

Essay on The Coalition Government

"For any coalition, the hidden enemies within the Government are more unpredictable than the outsiders. The trouble started even before the ship was to set sail and the captain knew well that a rough voyage and hidden icebergs are ahead of him".

It appears that the chapter of a single-party rule in India has become a matter of the past. The most significant development in the Indian political scene since 1996, has been the emergence of the coalition era in Indian Politics. Till 1989, the stable Government at the center under the leadership of Smt. Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi did well. In 1989, the country was amidst instability as Rajeev Gandhi lost power and Mr. V.P Singh took over as the next Prime Minister of Minority Government. Mr. V.P Singh had to step down as BJP withdrew its support. Mr. Chandra Shekhar assumed power and formed Government with Congress support from outside. But it was a matter of four months that Congress-I also withdrew its support and the President announced fresh polls. Congress came back and stayed in Power from 1991 to 1996. In 1996 the Congress was voted out of power and the United front which mustered the support of 14 parties formed a unique Coalition Government with Congress-I once again decided to support from outside. Again the coalition failed an election for the 13th Lok Sabha held and the Coalition Government under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee took the reign of the country. The 14th Lok Sabha is also a coalition government under the Prime Ministership of Dr. Man Mohan Singh, with a number of partners supporting either from outside or inside the government, took oath on 22nd May 2004 with 68 ministers.

Many a time, coalition partners resort to political blackmail to further their personal political interests, taking advantage of the

fragility of the Coalition Government, AIADMK leader Mrs. Jayalalita's lists of demands to Mr. Vajpayee kept the coalition government to ransom and finally led to an eventful fall of the BJP coalition. How much the elections cost to this poor country? By the time the elections were held for the 13th Lok Sabha, the cost spiraled to Rs. 900 crores.

Often the instabilities prevail, when the Coalition Governments are formed on the basis of negative reasons, for example, the United Front was conceived with the sole objective of preventing the BJP from forming the Government, the BJP-BSP Alliance in U.P was formed to keep the Mulayam Singh Yadav away from the power, the Rashtriya Janta Party – Congress Combine in Gujrat had the sole objective to keep the BJP out of power. The 14th Lok Sabha again a Coalition Govt. named United Progressive Front has but one aim to keep the BJP out of power. Having a coalition with such an objective and motive, the government has nothing positive to offer. Most of these alliances were post-poll pacts without any ideological compatibility and once power was gained the Intra as well as inter-party differences over the key issues made the functioning of the government very difficult.

The present 14th Lok Sabha is also a Coalition Government. Under the cool and capable leadership of Mr. Manmohan Singh, the Government has just assumed office. Some instances of putting unreasonable demands of coalition partner came at the beginning itself but the oath was taken on 22nd May 2004. A lot of wisdom, experience, tact, patience, and compromise skills will be necessary to keep its ship sailing amidst all hazards, taking care of every passenger aboard until it reaches the destination of five years.

After initial hiccups, coalitions are now less brittle than before and this is bringing in a greater amount of political divergence in the process of governance. Several instances have revealed in the

past that a multipolar political system (a Coalition Government) has its own system of 'Checks and Balances' and there is no apparent logic to yearn desperately for a return to a bipolar polity.

There is no point in blaming the people or the political system for returning a hung or fractured verdict that has resulted in houses not lasting their full terms. The coalition has some weaknesses or demerits like blackmailing by coalition partners, the withdrawal of support on trifling matters of self-interest, without caring for the loss suffered by the nation. The Prime Minister is kept busy in courting the coalition partners, having no time for development.

The present Government may find some solace because of the ninety-seventh amendment to the Constitution which disqualifies all elected legislators who violate party whip irrespective of the size of defecting faction. The earlier provision recognized a split of one-third of the membership as a valid defection, now this provision has been repealed. The scourge of defection has literally scarred the face of Indian democracy, the most delightful outcome has seen to negate the verdict of the people, as defecting legislators scamper across parties with abandon in search of greener pastures, ignoring the party symbol on which they were elected. It is hoped that this amendment will stop the prevailing sordid practice of defections by the political leaders.

Many suggestions were put forward to help the country out of the problem of withdrawing support on trifling issues or blackmailing to grind their own axes by the coalition partners. One suggestion was to switch over to the Presidential system, another was derecognition by the Election Commissioner of political Parties getting less than 10 percent of votes in the elections. This may definitely check the proliferation of small, even one person parties. Another suggestion was that only poll-election combine be recognized and even if such

combine is short of a majority, it should be given chance to govern, even if other post-poll combines manage to muster a greater numerical strength. The best solution to avoid frequent elections would however be that we incorporate a clause from the German Constitution, though of course with an all-party consensus, that whenever a no-confidence vote is passed against an incumbent Prime Minister. The house in that very sitting will have to elect a new P.M failing which, the defeated P.M would continue in office. This would obviate the need for frequent elections which our country can ill afford whatever remedial action be taken should be after thorough deliberations and with the consensus of all parties, keeping in view the interest-only of our beloved nation.