

COALITION POLITICS: WITHERING OF NATIONAL-REGIONAL, IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS?

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Electoral politics in the 20th century has been mirrored by a nation-building project propelled by a one-party dominant system. Politics since 1989 redefined the role of national and regional political parties, as it transformed the content of electoral discourse and use of ideological filters as per convenience. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to capture the tensions between state politics, populist politics and people's politics. It also deals with the politics of 'presence' and of 'representation' in their interaction with democracy, federalism and diversity as reflected in elections. To undertake this task, there is a need to capture the changing spectrum of interactive relationship between political parties, citizens and the policymakers in formulating and setting the agenda for governance. These interactive relationships shape the nature and level of political participation of the citizens, regions and their diversities. All of these considerations have vital implications for federalism, the electoral system and social democracy in terms of the stakes of social cleavages in political decision-making, and the extent of social and economic inclusiveness.

The shift from a command to market economy has redefined the role of the state. The mandate of governance changed from welfarism to fiscal management, public sector growth and employment to leveraging public resource for private growth and retrenchment of jobs in the public sector and subsidies to the private sector for making provision for health and education and imposition of user charges on the citizens. This shaped two divergent kinds of discourse, one emanating from the shift in the path of development manifesting in what has been termed as 'state

politics’, and another found articulation at the time of elections in the form of ‘populist politics’.

It has been argued that the practice of democracy has a select domain restricted to those who govern and those who avail its governance. The two have entered into a collaborative relationship and emerged as custodians of the state shaping the terms of political discourse under the banner of ‘state politics’. People on the margins outside the realm of democratic practice need doles for their survival that is provided by electoral politics, which becomes their mainstay lending content to what is known as ‘populist politics’. This has provided dominant space in mainstream politics to a coalition of interests in negation to the participation of citizens, diversities and regions in democratic governance. This tension has been reflected in the dichotomous relationship between populist politics and state politics. In populist politics it emanates from an articulation of politics of representation as synonymous with the presence of citizens, diversities and regions in exclusion of their stake building in state politics.¹ The ‘politics of presence’ has overtaken politics of ideas, values and purpose. The outcome of this vacillation is that the ideological difference between political parties has got blurred while the difference between ‘populist’ and ‘state politics’ has become more manifest.

Political transformations in a decade starting from 1967 were significant in so far as one-party dominant system is concerned. It led to the polarisation of the Indian party system into two blocks with anti-Congressism being the only unifying factor for the opposition parties. From 1989 onwards, the Congress party’s hegemony of being an umbrella party became questioned and the space thus vacated was appropriated by regional political parties. Examples include the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Janata Dal (U), Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Samajwadi Party (SP), DMK, and the

AIDMK. A perusal of the electoral results shows that since 1989, the multi-party character of the party system is illustrated by the fact that the values of the Laakso-Taagepera Index (N) (of the effective number of parties) by votes/seats were 4.80/4.35, 5.10/3.70, 7.11/5.83, 6.91/5.28, 6.74/5.87, 7.6/6.5 and 7.6/5.0 in 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004 and 2009 respectively, whereas prior to 1989, the effective number of the parties by seats exceeded 3 only once (3.16 in 1967) and the effective number of parties by votes exceeded 5 only once (5.19 in 1967).²

Further, within the multi-party character of the party system, the space occupied by the regional political parties in terms of votes and the elected members has increased. For instance, the percentage share of votes of the national parties is on the decline. Their share of votes was around 78 per cent in the 1984 parliamentary elections which declined to 64 per cent in the 2009 parliamentary elections. And the share of the regional parties increased from 12 per cent to 31 per cent during the same period. Further, the share of the national political parties in the elected members of parliament has decreased from 85 per cent to 69 per cent and that of the regional parties increased from 12 per cent to 29 per cent in 1984 and 2009 elections respectively (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1
Performance of National and Regional Parties

Party	Party-wise representation amongst elected members					Percentage votes				
	2009	2004	1999	1998	1984-85	2009	2004	1999	1998	1984-85
National parties	69.24	67.03	67.96	71.27	85.40	63.58	62.89	67.11	67.98	77.86
Regional parties	29.10	32.04	30.94	27.62	12.20	31.23	32.87	30.15	29.66	12.73
Independents	1.66	0.92	1.10	1.10	2.40	5.19	4.25	2.74	2.37	9.41
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: (i) *Statistical Reports on General Elections from 1984 to 2004*, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

(ii) For 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/results_of_the_2009_Indian_general_election_by_party

The change in the nature of party system from one-party dominance with greater emphasis on the unitary aspects of Indian federation and the moderate level of political participation of the citizens, regions and social cleavages to the

multiparty system, with higher participation of the people on the margins of society in the elections and greater presence of the diversities in legislatures has unfolded paradoxes of India democracy.

In the political science literature, the first phase up to the mid-sixties has been characterised as one-party dominance system.³ In this, the agenda of governance and of electoral discourse were in consonance with each other. This was the phase of one-party dominance in Indian politics. In this phase, it was assumed that there is a consensus on state-led capitalism, where state intervention was meant to create conditions of development in underdeveloped regions and groups. There was a broad understanding in politics about the strategy of state-led capitalism for moderating the uneven impact of development on regions, citizens and social cleavages. For instance, there were conscious attempts to assign central dole to the public sector to take the economy to 'commanding heights' and 'build a socialistic pattern of society'. Election manifesto of the Congress Party in 1962 declared that 'the public sector will increasingly expand and play a dominant role, both for the purpose of accelerating the speed of industrialisation and yielding additional resources. Public, private and co-operative sectors should function in unison as parts of a single mechanism. Government should exercise effectively its powers of control and the use of appropriate fiscal measures.'⁴ Public investment was made to create physical infrastructure; land reforms legislation was enacted; affirmative action for providing reservations in jobs for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes was taken, and the **Community Development Programme (CDP)** for creating rural infrastructure was also launched. The assumption was that the logic of development and broadening the base of democracy will lead to overall empowerment of the underprivileged sections and create conditions for the withering away of the

primordial identities based on caste, region and religion. The outcome of these initiatives, no doubt, blurred the divergence between economic policies under the banner of state capitalism and political mobilisation for building ‘socialistic pattern of society’. But the contradiction between the path of development, electoral promises and social expectations became glaring. As a consequence, people’s politics found expression through various protest movements of the youth, the Naxalite movement, and unrest among the Dalits, peasantry and public sector employees.

In the sphere of electoral politics, people on the margins could see the importance of their votes and political leadership realised that electoral outcomes were dependent upon garnering the votes of the poor. The *Garibi Hatao* slogan, nationalisation of banks and abolition of the privy purses were used as major planks to woo voters in the 1972 elections. Election manifesto of the Congress Party in 1977 made promises with a tinge of apologetic welfarism. It assigned the private sector a national role and hoped to make the public sector efficient. In its 1977 election manifesto, Congress Party declared, “To enlarge the role and efficiency of the public sector, to give proper scope to the private sector to play a national role without concentration of economic power, to control prices and ensure supplies of essential commodities.”⁵ These pronouncements were adequately reflected in the plan documents and government policies.

These policies and programmes provided content to these slogans by introducing a number of poverty alleviation programmes. They sought to provide income to the poor such as Food for Work and subsidies to agriculture. In this phase also, the attempt was to reflect electoral promises in the government programmes and policies. However, the outcome of this phase was the emergence of regional

politics as reflected in multiparty competition in the electoral domain and protest movements across the regions.

In the political domain, the Congress Party suffered a setback and a number of regional parties emerged at the state level. The strategy adopted was to vanquish dissent and negate regionalism. To the contrary, the strategy strengthened the opposition parties. Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi attempted to curb the opposition through divide and rule politics and an authoritarian mode which reached its peak with the imposition of emergency rule in the country. Her emergency could not be sustained as India's multi-cultural ethos blended with political democracy required an institutional mechanism which could articulate the coalition of diverse regional, cultural and class interests. A new political formation representing this diversity under the banner of the Janata Party, a replica of the earlier Nehru Congress Party, captured the political space and facilitated the return of political democracy. Political instability continued and the Janata regime was replaced by Indira Gandhi in 1980. The politics of populism was unleashed to woo the regional interests, religious and caste spectrum and the poor for electoral competition. The arena of conflict shifted from eradication of poverty to issues relating to federalism including decentralisation of power, autonomy for states and right to self-determination. Regional movements took the form of terrorism in Kashmir, Punjab and in several parts of the north-eastern states. The political system failed to cope with these issues. Paradoxically, because of the excessive centralisation the leaders became all powerful, but with a weak institutional base that rendered them powerless to mediate between the conflicting interests, conflicts and to bring about social transformation.

From 1989, the crisis in politics deepened coupled with economic reforms and the emergence of coalition politics.

Electoral compulsions, which required the support of the people through their votes, unleashed a competitive politics of populism.

Political parties and political leaders across the board sought to woo the people with sops... The number of promises made multiplied, but the number of promises kept dwindled.⁶

The state increasingly abdicated its governing role to market forces and in elections political parties made promises which were in contradiction with the economic reforms agenda.

For example, the Congress Party in Punjab, caught between Assembly elections (2002) and Parliamentary elections (2004), became a victim of the paradox between electoral promises and government mandate. In the 2002 Assembly elections, its promise of free electricity to farmers contributed to its victory over its opponent the Akali Dal. After coming to power, at both the state and central levels, the party started implementing the government mandate to introduce economic reforms. At the state level, it imposed electricity tariff on agriculture and, consequently, it performed poorly in the 2004 national elections.

The Congress Party was quick to announce the implementation of sops like free electricity to the farmers in the wake of the next elections in 2007. This ambivalence between electoral compulsions and their commitment to implement an economic reforms agenda led to a tension between populist politics and state politics. Not only the national but even the regional political parties also promised sops to the electorates at the time of elections. In the

2007 Assembly elections and 2009 Parliamentary elections, the SAD in Punjab promised free electricity to the farmers. But in the wake of fiscal reforms in 2010, the SAD-BJP coalition government imposed electricity tariff on the farmers.⁷

Furthermore, the national and regional parties promised a number of other sops at the time of elections. For instance, the answer to the price rise was to subsidise *Atta-Dal* and this was used to spearhead their election campaigns. For example, the SAD manifesto read:

Prices of wheat *atta* have gone up from Rs. 6.50 per kg in 2002 to Rs. 17 at present. Similarly, the price of ordinary pulses has also shot up from Rs. 18 per kg in 2002 to Rs. 65 at present. Diesel prices have gone up from Rs. 14.50 per litre to Rs. 32 per litre whereas a cooking gas cylinder which cost only Rs. 210 in 2002 now costs Rs. 375. The new government will provide *atta* at Rs. 4 per kg and *dal* at Rs. 20 per kg to the poor.⁸

And in Tamil Nadu, the DMK election manifesto promised the sale of rice at the rate of Rupees 2 per kg. to the ration cardholders.⁹

Similarly, the Congress campaign took up this issue belatedly and their manifesto read: “Strengthen Public Distribution System (PDS) in the state to ensure timely availability of sufficient foodgrains and cereals to the Dalits, economically weaker sections and BPL families at affordable prices. Ensure provision of 35 kg of wheat/*Atta* and 10 kg of rice @ Rs. 2 per kg for the poorest of the poor (Antyodaya families). Ensure provision of *dal* up to 5 kg to the poorest of poor (Antyodaya families) @ Rs. 20 per kg.”¹⁰

Political parties have not cared to analyse the causes and ways to reduce the prices and raise the purchasing capacity of the poor, and are silent on formulating policies for ensuring food security. This situation led to a disconnect between the people, the political parties and the government. In government, these political parties give subsidies as doles to the poor and as a right to the interest groups and stakeholders. However, during elections, subsidies are promised as rights to the poor. It is because of this reason that subsidies directed at the poor are termed as doles and subsidies directed to protect profits are described as a rescue package. The former is presented as populist and the latter a survival need.

Coalition politics functioned more as **coalition of interests** between big business, land speculators, big farmers and government contractors. As a leading political analyst, Alan Altshuler, commenting on the claims of political parties in the USA said: “Though their little favours went to little men, the big favours went to land speculators, public utility franchise holders, government contractors, illicit businessmen and, of course, the leading members of the machines themselves.”¹¹ Within the party system, coalition politics functioned more as a “coalition of patronage for sharing spoils between the national and regional political parties”. The state was “increasingly unable to mediate between conflicting interests and competing demands resorted more and more to a politics of patronage. This patronage, which came to be extended in a bewildering variety of ways, was a means of sharing the spoils among the constituents of the ruling elite’.¹²

Consequently, in order to appease regional political parties so as to form a coalition government at the national level, national political parties shifted their stance in the electoral discourse in favour of greater autonomy for the regions, while

regional political parties also amended their position from anti-centrism to co-operative federalism. In its 2009 election manifesto, the Congress Party claims that:

It is only the Indian National Congress that has demonstrated its commitment to a strong Centre, to strong States, and to strong panchayats and nagarpalikas. India's political system must have space for institutions at each of these three levels. Each has a vital and specific role to play.¹³

And the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2009 elections declared: “

We will place Centre-State relations on an even keel through the process of consultation. The genuine grievances of States will be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The moribund National Development Council will be revived and made into an active body'¹⁴.... for devolution of more financial and administrative powers and functions to the States. We will take suitable steps to ensure harmonious Centre-State relations in the light of the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission'.¹⁵

But, on the contrary, the BJP implemented policies which compromised autonomy of the states and reinforced the tendencies of centralisation.

In the political domain, the emphasis on mutually acceptable trade-offs between the national and regional political parties was loud in accommodation and feeble in substance. It only meant reconciliation to achieve power equilibrium. The language of political discourse was strongly influenced to construct 'coalition through patronage' across the ideological spectrum of political parties. Moreover, there is a regionalisation of national political parties and nationalisation of regional political parties. For instance, the Congress government in Punjab passed the Punjab

Repealing Act of 2004 on **Satluj Yamuna Link (SYL)** much to the annoyance of the central leadership of the Congress Party. In other words, the Congress in competition with a regional alliance started appropriating the anti-centre constituency in the state. The BJP changed its position from a strong centre to greater autonomy for states.¹⁶

Similarly, the SAD shifted its position from anti-centrism to anti-Congressism to co-operative federalism. The Akali Dal in its 1973 resolution proclaimed that “it would endeavour to have the Indian Constitution recast on real federal principles, with equal representation at the Centre for all the states.” The same Akali Dal through its president Parkash Singh Badal, who was party to the 1973 resolution, asserted in the year 2000, that “Our constitutional framework was for more federal structure, but owing to the rule of the Congress government, both at the Centre and in the states, the powers of the states were slowly usurped and a unitary set-up was nearly established.”

The shift in the Akali Dal’s position is mainly due to the emergence of coalition politics and the decline of one-party dominance. As a result, the thrust of the Akali Dal agenda changed from anti-centrism to co-operative federalism. “The Akali-BJP government has opened a new chapter in Centre-State relations, ushering in the age of co-operative federalism in the country. The era of confrontation has been effectively ended and replaced with a forward looking thrust on working together for the overall good of the state and the nation”.¹⁷

This position marks a radical shift from the anti-centre stance as reflected in the 1973 autonomy resolution and in its later 1985 memorandum to the Sarkaria Commission. The shift was first made public on the occasion of the Hola Mohalla festival near Gurdwara Takht Keshgarh at Anandpur Sahib in a political conference. The resolution passed stated, “Today’s conference demands of the centre that for the

prosperity of the country, in favour of development of people, the centre-state relations should be redefined in the light of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. Setting up of a true federal structure in the country was the need of the hour.”¹⁸

The issue of greater autonomy for the states was nurtured in a political climate marked by over-centralisation of power and one-party dominance since Independence. This has worked in two ways: on the one hand, it has provided greater access to regional parties to share spoils of power reducing the alliance between the national and the regional political parties as ‘coalition for patronage’ and, on the other hand, it has made the regional parties stand on redefining the Centre-State relations as ambivalent.¹⁹

Interestingly, in coalition politics, regional groups have become strong, and the forces of regionalism have become weak. It has, no doubt, created opportunities for the small regional opposition parties to have important ministerial berths as rewards, but the same has weakened the regional agenda and interests. Consequently, it has made Indian politics less federal and more centralised, extending ad hoc benefits to those regions which are strategic partners in the coalition. A few illustrations to prove the point. In centre-state fiscal relationship, the statutory transfer of funds to the states have become secondary and the role of discretionary grants to finance the State plans by the Centre have become more prominent (see Table 3.2).

This is especially noticeable between the eighth and ninth Finance Commission even when the total transfers had increased. Between the two components of transfers from the Finance Commission, the share of grants has substantially increased in the reform period, suggesting a declining access to the collective pool of national tax resources by the provinces put differently greater access to revenue to the Central government.²⁰

Table 3.2
Transfer from Centre to States as percentage of Gross Revenue Receipts of the
Centre: Finance Commission period average

Year	Finance Commission transfers				Other transfers	Total	Total transfers (4+7)
	Share in central taxes	Grants	Total transfer through Finance Commission (2+3)	Grants through Planning Commission	Non-plan grants (non-statutory)	Other transfers (5+6)	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
VII FC	22.39	1.96	24.35	12.11	1.66	13.77	38.11
VIII FC	20.25	2.52	22.77	13.56	1.54	15.10	37.86
IX FC	21.37	3.42	22.79	14.48	1.06	15.54	40.33
X FC	21.40	2.34	23.75	10.57	0.63	11.19	35.79
XI FC (first two years)	20.93	5.20	26.13	10.39	0.82	11.21	37.20

Source: 11th Finance Commission Report, Government of India.

Further, the Central Government expenditure has declined and States' expenditure share has multiplied (see Table 3.3). This acquires significance in view of the States' declining access to resources.

Table 3.3
Trends in expenditure to GDP Ratio (percent)

	Combined	Centre	States
1990-91	26.83	17.74	14.3
1991-92	26.3	16.52	14.84
1992-93	26.11	16.37	14.43
1993-94	25.89	16.49	14.21
1994-95	25.03	15.27	14.37
1995-96	24.2	14.66	13.78
1996-97	23.38	14.13	13.46
1997-98	24.16	13.64	13.76
1998-99	25.19	14.27	14.06
1999-00	26.26	14.79	14.95
2000-01	26.1	14.5	14.8
2001-02	28.1	15.2	15.8

Source: Indian Public Finance Statistics (IIPFS), various issues

Not only this, the centrally sponsored schemes funding has increased in the social sector. In most of the cases, these schemes are not commensurate with the needs of the local people. This results in non-performance of the states which adversely affects their claim to central resources.

In other words, the apportionment of resources are to the disadvantage of the states irrespective of the fact that the regional parties have emerged as important players in the national politics. And, the national parties alongwith the regional parties have also promised to build a genuine federal structure in the electoral discourse, but the character of the state and the policy regime continue to be in favour of centralisation.

In practice, the emphasis of politics has shifted from ideology of representation of the regions in governance to the distribution of patronage to the regional parties and interest groups. Similarly, in the case of common citizens and social cleavages, the focus has been to 'privilege political presence over common interests'. In the dominant discourse, the arguments are advanced to make voting compulsory or provide reservation of seats in the legislature on the basis of gender, social cleavages and minorities or the apportionment of the state resources on the basis of target groups.

The politics of presence was practiced not only to co-opt regions, but also the citizens and social cleavages based on caste and religion. The test of democratic participation is seen through voter's turnout, number of contestants and the representation of common people in the legislatures rather than the outcomes in terms of mainstreaming the poor and disadvantaged and also to achieve a more just and equitable society. A study of voter's turnover shows an increase from 58.07 in the 2004 elections to 58.43 per cent in the 2009 elections. The number of contestants has also increased from 5435 in 2004 to 8070 in the 2009 elections. In addition, the representation of people from low social origins has also multiplied. For instance, the number of Scheduled Caste candidates increased from 10 per cent (630) in 1989 to 24 per cent (1933) in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Similarly, the number of scheduled tribes candidates increased from 4 per cent (224) in 1989 to 7 per cent (565) in 2009 elections (see Table 3.4).

But the basic issue remains: how far has the increase in participation in elections benefitted people with low social origins in the decision-making process and created conducive conditions for equity? Not only this, it is worth analysing the shift in political discourse from, to use Benedict Anderson, categories “unbound serialities” and “bound serialities”. In electoral politics in the earlier phase, the language of politics referred to nation-building. Citizen rights, equality for all religion, castes and ethnicity largely remained within the domain of “unbound serialities”.²¹

Table 3.4
Caste-wise candidate summary – Lok Sabha Elections – 1971-2009

Year		Gen.	SC	ST	Total
1971	All India	2263	343	163	2769
	% from Total	81.73	12.39	5.89	100
1977	All India	2026	291	122	2439
	% from Total	83.07	11.93	5.00	100
1980	All India	3913	502	214	4629
	% from Total	84.53	10.84	4.62	100
1984-85	All India	4661	592	240	5493
	% from Total	84.85	10.78	4.37	100
1989	All India	5306	630	224	6160
	% from Total	86.14	10.23	3.64	100
1991-92	All India	7508	899	342	8749
	% from Total	85.82	10.28	3.91	100
1996	All India	12123	1356	473	13952
	% from Total	86.89	9.72	3.39	100
1998	All India	3936	571	243	4750
	% from Total	82.86	12.02	5.12	100
1999	ALL India	3816	602	230	4648
	% from Total	82.10	12.95	4.95	100
2004	All India	3674	1372	389	5435
	% from Total	67.60	25.24	7.16	100
2009	All India	5572	1933	565	8070
	% from Total	69.05	23.95	7.00	100.00

Source: Statistical Reports on General Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

In 1962, the Congress party in its election manifesto declared it would build:

a social order based on justice and offering equal opportunity to every citizen... The social services and, more especially, education and health should be expanded, greater attention being paid to economically and educationally backward people. The test of giving particular attention should be that of

economic backwardness. Thus, low income groups, irrespective of castes and communities should receive special consideration.²²

In the 1977 elections, the Congress party promised “to safeguard the interests of the minorities and weaker sections, to end privy purses and other such privileges, to provide the basic requirements of the people, speedily through dynamic rural programmes, to provide new employment avenues”.²³

However, after the mid-eighties, sectional interests based on caste and religion were articulated in the elections and the slogan of ‘justice for all’ was replaced by ‘justice for backward castes, Dalits and minorities’. These exclusive category usages for ‘inclusive governance’ led to polarisation in the elections. For example, in 2009 parliamentary elections, the projection of Mayawati, a dalit leader, as the prime ministerial candidate by the Third Front led by Communist Parties, may have polarised the middle class non-Dalit votes to the advantage of the Congress party. This can be seen from the increase in the urban votes in favour of the Congress party. The main thrust of the argument is that in the post-economic reforms, competition for the scarce resources is being shaped around sectional interests and identities. The tension between economics of the market, i.e. state politics and populist politics, led to the inclusion of sectional interests based on religion and caste. This became a major factor for electoral mobilisations by the competing political parties. For instance, Mandal Commission has promised job opportunities to the Backward Castes in an environment where jobs opportunities in the public sector are shrinking. And, it also acknowledges that politics of populism can only promise hope.

It is not at all our contention that by offering a few thousand jobs to the OBC candidates we shall be able to make 52 per cent of the Indian

population as forward, but we must recognize that an essential part of the battle against the social backwardness is to be fought in the minds of backward people, when a backward class candidate becomes a Collector or a Superintendent of Police, the material benefits accruing from his position are limited to the members of his family only. But the psychological spin-off of this phenomenon is tremendous, the entire community of that backward class candidate feels socially elevated.²⁴

The state has abdicated its responsibility to build a secular society through affirmative action, where caste shall not be the basis of dispensation of justice, and religious identities shall not be the basis of entitlement of national resources. On the contrary, it consolidated the hold of regional, communal and caste-based parties in elections. Most of the regional parties have provided impetus to the “sons of the soil” and articulated these concerns in their electoral discourse.

For example, in Maharashtra, it has been reported that the Congress party benefitted in the 2009 parliamentary and state assembly elections due to the radical assertions of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) Chief Raj Thackeray. These assertions brought about a division in the vote bank of Shiv Sena. MNS Chief Raj Thackeray attempted to involve ‘sons of the soil’ parochialism when he asserted that “Nashik was facing an influx of north India. They are earning here and sending the money to their native place...I am not against them, but they should have some affection for Maharashtra...He warned that north Indians who did not speak Marathi and did not respect Marathi culture would be driven away,”²⁵

The Congress government in Maharashtra has made their support to the MNS agenda explicit in announcing it would strictly implement the eligibility criteria for a driving taxi permit, which stipulated that a person must be a resident of Maharashtra for

a minimum 15 years and can read, write and speak Marathi.²⁶ These articulations acquire significance in the backdrop of the political parties mobilising support for elections on the basis of region, caste and religious group affiliations. A perusal of the election manifestos of the political parties clearly shows that the parties promised subsidies, social security and safety nets to the electorates based on social cleavages.²⁷

In the 2009 elections, the Congress party asserted that ‘The empowerment of the weaker sections of society — scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, OBCs, minorities and women — has been an article of faith with the Indian National Congress. This will be carried forward with emphasis on education, particularly skill-based and professional education’.²⁸ For instance, communalism has been used to even present problems like unemployment as affecting the Hindus or the Muslims or the Sikhs. Articulation of the findings relating to backwardness of Muslims in the Sachar Commission Report, reservation of jobs for backward castes and social and economic backwardness of Dalits have been used as vote catching devices.

The logical outcome of this approach is the feeling of a deep sense of discrimination amongst those who are either denied access to employment opportunities or who remained on the margins of the employment market. ‘Coalition of presence’ became rather the norm to co-opt social cleavages and offer doles to the common citizens under the banner of citizen-centric governance.

But a majority of the women representatives in the local bodies, as per a pre-election survey conducted in 2008, were dissatisfied as they were promised at the time of election that the ‘politics of presence’ shall provide answers to their claims to equity, access and accountable governance.²⁹ But these political parties, while in government pursued an agenda of downsizing the public sector and have, in fact,

leveraged public sector resources to the private sector with a claim to provide efficient and accountable governance to the people. People have been reduced to ‘consumers with the ability to choose and complain (although) not the ability to proactively shape services’.³⁰

Results in developing countries especially have shown that the interests of the powerless, the hardcore poor, the ethnic minority and the aged have been sidelined while the existing democratic institutions (the representative democracy) have been hijacked by the rich and the lobbyists and continued to function as a platform for the vested interests and not that of the poor. This has mirrored the regulatory dimension of the ‘state politics’ and the abdication syndrome ingrained into the practice of politics.³¹

The post-colonial state has failed to transform the status of people from colonial subjects to citizens. It has been very aptly described by Nicholas Dirks when he termed the colonial states as ethnographic states.³² In other words, the states do not seek participation of the citizens in decision making, but claim to provide for the welfare of population. This made governance less a matter of politics and more of administrative policy. The foremost ingredient of this has been mistrust in the subjects or populace. It can be exemplified in a number of ways, but the most visible is the filing of affidavits for almost every interaction with the government.

These affidavits are required in support of the facts given by the applicants for various services provided by the government. In other words, these are affirmations by the applicants in some cases supported by third parties. These affidavits in most of the cases are given on legal papers sworn before a Magistrate or public notary. For instance, affidavits are even required for public utilities such as new connections for electricity, sewerage and water supply. Besides resulting in

citizen's harassment and corruption, it has perpetuated the dichotomy between the state and the nation. Instead of providing universal representation for the citizens as expected, these elections contribute nothing, but "plundering rotating government...in many of these countries, multi-party elections are but a vehicle to legitimise an existing political economy and perpetuate an equation of patron/client dependency relationship in a society."³³

A major casualty of this is citizen-centric democratic governance. If the citizens are treated as population and targets of governance, rather than participatory stakeholders guiding the democratic processes, democracy becomes redundant and citizens' backlash is built up even against the right kind of intervention.

Conclusion

Coalition politics in pre and post-election 2009 has shown that it is the politics of presence that played a predominant role in shaping issues relating to citizenship, federalism and multi-culturalism. Political parties have formed coalitions in contradiction to their professed electoral ideological pronouncements. While in partnership with each other, they nurtured coalitions for patronage rather than articulation of their professed political agenda. For example, most of the regional political parties bargained for the ministries of their choice rather than the restructuring of the policies which govern centre-state relations.³⁴ The regionalisation of the national political parties and nationalisation of the regional political parties as reflected in the electoral discourse melts down in the power-sharing coalition matrix. It is not only the economic meltdown, but the political meltdown in the coalition era which should merit the attention of political analysis. It is a coalition of bargaining through which stability of the tenure of government is ensured.

The coincidence between ideological flux and dichotomous relationship between populist politics and state politics with an emphasis on privileging presence over representative stakeholding of the regions, social cleavages and citizens is not accidental through patronage. There are heterogeneous needs which defy any general formula and its solutions are situational, strategic and historical-specific. How far a coalition of interests and coalition through patronage shall be able to balance the needs to transform entitlements of regions, diversities and citizens particularly living on the margins into rights is a moot question?

ENDNOTES

¹ This distinction between politics of representation and politics of presence has been very aptly described by Zoya Hasan who argued that politics of presence blurs the underrepresentation and the representation of interests of the constituents specifically vulnerable sections. Zoya Hasan, *Constitutional Equality and the Politics of Representation in India* (Delhi: Sage; 2006). London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, <http://dio.sagepub.com>.

² E. Sridharan, "Coalition Strategies and The BJP's Expansion, 1989-2004," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 43, Issue 2, July 2005, pp. 194-221. For 2009, the data were gathered from the Institute for Development and Communication (IDC) Unit.

³ The distinction between one party dominance system and one-party system has been described by Rajni Kothari. He noted that one-party dominance system is competitive party system, but one in which the competing parties play rather dissimilar roles. It consists of a party of consensus and parties of pressure. See for details, Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress System in India', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 12, 1964, pp. 1161-73.

⁴ Lok Sabha Elections 1962: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

⁵ Lok Sabha Elections 1977: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

⁶ Deepak Nayyar, “Economic Development and Political Democracy: Interaction of Economics and Politics in Independent India”, in Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 381.

⁷ ‘Cabinet yes to tax Punjab’, *The Hindustan Times* (Chandigarh), January 23, 2010
– HT Correspondent chdnewsdesk@hindustantimes.com.

⁸ Assembly Elections 2007: Manifesto of The Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal).

⁹ Assembly Elections 2007: Manifesto of The DMK.

¹⁰ Assembly Elections 2007: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

¹¹ Quoted in Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1974), p. 141.

¹² Deepak Nayyar, op. cit., 2001, p. 381.

¹³ Lok Sabha Elections 2009: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

¹⁴ Lok Sabha Elections 2009: Manifesto of The Bhartiya Janata Party.

¹⁵ Lok Sabha Elections 1999: Manifesto of The National Democratic Alliance.

¹⁶ The BJP in its 1962 election manifesto declared that “The present Constitution which, by calling the Centre as ‘Union’ and provinces as ‘States’, has recognised a separate and somewhat sovereign status of the constituents, is also a hindrance to national unity. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh will amend the Constitution and declare India a Unitary State, with provision for decentralisation of power to the lowest levels”. The Congress Party manifesto was more explicit on issues relating to national integration and unity in diversity. The issue of centre-state relationship did not find any expression in its 1962 manifesto.

¹⁷ Lok Sabha Elections 1998: Manifesto of The Shiroman Akali Dal..

¹⁸ Staff Correspondent, 'Redefine Centre-State Relations: SAD', Hindu, 24 March, 1997.

¹⁹ For instance, the Akali Dal in Punjab in its 1973 autonomy resolution and, later in its 1985 memorandum to the Sarkaria Commission, asked for apportionment of financial resources within the framework of command economy. In the 1973 resolution, the Akali Dal demanded, "Complete nationalisation of the trade in food grains and, as such, shall endeavour to nationalize the wholesale trade in food grains through the establishment of state agencies."

It further stated that "the SAD shall try to fix the prices of the agricultural produce on the basis of the returns of the middle class farmers. Such prices would be notified well before the sowing season and only the State governments would be empowered to fix such prices." However, in its 2007 election manifesto these issues were not raised.

²⁰ For detailed analysis of this aspect, please see Atul Sood, "'Deepening Disparities and Divides: Whose Growth is it Anyway'" in *Social Watch India* (Delhi: Sage, 2007), Chapter II, pp. 89-94.

²¹ Partha Chatterjee has very perceptively reflected on Anderson's categorisation of bound and unbound serialities and has observed that for each category of classification any individual can count only as one on zero, never as a fraction, which in turn means that all partial or mixed affiliations to a category are ruled out. For limited purpose, in this paper these categories have been used with a qualification that the identity perceptions are real and that which of the elements of ethnic identity like caste, religion, language etc. shall acquire dominant manifestation is history-specific and contextually-based.

Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*. (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), p.6.

Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, South-East Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998).

²²Lok Sabha Elections 1962: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

²³Lok Sabha Elections 1977: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

²⁴ B.P. Mandal, *Report of the Backward Classes Commission* (Government of India, 1980) Vol. 1, Chapter XIII, Recommendations, pp. 57-60.

²⁵ Raj Thackeray booked for his speech' March 22, 2009,

<http://election.rediff.com/report/2009/mar/22/loksabhapoll-raj-thackeray-booked-for-his-hate-speech.htm>.

²⁶ Ketaki Ghoge, 'Marathi must for cab drivers' Hindustan Times, 21 January, 2010. Subsequently, the Congress government in Maharashtra moderated its statement in response to adverse reactions from North-Indian states.

²⁷ The Congress commits itself to amending the Constitution to establish a Commission for Minority Educational Institutions to provide direct affiliation for minority professional institutions to central universities. Special steps will be taken to spread modern and technical education among women in minority communities particularly... (Congress: 2004). A comprehensive national programme for minor irrigation of all lands owned by Dalits and adivasis will be introduced. Landless families will be endowed with some land through the proper implementation of land ceiling and land redistribution legislation.

Lok Sabha Elections 2004: Manifesto of the Indian National Congress

²⁸Lok Sabha Elections 2009: Manifesto of The Indian National Congress.

²⁹ The study indicated that women representatives were assigned the task to look into social engagements such as marriage alliances, information on birth, health and household activities in the domain of gender segregated roles.

See for details, Rainuka Dagar, *Authority Systems and Construction of Masculinities*, (Chandigarh: Institute for Development and Communication, 2008).

³⁰ M. Adil Khan, *“Engaged Governance”: A Strategy for Mainstreaming Citizens into the Public Policy Processes* (New York: United Nations, 2005), p. 13.

³¹ M. Adil Khan, *ibid.*, p. 13.

³² For an elaborate analysis of this aspect, please refer to Partha Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, 2006.

³³ M. Adil Khan, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 8-9.

³⁴ In post-2009 elections, DMK, the key ally of the Congress, demanded an increase in its ministerial berths as compared to 2004. It also made a determined pitch for lucrative ministries like Telecom, Information Technology, Surface Transport and Shipping. On the other hand, Trinamool Congress smoothly bargained for the Ministry of Railways and five Ministers of States. It also demanded the imposition of President’s Rule in West Bengal in contradiction to the demand of the regional parties for the imposition of Central rule in any state only in extreme circumstances.

‘Allies bargain hard for berths, Karuna to give outside support’, DMK, Didi keep UP on toes’, Anita Katyal, *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), May 22, 2009.