

AN EVALUATION OF THE WORKING OF INDIAN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

The significance of politics is that with time and circumstance the nature of politics changes and this is applicable to Indian politics also. Before independence the nature of politics was different as it was dominated by imperialist forces and it underwent changes after independence. An analysis of the working of parliamentary government demonstrates new trends which have affected the nature of Indian politics. Indian is a pluralistic society and gets influenced by religion, caste, language and minorities. India adopted parliamentary government for which a favorable environment was created by well-organized party system in the form of Indian National Congress hereafter referred to as INC or Congress. Congress ruled the entire political horizon of India from 1950 to 1967 and thereafter the centre till 1989 with brief Janata period from 1977-1979. Political developments taking place in the working of Indian parliamentary and federal system of governance dismantled the monolithic structure of the party which is called the end of one party dominant system.

End of the one party dominant system

Political changes in India started with political transformation in 1967 were important from the point of view of one party dominant system. Congress remained in power in states and at the national level. Broadly speaking three different phases are seen in so far as evolution of party system in India is concerned. The first phase lasted till 1967 in which Congress remained at the centre stage both in terms of votes and seats. Second phase started with the fourth general elections to the Lok Sabha and elections to state legislative assemblies in 1967 which brought to an end the monopoly of Congress at the state level. It brought about polarization of the party

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system into two alliances with anti-Congress emotion being the cementing force for the opposition. In the third phase since the elections to ninth Lok Sabha in 1989 Congress's existence as a coalition started eroding and the vacuum began to be filled up by regional political parties (Roy, 2005:192-194). Since 1989 no political party has been in a position to gain required majority to form governments on its own at the national level. Especially the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Janata Dal (United) (JD-U), Samajwadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Trinamool (Congress TMC), National Congress Party (NCP), Dravida MunnetraKazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) came to occupy the space created by the end of one-party dominant system. The strength of regional political parties has increased in terms of votes and seats and national parties have witnessed decline in terms of percentage share of votes. The percentage of votes which national parties obtained was 67.11 in the 1999 parliamentary elections which further shrunk to 63.58 in the 2009 parliamentary elections. In comparison the share of regional parties increased from 12.73 percent to 31.23 percent in during the same period. In addition the percentage of elected members of parliament of national parties has decreased to 69.24 percent whereas the share of regional parties increased to 29.10 percent in 2009 parliamentary elections (Election Commission, 2009). The one party dominance began to dilute on account of failure on issues like poverty, employment, corruption, communalism etc. State intervention in the economic sphere by assigning pivotal role to the public sector was supposed to create conditions of development in underdeveloped regions of the country so as to establish a socialistic pattern of society. Some initiatives like enactment of land reform laws, reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in services and legislative bodies were meant to create level playing field for all strata of society and do away with the parochial loyalties based on caste, religion and region. In the electoral politics, removal of poverty, nationalization of banks and abolition of privy purses were used as a poll plank in the 1972 parliamentary elections.

In the political domain the central intervention in the state subjects especially in law and order and deployment of paramilitary forces, creation of planning machinery further accentuated resentment among the power contenders in the states. The central government attempted to check the opposition by divide and rule politics. Invocation of internal emergency in the country dealt a severe blow to the constitutional, parliamentary and federal set up. The

continuous rule of one party at the centre eroded the federal structure by dismantling the inner party democracy which in return led to the concentration of powers. The powerful high command possessed the ultimate power of decision making. Amal Ray argued that “...the powerful Nehru, Patel, Parsad trio constituted the most important inner ring and all major policy decisions used to emanate from it. As India’s federal structure was conceived and planned in a unitary political environment so it was directed towards a powerful centre” (Ray, 1970:5). The organizational structure of all the existing parties was highly centralized. K Santhanam stated that “...Indian Republic started with a contradiction while the Constitution established a federal system of government all the political parties existing at that time were unitary and centralized. This was particularly the case with the Congress” (Mohan, 1996). In such an atmosphere state leaders found it more convenient to abide by the dictates of the party bosses even if they pertained to the exclusive domain of the state. But in the seventies it became difficult for the Congress to tackle problems of local nature. The population in the states was concerned more with the local issues rather than the national. Therefore to safeguard the distinct cultural identities and rectify regional economic imbalances, regional parties took up the cudgels and emerged as an alternative channel to the Congress. Thus the emergence of regional parties which cater to the regional interests can be termed as an outcome of highly centralized polity. The first challenge to Congress monopoly was in 1967 when it lost political space in some

of its stronghold states. Several regional political parties formed the government in the states. At the national level its dominance was briefly terminated from 1977-1979 when Janata Party captured the political space and restored political democracy. Thereafter, Congress again returned to power in 1980 and continued to be so till 1989. The politics of populism was resorted to, to win over the caste loyalties, and the poor for electoral mileage. During the phase the focus shifted from

economic issues like alleviation of poverty to federalism, decentralization and state autonomy. The political system’s inability to cope with these issues led to terrorism in Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and north – eastern states. The ninth Lok Sabha elections in 1989 finally ended the dominance of the Congress party. Since then political crisis accentuated coupled with economic reforms. Deepak Nayyar opined that “...electoral compulsions unleashed a competitive politics of

populism. Political parties and political leaders across the board sought to woo the people with sops...the number of promises made multiplied but the number of promises kept dwindled” (Nayyar, 2001:381). Coalition governments are being formed with no party enjoying majority in the house. National Front government came into existence with the outside support of Bhartiya Janata Party and Leftist parties’ in 1989. This government could not complete its full term, the withdrawal of support by BJP led to the fall of the government. All the elections since 1991 have produced hung Lok Sabha with no clear-cut mandate in favor of any party. Thenceforth the trend is toward multiparty coalition.

Coalition Politics

Coalition politics has become a political reality in India. There are three type of situations which give rise to the formation of coalition governments; firstly, the inability of a single political party to form the government. Secondly, when there is a deadlock between two political parties. Under such conditions one party makes compromise with the minor group such as neutral to form the government. Thirdly, a national crises or war gives rise to coalition. The first type of situation is found in India and in many Indian states like Kerala, West Bengal, UP, Rajasthan, Orrisa. Ramashray Roy remarked that “...when the Congress dominance came to an end, there began a period of alliance formation and acute political bargaining leading frequently to political instability as a quick turnovers in government” (Roy, 2011:30). The second and the third types of Coalitions are most commonly found in the history of England.

Due to the ‘catch all’ coalition character of the Congress provided an ideal type broad based political party. It remained in power till 1967 at state and national level. The elections to state legislative assemblies ended its monopoly over the entire political landscape, as Congress was no longer an ideological and social coalition. Absence of intra-party democracy and authoritarian rule weakened the party organization considerably. Centralized decision-making and authoritarian state that came to be established in the seventies paved the way for the end of the Congress System temporarily from 1977-1979 and permanently from 1989 onwards. Multi-centrism consolidated its roots in the subsequent years in Indian politics. In such a volatile situation, coalition governments have come to stay. Generally these governments are marked by instability and uncertainty with few exceptions. Such governments remained busy in their own

survival rather than laying stress on governance. Although coalition politics is a positive trend in a plural society like India where one party rule may result in lopsided development the political culture is not so developed so as to ensure the endurance of coalition governments. A coalition government takes place in two phases. Pre-poll alliance and post-poll alliance. In pre poll agreement there is adjustment between parties before elections. These types are most important because it is a pre-elections understanding that provides a common platform and attract the voters on the basis of joint manifesto. Post elections alliance is a union to share political power and run the administration. It is a compromise after the elections to keep one party out of power. The attributes of Coalition governments are. Firstly, they are unstable because coalition partners never think in terms of permanent friendship. In it conflicts don't end but just brushed aside for the time being. It is left to every political party to withdraw the support at any time. They have their own internal contradictions that lead to the breaking of the various parties and even the governments. As one political commentator points out that "nothing is more unpredictable in Indian politics than the nature of alliances between political groups and parties today" (Kantha, 1999:359). Secondly, due to lack of polarization, coalition is the marriage of convenience, as they are not based on fixed principles. There are widely heterogeneous elements. It is just for the sake of capturing the power that they are united. Indeed there are no sincere efforts to establish political stability. Thirdly, based on political defections shifting of loyalties from one party/alliance to other is a significant feature of coalitions and their failure. Fourthly, Coalition governments become a game of selfish, narrow-minded opportunist power hungry politicians who have to look after nothing but their personal interests. Pramod Kumar observed that "...coalition politics functioned more as coalition of interests between big business, land speculators, big farmers and government contractors...within the party system, coalition politics functioned more as a coalition of patronage for sharing spoils between the national and regional political parties" (Kumar, 2011:49). In a coalition government regional political parties have become stronger as the continuation of their vital support is essential for the survival of the government. This has provided regional political parties opportunities for broaden their horizons which has made Indian political system more federal. The centre government is no longer blamed for the lopsided development. Nevertheless in a coalition government certain parliamentary democracy principles like collective and political homogeneity become casualty of the fluid nature of the coalition arrangement.

Delay to the Principle of communal liability and Political Homogeneity

Along with coalition politics another trend which is visible in Indian politics since 1999 and is directly linked with it. Collective responsibility and political homogeneity are the two significant features of the parliamentary government which provide strength and stability to the government. These two principles are on the decline with the working of the coalition government. Strains on the principle of collective responsibility are inevitable in federal coalitions. Today's governments includes parties which are ideological heterogeneous. Besides this every party has its own program and they fight elections on their own political program. For instance there is a gap between the program of DMK and INC but they are an alliance partner. Similarly BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) are running coalition in Punjab devoid of homogenous ideology. In such a situation political homogeneity is not taken into account owing to political compulsions. To run administration Common Minimum Program (CMP) is chalked out, despite this every party has its own agenda. This leads to differences among coalition partners and premature fall of the governments. Cabinet speaks in many voices.

Sense of direction and unity of purpose get lost in the working of the government. Cabinet which works on the principle of sink or swim together like a team in a one party government becomes a divided house in coalition governance. Therefore collective responsibility and political homogeneity have become a causality of coalition culture. In a one party government members of the cabinet work in unison as a team. Any minister who doesn't abide by the decisions of the cabinet or has a poor performance as a minister can be asked to put in his paper and can be dropped in the reshuffled cabinet. But it is not possible in coalition government. Non-performance and inefficiency becomes the attributes of coalition government. In the UPA II Congress as a major alliance partner failed in prevailing upon the Agriculture Ministry to check the rising prices. Congress General Secretary Janardan Dwivedi expressing helplessness in a coalition dispensation commented, "...It is a coalition government and not a fully fledged Congress government...Congress is the largest in coalition, but it is the first among equals" (The Times of India, 2009). In this context coalition has proved to be what Arend Lijphart calls consociational type (Lijphart, 1996:258-268). The experience of the coalition government shows that alliance parties put pressure for the allocation of important ministries viz AIADMK in National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government pressurised for finance, law and justice portfolios, Lok Janshakti insisted for Railway. Similarly in United Progressive Alliance (UPA)

Railway, Rural Development and company affairs department were allotted to RJD, Communication, Coastal and Road Transport to DMK, Agriculture, Food Supplies and Civil Aviation to NCP according to their strength in the parliament.

Practice of Outside Support

With the formation of coalition government the practice of outside support started. The National Front government led by VP Singh had the outside support of BJP and Leftist parties. The subsequent governments of Chandra Shekhar in 1990 and Deve Gowda and IK Gujral in 1996 and 1997 were formed with the outside support of the Congress and other parties. NDA led by A. B. Vajpayee enjoyed the outside support of Telugu Desam party. UPA –I got such support from Leftist parties, which withdrew it on the issue of Indo-American Nuclear Deal. The negative side of this practice is that parties extending support to the governance are not part of the government. These parties enjoy power without responsibility. They resort to the politics of blackmailing in the event of their demands not being accepted by the government. They don't share the responsibility for the failure of the government but take credit for the success of the government. This creates political instability and encourages the politics of opportunism. This is enjoying power without responsibility. Left front remained outside the government but managed to get its speaker of Lok Sabha elected in 2004. With this phenomenon the position of the Prime Minister (PM) has weakened considerably

Attrition of the Powers of the PM

In a parliamentary set up PM has a place of special significance. Formation of Council of Ministers, distribution of portfolios is the responsibility of the PM. But during the last years especially since 1989, the powers, prestige and position of the PM has undergone change in the wake of the increasing role of Steering Committee of the United Front, Coordination Committee of the NDA and the National Advisory Committee of the UPA. Despite these committees being extra-constitutional they wield enormous powers in decision making and PM becomes the chief executive officer merely endorsing the decisions. Constitutionally PM is the central figure in cabinet formation but practically PM is under tremendous pressure from coalition partners to select his cabinet ministers. The Congress- DMK deadlock on the issue of selections of ministers in May 2009 held up government formation for sometimes (Roy,

2011:104). PM is not free to select ministers of his or her choice with real powers in the hands of the alliance partners (Economic and Political Weekly, 2002). The coalition partners prepare the list of ministers. Moreover the pressure is on the PM regarding allocation of favorable portfolios to the parties giving support to the government failing which they threaten withdrawal of support to the government. PM is also bound to abide by the CMP and he has to coordinate with the chairman of Alliance. Nilopal Basu, the Marxist leader has rightly said that “Prime Ministers cannot ignore ideological opposition and they have to keep peoples’ aspirations in mind in the coalition governments” (Dainik Bhaskar, 2006:8). In addition to it PM has to bring along the parties providing outside support. The present UPA when it reassumed power in 2009 faced the initial setback. The immediate concern was allocation of ministerial ranks. Ramashray Roy opined “...certain differences were discernible in the drama that the DMK staged for getting ministerial posts for satisfying the aspirations of different members of Karunanidhi’s family” (Roy, 2009:39). Similarly TMC asked its railway minister to step down following the presentation of railway budget much to the disliking of Mamta Baneerji. However PM was reluctant to do so. But he had to abide by the wish of the alliance partner. This leads to weakening position of the PM. While addressing a Press Conference PM Dr Manmohan Singh clarified that, “Coalition government has certain compulsions. One has to make compromises against his wishes.”

Changes in Federalism

Changes in the nature of party system from one party dominant system to multiparty system and coalition politics becoming a political reality in the contemporary political discourse have altered the contours of Indian federalism. Coalition governance is rated to be wide representative of diversity prevailing in a federal system (Singh, 2007:15). Before discussing the impact of coalition on federalism and trends in the working of federalism it would be pertinent here to have a look at the different phases through which federalism has passed since independence;

The first phase from 1950-1967 was marked by the dominance of Congress party at the centre as well as states. The magnetic leadership of Nehru further strengthened the central government which was already endowed with tremendous powers by the Constitution. The High Command phenomenon did not let any state level leaders to assert them. Factionalism within the Congress

was encouraged as it was convenient for the party to prevent any Chief Minister from becoming powerful. The subordination of state governments to the centre was at peak when under the Kamraj Plan six Chief Ministers were forced to resign in the name of reorganization of the party (Awasthy,2009:136-137). In the first

two decade of independence there was consensus based on accommodation owing to affinity between leader and masses and closeness to freedom movement. During this period Congress returned to power in 1952, 1957 and 1962 in almost all the states and enjoyed absolute majority in the Parliament. In some states where non- Congress parties had formed their governments, Article 356 of the Constitution was invoked to topple the duly elected government. Kerala was a case in point where communist government was dissolved on the pretext of breakdown of law and order machinery. Even in Congress ruled states, state level Congress leaders could not assert themselves as Chief Ministers and members of the state council of ministers were chosen by Nehru and party high command. Planning Commission, the most important institution of central domination was established in 1950 under the chairmanship of Prime Minister. National Development Council (NDC) came into being in 1952. Therefore in the first phase there was of central dominance wherein states surrendered some of their important rights. Food grain crises and three wars; one with China in 1962 and two with Pakistan in 1948 and 1965 further strengthened the positioned of the centre (Ibid). With Nehru's demise the consensus and political system built thereon began to disintegrate.

During the second phase from 1967-1977 elections in 1967 resulted in the breakdown of Congress monopoly of political power and process of coalition governments started at the state level. Leaving aside the principle of consensus Indira Gandhi opted for majoritarian principle in view of vehement opposition. Authoritarian tendencies within the government and party set in. Centralization of powers became a norm which proved to be "suicidal for prevalent party system and the federal structure" (Kothari, 1988:30). Erosion of party organization led immensely to the erosion of federal system and concentration of powers into the hands of high command. During this period centre-state relations were nonexistent in the face of a strong state under the stewardship of leader instead of party organization. After split in the Congress, it was reduced to minority in the Lok Sabha. It tried to regain political space by all means at its disposal including

article 356. The highly centralized polity was challenged under the banner of J.P. movement to check authoritarian and corrupt practices. The open confrontation between the ruling and the opposition resulted in the imposition of internal emergency which was an open insult to federal principles which postulates harmonious relations between two sets of government at the national and state levels. In this phase centre state confrontation was in full swing wherein states asserted their rights by way of demand for state autonomy and repudiating the unitarian tendencies of Indian Constitution. Proclamation of internal emergency derailed the democratic set up and revoked all democratic measures granted under the Constitution in the name of internal threat to the unity and integrity of India. Forty second constitutional amendment increased the powers of the centre at the cost of the states. The authoritarian functioning style of the Congress's top brass destroyed the democracy within the party.

The third phase which lasted from 1977- 1989 witnessed the Congress losing power in the general elections after emergency. Janata Party formed the first non Congress coalition government at the centre with the promise of restoring democratic ethos in the working of the government and strengthening the federal principles which were taken for granted by the previous ruling party. Contrarily, the Janata Party became a victim of the same tactics being followed by the Congress led government and dismissed Congress governments in some states by invoking Article 356 of the Indian Constitution. The states again resorted to the demand for more autonomy and demanded appointment of a committee to review the centre-state relations. The demand was turned down by the central government. Therefore, brief interlude of Janata Party rule couldn't check the centripetal tendencies since it was grappling with personality clashes of leaders of parties forming Janata Party. In 1980 Congress returned to power and dismissed nine non congress state governments through Article 356. Subsequent political developments and demand for state autonomy by many states led to the appointment of Sarkaria Commission to look into the centre-state relationship in 1983 which submitted its report in 1987. It proposed inter- alia the setting up of the Inter-State Council (ISC) under Article 263 of the Constitution, make Finance Commission a permanent body. Contrary to previous Congress government Rajiv Gandhi preferred an accommodative orientation toward regional and ethnic movements in some states of the Indian union. Punjab accord signed with the SAD of Punjab in July 1985 pledged to resolve territorial and interstate disputes between Punjab, Haryana and

Rajasthan. The accord also promised an all-India Gurudwara act by the Parliament as demanded by the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (Jefery, 1986:34- 67). In a similar move Assam, Tripura and Mizoram accords were signed to address to the disenchantment of the people and restore normalcy in these respective states. Therefore the nineties witnessed the new wave in favor of federalism owing to the multi-party system and resultant coalition governments.

The fourth phase from 1989-2013 started with elections to the ninth Lok Sabha in 1989. The inability of the national political parties to form government on their own at the national level has allowed state political parties to determine the verdict of parliamentary elections as state level political players have become vital at the centre. It led to the termination of one-party dominance and formation of coalitions. In this phase Indian federalism experienced notable development in 1996. United Front (UF) came to power with the support of Congress and a conglomeration of fourteen parties mostly regional. The centre of power shifted from centre to states. The significant development was that for the first time the centre government acknowledged the need to review centre state relations. CMP, the basis of the functioning of the UF government, envisaged to advance the principles of political administrative and economic federalism. Keeping in mind the need for greater power to the states to meet their developmental needs the UF wanted to go beyond the recommendations of Sarkaria Commission. CMP pledged that the states must be given the chance to fix their developmental priorities and chalk out their plans within the ambit of national plans. It also urged in favor of suitable amendment in Article 356, shifting of centrally sponsored schemes to the control of the states and revitalize institutions like NDC and ISC to generate mutual trust in centre state relations. ISC was made active and there was regular interaction with the state governments. Thus a true spirit of cooperative federalism seemed to be in vogue. Participation of many regional political parties in the coalition indicates the significant changes in the federal set up in India. In this context observation of Rajni Kothari is pertinent. He opined that, “issue of federalism is gaining importance after a long period of ups and downs” (Kothari, 1988:56). So as to appease the regional political outfits as a tactic to garner their support, national political parties changed their stance in favor of more autonomy to the region. Congress in its elections manifesto in 2009 proclaimed that “...it is only the Indian National Congress that has demonstrated its commitment to strong centre, strong states, and to strong Panchayats 2 and

nagarपालikas 3 . India's political system must have space for institutions at each of these three levels. Each has a vital and specific role to play" (Election Manifesto, 2009). Similarly the Bhartiya Janata Party in its elections manifesto declared to "... place centre state relations on an even keel through the process of consultations and the grudges of states will be addressed in a comprehensive manner. National Development Council will be revived... to ensure harmonious centre-state relations in the light of the recommendations of Sarkaria Commission" (Election Manifesto, 2009). The regional political parties shifted their stance from anti-centrism to cooperative federalism. The demands for separate states within the Indian union by carving out of the large sized states were conceded in case of Jharkhand, Uttaranchal and Chhattisgarh in 2000 by enacting legislation to this effect. The changed stand by one of the prominent regional political parties namely SAD deserve special mention. In 1973 SAD in its much touted Anandpur Sahib Resolution proclaimed that "...it would endeavor to have the Indian Constitution recast on real federal principles with equal representation at the Centre for all the states" (Singh, 1977:6). In the changed scenario the same SAD in 2000 asserted that "...our constitutional framework was for more federal structure, but owing to the rule of the Congress government at the centre and states, the powers of the states were slowly usurped and a unitary set-up was established" (The Tribune.2000). The shift in stand is attributed to the phenomenon of coalition politics following the end of one party dominance. It is evident that the agenda of SAD took a significant turn from being anti-centrism to that of cooperative federalism. Elections manifesto of SAD in 1998 declared that "...the Akali BJP government has opened a new chapter in centre-state relations, ushering in the age of co-operative federalism in the country. The era of confrontation has been effectively ended and replaced with a forward looking thrust on working together for the overall good of the state and nations" (Election Manifesto, 1998). This posture was strikingly different from the anti-centre attitude towards harmonious relations with the centre. The resolution passed at the end of Hola Mohalla conference underscore this change in stand. The resolution stated that "...conference demands from the centre that for the sake of the prosperity of the country, the centre-state relations should be redefined in the light of Anandpur Sahib Resolution...true federal structure was the need of the hour" (The Hindu, 1997). The demand for state autonomy was raked up in a political atmosphere in the midst of over-centralized polity and one-party dominance. This has brought about significant shift in the functioning of Indian political system by providing greater space to

the regional political parties by ensuring more political space in national politics and regional political parties changing their stance on centre-state relations. The change in party system towards multi party system has encouraged the transition of the Indian political system from, as Douglas Verney opines a “quasi- federation” to “quasi-confederacy” (Verney, 203:171). Some trends in Indian federalism came to fore during this period.

Cooperative Federalism

Indian politics in the decades following independence was primarily based on consensus because of the trust between the elite and masses. After the demise of first PM of India Jawaharlal Nehru, the consensus disappeared and consensus was replaced by majoritarian principle. Concentration of power in the hands of party high command and union government during Indira Gandhi period reached its zenith. Suppression of voice of dissent contributed immensely to the dismantling of party's federal structure of the party and India's federal system. The autocratic style of working of the Indira Gandhi and subsequent imposition of internal emergency led to the frequent demand for state autonomy and restructuring of centre –state relations. The federalization process received a boost with the appointment of Sarkaria commission which submitted its report in 1987 (Sarkaria Commission, 1987-1988). This report made number of recommendations, prominent being the setting up of ISC. The Rajiv Gandhi government adopted an accommodative approach toward the demand for state autonomy. With coalition government gaining prominence federalism has entered the phase of cooperation. Power sharing between regional political parties and national parties in the parliamentary elections held in 1999, 2004 and 2009 displays flexibility and cooperation to accommodate regional concerns and redress the grievances of regional political parties. It is being increasingly felt that paramount centre can no longer work and hence the biases against the opposition ruled states have disappeared. There is an increasing understanding among states on the one hand and between states and centre on the other that cooperation is urgently needed for development. Therefore cooperative federalism has emerged in the first decade of twenty first century or so. Cooperative federalism has strengthened the nation which is evident from the consensus on democratic norms of governance. Over the period especially after the nineties the Indian federalism has moved toward greater federalization. Participation of many regional political parties in the coalition governments displays the significant shift from centralized governance

towards shared and federal governance (Khan, 2003:182). Since coalition governments involves conglomeration of different ideologies, they ensure balanced development and strengthen the federal system. they have weakened the authoritarianism of a single party and have encouraged decentralization by ensuring consensus on issues confronting the common man. Coalition could make possible the enactment of Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005. The upper house of parliament has assumed significance in view of the transformation in the nature of the party system. In the face of it Upper house of Parliament has emerged as the federal second chamber as exhibits' a different composition than that of Lok Sabha. Besides, coalitions have also harmonized the inter-party relations viz RJD and LJK are the partners in UPA government at the centre despite the fact that they are opponents at the regional level.

Federalization

of regional Political Parties

In the changed scenario regional political parties besides being in power in states have become a power to reckon with in national politics. Realizing the importance of regional political parties first BJP in 1999 and then Congress in 2004 and 2009 successfully formed alliances which paid rich dividend (Roy, 2011:38) to the national parties and regional parties in particular in the form of broadening their area of influence. They have become a central to the life and death of coalition at the centre. The emergence of regional political parties as important players in coalition formation has left significant impact on the working of coalition government. The role of regional political parties grew out of the demand for uniform development of all the regions. Growing importance of regional parties cannot be viewed as a challenge to the federal system but as a reaction against the highly centralized polity which strengthened lopsided development. However some regional parties like DMK played a role in national politics even prior to 1989. From 1969-1971 DMK with its twenty five MPs provided support to the minority government of Indira Gandhi following split in the Congress. But their role have increased manifold in view of the phenomenon of coalitions. The growing strength of regional parties in the Parliament demands that they should actively guide the nation. Party system since 1989 witnessed multipolarity with polarized pluralism and regional or federal segmentation (Singh, 2009:268). Regional parties have come to occupy significant space at the

union level. Initially they were confined to their specific regions but the breakdown of Congress monopoly led to the formation of non Congress coalitions. Consequently they have broadened their horizon and widen their outlook. Regional parties like National Conference, SAD, DMK, Telgu Desam, RJD, Smajwadi Party etc have come to acquire more clouts and forced national parties to accommodate regional sentiments. Emergence of regional political parties as major stake holders in the making of coalition governments at the centre especially since 1989 indicates the shift from centralized governance towards federalized governance. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar observed that, “National politics is not the political arena of political choices; political preferences and loyalties at the national level derive from primary loyalties in the state politics” (Yadav and Palshikar, 2009:57). The presence of regional political parties in coalition at the national level make it difficult for the government to scuttle the duly elected state government by taking recourse to Article 356.

Misuse of Article 356 checked

Changed government opposition relations have reduced the possibility of misuse of Article 356 which caused harm to the federal system. For the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy opposition’s role is of utmost significance. But an analysis of composition of Lok Sabha being constituted after every elections since 1989 demonstrates that most of the political parties are ruling at the centre and opposition in the states. In a situation of ruling party at the state level and coalition partner at the centre there is less possibility of centralizing tendency. A political analyst opines that “...the dividing line between government and opposition therefore gets further complicated by the fact that the central opposition

may be the state ruling party and vice versa. The complexities of the electoral federalism and the presence of large number of single state parties in federal coalitions make it virtually impossible to eliminate state concerns from parliament even if it were considered desirable to do so (Arora, 2003:369-404). Supreme Court of India in a landmark judgment in *S.R.Bomma & others vs. Union of India & others* 1994 (Supreme Court, 1994) reversed its previous decision regarding breakdown of law and order machinery in a state to be decided by the union cabinet. In this verdict Supreme Court ruled that satisfaction of the President that there is a constitutional failure in a state was subjective not purely absolute. The

Court also held that to determine the majority test of the government was the floor of the house. For the first time in the history of independent India the power of Union government to invoke Article 356 was made subject to judicial review.

This judgment has acted as a deterrent against encroachment to state autonomy at the hands of the centre. Nowadays central government cannot dismiss any state government arbitrarily under article 356. This trend has ushered in an era of cooperative federalism. In a coalition set up constitutional and democratic institutions are secure because the ruling dispensation can neither amend the constitution too much and nor it can thwart democracy by imposing Article 356.

Conclusion

To conclude, India has entered a new phase as far as party system, coalition rule and federalism is concerned. Multi-party system with considerable clout of regional parties in government making and functioning has become a reality of Indian political system. Regional parties which represent the different regions of India make the government much more broad based leaving little room for complaint of uneven economic development. Coupled with its coalition culture has come to stay. Political parties have subscribed to the reality of coalition politics forcing them to form pre-poll and post-poll arrangement. Either pre-poll or post-poll, coalitions have brought about significant changes in the office of PM, principle of collective responsibility and political homogeneity. Initially coalitions were a source a stability but since 1999, they seem to be maturing despite ideological differences among the coalition partners. With regional parties becoming more prominent in the working of union government and coalition governance taking roots in India, the nature of federalism has also undergone sea changes. Cooperation instead of confrontation is visible in centre-state relations. Demand for state autonomy is not heard any more. What the states want is more financial resources to carry out the tremendous developmental tasks and tap the opportunities thrown up by globalization and liberalization. Therefore the parties both national and regional must evolve consensus to provide governance in the transitional phase through which Indian parliamentary and federalism is passing. Representation of People's Act 1950 and 1951 can be suitably amended to prevent the further fragmentation of parties by way of making strict regulations regarding recognition of political parties. This will reinforce the prevailing coalition culture in India. Federal institutions

like ISC needs to be strengthened and states should be given more space in bodies like Planning Commission and Finance Commission

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Notes

Lok Sabha is the lower house of parliament.

2.

Panchayats are the elected bodies at the village level.

3.

Nagarpalikas are the municipal councils at urban levels.