

EMERGING ISSUES IN INDIAN PARTY SYSTEM

Dr. Sunita Rani

Head, PG Dept. Of Political Science, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College

Sri Anandpur Sahib, Punjab

Abstract

In the modern democratic age, the struggle for power takes place openly and not in disguise. So, the political parties have a special significance today. The political parties prepare people for election, spread political knowledge in them, contest elections and elect representatives. The paper begins by defining the terms 'political party' and 'party system'. It then traces the evolution and emerging issues in party system in India. This paper also deals with the nature of the party system in India, Understand the nature of the party system in India and identify its various characteristics, analyze the changing nature of party system and explain the emerging patterns and discuss the socioeconomic and the political factors underlying the changing nature of party politics. Hence the data collected from secondary sources books, newspapers and official websites i.e.

Keywords: Political Parties, Party System, Indian Politics, Emerging Issues.

Introduction

Political Parties are the most significant mechanisms in a democratic system, though they function informally. They both express and form public opinion. They are the chief mechanism of informing and influencing the electorate. Organization and mobilization of the electorate is an important function of these parties. They shoulder the responsibility of government if they get the support of people. In the parliamentary system, the majority forms the government and tries to implement the policies outlined in its election manifesto. The minority party has to play the role of opposition. Political parties very often become the chief agency for political education and socialization. They help the people to identify and articulate their interests.

The generally accepted classification of the party system is between the one party system, two party systems and three party systems. In terms of geographical spread there are four types of parties: All India Parties, Trans Regional Parties, Regional Parties and Local Parties. In terms of orientation, there are Parties of Left, Right Centre and Leader oriented parties. Among Left there are Communist Parties and Socialistic groups, Among the Right there are traditional Parties formed around, religious, community and caste. In the Indian context, the earliest political parties emerged in local self-governing institutions introduced in British India by

the liberal Viceroy Lord Rippon after 1883. Subsequently, parties acquired more concrete form and functions in the council and assemblies under the various Councils Act after 1861 and various Government of India Acts, 1909, 1919 and 1935.

Meaning of Political Parties

A Political Party is a group of persons who organize themselves on the basis of the fixed program and try to capture the power of the government through constitutional means in order to give practical shape to their program. Under an amendment made in the Representation of The People Act 1951, in December 1988, provision has been made for the registration of every political party. For this purpose, all Political Parties within 60 days and new political parties within 30 days will give an application for registration to the election commission. Political parties offer a vital link between the state and civil society. In a representative democratic system, parties often operate as autonomous units in the domain of political action. They play a decisive role in bringing political stability to the parliamentary democratic system. They are not only the catalyst for transforming people's aspirations into democratic goals but also act as watchdogs, as a representative democracy cannot function without political parties. Political parties are the essence of democratic systems as they tend to effectively channel the governmental machinery. Their role is no less important in non-democratic systems, though parties work more or less on the principle of checks and balances under democratic regimes. The success of a democratic polity is invariably linked to the strength of the parties and the vibrancy of the party systems. Political parties in contemporary societies have become the real catalysts, harbingers or wheels of democratic governance. Democratic polities seldom function effectively in the absence of political parties. With their genesis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, parties have been in a constant phase of transformation. The process of liberalization and globalization has further strengthened this transformation process in the twenty-first-century global world, which has become a competitive market society. As catalysts of democratic participation and good governance, parties have come to assume new salience in the contemporary world.

According to The New Encyclopedia Britannica, "Political parties are groups organized for the purpose of achieving and exercising power within a political system". A political party differs from other organized groups in that it necessarily seeks power with a view to form a government or influence governmental policies. What is a Party System? The Encyclopedia Americana also defines party system as "The number of parties and the pattern of relationships among the parties within a

nation". Party systems, in short, imply competitive interaction patterns among parties.

The party system is now said to be moving from a one party dominance system to a multi-party competition, from social cohesion to fragmentation, from a stable pattern to fluidity, from order to chaos as the principle of party competition. One party dominance has been replaced by coalition government. It has led to the emergence of regional centers of power. Regional political parties are playing very crucial role in the national politics.

Types of Party System

Three broad types of party system commonly cited are: single-party, two-party, and multiparty. Like all modern democracies of the world today, successive Indian governments, whether at the Centre or at the states, have always been formed by political parties. It is therefore obvious that an understanding of party system in India is vital for understanding the Indian political system. In a single-party dominant system, one political party more or less completely dominates the political landscape of a country for a considerably long period of time so much so that it is able to win elections and forms successive national governments on its own. Two prominent examples of single-dominant party systems are Russia (dominated by United Russia), and South Africa (dominated by African National Congress). In a two-party system, two major political parties dominate the political landscape. Under this system, one of the two parties normally forms a national government while the other party sits in the opposition. Both the USA and the United Kingdom have this system. The two dominant parties in the USA are Republican Parties and the Democratic Parties while the Conservative Party and the Labour Party are the two dominant parties in the UK. A multi-party system, on the other hand, is a system in which several political parties exist and no one of them dominates the national politics. All these parties have the potential to win national elections and form national governments, (very rarely) either on its own, or (very often) in coalition with other parties. Germany, France and Canada are prominent countries having multi-party systems.

Emerging Issues in Indian Party System

1. Rapidly Changing Party Structures: The party structure in India has been continuously and rapidly changing due to splits, defections, and alliances. Almost every political party has been living through splits. The Congress experienced four big splits in 1969, 1977, 1995 and 1999. In 1999 the Nationalist Congress Party emerged out of a split in the Congress. In fact, India Party System has been a continuously changing party system.

2. Multi Party Character of Opposition: Strong and well organized opposition is essential for the success of Parliamentary Democracy, whereas, in India, there is an absence of it. Since independence till 1977 and again from 1980 to 1989 there has been the dominance of a single party and opposition was quite weak. Though in 1989, the period of the one party dominance came to an end, yet the opposition is still weak. At present both at the national and state level, there are so many national and regional parties playing the role of the opposition but they are not united on various political issues not they have any common programme.

4. Large Number of Regional Political Parties: The existence of a large number of regional or state level political parties along with some national level political parties is a reality of Indian Political System. Such a feature is quite natural for a country like India which is characterized by social pluralism. A regional party is one which enjoys its popularity in one or two States. Biju Janata Dal (BJD) DMK, AIADMK, National Conference, Shiromani Akali Dal, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Assom Gana Parishad, PMK, TRS, LJP, RLD, RPI, RSP, MNF, NLP, Telugu Desam, Vishal Haryanaa Party, Bangla Congress, Utkal Congress, Forward Bloc, IUML, Kerala Congress, Manipur National Front, DMK, AIADMK etc. are some of the more prominent regional parties. Several States of Indian Union are being ruled by the regional parties either individually or in coalition.

6. Lack of Ideological Commitment: Almost all political parties have similar ideologies. In fact, the parties are not very rigid about their ideological commitments. There has been very sharp erosion in the ideological orientation of Political Parties. In India politics has become issue oriented rather than based on ideology. Since 1980's elections have been won not on the basis of the inherent strength of ideology of a political party but on the basis of issue of immediate concern to the electorate.

8. Factions within the Parties: In India, every political party tends to be factionalized. Factionalism has been present in most of the political parties. Internal groupism in Congress has been a recognized feature. The existence of 'Leftists', 'Rightists', 'Dissidents' and 'Inner Circles', within the Congress has been a historical fact. It is also true of all other political parties. This feature has been mainly responsible for political splits and defections. Groups owing loyalties to different leaders are present in almost every party.

9. Use of Extra- Constitutional Means to Get Power: Although electioneering and campaigning all of these are Constitutional methods. But along with the use of Constitutional means, the political parties do not hesitate to use unconstitutional means, the political power.

10. Personality-Cult Politics: Personality-cult dominates party politics in India. Several political parties stand organised around a leader. The existence of such political parties like Congress (Indira), Congress (Jagjiwan Ram), Congress (Urs), Janata Party (JP), AD (Mann), AD (Badal), AD (Longowal), AD (Man), Jan Sangh (Madhok), Janata Dal (A), Lok Dal (A) Biju Janata Dal and others reflect the presence of politics of personality-cult in Indian political parties. It has been a practice with the political leaders of India to float their separate political parties.

11. Lack of Proper Organization: Another nature of the party system in India is the lack of proper organization. The organization is the life and soul of Political Parties. But there are political parties in India that have failed to maintain their organization at the provincial level. Theoretically, all the political parties stand organized in a democratic way but in practice the 'top leaders' of a party always dominate the party organization. Party elections are rarely held. Political parties hold their state level and national level conventions and conferences but in these also the 'leaders' dominate the proceedings. The principle of 'One leader one office' is advocated but rarely followed. Even the political parties which are active actors in the democratic process are undemocratic in their internal workings. This is as true of the Congress Party as of the CPM, CPI or the BJP. The Election Commission has made it mandatory for the political parties to hold organizational elections. At times, the Chief Election Commissioner directs the political parties to complete their organizational elections by a stipulated date.

12. Populist Nature of Political Parties: Another emerging issue of party system in India is the populist nature of Political parties. It is generally observed that in India Political Parties in order to acquire power, take resort to populist politics. They take undue advantage of the sentiments and compulsion of the people, raise populist slogans and misled the innocent people. Almost all the political parties adopt and follow populist policies and raise populist slogans for securing votes. The party in power uses its power of policy-making for attracting votes. Flour and Pulse at Rs. 4 and Rs. 20 per kg, etc. are used as election-eve slogans for securing votes. 18. Resort to Direct Action Means and Electoral Malpractices: In India all the political parties have been using—strikes, dharnas, gheraos, bandhs, boycotts, passive resistance i.e. direct action and pressure means for securing party gains.

15. Large Number of Independent Candidates in Elections: Another feature, which has a bearing on the working of Indian Party System, can be described as the presence of a large number of independent candidates in the elections. The political parties have to meet the challenge posed by locally popular independent candidates who are contesting elections from various constituencies. The Constitution grants to

the citizens the right to contest elections and in actual practice a large number of independent candidates come forward to utilize this right.

16. Communal and Caste Character of Political Parties: There is a special influence of caste and religion on the people of India and they owe special loyalty towards their caste and their religion. Because of this, the clever politicians have formed political parties on the bases of caste and religion, and during elections, they exploit the caste and religious sentiments of the people and they ask for their votes. While putting up candidates for different constituencies, the caste and religious combination of the candidates is kept in mind. The states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, etc., have a special influence of caste and regional political parties in the states.

17. Politics of Opportunistic Alliances: Political parties often resort to unprincipled electoral alliances and coalitions for securing short term gains. During elections, almost all the political parties enter into unprincipled alliances. These do not hesitate to enter into electoral alliances with communal parties. During October 1999—May 2004, the ruling alliance (BJP-led National Democratic Alliance) was a collection of several mutually opposed organizations. Trinamool Congress left the alliance to joint hands with the Congress in West Bengal. However after few months it rejoined the NDA. The left parties have been continuously opposing the Congress, yet in May 2004, these extended support from outside to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance. RJD of Sh. Laloo Prasad and LJSP of Sh. Ram Vilas Paswan are totally opposed to each other in Bihar and yet both are coalition partners in the ruling UPA. It is all politics of opportunism.

18. Dawn of the era of Coalition Politics: The era of coalition politics has dawned in India. Since 1996 coalition governments have been in power at the centre and in several states. Between October 1999 May 2004, the Centre was ruled by the National Democratic Alliance government. Since May 2004 UPA coalition has been ruling at the Centre. West-Bengal has been under the rule of a left front for more than three decades. Congress-NCP has been ruling Maharashtra. Congress-PDP alliance has been in power in J & K. In Orissa BJD-BJP alliance has been ruling the state since 1999. The age of coalition politics, which can be described as the natural outflow of a multi-party system, has definitely arrived in the Indian political system.

20. Trends of Media in Indian Politics: Media is the most powerful entity on earth. It has an undisputable role in a democracy. A free and independent media is considered the watchdog of the government. A stock of the media behavior, therefore, is crucial largely because of the process of agenda setting and gate keeping attached with media. A disconcerting fact is media being an oligopoly.

This is a concern in many liberal democracies as this means only a few individuals have massive powers to influence political opinion and undermine a political establishment. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent and with this tremendous power, they control the minds of the masses. Media plays very important roles in politics as it influences and shapes the public opinion and takes up the issues of public interest. Hence, it is important that media doesn't set the agenda of the select big business houses that control it. That only journalistic considerations form the basis of gate keeping. Else the polity of a nation would be threatened by crony capitalism – an unholy nexus of politicians and big business houses. Any such prospect would spell doom for our democratic political structure. It is a very powerful tool by which the mighty and corrupted can be checked.

In nutshell

The party system in India has undergone major transformation in the last many decades. The party system changed substantially after 1967 with the change in the nature of the socio-economic profile of Indian polity. With the politicization of the masses as well with the assertion of the new socio-economic groups, mainly the middle peasantry, the backward castes and the Dalits, the party system also changed. The inability of the Congress to accommodate conflicting interests and the erosion of its organizational structure led to its decline. By the end of the 1980s, the Congress had lost its centrality. A multi-party system replaced the Congress System. There was another significant development after the 1989 elections affecting the party system. Coalition politics gained a new trend: Parties tended to lend support to Government from outside without formally join it, thus ostensibly sharing power without assuming any responsibility. The contemporary party system is defined by its multiplicity. A number of national and regional parties have filled in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Congress from its central position. The regional parties have become more assertive as they have joined the national politics as the allies of the national parties. This also has strengthened the federal structure of India.

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