

“Role of Regional Political Parties in Creating Co-operative Federalism in India in an Era of Coalition Politics”

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Abstract

Abstract: Although, the Constitution of India has nowhere used the term “federal” but “Union of states”¹, it has provided for a structure of governance which is essentially federal in nature. Within the basic framework of federalism, the Constitution has given overriding powers to the Central government. The objective of the constitution makers was to have Cooperative 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 regional parties has made the state as the Epic-Centre of Indian Politics and also been playing major roles at the national policies and further federalized the working of federalism. Hence during the coalition era of Indian politics the roles of regional political parties are strengthening the federal system of India.

KEYWORDS: Federalism, Co-operative, Regional, Autonomy, Bargain, regional political parties.

In Indian federal system has been put to trial, in last sixty five years. This article intended to focus on the impact of party system in general and regional party in particular on the working style of Indian federalism. Political Party and Federalism in India After independence, the Indian National Congress transformed itself into a political party and took over the administration and formed governments both at the Centre and the States. The Congress defended the strong centre in order to maintain national integrity of nation. This situation remained unchanged till Jawaharlal Nehru took over the destiny of the nation as its first premier. There were no dissidents and the centre-state relations were generally amicable, because of (a) the role of the Congress party which won freedom and institutionalized state-society relationship, (b) the national elite enjoyed high legitimacy because of contribution to the freedom struggle, (c) despite elitist predisposition, there was moderation in the use of state-power and, (d) the states as largely utilized as an instrument of social change². During Nehru Era, India had a highly centralized federalism. The Congress party remained a centralized party, formulating all-India policies of the guidance and control of the Congress-led ministries in the states. After the death of Sardar Patel in December 1950, Nehru combined the premiership and the party President, and later handover to his protégé. It was in this context in 1953 Nehru came to proclaimed that the, “Congress is the country and country is the Congress”, Intra-party democracy in the political parties was not looked upon with favour and dissidence as suppressed with heavy hands. The Parliamentary wings of most of the national political parties followed the Congress line and voices from below were ignored and dissidence forcefully curbed. The Centre, in order to maintain its supremacy, proclaimed

President's Rule under Article 356 of the constitution. It was so common that, from June 1951 to November, 1967 President's Rule was proclaimed 14 times- in Kerala (6 times), Punjab (3 times) and in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Goa, Rajasthan and Haryana (one in each). After 1967, its use threatened state's rights and use of power sharing with regional leaders and parties.³

During 1960s to 1980s Mrs. Gandhi humbled the Congress machine, re-established the supremacy of the Parliamentary party over the party organization, broke the power of the state Chief Ministers and established a new balance, or rather imbalance between the Centre and the State. The centre had allotted large funds to states but was centrally sponsored development projects, implemented by states while administered by the centre. However, Indira regime's policies of centralization, politicization and dictatorship had damaged the federal and democratic structure of the country which led to the rise of non-Congress political parties. The dominance of Congress party could not last long and the consensual politics of "Congress System"⁴ (Rajni Kothari, 1974) began to breakdown. The process became evident from 1969 onwards when Nehru's successor Indira Gandhi faced the strong opposition "rejected the principle of consensus in favour of the majoritarian principles"⁵

Emergence of Regional Parties 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 1970s, 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. As Surendra Mohan in his article "Pivotal role for Regional Politics"⁶ (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. The growth of regional parties, must, therefore be seen as mainly the out-come of over-centralization by national leaders and government. The regional parties have been grown in strength in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Sikkim, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and other states of the Union. Their distinguished feature is their cultural regional identity, their linguistic opposition to in most of the Non-Hindi states, political commitment to greater regional autonomy and focus on state-specific or regional specific (Khan, 1999).⁷ Regional Parties Demand for State Autonomy the regional parties in many states started making suggestions for restructuring of centre-State relations so as to ensure greater autonomy of state. The demand for more autonomy of the state may be caused out of discriminatory role of the Governor in the dismissal of Chief Ministers, reservation of Bills for consideration of the President, demand for repealing certain laws, dismissal of State Governments under Article 356, non-implementation of Central Laws, deployment of CRP, use of all India Services by the Centre, alleged discrimination against states in allocation of Central projects, allocation of food grains, discrimination in grants and loans, appointment of Inquiry Commissions and CBI against Chief Ministers. As a result, the regional parties started demanding the restructuring of centre-State relations in

order to ensure state autonomy. Since then various proposals and suggestions have been made by various regional parties⁸. In 1971 DMK government in Tamil Nadu appointed the Rajamannar Committee to review the federal structure. The CPI (M) led government in Kerala submitted a memorandum to the National Development Council on centre-state financial relations.

Some regional political parties like The Akali Dal in its Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 pleaded for autonomy for states. The CPI(M) led West Bengal government in 1977 published a memorandum calling for a drastic revision of the constitution in order to make India federal rather than union. In 1983 the Janata Party government in Karnataka issued a „White Paper” on centre-state relations held at Bangalore. In this meeting the non-Congress regional Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry demanded an equal distribution of financial resource between the centre and states (India Express, 1983). The Southern Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Pondicherry founded a forum for tackling their common problems and seeking drastic changes in centre-state relations, particularly in the financial area, known as “Southern Chief Ministers”. These Southern regional parties had demanded more autonomy for the states. The Congress government at centre (Indira Gandhi’s Government) did not give importance to it. But, as it, realized that other states had also begun gathering momentum for state autonomy, the central government announced the appointment of Sarkaria Commission to examine the working of the relations between the Centre and the State on 24th March 1983. The emergence of some powerful regional parties like DMK and AIADMK and subsequently TMC in Tamil Nadu, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh , the Shivsena in Maharashtra, the Akali Dal in Punjab, the National Conference in Jammu & Kashmir, the Assam Gana Parishad in Assam, the RJD in Bihar, Biju Janata Dal in Odisha, Janata Dal in Karnataka, the BSP/SP in Uttar Pradesh and CPM in Kerala and West Bengal and a host of other regional parties in various states replaced the Congress party in states, which is the concrete evidence that Congress had lost its national character.

With the growing importance of regional parties in Parliament after 1989, there has been further federalization. The regional parties became more strong (stronger) and started to demand more autonomy for the states. Subsequently a number of conclaves were organized by the regional parties on the issue of centre-state relations. N.T. Rama Rao, the first Chief Minister of a regional party in Andhra Pradesh, and the President of Telugu Desam Party, took initiative to organize a group of non-Congress and regional parties. The first conclave was called between 31st May to 1st June 1983, joined by leaders of 14 political parties. The main issue of discussion in the meeting was the restructuring of centre-state relations to ensure State Autonomy. The second conclave was held on 30th June 1983 and projected a collective stand on the sensitive Punjab issue and urged the centre to attempt a political solution to the problem. The third conclave was held in Srinagar on October 5, 1983, and passed a 31 points resolution suggesting large scale changes in centre-state relation in the administrative, economic and political fields. Further, they suggested that, the centre should confine itself to subject like defence, foreign affairs, currency and communications etc. The Srinagar conclave was an important one⁹. The regional parties on centre-state relations stressed the need for strengthening the autonomy of the states so as to maintain a proper balance in the centre-state relations. The fourth conclave was held in Calcutta on January 13 and 14, 1984. The concave adopted a resolution demanding “a total restructuring” of the economic policies of the centre and offered an alternative

economic programme for the uplift of the poor and the middle classes¹⁰. On September 17, 1988, seven parties namely, the Janata, Jana Morcha, Lok Dal (B), Congress (U), Telugu Desam, DMK and Assam Gana Parishad agreed to form an alliance known as National Front, at Madras with NTR and V.P. Singh as its Chairman and Convener respectively. One of the important objectives of the Front was to re-examine Centre-State relations so as to remove the imbalance in fiscal, legislative and administrative relations and to usher in an era of harmonious relation between the Union and the States in the true federal spirit. Regional Parties –Partner of Union Government with NTR's, sudden demise in January 1996, N. Chandra Babu Naidu, his son-in-law led a split group of TDP and fought the elections to the Lok Sabha in 1996 and won 16 seats on its own and captured 22 seats including its electoral allies CPM and CPI. The TDP President and United Front Convener N. Chandra Babu Naidu, played the major role in the formation of the United Front of 14 parties with the Janata Dal, DMK, TDP, AGP, TMC, NC and CPI as the major partners supported by CPM and Congress (I) from outside. After the fall of Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, under the Prime Minister ship of Deve Gowda, the regional parties joined as partners to form the government at centre. Besides being the Convener and the President of TDP, Chandra Babu Naidu along with other regional parties, realized the need for an institutional arrangement for regional parties at the national level, took active role in the formation of another Front known as the "Federal Front" consisting of TDP, TMC, DMK and AGP, so as to protect the interest of the states they were representing, and to gain a better bargaining power for themselves. In the last two decades, the regional parties are the partners of UPA and NDA coalition government at the centre. Bargain by Regional Parties with Federal Government The new role of regional parties has transformed Indian federalism beyond recognition. Once those states were dominated by the Union, became asserted themselves against the super-power of Union Government. They started to bargain with Union government for their state interest. For example, the two Dravidian state parties DMK and AIADMK are alternatively made alliances with the two all-India national parties, Congress and BJP and every time they are extracting some price in the form of project or larger grants for the State. Sometime ago, Tamil Nadu had no ministers in the Union Cabinet, but of late, they have not only been in the Union Ministry, but also able to get the portfolios demanded. In the latest coalition, the DMK has been able to get a commitment from the Congress-led Union Government that, the Tamil will be considered as a national language.

Some regional parties blackmailing the union Government even giving support from outside, For example, the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh had demanded several times and got concessions from the NDA Government in Delhi between 1999 and 2004. The support of TDP to NDA Government at New Delhi though from outside, brought benefit to state. The Department of Telecoms (later BSNL) had to give huge bandwidth to link up all the district towns to the State capital without charging a single rupee for years. To cope with natural calamities liked flood and drought, the TDP was able to extract generous grants from centre. Even the TDP pushed the central government to endorse its loans from the World Bank; in fact, it extracted the privilege to negotiate with the World Bank directly and got the Union Government's guarantees to backup its debt to the international financial enterprises. The 23 party coalitions Union Government in Delhi in the period during 1999-2004 had went on announces packages of thousands of crores of rupees for development schemes to please the north-eastern states, each one of which contributed one or two

MPs to the coalition. The full support and loyalty of some states were secured by financial packages. A Prime Minister of the United Front Government in 1996- 1997 announced Rs.8000 crore package to Jammu & Kashmir. National Conference Party in the hope of buying peace from terrorists.

Another Prime Minister in 2004 had announced Rs. 24,000crore package for Jammu & Kashmir. Every time the regional parties extended support to the Union government in Delhi and got some more packages. The requirements of regional parties ruling in the states have been working havoc in regard to the utilization of the river water, flowing across several states. The water dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the Kaveri water, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and marginally Maharashtra over sharing of the Krishna water have still pending. The government involves in the water disputes were the partners in the coalition government in Delhi. The Government was unwilling to take the risk of it and did not try to solve the problem rather referred to the judicial court. Till getting the decision from judiciary, there will be lots of time, water and wealth of the farmers. Cover up corruption, shielding of criminals and turning blind eye to illegal infiltration are some of the prices bargain by regional parties as coalition partners. The withdrawal of cases, non-progression of prosecutions already in progress, fabrication of cases, revival of cases, inclusion of criminals in Ministries, non-resolution of inter-state water disputes, extractions of „packages□ of funds from the Union, subversion of states, change of demography by infiltration are some of the challenges of the regional parties on the Union Coalition Government. Thus the regional parties could not remain silence, but raised their voice, for their state interest and to fulfil the aspirations of the people. This need not be seen as a negative growth. It is part of the process of democratization in a federal polity.

If we analyze the election results of Lok Sabha from 1989 we will see that that with time the regional parties are going stronger in the national politics, this is resulting in hung Parliaments in the India. In 1989 general elections state or regional parties had 27 seats; in 1991 it increased to 51. 1996 elections saw a steady increase in number of seats on regional parties and they got 129 seats. In 1999 elections regional parties played a crucial role they landed up getting 158 seats. In 2004 Lok Sabha elections the regional parties got 159 seats. So hereby we can see how regional parties are playing a dominating role in the national politics and as a result of which the national parties are not being able to form the majority marks, even coalition with these regional parties doesn't help at times. The year 2009 has proved all the arithmetic wrong when UPA alliance led by Indian National Congress almost reached the majority mark in the Lok Sabha on its own. Congress landed up getting 206 seats and the UPA with 262 seats fell short of 10 seats to reach the magic figure. Subsequently there has been a downward trend in number of seats won by regional parties. In the 2009 election, 363 political parties took part. The Bahujan Samaj Party contested the maximum number of seats (500 out of 543), followed by the Congress (440) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (433).

The elections held in May 2014 there were three national political parties, 51 regional political parties and 1701 other registered or unregistered political parties took part in elections. The results were that NDA won 334 seats and UPA won 60 seats. Narendra Modi has proved in letter and spirit what Napoleon Bonaparte said: "Impossible is a word to be found only in the dictionary of fools... Victory belongs to the most persevering."The BJP's prime ministerial candidate has made history. Securing a

resounding victory in the latest Indian parliamentary elections, he has proved wrong all the prophets of doom. The absolute majority for his party on its own is a first in 30 years. The larger National Democratic Alliance (NDA), in fact, has secured 334 seats whereas BJP alone secured the majority and won 282 seats. The regional political parties succeeded in securing more than hundred seats again. Though the trend of weakening of national political parties started in 1989 because until May 2014 no single political party could get majority in Lok Sabha yet the era of hung parliament has been finished for the transitional phase.

If we analyse Indian Federalism in the context of Indian Party System we shall realise the sea changes in the nature of Indian Federation because of changes occurred in Indian Party system. The Indian Party System has gone through a different phases from One Party Dominance to Multi Party System. It has different Phases like 1952-67, 1967-77, 1977-1989 and 1989 to 2009. A new trend in Indian Party System has started a fresh.

We shall realise that whenever power is centralised in the hands of one dominant party which was known as one-party-dominance phase the nature of Indian Federalism was considered to be a Centralised Federation. Where, non-congress parties had loud voices against the Centre. In the second phase of Indian Party System when non-Congress Govts were established in seven states the voices of states autonomy was also so loud. The declaration of national emergency in June 1975 which affected the position of Congress Party and in the elections that were held in 1977, it lost its majority and the newly formed Janta Party, a constituent of many parties, formed the government. But it was unable to pull all the constituent parties for long and in the next election in 1980 the Congress Party secured majority which continued up to 1989. During internal national emergency period 1975-77 Indian federation was totally converted into unitary form and democracy to dictatorship. Because of its reactions the dominant Congress Party was overthrown by the newly formed coalition Govt of Janta Party. Non-congress national/regional political parties were come to power when coalition partner also overthrown congress from number of federative units. But coalition Govt of Janta Party could not survive for a long. Ultimately the earlier dominant party Congress recaptured the power at centre and in numbers of states too. Because of loud voices of state autonomy and demand for strong state strong centre a Sarkaria Commission was constituted to examine the centre-state relations in April 1983. But in the next phase of 1989 onwards the nature of Indian party system changed from one-party-dominance to a multi party system. A coalition Govt of Janata Dal came into power overthrowing the congress out of power. After 1989 and till date the central has been governed by coalition governments. This transition from one-party dominant system in which the central government functioned largely in accordance with the Constitution providing for a strong centre to a coalition government in which regional aspirations had to be satisfied affected the very nature of the federal government. In states also the rule of the Congress party gave way to the rule by coalition of parties. While in some states, e.g. West Bengal and Kerala, even the coalition politics gave stability to government but in a number of states it was marked by instability inviting central interventions frequently. After 1989 phase which is known as Coalition Phase or Hung Parliament Phase or Multi Party System Phase or Phase of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation in which no national political party could capture power or obtained

majority in Lok Sabha alone. Each time four to twenty four political parties a blend of national and regional political parties formed the Govt at Centre. Two major alliances were formed one led by Congress known as United Progressive Alliance and the second one led by BJP known as National Democratic Alliance. The remaining national/regional political parties do tried to form Third Front. The first three coalition governments at the national level, viz., the National Front under V.P. Singh and two United Fronts led by H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral that were led by Janta Dal proved short lived due to internal problems and absence of adequate institutional mechanisms. After the failure of Janta Dal two broad fronts came into existence after 1997, viz., the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by BJP with the support of some regional parties and United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Congress Party. As it was generally believed that coalition governments had come to stay, these two broad based national coalitions viz., NDA and UPA, learning from past experiences, developed certain institutional frame work for coordination among partners such as common minimum programme, coordination committees to establish co-ordination not only among different departments but also between partners and (governmental) departments, and a suitable mechanism between the Prime Minister and leaders of main supporting parties. Working within such institutional framework, both NDA and UPA I and UPA II have been able to govern the country for full terms.

But in the Parliamentary elections of May 2014 the national or regional political parties those who were not the part of two man alliances of NDA or UPA they have formed the third front. Parties like CPI, CPM BSP, Smajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, Janata Dal United were trying to weigh their weight. During this era those regional political Parties like Shiromni Akali Dal. National Conference, DMK, Telgu Desam, Assam Gana Prishad, Lok Dak etc were partner of the coalition Govt at centre as well as ruling their respective state are the strategic partner of NDA or UPA or Third Front. The loud voices demanding for state autonomy or alleging Centre Govt giving step motherly treatment to the states are weakening in these days. We still hear some voices from those states other opposition parties come to power other than the ruling alliance at Centre. Like if Shiromani Akali Dal was ruling Punjab states and also a partner of ruling NDA at Centre it had no allegations of victimisations of Centre. If there was UPA Govt at Centre it had numerous issues of victimisations. It seems that the problems of centre state relations or state autonomy issues are resolved to its maximum extent with establishment of coalition era or hung parliament or multi party system. The reasons we realise that National Political parties are weakening in the era of coalition politics. The other reason if a regional political party is the partner of ruling alliance of federal govt to whom it can blame? Even if we are hearing some voices by those political parties who are not the partner of ruling alliance it is because of raising some issues to play a role of opposition against the ruling alliance. Like SAD had no issue of water sharing dispute or lesser development grants if he was partner of ruling NDA. Even SAD was party to the decision of federal govt for linking of all rivers which was totally against its earlier stand of riparian state. With the formation of national alliances the regional political parties has a strong counter voice because of the support of alliance partner. Ruling alliance cannot dare to victimise one state or other. Like NDA partners did not allowed the UPA II Govt to pass the Constitution of National Counter Terrorism Centre. Thus, the development of regional parties and coalition politics both at the centre and states helped to develop in India a participatory political culture which influenced inevitably the federal process. These developments successfully checked arbitrary actions of one-party dominant rule on

the one hand and provided a source of strength to cooperative atmosphere between the centre and states. This is not to say that actions of regional parties were always justified but their influence on the federal process was evident. But we should also analyse the political costs of this positive development in context to Indian Federalism. The political cost we had paid that was political instability in transitional phase where the coalition Govts. could not survive for a long time. Though the political parties learnt the lessons of coalition culture which brought political stability yet numerous other problems erupted. The demand for particular ministry or blackmailing with major partner threat to withdrew the support. The prevailing coalition era is known as lack of firmed decisions because of the problems of creation of consensus amongst the coalition partners like civil nuclear deal or FDI etc. The reverse problem also erupted where major alliance partner sometimes did not bother about the sentiments of alliance partners because it very well knew that alliance partner only threaten not executed. Because, no political party desired to face mid-term polls and understood the compulsions of ruling alliance. However what so ever the gains and losses of the prevailing coalition era the democracy of India got strengthen in a big way. With the establishment of BJP led NDA coalition Govt with BJP emerged as majority party with 282 and alliances with PDP in J&K proves that BJP may not pose any serious threat to federalism in India.

CONCLUSION: This paper has tried to show that the rise of regional parties has contributed to the break-down of the one-party dominance at the Centre (which looked like Unitary form of Government) and a total reversal of the authoritarian and centralized politics of Congress (I) leadership under whose tenure, the Congress (I) High Command was treating the Chief Ministers as though they are the Chief of Municipalities. The Congress (I) Prime Ministers never treated the Chief Ministers as equal partners in the running of federal polity of India.

The Chief Ministers had to depend on the Prime Minister for survival in their office. In contrast to these past political cultures, the current Indian politics have been drastically federalized by the regional parties. The Prime Minister is no more as powerful as they used to be under One-party dominance system. The President and the Governors are no more rubber stamps endorsing the dictates of the ruling party; rather they are conscious of their constitutional roles. The new role of regional parties has transformed Indian federalism significantly. 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. This kind of change in political parties in India, reflect the drastic change in politics of federalism, shifting from dominant federalism to cooperative Federalism.

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