

Coalition Governments : Democracy in Dilemma ?

Uday Narain Choudhary
Hon'ble Speaker
Bihar Legislative Assembly, India

The idea of coalition has historical roots in India. There has been a fundamental change in the role of Parliament since the emergence of multi-party coalitions as a 'regular form of Government' in India. The expansion of political participation in the last two decades has placed historically disadvantaged and marginalised groups at the Centre of the Political system and Governance at all levels. The rise of coalitions Government in India is in a way a manifestation of the widening and deepening of democracy in India. In the process, different regions and social groups have acquired a greater state in the system with parties that seek to represent them winning and increasing number of seats usually at the cost of national parties.

An important element in the evolution of coalition culture of this stage was the drawing up of a "Common Minimum Programme" which was entitled the "Common approach to Major Policy Matters programme coalition culture in India.

There are several explanations about the rise of coalition politics as a "regular form of Governance" in India and some of these merit close consideration. An explanation of the fragmentation of India's policy has been sought by several analysts in the mixed economy model of development. It is contended by them that the benefits of this model were lapped by a Section consisting of the 'bourgeoisie, high managerial elites, state bureaucracy and agrarian magnets' which fostered resentment in a sizeable segment of the population. It is this resentment, they argue, which made it easy for the marginalised sections to respond favourably to political representatives from their own ranks.

According to some academicians, when the ability of the Pan-India parties represent varied social interests broke down, the inevitable result was the favourable response to the political parties claiming to represent

the particular interests at the grass roots. As can be seen with the increasing diverse nature of the parties and their support bases, political coalition is reflective of the social coalitions represented by different state based on regional parties. Political coalition, at the level of government formation seek to articulate the neglected voice by bringing into the centre state those parties that are not exactly 'centrist' coalition is a great leveler of interests. Thus the regional parties act as an ideological block according 'corrective steps' so that decision makers cannot lose sight of inputs for socially meaningful and economically ameliorating programmes from the grass roots. The goal of group equity that has been sought to be achieved through political power has resulted in the increasing use of several undemocratic means including violence, that has made democratic governance difficult. "Coalition" is not only the coming together of political parties to capture power, it is also reflection of the fragmentation of social interests at the gross roots. It may be contended that coalitions are not only political expedient formations but are institutionally better equipped to deal with the tensions of a fragmented society than single party governments that have a tendency to centralised and homogenize.

Conclusion

To conclude any coalition is exposed to strains and coalition can come apart due to rivalries between parties and individuals, demand for particular ministerial portfolio and other constitutional positions, and electoral compulsions at different levels or government specially at the state level as in case where one party is positioned to cut into another's support base.

Critics pointed out that as a consequence of coalition culture, the idea of coalition ministerial responsibility, which is one of the cardinal principles in a west minster type of parliamentary government, has been weakened considerably, with conflicts between coalition parties and tensions between particular Minister and Departments often played out in public. Critics have also pointed out that the focus on consensual policy making often precludes radical reforms and that the emphasis on stability often leads to compromise in terms of policy initiations. They also argue that development activities and good governance may suffer under the compulsions of coalition politics.

But that as it may coalition Governments and parliamentary democracy are not incompatible and the inferred dilemma in their relation is not borne out by empirical evidence. If coalition culture has spread to more number of parliamentary democracies which are now evolving their own mechanisms to deal with the situation.

In India, the coalition culture has taken deep roots, and there seems to be better alternative evolving anytime soon. It is further evolving with more and more states being governed through coalition Governments, besides one of the national level. There is also a clear pattern of coalition formation that despite being ideologically heterogeneous, parties both national and regional come together on the basis of programmatic compatibility.

In the context of Indian Society, fragmented as it is by every conceivable marker of differentiation such as language religion, class, caste and region, it should be recognised that a consensual style of politics is the most viable way to do politics. The rise of coalition Governments may be seen as a manifestation of the widening and deepening of democracy in India, since the interest of all coalition partners are given due weightage and are protected.

JAI HIND, JAI BHARAT.
