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Relevance of Coalition Politics in India

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Abstract: *Democracy in India has got matured since first general elections held in 1951-52 for first Lok Sabha. It had witnessed single party dominant majoritarian governments under charismatic leadership of Nehru- Gandhi; first historic Janta Party coalition government led by Morarji Desai in 1977, and then era of minority and coalition governments since nineties. India's unique geography demands unique federal structure where social, cultural and political aspirations of its people are accommodated. This has forced the polity to readjust itself with changing democratic demands and aspirations of the people. Therefore there had been different election results since independence, showing marked shift of voters taste time to time. Coalition era which started in 1977 in national politics, reached to new heights in successive elections since its rebirth in 1989 general election for parliament. However general election held for 16th Lok Sabha in 2014, and thereafter state elections of Delhi, Utter Pradesh, Uttakhand, Himanchal Predesh, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Haryana..... etc, where voters reversed the earlier set trend and shown their faith again in single party led majority government. .*

This research paper tries to examine 'relevance of coalition politics in India', in light of recent political developments and also looks at future of coalition politics in India.

Key words: *Coalition, democracy, government, alliance, representation, demography, political rights, election, people*

Introduction:

In democratic societies, government formation after peoples mandate remains at the centre stage of all political processes. India chose to democracy after independence and has worked a vibrant democratic system in these seventy years of independent India. People of India have shown tremendous political awareness and extraordinary political sense of maturity in shaping democratic set up and political system in the country. The journey from single party majoritarian governments to multi party-party minority governments with inside/outside support and coalition governments under pre or post pole arrangement is result of democratic demands created out of changing political environment in the country.

Framers of constitution designed Indian constitution as rainbow of polity in their original design of federal democracy. This rainbow federal structure is emerging in form of coalitions emerging at national and regional political arena. Prof Ogg defines the term 'coalition' in Encyclopedia of Social Sciences as "a Cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or ministry". Thus coalition is formation of alliance pre or post election in order to win an election or form the government after declaration of election results. It is an activity of forging alliance for growing together by way of co-operation and co-ordination among alliance partners.

In India coalitions started taking shape in some form or other soon after the independence at state level politics(in Kerla), but in national politics it could become reality only in 1977, under leadership of Shri Morar ji Desai When first coalition government formed by Janta Party with support of other parties, though short-lived. Since nineties, coalitions gained prominence in national politics and became indispensable in today's political environment.

Hypothesis:

Results of several state elections and general election of 2014 for Lok Sabha has indicated return of single party era in India, wherein people voted a party to majority thought it fought election in coalition. Now the moot point is “Whether the days of coalition era are over in India” and “are coalitions still relevant in India”? This research study takes the hypothesis that “Coalitions are still relevant in India”.

Shaping up of Indian polity:

Since India gained independence and democratic processes started for government formation, polity has shaped itself to a manner, suited best to Indian conditions. From strong single party centrist governments to unite India into a 'nation' to multy-party coalitions though weak but representing true federal structure of the country, journey has been tremendous. Congress party once invincible, lost political ground due to its own internal contradictions and elite leadership, insensitive to changing aspirations of people and space left was occupied by congress breakaways, and other national parties with active alliances of regional parties in national politics and local/regional parties at state level politics. This has brought an era of coalitions and political alliances in India. They though provided alternative to voters but had inherent problem of instability and indecisiveness. Some greedy, opportunist and power hungry politicians frequently changed their position, encouraging horse trading and political blackmailing resulting 'Ayaram – Gayaram' type of unstable governments.

Educated, informed and aspiring young voter of 21st century has different demands and political expectations and wants their government to do serious business of governance and deliver results rather than getting involved in tricky political gaming and maneuvers. This resulted in change in voting preference and India witnessed a single party majority government at centre in 2014, after a long gap of around 30 years when Rajeev Gandhi led majority government was formed in 1984. In seven consecutive general elections of Lok Sabha (from 1989 to 2009), no party could cross threshold of majority, resulting alliance formations and development of coalition politics at national level. However, result of 2014 general elections surprised everyone with marked shift on people's preference and turnaround of single party rule in India at center. This is clearly evident from table 1 and table 2 given herein under–

Table 1: National Democratic Alliance 2014

State	Party	Seats Contesting	Seats Won	Vote Share
National	BJP	426	282	31%
Tamil Nadu	BJP	7	1	5.50%
	Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam	15	0	5.10%
	Pattali Makkal Katchi	8	1	4.40%
	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	7	0	3.50%
	Kongunadu Makkal Desia Katchi	1	0	
	Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi	1	0	
	New Justice Party	0	0	
Andhra Pradesh	BJP	13	3	8.50%
	TDP	30	16	29.10%
Maharashtra	Jana Sena Party	0	-	
	BJP	24	23	27.30%
	Shiv Sena	20	18	20.60%
	Swabhimani Paksha	2	1	2.30%
	Republican Party of India (A)	1	0	0.10%
Bihar	Rashtriya Samaj Paksha	1	0	0.90%
	BJP	30	22	29.40%
	Lok Janshakti Party	7	6	6.40%
Punjab	Rashtriya Lok Samta Party	4	3	3%
	BJP	3	1	8.70%
Haryana	Shiromani Akali Dal	10	4	20.30%
	BJP	8	7	34.70%
Uttar Pradesh	Haryana Janhit Congress	2	0	6.10%
	BJP	78	71	42.30%
Kerala	Apna Dal	2	2	1%
	BJP	18	0	10.30%
Puducherry	Kerala Congress (Nationalist)	1	0	0.25%
	Revolutionary Socialist Party (B)	1	0	0.24%
	All India N.R. Congress	1	1	34.60%
Meghalaya	BJP	1	1	8.90%
	National People's Party	1	1	22.20%
Nagaland	Naga People's Front	1	1	68.67%
Mizoram	United Democratic Front	1	0	47.17%
Manipur	Manipur People's Party	0	-	
North-East	North-East Regional Political Front	9	-	
West Bengal	BJP	42	2	16.80%
	Gorkha Janmukti Morcha	0	-	
	Kamtapur People's Party	0	-	
Goa	BJP	2	2	53.40%
	Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party	0	-	
	Goa Vikas Party	0	-	

(%) NPP, NPF and MNF are contesting in each Seats & Other 8 Members supporting NDA Candidates
Source: Election Commission of India <http://ecresults.nic.in/PartyWiseResult.htm>

Table 2: 2014 Results—BJP's Stronghold and Rest of India

		BJP's Stronghold <i>Hindi Belt+ Gujarat+ Maharashtra+ Goa+ Dadra- Nagar Haveli,+ Chandigarh + Daman & Diu</i> (304 seats)				Rest of India (239 seats)			
Coalition/ Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seat %	Vote %	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seats %	Vote %	
NDA	BJP	266	244	81%	44%	161	38	16%	19%
	BJP Allies	39	29	10%	5%	75	18	8%	11%
UPA	INC	233	10	3%	20%	229	34	14%	21%
	INC Allies	65	11	5%	6%	6	4	2%	1%
	AIADMK					41	37	15%	8%
	AITC					60	34	14%	9%
	BJD					21	20	8%	4%
	Left Front					78	11	5%	10%
	Others					42	20%	44%	

Notes: For party acronyms refer to Table 1.
Source: Election Commission of India <http://ecresults.nic.in/PartyWiseResult.htm>

Aforementioned table 1 shows detailed performance of NDA coalition - state wise in terms of seat contested seat won & percentage of vote secured, in general elections of 16th Lok Sabha held in 2014. Table 2 Shows performance of UPA coalition in detail in comparison with performance of BJP and its alliance partners in same election. Table 3 shows overall

performance of National Parties of India in terms seat contested and seat won and vote secured by the those parties, including vote polled by service voters through postal ballot in that election.

Table 3 : Performance of National parties- 2014 results

PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL PARTIES							
PARTY NAME	CANDIDATES CONTESTED	WON	DF	VOTES SECURED BY PARTY	% OF VOTES SECURED		
					OVER ELECTORS	TOTAL	OVER VALID POLLED
Bharatiya Janata Party	428	282	62	171660230	20.58	71.778	31.33629586
Bahujan Samaj Party	503	0	447	22946346	2.75	1087256	4.188818151
Communist Party of India	67	1	57	4327460	0.51	8828578	0.789970786
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	93	9	50	17988955	2.15	6734883	3.283854485
Indian National Congress	464	44	178	106935942	12.82	2078233	19.52098233
Nationalist Congress Party	36	6	13	8635558	1.03	5335803	1.576407071
GRAND TOTAL	1591	342	807	332494491	39.86	348662	60.69632869
TOTAL ELECTORS IN THE COUNTRY (INCLUDING SERVICE - ELECTORS)-834082814							
TOTAL VALID VOTES POLLED IN THE COUNTRY (INCLUDING SERVICE-VOTES) -547800004							

Source : Election Commission of India, http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/statistical_reportge2014.asp

In addition to trend seen in national general elections of 2014, BJP's rise and peoples mandate in favour of single party majority government is evident from elections results obtained in state elections of Haryana, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujrat, Himachal Pradesh..... etc. Except Punjab, in all other states, BJP obtained either clear majority or majority with alliance partner but had dominant electoral position. Coalitions had either been rejected by electorate as in case of UP (congress-SP), Gujrat (Congress- ST/SC/OBC movement leader), Punjab (BJP-Aakali Dal) or if accepted, main party of alliance given dominant majority (in Haryana, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh etc).

Recent development:

In recently held elections of three North Eastern state- Tripura Meghalaya and Nagaland, coalition worked wonderfully in replacing incumbent governments. BJP made historical imprint in political history of India by storming into hilly terrains of N-E, hitherto off- link to saffron

forces with the help of new found alliance partners. The smart back room maneuvering and artful on-ground political strategy with skillful coalition building (pre/ post poll) made BJP to conquer the north-east terrains and form NDA governments in these states. The marching of victory chariot over these sisterly states could become possible only with BJP's ability to align with local tribal parties and on ground political/ tactical decisions. This is evident from election results of these states as given here under-

Results: Meghalaya state election -2018

State	Political Party	Seats won	Percentage of vote
Meghalaya	Congress	21	28.5 %
	NCP	01	1.6 %
	National Peoples Party (NPP)	19	20.6 %
	BJP	02	9.6 %
	Hill State Peoples Democratic Party	02	5.3 %
	United Democratic Party	06	11.6 %
	Peoples Democratic party	04	8.2 %
	Others	05	13.7 %
	NOTA	-	0.9 %
Total		59	100

Source: Election Commission of India, http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/statistical_reportge

Results: Tripura state election -2018

	Political Party	Seats won	Percentage of vote
NDA	BJP	35	43.0 %
	IPFT(Indigenous Peoples front of Tripura)	08	7.5 %
	CPI(M)	16	42.7 %
	Others	-	5.8 %
	NOTA	-	1.0 %
Total		59	100 %

Source: Election Commission of India, http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/statistical_reportge

Results: Nagaland state election -2018

State	Political Party	Seats won	Percentage of vote
Nagaland	BJP	12	15.3 %
	Naga Peoples Front	27	38.8 %
	National Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP)	16	25.2 %
	JDU	01	4.5 %
	National Peoples Party (NPP)	02	6.9 %
	Independents	01	4.3 %
	Others	-	5.0 %
	NOTA	-	0.57 %
Total		59	100

Source: Election Commission of India, http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/statistical_reportge

Analysis

It can be analysed from above mentioned results of 16th Lok Sabha election-2014, state elections thereafter in western and northern part of the country that there was a reverse trend in favour of strong and stable government which can deliver to expectations of young and aspiring India of 21st century. Coalitions at center be it of Third front, NDA or UPA, they did not perform to expected level, and state coalitions also remain focused on their survival within party fractions or among coalition partners, and drawing political war lines with center by raising regional issues for petty political gains rather than to issues of employment generation, health, education, agriculture, price rise and state specific real issues. Coalitions became symbol of mis-governance, inefficiency, corruption, scandals and scams. Threats of support withdrawal and Political blackmailing by inside/ outside supporting alliance partners made the functioning of government very difficult, forcing rollbacks, indecisiveness and policy paralysis. This all resulted in voters' rejection of coalitions and bringing back of governments with absolute majority in some elections or working majority for main party in coalition in other elections, giving them necessary freedom to function and perform.

However, this is not all over for coalition politics in India. Despite majority of 282 in 2014 election, BJP still formed government of NDA coalition at center foreseeing its importance in Indian politics. BJP's victory in that election and in many other elections thereafter was as a result of skillful coalition formation. They helped BJP to rise as pan-India political party which otherwise looked almost impossible till recent time. Return of BJP in Uttar Pradesh became possible only with ability of its leadership to divide SP and BSP support base and aligning tactfully with breakaways. Formation of BJP led NDA government in Goa and Manipur despite winning lesser seats than main opposition party was result of its ability to form coalition timely and tactfully.

Defeat of BJP in Bihar elections during peak of Modi's magical period is one the best example of coalition charisma. The victory of 'Mahagathbandhan' in Bihar state elections in 2015 was outcome of the alliance of RJD, JDU and congress Party. Coalition worked remarkably and snatched victory from hands of BJP which looked favourable to political analysts and most of the poll surveys. In recent state election results of North-Eastern states of Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland, governments of NDA could be formed only with the help of pre/ post poll political alliances with local tribal fractions and other political entities. This is indicative of importance of coalition politics in such a multicultural, pluralistic and diverse country like India.

Conclusion

In a country like India, coalition is possibly the best political arrangement which not only provides platform to socially, culturally, ethically and politically diverse entities to link within political layout of the country but also nurture them to grow along with main stream India. Enormous diversity of India is turned into major source strength in shaping federal democracy of the nation as enshrined in Indian constitution. Despite certain shortcomings and apparent weaknesses, they still suited best to evolving Indian democracy. Coalition government continue to be instrumental device for ensuring participation of hitherto marginalized section and peripheral voices in political processes and achieving distributive justice for them. They work on

concept of consensus, which ensures interest of each section of society is taken care of in process of decision making. This strengthens the true federalism and enhances democratic legitimacy, representativeness and national unity.

Coalitions are thus surely a significant contribution to democracy of India in essentially multicultural and social context and complimentary to democratic process in involving participation of people in governmental activities and therefore unavoidable in fundamental sense. Coalitions, had been major force to reckon with in democratic history of India since beginning of electoral processes, and will continue to be relevant to future democratic polity of the nation.

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