

Coalition Government in Himachal Pradesh: A New Experience-1998-2003

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I. INTRODUCTION:

The Indian polity can best be described as parliamentary democracy: India is a democratic polity. Indian polity can best be described as representative parliamentary democracy. The parliamentary system refers specifically to a kind of democratic polity wherein the supreme power vests in the body of people's representative called parliament. The parliamentary system is one in which parliament enjoys a place of primary and pre-eminence in the governance of the state. Under the constitution of India, the union legislature called parliament is the pivot on which the political system of the country revolves.

The struggle for national independence was over by August 15, 1947, when India gained independence, the constituent assembly, functioning under a modified government of India Act 1935, became the provisional parliament. Its fundamental task however remained that of framing the constitution.¹ The constitution was adopted by acclamation on January 26, 1950. On this Republic Day, the new constitution came into effect. The new India was to be parliamentary democracy, federal, republic and secular. There were some members of the assembly who pushed for a Gandhian constitution. One that would provide for a decentralised state with the village panchayats as its nucleus. The vast majority, however, were committed from the beginning of a centralised parliament government. A constitution is a set of laws and rules setting up the machinery of the government of a state and which defines and determines the relations between the different institutions and areas of government, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, the central, the regional and the local governments. The constitution of India is not an exception to this rule and it has its own basic principles. A careful study of the constitution will show that these are at least six basic principles which are embodied in it and which form the foundation of democracy in India. There are popular sovereignty, fundamental rights, directive principles of state policy, judicial independence, federalism and cabinet government.² The preamble, of directive principles and the fundamental rights constitute the more important features of our constitution. The fundamental goals and objectives of the Indian republic outlined in the preamble, the directive principles of the state policy enshrined in part IV and the fundamental rights, granted in part III of the constitution are all parts of the same constitutional scheme without any of them varying with another, so to say, in superiority, importance or respectability. The preamble of the Indian constitution deals with the system of government which is sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic.

II. STRUGGLE FOR STATEHOOD:

In our system, we elect members of parliament. The adult population of those who are eighteen years and more constitutes the electorate entitled to vote. They can elect any representatives they like for sitting in the Lok Sabha and constituting a government responsible to Lok Sabha. So ours is a representative parliamentary democracy. There is the provision of election at regular and fixed intervals to ascertain the opinion of the people and to elect the representatives to the parliament and the different state legislatures. The government derives its authority from the people.³ The executive is responsible to the legislature and through it to the people of India. The constitution also guarantees several fundamental rights to the citizens. It is proclaimed as a secular and socialistic state. India launched her grand democratic experiment on the basis of universal adult franchise and political freedom and the electoral political process has revolutionised the levels of consciousness of an "unchanging India". The Lok Sabha and state assembly elections of the 1952, 1957 and 1962 were contested by many political parties, but the congress party maintained her electoral dominance by winning a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha and in almost all the states in India. The elections of 1967 were a kind of watershed because the Congress party was defeated in nine major states in India.⁴

A study of coalition politics in India is the part of defection politics, which is the result of fragmentation and polarization of power against the one party dominant system. Coalitions are products of the political realities as they emerge in a parliamentary democracy. These may result out of the complexities of a multi-party system where a number of majority parties join hands for the purpose of running the government.⁵ The coalitions are products of politics in a parliamentary democracy. The term as it is generally used

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in political sciences is a direct descendent of the exigencies of a multi-party system in a democratic setup. It is a phenomenon of a multi-party government where numbers of minority parties join hands for the purpose of running the government, which is otherwise not possible in a democracy based on party system.⁶

III. COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA:

Coalition governments have been formed, at different time intervals, in a large number of developed and developing countries. Coalitions signify the fragmentation of the popular mandate to an extent that no single party is in a position to secure a majority in the legislature. In this situation a number of smaller parties join hands to form the government. A coalition government thus implies an agreement between two or more parties for sharing power. It is an alliance or temporary union of distinct parties for the purpose of forming the government. Coalition are thus based on expediency and ostensibly formed for the purpose of sharing power.⁷ In our country, we have seen coalitions coming up either before the elections or after the elections. The pre-poll coalition is considerably advantageous because it provides a common platform to the parties in order WOO the electorate on the basis of a joint manifesto the post election union is intended to enable constituents to share political power and run the government. In India alliances and coalitions are different. Alliances may be formed before an election. Coalitions are formed to assemble the government after the election. In Indian coalitions seem to have become necessary. This is because no majority party seems to be getting any decisive vote after a general election. This is true of the Congress as well as of a BJP. A coalition government means to coming together of more than one political party or group on the basis of common understanding or agenda. According to that agenda, the government can run within a framework a political party or groups can retain its own culture and objectives.

The term coalition has been derived from the Latin word 'coalition' meaning to go or to grow together. Thus interpreted the term coalition means an act of coalescing or uniting into one body or alliance. It indicates the combination of a number of bodies or parts into one body or while. In the political sense the term coalition is used for an alliance or temporary union between various political groups for the exercise or central of political power.⁸

India has had the experience of coalition governments in the states as well as at the centre in recent times. As we analyse the coalitions in India, we have to keep in mind the background of various experiments of coalitions in different parts of the world. while in countries like France, Italy and Japan there have been unstable coalition governments, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden have witnessed fairly stable coalition. The politics of coalition is not a phenomenon peculiar to India. Such a system prevailed in Weimar, Germany and operated in contemporary France and Italy and some of the countries of Asian and Africa.⁹ During the period of the first fifteen years from the adoption of a written constitution for India, differences in the ruling party used to come to the surface now and again but disappeared forgely because of the magnetic personality of Nehru. After his death, the position has become normal and now it appears fairly certain that we shall have multiple party system. The emergence of a trend of coalition governments in our country has assumed the importance of not only a possibility but also of a reality after the 1967 general elections. The result was the imposition of the president's rule eleven times in a period of three years since 1967 in the various states. It is in this context of instability, resulting from the patterns of distribution of assembly seats in the states and the behaviour of what I may describe as fluid legislators that the problems and prospects of the coalition governments are to be studied in all seriousness.

IV. COALITION GOVERNMENT- A HIMALAYAN EXPERIENCE:

The first non-Congress government formed at the centre in 1977 was a coalition government in which the Janta Party and the Akali Dal shared power the main constituents of the Janta Party were the erstwhile BhartiyaLok Dal (BLD), Jana Sangh, Congress (organization) socialists and young turks from the Congress (I). It was formed by Jayaprakash Narayan after the emergency in order to defeat the Congress by preventing the splitting of the opposition votes. Although coalition governments at the centre formally began in 1989 and have continued since, the Janta Party government in New Delhi also was a defacts coalition government was based on non-Congressional ideological unity. It was an off shoot of the earlier Janta coalition and had a similar support base. The TDP and DMK became partners in the coalition while the CPI(M) and the BJP supported it from outside the BJP withdraw its support for the coalition government. This was also largely trace of the National Front government. Both of these coalition were left of centre in ideological terms and were aimed at keeping the Congress party out of power. The National Front minority coalition government collapsed and split within a year and the splinter Chandra Shekhar minority governments losted only a few months. The next phase of coalition governments at the centre began after 1996 general elections. Vajpayee led 1st government of 13 days, 2nd government 13 months and 3rd government 1999-2004 has completed their term in office. It was first coalition to complete its five years term in its office.

In Himachal Pradesh the Congress was the dominant political party since 1952 to 1977. In 1977 elections, Congress suffered humiliating defeat and lost power for the first time. It marked the end of prolonged dominance of the Congress in the electoral politics of the state. Its secure vote percent, the lowest ever. In this election, the Congress was completely ousted by the Janta Party. Congress could win only nine seats in the house of 68. The Janta Party secured a massive majority, winning 53 seats. The character of Janta Party secured a massive majority, winning 53 seats. The character of Janta Party in H.P. was such that its major constituent was the Jan Sangh. Other constituents like Congress (O) and Congress for democracy were only minor partners. Consequently, after the assembly poll, Shanta Kumar of Jan Sangh became the Chief Minister. Two years of Janta rule were politically quite eventful. The Jan Sangh used this period to consolidate its support base at the cost of other constituents of the alliance. When the Janta Party finally split under the weight of internal dissident, the BJP was able to walk away with most of the organizational network. However it could retain only twenty three of the fifty three party legislators and was reduced to a minority in the assembly and also failed. The BJP to win any Lok Sabha seat in the parliamentary elections from the state, coupled with the return of Indira Gandhi to power at the centre, had its fall out and the Shanta Kumar government had to bow out, soon the Congress was able to form its government.

First time in Himachal Pradesh the elections of both the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha were held on same day on 28th February 1998 for 3 Lok Sabha seats and 65 state assembly constituencies. There was no clear cut verdict of the voters in favour of any political party. These elections had changed the whole political scenario in H.P. for the first time emergence of 'third force' Himachal Vikas Congress under the leadership of former Union Communication Minister Pandit Sukh Ram, who was expelled from the Congress Party on corruption charges. It was during the state assembly election 1998, as four as 65 state assembly seats Congress Party got 31 seats while BJP got 29 seats HVC got four seats (Mandi Sadar, Dharampur, Behal and Karsog) and one seat was won by an independent candidate Ramesh Dhawla from Jawalamukhi. HVC joined hands with the BJP under the leadership of Prem Kumar Dhumal. This was the first time in H.P. that the coalition government (Post-Poll alliance) came into power. It was the first non Congress government had been able to complete five year term in office. The previous non-Congress government of Shanta Kumar in 1977 and 1990 could not complete their tenure.

V. CONCLUSION:

In this study attempt has been made to analyse the working of coalition government during 1998-2003. In 1998 the elections in the state legislative assembly and Lok Sabha were held simultaneously. The electorates of the state did not give clear mandate to any political party. Therefore state witnessed hung assembly. Although, the Congress was a single largest party in the assembly election but it had shortage of two seats to form a single majority in the house. In the elections history of the state the use of force and violence by both the political parties, was witnessed for the first time. An independent MLA was the prominent figure or role for Congress and BJP and the allegation of his kidnapping was labelled against each other by both 10 party. At least he joined HVC-BJP alliance to form the coalition government. It was first coalition government in Himachal Pradesh, which complete its full tenure in the office (1998-2003).

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