



The Coalition Culture in Indian Politics

* Miss. Nagale Prema Narsingrao

* Asst.Prof. in Political Science, Bi Bi Raza Degree College for Women's Gulbarga, Karnataka State Women's University, Bijapur

ABSTRACT

India is now in the coalition era. Coalition Politics has created instability and big and small political parties are forming different combination to suit their interest. The fourth General Elections held in February 1967 ended the golden era of Indian politics. By the late sixties regional aspirations began to acquire great dynamism. Splits within the splits are the real bane of our democracy. Coalition government can survive only when it receives collective responsibility. It is a daunting task to keep every partner in good humour. Coalition dharma demands on the methods of 'give and take'. It has promoted compromise in politics and checked regionalism. Coalitions provide the only alternative in a parliamentary democracy.

Keywords : Alliance, political parties, political power, regional parties, splits, collective responsibility, give and take

INTRODUCTION

The literal meaning of the term coalition is to grow together. In the political sense, it means that some political parties or groups will come together and form alliance or temporary union for the control and exercise of political power. Prof. F.A. Ogg defines coalition in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences as, "a co-operative arrangement under the distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or Ministry".

Coalition is a chariot the horses of which would like to take different courses. The charioteer is one who can take them to the right destination. No wonder to different constituents have taken to different courses and different goals. Positively thinking, coalitions reflect the tremendous diversity of the country.

The coalition governments are formed when no single party is able to enjoy a majority in the legislature and a combination of some political groups or parties is essential to command the majority in the legislature and a combination of some political groups or parties is essential to command the majority. It should be noted that when such political groups or parties agree to form a government, they do not lose their separate identity, they agree only for a certain minimum political, economic and social programme and when differences arise, any group or party is free to withdraw from the coalition. When a party withdraws from the coalition and if the coalition government is reduced to minority, then either it resigns or new groups join it to enable it to enjoy majority.

When no political combination was in a position of offer or receive the lawfully valid support of the critical number of MPs to secure a majority in the House there is no other way except calling for fresh elections. Even then whether a fragile government assumes office not or yet another election becomes inevitable, the consequent instability and uncertainty will extract a heavy price from country.

COALITION CULTURE

The Fourth General Elections held in February 1967 was one of the most important events in Indian Politics in the post-independence period when ended the golden era of Indian politics. The election ended one era-the era of Congress Party's

domineering rule at the centre and in most of the States and Union Territories and commenced another, the era of a weak Congress Government at the centre and coalition government in six states. Such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, etc.

India is now in the coalition era and given the dynamic of Political forces, does not look like switching back to single-party majorities. The political elite, however, has slumped in the face of the challenge posed by the new political turn, instead of surmounting it. It is futile to count on, it to inculcate the coalition culture or coalition drama. There is a case form innovation in the procedures and mechanisms. What is happening in our country today raises many questions about the democratic form of governance. Coalition politics has created instability and big and small parties are forming different combination to suit their interests. Because of this, many people feel that politicians are unscrupulous and keen on promoting their own interests and do not care for the country. This by and large is true but politicians in the democratic polity have their own compulsions.

Today the coalition drama at the centre brings to the fore another important aspect of democracy. The Congress ruled at the centre as well as in the states for a few years after independence because of the prestige it acquired during the freedom struggle and also because of the leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad, Jai Prakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Indira Gandhi, etc. in fact, as Prof. Morris Jones has said that "during the last few decades India has been lucky to have extraordinary national leadership". They are instrumental in winning freedom for the country and successfully met the challenges posed by the partition. During the freedom struggle, the regional parties did not emerge for many complex reasons. In 1967, the congress lost power in some states including Uttar Pradesh and the Samyukta Vidhyak Dal (a coalition of parties) won the election. It was in fact, the beginning of coalition politics. Also, it was the first expression of an anti-Congressism which assumed greater momentum over a period. By the late sixties democracy had taken root and regional aspirations began to acquire great dynamism because the congress failed to appreciate the depth of regional need.

Several regional parties emerged in different parts of the country like the D.M.K.(Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and AI-ADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra kazhagam) in Tamil Nadu on the crest of the anti-Hindi wave, when fears arose in Tamil Nadu during the Lal Bahadur Shastri regime that the centre was bent upon imposing Hindi on the South and thereby replacing Tamil. Politicians in Tamil Nadu whipped up frenzy on the language issue with the result that Congress never came to power in that State after 1965 under the leadership of C.N. Annadurai and M.G. Ramachandran. Akali Dal emerged in Punjab to organize the Sikh community led by Master Tara Singh. Similarly during the early eighties when a Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh was summarily dismissed by the Congress high command, the regional pride was deeply hurt and N.T.Rama Rao, popular film star of South Indian formed Telugu Desham in Andhra Pradesh. In Assam the problem of Bangladesh infiltration acquired serious proportions in the late seventies and the All-Assam Students Union began to agitate. The movement acquired prestige and took the shape of a political party AGP (Assam Gana Parishad) which ultimately captured power.

In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the deepening of democracy led to politics based on caste particularly lower castes became conscious of their rights and their leaders began to demand a greater share in power and jobs. Mr. Kanshi Ram jumped into politics forming Bahujan Samaj Party. Backward castes exerted greater pressure for a share in power and jobs. Mr.V.P.Singh became their messiah, who implemented the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1990. This led to the formation of Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh. But what adds to our woes is the split in regional parties on the basis of ego clashes. Thus, the Tamil party split into two and the Congress in Tamil Nadu also split. The Janata Dal which represented the backward class Hindu interests broke into several groups. Splits within splits are the bane of our democracy. Such splits led to multiplicity of parties and far from reflecting the real situation, harm our political health. The crisis at the center should be seen in this perspective. Another important problem is tokenism of the parties towards religious minorities. The Congress claimed to have represented the interests of Muslims and Christians, but its leadership never did anything substantial for them. For example, in independent India Muslims and Christians never got proper representation in either State Assemblies or Parliament. The Muslim population is 13-14 percent but its representation never exceeded 7-8 percent in any Lok Sabha. The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes even more under represented had there been no reservation for them.

From this it also becomes clear that a coalition is more representative of the interests of different sections than the government formed by a single party or two more parties. But in nation consisting of different classes, different religions, different linguistic, cultural and religious groups a coalition will be much more representative of the entire country. It should also be noted that stability tends to benefit the upper classes than the weaker sections. A coalition government fails to take note of this. Though the stability is highly desirable for good governance it should not be at the costs of interests of weaker sections. This can be ensured by properly constituted coalition, not based on opportunities but on the interests of different sections. Only such governments will be stable and also ensure justice to the weaker sections including religious minorities.

Again what makes coalition government that it can survive

only when it receives collective responsibility. Once again, the issue of collective responsibility haunted the existence of the BJP led coalition government. Traditionalists who appreciate the British model of cabinet government are shocked by the open criticism of the governments decisions by its own cabinet Ministers as well as the alliance partners. On the other hand compulsions of survival of an amorphous coalition government have increased the emergence of the new cabinet culture.

The General Elections in 2004 have once again brought to the fore the politics of coalition at the center. It is now the turn of the United Progressive Alliance government led by the Congress and headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh, an Economist. The delay in forming the government, the problems encountered in the allocation of portfolios and in the final drafting of the Common Minimum Programme pinpoint the troubles that coalition has to encounter at every stage.

It is a daunting task to keep every partner in good humour. It was the sulking time for every leader or partner when he did not get the portfolio of his choice. First it was the turn of Mr.Laloo Prasad Yadav and then it was that of Mr.Ram Vilas Paswan. It will be no easy task for the leader of a coalition to manage all the partners all the time. Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee had a tough time reigning in certain partners in his government.

Perhaps, the leader of a coalition government cannot go ahead with his own time tested plans of development since he has to accommodate the interest of all parties that form the coalition. Coalition dharma demands on the methods of 'give and take' by both the major and minor partner is duty bound to accommodate the interests of all partners, the junior partners should not blackmail the major partner. There should be adjustment and comprise by all partners instead of musical chair of power game.

Whatever have been the defects of the coalition governments, still they have not been without benefits. An Indian scholar Mr.N.C. Sahni has observed, "One of the major effects of coalition compromise in politics and checked ron-alism. It also relieved the government of the restrains and responsibilities which are imposed on the ruling party by the opposition benches under the biparty system". Similarly Madhu Limaye has also held the opinion that, "Akali-Jana Sangh coalition resulted in the welcome reduction of tension in the Punjab". Coalitions provide the only alternative in a parliamentary democracy. The ruling mechanism of our central governments for the last one and a half decade, the thirty four year long stinct of the left government in the West Bengal and the alternative pattern of stable government by UDF and LDF coalitions in the State of Kerala are live examples of stable coalition governments.

CONCLUSION

For the leader of any coalition, the hidden enemies are within the government. Therefore, he should prevent the cracks in the government which lead to the downfall of his government. Prime Minister Dr.Manmohan Singh, might have to use wisdom, experience, tact, patience and compromise skills to keep his ship sailing, amidst all hazards taking every care of every passenger aboard, until it reaches its destination. Thus, it can be concluded that, today, 'coalition system with one party dominance within it' is emerging as a stable alternative to the 'pure one-party governance' system.

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