

Continuum in The Indian Party System

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“The more things change , the more they remain same.”

Abstract

Indian party system is dynamic in nature. It has shifted from the one dominant party system to the multi-party system in which the regional aspirations has got space and plural tendencies accommodated in evolutionary way. System evolved in the last seven decades in peculiar way. Driving forces within the system to large extent are the same while the organizational structure of the party system has changed. Dynamism of the party system absorbed the various variables and their changing contours.

Hypothesis for the present work is shift from one dominant party system to the multi-party system is due to the changing paradigms of the socio economic dimension of the Indian society.

Review of the Literature

To construct the hypothesis and to find out the gaps in the research in this field extensive literature has been reviewed that includes the works of the eminent scholars of the field :Rajni Kothari, Rudolph & Rudolph, Maurice Diverge,, Nirja Jayal,Moshe Maor, Atul Kohli, Harold A Gould,James Manor, Paul Brass Giovanni Sartori and Parth Chatterjee. Scholarship in this field concluded Indian party system is peculiar in nature. Indian party system can not easily be analyzed by the single model evolved by the scholars. Maurice Diverger’s model based on exchange mechanism, electoral model of Epistone(1980), catch all model by Kirchhemir may explain the reality of the Indian party system to large extend. At the various levels different models applied to explain the party system in India.

Theoretical frame work

Descriptive, analytical and comparative approaches adopted to conduct the study. Work is mainly based on the secondary sources.

Introduction

According to Kothari ‘Party system to political development lies in its role of being a catalyst of governmental performance at various levels; parties do not simply compete and represent but also turn competitive arenas and representational processes into resources for and against government,’(Kothari 1970:161). In the Indian context without the political parties the democratic

system would not have worked. Parties remain the principle force around which contestation and mobilization are organized, working to structure political alternatives and formulating policies and translating them into effective choices for the people. It is hard to conceive of India's democratic system without the crucial role played by political parties. Indian Political party system is unique in nature. It does not fit in any liberal democratic model given by different theorists. Political parties display numerous contradictory features blending, different forms of modern organization and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions. Paper is an effort to understand the contours of the Indian party system. Paper is divided into three parts.

Section A deals with historical explanation;

Section B multiple issues concerned with the party system ;

Section C deals with the socio economic conditioning of the party system.

Historical Explanation of the Party system

Pre Independence period reflects the pluralistic character of the Indian society through its party system evolving during that period. Congress was the oldest party represented the heterogeneous character of the Indian society at large. Emergence of Akali Dal, Communist Party, Socialist Party and justice party, Hindu Maha Sabha and Muslim League reflects the regional aspirations , ideological differences and caste and communal aspiration and ethos of the Indian society. These sub regional and sub- nation interests subsumed by the cause of the independence and these parties mainly focused on the national independence which provided strong base for the nation building in the first half of the twentieth century. Narratives of the Indian Congress, debates and discussions in the different sessions reflect the factional tendencies within the Congress. Rising differences among Subash Chander Bose, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru and Jaya Parkash Narain became the legacy of the post independent Indian party system.

In the early years of the independence Congress one of the common names among the parties in India had privilege to be the mass party due to its role in the pre independence days. In the pre-independence days the nation-building process was revolved around the objective of independence. Heterogeneity of diverse India merged in the cause of independence. Mushrooming regional and ideology based parties reconciled and supported the cause of the freedom and to some extent the socio-economic freedom from the feudal tendencies of the Indian society. Over all national building process was party driven as well as in the beginning of 1920s mass motivation was there. In the post Independence period with political independence diverse interest and social forces gradually started taking concrete shape in the form of factions within the Congress. Patel the organization man of the Congress, who wanted to purge the Congress of other political groups and sought to make it a cohesive and disciplined party (Kothari 1970:168).. Nehru's policy to defer the confrontation accommodated the heterogeneity in the party for some time. 'When the Congress assumed power, since the question of social design and distribution of advantages through the legal form had become central, polarization within the party naturally became more intense...Strategic differences assumed a sharp form between the old style , liberal ,laissez-faire form of capitalist programme , and reformist state centered strategy advocated by the Nehru supports within the party,'(Chatterjee

1997:58). This approach of Nehru led to the dissent and confrontations within the party that ultimately gave space to the emergence of the rightist and socialist parties. organization of the Swatantra Party by one of the legend Congress leader C Rajgopala Charya in the 1961 was the outcome of Nehru's policy of state control which he considered as hindrance in the development. According to the Brass Parliamentary strength of 42 and 35 in 1967 of the Swatantra and Jan Sangh respectively indicates the rightist always persisted in the party system of the country. 'Opposition parties were disunited and relegated to the margins by Congress which occupied the centre ground and much of left and right as well (Manor 2014:84). His argument is (in India) 'there has never been a single national party system but instead each region of the country has its own distinctive party system in most of which the Congress was the dominant party, but itself had a distinctive social base and patterns of relationship with opposition in each state,' (Brass 1990:75). Contrary to the Kothari's model of 'one dominant party' Brass believes Congress never touched the fifty percent votes polled (Brass 83-85). Its highest voting percentage is 48.6 percent. Facts indicate till 1967 Congress enjoyed majority in the Lok Sabha. 1967 represents a major step in the direction of an increasingly competitive... still the dominant factor in Indian politics it is the centre in two senses, one according to which most other parties and factions have developed out of the Congress ...second occupying the centre of the ideological spectrum in Indian politics, as center part both sides of which are to be found other parts and factions.' (Kothari 1970:176). Policy programs of the Congress in the early period led to the conflict between the governing structures those dominated by the India bourgeoisies (rich farmers, bureaucracy) and state's socialistic intervention created confusion in the system that led to the Exchange model of party system in India, (Manor 1997:96). Congress was not able to cater the needs of the heterogeneous society. In the first twenty year after independence universal suffer age, reservation in the Parliament, legislature and services to some extent helped in the democratic nation building. Democratic nation building led to the consolidation of the caste and class forces provided space for the growth of state parties and consolidation of the opposition forces to challenge the establishment. Opposition was joined collective group of Jansangh, socialist parties and communists. This trend indicates that the ideological variable was not prolific factor of the Indian polity. Parties' flexibility in coalition formation is one of the prominent features of the Indian party system. In 1969 Congress's division into two parties also indicates ... Party politics till last sixties indicates that main issues concerning the conflicts were development strategies and economic issues. Saroti's model of independent party system where he believes parties organization is not determine by the the social and economic variables it was not applicable in India. Policy programs of first twenty years gave space for the growth caste and class nexus. BKD was the result of the rise of those castes which could be considered rich farmers in UP. DMK in Tamil Nadu and Akali Dal of Punjab also reflects the acceptance of the regionalization of Indian party system. Formation of Janta party by the four parties also indicates fluid condition of the party system in 70s. 1977 saw the socialists joined hands with the BJP's predecessor Bhartiya Jan Sangh to trounce Congress and form the Janta Party. Disintegration of the parties and rise of BJP as the dissent of the Jan-Sangh is indication of the revival of Hinduism in Indian party system. Since its formation the rising voting graph of the party reflects its persistence status in the Indian party system. Its support to the National Front along with Communism reflects the i central ideological position of both the parties in 1989. Flexibility and pragmatism has become the policy of all the parties in the country in the coalition era (1989-2018).

Features of the Indian party system

Categorizations of the parties on the basis of universe and ideology: Mainly there are three types of the parties, national regional and sub regional or state level parties. According to Brass (1990:69) authoritarian, centralization and demand for decentralization such tendencies in the Indian political system 'find expression in the struggle among organized political parties, among which some focus on national, others on regional powers.' for almost all the parties ideologically fall in three categories rightist, leftist and socialist. These tendencies persisted in the party system before the independence. In the first two decades ideological commitments were more strong as compare to the today. Presently their ideological orientation is poor except the leftist and they do not strictly follow any ideology. Congress and BJP Both left their basic ideological position and on the basis of catch all model parties tried to make alliances with the parties having different ideologies: 1967 coalition, 1977 coalition and communist and BJP support to the national front in 1989 good examples of such coalitions. Since 1989, ideology has never been important to join any coalition.

Location of the regional and state parties in the Party system: Regional aspirants had party organizations in the in the pre- independence period also Akali Dal ,Justice Party both organized before independence. After Independence they took concrete shape in 1967 .DMK's supported the Congress (R) in 1969 registered their presence on the national political map. Congress after 1967 lost its character of Umbrella party and regional aspirations materialized in the form of regional parties those represented the periphery and heterogeneous interests . 1980s was the period of the incubation of the second generation regional parties based on the Dalit aspirations. Members of these communities began "a silent revolution "increasingly asserting themselves within Indian democracy by forming their own parties, electing co-ethnics to public office,, and turning out vote at rates even higher than those among upper castes,'(Thaci:7). According to Partha Chatterjee caste always remained the fulcrum of the Indian Polity and party system particularly. After independence, upper caste hegemony in the party system led to the bourgeois democracy in early years. With the formation of the parties like BSP, SP, RJD, TDP DMK, and TMC in 1980s exploited found the way for assertions. Hasan (2010:244) quoted Arora(2000) regarding SP and BSP 'are essentially ethnic in character and represent the backward and lower castes ,they also share the characteristics of electoralist party, promoting the interests of distinct social constituencies.' Rudolph & Rudolph recognized the role of regional parties in stabilizing democracy in India by providing opportunities to the heterogeneous interests. James Manor also endorse the view and held the view regional parties are more penetrative in the system.

Intra-party Coalition was the basic principle of the Indian party system .From the beginning Congress was the loose coalition of various interest in the pre and post independence days. According Hasan in Jayal(2010:242), 'Although party was led by upper caste/class leadership ,there were Muslims ,Scheduled castes(SCs) Scheduled Tribes (STs),and various regional and linguistic groups represented in its higher echelons'. BJP younger to the Congress and the one of the main parties in the present is also coalition of the extreme rightist and moderates. Parties like SP and BSP is the combination of dalits and minorities. Regional parties of the South are mostly coalition of backward classes and SC.

Inter party coalition politics: coalition practice became popular at the national and states' level to combat the establishment since 1967. Present political scenario also reflect the coming coalition of

the opposition would be anti establishment. Since 1967 these coalition are opportunistic .Multiplicity of the parties gave space to the regional forces to have share in national decision-making through coalitions. Transitory phase ended in 1999 since then stable coalition system evolved at the national level. Inter party coalitions resulted into the deepening of the democracy , The system also created the problems for governability according to Atul Kohli. Ruling party sometimes finds it difficult to give practical shape to its policy programs. Coalition mantra would be dominant feature of near future, due to the stable vote share of regional parties i.e. 35% in the last three elections and total vote share of two main parties is less than 55% indicates it is not going to be bi- party system at the centre in near future.

Ideological fluidity of the parties: Parties at the national and states' level lack ideological commitments. 'By and large Indian parties are more pragmatic than ideological, which makes party boundaries highly flexible and permeable'(Hasan2010:245).Their base lies somewhere in the indigenous practices and institutions. Due to fluidity they make unholy and temporary alliances based on their self interest which is one of the major causes of corrupt practices among the political parties.

Dissent and defections in the parties : Intra -party factions and coalitions are the permanent feature of the Indian party system. In the pre independence period moderates and extremist factions were preliminary growth in the party. Later CR das organized (Sawraj part)in 1924. JP formed congress socialist party within the Congress. Practice of dissent and defectors became common after the independence. Ideological principle based defections replaced by the opportunism. Politics of dissents and defectors multiplied the number of political parties. This phenomena evolved in the last one century. In the near future the political parties' strategy to catch all may lead to further crystallization and defections in the parties to become the part of pre and post election alliances (2019).

Dynastic Party System: Democracy stands for the equal power share and equal right to govern. Most of the national and regional parties are dynastic institutions. Families try to consolidate their position within the party. Party workers are least loyal to the party. Their loyalty towards families is exceptional. These practices are not favorable to the healthy growth of the Indian party system. 'Leaders who acquire power because of personal appeal have little incentive to encourage the development of the parties from above...many of India's popular leaders not only have helped the development of parties, but even sought to destroy the constitutional institutional constraints,'(Kohli1991:392). These practices also indicate the dominance of the 'class a part' in the politics. Its important examples can be found on the pan India level.

Competitive party system : Before 1991 the total vote share of the opposition parties was not more than half of the Congress party which touched 50% of the total votes cast. Since 1991 the gap between the first two parties decreased considerably. BJP emerged as strong alternate to the Congress. It also resulted into the competitive party system at the national level.

Nature of the party system: Indian party system is leader centric party system. According Thachli (2014) Indian party system can be defined as 'Elite Parties Poor Voters'. He quotes Barrel(2008: 6)' these parties on the basis of social composition of their core constituencies (the groups most

influential in providing their ideological ,and financial support, and shaping their policy profile,'(quoted in Thachi2014:3. According to the Maurice Dverger's control mechanism model it falls in the top-down system of control. From the beginning Congress was leader centric party. Nehru , Mrs. Gandhi were the strong leaders who enjoyed party loyalties and had full control on the organisation. BJP and most of the state parties are also have same trait. They are known by the name of their party leaders. Most of the parties lack strong party structure and internal democracy. Parties lack will to address the genuine issues and concerns of national interest. Due to lack of principle based party politics parties are vulnerable, volatile. They are more prone to fragmentation, splits ,counter splits and mergers. According to Kohli(1991:384), 'weak political institutions have encouraged undisciplined political competition ,and has politicized all types of social divisions, including caste, class.'

Socio Economic Variables and party system

Indian party system is one of the most important subsystem of the Indian political system. Kohli (1991)viewed political change as the change driven by many factors. 'Four factors have influenced the nature of political change in India: (1)the deinstitutionalizing role of national and regional leaders ;(2) the impact of weak political parties;(3) the undisciplined political mobilization of various castes, ethnic ,religious and other types of groups;(4)the increasing conflict between haves and have nots in the civil society,'(Kohli1991:387). Kohli's analytical argument is true in the case of party system in India. It is imperative to analyse the forces behind the evolution of the party system.

Dalits and minorities always remain on the main plank of the political parties as vote bank. Dalit vote always played determining role to decide the fortune of the parties. In 1980 Congress dalit vote share was 53% which was reduced to 31 % in 1991 and 19 in 2014 data indicates the reducing vote share of dalits affects the party position in the Parliament. Gap between 1980& 91 indicates with the emergence of the second generation parties based on the caste& class nexus dalit vote shifted to the regional and national parties such as BSP,SP,TDP,AGP. Dalit vote has played important role in consolidating the regional parties . Rise of regional parties and reservation in the constitution to some extent helped in the democratic nation building. India is also experiencing a revolution in its previously inequitable caste system. ..The reservation system has radically transformed the social landscape(Rudolph2006 :412). Dalit literacy which was 10.27% in 1961 rose to the 66.10and their share in central jobs was 2.35in 1965 and 17.65 in2015. These favorable developments raised their bargaining power. BJP won 40 SC seats in 2014 it indicates their flexibility and their criteria for voting. They casted their vote in favor of Modi for his developmental agenda. Trend indicates dalit vote cannot be taken by any party guaranteed Dalit politics is based on the 'Exchange Model' given by Storm . According to this model voter in exchange of his vote demands dividends.

Caste and Class nexus and explanation of the Indian party system: Indian politics ca not be explained on the basis of the class variable alone. Caste and Class collectively determine the nature of the Indian party system to large extent. 'J(j)ati is arguably the most durable pre-existing social institution in Asia, Africa and Latin America-not it because refuses to change ,but it absorbs it and adjusts it,'(Manor2014:7). Congress originated with the efforts of the upper middle class and majority of the congress leadership was from golden caste and upper class. Indian party system was controlled by the same strata after the independence. Consolidation of the caste and class nexus of backward

classes and castes strengthened the position of those who were deprived sections and socially and political backward.

Caste has prominent position in the Indian political system and party system of the country according to Brass(1990:) Rudolph & Rudolph(2008:59) gave argument in the favour of caste as stabilizer of the polity. 'The role of caste in Indian politics has nevertheless been subjected to severe and often uncomprehending criticism. The caste association has created less severe strains in modern Indian politics than have religion and language in these modern societies(America), even while it has contributed to political socialization, modernization, and meaningful participation in a society whose economic and social under development stands in the marked contrast to these(Rudolph 2008:61). Will Herberg quoted in Rudolph & Rudolph' Natural associations based on language, religion, ethnicity and locality have not been assimilated or dissolved, and continue to play crucial, sometimes a decisive part in their politics'(ibid.59).

In nut shell in case of Kerala Rudolph & Rudolph(2008) remarked 'As the state's political parties have become increasingly congruent with these social differences, their integrative capacities have declined. Instead of subsuming, combining, or disintegrating social differences based on birth, they have in considerable measure begun to enforce them' (Rudolph & Rudolph 2008:60).

In near future party system would be more imbued in the traditional ethos of the Indian social and economic institutions vis-à-vis parties as institutions would focus on revisiting old practices. Crystallization, fragmentation of the different sections of the society would be compulsion of the parties to maintain them in the electoral game of 2019.

Scholars like Paul Brass, James Manor, Rudolph & Rudolph appreciate the Indian parties to facilitate the democratic practices in the country. Political parties have played an important role in democratic consolidation. System penetrated to accommodate the diversities which were not easy in the country with demographic diversities.

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