STABILITY OF GOVERNMENTS UNDER COALITION POLITICS IN KERALA SINCE 1960

Introduction

The word "coalition" has become a dirty one in political circles. It is not because coalitions have been entirely absent from our politics, but because of the manner in which the previous coalition governments in the State and in the Centre collapsed due to factors such as defections, misuse of the Article 356 and clash of personality cult. Yet coalition governments in Kerala and West Bengal have become a regular feature of Indian polity and these models have earned reputation.

The State of Kerala represents a unique political culture when compared to other States in the Indian Union. Political scientists have called the State a political laboratory. Almost all political parties having representation in the State Assembly, have through various permutations and combinations, cutting across political ideologies and socio-economic interests, have formed alliances and participated in power sharing at one time
or other. Virtually almost all the political parties have neglected their ideologies by which they have attracted a large number of people. A politically conscious voter has only limited choice before him that he can exercise his franchise in favour of this or that party. He is in no position to invalidate his vote deliberately. When the elections are over the rest of the business is carried out by the political parties and their leaders. An influential leader of any party can manoeuvre the things according to his whims and fancies. This deviates the party from its declared stand and produces evil impact on the society by destroying the very foundations of true democracy. In such a situation the people and the political parties have begun to think about remedial measures and try to find out better alternatives. A radical change which upsets the entire system is never conducive to parliamentary democracy. The only possible way is to adopt a slow process which aims at evolving a stable governmental system. In this background one can see the gradual evolution of the system of coalition government in the State of Kerala and elsewhere in India.

Since independence, for over two decades, the people chose the Congress Party to decide the destiny of India. It was a kind of monopolistic rule without a rival-party that could play the role of an effective opposition at the Centre or in any State of India. The people had unflinching faith in the Congress
Party and its leaders. The pro-poor approach and the adoption of a socialistic pattern of society attracted a large number of common people to the Party. But when the ideology was put into practice, the Congress Party and the government faced problems of great magnitude. Gradually the Congress system declined due to internal disputes and rivalry. Disillusioned and impatient leaders, waiting outside the corridors of power began to revolt and break down the organisational ties. The disintegration of the Congress was enthusiastically welcomed by all opposition parties waiting eagerly outside for an opportunity to share power. This prompted the rebellious Congress leaders to make alternate arrangements at the Centre and in the States. Each party began to shed its ideology for convenience. Their only desire was to capture power or to have a share in it by effecting compromises with any party other than Congress. The anti-Congress propaganda of non-Congress parties in cooperation with former Congressmen created a new climate in the Indian political scenario. The only possible alternative was a coalition arrangement in which all parties opposing the Congress could sit together and chalk out a plan to share governmental power.

The peculiar feature of the Indian federation to a certain extent helps to weaken the governmental system in the constituent States. The Constitutional provisions tilted
governmental powers in favour of the Centre government. With the desire to establish a strong Centre, the States are granted only less powers. The inability of the States to cope with the emerging situation greatly hampered governmental stability. Politically, financially and administratively the Centre possesses superior powers when compared to the States. If the government at the Centre and in the States do not belong to the same party, very often, the will of the Centre prevails resulting in the dismissal of the State Governments by the Centre using Article 356 of the Constitution. Again, President’s Rule in a State practically means rule of the party in power at the Centre.

The high literacy rate, the spread of progressive ideologies, ideas like communism, socialism etc. and the more or less equal strength of various religious communities gave new dimensions to political development in Kerala. Till independence, the Congress was a movement that led the freedom struggle. It embraced all sections of Indian society irrespective of their loyalties, allegiance or social status. When the Congress was transformed into a political party, its objective was also changed. The Congress, then, began to share and exercise political power. The magnetic appeal of a Movement and the charisma of its leaders held the followers of the Congress together for sometime. The strong desire of its leaders to be the centre of the political power changed the
whole situation. It initiated the degeneration of the Congress Party. The process of diversification of political society in Kerala was clearly manifested early in the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin. This process continues with varying magnitude even today.

Religious communities and caste groups play a significant role in the political life of Kerala. Loud proclamations from public platforms and statements in strong words against communalism and casteism by political parties are far from what they practice in day-to-day politics. Even the secular and the revolutionary parties are not free from communal restraints. During the period of normal relationship, community leaders and political leaders maintain a hotline between them.

The relationship between different communities and political parties assumed a new dimension in Kerala politics that no political party alone can come to power in Kerala without being supported one or the other community. Often by the combined strength of these communities become a major force in the making of a government in Kerala. During the "Liberation Struggle" against the first E.M. Sankaran Nampoothiripad Ministry the State witnessed the cumulative effect of communal politics.

Though coalition politics emerged in Kerala State as early as 1960, the 1980 Assembly Elections onwards it took a new
dimension. It saw the emergence of two fronts viz. the UDF led by the Indian National Congress (INC(I) and the LDF led by the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI(M)). They have led the coalition governments in Kerala more or less alternatively after each successive Assembly Elections. Both these Fronts continuously seek alliance partners from everywhere—individuals, political or other groups or defectors from other political parties—leaving aside the concept of ideological homogeneity which is a pre-requisite for the stability of a coalition government in any State.

Apart from the above said two Fronts, the LDF and the UDF, Keralites witnessed the presence of a third force, the Hindu Munnani with the combination of BJP, in the 9th Assembly Elections to Kerala Legislature in March 1987. But the balance sheet of the third front in that election was blank. Though the BJP contested with greater vigour and enthusiasm in the successive Assembly Elections in Kerala its fate was the same as those of the previous ones. Now the BJP is prepared to ally with any party to defeat Congress(I) at the national level and the left parties in West Bengal and Kerala.

From the past experiences the people of India have learned that there is no going back to one-party dominant system which prevailed during the first two decades after independence. It is also impossible for a two-party system of
the type in the U. K. or in the U. S. A. to emerge in India. The multi-party system will possibly stay here with timely modifications. In Kerala the existing Front politics will continue unless altered by the newly formed BJP front or force with the active support of alliance partners from the LDF or the UDF. This possibility eluded the political parties and the electorate when results of the 2001 Assembly Elections came out. However it is not fair to rule out new developments in a democracy where economic difficulties and serious social problems corner the electorate particularly under degenerated ideological perceptions.

Meaning and Nature of Coalition Politics

The term “Coalition” is derived from the Latin word ‘Coalitio’ which means a combination of bodies or parts into one body or whole with the aim ‘to grow together’. Apart from its meaning as a temporary alliance or as a combination of states for joint action the term coalition, as employed in a political sense, commonly denotes a cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties, or at all events members of such parties, unite to form a government or ministry.4

Three familiar types of situations are responsible for coalition: the inability of any single party, where a multi-party system exists, to form a ministry commanding a workable
majority in the lower house of parliament; and even balance between parties under a bi-party system, leading one of the two to ally itself with any minor group or party strong enough to keep it in powers and a national crisis necessitating the party and the concentration of all forces in a common direction for the common safety.⁶

Coalition implies interaction, and coordination in a defined way for the achievement of a particular objective. Its essential features are: (a) more than one actor (b) a desire to coordinate the behavior of each other (c) a common objective, and (d) a well defined method to be adopted for the achievement of objectives.⁶

Broadly speaking coalition governments are of three varieties. They may be 'grand coalitions' as existed in Britain during the First and the Second World Wars, in Austria from 1945 to 1966 and in West Germany particularly from December 1966 to October 1969. Secondly, they can be 'stable coalitions' as found in Scandinavian Countries, Holland and Belgium, Ceylon and also sometimes in Italy. A third variety is that of 'unstable multi-party coalitions' more frequently found in France (under the third and fourth Republic), in contemporary Italy and in majority of Indian States between 1967 and 1972.⁷
Political alliances constitute an important part on the coalition set up. There are two other types of alliances: the electoral alliances and the governmental alliances. The second may exist without the first. In other words coalition has two phases, pre-election alliances or adjustments between the parties and post election alliances to share political power to run the government. The pre-election alliances may be broken down after the election. Continuing the coalition by scrupulously upholding certain principles for which the coalition is formed, and ultimately destroying the coalition at the opportune moment, is coalitional politics.8

Quite often coalitions are formed to prevent a common enemy from assuming power. In this context the coalescing parties, having ideological differences, are compelled to come to an understanding as they have to choose the lesser of the two evils. There have been instances of the Rightists and Leftists coming together to challenge the citadels of the ruling party. Equally interesting is the instance of the communists and anti-communists forging an alliance to face a common enemy. A coalition devoid of ideological moorings survives till the enemy is humbled. Once the euphoria is over, differences come to the surface and the structure collapses like a pack of cards.9
There are a good number of instances of parties shifting their alliance in search of fresh partners. If power is the only motive behind joining a coalition, realignment will be a regular feature. Indeed, in a coalition set up alliance goes on changing like the sand dunes in a typical desert. No coalition partner has permanent friends or enemies. it has only permanent interests.10

Coalition governments are representatives of diversity. Coalition governments dictate an accommodative politics of compromise and conciliation by which smaller parties and less powerful interests get a voice in government and public policy. A greater part of the electorate is represented in a coalition government. There can be a threat to the stability of the country of great diversities, if some regions or groups start nourishing the grouse of being un or under represented.11

The spirit of a coalition is consensus. Any decision has to get the consent of all partners in a coalition. If this principle of consensus is effectively adhered to, then in course of time, the coalition itself would be found to be more viable than even a single-party majority, because the coalition would absorb within its functioning the viewpoints and wisdom of more than one party. The decision of such a coalition carries more weight, since it reflects the opinion of more than one party.
In a coalition, the practice of "outside support" must end and all partners must join the government. "outside support" means power without responsibility for any of its omissions and commissions.\textsuperscript{12}

The stability of a coalition, whether in the government or in the opposition, is largely dependent upon the quality of leadership and the commanding position of the leaders of the partners over fortune seeking members. Along with the internal problems of coalition partners arise exorbitant demands of the communities upon whom the coalition heavily depends for electoral victory.

In the ultimate analysis, the success of a coalition depends on the presence with in it of a political force that must command respect and allegiance by the soundness of its political theory or by its all-prevailing sort of political backing, an ideological homogeneity, a mature leadership, a common goal, the restraint displayed by the constituents in pursuing their own individual policies and above all the ability to be on the same wave length with the central force.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Scheme of the Thesis}

The scheme of the Thesis is as follows: The work is divided into an introduction, five chapters and conclusion. The first chapter deals with "The Congress System and Coalition
Politics in India.” The chapter explains the reasons for the emergence of multi-party system both at the Centre and in the various States, and thereby the formation of coalition ministries, more importantly after the decline of one-party dominance of the Indian National Congress.

The second chapter entitled “Coalition Politics in Historical Perspective” explains the political background of the first coalition ministry in Kerala i.e., the coalition ministry of Sri. Pattom Thanu Pillai of the PSP in 1960 with the help of Congress and Muslim League. The split in the Congress Party and the subsequent formation of Kerala Congress are explained in this chapter.

The third chapter entitled “New Dimension of Coalition Politics in Kerala” explains in detail the functioning of the various UDF and LDF ministries from 1980 onwards. The ups and downs of the UDF and LDF ministries and how far they have contributed to the stability of coalition governments are included here.

The fourth chapter “Communities and Politics of Coalition” presents the rise of the politics of religious and communal affirmation in Kerala. The influence of alignment and realignment of the major communities and their influence in the creation and destruction of ministries in Kerala are explained here.
Chapter five deals with “Leadership in Coalition Politics and the Role of Liaison or Coordination Committee System.” The success of a coalition depends on the ability and calibre of the leader and more over the effectiveness of a Liaison or Coordination Committee to coordinate the various activities of the ministry.

The conclusion of the thesis proves that the State of Kerala has now established coalition politics in its matured form and it has played a considerable role in creating stability of governments. But they have undermined specific ideologies.

Notes and References

1 If the President of India, on receipt of a report from the Governor of a State or otherwise, is satisfied that the Government in any State cannot carry out its duties in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, he may declare an emergency in that State and assume to himself all or any function of the Government of that State. The State Legislature, in such a case, is dissolved and the Parliament is empowered to make laws for that State.


5 Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol III, 600-601.

6 Nanda Sukdev, Coalition Politics in Orissa (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979) 12


8 Nanda Sukdev, Coalition Politics in Orissa (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979) 14


10 Indian Government and Politics 726.

