

Coalition Politics is an essential feature of a multiparty government where several political parties join hands to run the government. In the Encyclopaedia of Social Science, F.A. Ogg defines coalition in political sense as a cooperative arrangement under which distinct political parties or at all events members of such parties unite to form a government or a ministry." There can be two types of coalition governments—pre-poll and post-poll. In a pre-poll coalition, several parties or groups contest elections on the basis of an agreed policies and programmes. If such a coalition group secures a majority of seats, it forms a government consisting of representatives from the parties joining the coalition. A post-poll coalition is formed when no party is in a position to obtain absolute majority to run the government. In such a case, a coalition group or an alliance is formed to constitute a government.

Again, Coalition Politics can be tactical and formal. In case of tactical coalition there may be one party in power but certain other parties support the ruling party from outside. In 1979 when caretaker government of Charan Singh was functioning, Cong. (I) gave support remaining outside the government.

From the above analysis we can identify certain basic features of a coalition politics.

(1) It is a cooperative arrangement to share political power and run the government.

(2) It can emerge either before or after elections.

(3) In case of coalition formed before elections, candidates are selected according to agreements among partners joining coalition.

(4) In case of coalition formed after elections, a common agreed programme may be adopted on the basis of which coalition partners collaborate to exercise governmental powers.

(5) Compromise or agreement is always the bedrock on which a coalition politics is built.

(6) Compared to one party majority government, a coalition government is weak and unstable. It is not a static but a dynamic

affair as coalition partners may decide to disunite and form a new coalition.

(7) Coalition Politics implies a temporary conjunction of particular interests to enjoy some material reward or psychological advantage by seizing political power.

The history of coalition politics in India can be traced to pre-independence period when in 1946 an Interim government with 14 representatives from Congress, Muslim League, Akali Dal etc. was formed. It lasted about 9 months and it revealed some problems of coalition of unlike-minded parties.

After independence from 1952 to 1967 there was Congress Party dominance and hence little possibility of emergence of coalition. After 1967 several regional parties started playing prominent role and by 1969 the difficulty of forming a stable and majority party government was felt. Though at the national level the first coalition government was formed in 1977, at the regional levels coalition politics was experienced in W. Bengal, Bihar and Punjab from 1967 onwards.