

## CHAPTER - SIX

### COALITION POLITICS IN THE STATES :

The Indian Union has a federal structure, although there are many unitary features. It has 29 States, including the three States - Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh - created in August 2000. There is a Central Government for the whole of the country and State Governments for each of the 29 States. The system of government is parliamentary, the Constitution having made provisions for both Central and State Governments, more or less on a similar pattern. Built on the majoritarian principle of the Westminster model and buttressed by the single-party dominance of the Indian National Congress, the Central and State Governments in India have been able to present a picture of stable parliamentary politics in the first two decades since Independence. However, there have been instances of States lacking in political stability from early 1950s owing to the failure of the major national party - the Indian National Congress - and of the regional parties to muster enough support to form a stable government.

The erstwhile States of Travancore-Cochin and PEPSU were the first two States in the country to form coalition governments after the first State Legislative Assembly elections in December 1951-January 1952. During 1953-67, three more coalition governments appeared: Andhra Pradesh (1953-56), Orissa (1957-62) and Kerala (1960-64). In 1967, eight States formed non-Congress coalition governments, and they were: Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. Of these States, Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Bihar and Orissa had fragmented Assemblies after the Fourth General election of 1967. In Haryana, UP and MP, the Congress party formed its own governments but they fell owing to defection of members and gave way to coalitions. This trend continued although some of the above States went back to single-party Congress governments. In 1997, the number of States with coalition governments rose to fourteen, the States being: Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Sikkim. In successive elections to the Parliament, the Congress party retained power at the Centre until 1977 when it was replaced by the Janata

party which was a hotch-potch union of several parties. The Centre also entered the coalition phase in 1996, having formed the first United Front government which was undoubtedly coalitional in character. Among the above States, Kerala has had the longest experience of stable coalition politics with West Bengal standing second. Their experiences have been unique in Indian politics. Coalition politics of the other States have had a chequered history, going back and forth between single-party and coalitional forms of government. The experience of the major States are outlined briefly in the following paragraphs.

It may be stated that Punjab witnessed the emergence of coalition politics in 1967 when the then ruling Congress party lost majority and the opposition parties formed a coalition government under the leadership of Gurnam Singh.' The constituents of the United Front were: Akali Dal (Master Tara Singh Group), Akali Dal (Sant Group), CPI(M), CPI, Jan Sangh, Republican Party, SSP and Independents. The CPI(M) gave unconditional support to the Ministry without joining it. Starting with five Ministers, the Cabinet was expanded five times to give representation to the constituents as well as to accommodate defectors from the Congress. However,

internal dissensions within the leading Akali group and the manoeuvrings of the Congress from outside led to the rise and fall of four coalition Ministries during the period from 8 March, 1967 to 13 June 1971 with a six months' President's rule and a mid-term poll in February 1969.

The second phase of coalition government started after the June 1977 Assembly elections when the electoral alliance of Akali, Janata and CPI(M) parties captured 91 out of 117 seats. The Akalis and the Janata formed the government and the CPI(M) gave external support. This Ministry led by Prakash Singh Badal came to an early end owing to infighting among the Akalis and withdrawal of support by the Janata members on 3 September, 1979 for reasons relating to the then Central Government. The Ministry continued until 17 February 1980 when it was dismissed and President's rule imposed together with eight other States in the wake of the Congress party coming to power at the Centre in January 1980. In the elections that followed to the Punjab Legislative Assembly the Congress secured 63 seats out of 117 and formed a government under Darbara Singh. President's rule was imposed again in 1983, and the next polls were held in September

1985. In this poll, the Akalis secured 73 out of 117 seats and formed the government. But this government led by Surjeet Singh Barnala had to face a serious crisis as 27 Akali members left the party and the government had to depend on the support of the Congress(I), BJP, CPI and CPI(M). However, in view of the fast deteriorating law and order situation in the State, the President's rule was declared again on 11 May, 1987.

After another spell of Congress(I) rule, marked by continued infighting of Akali factions and mass scale destruction of human lives, Punjab entered the next phase of a peaceful coalitional politics after the Assembly elections of February 1997. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-BJP electoral alliance won a near three-fourth majority and formed a coalition government under Prakash Singh Badal as Chief Minister. Although SAD alone had a strength of 74 out of 117, it preferred to maintain the alliance in running the government for various political reasons.

First, it was a pre-electoral alliance and was therefore committed to implementing common minimum programme.

Second, the BJP and the SAD are allies in the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre and had a joint responsibility to work together at the Centre for implementing the national agenda.

Third, they had a common interest in sharing power at the Centre and in the State despite the apparently contradictory positions they occupied at the two capitals. The BJP's command over the coalition at the Centre and the superiority of the latter over the former in the State of Punjab make for a see-saw arrangement beneficial to both the parties.

To sum up, the coalitional experiments in Punjab during the three decades since 1967 had been chequered by factional infighting in the major parties and the extremist violence let loose by terrorists and the police, resulting in the prolonged breakdown of law and order and the failure of constitutional government. Only when peace was finally restored in late nineties, coalition politics of the Akalis and the BJP were established as a normal system of parliamentary government.

Bihar provided another instance of unstable coalition governments during 1967-72. During the five-year period the State had as many as nine governments with the life-span of four days to ten months. Out of these governments, four were anti Congress coalitions, three Congress-led coalitions and two Congress-supported minority coalitions. A mid-term poll was held in February 1969 which did not make any improvement on the situation. However, with the general elections in March 1972 the Congress (I) came back to power on its own, putting an end to the era of coalition

governments. The second phase of coalition politics in Bihar started after the Legislative Assembly elections held in February 2000. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (101) - a breakaway wing of the former Janata Dal - led by Laloo Prasad Yadav and his wife Rabri Devi who was Chief Minister, lost majority but gained the largest number of seats. Ignoring the claim of RJD to be invited to form the government, the Governor V.C. Pande played politics to favour the NDA and invited Nitish Kumar who had been elected the leader of the NDA parliamentary party to form the government and prove his majority. However, Nitish Kumar had to make exit within seven days as he could not prove majority in the Assembly. Although the Congress(I) and the Left parties had opposed the "corrupt" RJD government in the elections, they offered to support a "secular" RJD government to spite the "communal" NDA. Laloo Prasad Yadav cleverly supported the Congress(I) candidate for Speakership and checked the expected split in the Congress(I) by manipulating the absence of Congress(I) MLAs by keeping them in a Patna hotel.' The parties represented in the Assembly were so fragmented so as to close the possibility of single-party government reemerging.

The State of Orissa was one of the earliest to experiment

the coalition government. They formed a coalition of the two largest parties in the Assembly - the Congress and the Ganatantra Parishad - in 1959. After the second general elections in 1957, the Congress party had formed a government of its own under H.K. Mahtab as Chief Minister with the support of the Communists and the Jharkhand party. As problems arose between the Congress and the Communists, the former entered into coalition with the Parishad and formed the first coalition government on 12 May, 1959. The government continued to function for 21 months and finally broke down on 25 February, 1961 owing to factionalism within the Congress.

The second coalition government came to power after the Fourth General elections in 1967 when the Swatantra–Jana Congress government was formed with R.N. Singh Deo, the Swatantra Party leader as Chief Minister. Split in the Congress in 1969 and the consequent changes in the relations between the Congress party of Orissa and the Jana Congress led to the withdrawal of the Jana Congress from the Ministry in January 1971.

The Assembly elections held in 1971 left the situation equally fluid although the Congress(I) emerged as the largest party. But a government could be formed by a coalition of the Swatantra Party and the Utkal Congress and supported by the Jharkhand Party. The Ministry was headed

by Biswanth Das, a veteran Congressman who returned from political retirement. But the Ministry broke down barely after 14 months, with the election of some Swatantra members and the merger of the Utkal Congress with the Congress (1). Thereafter, the State had a long spell of Congress rule, with a brief Janata return between 1978-80 and a Janata Dal government under Biju Patnaik until it was replaced by the fourth coalition government. After this the Biju Janata Dal and the BJP were elected in the Assembly elections of February 2000.

It should be stated that none of the first three coalition governments could complete full term, and they broke down owing to intra-coalition conflicts or factional infighting within the constituents. The fourth government led by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and headed by Naveen Patnaik, was cemented by the common interests of the BJP and the BJD who were also partners in the Central government and therefore depend on mutual support at the Centre and in the State.

The political situation in Uttar Pradesh was slightly different from that of the other States after the fourth general election. The Congress emerged as the largest party in the Legislative Assembly but it failed to secure absolute majority. However, the Congress managed to form a government of its own under C.B. Gupta as

Chief Minister with the support of seventeen independent MLAs and four other MLAs who joined the Congress. But soon dissensions broke out in the Congress and Charan Singh, together with sixteen followers, left the Congress to form his own party, the Jana Congress. At the time of voting on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, the Jana Congress voted with the opposition and defeated the government. On resignation of C.B. Gupta's Ministry, Charan Singh was elected leader of the opposition United Front and was sworn in as Chief Minister on 3 April, 1967. However the government could not function smoothly, and MLAs started leaving the fold in batches until Charan Singh tendered his resignation on 17 February, 1968. The State was placed under President's rule and the Assembly was dissolved.

Accordingly, fresh elections were held on 9 February, 1969, and the Congress having secured majority in the Assembly, C.B. Gupta again formed the government on 26 February, 1969. Following the split in the Congress at the national level in 1969, some Congress MLAs led by Kamalapati Tripathi, left the Congress. Possibilities of a coalition government were explored but differences could not be settled regarding who was to lead a new government. After days of "bargaining games", Charan Singh, who had

by this time merged the Jana Congress with the Bharatiya Kranti Dal, formed the second coalition government together with the Congress (1) on 17 February, 1970. The B K D soon fell out with the Congress (1) on several issues including nationalization of sugar mills in the State and the abolition of privy purse by the Centre. The situation reached a breaking point when the Chief Minister asked thirteen out of twenty-six Congress ministers to resign and the latter refused. The Chief Minister then requested the Governor to dismiss the ministers and the Congress in a countermove withdrew support and demanded the dismissal of the government. Although the Congress (0), Jan Sangh, Swatantra and Samyukta Socialist Party decided to extend support to the Charan Singh Ministry, the Governor recommended suspension of the Assembly and the proclamation of President's rule. And thus the second coalition came to an end on 1 October, 1970.

On the same day, the Congress (0), Jan Sangh and Swatantra Party agreed to form a United Legislative Party (Samyukta Vidhayak Dal) which was joined by the BKD in four days. The SVD thus came to have a strength of 242 members in a House of 425, and elected T.N. Singh of the Congress (0) as their leader. After seventeen days of the President's rule, the SVD coalition under T.N. Singh came to

power. As T.N. Singh was not a member of the legislature, he sought election on 5 January, 1971 but was defeated by a Congress (1) candidate. However, he continued as Chief Minister until 30 March, 1971 when he tendered his resignation on the passage of an amendment to the official motion of thanks to the Governor. Several single-party Congress governments followed, with a Janata inter regnum after the Emergency (1975-77). All political developments in UP were pushed under the carpet of history and politics stood still during the long spell of President's rule lasting from 1985 to 1997. The second phase of coalition politics in UP appeared when the elections were held in March 1997.

The President's rule continued until 21 March, 1997. Through a protracted process of discussions a novel political formula was devised between the BSP and the RIP to co-operate in spite of their being bitter enemies in the election. According to the formula, the Chief Ministership was to rotate between coalition partners —BJP and BSP —after every six months. The working of the Ministry was to be monitored by a three-member panel comprising Vajpayee, Advani and Kanshi Ram. The first term of Chief Ministership was to be with the BSP and Speakership with the BJP. It was also agreed

that the political situation would be reviewed by the two parties at the end of one year.

The Ministry did not work smoothly, and a serious friction arose on the question of the change of Chief Minister and Speaker at the end of the first term of six months. However, it was decided to retain the Speakership with the BJI, and Kalyan Singh of BJP was sworn in as Chief Minister on 21 September 1997. The friction continued and the BSP pulled out of the government within a month. An unusual spectacle of horse-trading and defection followed which helped to prop up the Kalyan Singh Ministry in power. Twenty-two out of thirty-seven Congress (I) MLAs formed the Loktantrik Congress Party and three out of seven Janata Dal members formed a separate group. Twelve rebel BSP members also joined the pro-Kalyan Singh camp. All defectors were rewarded with ministerships, raising the total number of ministers to 93 — the biggest ever Ministry in the Indian States. Although BJP could strengthen its hold on the government with artificial support encouraging defection in the opposition ranks, Chief Ministers had to be shifted to accommodate intra-coalitional conflicts and BJP's factional infighting.

Thus it is seen that Uttar Pradesh experimented with coalition governments, but governmental stability has been always undermined by

the ulterior motives of power-mongering politicians. The trends established in the earlier phases are still maintained, resulting in frequent changes of ministries and their unscrupulous expansion. No serious efforts have been made to forge pre-poll alliances with any commitment to a common agenda; even the present ruling coalition is a post-poll, hotchpotch arrangement. No institutional mechanism has been created to effectively co-ordinate the coalition partners or iron out their differences.

The State of Haryana, born on 1 November, 1966 out of the reorganisation of the State of Punjab, has been notorious for the defection games of its politicians. At the time of its formation, the Congress party was able to make a government of its own under Bhagwat Dayal Sharma as Chief Minister who was reappointed as such after the Assembly elections of 1967. But differences arose within the Congress on the question of Ministry formation, and the dissidents formed a new party — the Haryana Congress — and elected Rao Birendra Singh as its leader.

The opposition parties collaborated with the Haryana Congress to form the United Front, elected Birendra Singh as the United Front leader. The latter was sworn in as the first coalition

Chief Minister on 24 March, 1967. But as a result of frequent Floor-crossings, the relative strength of parties underwent changes and the Governor was compelled to dismiss the Ministry on 21 November, 1967 and bring about President's rule in the State.

In the mid-term elections of May 1968, the Congress secured absolute majority and Bansi Lal became the Congress Chief Minister. But the game of defections continued and obstructed functioning of the Legislative Assembly. Ultimately on the recommendation of the Chief Minister, the Governor dissolved the Assembly on 21 January, 1972. After the next elections were held within three months, the Congress (1) could provide a single party government which completed the full term.

The second coalition Ministry in Haryana came to office after the elections of June 1987 in which the Lok Dal (Bahuguna group) and its electoral ally BJP made a clean sweep." Lok Dal had enough strength to form its own government, but Devi Lal, who became Chief Minister included some BJP members also in the Ministry. Instability of government continued to haunt Haryana from 1987 to 1991 when there were seven governments under five Chief Ministers.

The next major coalitional development took place after the 1996 Assembly elections in which the BJP was all ally of the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) led by Bansi Lal. A coalition government of the two parties was formed under Bansi Lal as Chief Minister. Inter-party conflict led to the withdrawal of support by BJP which rendered the government in a minority. Although the Congress (I) offered to prop up the HVP Ministry, they had to back out as Bansi Lal did not accede to some of their conditions. Further, a section of the HVP legislators broke away and helped the Indian National Lok Dal under Om Prakash Chautala to form a government in July 1999. In the February 2000 Assembly elections, held one year and a half ahead of the schedule, the INLD fought in alliance with the BJP under the NDA banner and secured 47 and 6 seats respectively in the Assembly of 90 members in total. Although there are several points of conflict between the INI-D and the BJP at the State level as well as at the national level, the alliance continued as a coalition government even after the elections.

Another major State where coalition government existed in Maharashtra. In the Assembly elections held in September-October 1999 no party or combine could secure absolute majority. The BJP -

Shiv Sena alliance, which was ruling the State at this time was short of 20 seats to reach majority (Shiv Sena-69, BJP-56) in a House of 288. The Congress (I) emerged as the largest party with 75 seats and the National Congress Party secured 58. The Congress (I) and the NCP had fought the elections independently and were enemies, the latter Bahujan Mahasangh and the CPI(M). The new coalition Ministry took office towards the end of October 1999 under Vilasrao Deshmukh of Congress(I) as Chief Minister and Chhagan Bhujbal of NCP as Deputy Chief Minister.

The first coalition government of Maharashtra, formed by BJP and Shiv Sena, which ruled the State since 1995 had begun rather smoothly. But they developed intra-coalition conflicts and factional infights within the Shiv Sena, leading to the' replacement of the Chief Minister Manohar Joshi by Narayan Rane, both belonging to the Shiv Sena."

On the whole, out of the 29 States in India as on 1 January, 2001, 15 States have coalition governments and 12 single-party governments.