

THE COALITION GOVERNMENT IN INDIA AND ITS FUTURE

Dr. Nagendra Singh Bhati*

ABSTRACT

The Coalition Politics 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 in a democracy based on a one-party system. A coalition is formed when many splinter groups in a House agree to join hands on a common platform by sinking their broad differences and form a majority in the House. The terms 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word 'coalition' which is the verbal substantive of coalescere-co, which means together and alescere, which 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' According to Ogg; "... the terms coalition as employed in a political parties, or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or ministry. " The system of coalition has certain important implications: Firstly, coalitions are formed for the sake of some reward, material or psychic, secondly, a coalition implies the existence of at least two partners. Thirdly, the underlying principle of a coalition system stands on the simple fact of temporary conjunction of specific interest. Fourthly, coalition politics is not a static but a dynamic affairs as coalition players and groups dissolve, and form new ones. Fifthly, the keynote of coalition politics is compromise and a rigid dogma has no place in it. Sixthly, a coalition Government works on the basis of a minimum programme, which may not be ideal for each partner of the coalition. After all, politics is the act of the possible and coalition politics is its highest expression. Seventhly, pragmatism and not ideology is the hallmark of coalition politics. In making political adjustments, principles may have to be set aside and in the process ideology is the first-casualty. Lastly, the purpose of a coalition adjustment is to seize power, it may seek to stake its claim for the formation Of a Ministry or for pulling a Ministry down, As the former Governor of Punjab D.C. Pavate visualised; if 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 defection. Quite often coalitions are formed to prevent a common enemy from capturing power. In the context the coalescing parties having ideological differences are compelled to come to an understanding, as they have to choose the lesser of the two evils. There have been instances of the Rightists and Leftists coming together to challenge the citadels of the ruling party. Equally interesting is the instance of the communists and anti-communists forging and alliance to face a common enemy a coalition devoid of ideological moorings survives till the enemy is humbled. Once the euphoria victory is over, differences come to the surface and the structure collapses like a pack of cards. There are a good number of instances of parties shifting their alliance in search Of fresh pastures. If power is the only motive behind joining a coalition, realignment will be a regular feature. Indeed, in a coalition set up alliance go on changing like the sand dunes of a typical desert. No coalition partner has permanent friends or enemies, it has only permanent interests.

Keywords: Coalition, Substantive, Implication, Psychic, Dogma, Euphoria, Realignment.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India.

Introduction

The Coalition Politics in India

Just after independence, the Indian National Congress was the only national party which commanded popularity and respect of the people. This party undoubtedly had a mass base and grassroots in India. It remained in power both in the Centre as well as in the states right from 1947 to 1967 and it had a monolithic character. But, it also had coalition character too. The Congress was a grand coalition with great historic antecedents. This was because it was a party of the Centre with a basis towards the left adhering to a set of ideals which are shared by other parties and groups, whether rightists or leftist. The coalition character of the Congress organisation formed a predominant model providing both intra and inter-party competitive-cum-coalition model without allowing for the alteration of power as far as possible. It created a very peculiar situation in which non-Congress parties acted essentially as catalysts for groups within the Congress fold to articulate their discontent and grievances in order to bring about leadership changes in the single-dominant party system. This is evident from the Presidential election of August 1969. A group of relatively junior Congressmen (called Young Turks) attracted the leftist organisations who formed a workable coalition to defeat the official Congress nominee. The old guard (Known as the Syndicate) associated themselves with the rightist forces to defeat the non-official Congress candidate.

The interim government of Jawaharlal Nehru was a coalition of the congress and the Muslim League. Perhaps there was also a virtual coalition at the Central level after the congress split in 1969. With the Congress CPI and DMK as its more or less stable partners together with some floating ones, choosing to join hands with it from issue to issue. The formation of the first janta government at the Centre was the result of an accommodative spirit of its constituent political groups, who agreed that they would each have two members in the cabinet. The power struggle within the coalition was muted at the time of the formation of the Central Government, Once Morarji Desai was chosen as Prime Minister, it was up to him to balance the diverse political elements at the Centre. But he kept his own counsel and filled his cabinet with his own blind supporters. This was resented by other groups of the coalition. The Janta coalition collapsed like a house of cards in July 1979 when floodgates of defections opened with the departure of various groups leaders like George Fernandes, H.N. Bahuguna, Biju Pathaik and Madhu Limaye. Even regional Groups like the Akali Dal and the ADMK withdrew their support. A new coalition government was formed with Charan Singh as the Prime Minister in October 1979. This coalition included leaders and groups from one end of the spectrum to the other-from the CPI-M and the CPI on the one hand to those who were close to big business.' But since the President knew that Mr. Charan Singh had no absolute majority he asked him to seek a vote of confidence in the House within three week time.

The party headed by Mr. Charan Singh was a party of defectors and was not recognised as a party in the Lok Sabha. Consequently, Mr. Charan Singh's Ministry did not last long. Before facing the Lok Sabha Mr. Charan Singh tendered his resignation to the President because one of his coalition partner (Congress-I) withdrew its support to his government but he advised the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha and order a mid-term poll.

After the ninth Lok Sabha elections in 1989, the country witnessed the first minority-cum-coalition government at the Centre, though it is supported by a majority of the MPs. Almost all the non-Congress groups-big and small, Rightist and Leftist have joined hands to back the National Front led by V.P. Singh. As Prime Minister V.P. Singh said his is a minority coalition Government with majority backing-that of the partners of the National Front, the BJP and the CPM. The latter two are basically hostile to each other and interestingly neither would support the Government if the other becomes a co-sharer of power with the National Front. The BJP withdrew its support in mid 1990 and V.P. Singh Government is defeated in the house.

V.P. Singh's coalition government remained in power for eleven months. About the working of this government, the President Venkataraman 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 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." Shri Chandra Shekhar became P.M. with the support of Congress after fall of V.P. Singh Government. Congress withdrew its support and Chandra Shekhar resigned on 6 March, 1991.

The President R Venkataraman observes about the working of the coalition government under the leadership of Chandra Shekhar, "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 Shekher only proxy. The office hungry coterie of the Congress party used to misguide Rajiv Gandhi that Chandara Shekhar'S attempts at building up a good image could prove deleterious to his image... I realised that unequal Combinations are always disadvantageous the weaker that side."

Indian entered an era of coalition politics as a hung house emerged for the third time in as many general elections. But unlike the last two rounds, the verdict appeared none to clear. Among the national parties, only the Congress and the BJP between them won 301 seats, while five other national parties including the Janata Dal and the CPI (M) picked up another 102 seats. The remaining 140 seats were shared by the regional and smaller parties besides three independents. With the three major national combines headed by the congress.BJP and JD failing far short of a simple majority in a house of 543, small parties played a key role in the numbers' game. In the event, it took 13 of them, apart from the Congress support from outside to prop up H. D. Deve Gowda's United Front Government.

The United Front had no working majority in the Lok Sabha. The choice before the congress was between forces of Secularism and of Communalism. Opting for a secular government headed by Deve Gowda who was unanimously chosen as the leader of the UF in Parliament by its constituents. By the political compulsions of secular politics, altogether a different pattern of coalition government at the Centre supported by CPI (M) and Congress from outside has evolved.

The United Front Coalition Government headed by H.D. Deve Gowda was like a chariot being pulled at time in different directions by 13 horses and Deve Gowda Government fell on April 11, 1997.

The endorsement of Gujral's candidature by the Front's Steering Committee set the stage for the formation of a new UF Coalition. In the overly crowded race for power, Gujral had emerged the sinner as the agreed nominee of the Left Parties as also the Janata Dal and The Telugu Desam.

After the fall Of the Gujral Coalition there was consensus on one thing among the UF partners: Gentleman Gujral is unfit to lead a party, leave along a government. It is for the first time that the leader of the government is suspect in the eyes of his cabinet ministers, coalition partners and party colleagues Never before has an incumbent Prune Minister legitimate chance to lead his party or a coalition in the election.

In a virtual charge sheet against the United Front Coalition, the Congress working Committee (supporting party) has accused the united Front of non-government and to "discharge its responsibility of governing the country Member criticised the Gujral Government for failure to take the economic and political decisions reducing "the Indian State to a rudderless ship."

Intra-alliance squabbles and inter-ministry conflicts have been a part of the United Front Government from its inception. There were reports in the media that the Agriculture Minister. Chaturanan Mishra not only complained about the Finance Minister to the Prime Minister hut also took on Gujral by saying. "I am not his employee. I am his colleague." Mishra's outburst against the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister can be seen in the background of the Left parties' discomfiture with the Finance Ministry's policies towards agriculture. Public sector, insurable and public distribution system among other things.

The Mishra episode is symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting Gujral Government. After a marathon meeting the Union Cabinet first recommended imposition of President's Rule and backtracked when the President sent it back for reconsideration. The cabinet as well as the Prime Minister came in for much criticism for the manner in which the UP issue was handled. The differences that existed between the Defence Minister Mulayam Singh and the Home Minister Inderjit Gupta and others came to the fore.

"The cracks are getting more and more and more visible in the cabinet meetings." says a senior Government official pointing out that even during Gowda regime it was not so clear.

The Seventh Coalition (Government at the centre was formed on March 19, 1998 and A.H. became Prime Minister. This Government lasted up to Oct 10. 1999. It failed due to confidence motion moved by Prime Minister,

The Confidence Motion moved by the Prime Minister, when put to vote, was lost by 269 to 270 votes. After he lost the Confidence Motion, Shri Vajpayee called on the President Shri K.R. Narayanan and submitted his resignation. A Rashtrapati Bhawan communique said that "the ruling alliance lost its majority because of lack of cohesion within its ranks....."

The thirteenth Lok Sabha was constituted on October 10, 1999. On October 11, a Press Communique was issued by the Rashtrapati Bhawan inter-alia stating that the election results conveyed to the President by the Election Commission and the documents expressing support to Shri Vajpayee received by the President have satisfied him that Shri Vajpayee will command a majority in the newly elected House. On October 13, a 70 member coalition government led by Shri Vajpayee was sworn in New Delhi. It lasted for full five years.

The 14th Lok Sabha elections of April-May 2004 have led to the formation of a United Progressive Alliance Coalition government at the centre replacing the Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance. Shri Manmohan Singh became P.M. A salient feature of the Manmohan Singh-led Government is that many state level based parties and groups which agreed to participate in this government led by the Congress Party, supported by outside by the communist bloc of MPs, have interpreted that their mandate is to promote and solidify the secular forces and transform Indian democracy with a view to bring comfort to the wretched of the earth.

The UPA partners have concretized their above mentioned mandate the National Common Minimum Programme expected to act as a roadmap for the government the centre.

The country is once again being governed by a Coalition marked not only by external support of the Left parties a Minister who is not the 'elected' leader of the single largest party. And as much as the Congress will be members in parliament it faces the challenge of reworking the delicate relationship between the party (represented by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi) and the government (headed by Manmohan Singh), this along side managing a coalition. This coalition Government worked for five years and a coalition government formed after 15th Lok Sabha election.

Conclusion

India, then, appears to have entered a fairly long season of coalition governments, fragile or enduring. The BJP- led coalition (NDA) has almost completed its full terms successfully. The Janata Party Government-a one party majority coalition lasted a bit longer for about two and a half years. Formed in March 1977, it prematurely fell in July 1979, others lasted for less than a year, the life of short lived ones ranged from four months to two weeks. Barring the minority regimes of Indira Gandhi (1969-70) and P.V. Narsimha Rao (1991-96) which survived either through artful manipulation of the political agenda or through questionable techniques of floor-crossing, minority governments led by Charan Singh, V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, A.B. Vajpayee, H.D. Dewe Gowda and I.K. Gujral have gone down in fiery spectacles of backroom infighting and betrayal. Shri Manmohan Led coalition government lasted for full five years.

However, some cite the success stories of coalition government in Western Europe to buttress their thesis that coalitions in India can be a solution to India's heterogeneous polity. They argue that even during the era of Congress dominance, the ruling party represented a coalescence of diverse ideological, economic and territorial interests. What cannot be ignored, though, is the stark difference between party systems in Europe and India. In Finland and Belgium, for example, where heterogeneous non-bloc coalitions have lasted, political parties, are compact, disciplined structures. In India, except for the left and, to some extent, the BJP, most political parties have witnessed continued fragmentation.

As coalitions are becoming more inevitable, they are gaining more acceptability. The BJP's search for allies reveals how its own much emphasised political theory of two party systems had become obsolete. Remember, the BJP once upon a time has the distinction of being a coalition partner in the largest number of States than any other political party. Even at the eve of 1996 Lok Sabha elections, it forged alliances with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Haryana Vikas Party in Haryana and the Samta Party in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Now power seekers will have to reach Delhi via Hyderabad, Lucknow, Mumbai, Calcutta or Chandigarh.

The Congress (I) took nearly five long years in political wilderness to realise the inevitability of coalitions for its return to office. It now recognised the sea change brought about by new political dynamics. That was the meaning of the political resolutions adopted by the Congress (I) plenary at Bangalore in March 2001. Maintaining that the Panchmurti line was misunderstood, the Congress (I) clarified "that, taking into account the present political scenario, the party would be prepared to enter into appropriate electoral or coalition arrangement with secular parties on the basis of mutual understanding but always without compromising its basic ideology. "

Thus, fragmentation of political parties creates unhappy electoral situation in which hung parliaments become the norm rather than an exception. Political parties have demonstrated a shocking

lack of ability to create enduring coalitions. The Congress Party, even while sitting in the opposition, as it did briefly thrice since independence, had enough power and clout to disrupt non-Congress coalitions. Indeed, Indian democratic politics so far has been lacking in the talent and the culture of coalition making and coalition maintaining. A succession of unstable coalition or minority government has made its own contribution to the crisis of the State as the State is inextricably mixed with the webs of government.

As regards coalition governments, people are saying that they are unstable, wheeling and dealing and that they lack consensus on vital issues like reforms. It is also said that coalitions may not work as effectively as single party government.

There are some advantages in the coalition system like accommodation of diverse interests, consensual decision making etc. It is also participatory and where there is pressure to perform. A coalition system is also more sensitive and responsive to regional concerns. There are strengths and there are weaknesses, but ultimately India has reached the stage of coalition government. One has to live in that.

References

1. W.H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven, 1962), p. 12
2. F.A. Ogg. "Coalition" in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York. 1957) p. 600
3. J.C. Johari, *Reflections on Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1974) pp. 3-5.
4. D.C. Pavate, "Coalition Government. Their Problems and Prospects," Sahni, n.l. p. 18.
5. BabuLalFadia, *Pressure Groups in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1980), pp. 202-23.
6. *The Hindustan Times*, 20 November 1969.
7. *India Today*, March 31, 1994. p. 35
8. S. Rajagopalanm" *A Marriage of Convenience*" *The Hindustan Times* (Sunday Magazine) March 30, 1997.
9. *The Hindustan Times*, September 30, 1997.
10. KalyaniShanker, "UF Coalition : Peeling Plaster", *The Hindustan Times*, November 2, 1997
11. *II . India Today*, March 16. 1998, p, 13.
12. Arun Kumar, *Turning Point-1996 Poll Story* (Delhi, 1996), p. 26.
13. P. Raman, "Age of Coalitions", *The Hindustan Times*, April 11, 1997.
14. K.K. Katyal, "Making Coalitions work", *The Hindu* (March 26, 2001).
15. *The Journal of Parliamentary Information*, Vol. XLVI No. 3, September 2000, p. 388.

