

## Trend of Defections in Indian Politics

Dr. Bhavna Sharma

We are all aware the political parties occupy an important position in the democratic set up of any country. The political parties in any country are the result of not only the prevailing political situation in that country but also the history, culture, geography and economy of that country.

Political Parties are essential for any democratic government and we cannot conceive of democracy without any political party. Therefore it will not be an exaggeration to say that political party system is the life and blood of democracy.

In our democratic system the political party which commands the majority in the Lok-Sabha, forms the Government at the centre. Initially in the post-independence period the Indian Culture was influenced by the role of the Congress in the freedom struggle.

Legislators defecting to ruling parties has increased in recent times needing a debate on the inadequacy of the present laws. The impunity with which politicians are defecting, calls for an urgent legal discussion and find remedy for betterment of democratic system. One remedy may be to disqualify the member immediately without the cumbersome procedure involving speaker, who invariably is found to be partisan due to his party affiliation Also the clause relating to number of defectors must be amended in such a way that all the defectors should be penalized.

Dictionary meaning of the term 'Defection' is falling away from duty or revolt. This term is derived from the military vocabulary and in that sense it means running away of a soldier from duty. In the political field it means a change of political label.

The process of defections started in the later decades of Indian Independence when a small number of the elected MLA's were capable to lift the balance.

In India, members of political parties change sides purely due to selfish motives, irrespective of the interest of the party and of the country. Some factors, which have encouraged defections, are:

1. **Absence of ideologically coherent and well-knit national political parties**

Congress which was the sole ruling party upto 1967 is, strictly speaking, not a political party. It is a continuation of the broad movement built by country's patriots to wrest freedom from the foreign hands. As such it is a conglomeration of individual and groups with different socio-economic outlook and approach. Even on' basic questions of concept of Indian nationalism and requirements of Indian unity and security it has different and distinct streams of thought and groups based on them which are kept together by one supreme consideration of preserving and sharing power. So long as Congress provided the only road to power all such disparate elements are kept together. That situation changed after 1967 when new roads to power were opened.

As per Mr. P.M. Kamath, the main cause of defection is the character of the Congress party which is the premier political organization in the country. This party has been, and still is the umbrella party representing conflicting personalities, policies and programmes. This feature has not undergone any major change in spite of splits in the party in 1969 and 1978. This character of Congress party has made the political environment in the country conducive for defections.

To make it more explicit, the Congress has been neither an ideology - based nor a clear policy-based party. Moreover individual and groups in the Congress who never had any ideological

hand with the ideology of its dominant section began to defect from it without any qualms of conscience.

On the eve of the first phase of active defections (1967-70), the ability of the Congress Party to provide political consensus and stability had declined. Mrs. Gandhi's credibility as an effective national leader was seriously impaired. While the dissatisfied regional, communal and ethnic groups were quite aggressive in imposing their claims on government, the Congress party confronted by new demands on an already stained patronage system was losing its capacity to function as an umbrella organization. Such a conflicting base of the Congress, which had so far occupied the place of political centre, was the basic factor responsible for the defection at the relevant period.

The Jana Sangh (now BJP) and the Communist Parties are the only really distinct parties in the country. But, the ideological understanding of all their legislators is not of the same order and they have not remained totally unaffected by the general scramble for power in the country.

2. **Lack of a deep rooted convention**

Democracy is run on conventions rather than the letter of the law and constitution. The congress Party had the rare opportunity to set the right conventions without any fear of losing power. But, it failed to do in pre 1967 years. Even after 1967 elections it set the ball of defections rolling in Rajasthan. This absence of right conventions has also contributed a good deal to unprincipled defections.

3. **The general fall in values and lack of idealism**

The general fall in values and lack of idealism is a result of too much stress on material side of life. This has affected politicians and legislators no less than the common man. Therefore, the lust for power and money has often led to large scale defections. The worst case of bulk defection was seen on a motivation for reward of office or other allurements. For example, the-floor crossings by Rao Birendra Singh in U.P., Gobind Narayan Singh in M.P., Charan Singh in Uttar Pradesh, Sarat Power in Maharashtra, Janata Members in Himachal Pradesh, G.M. Shah in Kashmir and Bhaskar Rao in Andhra Pradesh, all have defected either for ministerial portfolios or for financial gains. Those defectors would not have left their parties, if the opposition had not offered Chief Ministership to them. Hence, the personal ambition, more than any other factor, has played a significant role in the politics of defection.

Accordingly to Morarji Desai, "The general lack of character among present day politicians is the root cause of defections in India. In adversity, great leaders emerge and in prosperity or complacency only Bhajan Lal and Bansi Lal Flourish. No doubt, the lack of national character is the bane of Indian politics which is openly treated as 'exchange and merit'".

4. **Factional infighting**

Factional infighting in the parties has also been a major cause of political defections. On the eve of the Fourth General Elections, the internal disputes over the allocation of party tickets in Madhya Pradesh led to large scale political defections in the Congress Party. In several states there was a complete breakdown of party discipline as dissidents maneuvered "day and night" to oust the leadership from office. Thus factional infighting and defection brought about a sudden collapse of Congress Ministries in Andhra Pradesh in January, 1973 and in Orissa in March, 1973. In Bihar, Gujarat and Mysore, the struggle for power among rival groups led to renewed toppling activities that saw the reshuffling of ministries to accommodate rival factions. At times, family feuds among the top influential political leaders have caused political defections. Col. Ram Singh's defection and re-defection from the Congress(I) can be attributed to no other factor than his dispute with Rao Birendra Singh, a Minister in the Union Cabinet. The defections in Kashmir which brought about the collapse of Farooq's Government were, in the main, the result of Farooq's differences with his sister and her husband G.M. Shah. The removal

of the then Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao after his second marriage to Smt. Laxmi Parbati and the elevation of Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, the son-in-law of Mr. Rama Rao can also be attributed to the conflict in Mr. Rao's family.

5. **Low calibre of Legislator**

There is no provision in the Indian constitution for some minimum educational qualifications for intending candidates. Many of them are as ignorant as their electorate' or even worse. Therefore, they can't be expected to be very much conscious of democratic code of behaviour.

6. **Indifference of the Electorate**

Indian electorate, though it is much more awakened now than ever before, still continues to be indifferent to political behaviour of its representatives. The wide areas of the constituencies and vastness of electorate in each constituency also contribute to the growth of this general indifference of the electorate, particularly after the elections are over.

7. **Too much importance given to office and status**

Indian Society is too much status conscious. Ministerial office gives both status and power. The emoluments and other facilities given to Ministers and wide gap between the positions of Ministers and ordinary legislators have also contributed to defections to gain ministerial position.

8. **Intolerant Leaders**

For most of the period between 1967 and 1984, Mrs. Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India. Being intolerant of the non-Congress governments in the states, she never disapproved the defectors' roles. Rather she welcomed those who defected to her camp. It was she who not only allowed the notorious defector Bhajan Lal but also allowed him to continue as Chief Minister for more than five years without seeking the fresh mandate from the electorate. During Andhra crisis of August 1984, she did not say a word of condemnation for the plotters. Rather, she seemed to believe that the only way to run the Indian States was the way Bhaskar Rao sought to run it for a month.

9. **Role of Governors**

There is reason to believe that some Governors have also at times misused their office at the behest of the centre, to secure defections. In the case of Mr. N. T. Ramarao, the Governor's role was partisan. He not only refused to accept the request of Mr. Ramarao but also had him and his supporters arrested in Raj Bhavan when they went to convince the Governor that they still enjoyed a majority. The role of the then Governor of Kashmir, Mr. Jagmohan, was also not above board. In both states, the Governors installed minority governments after dismissing popular ministries and gave the new Chief Ministers a month time to prove their majority on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. This period was obviously to be used for buying defectors from the opposite camps. While this trick succeeded in Jammu and Kashmir, it backfired in Andhra Pradesh with the result that the then Governor Ram Lal had to resign.

10. **Role of Caste and Religion**

The caste and communal consideration have also been a factor to be exploited in the game of defections. In the states where caste lobbies have been active and strong, bitter internal disputes over the allocation of party tickets have often led to large scale defections that splintered the organisation around the factional and caste groupings at its core. There is no dearth of such cases in the history of Haryana, U.P. and Bihar.

A committee under the chairmanship of Shri Y.B. Chavhan was first appointed in 1968 to study this phenomenon and later in its supports the Chavhan committee made certain recommendation with alia which were:-

1. There should be a code of conduct for political parties.
2. The elected representatives should understand their duties.

3. The defectors should not be made ministers.
4. Political parties should be registered.

The political drama of defection has been popular since the fourth and fifty Lok-Sabha Elections i.e. during the period of 1967 to 1977 where India faced approximately 2000 defection cases among the 4000 members of the lower house and the State Legislative Assemblies as well. The situation went beyond the control of the parliament when, half of the members of Lok-Sabha shuffled between parties more than once among the members one of them was identified to commit the act of defection only to be a minister for a limited period of five days in March, 1971.

In March 1968 under the leadership of Y.B. Chavhan, the then Home Minister, a committee of the political parties representatives and the experts was established in order to settle the dispute of frequent political horse trading by making some recommendations Y.B. Chavhan, mentioned defection as a 'national malady' endangering democracy of Indian citizen.

Finally in 1985, Indian legislature made 52<sup>nd</sup> amendment to enforce the mandate of Rajiv Gandhi where the Anti-Defection law has been added at the 10<sup>th</sup> schedule in our constitution. If we delve deeper into the concept of Anti-Defection, we have to apply focus in the purpose and reasons of the introduction of 10<sup>th</sup> schedule enshrined by the Parliament.

The evil of political defections has been a matter of national concern. If it is not combated, it is likely to undermine the very foundations of our democracy and the principles which sustain it with this object; an assurance was given in the address by the President to Parliament that the government intended to introduce in the current session of Parliament on anti-defection bill. This bill is meant for outlaw and defection and fulfilling the above assurance. The grounds for disqualification are:

- a) If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- b) If he votes or abstains from voting in such house contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorized to do so without obtaining prior permission. However there are certain exceptions that a person shall not be disqualified if his original political party merges with another and if he and other members do not accept the merger and opts to function as a separate group. As far as disqualifications under anti-defection law are concerned till 2009, 88 such laws have been complained out of which 26 have been disqualified in the Parliament. In the States till 2004 there have been 268 complaints registered and 113 have been disqualified.

The anti-defection law comes up with various pros and cons. Though it has the advantage of providing stability to governments and ensuring loyalty to party manifest to, it reduces the accountability of the government to Parliament and curbs dissent against party policies. Many also say that freedom of speech and expression is curtailed by the 10<sup>th</sup> schedule. But the Supreme Court in *Kihota Hollohan v/s Zachilhu* and others stated that it does not violate any right or freedom under Articles 105 and 194 of the constitution. The same judgment also maintained that decisions of disqualifications shall be open to judicial review. However with the growing cases of defection in India how functional is the law against defections is questionable.

Politics of defection has given rise to unpredictable alliances. Any notion of political ideology is relegated to the background in politics and defection from one party to another adhering to a completely opposite ideology is a reflection of the same, the main aim of most of the politicians has been to contest election and get into positions of power. Political opportunism in most cases has become the order of the day and this can be said from the fact that defection exacerbates when elections are close at hand and politicians shift their loyalty towards the dominant party, General elections are regarded as the best and suitable time for political defection and political fraction.

It is also important to know how common people perceive this phenomenon. The pertinent fact to note is that how many of us (voters) take into account the factor of ideology while voting. It has

become very difficult to predict voters' behavior in the present time. They also shift their Loyalty to a particular ideology and a particular party both from the point of view of voters and politicians themselves has become an unexpected factor. Indian democracy is vitiated by many opportunists and communal leaders.

Further, regionalism and groupism have increased giving rise to centrifugal forces. I therefore suggest that amendments should be made in the Anti-Defection Law specifying that:

1. A person changing political affiliations would be debarred from holding a public office for a limited period. In this regard the decision of the election commission would be final.
2. Secondly, it should be laid down that political coalition, if formed before general elections, would not be changed after the elections.
3. The system of giving support from outside should be completely done away with and the political parties giving support to any other political party or a coalition should participate in the government formation.
4. Horse-trading of MP's and MLA's should be made a punishable offence so that instability is avoided.
5. All political parties should have a code of conduct of not accepting defectors.
6. In conclusion I have to say that the system of defection should be eliminated. If necessary a committee comprising of the Election Commission MP's from various parties, constitutional experts and intellectuals should be formed for suggesting remedy against defections.

**Associate Professor,  
Political Science, Government College, Jaipur**

**References :-**

- 1 Kamath P.M., Anti-Defection Politics in the 1980s. Asian Survey, Oct., 1985.
- 2 Sikri S.L., Politics of Defection. Ed.1990, p.328.
- 3 Limaye Madhu, Law Against Defections (Several Serious Flaws'). The Times of India, March 4,1985.
- 4 Nandi Ashis, Three Lessons of Andhra Pradesh. Express Magazine, 30th Sept., 1984.
- 5 Fronkel R. Francine, Indian Political Economy ed., p.346-347
- 6 Nandy Ashis, Supra f.n.5
- 7 Masodhar B.A.. Law Relating to Electoral Disqualification - From Disability to Defection. P-17.