

Whither Ethiopia; towards a Dominant Party System or a Single Party State??

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There has been an acute and hugely observable dialogue and fierce debate that under grid the critical discourse of the Ethiopian polity in the wake of the fast paced development drive and the aftermath of the 4th national election in the present burgeoning era of our country, Ethiopia.

It is appropriate to gauge the raging debate that informs itself from two irreconcilable and far-fetched premises. As expected outcomes emanating from such extreme precepts and outlandish methodologies pursued will augur a series of real, potent or imaginary conclusions that call for the need to take stock of the past and allude to a plausible scenario by pointing out to a reasonable trajectory that could noticeably ensue.

By way of constriction and obvious timing what primarily clings to mind is the all too pervasive ascendance of the debate surrounding the cliché: A Dominant or a Single party system, and its attendant manifestation in the Ethiopian political landscape.

Incidentally this has gained currency since the indelible and unmistakable tilting of the pendulum towards determining the feature and indeed, the ultimate defining characteristic of the de facto and de jure evolution of the nature of political system in the constitutional federal arrangement of today's Ethiopia.

It has been common knowledge to learn that arguments on the two sides of the isle pursuant to the landslide and triumphant electoral win by the EPRDF after the recently held nation-wide fourth parliamentary election results were announced, have brought to the fore whether the future of Ethiopia shall tilt towards a one party state or a dominant party system.

Needless to say, those who have ballooned out to be the ardent protagonists of the fable that Ethiopia is headed on the wrong direction are fixated and infatuated with the inevitable preponderance of a single-party system impacted as a result of the overwhelming majority of votes as they allegedly concoct were swayed, swindled and grabbed by the EPRDF, whose dream they fabricate is, of transforming the nation to be a breeding ground of a dictatorial rule under its grip.

This kind of wild accusatory tone totally betrays the truth, that Ethiopia is run by a Constitutional Federal and Parliamentary system wherein the ultimate political verdict is sealed by the free and voluntary participation of the electorate expressed by its deciding vote. A single-party system is a type of government in which a single political party forms the government and no other parties are permitted to organize or run candidates for election.

In modern societies single party states have arisen from an overdue adherence to communism, and fascism. No political grouping or political parties are allowed de facto or de jure nor are they permitted by the constitution to exist at all in a single party state.

Examples of a single or one party system mushroomed in the world until the Soviet communist bloc collapsed in the not too distant past. To-day, there remain some single party states openly proclaiming themselves as the sole choice of the peoples of the countries where their grip on power rests on sheer force and dictatorship.

To cite but a few of current one party or single party states, where no opposition is allowed to organize or submit individual candidates for election other than the party in power are the Communist Party of Cuba, The Korean Workers' Party. The Baaz Party of Syria, the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice of Eritrea, and the Communist Party of Vietnam.

In all the above referenced countries, the constitution of the country in question forbids the existence of any other party. And in the case of Eritrea, to add insult to injury in the absence of a binding constitution, the state exercises coercion by its omnipresence and heavy handedness, so much so, no fiat is rendered necessary to preclude the existence of any other political party either de jure or de facto.

It is against this backdrop, that one needs to evaluate and reexamine the bogus clamor and sham claim by some quarters in the ranks of the hate-mongers and extreme Diaspora elements and their unquestioning tutelages, that Ethiopia is headed towards a single party system.

This argument does not hold water not does it bear an iota of truth when observed through the prism of the above templates. In our country, the struggle to form a democratic order has been realized by the unflinching sacrifice paid by thousands of the true sons and daughters of the nation, which consummated in the promulgation of a democratic constitution and a

federal system of governance which allow for the free, voluntary and peaceful participation of contending political parties in a multi-party setting. To-day as a result of the enabling constitutional order, there are close to a hundred political parties most of whom were actively engaged in the contention for power during the consecutive elections held in our country, particularly so, during the recently concluded 4th national election at the federal or regional levels and are currently gearing themselves up to partake in the upcoming municipal elections to vie for city parliamentary seats to be held in the not too distant future.

This constitutional guarantee ensures that parties contend for power trying to win the endorsement of the voters. This feature is a distinctive and crucial characteristic that is clearly and conspicuously absent in any single or one party system.

Viewed from such a perspective, the contestation and the venue to run for election which is open for any legally registered party, opting to function within the bounds of a given constitution in question, and which wins the hearts and minds of the electorate, commanding the decidedly enough votes clings to power in as long as it enjoys the support and endorsement of the voters.

The issue as it relates to the EPRDF, becomes relevant under such a political microscope. The EPRDF, has refined itself through thick and thin, to subscribe to the will of the electorate and thus has been repeatedly able to gain the confidence and trust of the Ethiopian people, who have consciously endorsed its program and development strategy.

This phenomenon, held under a multi-party contestation, wherein several political parties vie for power and culminating repeatedly by the victory of one party drawing the overwhelming support of the electors, and indeed the population at large is called a dominant party system.

The case in point, where the EPRDF has been winning the last four election by periodically expanding its margin of victory demonstrates that our political culture has entered a new chapter in its history where we have one dominant party, in a multi party, constitutional socio-economic and political system, repeatedly unleashing its sway on the pinnacle of the political saddle.

It is a common occurrence to witness the existence of, and the exercise by Dominant political states in the political life of many countries abundant of the globe. A few dominant parties taking the helm of power

under a multi-party competition and where the engine of power is controlled through the rule of the game governed by a constitution, like in our country, could symbolically be enumerated::

Africa

Angola - The Popular Front for the Liberation of Angola, in power since 1975.

Botswana - Botswana Democratic Party, in power since 1966.

Mozambique - Mozambique Liberation Front /FRELIMO in Portuguese/ 1975-1990

Nigeria - Peoples Democratic Party in power since 1999.

Tanzania - Chama Cha Mapundizi, in power since 1964.

South Africa - African National Congress in Power since 1994.

Asia

Japan - Liberal Democratic Party 1955-1993

Singapore - Peoples' Action Party, in power since 1959.

India - Indian National Congress 1947-1977

Europe

Luxemburg - The Christian social peoples party - since 1919

Sweden - Swedish Social Democratic party - 1932-1976.

Norway - Norwegian Labor party 1935-1965.

Americas

Mexico - Revolutionary Institutional Party - 1920-2000.

Argentina - National Autonomist Party - 1874-1916.

In all the above countries the common denominator is that each country has a constitution wherein fair, free and peaceful election is ran periodically among different contending parties, which vie to buy the support of the electorate by trying to win their hearts and minds expressed through their votes. In each country, we observe among the competing parties a dominant party has clung to the levers of power entrusted by the people for a continuous period of time.

This is the current scenario that we are witnessing in our country

as the EPRDF continues to enjoy the unreserved “Yes” vote from the Ethiopian People to emerge as the favored and dominant party of the day in present day federal Ethiopia, governed by the will of the various nations, nationalities and peoples of the country who exercise their voting rights, through the constitution they have wholeheartedly ratified.

In summation it is congruent to look into another angle that portrays the correctness of the manifestation of a dominant party, even in the ranks of multi-party states, where more often than not parties alternate in power in a span of a short period of time without a noticeable dominant party likely to continue controlling the levers of power albeit operating, in a synonymous political climate as those countries that nurture the emergence of a dominant party.

For instance while one talks of the United States of America, it is deciphered that there are two major political parties that alternate in power without allowing one or the other party to emerge dominant at the national level. There are however, pockets of governance in some cities and states, where a dominant party, ie, one of the major two national parties in the US, the Republican or the Democratic party, continues to enjoy the exclusive endorsement of the American voters in a given constituency.

The District of Columbia, Washington DC, the political hub of the nation, has been ruled by a Democratic Party ticket holder Mayor, since the Home Rule Act was promulgated in 1973, which granted D.C an elected city government.

It is widely observed that candidates from the Republican Party never ceased to compete for the position of the Mayor or to vie to be Council members of Washington Dc., dubbed as the political powerhouse of the world during the last four decades of the heyday of the Democratic party which has continued to be the Dominant Party.

Would this feature, wherein the Democratic Party, has continually held the golden key to power in Washington D.C for the last thirty seven years castigate Washington D.C to be an island of a single party system, that functions by the letter and word of the US constitution, which is believed to be the most democratic document by any standard in the world? Is this not arguably the most logical and pertinent showcase and a lucid confirmation of the emergence of a dominant party system even under the most liberal democratic exercise and political mores?

What is more, that the mayoralty of the city of Chicago has been held by a member of the Democratic Party since 1927 does not imply that the city is engulfed by a single party system. On the contrary, it puts to rest the erroneous argument that a given party in a nation ran by the supremacy

of the most democratic Constitution that conducts periodic elections under multi-party contestation could be leveled as a one party system. It does not stand the test of time as it is totally nullified by a vivid reality.

To add but a few anecdotes, the Canadian province of Alberta has been ruled by the Progressive Conservative Party since 1971, although Canada as could be rightly observed is a country, where the emergence of a Dominant Party at the national level is not a common phenomenon. It is to be noted that the Canadian province of Alberta was ruled by the Social Credit Party, another Dominant Party scenario between 1935-1971.

In Australia, again another democratic and constitutional country, the state of Queensland has been ruled by the Labor Party as a dominant one since 1987. In conclusion, the kernel that defines whether a state is anchored by a Dominant Party or a Single Party System, is the existence or the non-existence, of a Democratic Constitution which allows periodic elections with the unhindered participation of contesting parties in a multi-party setting, legally registered and peacefully operating and the orderly, peaceful, free, fair and voluntary engagement and empowerment of the electorate.