

Impact and Importance of Alliances on Different Political Parties in the Indian Federation: A Death of Ideological Factor

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Abstract

Coalition and political alliances are widely perceived as opportunistic attempt of power hungry politicians or at best, transitory arrangements necessitated by hung legislatures. This misplaced notion becomes more surprising in a country like India where no single party could ever succeed in winning elections alone at the Centre. Even the Indian National Congress retained its alliance character of pre-independence days till Indira Gandhi converted it into a discrete political party by stifling the functional autonomy of its ideological factions and state unit. But the long existence of alliances has not helped them to acquire adequate acceptability and still their success is measured on the basis of their durability.

This article highlights the status, problems, impact and importance of alliance politics in the Indian Federation and depicts some constructive suggestions for the betterment of Indian politics.

Key Words: Coalition, Political alliance, Hindutva, Deideologized, Two poles, Political Culture

Introduction:

Although usually a product of political parties, alliances have seriously influence them. Their impact on different political parties has been so overwhelming that the latter are facing threats to their independent existence. In many countries the parties have already been displaced by alliances from the power and reduced to the status of interest groups. Alliances have also arrogated most of the functions of the catch all parties and have in fact proved more integrative as well as effective. The political parties are, therefore, experiencing drastic changes in their nature and functioning by the demanding of time.

Impact and Importance of Alliance politics in India:

However the major impacts and importance of alliances on different political parties in the Indian federation are depicted below:

Alliances in India have moderated the extreme ideologies of political parties in India. For example, the BJP, which consolidated itself on the agenda of Hindutva, fought the 1999 elections on the twin slogans of stability and good governance. Even in 1996 elections itself it had toned down in Hindutva rhetoric, in 1998 it was further relegated to background. Secular allies like TDP, DMK and Samata have successfully depoliticized some of its crucial agenda and it was dropped most of its controversial planks at least temporarily. In March, 2002, the BJP came under tremendous pressure from its support base to allow religious ceremony at the disputed

place (Ram Janma Bhoomi – Babri Masjid) at Ayodhya but it did not allow that saying it was bound by the secular agenda of the NDA.

Likewise, Communist parties, have been ruling ‘Kerala and West Bengal’ for post several years yet they have not been able to implement even in a single measure which could be called Marxist in the true sense or which is not implemented elsewhere by other parties like Congress (I). here, the parties like, DMK or SAD have even desisted from demanding more autonomy to the state demand for which both of them are best known since they themselves are sharing power at the centre. The compulsions of the alliance politics are such that even ideologically discordant alliances start acquiring a moderate learning.

Similarly, the alliances have downgraded the importance of ideology so much that it has become futile to analyse the present day politics in terms of ideologies. This is because the politicians have given a go by to ideologies and decade old associations in search of winnable partners. During 1998 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu, DMK leader Karunanidhi said that DMK’s self-respect was at stake. He pointed out the AIADMK-BJP alliance posed a challenge to the ideology of E.V. Ramaswamy and C.N. Annadurai, the founder of Dravidian Movement which has secularism as its main ideological plank. He also alleged that Jayalalita was sowing the seeds of communalism in Tamil Nadu. A year later DMK itself became the chief ally of BJP.

Further, alliances necessitate pragmatism and there is hardly any difference between the policies of two rival alliances when

they form the government. Alliances invariably move or lean towards the centre irrespective of the ideological mooring of their constituents. They have therefore, de-ideologized the politics and an ideological confusion has become the prevalent phenomenon. Similarity in the ideologies of different alliances has created a situation where the voters are not able to differentiate between two competing alliances on the basis of their ideology.

As the parties ally with opposite or contradictory ideologies, their image and credibility become questionable in the eyes of their supporters. AGP allied with the BJP in 2001 Assembly Elections. This influenced its vote bank as the minorities who account for 28% of the state’s population and who had largely voted for AGP in 1998 elections, shifted en-bloc to the Congress (I). In a similar fashion, the secular ideology of the DMK was questioned in Tamil Nadu. Its alliance with the BJP in Assembly Election of 2001, reduced its influence among Muslims, a significant chunk of whom shifted to the AIADMK.

Therefore, the alliances not only reduced the significance of ideology in politics they even tarnished the long-nurtured image of a party whose support base shifted elsewhere consequently.

Further, the political alliances have brought realism to Indian politics which was marked by idealism for a long time. Many parties operated at the periphery in the past with their impracticable ideologies. Now almost all political parties adopt pragmatic programmes so as to be a partner of a possible governing alliance. The BJP remained a marginal player since the days of Jan Sangh because of its

idealist views which were not acceptable to other parties. It was treated as a political untouchable till it changed its stance on some of the objectionable issues in 1990's. The CPI (M), CPI, DMK, AIADMK, AGP and SAD all have given up their unrealistic demands for the sake of sharing power with others. Similarly, after having, failed to rally the entire Bahujan votes behind it, the party gave ticket to as many ten upper caste candidates during the 1996 parliamentary elections. This was a significant sign of the developing realism within the BSP whose most famous slogan was 'Tilak, Taraju Aur Talwar', Inko Maro Jute Char, i.e. the Brahmins, Vaishyas and Kshatriyas should be beaten with shoes.

Similarly, during the 2002 Assembly Elections for UP, the party gave 91 tickets to upper caste and 86 to Muslims. As a result out of the 99 successful candidates only 18 belong to the Dalit castes, the original support base of the BSP. It is, therefore, diluting its previous ideological stance and moving towards alliance politics.

If alliances have damaged the image of some parties, they have also improved the credibility of a few. The BJP which was seen as a communal party till recently, have acquired some acceptability among the Muslims due to its alliance with the secular parties like TDP, DMK and the National Conference. It could poll 6.8%, Muslims votes in 1999 general elections because of its alliance with such secular parties. Alliances have also helped the parties to widen their bases beyond their strongholds. For example, BJP could reach Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the North-East with the help of alliances only. Its strategy to tie up with a dozen regional

parties had converted it from a mostly North-Indian phenomenon to a truly Pan-Indian force. For the first time in 50 years, a non-Congress party has emerged as an all India formation and an alternative to the Congress. Likewise the alliances have also helped the parties to expand their social bases cross the communities. The AGP got 30% of the tribal votes in 2001 assembly elections due to its alliance with a faction of Autonomous State Demand Committee. Here, the tribals had been voting against the AGP traditionally.

More importantly, the alliances in India succeeded in what the political parties failed to achieve individually for a long time. They provided an alternative to the Congress party not only at the centre but also in many states. The most outstanding achievement of the alliances in India appeared in 1977 when an authoritative regime which imposed emergency on the nation by mis-using some provisions of the constitution for perpetuating itself in power, was dislodged by an alliance. So it could never have been possible for a single political party to win election against Congress of these days. During the past decade, the hegemony of the Congress party has been seriously weakened by alliances throughout the country so much so that it has ceased to exist altogether in many states. It fought election as a junior partner of BSP of the Up assembly in 1996 and allotted less than 30% seats in the state. Similarly, it had to lay a second fiddle to AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and RJD in Bihar due to its alliance with those parties.

Moreover, the political alliances have reduced the inter-party animosity to a great extent. The politicians no more indulge in the fierce polemics of the yesteryears

because enemies of today be allies of tomorrow. Thus, the distance among different political groups has decreased sharply. Except the TDP, AGP, RSP and the Forward Block almost all regional, Centrist and Leftist parties have either allied with the congress or expressed a desire to do so. Similarly except Left parties, the Samajwadi Party, the Muslim League and the Congress (I) most of the Indian parties at present do not have any compunctions about forming an alliance with the communalist BJP. Now active rivalry remains between the two poles, the left and the right. Even, they have formed alliances and shared power in the past in Delhi (1959), Punjab (1967) and Bihar (1967). Thus, most of the parties have

given up their hostile positions towards other parties and adopted accommodative pastures after the growth of alliances politics in India.

Further, alliances in India have dramatically increased the power and prestige of regional and smaller parties. It happened because most of the political parties could realize their goal of acquiring political power only with the help of regional formations. It is truer about the post 1989 alliances. The seat share of the regional parties in National Front, the United Front and the NDA was significantly high. More importantly, smaller parties even with a single member have succeeded in getting ministerial berths for them.

Here the table shows over representation of Small parties in Union Council of Ministry in recent years

Name of the party	Alliance	Year	Total MP's	Total Berths#
All India Indira Congress(Secular)	UF	1996	01	01
Maharashtra Gomantak party	UF	1996	01	01
Tamilgha Rajiv Congress	NDA	1998	01	01
Independent*	NDA	1998	04	03
Arunachal Congress	NDA	1998	02	01
MMK	NDA	1999	04	02
PMK	NDA	1999	05	02
Independent*	NDA	1999	01	01

* Only those independents who had an alliance with the ruling party are included.

Total berths include Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State and the Deputy Ministers.

It is important to note that unlike the bigger players, these smaller groups change their stand more frequently and as a result the balance of power seem to be held not by those at the Union Level but by the minor parties on the fringes.

Next, the alliances have demoralized the rank and the file of the party. Here, grassroots supporters create goodwill for their parties after an arduous and long efforts spread over many years but sometimes the top leaders enter into alliance with the very party which their workers had been opposing for a long time. Party functionaries, therefore, lose credibility in the eyes of the local population and face difficulty in justifying the alliance. This is one reason why the

alliances, particularly, the electoral ones have been opposed by the local or state level party functionaries. It has been resulted in party splits when the national leadership persisted in ignoring the objections of the local leaders. It is important to note that such electoral alliances have seldom succeeded in winning the elections.

In 1996 parliamentary elections, Tamil Nadu unit of Congress (I) opposed the party's alliance with AIADMK. The central leadership, however, refused to break the alliance. As a result nearly whole organization of state Congress split from the party and formed a new group called Tamil Maanila Congress under the leadership of the then president Tamil Nadu State Congress, GK Moopanar. Here, TMC formed alliance with the DMK and won all the twenty seats it contested. A similar situation occurred in Assam before 2001 assembly polls. A big section of BJP in Assam felt that its alliance with the highly unpopular AGP would prove counterproductive. The central leadership, however, did not relent. As a result a section of BJP led by its state vice-president formed a separate group called 'Assam BJP' and fought the election separately.

The evidence in India suggests that when a party breaks away from an alliance, it itself becomes vulnerable. This is particularly true if the alliance is a governing one. The association with power develops a hankering for its perpetuation. A party may like to quit an alliance for safeguarding its larger interests but some of its members would like to maintain alliance for the sake of power. For examples, when BSP broke its alliance with the SP in UP in 1995, twelve MLA' LED by Raj Bahadur, split the party and

formed Asli-BSP (later called BSP-Raj Bahadur). This split faction continued its association with the SP. Again in 1997, when BSP broke its alliance with the BJP in UP, some of the BSP legislators split from the party and formed Janatantrik BSP.

Similarly Janata Dal also broke before the parliamentary election of 1999 on the question of maintaining its alliance with United Front. The splitting faction, the Janata Dal (United) joined the National Democratic Alliance. Similar trends could be seen Trinamool Congress when it broke from NDA.

'Self-preservation' is the top priority of any political party in the recent India which is another death of ideological politics. So all alliances are formed or broken with a view of enhancing the political gains. If an alliance threatens the existence of a political party, the party will not care for the agreed terms and instead work for the strengthening of its own base. In this regard an example can be considered from Haryana. In Lok Sabha elections of 1999, the electoral alliance of Indian National Lok Dal and BJP led in 45 and 40 assembly segments (out of total 90) and won all the 10 Lok Sabha seats. This alarmed the Indian National Lok Dal greatly because the BJP which was a marginal player in Haryana till recently, was emerging as a formidable force and a potential challenge to it.

In the assembly polls of 2000, therefore the Indian National Lok Dal leader Om Prakash Chautala worked against the BJP candidates. While the BJP transferred its vote to Chautala the INLD supreme did not reciprocate and succeeded in reducing the BJP to a marginal presence in Haryana.

Here BJP could win only 6 out of the 28 assembly seats it contested whereas the INLD win 47 out of 61. The similar pattern was also seen in Odisha where BJD won 68 out of the 84 seats whereas BJP could win only 38, out of 63 assembly seats. This also shows that regional parties are ready to make concessions to their alliances partners as far as the elections for central parliament are concerned but they do not want to strengthen allies who could become rival in the future in their own states.

In this manner, the political alliances have forced the political parties to be area specific. The regional parties have tended to strengthen their regional base against the all India parties. Similarly, the all India parties have been concentrating more and more on forming government at the centre. Functioning of BJP-HVP alliance in Haryana demonstrates that this point. The HVP fought election for 72% seats and conceded only 28% to BJP for assembly election in 1996. However, for parliamentary elections of 1995, HVP got only 40%, seats as against 60% of the BJP. In Maharashtra also BJP contested 58% seats and Shiv Sena only 42% during the parliamentary polls of 1996. During the assembly polls of 1995, however, the BJP had got only 40% seats against 60% of the Shiv Sena.

And above all, the alliances have reduced the importance of political parties. It is no more possible for political parties to win elections alone. Even a big and successful party like Congress (I) had to face repeated defeat in the hands of invincible alliances. After 1984 elections, the Congress (I) could not any parliamentary election decisively. In 1991, the sympathy vote due to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, won

it many additional seats yet, it could not get majority of its own. This condition is becoming increasingly pronounced in the states as well. In UP, Haryana, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala no single party has shown capability to win election without allies.

Generally when a party wins elections with the help of alliances, it faces innumerable restraints in its functioning National Agenda for Governance, which is being followed by the NDA at the centre after 1999 elections, precludes most by the policy planks of BJP on the basis of which it grew in the past. It is not in position to implement anything of its own without endangering the existence of the alliance. Thus, despite being a dominant partner, BJP cannot make its will prevail. The smaller parties are even at a greater disadvantage as far as their ideology is concerned. Most of the NDA constituents favour the role of the state in the economy. They were, therefore, opposed to the reduction in the various subsidies in the Union Budget of 2001. But none could succeed in preventing the finance ministers from doing so. They were told about this only a few hours before the actual presentation of the budget.

Another ideological killing instance about the impact and importance of alliance politics is seen in the UPA-II govt. at the centre in March, 2012. The first example is that, when the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal got the absolute majority, then Mamata Banerjee became the Chief Minister and she resigned the Railway Ministry from the UPA-II government. Here she also demanded that, Dinesh Trivedi who is important leader of TMC, will be the another Railway Minister. Her

threatening demand was fulfilled by the UPA-II partners but another drama in the UPA-II coalition politics was seen when the passenger fares increased in the Railway Budget in the parliament.

A day after a furious Mamata Banerjee asked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to sack Railway Minister Dinesh Trivedi and reverse the increase in passenger fares proposed in the Railway Budget. However the five day long battle between Mamata Banerjee and the UPA-II partners had finally ended as a dramatical manner and at last Mukul Roy of TMC became the Railway Minister on 20th March, 2012. This clearly shows that, alliance politics in completely based on the threatening demanding and withdrawing in the recent India, which is not a good symptom of India's forthcoming politics as an ideological manner. Secondly, due to the DMK demands India voted in favour of United Nations Human Rights Commission Resolution regarding Sri Lanka's policy towards its Tamil Ministry during and after the civil war in Sri Lanka.

Due to the complexity nature, Indian Coalition politics cannot be compared with any other country in the world. However^{ix.} the above discussions about the clumsy nature and the changeable ideological situations of coalition governments in recent India lead to certain inferences which are depicted below.

- i. Firstly, coalitions cut across left-right, communal-secular, and national-regional divisions with the chief pursuit of office as the only reality.
- ii. Secondly, coalition between an anchor party and satellite parties tends to be stable.

- iii. Thirdly, among such coalitions, if the anchor party commands and a majority by itself as in West Bengal, it is likely to be stabler. A coalition of mutually dependent parties (that is, no party having a majority on its own) also is likely to be durable as in Kerala of the two categories mentioned, the former is likely to be stabler.
- iv. Fourthly, minority coalitions propped up by external support whether conditionally or unconditionally, are not likely to be stable.
- v. Fifthly, the anchor party tends to make more than proportionate concessions to the smaller ones who gain more than proportionately to their strength.
- vi. Sixthly, factions within the parties particularly the anchor party threaten the stability or the coalition.
- vii. Seventhly, factional splits tend to be accommodated in the pursuit of office-seeking interest.
- viii. Eighthly, surplus majority or large-size coalitions are stabler than minimal winning coalitions.

Lastly, political cultures of Indian states vary and some are more conducive to stable coalition politics than the others.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The above discussions clearly indicate that the impact and importance of coalition politics in the present India, immensely affects on ideology and stability of different political parties. Today, all most all political parties are curiously engaged to enjoy the power by any cost instead of national interest which is the matter of great concern. Here in India, coalition politics is not only causing great harm to country's interest at national and

international level but also they throw tantrum at one or the other issue to achieve their vested interest. The helplessness government receives jeers and jabs whenever it enacts legislation or frames a national or international policy. So, if things continued to take place in such a manner, no doubt, it will not only hamper the progress of the country but also another internal revolution will be started among the political parties and the people of India.

Coalition politics is particularly in the case of 'Emergency or War' is a matter of great

concern for future India. Because the partners of Coalition governments and their leaders are not more important than the safe guard and dignity of our country. So it is a proper time to think how this can be handled as a smooth manner instead of bargaining among the Coalition partners in India. Here it is seen that not only the Executive Head of the country like, the Prime Minister but also Defense Minister are completely paralyzed during the era of coalition politics, particularly when our country is in a great trouble for its safeguard and to keep its dignity in International Forums.

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