

## Regional Parties and Question of Survival of coalitional Politics

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After the victory of the BJP in 1994 elections, many scholars and citizens of India have started raising questions about the survival of the coalition politics or the role of regional parties at the centre. At times, their doubts about the regional parties seem to have some strong points. But for an academician, it is not good to jump to some kind of conclusion without serious analysis. In this article, I have made effort to understand the conditions which have brought about the regional parties to this state of affairs.

In the initial years of independence, the citizens of India trusted the national party which was known as 'Congress System' suggested by Rajni Kothari.<sup>1</sup> The Congress was considered to be to improve the destiny of Indian masses as claimed by the first Prime Minister, Nehru. But soon people realized that the congress was not doing a good turn to the citizens of India. So, the people of India turned their back on the congress or national party, and took to regional political parties to cast away poverty, filthiness of their environment and looked forward for clean water, hygienic conditions, healthy and social and economic infrastructure. They also envisioned a corruption less society. So, they put their faith in regional political parties, especially after 1990. Two and half decades are on, we do not see much improvement in the life of local citizens. The problem is that these regional parties have also taken power from the national political parties in the name of some kind of community syndrome, whether it is in the name of culture, sons of the soil, language, religion or natives. According to Ashutosh Varshney "noneconomic interests defined in ethnic, caste, and religious ways - are now blocking the economic construction of rural interests. These identities, moreover, are unlikely to be subdued by the economic thrust of the farmers' movement and politics".<sup>2</sup>

Though the factors like religion, caste, community, culture and ethnicity can not be ignored easily, I maintain that who so ever comes to power through these means has not improve the life chances of the

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majority of citizens accept for psychological satisfactions. The leaders of these regional parties have not created much space for individuals to improve but they have been used for the vote bank. Regional political parties have failed to give any important and different agenda from national political parties. They are also obsessed with populist and rhetoric policies like poverty elimination, distribution of food and lap tops. These regional parties have not taken interest in improving the social, economic and transport sectors, leaving no concrete agenda for giving opportunity to citizens to stand on their feet. As a result, the individuals have not learnt the importance of self dependence; they have not learnt the rules of civic sense; they have not become aware of true democratic process and unfortunately, they have been pushed to vote bank by the regional political parties in the same fashion as by the national political parties. So, regional parties have nothing different on their plates to offer to the citizens of India. The rise of regional parties in Indian society is good only in the sense that this process has increased the participation of plebeian classes in limited way in political process but the question arises that have these parties really benefited the common people or these parties have also become some kind of clubs of particular elites in the name of culture, community, caste and religion? Generally speaking, these regional parties have not done much for the local people in the true sense of the term. They are feeding on populist politics which is the byword in the corridors of politics whether it is national or regional. Though the regional political parties have not done very badly in the elections of 2014 but the problem is that they have lost earlier attraction for the citizens of India. It has happened because they have nothing to offer anything better than national political parties. Another difficulty is that the members of these parties have national aspiration without any national experience and acceptance. In the process, they do not pay much attention to regional agenda for which citizens elected them. If the regional politics goes for quite a long time in the same fashion, the future of regional political parties is not bright. Though one should not underestimate the role of regional parties in the short term. If the regional parties stick to improving the destiny of local people a genuine way and if the members of regional parties finish all kind of corruption, they will go a long way and perhaps, the citizens will not witness true national parties in the near future of Indian society.

Parties like BJP and the Congress may be national in technical sense but both of the parties have been not able to form the Government at centre without the support of regional parties since 1991. These parties have to face such situation because they have failed to meet the expectations and aspirations of the Indian citizens. Only a coalition of 'dominant classes',<sup>3</sup> like a few capitalists with monopoly helped by the state, elites and bureaucrats, landed elites and a few rich farmers have benefited from the ideals of democracy in India. It was expected after the introduction neo liberal policies that the common citizens would be able to enter the market system, but nothing of that sort has happened in India. In theory the role of the state has reduced but it is a mythical idea. The national parties have been working in nexus with a few capitalist to give benefits and take benefits. So, capitalism or neo liberalism have not shown tendencies of inclusive participation and shared benefits. The role of Indian citizens has been restricted to a sheer consumer not producer which is very dangerous for the liberal democracy adopted by the fathers of the Indian constitution. Though some of the people can claim that some capitalist have risen at regional level thereby making the market system competitive, but one should remember such tendencies have taken place only in the limited sphere occupied by politicians of regional political parties and the common citizens have been knowingly kept at arm's length. The masses have been kept out of the circle of development. When people come to know about true colours of regional leaders in the near future, it will be the most difficult time for the idea, called the idea of India which goes further than mapped territory. Sunil Khilnani says that 'India is a state of mind.'<sup>4</sup> He beautifully cites Rabindranath Tagore: 'A country', is not territorial, but ideational'.<sup>5</sup> Now question arises that to whom they will go to elect once in a 5 year for fulfilling their betrayed promises expectation and aspirations, for which they in their individual capacity have never tried to shoulder the responsibilities to improve their conditions. Nehru declared tryst with destiny but now time has come to change this phrase. Citizens and politicians should realize that it is not always good to talk about luck and destiny which have absolutely taken the shape of rhetoric with which people are disenchanted. Instead of tryst with destiny, in contemporary India, it should be tryst with positive actions in all domains: politics, civil society and to take further, in words of Partha Chatterjee 'Political Society'.<sup>6</sup>

So the question arises has the era of coalition politics ended? The answer is probably no. in the 1914 elections the regional parties got

fifty percent of the total votes which indicates that coalition politics still has got some weight and will play important role in the future of India given the diverse nature of our society.<sup>7</sup>

#### **References**

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