



POLITICAL PARTIES IN MODERN INDIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Anil Kumar Misra
Head, Department of History
V.S.S.D. College Kanpur

Politics in India take place within the framework of its constitution, as India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic in which the President of India is the head of state and the Prime Minister of India is the head of government. India follows the dual polity system, i.e. a double government which consists of the central authority at the centre and states at the periphery. The constitution defines the organisation, powers and limitations of both central and state governments, and it is well-recognized, rigid and considered supreme; i.e. laws of the nation must confirm to it. There is a provision for a bicameral legislature consisting of an Upper House, i.e. Rajya Sabha, which represents the states of the Indian federation and a lower house i.e. Lok Sabha, which represents the people of India as a whole. The Indian constitution provides for an independent Judiciary which is headed by the Supreme Court. The court's mandate is to protect the constitution, to settle disputes between the central government and the states, inter-state disputes, and nullify any central or state laws that go against the constitution. The governments, union or state, are formed through elections held every five years (unless otherwise specified), by parties that claim a majority of members in their respective lower houses (Lok Sabha in centre and Vidhan Sabha in states). India had its first general election in 1951,

political party that went on to dominate the successive elections up until 1977, when the first non-Congress government was formed for the first time in independent India. The 1990s saw the end of single party domination and rise of coalition governments. The elections for the 16th Lok Sabha, held from April 2014 to May 2014, once again brought back single-party rule in the country, with the Bharatiya Janata Party being able to claim a majority in the Lok Sabha. Compared to other democratic countries, India has a large number of political parties. It has been estimated that over 200 parties were formed after India became independent in 1947. Some features of the political parties in India are that the parties are generally woven around their leaders, the leaders actively playing a dominant role, and that the role of leadership can be transferred, thus tending to take a dynastic route. Such parties include both national and regional parties, such as the Indian National Congress (INC), which has been led by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty since independence, beginning with Jawaharlal Nehru who dominated the INC and led it to victory in three consecutive elections, and continuing with, after a brief interlude of the prime ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi. After the split in the Congress party in 1969 she formed her own Indian National Congress faction called the Indian National Congress (Ruling). After a



further split, she formed the Congress (Indira) or Congress(I). Indira remained the leader of the party until her death in 1984, handing power to her son Rajiv Gandhi, who, after his death, his widow Sonia Gandhi, the current leader of INC, took command. As a result of such dominance, the leaders of political parties of the country tend to take an autocratic tone.

One other major feature of the political parties is that, except for the communist parties, most of the political parties of India lack an ideological basis. Instead political parties in India are formed on the basis of race, religion, language, caste etc. factors, thus the high number of political parties are related to them

There are two types of political parties in India - National Party and Regional/State party. Every political party must bear a symbol and must be registered with the Election Commission of India. Symbols are used in Indian political system so that illiterate people can also vote by recognizing symbols of party.

In the current amendment to the Symbols Order, the Commission, has infused the following five principles, which, in its view, should govern the polity in the country, situate as it is in its present state:

1. Legislative presence is a must for recognition as a National or State party.
2. For a National party, it must be the legislative presence in the Lok Sabha and for a State party, the legislative presence must be reflected in the State Assembly.
3. In any election, a party can set up a candidate only from amongst its own members.
4. A party, that loses its recognition, shall not lose its symbol immediately, but shall be given the facility to use that symbol for some time to try and retrieve its status.
5. Recognition should be given to a party only on the basis of its own performance in elections and not because it is a splinter group of some other recognised party.

A political party shall be eligible to be recognised as a **National** party if :-

1. it secures at least **six percent(6%)** of the valid votes polled in any **four** or more states, at a general election to the House of the People or, to the State Legislative Assembly; and
2. in addition, it wins at least **four** seats in the House of the People from any State or States.

At present there are 3 national parties and 57 state parties. There are three alliances on a national level in India, competing with each other for the position of Government. The member parties work in harmony for gratifying national interests, although a party can jump ships whenever it may deem fit.

- National Democratic Alliance (NDA) - Centre-Right coalition led by BJP was formed in 1998 after the elections, NDA formed the government although the government didn't last long as AIADMK withdrew support from it resulting in 1999 general elections, in which NDA won and resumed power. The coalition government went on to



complete the full five years term, becoming the first non-Congress government to do so. In the 2014 General Elections NDA once again returned to power for the second time, with a historic mandate of 336 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats. BJP itself won 282 seats thereby electing Narendra Modi as the head of the government.

- United Progressive Alliance (UPA) - Centre-Left coalition led by INC, this alliance was created after the 2004 General Elections, with the alliance forming the Government. The alliance even after losing some of its members, was reelected in 2009 General Elections with Manmohan Singh as head of the government.
- Third front - The coalition of parties which do not belong to any of the above camps due to certain issues. They are not bound together due to any ideological similarities but primarily due to their stand of maintaining distance with both major parties. One of the party in the alliance CPI(M), prior to 2009 General Elections was a member party of the UPA. The alliance has no official leading party and generally smaller parties keep coming and leaving the alliance as per political convenience. Many of these parties ally at national level but contest against each other at state level.

India has a multi-party system, where there are a number of national as well as regional parties. A regional party may gain a majority and rule a particular state. If a party is represented in more than 4 states,

it would be labelled a national party. Out of the 66 years of India's independence, India has been ruled by the Indian National Congress (INC) for 53 of those years.

The party enjoyed a parliamentary majority save for two brief periods during the 1970s and late 1980s. This rule was interrupted between 1977 to 1980, when the Janata Party coalition won the election owing to public discontent with the controversial state of emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The Janata Dal won elections in 1989, but its government managed to hold on to power for only two years.

Between 1996 and 1998, there was a period of political flux with the government being formed first by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) followed by a left-leaning United Front coalition. In 1998, the BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance with smaller regional parties, and became the first non-INC and coalition government to complete a full five-year term. The 2004 Indian elections saw the INC winning the largest number of seats to form a government leading the United Progressive Alliance, and supported by left-parties and those opposed to the BJP.

On 22 May 2004, Manmohan Singh was appointed the Prime Minister of India following the victory of the INC & the left front in the 2004 Lok Sabha election. The UPA ruled India without the support of the left front. Previously, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had taken office in October 1999 after a general election in which a BJP-led coalition of 13 parties called the National Democratic Alliance emerged with a majority. In May 2014,



Narendra Modi of BJP was elected as Prime Minister of India.

Formation of coalition governments reflects the transition in Indian politics away from the national parties toward smaller, more narrowly based regional parties. Some regional parties, especially in South India, are deeply aligned to the ideologies of the region unlike the national parties and thus the relationship between the central government and the state government in various states has not always been free of rancour. Disparity between the ideologies of the political parties ruling the centre and the state leads to severely skewed allocation of resources between the states.

The lack of homogeneity in the Indian population causes division between different sections of the people based on religion, region, language, caste and race. This has led to the rise of political parties with agendas catering to one or a mix of these groups.

Some parties openly profess their focus on a particular group; for example, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's focus on the Dravidian population, and the Shiv Sena's pro-Marathi agenda. Some other parties claim to be universal in nature, but tend to draw support from particular sections of the population. For example, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (translated as National People's Party) has a vote bank among the Yadav and Muslim population of Bihar and the All India Trinamool Congress does not have any significant support outside West Bengal.. Garibi hatao (eradicate poverty) has been a slogan of the Indian National Congress for a long time. The well known Bharatiya

Janata Party encourages a free market economy. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) vehemently supports left-wing politics like land-for-all, right to work and strongly opposes neo-liberal policies such as globalization, capitalism and privatization. Terrorism, Naxalism, religious violence and caste-related violence are important issues that affect the political environment of the Indian nation. Stringent anti-terror legislation such as TADA, POTA and MCOCA have received much political attention, both in favour and opposed. Terrorism had effected politics India since its conception, be it the terrorism supported from Pakistan or the internal guerrilla groups such as Naxalites. In 1991 the former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated during an election campaign. The suicide bomber was later linked to the Sri Lankan terrorist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, as it was later revealed the killing was an act of vengeance for Rajiv Gandhi sending troops in Sri Lanka against them in 1987.

Law and order issues, such as action against organised crime are issues which do not affect the outcomes of elections. On the other hand, there is a criminal-politician nexus. Many elected legislators have criminal cases against them. In July 2008, the Washington Post reported that nearly a fourth of the 540 Indian Parliament members faced criminal charges, "including human trafficking, immigration rackets, embezzlement, and even murder".

Reference:

- Chowdhuri, Satyabrata Rai. Leftism in India, 1917-1947.
- Shively, W. Phillips. Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science
- Parliamentary Government in India. McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2008.
- Mitra, Subrata K. and Singh, V.B.. Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the National Electorate. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999



This is one of the many artifacts lying scattered all over the mound in village Bihupur, Ghatampur Tehsil, Kanpur Nagar.