



DYNAMICS OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA AT THE CENTRE: CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES

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Abstract

After independence, India has witnessed the formation of coalition governments, firstly at the state level and then at the centre level. The last more than three decades of Indian politics (i.e., 1989-2021) have witnessed an era of coalition governments at the centre. Prior to 1999, coalition government in India was an unstable phenomenon, but after the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1999 a stable phase of coalition governments struck the roots in Indian politics. This phenomenon of Indian politics invites our attention to some answers for the vexed questions such as- why coalition governments have become mandatory after 1989? What were the reasons for the NDA and the UPA governments to provide stable governments after 1999? What were the changes and continuities in coalition governments in India? Keeping these questions in view, the present research paper focuses on the dynamics of coalition politics in India especially regarding its changes and continuities.

Keywords: Coalition, Dynamics, Governments, NDA, Politics, UPA.

Introduction

Meaning and Definition of Coalition Government

The term ‘coalition’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘Coalition’, that is the verbal subjective of ‘Coalescere-co’, which means ‘together and alcescere’, meaning thereby to go or to grow together. According to the Advanced American Dictionary, the term ‘Coalition’ stands for a group of people who join together to achieve a particular purpose or a union of separate political parties that allows them to form a government and fight an election together. Hence, coalition government means a government, run by different political parties, working together or a process in which two or more political parties or groups join together (Advance American Dictionary, 2000, p. 255). The Webster Dictionary has also similar illustration of the coalition government whereas Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary defines coalition as ‘a temporary union of separate political parties usually to form a government’ (Hornby, 2001, p. 214). Encyclopedia Americana defines the term coalition as ‘a temporary alliance or union for joint action of various powers or states or of political parties or members of parties in order to form a government where no single party can command a majority’ (Encyclopedia Americana, 1965, p. 165). Encyclopedia of Social Sciences denotes the term coalition as ‘a cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties unite to form government or ministry (Seligman, 1959, p. 600).

Thus, coalition means unity and coming together into one body for a particular purpose, which in other words means pooling of resources for achieving a particular goal. It also means collective use of resources and an alliance for joint action of various groups or organization into a single government of distinct parties (Singh, 2009, p. 58). It is also generally accepted that a coalition “can take place only within the context of mixed motive in which both conflict and common interest have simultaneously been present and must govern the course of action chosen” (Sahani, 1971, p. 18). It is applied to the union of two or more parties, or, as generally happens, portion of parties, who agree to sink their differences and act in common. Coalition, thus, denotes a combination of political groups or forces which come together for specific objectives but temporary in nature.

Coalition Governments in India

After independence, India has witnessed the formation of coalition governments, firstly at the state level and then at the centre level. The last more than three decades of Indian politics (i.e., 1989-2021) have witnessed an era of coalition governments at the centre. Prior to 1999, coalition government in India was an unstable phenomenon,¹ but after the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1999 a stable phase of coalition governments struck the roots in Indian politics. This phenomenon of Indian politics invites our attention to some answers for the vexed questions such as- why coalition governments have become mandatory after 1989? What were the reasons for the NDA and the UPA governments to provide stable governments after 1999? What were the changes and continuities in coalition governments in India? Keeping these questions in view, the present research paper focuses on the dynamics of coalition politics in India especially regarding its changes and continuities. For this study, the researcher has relied on secondary sources such as books, journals, newspaper and websites.

Downfall of One-Party Dominance and Emergence of Coalition Politics in India at the Centre

A study of coalition politics in India is the part of defection politics, which is the result of fragmentation and polarization of power against the one-party dominant system. Coalitions are by product of the political realities as they emerge in a parliamentary democracy (Malhotra, 2000, September, p. 392). In a country like India representing the diversity of interest groups, one of the



alternatives is coalition to represent them properly, provided there is a faithful pursuit to benefit these sectional interests (Gehlot, 1998, p. 214). When the parties enter into coalitions, they not only are compelled to compromise with down play their differences for the sake of the some core principle or issue in order to political unity, because they have little or no opinion but to take the electorate, which as an acid test is very tuff to get through time and again by contesting frequently.²In between 1989-1999, the India's electorate witnessed five Lok Sabha elections due to fractured mandates and failure on the account providing stable coalition government at the national level. It is therefore necessary to share power, and also have an investigation and enquire about the causes and the circumstances in which coalition politics began in India and the challenges that emerged regarding the question of governance and political stability; secondly, and more importantly, the federalizing character of government and the significant role of the regional parties and their leadership at national level.

India has gone through the experiment of coalition governments, first at the state level and then at the national level. The coalition politics at state level began much earlier than at the national level. Following the end of the 'One Party Dominant System' or 'the Congress System' (Kothari, 1964, December, pp. 1161-1173) after the general elections of 1967, many state governments were formed on the basis of coalition (Singh, 1975, p. 47). The 1967 assembly elections constitute a watershed in the post- independence politics of India. It marked the end of the era of one-party dominance and the beginning of a new era of coalition politics at the state level. The Congress had considerably weakened because of its defeat in a number of states. In order to capitalize on the defeat of the Congress, opposition parties joined hands and formed coalition governments in many states, viz, Bihar, Kerela, Orissa, Punjab, Utter Pradesh, Haryana, Madhaya Pradesh, and West Bengal. At the same time defection politics also emerged especially in these coalitional states. In result, most of these coalition governments did not complete their term in these states.

After the 1967 General Elections, Indian politics moved to a second stage to confront the problems of transfer in power from the previously dominant Congress to diverse parties and party coalitions in more than half the Indian States (Brass, 1984, p. 97). After 1967, the centralizing tendencies under Indira Gandhi subsequently knocked the bottom out of the Congress coalition. The alienation of the minorities and the decline of Congress rural support base soon become evident in later elections (Gehlot, 1998, p. 210). Except for 1971 and 1984, the popularity graph of the dominant party has slowly but steadily declined. On the one hand, the Congress which was once the dominant party has started slowly diminishing in numbers; on the other hand, we could see the rise of regional parties in many states. In short, India is having multiparty system. Naturally, when there is multiparty system, there would be some gaps which some political party will have to fill. That is one of the reasons for the emergence of many regional parties (Naidu, 2000, September, p. 386). And this increased number of political parties represented in Lok Sabha is an indicator to the facts that the Indian politics has undergone tremendous change from one party dominant system to multi-party politics along with a regionalized trends in the representation at the national and state level resulting in the emergence of a coalition politics during the last almost more than two and half decades at the centre (Ratna, 2007, April-June, p. 337).

The first coalition government at the national level was Janata Party government formed in 1977, under the Prime Ministership of Morarji Desai. The Janata Party government (1977-79) was the conglomeration of Congress (O), Congress for Democracy, Jan Sangh. It was Jayaprakesh Narayan who inspired leaders to come under the umbrella of a movement which consisted of socialists and the Bhartiya Lok Dal of Charan Singh. They came together against the authoritative regime of Indira Gandhi during emergency (1975-1977) and fought the election under a combined manifesto and a common election symbol in 1977 (Chander, 2004, p. 30). Therefore, technically this government was one party (Janata Party) government, but it was a grouping of different ideological outfits together due to extraordinary political situation, hence, the experiment at first instance did not succeed due to ideological issues and leadership egos.

Unstable Coalition Governments and Indian Politics at the Centre (1989 to 1999)

In the last more than three decades i.e., since 1989 onward, there have been some fundamental changes in the morale, objectives and the style of functioning of our national as well as regional political parties. These changes are a result of what is widely referred to, and accepted as 'the compulsion of coalition politics'. A continuous process of coalition governments was started since 1989, when the elections for Ninth Lok Sabha were held and brought a strange arrangement for governance in India because the fragmented groups emerged in place of the simple majority party i.e., the Congress. The V.P. Singh led National Front Government manufactured a parliamentary majority on the basis of an outside support by the Bhartiya Janata Party on the one hand, and the Communist Parties on the other. This arrangement of 1989, was based on 'contradictions' (Bhambhri, 1998, p. 223) because the Communists, the BJP and the Janata Dal were ideologically opposed to each other.



Table-1
Lok Sabha Election Results of Different Political Parties from 1989-2019

Parties	Seats Won								
	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
Bhartiya Janata Party	85	120	161	182	182	138	116	282	303
Communist Party of India	12	14	12	9	4	10	4	1	2
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	33	35	32	32	33	43	16	9	3
Indian National Congress	197	244	140	141	114	145	206	44	52
Janata Dal	143	59	46	6	-	-	-	-	-
Janata Dal (United)	-	-	-	-	21	8	20	2	16
Janata Dal (Secular)	-	-	-	-	2	3	3	2	1
All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	11	11	0	18	10	0	9	37	1
All India Forward Bloc	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	0	0
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	0	0	17	6	12	16	18	0	23
Indian Union Muslim League	2	2	4	0	0	0	2	2	3
Jammu & Kashmir National Conference	3	0	0	3	4	0	3	0	3
Revolutionary Socialist Party	4	5	5	5	2	3	2	1	1
Shiromani Akali Dal	0	0	28	8	2	8	4	4	2
Telugu Desam Party	2	13	16	12	29	5	6	16	3
Bahujan Samaj Party	3	3	11	5	14	19	21	0	10
Rashtriya Lok Dal	-	-	-	-	2	3	5	0	0
Jharkhanda Mukti Morcha	3	6	1	0	0	5	2	2	1
Nationalist Congress Party	-	-	-	-	8	9	9	6	5
Shiv Sena	1	4	15	6	15	12	11	18	18
Asom Gana Parishad	-	1	8	0	0	2	1	0	0
All India Majlis-Ittehadul Muslimen	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	2
Rashtriya Janata Dal	-	-	-	17	7	24	4	4	0
Biju Janata Dal	-	-	-	9	10	11	14	20	12
All India Trinamool Congress	-	-	-	7	8	2	19	34	22
Samajwadi Party	-	-	17	20	26	36	23	5	5
Marumalarchui Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	-	-	-	-	4	4	1	0	0

Source: Data is compiled by the author from various Statistical Reports of General Elections of the Election Commission of India (Retrieved from [http:// www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in))

The 1989, National Front Coalition was a corollary of the 1977 Janata alliance, with almost similar social basis. The government collapsed in 1990, on the issues of Mandal and Kamandal (Tiwana, 1996, p. 9) and Chander Shekhar's coalition government with the unconditional support of the Congress Party lasted only six months. It was during this period only that the BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad announced their decision to go ahead with the construction of the Ram Temple and gave a call to converge in Ayodhya to render Kaarseva. The BJP leader L.K. Advani began Rath Yatra from Jaganath Temple in Gujarat to Ayodhya. The BJP threatened to withdraw support to the National Front if Advani was arrested. V.P. Singh was not daunted by this threat and on October 23, the Bihar Government under the National Security Act (NSA), arrested Advani. Prime Minister Vishwa Nath Pratap Singh's minority government was defeated on the floor of the house, when BJP with 85 seats withdrew its support to V.P. Singh government. A Congress breakaway faction headed by Chandra Shekhar assumed power (Ahmad & Nilofer, 2009, July-Sept., p. 755).

However, this whole political drama, brought the nation to choose a new government through the tenth Lok Sabha elections, held in May-June 1991. During the course of the elections the former Prime Minister and President of Indian National Congress, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, resulting in leadership crisis and political instability in the Congress Party (Swain, 2008, Jan.-March, p. 66). Therefore, the election for 23rd and 26th May, 1991 were postponed to 12 June and 15 June, 1991 respectively. After the assassination



of Rajiv Gandhi, P.V. Narsimha Rao became the Congress president and he was appointed Prime Minister on 21st June, 1991. He faced numerous economic difficulties because of acute shortage of foreign exchange, so he had to resort to economic reforms and concessions to the industrialist in the country. He had to take loan from Aid India Club and other countries (Ahmad & Nilofer, 2009, July-Sept., p. 755). Narsimha Rao stayed in office for the full term because none of the major opposition political parties opposed the government and ultimately Rao succeeded in manipulating a minority government as a majority in the Lok Sabha (Chaudhari, 2005, April-June, p. 409).

During 1990-96, many issues emerged in Indian politics. The main issues were like: Ayodhya issue, Babri-Masjid dispute after its demolition on 6th December, 1992, - resulting in communal riots. The Mandal verdict in which reservation was given to OBCs (Vanaik, 1997, p. 320); and Economic reforms put into practice by Rao's government by adopting the policy of liberalizations, privatizations and globalizations. These were also known as the three 'Ms' of Indian politics: Mandal, Mandir and Market (Yadav, 1999, August, p. 15). The almost simultaneous and sudden occurrence of these three events-the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations for OBC reservations, the BJP's Rath Yatra that catapulted the Babri Masjid dispute into national prominence, and these crises leading to the implementation of the first phase of the IMF sponsored package of 'liberalization' created an extra ordinary opportunity or some may call it a challenge in terms of stability and governance- as there was a paradigm shift in India's economic, political and foreign politics. All three offered the possibility of creating new cleavages that cut across the established structure and thus engaging in a new kind of political mobilization. The eleventh Lok Sabha (May 1996), was constituted with fractured mandate. This time BJP emerged as the largest party with 161 seats, followed by the Congress (I) with 140 seats (see table no. 1). Therefore, the president S.D. Sharma appointed BJP leader A.B Vajpayee as PM and asked to prove majority by May 31, 1996. It was the first BJP led coalition. But this government could survive only for 13 days and Vajpayee resigned without facing the confidence motion in the parliament. The United Front government which was a coalition of National Front and Left Front, with 13 parties, besides the Congress support from outside, was formed under the leadership of H.D. Deve Gowda in June 1996 (Dalal, 2005, pp. 131-132). If Moraji Desai could not manage the conflicting goals of five partners; and if V. P. Singh could not deal with the contradictions of two major supporters from outside, the Deve Gowda Government was an extremely inconvenient arrangement of thirteen partners who claimed to agree on a Common Minimum Programme for governance of India (Bhambhri, 1998, p. 223). The only basis for formation of this government was to throw out the BJP from power. Hence, after hectic efforts, Deve Gowda a non-ranking leader was searched out and become the first PM, who hailed directly from state politics. Since the government depended on Congress support from outside, people in general did not hope much from this government. This proved true when the government fell on April 11, 1997. The Congress president Sita Ram Kesari, who was annoyed with Deve Gowda for some personal reasons, offered to support UF Government if the Front changes its leader. The Congress had nothing against the government or its policies but was against the leader.

After this offer of the Congress, United Front once again started the search for another suitable candidate for Prime Ministership. Several names such as those of Y.K. Moopnar, Laloo Prasad Yadev, Mulayam Singh Yadev were considered, but each of them was opposed by strong groups and persons. Ultimately, they all agreed on the name of I.K. Gujral, who was external affairs minister in the outgoing ministry of Deve Gowda. Gujral took oath of office on April 21, 1997 and formed another coalition government at centre with outside support of Congress (Ratna, 2007, April-June, p. 337). But even Gujral could not last long. The Congress knew that the voters would be angry, if it again withdrew support forcing on the nation another election in less than two years. Yet they had their own compulsion. Sita Ram Kesari was responsible for bringing down Gujral Government on the issue of the Jain Commission Report³ and the alleged role of the DMK (Srivastava, 2005, February, p. 14). Gujral continued as caretaker PM till March 1998. Gujral resigned on Nov. 28, since no party was in position to form a government, the President dissolved the Lok Sabha on Dec. 4, 1997 and ordered a mid-term poll which was held on February 16, 22,28 and March 7, 1998. There were no substantial issues for the fall of these two consecutive governments except the ego of Congress leaders.

The election of 12th Lok Sabha again resulted in a hung Lok Sabha. No party or alliance gained majority. However, the BJP-led alliance emerged with 264 seats, as the largest alliance in which BJP had the largest numbers of seats (182) (see table no.- 1). Vajpayee was sworn in as Prime Minister for the second time on March 19, 1998 to head another coalition government at the centre. Immediately, thereafter Atal Bihari Vajpayee started feeling the pangs of coalition governments. President too was in a different position. Jayalalita started troubling Vajpayee from the first day and kept him on his toes on one pretext or another. The whole year of 1998 passed as a period of black-mailing by allies supporting Atal Bihari Vajpayee from inside or outside (Jai, 1996, p. 275). He lost majority after 13 months when key regional ally the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), led by Jaya Lalitha decided to withdraw support. Another mid-term election was called after Congress failed to form an alternative government (Ahmad & Nilofer, 2009, July-Sept., p. 757).

However, the intriguing phenomenon of Indian politics is that electoral behaviour has been baffling right from 1989 onwards and the ten years (1989-99) instability resulted in five national elections reflecting the regionalized character of Indian politics as



regional political parties and leaders captured the centre-stage of national drama. The change caused political instability, despite growing political awareness among the voters. The factions like factionalism, religion, caste, money-muscle power, regionalism or the Dalit politics, etc. gained strength in the mid of political churning and turmoil. The Congress, BJP and National Front as the major players in this game failed to fulfill the goals of political stability at the centre with the commitment to national agenda. In brief, this period (1989-1999) was very unstable and crisis ridden in several ways. Many hung parliaments and coalition governments were formed and collapsed. A major issue, within a decade during 1989-1999, India faces five parliamentary elections and holds the office of Prime Minister by six persons. During these ten years certain unexpected and unprecedented developments took place both at national and international level. The end of Cold War, bi-polar world order, disintegration of Soviet Union and ethnic insurgence in East-Europe, Yugoslavia and many other parts of the world were followed by growing menace of terrorism internationally the growing pressure of neo-liberal economic policy. All this compelled the nation-states to make readjustment in their economic, foreign and diplomatic equation with other states. At domestic level Indian state confronted with several challenges such as the political crises of governability, communalism (Hindu-Muslim) divide, caste assertion and crisis of leadership along with the economic crisis and response of the ruling class to overcome these crises, while fulfilling the expectations of the citizens in a system where representative democracy holds the key to governance and political stability is a formidable challenge to overcome. Under such crisis one of the options was the formation of national government. If the national parties build a principled programme, based on clear transparent rules with commonly agreed upon agenda, the coalition model could inaugurate a transition to a workable paradigm. As per the behavioural characteristic of Indian voters, the first-past-the post (FPTP), electoral system can provide us stable and viable coalition government, provided there is polarization of ideological inclinations and the opportunistic power-seeking alliances after the elections are discouraged. Ideology/policy-based alliance must be the basis of governance (Gehlot, 1998, p. 218).

Compulsive and Stable Coalition Governments at the Centre (Post 1999-2014)

The Thirteenth Lok Sabha Elections 1999, was the third mid-term poll within a period of four years. It proved to be the political opportunism, irresponsible behaviour and greed for power of the heterogeneous opposition parties on the one hand and the failure of the alliance led by the BJP to effectively manage the floor as well as govern the nation on the other (Swain, 2008, Jan.-March, p. 67). There was clear indication since 1996 that the days of one-party dominance in parliament were over and the days of hung parliament have started. Hence two main claimants of power, the BJP and Congress, set their cards on course of coalition politics, the BJP with full energy and the Congress only halfheartedly. The BJP formed a grand alliance of political parties as National Democratic Alliance (NDA), on May 15, 1999. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was elected leader of NDA. The NDA was an alliance with 24 larger and smaller/regional political parties. So, in 13th Lok Sabha election, a pre-electoral alliance led by BJP crossed the magic number to form the government for first time. The BJP led NDA captured 299 seats sharing 40.48% of the popular votes. As a result, the BJP led NDA government was formed with Vajpayee as the Prime Minister once again. Of course, the NDA Government proved to be more stable this time by successfully completing its term. The NDA, government recommended to dissolve the Lok Sabha 8 months before its actual tenure, and contested elections on the slogans of 'Shining and Rising India', under the charismatic leadership of A.B. Vajpayee in May 2004. This was the first coalition government in history of Indian Union, which was dissolved earlier with an optimistic view and to regain power on the issues of development and stability (Dalal, 2005, p. 133). Atal Bihari Vajpayee successfully leading a coalition government for a full term performed the rarest of rare feat in the annals of parliamentary government. He proved that coalition government can be stable provided the parties forming the coalition observe coalition culture and work within the limits set by the agenda of coalition government better known as Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

The General Election of May 2004 was more or less the same as that of 1996, 1998 and 1999 elections which saw coalition politics and large-scale defection in action. The BJP's politics of communalism, parochialism, divisiveness, deception and unabashed economic elitism-Modi's politics of crude communalism and temperate language became a liability for the party. Chandra Babu Naidu's defense of Gujarat pogrom and his economic policy driving about 3000 farmers to suicide affected the BJP's base adversely leading to its defeat in the 2004 elections. For making government at the centre, the Congress was forced to think and feel that the coalition politics was the need of the hour. Hence, it declared its willingness and readiness to form a coalition known as United Programme Alliance (UPA), to form the government after 2004, parliamentary poll as an alliance. The Congress which secured just 145 seats in comparison to BJP's 138 (see table no.-1), was able to form the government with the support of regional parties and outside support of the Left Front with its 59 MPs (Ashraf, 2004, p. 18). Sonia Gandhi was nominated by the 19 Congress allies to be the next Prime Minister, but she declined to take the top post and instead nominated an eminent economist, former Union Finance Minister and senior Congress leader, Dr. Man Mohan Singh for the post. This was approved by the Congress parliamentary party and UPA partners. Hence, he was sworn in as prime minister on May 22, 2004 to lead the next coalition government at the centre. India's political stage was set for yet another coalition regime at the centre. Pushing the BJP led coalition of NDA out of power certainly seemed to be a historic victory for the Congress Party, which emerged as the single largest party in general election 2004. However, the fact that the Congress failed to secure a clear majority and was forced to woo a number of regional parties to form government at the centre clearly indicates that multi-party coalition government has now become indisputable reality of Indian democracy.



This coalition also seems to be a stable one because a total harmony has been maintained between the de-facto (Sonia Gandhi) and the de-jure (Man Mohan Singh) center of power. Until both of them acknowledge and maintain their ground realities, this government will run without any major obstacle (Dalal, 2005, p. 133). Although the Left Parties with its 59 MPs withdrew the support to the UPA government on 23rd July 2008, when serious differences on nuclear agreement with United States of America resulted in floor test i.e. the no confidence vote in the Lower House which the UPA successfully managed and won. The confidence motion was passed by 275 votes against 256 voters with the support of Samajwadi Party (SP) led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and other parties. However, BJP tried all its best to defeat the motion of confidence moved by Dr. Man Mohan Singh, but in vain (Ahmed & Nilofer, 2009, July-Sept., p. 258). United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government, under the leadership of Dr. Man Mohan Singh completed its full term of five years and proved again that coalition government could survive to its full term in India.

Hence, the 15th Lok Sabha Elections were held in 2009. The electoral verdict in this election has gone once again in favour of UPA with Congress as the major leading party. However, this time the composition of the constituents of the UPA is slightly different from what it was in 2004. The RJD has been replaced by Trinmool Congress led by Ms Mamta Banerji. This is again a coalition in which the Congress is likely to buckle under pressure from its allies like Trinmool Congress and DMK on different issues (K., 2009, June, p. 5). The UPA-II government also faces many challenges in governance. Scams broke out one after another, like proverbial skeletons, tumbling out of the cupboard-CWG, 2G-spectrum, the appointment of CVC, the Aaderh Society in Mumbai, Lok Pal issue, Foreign direct investment issue, quota within quota (OBC) for minorities (Muslims and Christians etc.). While all these shocking exposures were being hotly discussed in public domain, the Prime Minister remains speechless and helpless. There has been perhaps no Prime Minister, in any country who spoke so less to the people even during severe crisis. The government drifted and dithered (Giri, 2011, July 3, p. 4). However, this government also completed its full term due to the good support of its alliance partners.

Optional Coalition Governments at the Centre (Post 2014)

The compulsion of coalitional government was ended after the 16th Lok Sabha Elections which were held in 2014. The BJP won 282 seats (see table. 1) under the leadership of Narendra Modi and became the first party (individually) to have won a majority in the Lok Sabha in post-Congress era i.e. since 1989. Interestingly, since 1989 – 2009 general elections, no single party apparently won a majority of seats in Lok Sabha because Indian politics faced more competitive elections, growing role for regional parties, halting over turnout, consequently, resulting in minority governments, including unwieldy minority coalitions, dependent on external support. Instead of these all, the 2014 election represents a surprising reversal of these trends. Fragmentation has taken the back seat; the rise of regional parties has been arrested; elections actually were less competitive than in recent years; turnout hit a record high.

Moreover, the 2014 Indian general election has been regarded as the most important election in Indian history since 1977. It saw the decimation of the ruling Congress party, a spectacular victory for the BJP and a new presidential style of campaigning that broke every rule in the political game. India has a history of alliances and breakdown of alliances. The compulsion of coalition politics can be seen in this election very clearly because have a clear-cut majority in the Lok Sabha and BJP did not leave its alliance partners. It becomes evident that the BJP's need for its alliance parties in Indian politics is largely based on these following reasons: firstly, the importance of pre-electoral alliances in many states, secondly, the BJP's poor strength in the Rajya Sabha and, finally, the importance of alliance parties in assembly elections for the expansion of its clout in the states (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014, p. 2). Modi led NDA government completed its tenure in 2019 and Seventeenth Lok Sabha elections were held in April–May 2019. The main contenders were two alliance groups of the incumbent NDA and the opposition UPA led by BJP and INC respectively. The BJP became the single largest party in the House and won 303 seats, with its alliance partners bringing the NDA to a total of 353 seats. Reasons attributed to the victory included the personal popularity of Narendra Modi, effective voter turnout drives by the NDA, a surge in public nationalism following the Pulwama attack, the consolidation of Hindu voters in a multi-caste coalition and the successful implementation of social welfare programmes during the First Modi ministry's term (Hindustan Times, 2019, May 25). After the victory of this election too BJP did not left its alliance partners and formed NDA government again under the prime ministership of Narendra Modi. This clearly shows that after 2014, coalition governments became optional for BJP but because of the relevance of its alliance partners in concerned states, BJP still formed government with them as coalition government.

Thus, after 1989, the country has undergone as many as eight general elections, and multiple coalitions of different parties have ruled the country. The exception that the tenure of a government is going to be short has had several unintended consequences. Ideology and programmes have become relatively less important (Tagi, 2008, July-Sept., p. 621), and the party is willing to combine with any other party for possible political or electoral gain or seats in the cabinet at the centre. Therefore, the nature of coalition politics is dynamic in India which is discussed above.

Changes and Continuities of Coalition Governments in India

However, after analyzing the political and electoral developments in India after independence to till date, we may find that after 1989, the coalition politics became a prominent feature in Indian politics. After independence, India faced an era of Congress



System and after that we also witnessed the decline of this system. The main reasons for this decline were pointed out by Achin Vanaik, these were first, due to large scale defection after Nehruvian era; second, the steady transformation of the urban class and professionals who lost progressivist inclination as they became more-self-centered, hedonistic and consumerist in their aspiration; third, the change in the Congress leadership; fourth, the rising expectations and the increasing electoral volatility of the core minorities; fifth, the growing federalist pressures in the Indian polity leading to the rise of all kinds of non-Congress regional political formations; and finally, the ever starker inability of the Indian economy to meet adequately the basic needs of the poor, whose absolute numbers have risen (Vanaik, 1997, pp. 301-302).

After the decline of Congress system many regional parties emerged in Indian parliamentary system. Different national political parties like BJP, BSP and SP at national level and many regional political parties like TDP, NLD, DMK, AIADMK, RJD etc. worked in different regions occupied the political space vacated by the Congress during 1990s (Varshney, 2000, February, p. 25). During the formation of coalition governments, these regional political parties have remained in a better bargaining position and got more share in power, which also boost up this process. These regional parties emerged because the general mass took it for granted that regional parties coming together may serve their regional interests in a better way. Second, growth and nurturing of 'regionalism' concept rather than 'nationalism', in the mind of the general people as they viewed that the national level political parties have failed to solve regional problems and to fulfill the regional aspirations which became very strong during the recent times. Third, when the regional parties joined hand with the national level parties to form the coalition at the centre, their main aim remained to fulfill their regional interests, as the strength and existence of the regional parties depend on this aspect. They tried to build pressure and exploit the central government for fulfillment of their regional interests; and finally, corruption and politics became the two facets of the same coin (Sinha, 2000, p. 240). Sridharan argued that the party system has seen three interrelated trends- first, the decline of the Congress, first in the states and later nationally; second, the rise of regional parties, usually based in a single state; and finally, the emergence of the BJP as a force both nationally and in the states (Sridharan, 2003, Autumn, p. 141).

Therefore, the main features of coalition governments in India are defection politics, lust for power, opportunism, corruption, nepotism, decline of moral values and shattered ideological basis are some features of coalition government. During pre-NDA era, the coalition government had become a game of selfish, narrow minded, opportunist, power hungry politicians who had to look after nothing but their personal interests (Doddamani, 2007, Sept., pp. 15-16). Lack of statesmanship and national character and declining mutual trust and faith in politicians have resulted into emergence of so many political parties, which have made 'coalition' as a necessity. Rising communal tension, communal riots and feeling of insecurity among minorities are the other factors, which have prepared fertile grounds for the emergence of new forces in our political system and decay of the Congress vote bank (Dalal, 2005, p. 135). After 1999, coalition governments became compulsive and stable in Indian union. NDA and UPA were the main blocs during this period. After 2014, India witnessed optional coalition governments in India.

The experiences of the coalition politics in India faced some merits and demerits. The merits of coalition governments in India are such as it addresses the regional disparity more than the single party rule; it makes democracy more participative as every small faction gets representation and is heard in the parliament. Therefore, it represents a much broader spectrum of public opinion than government by one party alone. It provides good government because their decisions are made in the interests of a majority of the people. Because a wide consensus of opinion is involved, any policy will be debated thoroughly within the government before it is implemented (Pandey, 2010, September, p. 60). In coalition politics, one has to compromise with all your principles to accommodate the other and finally you will stand nowhere. The communist one-time severe opposition to Congress is today supporting them. Another positive aspect is that in coalition system the centre state relations have become quite harmonious and healthy as compared to the centre-state relations during one party dominant system.

However, beside these all merits there are many disadvantages of coalition politics which India also faced time to time. Firstly, in coalition government, the Prime Minister (PM) remains under the consent pressure from the supporting parties and many a times PM is not able to take important decision. For example, Morarji Desai in Janata Party government (1977-79), VP Singh in National Front government (1989-90) Deve Gaowda and I.K. Gujral in United Front governments (1996-98), A. B. Vajpayee in NDA government (1999-2004), Manmohan Singh in UPA government (2004-2014) work many times under pressure of their alliance parties. In other words, the constituent parties play the key role here. Secondly, coalition politics also leads to increasing the powers and influence of the bureaucracy because of the instability in the government. The main demerit is that by nature it is a weak and unstable government. We see the fear of instability in governance during 1990s in Indian context which also resulted into the short-lived governments; and some occasion during the NDA and the UPA governments, even in 2008 the UPA faced the no-confidence motion but succeeded to save the government with the outside support of Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party. However, coalition government is less effective, not durable and dependent as compare to the governments formed by any one party with a definite ideology and principles.



A coalition government is less transparent because a party has no real chance of forming a government alone, the manifestos they present to the public become irrelevant and often widely unrealistic. Real decisions about political programmes are made after the election, in a process of secretive back-room negotiation from which the public is excluded. Another disadvantage is that coalition provides bad government because they are unable to take long term or futuristic view. Sometimes an ideological compass is necessary for government to navigate in difficult political and economic waters, and coalitions lack such a unifying philosophy. In addition, planning for the long-term often requires decisions to be made that are unpopular in the short-term. Coalitions often fail such tests because temporary unpopularity may encourage one of the parties involved to defect, in search of a populist advantage. Thus, the era of coalition government has given both positive and negative signals. We should catch hold of positive signals.

From the above analysis, it is evident that the coalition governments will continue for a long period in the Indian political system as the nature of the polity in the country is centripetal. Today, the compulsion of politics demand that we should try to place in position a healthy two-party coalition system. The Common Minimum Programme will remain at the centre to make coalitions a successful experiment. Coalition experiment in India has led to a remarkable blending of tradition and modernity in Indian society and has allowed various identities to be democratically expressed. India is a plural society which has the legitimate space for multiple visions. Indian exhibits various level of pluralism in different works of life (Appaiah, 2014). Thus, coalition system is a natural political process depicting diversity in language, religion, culture etc.

Conclusion

Summing up the above study one can have a closer look how the coalition politics and governments in India have very distinctly and noticeably maintained a democratic resemblance in the policy making and governing process. Pluralistic and federal approach came to the forefront under the coalition dispensation. Coalition could even be a post-election arrangement of ideologically disparate parties as in the case of the UPA-Left outside support (from 2004-July 2008) are unlikely to provide stable governance. However, the circumstances changed in 2014 general elections because the pre-electoral coalition compulsion has become so inevitable that despite the BJP's repeated discourses on the sensitive issues like- Ram temple issue, Article 370 issue and Uniform Civil Code issue, the alliance partners seemed less affected as were in 1998 and 1999 and continued supporting the BJP/NDA. After 2014 elections, coalition government at the centre is not out of the compulsion but is optional. Noticeably, the coalition government, however, has come to stay in Indian union. It also shows that India is now in the era of coalition culture. No doubt, the bad experiences of the coalition government are likely to keep this so-called coalition compulsion on the tenterhooks.

Notes

- 1 Within the period between 1989 to 1999, India faced five Lok Sabha Elections and witnessed Seven Prime Ministers namely V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, Narsimha Rao, AB Vajpayee, H.D. Deva Gowda, I.K. Gujral, and again AB Vajpayee. This phase clearly shows the political instability at the centre.
- 2 It was only after the 1999 elections that a clear-cut polarization emerged in the form of the NDA, and later in 2004, the UPA as the two broader poles of coalitions under the BJP and the Congress, leading these coalitions as major political parties.
- 3 Rajiv Gandhi was killed while campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections of 1991. The Congress led government of Narasimha Rao set up the Jain Commission of enquiry to inquire into a larger plot behind the assassination. The Commission took a long time and submitted an interim report which even led to the fall of the central government. Finally in August 1997, it submitted its final report.

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As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 9
Number of Words: 7,349 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 41,890 (approx.)