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Coalition politics and the transformation of India's parliamentary system – A study

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Abstract
Coalition politics have had a major impact on the parliamentary system in India. Multi-party competition began to increase after the late 1980s, single-party rule decreased, regional political parties gained more importance and coalition politics became much more significant. This has led to changes in the way politicians negotiate and share power within a coalition, building consensus between parties. Regional political parties have gained more of a presence in the national political environment. This has resulted in the changing of the parliamentary system in India. Coalition governments have impacted how governments are formed, how the executive and legislature interact, debates within parliament, policy making, federal relations and political accountability. The National Front government, United Front government, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government and United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government have illustrated the changing nature of coalition governments. Coalition governments have increased representation within politics but have also created problems with political instability, differing ideologies, clashing party interests, disagreement with party leadership and managing coalition partners. With the return of coalition based parliamentary government at the Union level following the 2024 general election it shows that regional parties and coalitions are still important within the political arena. Overall, coalition politics has become an important part of the evolution of the parliamentary system in India.

Keywords: Coalition politics, parliamentary system, Indian Democracy, coalition government, regional parties, federalism, political alliances, democratic governance

Introduction

In India's parliamentary democratic system, the legislative majority gives rise to executive authority. In theory, a political party can create a government without outside assistance if it is able to independently secure a parliamentary majority. But idealistic institutional aspirations are rarely the basis for democratic politics. Election results often result in split mandates, making it impossible for any one political party to reach the majority requirement. Coalition politics appears as a governance strategy in such circumstances. A coalition government is one in which many political parties work together to establish and maintain executive power. These kinds of governments typically emerge when no single party has enough parliamentary power on its own. Therefore, coalition politics converts competitiveness into negotiated governance.

The parliamentary system provides an institutional framework that allows elected officials to take part in policy discussions, government formation, lawmaking, and democratic accountability. The Indian National Congress dominated national politics in the early decades following independence and was crucial to the establishment of both federal and state governments. However, as regional political parties emerged, opposition politics grew, electoral rivalry increased, and the party system became more fragmented, the character of Indian parliamentary democracy steadily changed. A significant turning point in the evolution of coalition politics was the late 1960s political developments, especially the establishment of non-Congress governments in a number of states. The long-standing pattern of one-party dominance was called into question by these developments, which also made it possible for several parties to form political alliances.

A pivotal moment in Indian national politics was the general election of 1989. A new era of coalition-based political arrangements at the national level was brought about with the fall of Congress control and the establishment of the National Front administration under V. P. Singh. From this, several methods of coalition building, political negotiation, and legislative governance were displayed by the United Front administrations, the National Democratic Alliance, and the United Progressive Alliance. By altering the relationship between political parties, Parliament, and the executive, coalition politics has completely changed the Indian legislative system. Negotiations between political parties representing various ideological stances, local interests, and socioeconomic groups became more and more necessary during the creation of governments. As a result, consultation, accommodation, and compromise became increasingly important in political decision-making.

Coalition Politics in India: Historical Evolution and Political Development

The developing character of the party system, regional political ambitions, electoral competition, and the growing diversity of political representation all contributed to the emergence of coalition politics in India. Coalition arrangements were present in Indian politics before to the 1980s, but as Congress's hegemony waned and a competitive multi-party system emerged, their importance increased. A political arrangement known as coalition politics occurs when two or more political parties unite to establish a government or give parliamentary support to a government. When no one political party gains enough legislative power to form a government on its own, such agreements typically take place. Political negotiations, shared programs, power-sharing agreements, and

collaboration amongst member parties are necessary for coalition governments. Coalition politics evolved in India throughout the course of several historical eras, reflecting shifts in party rivalry, electoral behavior, and the interaction between national and regional political forces.

Early Development of Coalition Politics in India

The Indian National Congress dominated the initial phases of Indian parliamentary democracy. The Congress party continued to hold a dominant position in the country's political system and received significant election support. But this dominance was gradually undermined by the political changes of the 1960s. In Indian politics, the general elections of 1967 were a significant turning point. Through the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal arrangements, non-Congress political parties established coalition governments when Congress lost control in a number of states. Parties with disparate ideologies were brought together by these regimes, mostly because they opposed Congress's hegemony.

The rise of coalition administrations in several states showed how crucial political alliances are becoming and how competitive Indian democracy is becoming. Additionally, it gave regional political parties a chance to influence state-level policymaking and take part in government formation. Another significant attempt in non-Congress political unity at the national level was the Janata Party government, which was established in 1977 after the Emergency. Throughout its life, the Janata Party brought together a variety of political organizations and illustrated the potential and challenges of political consolidation, although not being a traditional coalition of distinct parliamentary parties.

Emergence of Coalition Governments at the National Level

India's legislative politics saw an important transformation with the general election of 1989. With the backing of several political parties, V. P. Singh's National Front government overthrew the established pattern of Congress domination. The National Front administration reflected the growing significance of opposition coalitions and regional parties in the creation of national governments. However, its instability was exacerbated by disagreements among the political organizations that supported it as well as the withdrawal of political backing. Several coalition government experiments were place between 1989 and 1998. The governments of the United Front, headed by I. K. Gujral and H. D. Deve Gowda, further illustrated the significance of external parliamentary backing and political discussions. Coalition politics became a prominent aspect of India's parliamentary system as a result of these events. They also showed that the capacity of political leaders to keep alliance partners cooperating was just as important to coalition governments' survival as parliamentary strength.

National Democratic Alliance and the Institutionalisation of Coalition Politics

An essential pivotal period in the evolution of coalition politics in India was the creation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. National and regional political groups with disparate ideologies and local interests came together under the NDA. Although the 1998 government was unable to serve out its entire term, the NDA government that followed in 1999 served for five years. This experience showed that political coordination, negotiated agreements, and a shared agenda might help coalition administrations preserve legislative stability. Regional political parties now play a more significant role in national government thanks to the NDA experience. While alliance management became a key component of executive leadership, parties representing various states became significant participants in national-level decision-making.

United Progressive Alliance and Coalition Governance

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Indian National Congress, was established as a consequence of the 2004 general election. While the Left parties initially offered external support, a number of regional and national political parties backed the UPA government. The Common Minimum Program was implemented by the UPA government as a vital tool for coalition collaboration. It allowed accommodate various ideological stances and gave participating parties a similar political framework. The UPA government held power for two consecutive legislative terms, from 2004 until 2014. Its experience proved the value of political accommodation, coalition consultation, and negotiated policymaking. However, the shortcomings of coalition governance were also exposed by arguments between coalition partners, disagreements over economic strategies, and disagreements over significant policy decisions.

Parliamentary System in India: Constitutional Framework and Political Functioning

According to the British Westminster model, India established a parliamentary form of government that was customized to the political, social, and constitutional circumstances of the nation. The parliamentary system creates a partnership between the legislative and executive branches that keeps the government answerable to the people's elected representatives. The institutional framework for parliamentary government is provided by the Indian Constitution. The Prime Minister leads the Council of Ministers and has political authority over the government, while the President is the constitutional head of the Union administration. A Council of Ministers, led by the Prime Minister, is established by Article 74 to support and counsel the President. Important rules pertaining to the tenure of the Council of Ministers, collective accountability, and ministerial appointments are established in Article 75. The House of the People will hold the Council of Ministers collectively accountable, according to Article 75(3). One of the cornerstones of India's legislative system is represented by this clause.

Collective Responsibility of the Council of Ministers

One of the main tenets of parliamentary government is collective accountability. It mandates that the Council of Ministers continue to be answerable to the Lok Sabha and operate as a collective political body. Collective accountability is more difficult to achieve in coalition administrations since ministers may be members of many political parties with differing political agendas and ideologies. Coalition partners must accept agreed-upon government policies and choices in order to participate in government, even though they may continue to identify as separate parties. Maintaining a cohesive stance on parliamentary issues may be challenging due to

disagreements within the coalition. As a result, coalition politics adds new aspects to the idea of collective responsibility, especially with regard to maintaining government unity, party discipline, and ministerial coordination.

Government Formation and Parliamentary Majority

In India's parliamentary system, gaining the support of the Lok Sabha is essential to forming a government. Different political parties may negotiate to form a coalition government when one party is unable to achieve a parliamentary majority. Pre-election alliances, post-election agreements, or outside assistance from non-Council of Ministers parties could serve as the foundation for these arrangements. Negotiations over leadership, ministry representation, policy priorities, and parliamentary coordination are all part of the process of forming a coalition government. The procedure illustrates how crucial parliamentary numbers and political agreement are to preserving the legitimacy of the administration. It also emphasizes how regional political parties influence the stability and makeup of national governments.

Role of the Prime Minister in Coalition Governments

In India's parliamentary system, the prime minister holds a pivotal role. The position includes maintaining parliamentary confidence, coordinating government policy, and leading the Council of Ministers. The prime minister's responsibilities under coalition governments go beyond leading the main political party. It also entails preserving political consensus, settling disputes, and managing relationships among coalition partners. The expectations of coalition partners and the interests of the ruling party must be balanced by the prime minister. As a result, coalition leadership necessitates collaboration, compromise, and political accommodation. The history of several coalition administrations shows that the capacity to keep participating parties united is intimately linked to the efficacy of executive leadership.

Transformation of India's Parliamentary System through Coalition Politics

From influencing party organization, political representation, legislative decision-making, federal ties, and democratic accountability, coalition politics has profoundly changed India's parliamentary system. Regional and national political parties now have more chances to take part in the formation of governments as a result of the shift from one-party dominance to multi-party competition. Congress's hegemony dominated national politics in the early decades following independence, but regional parties and alternative political organizations progressively altered the character of electoral struggle. The involvement of regional political forces in national government has increased due to the growing prominence of parties like the Telugu Desam Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and Janata Dal (United). As a result, coalition politics has given regional interests more chances to shape policy decisions and parliamentary debates.

Additionally, by promoting political communication and negotiation between national and regional parties, coalition governments have helped to alter Center-State relations. They have also had an impact on executive-legislative relations because the government needs to constantly coordinate with alliance partners in order to maintain parliamentary confidence. Legislative decision-making increasingly entails reaching a consensus, accommodating various ideological viewpoints, and engaging in political negotiations. By forming new political coalitions and changing patterns of political collaboration, coalition politics has also changed how parliamentary opposition operates. Coalition arrangements have made it possible for a variety of regional, social, and political interests to engage in national decisions in terms of democratic representation. However, legislative effectiveness and government stability may be impacted by disagreements among coalition partners, political negotiations, and conflicting goals. Coalition politics has therefore transformed India's legislative system into a democratic framework that is more competitive, pluralistic, and focused on negotiation.

Coalition Politics and Parliamentary Stability in India

For democratic government to operate effectively, parliamentary stability is necessary. Depending on parliamentary support, leadership coordination, and political cooperation, coalition politics in India has resulted in both stable and unstable governments. The first NDA administration (1998–1999), the National Front government (1989–1990), and the United Front government (1996–1998) were all unstable as a result of alliance partner conflicts and withdrawal of support. Coalition management has often been complicated by ideological disagreements, conflicting regional interests, and disputes over cabinet positions. Coalition governments have used coordination committees, political discussions, and Common Minimum Programs to solve these challenges and preserve unity while establishing shared policy agendas. Although excessive talks may postpone legislative choices and policy execution, political bargaining among alliance partners can promote broader consultation and regional representation. In the end, coalition administrations must preserve the Lok Sabha's confidence, mutual trust, strong leadership, and shared accountability. Parliamentary stability is now more reliant on ongoing political cooperation and discussion between participating parties as a result of coalition politics.

Coalition Politics and the Role of Regional Parties in National Governance

According to their involvement in coalition governments, regional political parties have grown to be significant players in India's parliamentary system. Particularly in situations where major national parties lack an independent majority, their parliamentary strength has aided in the creation of governments, political discussions, and national governance. State-specific concerns in development, employment, infrastructure, agriculture, financial support, and cultural identity are represented by regional parties. Their involvement gives regional issues a chance to be discussed in national parliament. Additionally, coalition agreements have improved political interaction between state and national leadership, impacting the federal nature of Indian democracy and center-state ties. Regional parties take part in national government decisions through alliance talks and cabinet participation. However, political alliances, legislative representation, and electoral strength all affect their power. As a result, regional parties have made a substantial contribution to India's parliamentary democracy's federalization, political variety, and representational nature.

Major Challenges of Coalition Politics in India's Parliamentary System

The stability and efficacy of India's parliamentary system are impacted by a number of institutional and political obstacles that coalition politics must overcome. Coalition partners frequently find it challenging to come to a shared political agreement due to differences in ideological convictions, electoral agendas, and regional interests. Political instability and the survival of the government could be threatened by coalition partners withdrawing their support. While conflicts among ministers may impact the concept of collective responsibility, conflicting regional needs can hamper national policymaking. Legislative decisions and policy implementation may also be delayed by ongoing political negotiations. Coalition governance is also made unpredictable by leadership disputes, poor coordination, and shifting political allegiances. These difficulties demonstrate how crucial mutual confidence, good leadership, institutional coordination, and political flexibility are to preserving parliamentary stability and democratic accountability.

Conclusion

The most significant factor in the evolution of India's parliamentary system is coalition politics. The nature of government formation, political representation, legislative decision-making, and center-state relations have all changed as a result of the shift from one-party domination to multi-party competition. Coalition administrations have been crucial in influencing national politics and giving regional political parties a chance to take part in national governance since the late 1980s. Coalition politics has brought about new patterns of political negotiation, power-sharing, and consensus-building, as the experiences of the National Front, United Front, National Democratic Alliance, and United Progressive Alliance governments show. The federalization of India's party system has been aided by these changes, which have increased the involvement of many political interests. In national political decision-making, regional parties have grown in significance, especially when their parliamentary representation becomes crucial for the formation of governments.

The crucial role of coalition arrangements in Indian parliamentary democracy has once again been brought to light by the general election of 2024. The NDA's combined legislative power helped establish the administration, demonstrating the ongoing importance of regional political parties and alliance partners in the creation of national governments. In the end, coalition politics has changed India's legislative system from one that was primarily controlled by one party to one that is more competitive, negotiated, and politically diverse. While posing additional difficulties for parliamentary governance, it has increased the significance of regional representation, political consultation, and federal involvement. The ability of political parties to strike a balance between their individual political interests and collective constitutional responsibilities, democratic accountability, and the stability of parliamentary institutions will determine how effective India's parliamentary democracy is in the future.

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