

POLITICS OF DEFECTION IN INDIA (1952-1985)

*Nagaraj G. Havinal**

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ABSTRACT

Politics of defection has been a sad reality of Indian political system. After 4th General Election (1967) Indian political system came to experience a spate of political defections. Politics of defection has its history in pre-independence India. But defections took place on a very limited scale. Between 1967 to 1970, 23 governments came and collapsed. In seven states, defections had a field day. As many as eight defectors became Chief Ministers and many others were successful in getting ministerial berths. Minority governments formed by defectors and supported by some parties from outside came into existence in Haryana, Punjab, West Bengal and Bihar. 32 governments of 10 states fell down because of defection politics. The practice continued radically up to 1985 in many states of India. This paper highlights the history of political defections in India from 1952 to 1985.

KEYWORDS: *Political Defections, Politics of Defection, Indian Political System.*

* Dr. Nagaraj G. Havinal, Associate Professor, GFGC, Alawandi.

Introduction:

The Constitution of India provides for a parliamentary form of government, both at the Centre and in the States. Articles 74 and 75 of Indian Constitution deal with the parliamentary system at the Centre and Articles 163 and 164 in the States. 1 In the parliamentary system of India, political defections practiced a lot. Particularly after the fourth General Elections. The practice of political defections has been a hard and sad reality of the Indian political system. This evil practice has been present in an alarming proportion. In these elections several states witnessed the rise of several non-Congress governments which came to power either with thin majority or as coalitions. The resulting situation witnessed an unprecedented floor crossings, by several elected representatives from one party to another and then to another. 2 All political parties experienced political defections. Each party also used it as a means to secure desired results in the game of toppling of governments. This resulted into an environment of political instability, and tremendously increased the scope of political corruption. Consequently, political defections became an object of serious concern, in fact a menace which needed immediate attention and measures for its control.

Meaning of Political Defection:

Political defections refer to the practice of changing party loyalties by elected representatives for securing certain gains. Such terms as Floor Crossing, Carpet Crossing, Political Turncoatism, Politics of Musical Chairs, Politics of Opportunism, are also used for defining political defections.

Political Defections Before 1969:

Politics of defection started before independence. At

the 1937 elections held under the Government of India Act 1935, the Congress was returned with absolute majority in the United Provinces. However, Chief Minister Govind Ballabh Pant deemed it proper to induce some members of the Muslim League to cross the floor and join the Congress. One of these, Hafeez Mohammad Ibrahim, was included in the Congress ministry. With the exception of Shri Hafeez, none of these defectors resigned their seat in the Assembly to seek re-elections on the Congress ticket. 3 After independence defections took place on a very limited scale. Between 1952 and 1957 there were only 67 political defections. Most of the political defectors however, chose to become independents. During this time the defections continued virtually a one-way traffic as in more than 75 percent cases the Congress, the all dominant party, was the gainer. The Congress accepted defectors and at times offered the justification that defections only led to the growth of political stability. However, at other times it condemned political defections, particularly when somebody defected away from the Congress.

The First General Elections produced hung houses in Madras, Travancore, Cochin, PEPSU and Orissa. The Congress party happened to be the single largest party in these state legislatures and their leaders were invited to form the governments. Congress party Chief Ministers then started the plan of securing defections for converting their minorities into majorities. However, the Chief Ministers of Madras and Orissa alone were successful in doing so. In 1953, in Andhra Pradesh, T. Prakasam and his followers defected to the Congress and Mr. Prakasam formed the government. Likewise, the game of defections was also practiced after the elections of 1957 and 1962, particularly in the states of Orissa, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Politics of Defection After the Fourth General Election

After the fourth General Elections, Indian political system came to experience a spate of political defections. In 1967 alone 438 defections took place. In Haryana a legislator created history by defecting twice in a single day. Between March 1967 to March 1970 there took place 1827 defections in all state legislatures. 4 In the fourth General Election, the Congress lost majorities in eight states and failed to form governments in seven of them. The Congress and the other political parties lost no opportunity of capturing power through the securing of defections. United fronts and coalition governments were formed in Kerala, Orissa, Bihar, Punjab, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. The Congress tried to topple these governments and was successful in doing so in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Punjab. The opposition parties reacted strongly and tried to pay the Congress in the same coin.

The split of the Congress in November 1969 added a new dimension to the phenomenon. After the 1971 election to Lok Sabha, the trend reached its climax when three governments in Mysore [Karnataka], Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat fell in quick succession in March 1971. The fall of the Veerendra Patil Ministry of the Congress (O) (Mysore State) was followed by the imposition of the President's rule in the state on March 27. 5 After the 1971 General Elections, river of defections turned as flood defections. During 1971-77, the country felt relieved as the number of defections remained limited and political stability remained generally intact. During this time the Congress was successful in replacing the non-Congress governments of Gujarat, Orissa, and Manipur through defection politics. Many legislators belonging to Bharatiya Lok Dal, Congress (O) and several regional parties jumped over to the Congress. However, defections in reverse, from the Congress to the newly formed Congress for Democracy

under the leadership of Shri Babu Jagjivan Ram, took place after February 1977.

When Janata Party came to power in the centre, Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai, openly invited the members of Rajya Sabha and State legislators to Janata Party. This invitation encouraged defections and gave rebirth to political instability. Between 1977-1979 eleven state governments, four ministries of the Congress, two of Janata Party, one each of AIADMK, Assam Janata Dal and Peoples Conference fell because of defections. Even after 1980 elections the defections continued almost unabated. During 1980-84 most of the defections were from other political parties to the Congress (I). 6

In 1985, the Congress government, led by PM Rajiv Gandhi, was successful in getting passed the 52nd Amendment Act which outlawed defections. This anti-defection measure made it difficult for legislators to change their party loyalties and allegiances. It was successful in reducing the menace of political defections. Later, the 91st Amendment Act of 2003 made one change in the provisions of the 10th schedule of the constitution. It omitted an exception provision i.e., disqualification on ground of defection not to apply in case of party split.

Conclusion:

Politics of defection is an evil practice in the Indian political system. Due to this, many governments fell down and faced instability. To stop this evil practice the Anti-defection law (1985) became a welcome step. It is hoped that political parties will maintain discipline among their respective members and discourage the elected representatives from defecting. However, splits and mergers and new splits, new mergers and new alliances have been keeping alive an environment of defections in political parties. Purchase of support in the name of support

from outside also tantamount to a virtual defection which compels the elected representatives to change their party loyalties. Political defections in the name of party split still continue to be present in the Indian political system.

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