under the Congress umbrella. Congress party succeeded longer time because of playing main role in reframing and sustaining political consensus. This framework of coalition politics in India set new trends and continued by 1967 elections, where non-congress party occupied power in major states. The demographic and socio-economic pattern of politics started to change. New entrants into the political system gave rise to the growth of newer recognition of political cleavage.

The failure of coalition politics of Congress boosts regional parties. Core central power of congress started to dismantle in 1970, and this weakened the regional base of party and opened disastrous impact. Resentment of the people started to rise, regional demands no longer listened and avoided by congress party. Neglecting of federal channels and centralization incited regionalism; and it's a substitute of national electorate and forced the congress to recognize local forces into national level, who worked to the benefits of those claimed to represent directly. Incidentally in 1996 national elections, 28 political outfits fought the elections, and performed remarkably. Congress Government in 1991 initiated economic reforms and assigned greater power to regional and state governments. Regionalism intensified political competition and resulted into producing better regional leaders having regional and cultural touch and sensibilities. India's political structure started to change in tremendous manner to accommodate changing conditions. In spite of these changes, parliament remains a powerful lever even than before. Federal structure appears strong presence in the era of coalition politics where no single party has full majority in parliament. Executive federalism works –a system of division of powers between at various levels of government with clearly defined guidelines in the form of Union.

The major effects of coalition is that states do not remain as an instruments of the central and importance of states growing fastly, and a major part of policy making at the central level; and this leads to legislative federalism, where upper level representing the units of federal government and lower level is the part of policy making. The decision making appears more democratic and representative of central and state articulation. Legislative federalism guarantees the democratization of decision making process and no longer exclusive within the domain of central government. The role of legislative process become more important speaks more regional representation counter balancing the tenets of representation by population on the basis of lower house is based. For the last two decades, political participation lead to certain doubts over the inclusion, exclusion, empowerment, and participation of OBC's, Dalits, Minorities, other secluded sections of the society. Whether coalition is truly representation theses sections of the society? Still questions remains to be unanswered.

Coalition governments demands more participation of secluded people and minority classes and they have to be the part of political process and part of decision making process. Regionalism acquire more stake in the system by winning more seats, seeks greater power. Regional parties start to acquire more space in the governance usually at the cost of congress which loosing the ground at the state level. Ideologies dominated and sustained after the post-colonial time start to lose the ground and regional ideologies become the main tenets of politics. These ideologies contain the anger of subaltern class against the elite class, that neglects the privileges of deprived classes; and these changes transformed the Indian politics.

The alliances started to take place in the year 1967 in various states with the formation of coalition governments by those regional parties who were alternate of congress government. This was initiated by Dr. Rammanohar Lohia by forming the coalition of 15 political parties carrying anti-congress waves. He was having the opinion that continued alliances amongst the political parties enable them to come closer irrespective of having their different political ideologies. There were certain doubts of forming the alliances between Swatantra and Jana Sangh at one hand and the Communists parties on the other hand. Clear ideological differences and doubts about their viability as a group did not appear to be unfounded. On the other hand, despite the diverse opinions and differences amongst the congressmen; they bound to be together and loyal towards Nehru-Gandhi Family, however some doubts remained about the feasibility of anti-congress parties. Lohia made efforts continuously to fill political sphere and vacuum created by congress parties. He argued that such alliances not achieve phenomenal success, but it would get rid of the congress rule and uprooted the congress parties from the state. Regional and other parties occupied power in 1967 in 9 states replacing the congress government.

A new Era started in the Indian politics, which was known as “Non-Congressism”, not fully flourished because of the lack of glue amongst the opposition parties. In spite of regional disparities, Samyukta Vidhayak Dal formed the governments in nine states in the assembly elections of 1967. Lack of ideologies and compatibility amongst the oppositions quickly disintegrated the non-congress governments. Death of Lohia made a vacuum in political sphere, as there was no such leader that could make grand coalition of the opposition parties. The division of congress party, 1971 war with Pakistan, 1975-1977 Emergency retarded the consolidation of opposition in the coming elections. Seventeen Indian political parties under the umbrella of Janata Coalition replaced the congress party in 1977 national elections, undergoing a major shift in the political system. During the Janata Party Coalition regime in 1977-80, no serious efforts were made to uproot the Congress party from the centre.

Indira Gandhi's had completely control over the congress party and there was not democratic system within the party. Disintegration of state congress party at the state level led more power to the central leaders in the congress party. Indira Gandhi was the main political power and hardly anyone can challenge her at party level. The result was disastrous. The centralization of power led to ignore the demands of state level and lower level.

The first real coalition was constituted by Janata Party after three decades of independence in 1977 at the Central level, when Janata Party came to the power. Janata party formed the coalitions of various parties on the issue of imposition of 1975-77 Emergency by the Congress party. Janata Party collapsed within a period of two and half years of its inception because of rivalry amongst the various political outfits and congress party came back to the power in 1980s national election. Another coalition government was constituted in 1989 by the Janata Dal under the leadership of V.P. Singh. No-confidence motion brought in the house and ousted the government from the power. Narasimha Rao government completed the tenure of five year and afterwards May 1996 national elections, four coalitions government was in power, but did not complete their tenure.

Four coalition governments only lasted for thirteen days led by BJP, as government lose the vote of no- confidence motion on the floor of the house. United Front Government under the leadership of H. D. Deve Gowda supported by congress afterwards led the government. United Front was a post-poll alignment of 13 parties. Congress withdrew the support in the Lok Sabha from the United Front on the issue of Inter-state disputes on Cauvery Water. This resulted into the formation of another United Front Government supported by congress, and elected I.K. Gujral as the Prime Minister of Central Government. Congress again withdrew support and mid-term election announced in 1998. This election was milestone in the history of Indian

political system for two important reasons; one is that BJP made pre-poll alliances with 13 regional parties spreading over 9 states; and second is that BJP was oriented towards coalition tactics to enlarge the base and run the government for longer period of time, as BJP learnt the lessons from 1996 collapse. This tactics was successful and BJP emerged as the single largest party in the 12th Lok Sabha elections in 1998 by winning 182 seats. Total 258 seats won with alliances by BJP, but short of 272 for majority. As BJP was the single largest part, as per norms President of India invited the BJP to form the government. This alliance was not stable as ally kept on threatening to leave the coalition. AIADMK left the coalition government, but remaining ally remained in the BJP led government. This fourth coalition government had the same fate as others. Four coalition governments failed and did not complete their tenure of five years. This indicated a new era of coalition phase; where by pre-poll alliance appeared at national level. Congress as well as BJP favored pre-poll alliance. Thirteenth National Election in 1999 was a milestone in the history of Indian political system for two reasons: firstly, pre-poll alliance-National Democratic Alliance- won the majority in the Lok Sabha. However the BJP lost two percent share of its popular votes, but earlier tally of 182 remained intact. In opposition, congress vote share rose by three percent, however, lost 30 seats in Lok Sabha.

BJP lead NDA government formed in 1999 completed its five year tenure indicated the importance of pre-poll alliance and coalition politics. The trend of 1999 continued with the formation of another coalition government in 2004 national election. United Progress Alliance was formed by regional and state level parties with the support of left parties and Samajwadi party led by congress. The rise of coalition government was the result of failure of National parties to win the majority in the parliament.

The social dimensions of the country changed the governance and political system. The coalition roots were found in the historical journey of Indian political system. Gandhian Stewardship philosophy reaped the rich dividends of social coalition by the congress till general elections of 1967. The trends continued during the regime of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, she steered India by her own name. However, the national level coalition efforts was made from the time of Janata Party and followed by Janata Dal in 1989, 1996, and 1997. BJP is the first party understands the changing paradigm of coalition politics much better in comparison of other political party. Apart from ideological differences from the BJP, the party gives due weightage of power sharing with its allies. Gradually NDA expands its allied from 18 party to 24 parties based coalition. National General Elections of 1999 and 2004 is similar; both national level parties failed to secure the majority in the Lok Sabha. The importance of regional and state level parties goes on increasing, and become essential part of governance. Multi party system started to originate at the national level and coalition is the reality of governance. Coalition started to rule and providing support to the government at the centre. Survival of central government depends on wishes of alliance parties from different ideological base.

Dependencies on the other parties lead to several consequences on the functioning of the government and forced the central government to focus on the regional issues. Ruling coalition started to run according to consensus of ally; and indicates “behind the scenes” scenario governance. Government enjoys support till consensus continues. Failure of congress leads to raise the role of regional parties and avoiding of social and economic welfare at the grassroots levels. Neglected voices of the people become the main reason of coalition politics.

National parties forced to redefine their goals and understand the changing socio-economic reality of the country. Coalition has ushered a new era of continued dialogues and deliberations in the power politics, understand the social classes and economic parameters from different angle. Regional parties are formed on socio-economic goals representing regional interests; thus, redefine the political outfits of Indian political system. Regional parties redefine social coalition and provides link between the national and regional level. Prevailing socio-economic issues are relevant at national level and they cannot be avoided. Coalition represents true pictures to the government which is essential for policy formulation. Coalition is essential for decision-making to incorporate social and economical issue of the grassroots level. The thirteen and fourteenth general elections have shaped the pattern of governance. Coalition structure of governance shows the radical socio-economic changes. Coalition maintains the balance and forced the government to treat the regional parties at the same level and not merely appendages to the leading parties. The basic principles of sustaining coalition are governed by perceived political convenience and expediency. The evolution of coalescence patterns provides insights

into weaknesses that lead to unstable political coalition. Various factors are important for coalition in addition to centrism as binding force. Coalition is regional based political system. Regional parties have a major say in consolidation and their agreement to run the government on common minimum programme.

United Progressive Alliance came into power in 2004 and they also glued with the common minimum programme. Fourteen party alliance United front in 1996-97 designed a common minimum programme committed towards socio-economic, political, and administrative federalism. To achieve these goals, dual tactics were formulated; one to implement the Sarkaria Commission recommendations of 1984 ensuring greater autonomy to the states determining their own strategies within the ambit of five year plan; secondly, to constitute committee to assess the recommendations of commission and evaluate the devolution of financial power of state government. General elections of 1989 indicated the regionalized and fragmented electoral response. Mandal commission recommendations contributed to raise of regionalism by providing caste configurations of OBC's. This pattern remained static till 1996 elections, as there is no national wave against any political outfits, however mini-wave found at the regional level where local issues were more prominent. The disintegration of major and national parties finds the roots of regionalism and coalition. Indian political system is trying to seek to grow shared protocols with the pre-existing language of the masses. The power of the subaltern classes' orders into the arena of democratic contestation has transformed the language of candidates fighting elections. The narratives of social justice defined by Kanshi Ram, Laloo Prasad Yadav and Mayawati, learned from Lohia's ideological again found the place in the Indian political system. Caste started to dominate in the Indian political system. However, the narratives changed in caste system. Growing fragmentation of political parties and their changing nature of support base defined into two manners: one is called by Polity wide, and another is called centric regional parties. The polity wide parties have strong presence in all states organizational context, electoral and emotional context. Centric regional parties are getting their attention in specific geographical region. Coalition is a parliamentary system in which centric regional parties provides support to polity wide party to form the government.

Centric-regional parties coalition is increasing in India and growing regionalism become the reality of Indian political system. Regional parties are gaining the momentum at the national level and polity wide parties' role goes on decreasing. Party Across Nation fail to register their presence nation-wide, centric -regional parties flourished in this era. Pan India Parties do not have the centric stage in Indian political system. From 1977, disintegration of Prior NDA coalitions failed in governance. Morarji Desai governments pointed out that grass root democratic system absence of governance capability. Regional leaders have preconceived notion of regional interests which might not be good for central government. The entire interest of regional parties is to look after local welfare and ignore national interests. But this theme is not valid because of completion of five year terms of NDA at the centre level. The fact is that single party governance is not in existence, coalitions and alliances are reality of today's political system. Rise of regionalism has been seen in thirteenth Lok Sabha in which regional party grabbed 42 percent of seats. NDA having the 24 parties combination and provides stable government and become trend setter in Indian political system. Formation of coalition since 1989 has increased federalization in Indian political system. The increasing role of regional parties in the centre is due to following reasons: Congress has lost its hegemony because of devolution of democracy, personalized interest of leaders, and fails to address the national interest and mass appeal of leadership. Congress and other national parties have lost its credentials of not accommodate social interest with the national interest. Vacuum made by national party like congress had filled by the regional parties which draws the supports of secluded class, minorities, backwards class and others. Coalition is newer democratization process involving the masses at local level and introduction of new social and marginalized groups into political system. It would be much easier for new entrants to entry into the political system. Coalition takes into account the socio-political interests and ensuring consolidation of different political ideologies.

Conclusions: Coalitions and alliances become the regular practices of Indian political system which representing the subaltern class socio-political and cultural diversities. The trends of coalitions and alliances appeared in 1967 and become a regular pattern of formation of

governments. Formation of stable government at the central level is the outcome of alliance process. India is moving towards bi-party system from consolidation of the two major political parties namely; Congress and BJP. However, they failed to capture the power at state level and making them to form the coalition government at the central level and state level. This has been resulted into the Bi-Nodal party system in which the regional parties earlier played major role in governance; now become redundant. Still regional parties give strength at legislative level to maintain the balance of power in the political system, as none of the above political party has the magical number of Members of parliament to justify their claim. National parties hardly matters as decisive factors in the coalition periods, and difficult to ignore the regional parties opinions. In this new socio-political system, regional issues are of paramount importance in governance.

The support of regional parties is crucial to sustain the central level and state level. Coalition partners started to take the benefits for region and squeeze the juice for state governance. The fall of 1996 United Front Government is the example of taking back of congress support and this led to loss of majority in the parliament. Holding of majority in the state legislature and survival without support is the example of coalition. Left Front Governments had their stability to have had adequate strength in the state assemblies. Coalition can protect the interest of their ally and differences can be phased out through deliberations and debates. The coalition may have two tenets: firstly, ideological differences amongst the political parties provides a better platform for stable formation of government, and secondly on the other hand, lacking of bonding weakens the coalition, unless the parties burnt their differences and appreciate their concern towards common agenda. The BJP led NDA governments almost completed nine years glued by the Common Minimum Programme trying to avoid complicated issues, and resolved all the issue amicably. NDA is the obvious examples of successful coalition governments in the history of Indian political system; despite having ideological differences, they glued together with Common Minimum Programme.

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