

A critical review of non majority party politics in Karnataka – understanding its pro's and cons'

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Abstract: After the general election, if no political party gets the majority of votes, needed to form the government, results in two or more political parties joining hands to form Coalition Government. This is a multi-party government, in which two or more minority political parties join together and form the government, either on the basis of pre poll alliances or on the basis of post poll alliances. As the number of regional parties have increased tremendously over past two decades in India in general and Karnataka in particular, Coalition Government appears to be a panacea for the political turmoil, as single party fails to get the required majority. When single political party fails to get the simple majority, which is a pre-requisite to come in to power, the only way out is to join hands with other political parties on common terms with each other and define a common programme or agenda on which they work. Despite many merits of these Coalition government, these fail to contemplate and even fail to complete a full term, due to differences of opinion and coalition government always remains in pulls and pressures. Rightly remarked as 'push-pull government', coalition government often fails to achieve the formation objective as their fundamental manifesto itself differs. Multiple reasons are associated with it. This paper attempts to study the characteristics, nature of coalition politics in Karnataka and causes for its failure over the years.

Keywords: Regional political parties, co-operation, Failure, Pressure, Common Programme.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word 'coalition' which is the verbal substantive 'coalescere'. Co means 'together' and alescere means 'to go or to grow together'. According to the dictionary meaning, coalition means an act of coalescing, or uniting into one body, a union of persons, states or an alliance. It is a combination of a body or parts into one whole. In the strict political sense the word 'coalition' is used for an alliance or temporary union for joint

action of various powers or states and also of the union into a single government of distinct parties or members of distinct parties. A coalition government is a combination of heterogeneous socio-political elements, which are susceptible to political turmoil and storms emerging from changing socio-political conditions and compulsions. A close look into coalition government, reveals the fact that, whatever agreements and understanding that happens at the beginning of forming the government, later gradually evades and erodes, thereby leading to break of coalition government. This form of government depends on the principle of co-operation than competition. 'Swim together and sink together' is the philosophy of this form of government. Different political parties join hands in forming the government. It is a system of governance by a group of political parties or by several political parties. When several political parties collaborate to form a government and exercise the political power on the basis of a common agreed programme or agenda, it is called as 'Coalition Government'. Such a Coalition government is organized when no party is in a position to get a simple majority in the parliament, and some minority parties form a coalition group or an alliance for forming a government.

Coalition can happen at two different levels – known as (a) Before the general elections – pre-poll coalition and (b) After the general elections – Post Poll Coalition.

Before an election if several parties form an alliance or a coalition group, and after getting a majority or after emerging as the single largest group in the legislature, forms a government in which all coalition partners find a berth in the Council of Ministers – it is called as Pre-Poll Coalition. A pre-poll coalition group always contests elections on the basis of a common manifesto or an agreed programme and policies behind which all the coalition partners are united through a

consensus. When the coalition group as a whole secures a majority in elections, it gets the mandate to rule and implement its agreed programme and politics. Consequently, it forms a government in which every coalition partner has a share and the coalition government exercises power for giving effect to the agreed policies and programmes. In other words, a coalition government means, the formation of a government by a group of political parties and coalition politics means the collective exercise of power by a group of political parties as coalition partner.

Most of the time, in general election if no political party gets majority, some parties come together and form a coalition government and exercises power in the agreed policies and programmes. The Coalition group/alliance selects a coalition leader and coalition government is organized under the leadership of such person.

General characteristics of a coalition government:

1. A coalition government is organized by two or more political parties.
2. At times when no party is in a position to get a majority some parties form a coalition for organizing a government. The coalition partners then share the exercise of power of the state.
3. Coalition Politics is a collaborative-cooperative efforts in which some political parties together exercise political power i.e., form a government to make binding decision for a whole society.
4. At times some political parties form a pre-poll alliance and contest the elections collectively by fielding common candidates in various constituencies. After getting a majority in the elections, the coalition partners collectively form a government.
5. Before or after the organization of a coalition government, the coalition partners prepare a common programme, which incorporates a set of mutually agreed politics and principles. The exercise of power is undertaken for implementing the agreed policies and programmes. In case the coalition alliance or group is organized before the elections, a common election manifesto is prepared, adopted and released.
6. The coalition group/alliance either elects or selects a coalition leader in advance or elects such a leader after the elections. The coalition

government is organized under the leadership of such a person.

7. Coalition government is always based upon a compromise or agreement. In decision-making all the coalition partners try to practice decision making by consensus. Each coalition partner has to accommodate the wishes, desires and politics of other partners.
 8. A coalition government has usually a large sized Council of Ministers because all the coalition partners have to be given a berth in the Ministry.
- It is often stated that each system will have its own merits and de-merits. Just like a coin has two faces, merits of a system will be coupled with de merits. Advantages follows dis advantages. Similarly coalition system of government is not completely pool free. There are many merits and equally there are de merits.

Tracing the foot steps of coalition politics in Karnataka:

- The first coalition in Karnataka was formed in 1983. The Janata Party (JNP) had emerged as the single largest party with 95 seats and got outside support from the Bharatiya Janata Party, which had 18 seats, left parties and 16 independents. Ramkrishna Hegde became the Chief Minister of this coalition. After an embarrassing performance of Janata Party (JNP) in the 1984 general elections (just 4 seats), Ramkrishna Hegde dissolved the government after one year and 354 days, stating that the party does not have peoples mandate. This the first break of coalition government in Karnataka.
- Though the general elections in 1994, 1999 and 2004 were triangular contests among the Congress, the Janata Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party, the results of 2004 elections paved the path for a 'hung assembly' once again, with Bharatiya Janata Party emerging as the single largest party. The result was the formation of two unstable coalition governments. To keep BJP out of power, Congress and JD (S) formed coalition government. N. Dharam Singh of the Congress was the Chief Minister. The government collapsed after a group of the JD(S) leaders withdrew their support. The Bharatiya Janata Party joined hands with the JD(S) in the second coalition (2006-2007). The JD(S) led this

government with H.D. Kumaraswamy as Chief Minister. Both parties would enjoy Chief Ministership for a period of 20 months each (which would cover the time left for the next elections). This has created a unique situation, where a government has been headed by three different political parties with no elections between them. The JD(S) was to hand over the chief minister's post to the BJP in November 2007. It refused to do so, resulting in President's Rule and eventually the 2008 mid-term elections.

- Again the May 2018, the state assembly elections threw up an inconclusive verdict. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the single largest party with 104 seats, it was short of a simple majority by nine seats in the 224-member assembly. The Congress with 78 seats and JD(S) with 37 seats decided to form an alliance to keep the Bharatiya Janata Party out of power. At the time, the Congress had its national compulsions – general elections were just a year away and the JD(S) that had been out of power for 10 years was more than willing. While the Congress and JD(S) both professed a 'secular' ideology, from day one, it was clear that the alliance was forced. The Congress is a pan-Karnataka party while the JD(S) has its base in the 'Old Mysuru' belt comprising 10 of the state's 30 districts. Also, the Congress draws its vote base from across castes, regions and religions. The JD(S), on the other hand, is seen almost exclusively representing the interests of Vokkaligas, a dominant landowning caste. The JD(S), with less than half of the Congress's legislative strength, seized its good fortune with both hands. HD Kumaraswamy not only became the Chief Minister but his party men got many of the lucrative portfolios. Leaders who had fought against each other for decades were suddenly asked to compromise. While the party high commands could knock the heads of leaders, the workers on ground refused to gel with one another. It is believed that the BJP worked indeed very hard to increase the rift and also tried to expand its strength. Finally, 13 rebel members submitted their resignation, setting the stage for the fall of coalition government once again in Karnataka.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To know the meaning of Coalition Government in general
- To study Pre Poll coalition and Post Poll coalition with special reference to Karnataka
- To bring out the features of Coalition government.
- To explore the causes of failure of Coalition Government in the state.

This Research paper is Descriptive study in nature and based on secondary data only.

An attempt to discover failure causes of Coalition Government:

The process of coalition government started in India from 1967. It also marked the emergence of coalition and also new parties merging along with each other. This introduced the 'Era of Coalition Politics or Multi Party rule' in India. Adoption of multi party system and regionalism changed the centre state relations to certain extent. Participation of many regional parties in the coalition government at the centre particularly indicating a significant shift from centralized government to shared rule and responsibilities. It is indeed fascinating to explore the reasons for the failure of Coalition Government and complete fall down of an administrative mechanism. Several causes leading to failure of Coalition Governments could be grouped into financial, ethical, administrative, lack of co-operation, mismatch of ideology etc., however, following are the common list of causes, resulting in failure of Coalition Mechanism.

- Coalition Government came into existence due to opportunistic nature of political parties. To keep away some other political parties, two or more political parties have consented and joined hand. Once the objective of government formation is achieved, they start looking at differences now.
- Disputes and mis-understandings are an integral part of Coalition Government. Initial attitude of compromisation becomes competition, leading to ultimate rift between parties.
- Always, history has proved the fact that, Coalition Governments results in short term temporary nature of government. The agenda of different political parties differs from each other. As a result, people belonging to different political parties would not get along for a longer period of time.

- Coalition partners always have a credible excuse for not delivering on their promises.
- Corruption is also seen as an acceptable practice to meet the needs of various political parties who demand their pound of flesh.
- No one is accountable. Shifting of responsibility is very easy in case of coalition government. Therefore, it is said, success has many fathers and failure is an orphan. Something happens good, every partnering political party claims the mileage out of it and if something goes wrong, no one is ready to take up the responsibilities.
- Given the 5 year duration of the government and even shorter duration of coalition understandings, the political parties know that they have a short window to maximise financial gains for their respective groups. So they will be having vested interest and concentrated efforts to enhance their revenue sources.
- The political partners have their own set of divergent views on every subject. Therefore, decision making on even the simplest of matters needs the support of everyone thus slowing down decision making.
- Supported by a group of individuals who have no common ideology. The first step is to start making statements against the coalition, next is to sulk and the final step is to withdraw support thus ensuring that the house of cards will collapse.
- Several instances of Governments hanging their or compromising their values have been seen and continue to be seen. As the old saying in English states “Too many cooks spoil the broth”.
- Lack of co-ordination, gradual misunderstanding and difference of ideology are the prime factors, which begins the fall of coalition government.

Therefore, due to above foresaid reasons and many other factors, Coalition Governments always fail and fall miserably before completing its term.

CONCLUSION

Coalition government is a system of governance by a group of political parties or by several political parties. When several political parties collaborate to form a government and exercise the political power on the basis of a common agreed programme or agenda, we describe it as Coalition Government. Both forming

and operating a coalition government is a very difficult task. Parties that used to form coalition governments earlier are now completely weak or extinct. All the coalition governments from 1946 to 1953 to 1999 have again proved unsuccessful. Coalition Governments bypass the development of the nation and will develop vested interest in their own development, while many times it happens that many parties start pulling the country in many directions. In such a situation, the biggest loss for the country occurs. When coalition governments are formed, even the smallest parties start doing arbitrary work by threatening other parties with the fall of the government. By doing arbitrary work in the whole country, they create an atmosphere of fear. It is rightly said “too many cooks spoils the broth”. Therefore, time and again, historical evidences suggests that, Coalition Governments are unsuccessful.

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