

Role of Regional Political Parties in Formation of Governments in India

Mohammad Hussain Yattoo

Research Scholar School of Social Science DAVV Indore M.P, India

Abstract

Regional politics in India is the off-shoot of caste, economic and environment factors. The pattern of party system, however, varies from State to State as it is largely shaped by the socio- economic milieu of a particular society. India is a multi-lingual and a multi-cultural Nation. The linguistic and cultural diversities give rise to separatist tendencies. The people living in a particular linguistic region tend to indentify and attach themselves with that region. The objective of the constitution makers was to have Co-operative Federalism. However, it is observed that national parties tend to lead to centralization of powers. Since independence, for four decades, India under One-party dominant system, which was seen as a unitary government? However, the emergence of regional parties has contributed to the break-down of One-party dominant system at the Centre. The essence of federalism lies not in the constitutional or institutional structure but in the society itself. Federal government is a device by which the federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected.

KEYWORDS: Regional political parties, Federalism, Centre, State, Constitution, Coalition, India

Introduction

Political parties have become an indispensable factor in the working of a representatives form of government. It lays down for irrefutable rule that a political party, whether at the national or regional level, in one form or another, is omnipresent. This phenomenon also signifies that the electorate has to express their confidence by way of casting their votes either in favour of a national or regional political party. Thus, citizen's commitment to political parties plays an important role for maintenance of a representatives system of governments. "Regional Party" is any political party with its base in a single region, whatever its objectives and platform may be where as "regionalist" parties are a subset of regional parties that specifically campaign for greater autonomy or independence in their region. Because regional parties including regionalist parties often cannot receive enough votes or legislative seats to be politically powerful, they may join political coalition or seek to part of a coalition Government. The growth of their pen-Indian forces had, however, taken shape under the centralisation of power during the British rule. But they were submerged in the national movement. After the independence, growth of regional parties in this vast society composed of numerous groups has been proliferated. There regional parties are not in an advantageous position to raise their bargaining power in national politics although some of them have proved their strength against their adversaries including the congress at the State level.

The new circumstance immediately after independence led to the growth of several primordial linguistic and sub-cultural groups which demanded regional identity and regional personality of their own. It is suggested ,further that a three-tier classification all India cross-regional and regional parties would be lass ambiguous and more stable, it is suggested, further ,that a regional political party, properly so-called must satisfy three specific criteria. The first criterion must, naturally be the territorial differential. By its very nature, a regional party restricts its area of action to

a single region which, in the prevailing India situation, means a state. Our best example of a cross-regional party is the communist party of India (Marxist)-CPI (M). The second criterion of a regional political party is that, typically, it articulates and seeks to defend a regionally based ethnic or religio-cultural identity. Thus Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) act as the voice and champions of Tamil 'Cultural Nationalism' against the inroads of what is perceived as the Aryan imperialism of the north. In the third place, it is in the very nature of a regional party to be primarily concerned with exploiting local sources of discontent or pressing a variety of primordial demands based on language, caste, community or regions. This is so because the electoral destiny of these parties is inseparably linked with their respective regions. With no hope of capturing power or being able to play a decisive role at the centre, they perceive their essential role as pressure groups for protecting and promoting local support by playing up real or imagined feelings of discrimination or deprivation. When N.T.Rama Rao opposes a 'national' policy on water resources which proposes to treat an entire river basin rather than the territorial limits of a state as a unit, his opposition results from the perception that the principle, if implemented, will trim his freedom of push on with his Telgu Ganga project, despite the objections raised by neighbouring States like Karnataka.¹

Objectives

- To evaluate the development enhanced by the regional political parties.
- The aim of this study is to develop a systematic understanding of the changes that have taken place in the formation and maintenance of governments at the national level.
- To analyze the efficacy of formation of governments in general and their performance.

Genesis of Regional Political Parties in India

During the British period, political polities and society, so to say, were, bifurcated from each other, except a very privileged few the vast mass of India did not have any share in the political process of the country. Only a few zamindars and other supporters of the British enjoyed some political power, to the extent, allowed to them by the alien ruler. But the situation began to rapidly change in the aftermath of independence with the introduction of adult franchise in 1952 and the establishment of the Panchayat raj in later part of 1950s in different states, was democracy meant to reach the common man. The rich and the poor, the urban and the rural people, and the federal lords and the commoners were given equal legal rights to complete for power and make policies for their betterment. It is true that some of these expectations have not yet been fulfilled, polities in India still continues to be a game of the elites. But one would concede that the number and base of political greatly increased. Besides the ex-rulers and zamindars, many other persons, of especially arena, democratic politics, based upon adult franchise, irrespective of caste, religious and creed, which has been in vogue since 1952's has resulted relatively importance of the common man. The village has politically come to the limelight but ironically enough, some parochial and infrastructural force like Casteism, Communalism, Ethnicism and regionalism have gained ascendancy. In this restricted sense, as Morris-Jones has pertinently pointed out in the walk of independence, polities and society came to meet². The need for a truly decentralized federal polity has been a constant demand of the states in the post- 1967 period. The changing nature of the party system and the growing importance of regional parties have federalized the

working of Indian democracy to a large extent. In mid 1970's sub-regional cultures started at the state level. It was difficult for Congress to take care of all provinces and their local issues, as different issues of local nature had begun to raise their heads. For the common masses, their local leaders were very closer to them than the national leaders, and their local leaders were more concerned with local issues than the national (Chakroborty, 2003). As Surendra Mohan in his article "Pivotal role for Regional Politics" (Hindustan Times) has pointed out that the Central leadership failed to take note of safeguarding distinct cultural identities, persisting regional economic imbalances and as such the regional leaders started to assert their existence. The regional leaders and local leaders came forward to assert their regional issues and play the game of regional politics, and to build a close relationship between State and society for the people's welfare.³

In this continuum, regionalism began to raise its head in different parts of India in different forms. It assumed great significance in the changing context of the nascent democracy its disintegrating potential at national context threatened the very unity of the Country. Regionalism in India is essentially a product of her diversity. India is a big federal state with vast size and a great deal of cultural and ideological diversity. It is difficult to call India a culturally integrated country: strictly speaking it is a loosely fastened common unity of many sub-cultures this development is peculiar to the under-developed States. Sub-regionalism surfaced either in the forms of sub-regional conflicts or at times in the areas having deep roots of historical or cultural difference between the sub-regions within a region. Historical and economic factors produce sub-regional problems and encourage the growth of compelling political sub-culture which not only does not correspond but conflict with the larger units of language, culture and caste represented by the linguistic state. Sub-regional conflicts have often been found to take the shape of movements claiming their separate identity either in the formation of separate state or in the formation of regional political parties on the basis of the localised support of the depressed region both regionalism and sub-regionalism have encouraged the growth of new political alignment in the Indian states after independence in some cases they have proved to be very strong regional parties which not only challenged the hegemony of the congress but also provided alternative government. Where the regional parties were united and harmonious and could successfully evoke their regional pull at the state level, they continued to rule the states replacing congress from power.

Rise of Regional parties in National politics

With the emergence of coalition politics at the centre the national parties had to seek support of regional parties which had only a few members, only token presence in the Lok Sabha. This gave importance to regional parties and regional parties started playing a key role in the national politics, regional parties existed even before the 1967 elections, however, with the decline of the aggregative capacity of the congress party and the subversion of the autonomy of the state and local level congress party elites, there has been an increase in the member of parties representing regional aspirations and sub national interests. In several fields regional leaders proved more successful than the leaders of national parties in ensuring growth better governance and checking corruption. Actually there are three kinds of regional parties. First, there are some parties who are based upon caste, religion region or community interests.

In this category is D.M.K and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab, National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Jharkhand Party and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (J.M.M.) in Jharkhand, Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (U.K.D) in Uttarakhand, Telugu Desham Party (T.D.P) in Andhra Pradesh, Asom

Gana Parishad (A.G.P) in Assam, Manipur People's Party (M.P.P) in Manipur and Haryana Vikas Party in Haryana etc. In second category there are those parties which came into existence due to any crisis or as a breakaway group of any national party. The main political parties in this category are Kerala Congress Telengana-Rajya Samiti (T.R.S) of newly created state Telengana, Trinomool Congress (T.M.C) of W. Bengal, Biju Janata Dal (B.J.D) in Orissa and Gujarat Parivartan Party in Gujarat. The third category comprises those political parties which are national in terms of ideology aims as well as outlook but their support bases as well as issues are limited to certain areas. Janata Dal (United), Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Janata Dal (S) forward bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party are included in this category. The regional parties are pragmatic in their approach adopting a variety of electoral strategies and forming electoral alliances with major political parties to get better their bargaining power. Even though the number of their MP's in Lok Sabha may be small, in the context of multipartism, when no party holds a majority in parliament, they do play important role in national politics⁴. In this respect the role of Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, AIADMK, AGP, T.D.P and Biju Janata Dal in N.D.A collation government led by A.B Vajpayee and that of P.D.P, T.M.C, P.M.K, J.M.M and Mizo National Front in Congress collation government led by UPA under Dr. Manmohan Singh may be cited.

Role of Regional Parties in Coalition Governments

The popularity of regionalism has been hailed by some political observers on the ground that the more regional parties come to power the less will be the imbalance between the Centre and States. India is a multi-lingual and a multi-cultural nation. The linguistic and cultural diversities gave rise to separatist tendencies. The people living in a particular linguistic region tend to identify and attach themselves with that region. Political parties also try to exploit the ethnic and cultural factors for political gains in the competitive politics. In a different sense uneven development of regions also brings a sense of discrimination and alienation leading to the formation of regional parties.⁴

In India, the formations of coalition governments at the centre started with Morarji Desai's regime. The period since 1967 has seen the birth steady growth, and consolidation of a host of major and minor regional parties. There are six major regional parties, or groups of parties if offshoots are treated as a single family for genealogical purposes, and if the definition is limited to parties that are not only based in a single state but also have an explicitly ethno-linguistic, cultural, national, regional, autonomist ideology. These are the Dravidian parties of Tamil Nadu (originally the DMK, now the AIADMK, MDMK, and PMK), the SAD of Punjab, the JKNC of Jammu and Kashmir, the TDP of Andhra Pradesh, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) of Assam, and the Shiv Sena of Maharashtra.⁵ Although Indian political system has practised some regional politics in first general elections in 1951. They are come into existence because of the centralism and monopolist politics of the Congress. The regional parties played a key role in some of the states mostly after the fourth general elections in 1967. The increase of regional parties in India seems to have had major blow its political and constitutional setup.

During the period of 1967-1971, the Union-State conflict was at its peak. The states under the non congress government were asserting their rights and the Union government refused to accept such assertion. Thus, the over-centralization of power in the hands of Centre and the emergence of different party government at the Centre and in the States led to demand of the State autonomy.⁶ The Indira Gandhi government for occasion depended to some extent on support from Tamil Nadu's Dravida

Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Lok Sabha elections to maintain a Congress majority. In 1977, the Akali Dal and DMK were partners in Janata party government, although, the Janata party had a clear majority (295 seats) on its own. This was first time that regional parties shared power at the national level. Non-Congressism brought many regional parties together in the National front (NF) formed in 1988. These included the TDP, DMK, AGP and Congress (S), apart from the newly formed Janata Dal. But in the elections in 1989, these regional parties did not meet with success. In the ninth Lok Sabha, 45 members belonged to regional parties but the regional allies of NF had only two seats (won by TDP). In spite of their disastrous performance, these regional parties became partners in the NF-led government of 1989. In 1991, the strength of regional parties in the Lok Sabha was at 56 but this time around TDP had a fair share (13 seats). AIADMK, Janata Dal (G), Indian Union Muslim League (ILUML), Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and Kerala Congress supported the Congress government of Narsimha Rao. However, these parties were not part of the government. In any case, both in 1989 and 1991, regional parties were playing a crucial role at the national level in making or unmaking the central government.⁷ Consequently 1977 elections of Congress party were inaugurated a new era of partnership between National parties and regional parties which had never happen in the pre-1977 period.

Since 1996, regional parties have become obligatory in the development of government at the National level. They have emerged in a large number of states. They have been important partners in the alliance that came to power after 1996. The strength of the regional parties has significant increases with a huge vote share being captured by them. In 1996 Lok Sabha, 137 members of parliament belonged to various regional parties. Some of the regional forces quickly switched over to the BJP-led national democratic alliance. The 1996 Lok Sabha election clear the appearance of the regional political formations on the national scene. The real assertion of the regional parties, however, became possible in 1996 when the national front government, formed in the aftermath of the resignation of the 13-day old BJP government, was essentially a coalition of various regional parties. Unlike the 1977 and 1989 occasions, the Lok Sabha in 1998 included 161 MP's belonging to regional parties, 92 of these, being part of the NDA, which proved crucial in the survival of the government. AIADMK played a decisive role in defeating the NDA government.⁸ In 1999 Lok Sabha elections regional parties had inspiring presence and had 168 MPs who belonged to regional parties. The NDA then included 109 MPs from different regional parties. In all, 32 regional parties were represented in the 13th Lok Sabha of which 15 were part of NDA, four constituents of the left front, six Congress allies and seven parties did not join any front or alliance. A regional party shows an increase the share of votes. While BJP polled 23.5 percent votes, its regional allies polled 18 percent votes; Congress regional allies 5 percent votes. Other regional parties polled more than 15 per cent votes.

Thus, the BJP entered into active alliance with regional political parties only when it realized the impossibility of forming a government on its own. This made some partners of the national front, like the DMK and the TDP, to swing their loyalties to the BJP-led coalition's government. Even a faction of the Janata Dal, another constituent of the front, eventually came over to this national coalition of the largest number of regional parties that ever came together to form a government in India. The Jayalalitha factor in 1999 and the Chandrababu Naidu or the Mamata factor only indicate the growing power of the regional satraps of the parties that have emerged in the last one decade as powers to be reckoned with. In the States of

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat regional parties do not have much existence. In smaller states like Sikkim, Manipur and Meghalaya, regional parties dominate. Other states in this category are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa and Haryana. In 13 states, regional parties had 30 per cent or more share of the votes in 1999 election. In Manipur and Sikkim, regional parties polled 67 and 95 per cent votes respectively. In the assembly election in Sikkim held in 2004, the regional party even captured all the seats. Other states where regional parties polled around 30 per cent or more votes are Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, and U.P. In Tamil Nadu various regional parties together polled 75 per cent votes. In Maharashtra and Andhra, regional parties polled 44 and 42 per cent votes respectively. The growth of regional parties upset the established patterns of voter preference and traditional loyalties were put under strain. The regional parties succeeded in mobilising a greater share of votes. The Congress was the obvious lose in most states, notable in Andhra, Assam, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Lok Sabha Seats Occupied by Regional/Caste Based Parties (1989-Till Date)

Parties	1998	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009	2014
Asom Gana Parishad	0	01	05	0	0	02	01	0
Telgu Desam	02	13	17	12	29	05	06	16
Jharkhand M. Morcha	03	06	01	0	0	05	02	02
N.C (J & K)	03	0	0	03	02	02	03	0
Akali Dal	06	0	08	08	02	08	04	04
AIADMK	11	11	0	18	10	0	09	37
DMK	0	0	17	06	12	16	18	0
Sikkim Dem Front	0	0	01	01	01	01	01	01
Biju Janata Dal	-	-	-	09	10	11	14	20
Trinomool Congress	-	-	-	07	08	02	19	34
Shiv Sena	-	-	-	06	15	13	11	18
Pattali M.Katchi	-	-	-	04	05	06	0	01
Marumalarchi DMK	-	-	-	03	04	04	01	0
Himachal Vikas Cong.	-	-	-	01	01	0	0	0
Samata/Janata Dal (U)	-	-	-	12	21	08	20	02
Reshtriya Party	-	-	-	17	07	21	04	04
Samajwadi Party	0	05	17	20	26	36	23	05
Bahujan Samaj Party	04	03	11	05	14	19	21	0

Source: Compiled by author on basis of Statistical Report on General Elections (Election Commission of India) and Subhendu Ranjan Raj, Coalition Politics in India Dimensions of Federal Power Sharing, 2009, P.232

Methodology

The paper is based on secondary data and information where all data and statics are collected from several, book, journals, newspaper and related website. The study has made use of the historical-analytical approach to study the origin and development of regional political parties in India.

Conclusion

This study thus disparity with some of the more exaggerated claims about the dramatic rise of regional parties and the regionalization and deinstitutionalization of parties and party systems in India on the one hand. On the other it was able to show that regional parties are indeed playing a more important role overall which is also a

consequence of the fact that parties initially always start out as regional organizations rather than national ones, in particular in a large and diverse country as India. Since 1990s have seen the emergence of the State as the epic-Centre of Indian Politics. The regional parties came to play major roles at the national level and also the key players in coalition government. The heterogeneity of the country may have proved a source of various recurring conflicts, it has acted as a offset to too centralistic, top-bottom politics. Excessive centralisation and personalisation of political decision- making was not a healthy sign for Indian federalism. The rise of regional parties has contributed to the break-down of the one-party governing at the Centre. This kind of change in political parties in India, reflect the drastic change in politics of federalism, shifting from dominant federalism to cooperative Federalism Growth of regional parties has shown that reconciliation of interests and negotiated compromise is the soul of Indian politics and no group or party can claim an absolute majority in coming future. Federalism in the sense of negotiated power sharing between the Centre and the state has strengthened the nation rather than weakened it as there has merged agreement on democratic norms of governance and its necessary institutions. Thus, it is clear from the evidence and analysis provided in this section that firstly, the expansion of regional parties have prevented the expansion of national party alternatives. (this was so till the 2009 elections) secondly, the national parties by coming closer to regional parties were better able to understand the regional aspirations of the people of different parts of the country. Thirdly the critical role of regional parties has also affected the composition and duration of national government coalition and that they have played catalytic role in the gradual mode of transition within Indian democracy.

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