

CHAPTER -3

EMERGENCE OF COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA- CAUSES AND GENERAL TRENDS

I

Any study of the trend in India's federal governance will reveal a number of features which are typically Indian in nature .

That is to say , these features cannot be found in any other federal experiments all over the world . India's federal experiment , it is admitted , is based on the model outlined in the Government of India Act, 1935. So far as distribution of power is concerned, there is heavy tilt towards the centre, thereby making the centre more powerful in relation to the states. Besides the political equations that emerged after the attainment of independence was the predominant position of the Congress Party in an essentially musty-party system. This was a novel feature which has led Rajni Kothari to described it as "One – dominant party system".

Moreover the position of the Congress Party was so strong that it could exert influence over all other political parties and the Congress Party was able to develop a pattern of governance which no other political party could do. The term "The Congress System" used by Rajni Kothari was an attempt to describe the situation.

II

One of the convenient ways of studying Indian politics is to make periodisation, however tentative it may be. From the point of view of party position and power equation , the periodisation can be as follows :

Phase 1 : 1950-1967

Phase 2 : 1967-1977

Phase 3 : 1977-1989

Phase 4 : 1989-Till Date.

It may be noted that in the first phase, it was the Indian National Congress which was in power both at the centre and the state levels. It was essentially a one-party dominance. But it is equally

interesting to note that the Congress as a unit of political power was also a combination of many interests and issues. So structurally it was a one-party affair, but inwardly it was a coalition of many interests issues, and objectives. So, it may not be incorrect to say that coalition of political interests was there in Indian politics right from the beginning.

The course of Indian Politics underwent substantial changes after the Fourth General Elections in 1967. For the first time some non-congress government were formed in some states. This was the beginning of coalition politics in India. It had its impact on the functioning of the federal system. It not only destroyed the congress system but also brought forth a new kind of politics-bargaining politics. A sense of competition emerged as the non-congress government began to demand more financial power. From the institutional point of view, two authorities were revitalized-the Planning Commission and the National Development Council. In a word, a climate of competition and confrontation in the field of sharing of federal power appeared and the emergence of coalition politics at the state level sowed the seeds of coalition politics at the national level, the culmination of which was seen in 1977

with the formation of the Janata Government of the centre.

Table showing the voter turnout and percentage of votes polled by ruling and opposition political parties

Year	Electorate (In millions)	Turnout	Percent voting	
			Ruling	Opposition
1952	173.2	46.6	45.00	55.00
1957	193.7	47.1	47.78	52.22
1962	217.7	55.1	46.02	53.98
1967	250.1	61.1	40.73	59.27
1971	274.1	55.3	43.68	56.32
1977	321.2	60.5	43.00	57.00
1980	355.6	56.9	42.66	57.34
1984	375.8	63.4	49.16	50.84
1989	498.6	59.9	17.73	82.27
1991	510.2	60.3	37.00	63.00

Source : Press Information Bureau, The Government of India.

Cited in : S.S. Tiwana, Crisis in Indian Parliamentary democracy: The Indian Journal of Political Science. Vol. – 55, No. 1 January – March, 1994

The overall impact of coalition politics on the nature of India's political party structure has been correctly assessed by Baldev Raj Nayer. Considering the social diversity and the method of mass mobilization pattern of the national political parties, he observes:

"India's immense social diversity and the considerable institutionalization of its democratic political framework have had a significant impact on the party system. This social heterogeneity has made the reaching of concrete policy decisions difficult. However, under its impact India's political parties have tended to become centrist. More recently, they have tended to enter into alliance - building, which has moderated the extreme ideological positions of individual parties. Social diversity has had a double effect. In the arena of political mobilization, it has accentuated appeals to ethnic identities. At the same time, it has attenuated tension by advancing a centrist agenda. No national Party appears to be immune from either tendency."⁽¹⁾

Thus the emergence of coalition politics in India made the national parties realized the fact that henceforth, no single party can dominate the national as well as state level politics. Thus in place of

competitiveness, a new force began to appear which is known as “Dialogue, Debate and Discussion.” In place of majority-minority syndrome, a new sense of equal Partnership emerged which led Rajni Kothari to remark “issue of federalism is gaining importance after a long period of ups and downs.....the reality of growing regionalisation in politics.”⁽²⁾

This led to the concept of “governance through consensual approach.” A number of issues that attracted attention of the Political Parties and which demanded national consensus were electoral reforms, centre-state relations, settlement of inter-state water dispute, welfare or the weaker sections and above all issues relations to economic reforms. In this connection an interesting point can be sited where major national parties came to agreement on vital issues like constitutional amendments and making adequate room for the regional parties to play major role in the governmental policy making process.

A look into the political scenario at the state level will show that regional political parties could capture power in states like Assam, Haryana, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and others. To the observers, this development was a healthy sign for the

prospect of cooperative federalism besides ensuring national unity.

So there were changes not only in the nature of federal process in the country but also infused dynamism which was very essential for the smooth functioning of the federal system. Side by side there was the need for alliance making by the national parties and in this process the regional parties became, in many cases the balancing factor. This process of coalition making has been described by Balveer Arora as “electoral federalism.”⁽³⁾ A new electoral arithmetic compelled the national political parties to see that proper seat – sharing between the national party and the regional parties is made.

This change scenario also pointed out that the demand for restructuring of centre-state relations and reevaluation of federal governance was justified. Although it is accepted that in the process of state building, nation building and development, the national parties should play a dominant role but it does not suggest that local or regional political parties should have more role to play. In fact, the changed political conditions established the fact that the success of coalition building is very much dependent on a harmonizing process between the national and state interests.

The emergence of coalition politics in India has released centrifugal forces in the political system and in this respect, constitutional scheme may not be helpful. One may not be incorrect to suggest that the demands for autonomy can be linked up with the release of these forces, so long they lay beneath the political surface. There have been attempts at reconciling the issues of national unity and regional autonomy on a grand scale.

II

It is observed that the working of federal system in India since independence has shown both its strength and weakness. That the growing overcentralisation of power became inconsistent with the new realities of political climate became evident. It can be concluded that the conflicts between the centre and the states over federal governance were more political than legal-constitutional. There has been conflict of political ideologies, policies, issues, approaches and above all priorities. To suggest that these conflicts were mainly the conflicts between different institutions or personalities working at central and state levels will be an oversimplification of the problem. It becomes clear from the steps

taken by the centre to reconstruct the present federal set-up. The best example in this regard is the institution of the Sarkaria Commission and its recommendations on centre-state relations. Even the acceptance and subsequent implementation of some of the recommendations of the commission could not remove imbalances at the level of federal governing system. Reforms and changes cannot, therefore, be exhaustive and definitive because of fast changing political scenario of the country.

It is now believed that, given the Indian situation federalism should be a means for reconciliation between nationalism and regionalism. So long as regionalism is constructive and conforms to national demands, this should be encouraged. The politics of inclusion , as said earlier, should replaced the politics of exclusion and the political system should be so flexible as to accommodate divergent interests, operating at the local levels.

III

Coalition making has become a growing reality and it is gaining acceptability at all levels. That the pattern of coalition politics

will dominate the Indian situation has been widely accepted by the observers on Indian politics. In this context, one cannot ignore the forces like historical context, the social structure and the cultural environment of India. Here adopting a Western model of coalition building may be inadequate in explaining the historical reality. Coalition politics has emerged in India out of a number of factors, contextual and functional.

One may argue whether India's democratic experience and power sharing fits into what Arendt Lighphart called "Consociational pattern of democracy". Consociationalism proceeds on the assumption of what is known as "grand alliance"-an alliance of diverse forces and interests.

Without growing into this debate , it can be said that democracy or for that matter, federal democracy is nothing but the existence, interaction and formation of alliance of many forces. This had been and still is the feature of India's governing system . And coalition politics in India should be placed against this general backdrop.

The federal pattern in India as, has been evident from the preceeding discussion, shows that in the Indian context federal

governance has been a combination of many forces and factors, thus leading to the formation of some kind of coalitions both at the theoretical and at the operational levels. It can be recalled that even during the period of Congress hegemony, which Rajni Kothari called 'the Congress system' were examples of coalition making within the Congress Party itself. Coalition at the leadership level or coalition at the functional level relating to centre-state relations was quite evident. A look into the correspondences between the central leadership and the state leadership can substantiate these position There had been numerous occasions when Congress Chief Ministers came into direct conflict with the central leadership. It may not be out of place here to refer to the difference of attitude between Prime Minister Nehru and Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr. B.C. Roy over many economic issues relating to the development problems of the state. But these issues could be resolved and consensus reached because of the interplay of many other forces which were not visible or tangible at the first instance.

Since the inception , India's federal governance has shown remarkable degree of flexibility through which it could accommodate emerging forces and factors . Here a reference can

be made to the debates held at the Constituent Assembly. While debating on the future pattern of federal governance, members expressed not only different views but also took conflictual positions. The central issue was whether the union government should be made stronger and the federal units would be made dependent on it. But the conclusion that the Assembly could derive was that India's complex situational variation demanded a federal governance with a strong centralizing tendency.

But one should not ignore that political process of any polity does not and can not follow a single straight line. This is true for all countries of the world-be those federations or unitary systems. India's experience in federal governance has shown that with the changes in the party configurations, newer and newer forces emerged and federal governance had to be organized, restructured or modified with a view to either accommodating or absorbing those forces .

Because of these changed situations, there have been both qualitative and substantive changes in the federal operations in India. This can be considered as the justification for instituting a good number of commissions to look into the changes in federation

and recommend certain wage and means for enabling the federal governance to work in the change situation.

Thus a study relating to the emergence of coalition politics and the nature of federal governance should take into account not only political factors but also factors which are not strictly political but having their impact on the political process. A good example in this regard may be the ethnic or the linguistic considerations and their impact on the federal system in India. One may not be wrong in suggesting that the need for states reorganization on the basis of language was felt just to accommodate the linguistic aspirations of people at different regions. But had it been comprehensive and final in nature, there would have been no necessity for further reorganizing the federal polity on the basis of ethnicity or other considerations.

So in the context of political dynamics federalism can not be viewed merely as a governing structure but as a political process. With the changes in time and context, the nature of federalism is bound to undergo changes. In this process , many factors may contribute but it is not possible to single out one particular factor or issue responsible for it.

Viewed in this context, it is convenient to conceptualise federalism as a flexible notion. Even in the U.S.A , There have been qualitative changes in the federal governance over the years mainly in the economic field. Same is true about Canadian or Australian federation. A line of similarity between Canadian federation and the Indian federation can be drawn when the role of language or ethnicity is taken into consideration. In the same way the role of the judiciary, its attitudinal positions and the nature of judicial decision making can be cited as one of the possible explanations in this process.

IV

In the backdrop of these discussion the issues relating to coalition politics and its impact on the federal governance can be examined. For the sake of convenience a tentative periodisation as has already been made clearly shows that the nature of federal dynamics in India has not followed a uniform pattern ; rather there have been many turning points in the course of political developments in India. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the federalizing process is closely linked up with the changing dimantions of party position since 1950.

Seats contested and won and percentage of vote share in

Seats Contested :

Party Year	Parameter	BJP	INC	CPI	CPM	JD	BSP	DMK	AIADM K	TDP	SP
1989	A	227	510	49	64	243	246	32	11	33	-
	B	86	197	12	33	142	3	0	11	2	-
	C	24. 4	40. 9	25. 6	53.8	38	1.9 1	39.5	72.1	52.7	-
	D	11. 5	39. 5	2.6	6.6	17. 7	2.1	2.39	1.5	3.3	-
1991	A	168	492	42	60	307	231	30	11	35	2
	B	120	232	14	35	59	2	0	11	13	0
	C	19	37.4	29.4	52.7	17.5	1.58	36.3	76.7	44.2	.004
	D	20.1	36.5	2.5	6.2	11.8	1.61	2.1	1.6	3.0	-
1996	A	471	529	43	75	196	117	19	10	36	64
	B	161	140	12	32	46	11	17	0	16	16
	C	23.4	29.7	24.9	37.1	23.4	18.9	53.7	29.4	38.2	27.3
	D	20.3	28.8	2.0	6.1	8.1	3.6	2.2	0.6	3.0	2.9
1998	A	368	477	58	71	191	251	18	23	35	166
	B	182	141	9	32	6	5	6	18	12	20
	C	39.5	29.0	16.2	33.7	9.1	9.7	42.3	45.4	38.0	15.9
	D	25.6	25.9	1.7	5.1	3.2	4.6	1.4	1.8	2.8	4.9
1999	A	339	453	54	72	96*	225	19	29	34	151
	B	182	114	4	33	1*	14	12	10	29	26
	C	38.8	33.3	15	34.6	-	9.8	46.9	33.7	48.6	14
	D	23.8	28.3	1.4	5.4	-	4.1	1.7	1.9	3.7	3.8

*Figure represent the seats contested and won by JD(S), a Principal fragment of JD.

A.B – Seats contested/won, C-% vote in seats contested, D-% of all India vote.

Cited in *A Decade of Parliamentary Elections in India – Mapping of Trends* : Ravi Bhatia, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. – 62, No. – 4 December 2001.

V

It may be relevant to suggest that the rise and growth of coalition politics in India has a direct link with the breakdown of the ‘Congress system’ or the system better known as ‘One dominant party system’. It will be too simplistic to suggest fall of the Congress system was the result of changes in the political environment only. Many other factors of economic or social nature contributed to its downfall. That is why, attempt should be made to look at the problem from a larger perspective , covering all dimensions of the political system. In other words, a multi-dimensional analysis of political and socio-economic issues becomes a necessity in order to situate the problem in the right contextual setting.

India’s federal governance and the consequent emergence of new power configuration should be examined in the context of economic development , the policy of which has been adopted to overcome the crisis of development . In other words, it calls for the study of the respective rolls of the state and the market in the conduct of economic arrairs. Since Indian state represents democratic set-up , such a study should take into account the role of the societal

demands within a specified period . In the context of the economic liberalization period in 1990s, the democratic structure of the Indian state emerges as a key factor in analyzing the steps taken to solve economic crisis both at the national and regional levels.

A convenient way of explaining this economic factor in the federalising process can be made by referring to :

- a) the fundamental issues that emerge from the interaction of economic policy reform and the needs for federal restructuring;
- b) the nature and content of the Indian development model;
- c) the content of adaptation of the federalizing process in the context of emerging economic and political issues;
- d) the nature of response of the federal structure and the manners of either accommodating or rejecting the political compulsions.

That the nature of planning and overwhelming centralizing power of the central authority have been the areas of conflict can be traced back in the formulation of the national planning and its implementation during Nehru's regime. The consolidation of

political power enabled the Congress Party to adopt a comprehensive national planning which was later on challenged by the regional governments and which has been considered as one of the reasons behind the rise consolidation and manifestation of regional forces. In a general way, the Indian development pattern until the beginning of 1990s can be characterized as a highly centralized and unidirectional development model which failed to consider regional aspirations. This development pattern has been considered to have three dimensions :

- a) the kind of industries accorded prominence ;
- b) the orientation of these industries to the world economy ; and
- c) the economic agents chosen for development.⁽⁴⁾

VI

The development pattern that India followed during this regime can be called a model towards heavy industrialization. It is interesting to note that this model and the pattern of development

had been followed during the period between 1956 and 1965 . From the point of view of political dynamics , this period witnessed a system where Congress as a political party dominated both the center and the state . One may even suggest that the 1956 industrial policy declarations set the trend of development process during this period . but subsequent developments have proved that changes in the political scenario has their direct impact on the federal functioning of a country and India was no exception. The central question that is generally advanced is : what were the economic and political compulsions that led the government to adopt a new strategy for economic development ? Closely following this comes the next question : what has been the nature of political configuration at the regional level which could be described as the factor responsible for bringing about such changes both at the structural and the functional levels ?

These two questions are , in a sense interrelated and can be fitted into, what is called the ‘Power Theory’ where political and economic forces interact with each other. One may recall the essence of the model developed by the Father of Indian Planning , P. C. Mahalanobis which can be stated as :

"In the initial stage of development, the larger the percentage [of] investment on consumer goods industries, the larger will be the income generated. But there is a critical range of time and as soon as this is passed, the larger the investment in investment goods industries the larger will be the income generated. Hence, it would be desirable to invest relatively more on the consumer goods industries: provided we are interested in the immediate future. If, on the other hand, we are interested in the more distant future, relatively larger investment on investment goods industries would give distinctly better result."⁽⁵⁾

It suggested that the model would consider 3 types of industrial productions—a) the basic goods, b) factory consumer goods, c) house-hold goods. In such a scheme more emphasis was placed on manufacturing sector which was intended to serve on a national scale. In fact, more emphasis was placed on industrialization and the agricultural sector did not receive adequate attention from the policy planner.

The history of subsequent economic developments show that the developmental model during Nehru's regime could not provide any answer to the emerging questions relating to the regional

autonomy and self-sufficiency. The bias towards public sector appeared to the policy planners to be a correct answer to the pressing questions. This was criticized in the scholarly statement which categorically stated:

“How to explain the Government of India adopting a strategy which turned out to be one for building State Capitalism in the name of Socialism but which was initially opposed by the bourgeoisie itself? This is one more instance in history of leaders of a ruling class being much more farsighted than individual members of the same class. This distance between the understanding of ruling class interests as perceived by ordinary individual members of the class and their representatives in the state can be so big that the former may actually oppose the actions of the state until they come to understand the real motive behind the state policies..... Nehru and his closest cabinet colleagues were alone crystal clear about what was happening –they alone did not suffer from any delusions.”⁽⁶⁾

It is interesting to note that the Communist Party of India in 1977 supported the important features of the plan –frame since it put emphasis on the basic industries which in their opinion, might

reduce the dependence of India on foreign countries. It was clearly stated when the party observed :

“The proposals to build basic industries , if implemented , would reduce the dependence of India on foreign countries in respect of capital goods, strengthen the relative position of industry inside India and strengthen our economic position and national independence. The party, therefore, supports these proposals and also the proposal that these industries should be mainly developed in the public sector. It supports the proposal that the demand for consumer goods should be met, as far as possible, by better utilization of the existing capacity and by development of small-scale and cottage industries so that jobs are provided for an increasing number of people and maximum possible resources are available for the development of basic industries . The party not only supports these proposals but will expose and combat those who want them to be modified in a reactionary direction.”⁽⁷⁾

Inspite of the opposition from the capitalist class, Nehru’s commitment to socialism enabled him to go forward with socialist ideas where he wanted to put emphasis on equal distribution of resources through out the country. It may be recalled that in 1957

Nehru himself declared:

“The Picture I have in mind is definitely and absolutely a Socialistic Picture of society .I am not using the word in a dogmatic sense at all. I mean largely that the means of production should be socially owned and controlled for the benefit of society as a whole. There is plenty of room for private enterprise there, providing the main aim is kept clear. ”⁽⁸⁾

In the same way the Second Five Year Plan declared :

“The basic criterion for determining the lines of advance must not be private profit but social gain..... The public sector has to expand rapidly.....it has to play the dominant role.....the public sector must grow not only absolutely but also relatively to the private sector.”

The same process continued till the stage arrived for liberalization in the context of globalization. The Nehruvian model of development, according priority to public sector has been replaced by a policy of liberalization, free market economy and deregulation where the state has been given a very marginal role to play. Since 1991 with the announcement of new economic policy, there have

been both qualitative and quantitative changes in the policy and performances of the government under democratic coalitions. It has been found that the practice of coalition at the center has been under the constant changes of government policy because a coalition government exists on the support of the coalition partners either from outside or from within the government. That is why it is held that coalition experience must be very temporary in nature. Moreover, the coalition government, in most cases, can not pursue a very consistent and uniform social, political and economic issues for a longer period. That is why, Lawrence Lowell observed long back that,..... "except under very peculiar circumstances, coalition ministers are short-lived compared with homogenous ones."⁽⁹⁾

This position has been analyzed by the scholars with the help of the theory known as "prisoners dilemma" in which case the coalition partners see the merit of cooperation and demerits of opposition.

The Indian experience with coalition governments has brought about many changes both at the structural as well as operational planes. During the 1996 elections, there appeared an anti-Congress

wave and a move for rejection of the Congress Party. Although in the 1996 elections the Congress could capture 162 seats out of 546 in the Parliament. In the elections of 1996, the United Front Coalitions consisting of major regional parties and the Left Front assumed office on June 1, 1996. The basic thrust of this attempt was to ensure secularism and socialism among the 13 constituent Groups of the United Front Coalition, the key political parties were : The Janata Dal [46 seats]; the C.P.I.(M) [32 seats]; the Tamil MaanilaCongress [20 seats]; the D.M.K [17 seats]; the Samajwadi Party [17 seats]; the Telugu Desam Party [16 seats] and the Communist Party of India [13 seats]. However, the C.P.I.(M) remained outside the government but continued to offer support from outside.

An analysis of the United Front will show that it was primarily a centre-left coalition which was formed on the basis of two principles : Secularism and anti-Congressism . The government tried to negate the economic policies adopted during 1950s , 1960s and 1970s. Moreover , efforts were directed toward creating a condition for rejecting the policies of the B.J.P.

The formation of the United Front Coalition was considered to be

an attempt against Congress Party and the rejection of the economic policy during Congress regime. It was clearly stated by the C.P.I.(M) that no privatization will be allowed and the state would have to play more proactive role in the development process.

The coalition partners agreed to adopt ‘A Common Approach to Major Policy Matters and a Minimum Programme’. The Common Minimum Programme that was adopted tried to provide direction to the Government Policy.

It is important to note that the United Front acknowledged the role of the corporate sector in creating ‘a strong and modern India’ with a view to enabling her to face global competition. It fixed a target of 7% annual growth rate in GDP and 12% annual growth rate in industry. At the same time the United Front acknowledged the importance of public sector and suggested policy’s for its strength and competitiveness.

The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) also declared the policy of ‘growth with social justice’ with regard to employment, public distribution system and education. It also admitted the fact that the Coalition Partners which were mostly state-based parties, should

be given adequate space for forwarding their demands. The CMP received support from all quarters. Even the media analyzed the points of strength and weakness of this declaration . The Times Of India in its 6th June 1996 edition held the view that the CMP “reads a lot like manifestos of the two major political formations, the Congress Party and the Bharatiyo Janata Party.....It is reassuring to see the vast common ground between all the national and regional parties on issues of central concern to the people of India .”⁽¹⁰⁾

The Economic Times of June 6 , 1996 in its editorial under the title, “Good Script , Act on It” observed : “ The United Front has just supplied Dr. Manmohan Singh’s answer to those who raised skeptical eyebrows at his assertion of broad national consensus on economic reform continuity is the hallmark of the United Front Government’s economic policy as enumerated in the Fronts Common Minimum programme.”⁽¹¹⁾

VII

Phenomenal changes have taken place in the course of federal

dynamics over the years. The culmination of this process can be seen in the Tenth General Elections when the regional/local political parties found adequate space in the game of national power-sharing. The local players were seen very much eager to play key role in national politics. This was quite visible from the electoral success of different regional parties is indicative of this situation. It can be understood in the context of the following observation when the scholar holds :

“In the 10th General Election it was for the first time forcefully asserted that regional Parties did not simply mean state Politics; that these parties were not only state-level players but were seeking a share in central power in order to renegotiate their Position within the nation. In the Eleventh General Election in 1996, In performance of regional Parties was striking. In Assam the AGP and other smaller groups polled 39.3% of the vote; in Andhra Pardesh the TDP (Naidu), the TDP (Parvathi), and others polled 49.4%; in Bihar the combined vote of the Samata Party. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, and others was 37.6% apart from the 25.7% for the Janata Dal, which is now no more than a regional Party. In Haryana the vote won by regional Parties was a hopping

53%. In Maharashtra the Shiv Sena and others polled 25.8%; in Punjab the two Akali Dal and the other groups got 41.5%; in Tamil Nadu the Combined vote of the DMK, the ADMK, the breakaway MDMK, the PMK, and the Metamorphosed Congress breakaway came to well over 60% and if we include other smaller groups the total was a phenomenal 71.9%. In Uttar Pradesh the combined vote of the JD, the SP, the BSP, and others was 53.9%. In the event, many of these parties became coalition parties in he subsequently formed United Front Government that is now in Power at the Centre.”⁽¹²⁾

That the states in India in this changed political environment began to assume a character almost identical with the Pan-Indian perspective, has been highlighted in the following observation when the author has very correctly observed :

“It has been said that the entire post, independence period can be read on the one hand as a constantly threatened and fragile attempt to reinvest in a Pan Indian identity on behalf of he state and the various all-India Political Parties, including the Left Parties and the Communists. On the other side, Pan-Indian identity was being constantly renegotiated through the ‘locality’. The local space was

never well-defined, either geographically or socially, or even culturally. Regionalisation in a Problematic Category when used in the Indian Political Context, for it immediately brings to mind an entity or set of entities distinct from the national and usually well-defined in geographical and linguistic cultural terms. I use the term locality to distinguish it not just from the national space but also from the regional in the above sense. It is meant to connote location of specific social groups almost any of the grids of identity linguistic, religious, caste, ethnic - the amchal (as district from the state, e.g. Bundelkhand, Bhojpur, Uttarakhand, Rohilkhand). It is quite clear that if we examine the development of this period, those identities were fluid and fuzzy, and therefore could potentially take on any shape.”⁽¹³⁾

Going back to the days of freedom struggle movement, it had been noticed by scholars that the mediating role of local identities was very much present there, of course, with a different objective in view:

“It can be argued that such local identity has always mediated the sense of “being Indian”, and that since the days of the national movement, the Swaraj of the Indian identity was the precondition

of the Swaraj of so many local identities. What is happening now is not that the nation is distingratering but that in the discursive shift that has taken place, it is that relationship that is being reversed: the Swaraj of the local is a Precondition for the “real” Indian Swaraj.⁽¹⁴⁾

It appears to be very difficult to characterize the nature of Indian politics in one single statement. That is why a better way to understand it is to study its course of development in different clearly separate phases. The following observation given by Sudipto Kaviraj deals with this aspect in greater details. :

“It is, therefore, necessary that we reconceptualize Indian Politics in fundamentally different ways. Indian Politics has been understood so far in terms of “Who governs and “how is order maintained.” Various concepts such as the congress system, coalition era, and that Post-Congress polity focus only on one aspect of the situation. What happens, however, if we shift our page from the questions of order and governance to those of mass movements and popular protest ? What sort of a picture do we get of the Indian Polity ?”⁽¹⁵⁾

A federal Governance in India has been viewed phase-wise by many scholars, Sudipto Kaviraj, for instance, has made clear decision of this Process highlighting the distinctive features of each Phase, In his elaboration, he has noted the interaction between Political process and the Political environment, keeps into consideration the forces and factors that have determined the course of development.

The period upto 1979-80 can be further subdivided into two phases. The first was when attempts were being made to settle disputes over issues like the linguistics reorganization of states, mainly in institutional forms. There were movements for the creation of states like the Andhra Mahasabha, the Samyukta Maharashtra, and the maha Gujarat movements. By and large, the fact that many leaders of the nationalist movement generation were still at the helm of affairs provided the legitimacy that was required for an “orderly” settlement of disputes. This period could actually be said to have began in 1952 rather than 1947 since, as Sudipto Kaviraj suggests, the early years were ones of realignment and the metamorphosis of the Congress.⁽¹⁶⁾

Aditya Nigam has elaborated this point by referring to the

problematic areas in explaining the distinctiveness of this analysis:

"In any case, it is important to remember that when we are defining the overarching tendencies, they were not the only ones present, even during this period. There were also the problematic areas, such as the entire Northeast and Kashmir, that defined any solution within the given institutional frameworks. The second phase, beginning around 1966 and going on to late 1970's, was a period that saw the rise of militant, radical protests: famines and widespread food riots, movements against price increases and corruption, the Gujarat and Bihar movements, the Naxalite movement, and the railway strike of 1974. The rise of left-wing movements and governments was symptomatic of these times, which continued for a brief period after the emergency (1975-77). While these movements were radical in the ideological sense and in the forms of protest they adopted. Often going outside the available institutional forms of redress, they continued to operate within the inherited consensus. They sought redress within the form of nation-state without even remotely challenging the idea of the 'Indian nation', as if it were immutable"⁽¹⁷⁾

By following Aditya Nigam it can be said that the 1979-80 and

1989 period sees the first split in the secular nationalist discourse that grew out of the freedom struggle. It was the first time when the overarching Indian identity gives birth to various ods and ends identities. Aditya Nigam suggested that there are “four major strands which can be discerned in this period ⁽¹⁸⁾:

- 1) Subnational assertions of identity and movements for autonomy, ranging from Punjab and Assam to Jharkhand, Gorkhaland, and Uttarakhand. It is this situation that also opened the political space for the assertion of the Hindu right; indeed, many of these movements and assertions of identity took on anti-democratic and sectarian forms.
- 2) Struggles around issues of gender oppression, with questions like dowry, rape/ custodial rape, and sati occupying centre-stage. These struggles, even though they remained self-consciously within the secular- nationalist framework, took on a different character in practice. The fact that they were privileging the identity of the woman over all other identities, in effect brought all other institutions from the family to the state into question. To that extent, these struggles belong to this moment of rupture

of the secular-nationalist discourse.

- 3) Ecological movements centering largely on the displacement of people by large dams and mega-development projects, as well as on people's access to natural resources. Such movements also focused on questions of tribal and local cultural identity and its erasure by the homogenizing processes of development. Therefore, they emphasized local sovereignty. Here, too, it is necessary to keep in mind that within these movements there also were strands that preferred to remain within the consensus, demanding only the rehabilitation of the displaced.
- 4) Issues of caste oppression starting to come to the fore in a major way in many northern states.”

In 1990, three important events have characterized the political scenario of India-

- a) The anti-Mandal Commission agitation.
- b) The dramatic initiation of the structural adjustment programmes from July 1991 onwards.

c) The demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 6, 1992.

Following Aditya Nigam it can be said that these three features “mark a discursive rapture along a common grid symbolically overturning the discourse on privilege and oppression. The anti-Mandal agitation transforms the upper-caste elite into the “victim” and the “oppressed”, just as structural adjustment transforms the organized worker into a privileged being and the investor/entrepreneur/ capitalist into a harassed “victim of socialist tyranny”. The third event transforms the majority Hindu community into the ‘besieged victim’, outflanked on all sides by the Muslim minority-turned-oppressor. This could be termed the second moment of rupture; if the first ruptured the secular-nationalist discourse ‘from below’, the second could be said to have done so ‘from above’. The socialist welfare state becomes the target of criticism- through policies of affirmative action, an interventionist economic role, and a pseudo-secularist appeasement of minorities- for having created new privileged classes/groups.⁽¹⁹⁾

The causes behind the break-down of the ‘Congress System’ has been detected and twin reasons have been identified : centralization

and de-institutionalization. The result of this breakdown has been tremendous and exerted a far reaching influence in the federal governance in India. The decline of Congress System began in the late 1960s and it was the 1980s which witnessed the breakdown of the Congress party both at the centre and in the states. As Sudha Pai observed that ‘under Indira Gandhi there had been a gradual erosion of inner-party democracy, increasing use of centralizing institutional devices, and interference in the working of state governments, leading to loss of autonomy and even atrophy of the party organization in the states.⁽²⁰⁾ Rajiv Gandhi, during his prime ministership, failed to reverse these trends and revitalize party structures, leading to a total shift from a ‘mediatory’ to a ‘plebiscitary’ model in which the leader overshadowed the party, weakening it.⁽²¹⁾

In spite of the fact the Congress regained its dominance in 1980 elections but there was difference between pre-1980 position and post-1980 positions both from the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Sudha Pai described that “Although the Congress Party achieved massive victories in the 1980 and 1984 parliamentary elections, this did not restore its structure of

dominance that had been undermined by its defeat in the 1977 elections by the Janata Party. And its dominance was only ‘partially restored’ in its traditional bastion of the Nehru era, the six northern states in the Hindi heartland. As a result the party leadership began a southern strategy, entering into an electoral alliance with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, which enabled it to win 25 parliamentary seats in 1984. In Kerala the Congress won 13 of the state’s 20 seats, improving its performance over 1980 when it won only 5 seats, while in eastern India it improves its position due to its gains in Orissa where it won 20 of 21 seats. However, in the upper South, regional parties- the Telugu Desam and the Janata party.....The all-India opposition parties now had space to build regional bases in states where Congress support began to decline rapidly.”⁽²²⁾

The roots of regionalization can be traced in the socio-cultural and historical settings of Indian polity. There were and still are “poly-centre” situations where local authority comes into conflict with national authority and the federal system is largely a combination of a number of power-centres either at the regional and national levels. Following Sudha Pai it can be stated that

‘The party system since 1947 has simultaneously undergone a process of broadening and regionalization, that is, a steady movement away from a single centre toward multiple poles in the states. The emerging region-based multi-party system as reflected in the results of the 1996 Lok Sabha elections is largely an outcome of this process. This is a logical development in a federal society with diverse cultural and linguistic regions, and is also part of the wider process of democratization since independence. The seeds of this development were present in the immediate post-independence period because the process of regionalisation began in the colonial era as a product of the historical-cum-geographical configurations of the subcontinent—the way in which nationalism arose and the modern nation-state was formed here, and consequently, the organizational structure and manner of working of the Indian National Congress.’⁽²³⁾

In this respect, a brief reference has been made to the circumstances leading to the birth of the Indian National Congress. The historical setting and compulsions of that time can be held instrumental in creating an all-India forum to ventilate the grievances of the people of India. Sudha Pai further developed her view as “The reason for

the development of the Congress into an all-India party, dominant both at the centre and in a number of states, lie in the peculiar circumstances under which it was formed . Due to the presence of the imperial power, the first aim of all nationalists was to attain independence, leaving all other social and economic problems to be solved later. Hence, the Congress developed into a broad movement that enabled it to be identified with the Indian state after independence, while opposition parties were unable to claim such a legacy and could not challenge it. But with the establishment of a democratic polity, the process of regionalisation began to operate actively; the linguistic reorganization of states in 1956 and later the redrawing of some state borders brought territorial boundaries into close alignment with their sociocultural coordinates.⁽²⁴⁾

In this respect, D.B.Forrester argued that the consequence was an “indigenization and democratization of provincial politics which gave a strong impetus to the development of political cultures, enhancing the political significance of caste and educated regional elites”⁽²⁵⁾.

The reasons why other opposition parties such as Jana Sangha,

Socialist, Swatantra and Marxist failed to develop an all- India base in all major regions due to the great diversity among the regions. The nature of one- party dominance consequent on the emergence of the Congress Party and its impact on the over-all party-configuration has been well explained in these following observation :

Rajni Kothari observes that ‘in the post independence period, the concept of one-party dominance was formulated to describe the workings of the Congress Party.⁽²⁶⁾ Following the same way Pradeep Chibber and J.R. Petrocik have raised the question ‘whether there has ever existed anything that can be called a central party system. First the Congress Party in the post-independence period has been a coalition of state units held together by the central leadership, thereby reflecting the federal society in which it is situated.⁽²⁷⁾ In the same way Sudha Pai observes that “the parliamentary elections have represented simply a sum total of the distinctive results in each of the states, the common feature being the existence of the Congress as the largest or second largest party in every state. The party has always operated through local networks of social workers and entrepreneurs, and as a result the regional base of the

Congress has shifted to reflect changing configurations within the states. Second, beneath the apparently strong position of the Congress, distinct state party systems have developed in all the states since independence. Third, there has been not one but many distinct Congress 'parties' at different points in time : the Congress party of the Nehruvian era, the party under Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, and so on, each with its own system of predominance, ideology, organizational structure, and membership.

In fact, 'structural consolidation' of a one-party dominant system remained incomplete, which explains the rapid electoral decline of such a large and old party. Thus the notion of a stable, continuous, and unchanging one-party system is incorrect".⁽²⁸⁾

The rapid process of regionalization in the political process of India can be explained with reference to the post-1980 developments which witnessed two important currents of political dynamics : rapid increase in politicization and democratic consciousness in the states. A. Ghosh and R. Chakraborty in their edited book and Prabhat Datta in his writing argued that regional disparities and political mobilization on the basis of territorial

identities also generated fresh demands for decentralization and the formation of separate states by non-congress parties in power in many states.⁽²⁹⁾

The 1996 elections and its aftermath can be cited as the culmination of the process already visible in the political dynamics of the country. A new set of regionalized multi-party system emerged thereby replacing the old multy-party system at the national basis. In her writing Sudha Pai has described the reason for the emerging party system as ‘the result of the 1996 Lok Sabha elections point to the emergence of a new regionalized multy-party system in the Indian polity. Although the contours of this new system are not yet clear, some of its features can be identified- a) there has been a shift from a hegemonic to a competitive multi-party system at the national level consisting of the three all- India partiesb).In India today, the all-India parties are limited to specific regions and are competing for power at the centrec)The multi-party system at the national level is moving toward ‘federalization’, a process visible in the 1989,1991, and particularly the 1996 Lok Sabha elections.⁽³⁰⁾

The courses of political developments in India suggest that during the dominant position of the Congress Party, there has been sharp decline in the territorial pluralism working with the party system at the state level. It is generally believed that the factors of charismatic leadership of Nehru and Indira Gandhi, transformed the nature of the working of the Congress Party into a highly personalized and centralized affair. L. Neumann Franz argued that “the Congress party which was monolithic lacking democratization and dominated by Indira Gandhi, subsequently baptized in her own name and the disarrayed and truncated opposition created a political environment in which the charismatic personality structure of Indira Gandhi staged a dramatic role for the manifestation of a unitary centre.⁽³¹⁾

As Duchacek described, ‘With the party, whatever its members and supporters commitment to federalism or Unitarianism, there may emerge a charismatic leader of exceptional talent and skill whose personal bias against, or in favour of, a territorial dispersion of power may give a new orientation to the party and to the political system.⁽³²⁾

With the decline of the monolithic nature of the Congress Party, there had been rise and growth of regional parties with assertions of regional demands thereby changing the very nature and functioning of the federal process in India. During 80s, in Indira Gandhi's reign Chief Ministers of non-congress states and opposition leaders formed coalition conclaves at various places like Kolkata, Bangalore and New Delhi not only demonstrating centre's negligence of state's development programmes and eroding of states autonomy but insisting upon a need to review the centre-state relationship.(33) The example of such kind of Council for centre-state relations for ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources is Council for the Southern Region headed by Chief Ministers like Ramkrishna Hegde of Janata Party in Karnataka, M.G. Ramchandran of AIADMK IN Tamil Nadu, N.T. Rama Rao of Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh. (34)

The nature and impact of coalition politics in India can better be understood with reference to electoral politics. In a democratic process, electoral politics not only signify the percentage of people participating in the voting process, it also indicates the support

base of each of the political parties. After all, the primary task of a political party participating in the election process is to gain maximum number of seats. In a situation where individual political parties can enlist support from the electorate on their own strength, the picture becomes clear. But in a coalition politics where a combination of political parties seeks to gain maximum supports, the picture becomes rather hazy and the process of politics becomes fluid. Even within this structure, when pre-election coalitions are made, it is easy to understand the nature and quantum of support that a particular group can achieve. But the calculation becomes complicated when post-election coalitions are made. In such a situation, the electoral arithmetic follows a very difficult path because the constituent parties in such a coalition seeks to take advantage of the fluid political situation.

The following table dealing with all- India Lok Sabha results, 2004 will illustrate this point, because in this election, pre-electoral alliances were made and the result was very clear both in terms of alliance making and seat capturing.

All- India Lok Sabha Results 2004

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Change from 1999	Vote (Per cent)	Change from 1999
Congress allies	535	222	69	36.53	-0.39
Congress	414	145	31	26.44	-1.85
TRS	6	5	5	0.60	0.60
IND (Congress)	6	1	1	0.16	0.16
RJD	28	24	17	2.39	-0.38
LJNS	11	4	4	0.66	0.66
NCP	22	9	2	1.78	-0.36
JMM	7	4	4	0.41	0.20
PDP	3	1	1	0.07	0.07
MUL	2	1	-1	0.19	-0.03
KCM	1	0	0	0.05	-0.04
JDS	1	0	-1	0.05	-0.03
RPI	2	0	0	0.04	-0.09
RPI(A)	1	1	0	0.09	-0.04
PRBP	1	0	0	0.06	0.06
DMK	16	16	4	1.81	0.08
MDMK	4	4	0	0.43	-0.01
PMK	6	6	1	0.56	-0.10
PDS	2	0	0	0.02	0.02
AC	1	0	0	0.62	0.60

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Change from 1999	Vote (Per cent)	Change from 1999
NDA	543	189	-89	35.88	-2.39
BJP	364	138	-44	22.16	-1.59
TDP	33	5	-24	3.04	-0.61
JD(U)	33	8	-13	1.94	-0.99
IND(BJP)	1	1	1	0.18	0.18
IFDP	1	1	1	0.07	0.07
SHS	22	12	-3	1.77	0.24
BJD	12	11	1	1.30	0.10
SAD	10	8	6	0.90	0.21
AIADMK	33	0	-10	2.19	0.27
TRMC	31	2	-6	2.06	-0.51
MNF	1	1	1	0.05	0.05
SDF	1	1	0	0.04	0.01
NPF	1	1	1	0.18	0.18
 LEFT	 112	 61	 18	 8.01	 0.13
CPI	33	9	5	1.32	-0.16
CPI(M)	69	43	10	5.66	0.26
JDS (Left)	1	1	1	0.09	0.09
KEC	1	1	0	0.09	-0.01
IND (Left)	1	1	1	0.08	-0.07

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Change from 1999	Vote (Per cent)	Change from 1999
RSP	4	3	0	0.43	0.01
FBL	3	3	1	0.35	0.01
BSP	435	19	5	5.33	1.16
SP +	247	39	11	4.93	0.79
SP	237	36	10	4.31	0.55
RLD	10	3	1	0.61	0.24
OTHERS	3563	13	-14	9.32	0.69

NET EFFECT OF CHANGE IN ALLIANCES

	Congress Alliance		National Democratic Alliance	
	(UPA)		Alliance	
	Seats	Vote (Per Cent)	Seats	Vote (Per Cent)
New allies added in 2004	49	6.32	4	2.53
Alliances of 1999 dropped	3	2.80	31	3.96
Net Gain/Loss (+/-)	+46	3.52	-27	-1.43

Notes : *New allies of the Congress are : NCP, TRS, DMK, MDMK, PMK, LJNP, PDP and JMM*

Old Congress allies now dropped include : RLD and AIADMK.

New allies of the NDA are AIADMK, SDF, MNF, IFDP and NPF

Old NDA allies now dropped include : DMK, MDMK, PMK, INLD, and LJNP.*

**LJNP (Lok Janshakti Party) was formed after the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections and in 1999 it was a party of the JD (U) [Janata Dal (United)].*

Source : CSDS Data tables.

Thus it may be concluded that the 2004 elections show the emergence of Congress-led alliance as the coalition having greatest number of seats. It should be mentioned that the Congress alliance (UPA) gets support of the Left Parties who have not joined the government and the alliance and its supporters work on the basis of Common Minimum Programme.

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