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Coalition Government in World Scenario : Special Reference to India

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Coalition governments are common in countries where the parliament is proportionally representative for several political parties. It does not appear at all in countries where the cabinet is chosen by the president rather than the lower house, such as the United States. In semi-presidential systems, such as France, where the president formally appoints the Prime Minister, but where the government itself must still maintain the confidence of parliament. Countries that often have a coalition cabinet include the Nordic countries, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Israel and India. Switzerland has been ruled by a loose coalition of the four strongest parties in parliament since 1959, called the Magic Formula. Sometimes a coalition government is also created in times of national difficulties or crises, for example during wartime, to give the government a high degree of political legitimacy and acceptability whilst also diminishing internal political strife.

In Germany, for instance, coalitions are the norm as it is rare for either the parties to win a majority of their own. Thus coalitions are formed with at least one of the smaller parties. Helmut Kohl's governed for years in coalition with the other parties from 1998 to 2005.

A similar situation exists in Israel with its dozens of parties. The center-right Likud party thus forms coalitions with far right and orthodox groups, while Labour party allies itself with more leftist and pacifist parties. Likud is a right-wing political party in Israel and Labour is an Israeli political party.

In both countries, grand coalitions of the two large parties also occur, but these are rarer and large parties usually prefer to associate with small ones. But if none of the larger parties can receive enough votes to form their preferred coalition, a grand coalition may be the only choice. This is the current situation in Germany.

A Coalition can consist of any number of parties. In Germany, a Coalition rarely consists of more than two parties, while in Belgium, where there are separate Dutch language and French language parties for each political group, coalitions of six parties are quite common. India's governing coalition, the United Progressive Alliance, consists of fourteen different parties. Finland experienced its most stable government since the independence with a five party coalition established in the 1990s.

In Australia, the conservative Liberal and National parties are united in an effectively permanent coalition. This coalition has become so stable at least at a Federal level and so permanent.

In the United Kingdom, coalition governments (known as National Governments) have since 1915 only been appointed at times of national crisis. The most prominent was the National Government of 1931-1940. In other circumstances when no party has had a majority, minority governments have been the rule. However, the devolved government in Scotland is run by a coalition of Scottish Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, as Labour does not have a majority in the Scottish Parliament. In the United Kingdom the term National Government is in an abstract sense used to refer to a coalition of chimps.

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INDIAN SCENARIO:

The system of single party dominance by the Congress was practically eroded by the end of the 1980 due to factors such as long spell of incumbency, lack of credible leadership, its failure to accommodate the newly mobilized section of the population and rise of other national and regional parties.

After the election of 1996, it was generally held that the era of a single party government is over and the future lies with coalitions based on a reconfiguration of political forces. The BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) realized that it can not come to power without incorporating the regional parties into its support base. It therefore cobbled up an alliance of eighteen parties in 1998 and twenty four in 1999, although they had nothing in common ideologically and programmatically. The BJP success in 1999 election is mainly due to its coalition strategy. This strategy has yielded rich dividends in 1999 elections, as the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) has managed to gain a able majority.

Unlike the BJP the Congress wrongly read the political present. It actually lost the election when it failed to provide an alternative after the fall of BJP government. This failure was mainly due to miscalculation of its potentials. The congress thus lost the opportunity to bring the secular forces together. Given the quick changes of government due to the failure of coalitions the congress hoped to romp home on the plank of stability and single party rule. But what actually sealed the fate of the congress was the lack of allies in a fractured polity. Many of them are individual based parties without any clear-cut ideology. While the BJP went out of its way to mop them up the congress did not try to bring even the like minded parties.

The success of the NDA to a large measure is rooted in the failure of the third front. Much before the elections the third front had already disintegrated. The United front experiment of 1996 was short-lived.

The BJP's rise to power is clearly not on its own social and political support neither its organizational strength. The success of BJP is mainly the lack of political vision of social democrats.

Riding a wave of positive economic news and the prospects for regional peace with its arch enemy, Pakistan, the incumbent Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpai, sought to solidify India's international standing as an economic super power. Having completed its first full term office, the BJP, attempted to start a second full term in office by obtaining a simple majority of seats in the Lok Sabha. The BJP was the largest party in a 15 member coalition government called the NDA.

The general election of May 2004 saw a new set to power equations emerge in New Delhi which have no clear precedent in our political history. The result of the 2004 election proved to be a surprise as a Congress party unexpectedly obtained the largest share of seats in the Lok Sabha. The Congress was able to form a government by securing 26.60% of vote (145 seats). The BJP obtained 22.16% of vote (138 seats). Unable to rule without coalition partner, the Congress secured the cooperation of several regional and Leftist parties. This minority governing coalition is called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

This is the new experience for the Congress. Turning back on the pachmarhi Resolution, and in line with the Shimla sankalp or resolution of winter 2003, the Congress is for the first time heading a coalition government. Pre-electoral alliances had been crucial to winning states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Tamilnadu. They also gave the combine a fighting chance in Maharashtra, where polarization helped them contain and limit the NDA.

In 2004 with a slight decrease in its percentage of votes the Congress was also to increase its share of parliamentary seats to 145. With 273 seats necessary to form a government, the members of the congress led UPA coalition were able to cobble together a government with 220 seats, plus 121 additional seats pledged by the parties that supported the UPA.

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CONCLUSION

Coalition governments often occur in countries that possess an electoral system based upon proportional representation. Advocates of Proportional representation suggest that a coalition government leads to more consensual politics, in that a government comprised of differing parties (often based on different ideologies) would have to concur in regard to governmental policy. Another advantage is that a coalition government better reflects the popular opinion of the electorate within a country. Proportional representation is an electoral system whose use tends to make elections result in groups of votes being represented in proportional fractions in some body of representatives.

People who disapprove of coalition governments believe that such governments have a tendency to be fractious and prone to disharmony. This is because coalitions would be comprised of different parties with differing beliefs, who may not always agree on the correct path for governmental policy. Sometimes the results of an election are of such nature that the coalitions that are mathematically most probable are ideologically unfeasible. A second problem may be the ability for minor parties to be kingmakers and especially in close elections, gain for more for their support than their vote would indicate. Coalition have played a vital role in the unexpected Congress victory in 2004, including in a negative sense, i.e. lack of coalition in BJP's defeat in Haryana. Assam and Jharkhand. The coalition experience of election 2004 has been conforming the theory in the following way. Coalition have been largely opportunistic or office seeking, formed primarily to aggregate votes regardless of programmatic differences.

At the state level Congress is coalitionable only when it is either a third or fourth party, or where a third or fourth party emerges where the Congress is locked in competition with a BJP/NDA rival party or alliance, has been borne out.

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