

# A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE COALITION GOVERNMENT AND UNI-FEDERAL NATURE OF THE POWER SHARING IN INDIA

**Dr. Vinod Kumar Meena**  
Assistant Professor  
Faculty of Law  
Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur

**Kailash Chander Meena**  
Research Scholar,  
Faculty of Law  
Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur

## Abstract

The researcher has analysed both the legal and political aspects of the power-sharing agreement between the Union and the State Governments. The researcher is of the view that the provisions of the said agreement are constitutionally valid, but also finds that certain issues have been ignored by the government. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that in the present agreement between the Union and the State Governments, it is recognized that there are powers with which the Union can influence the States indirectly. Therefore, in any arrangement made between the Union and the States, it is essential to have these powers for effective implementation of the policies of the Union. This may be a major reason for the present arrangement to exist. Another consideration is the position of the States in national affairs. Though the Constitution of India speaks of India as a nation, nevertheless, the States have to face various problems such as the ones referred to in the text. Therefore, in order to provide solutions to these problems, a certain amount of power sharing arrangement is needed between the States and the Union. This paper examines the nature of power sharing agreement in India.

**Keywords:** State, Union, Constitution of India, Government, Coalition, Legislative Power.

## Introduction

India has a long tradition of democratic governance with a federal structure. According to the Government of India: The Government of India is a federal State governed by a Federal Union of States. The union and the states are governed by the Constitution, the supreme law of India. The states are represented in the federal Parliament by its elected legislatures; the union is represented in the Parliament by its elected legislative and executive assemblies.

Political parties have emerged as the most important institutions of democracy. They have shaped the development of the country through their role in government. They have also served as the voice of various interest groups including regional and local communities. They have also been considered to be the basis of Indian federalism.<sup>1</sup> The major political parties of India are Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian National Congress (United), All India Trinamool Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party and Lok Satta. With the growth of Indian democracy, the power of these parties has expanded, leading to major policy changes. In the past five years, the Bharatiya Janata Party has emerged as the major political party in India. The power of the Congress party has declined, while the role of the All-India Trinamool Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, All India Trinamool Congress (United) and the Bahujan Samaj Party has grown. Lok Satta (Lok Satta Party) is a socialistic party formed in India in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Political Parties in India**

While political parties have their roots in the English era, the Indian parties were mainly established in the late 19th and 20th century. From the early 1960s, with the political mobilization of India, the Indian political parties started gaining popularity. The most notable groups were the All India Student Federation, Student Federation of India, All India Students Federation, Peoples Students Federation, Lok Dal, Communist Party of India, Socialist Party of India, Indian Communist Party and Communist Party of India (Marxist). The All India Youth Federation was established in 1961. In 1964, the Socialist Party of India (Marxist) was founded and in 1967, the Lok Dal was established. In 1967, The Communist Party of India and The Communist Party of India (Marxist) were founded. After 1968, when the socialist forces came together to form the Janata Party, the Janata Party was divided into different parties. The Janata Party became the Indian National Congress party in 1971.<sup>3</sup>

Political parties have been an integral part of Indian democracy. They have played a crucial role in providing representation to different political ideologies in the Indian political and administrative system. In the early years, each party represented a specific class of people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sahni, Naresh Chandra (Ed.), *“Coalition Politics in India,”* New Academy Publishing Co., Jullundur, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Karunakaran, K. P. (Ed.), *“Coalition Governments in India - Problems and Prospects,”* Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Nanda, Sukadev, *“Coalitional Politics in Orissa,”* Sterling Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1979.

They represented the farmers, labourers, the urban dwellers and the ethnic communities. The Congress party, for example, was a political party formed to represent the interests of the urban middle class. In the 1950s, they supported the Congress coalition in government, which was formed by various political parties to manage the partition of the country, as well as to fight the liberation struggle of the Indian people.<sup>4</sup> However, when the government failed to implement the measures they proposed and led to severe economic crises and instability, the Congress party found it difficult to lead the coalition. In 1975, the coalition collapsed and the Congress party formed the Janata Party. While the Congress party has continued to represent the urban middle class, the Janata party has represented the rural and tribal population. In 1982, the Congress Party, led by Indira Gandhi, became the strongest political party in the country. They were also re-elected in 1984. But during the next two years, a series of massacres in the country against the Sikhs and Muslims led to riots, and the Indian National Congress party was banned.<sup>5</sup>

The Indian National Congress Party remained in power from 1984 to 1989 when Rajiv Gandhi was elected as the President. A coalition government was formed by the Congress and other parties to lead the country. Since 1989, when the party came to power, the role of the Congress Party has continued to decline and it is no longer a leading political party. In 2004, another Congress led coalition government came to power. The United Front government brought the party back to power in 2004. In 2014, after the United Front government lost the election, the party returned to power in New Delhi. In 2019, another Congress led government has been formed and is still leading the government in New Delhi.<sup>6</sup>

## Phases of Coalition Government

### ❖ *Pre-Election Coalition*

---

<sup>4</sup> Kashyap, C. Subhash (Ed.), “*Coalition Government and Politics in India*,” Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Chander, Prakash (Ed.), “*Coalition Politics in India*,” kmo Publications, New Delhi, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Sartori, Giovanni (1976). *Parties and Party System*, Cambridge, Cambridge University press.

It means adjustment between the parties. There are coalition governments in India since independence. There were coalition in the 1st general election in 1952 too but the result of 1952 election showed that Congress majority and formed coalition with the Congress President-Hari Krishnan (K. Kamaraj). Then they started fight with each other and fought out for the post of Prime Minister. The coalition governments were formed as a necessity of necessity. In the next general election in 1957 the Congress won by a huge margin and formed the governments. Then it started fighting with the Congress President-Pandit Nehru. Then from the next general election in 1962 till Indian general election in 1967 they were in power.<sup>7</sup>

#### ❖ *Post-Election Coalition*

It means after election they formed some kind of tie-up with each other to get the post of Prime Minister. In the 1st general election of 1952 congress got 63 seats, but no one supported them. From 1953 to 1962 the congress got the majority seats but some time they contested with some other parties like the Swatantra Party, the Samata Party and the Communist Party etc. in post-election. There were lot of coalitions in post-election, even in 1962 and 1967, but Congress was still the boss of it. In 1967 the Congress got the majority votes, but there were lot of fights over the posts of Prime Minister. Finally the congress got the post of Prime Minister under the leadership of Indira Gandhi.<sup>8</sup>

#### ❖ *Election-Losing Coalition*

It means the party did not get the minimum of 50 seats in the parliament in the last general election and then the coalition government was formed. In the Indian general election in 1980, the Janata Party formed the government with support from some other parties. In the next general election in 1985, Congress won the majority of seats but their vote share was below the minimum of 50 seats. It was the main reason that brought Janata party into power and formed the coalition government.<sup>9</sup>

#### ❖ *Governmental Coalition*

---

<sup>7</sup> Riker, William. H., "The Theory of Political Coalitions," Oxford and IBH Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

It means the party get some posts in the government, but not as much as the other party. It means that both the party got some posts in the government but they are not the main bosses. In the Indian general election in 1989, the Congress won the majority of seats and formed the government. The government they formed was known as United Front government and did not include the Bharatiya Janata Party and National Conference. The Government came up to a power.<sup>10</sup>

#### ❖ *Vacuous Coalition*

It means when the majority party is in power, the coalition goes with the other party as the deputy, rather than taking any kind of initiative. It means that there is no decision-making power. In the Indian general election in 2004, the Congress won the majority of seats in the parliament, but their share of votes were very less. It was the main reason that brought Bharatiya Janata Party and National Democratic Alliance into power and formed the government.<sup>11</sup>

### **Nature of the Power Sharing in India**

The nature of power sharing during coalition government in India can be described as “bi-federal” rather than “uni-federal”. This is because the "federal" structure for India has essentially nothing to do with its federal characteristics. Federalism is not an "unitary system" of governance in which power is distributed to "federal" governments by the central government.<sup>12</sup> To begin with, "federalism" in India is an arrangement, in which the constituent units are the central government, the state government, and the local government. Since the central government is already a "state" (within the limits of its territory), "federalism" would make the federal level redundant. Then, what is the purpose of having separate levels of governance? There are several examples where such "dualism" exists, though in some cases it is “uni-federalism”. Two countries are in the same federal arrangement, but operate differently.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Ram, D Sunder, (2007). Federal system and Coalition Govt. in India; Conflict and consensus in Centrestate relations, New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers.

<sup>13</sup> Ramsundar, D. (Ed.), “Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability, “, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000.

India, like many countries, has a dual structure: a federal and a unitary structure. This is because of historical reasons, such as caste system and language divide. For example, India has two main languages, i.e. Hindi and English, and two main religions, i.e. Hinduism and Christianity. These three things are basic to the Indian psyche, and in the history of India, there have been periods where one could dominate. This happened in caste system and in religion.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of language, we can see the state government as a unit, while the central government remains with the people as a whole. The state government is a subordinate position, because the state is a territory which has a distinct territory, so the powers are divided. The central government, on the other hand, is a unitary system, where the central government, the state governments, and the local governments are separate.

Federalism is an arrangement, where the constituent units are the central government, the state government, and the local government. Thus, for India, the central government has a unitary and the federal arrangements simultaneously, since the states are already parts of the central government. Thus, what is the need for a "federal" arrangement, which is actually redundant? A federal arrangement, for India, is like one of the many "regions" which exist in India: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh. A large country like India, with this many regions, is a problem in itself. It is confusing for people. How does a region operate with such a different structure?

India is a federation with a "unitary" aspect to its "federal" arrangement. A federation is a government in which the units are two (or more) countries, who have agreed to share sovereignty and authority. In India, the federal arrangements are the same, but the way they work is different. India's constitution is a "unitary" system, meaning that all powers are vested in the central government. It is a "bi-federal" system, in which power is distributed to "federal" governments.<sup>15</sup>

Here, we begin to see the difference between the "federal" and "unitary" systems. It is easy to see why the federal system of India is bi-federal: The states are already in the central government. Since these states have their own territories, and thus "federalism" doesn't make

<sup>14</sup> Maheshwari, S. R., 'Coalition Government - 1976 Indian Experience: 1946-1996,' 'Politics in India, "New Delhi, July 1996, p.23.

<sup>15</sup> Dodd, Lawrence C. (1976). Coalition in parliamentary Government, Princeton, Princeton University press.

sense, there is no reason to have a level of governance, which is not a part of the central government.

India's "unitary" system is different from other "unitary" systems, for example, Brazil. A "unitary" system, like in Brazil, is a system where all powers are vested in the central government. The central government and states are completely separate, and the state governments have no say in the matters of the central government. In India's constitution, the states are different from the central government. The "federal" government has an authority, i.e. it is the "federal" system. The "unitary" system is the constitution of India, which the "federal" system is different. The state and federal governments are separate, in which the federal system has its own powers. India's constitution has elements of both.

### **Issues of Coalition Governments**

The issue of coalition government has been the main focus of political attention in India for the last six decades. Several coalition governments have ruled India between 1950 and 1999, in a long series of short-lived regimes. India's experience of coalition government was initially the result of the country's early efforts to find a solution to its political problems. The idea of the government coming together with other political parties had occurred to the minds of politicians, especially in the post-independence era. The reasons for the establishment of coalition governments were varied, but among the primary motives were the following: to secure the approval of groups that had not received fair representation or to secure an overall majority in Parliament, or simply because the ruling party wished to make a policy change or to avoid defeat at the polls.

At the heart of the matter was the question of coalition with which party, with what partners. The parties were seen as differing or agreeing on certain points. They were also seen as sharing a common interest in promoting a common agenda. There is, of course, the issue of the party which is in office being the political representative of its constituents. But beyond that, a government of coalition should be of a character which is agreeable to all parties involved. In other words, an agreement should have been reached between the parties to cooperate with each other and that this agreement should not be in opposition to the interest of any party.

While the term 'coalition' (which includes its derivatives 'agreement' and 'alliance') can be referred to the agreement of political parties to work together, and can also describe the actual



government, it should be noted that the term is quite often used in a manner distinct from these meanings. For example, some newspapers (as late as November 1999) described the Congress–NCP–CPI government as a 'coalition'. This was a misnomer. No agreement had been reached between these three parties on the question of continuing in office; it was simply a description of the present government. The term coalition government was also used in India between 1990 and 1999 to describe a government which remained in power with outside support.<sup>16</sup>

### **Critical analysis of Coalition Governments**

It is true that the Indian did not have a very good experience with coalition Government experiments. So, the government resorted to inviting the advice of the then most experienced British economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, to suggest how to form a Coalition Government. Galbraith in his long essay “The New Indira” described the experiment in a positive manner, and it is interesting to note how his views have been vindicated more than five decades later.

But before we examine in detail the experiment of 1980, it is pertinent to make it clear why coalition governments are considered so problematic in India, and why this is the case. In India, all coalition governments to date have involved a regional leader joining hands with national political parties to form a government. It is always the regional party that is able to gain maximum political benefits, and this is the case all through India’s history. There have been instances, notably in Gujarat, when regional leaders have become Governors or Governors have been given ministerial portfolios and this has happened in the name of coalitions, but it has always been a strategic deal in which the regional leaders have benefitted the most.

#### **❖ *Why coalition governments fail in India***

Coalition Governments have not been a success in India. A detailed analysis of why this has happened would help us appreciate how governments fail. For a nation like India, in which one party rule has become a way of life, coalition governments appear difficult to achieve.

Partly because it is a nation where the idea of majority rule is a big part of our thinking. It is also because India is a country that is essentially a democracy, with the electorate able to choose between political parties, and so coalition governments are a problem for India. There is also a

---

<sup>16</sup> Raj. Subhendu Rajan (2009). Coalition politics in India: Dimensions of federal power sharing, New Delhi, Manak publications Pvt. Ltd.



tradition of coalition governments within the ruling party of a nation, for example, in the UK, where the Conservatives had governed for nearly 40 years, and the Liberals for nearly 50 years. In a country like India, the problem of coalition is compounded by the fact that the party in power is often the same as that which won the last elections, and the idea of coalition with the Opposition is not an easy one.<sup>17</sup>

#### ❖ *Indian experience of coalition governments*

All three coalition experiments in India so far – the UPA, the NDA and the INC – have been highly controversial. The first of these, the UPA, lasted only 50 months, and was brought down by a strong Opposition led by the BJP which had won a massive victory in the 2004 general elections. The UPA was defeated after a huge loss in the 2009 general elections, and for the next five years there was absolute political deadlock. After the 2009 elections, the Congress made overtures to the BJP, and an agreement was struck between the two parties, which led to the formation of a Congress-led government with the support of an alliance of two regional parties – the JDU and the RJD. This coalition lasted till the end of the 2012 elections, after which the alliance collapsed. In 2015, the JDU withdrew from the coalition and decided to contest elections separately, and the BJP returned to power on the basis of the support of the Shiv Sena, an organisation that does not recognise the Constitution and is a major party in Maharashtra. The INC, which had been the largest party in the 2009 elections, was reduced to a much smaller third place. It fought the 2014 elections on the basis of not being the same Congress of 2009. It won 29 seats, less than the 44 seats it had won in 2009. The Congress is today a much smaller political entity than it was in 2009. In 2014, it came a distant third in terms of numbers of seats, and has been reduced to the Congress (O) party, which is a small party with no real organisational strength.<sup>18</sup>

These three experiments are highly significant because they showed us that coalition governments do not last for a very long time, and do not really survive after the initial honeymoon period. The honeymoon period is the period when both parties believe that they can do well together. In three successive Indian experiments, coalition governments did not

---

<sup>17</sup> Prakash, Chandra (2006). *Coalition Politics in India*, New Delhi, Anmol publications,

<sup>18</sup> Chander, N. Jose (2004). *Coalition politics: Indian experience*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing company (ed),

survive this honeymoon period, and the initial period of honeymoon ended in defeat for the government.

## Conclusion

A democratic government is a trustee of the interests of the entire people including those who oppose and criticize the policies and actions of the government. In a democracy, criticism by the opposition is a positive achievement. It shows that the criticism is based on truth and is an honest attempt to seek improvement in policy and administration. A democracy is therefore the best means of social progress, of economic improvement and also of political stability in the long run. The state's task in a democracy is therefore not only to preserve and safeguard the interests of the public, but also to secure the conditions in which this task can be carried out effectively and smoothly, so that individual interests may be brought into harmony with the common good.

From the above details it can be understood that our political system had witnessed many Coalition governments, all of which had been short-lived. From the years of independence till 1985, five Prime Ministers have had to be deposed at different occasions. The reasons of the formation of short-lived governments and non-formation of government for a long period of time is due to many causes. One of the main cause is the absence of a stable majority or government in both the houses of the Parliament of India, which is one of the reason for the unstable coalition governments and short-lived governments.

In short, all the Prime Ministers have faced a common problem of lack of a stable majority in both the houses of the Parliament of India. All these governments came into existence only due to the co-operation of the political parties with the exception of the governments of Chidambaram and Narasimha Rao which were formed by themselves, even when all the parties in the coalition were not in power. We can see that Indian political systems have undergone fundamental change in recent times. In fact the Indian political scenario seems quite unsettled. On one hand there is the increasing number of politicians in the country. On the other hand we have seen the rise in political parties and their associated networks. The media is also getting increasingly active in bringing out the truth in respect to political events and developments. We see this with the recent case of the so-called Raman Scindia case, we see the case of Sonia Gandhi's political rival Ram Nath Kovind being declared the president of India.

## Suggestions

As a corollary to all this we see with increasing frequency politicians running for election as candidates of their political parties, rather than in the office of their party leader. This is happening at both the State and the national level. We also see political parties who at the State and the national level are not even holding office due to some political power struggle within the party. Hence a State is without a government for considerable period.

We can also see the rise of the political network and party machinery at the State level. They are increasingly using these structures to their advantage and there is no limit to the level of corruption that these networks are willing to indulge in. We see all this in various States in India and we see that the political system is heading to a critical state.

The system of coalition form of government in India is being further abused in such a way that is making the situation more and more critical. The current situation is one where there is a party that is not even holding office and another that is using the resources of the party to fight elections on its own. We can see that the power centres in the party system are being more and more misused to the disadvantage of the common man.

The way forward for the system of coalition form of government in India is for the politicians and their party members to behave properly. We are sure that there are many party members who will not want to engage in such behaviour. For them there is no need to engage in it as they are not interested in running the country. We are sure that there are politicians who are willing to behave responsibly and there is no need for such power centres to get in the way of the people's representatives. Such misuse of power will destroy the unity and trust of the Indian political system. Any politician or his or her party members that indulge in such behaviour will find no place in the system.