

BOOK REVIEW

Coalition Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Asia,
edited by E. Sridharan (*New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012*), pp.
284 (*hardbond*)

The present volume is a compilation of enriched essays written by scholars of repute in their respective fields of specialisation from four Asian countries— India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Japan. The central argument of the volume is that the current phase of coalition system in Asian polities has led to the deepening of democracy in Asia. Factor contributing to the strengthening of democracy is power-sharing arrangements, which is socially progressing and politically consolidating. Since coalition government is more representative of diversity, we find a new statement of inclusive democracy in the four polities. The nature of party system and structure of coalition further determines the extent of power sharing. The volume examines the relationship between coalition politics and democratic consolidation textual-interpretive. The methodology applied varies from comparative, textual-interpretive, empirical to analytical. Variables selected for analysis and comparative studies include party system, electoral system social cleavages, and coalition theories.

E. Sridharan, in his introductory chapter analyses interrelationship between coalition politics and democratic consolidation and interrogates not only the theories of democratic consolidation but also the 'types of coalition'. An elaborate discussion on the broad genre of political parties ranging from elite parties, mass parties, ethnic parties,

electoralist parties to movement parties, leave the reader with a deeper understanding of the typologies of the party system.

The emergence of coalition politics in Japan is largely attributed to the electoral system having multimember constituencies leaving no option for the candidate, but to strengthen his position through *koenkai* (the supporter's group). The political parties in Japan are neither ethnicity based nor ideological, but mostly personality based. The political landscape is dominated by "coalitional behaviour that follows the logic of enemy of my enemy is my friend." (p. 271). The case of Japan is not fitting well with the thematic foci of the volume as it is an ethnically homogenous country.

In an ethnically divided society of Sri Lanka, proportional representation system has not enabled the Tamil minorities to have a decisive say in the coalition governance. E. Sridharan describes it as 'crisis of democracy'. The Sri Lankan case negates the widely accepted assumption that PR system is conducive for the representation of minorities. Sri Lanka qualifies as case of 'controlled democracy'.

Adoption of first past the post system has ensured systemic stability (different from governmental stability) of the polity in India. In addition, an all-encompassing umbrella party— Indian National Congress with a federal set up consolidated the democratic credentials of the Indian state. Duverger law played itself out at the national level making it bipolar, and multipolar at the state level. Regionalisation promotes formation of social coalitions of castes, ethnic and religious groups, cultural forms and other segmented manifestations of diversities. Consequently, coalition system not only accommodates but also responds to specific minority questions.

The most commanding success of Malaysia's political system is the "creation of ethnically heterogeneous state creating incentive for inter-ethnic cooperation in which different groups must coalesce to gain advantage from the centre" (p. 278). In matters of formulation of public policies, ethnic minorities are not excluded though their participation is indirect and limited. However, the adoption of semi-authoritarian practices by Malaysia in the form of putting restriction on freedom of press and assembly raise questions on the quality of democracy in Malaysia.

On critical estimation, except Sridharan, other contributors have not analysed and causatively explained the relationship between coalition politics and democratic consolidation. Their account remains more of reporting than of analytical reasoning. Despite these known deficiencies, the volume is of scholarly interest, extremely useful for students and researchers on coalition system as it has pastly succeeded in filling up knowledge gap in the field.

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