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IMPACT OF REGIONAL PARTIES ON INDIAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

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Abstract:

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. Political parties play an important role in a democratic system. They are indispensable for the successful working of democracy. One without the other cannot exist and they are two sides of the same coin. Political parties in any democratic polity are supposed to be vital links between the State and Civil Society. The role of the political parties in the political system is almost the same as that of nerves and arteries in the biological system because they are the supply lines of the political process in a democratic polity. In the words of Finer "Democracy rests in its hopes and doubts upon the party system."

KEYWORDS:

Regional Parties , Democratic System , Political Parties , Civil Society .

INTRODUCTION

The most important political exercise in a democracy is elections. Elections are crux of democracy. Parties are essential for meaningful conduct of elections.

The number of parties contesting elections in India have varied from 36 in 1980, 209 in 1996, 176 in 1988 and 169 in 1999. One of the important functions of the Election Commission in India is to recognize political parties as All India or State level parties. In December, 2000 the Election Commission of India revised the classification of parties as

- 1) National Parties
- 2) State Parties besides Registered (un recognized) Parties.

The parties which i) secure not less than six percent of the total valid votes in four or more States in previous Lok-Sabha elections or Vidhana Sabha elections ii) whose M.Ps are elected from not less than three States are called as NATIONAL PARTIES Ex: Indian National Congress (INC), B.J.P., C.P.M., C.P.I., N.C.P., B.S.P., & R.J.D., The parties which i) secure not less than six percent of the total valid votes in the State where it is so recognized ii) returns at least two members to Vidhana Sabha in the previous Assembly elections or wins at least three percent of the total number of seats in the Vidhana Sabha or at least three seats whichever is more are called STATE PARTIES. Ex: T.D.P. & T.R.S. (Andhra Pradesh); A.G.P. (Assam); R.J.D. (Bihar); J.D. (S) & J.D. (U) (Karnataka); Shiva Sena (Maharashtra); D.M.K., A.I.A.D.M.K., M.D.M.K., & P.M.K., (Tamil Nadu); J.D. (U) & J.M.M. (Jharkhand); B.J.D. (Orissa); S.P. & R.L.D., (Uttar Pradesh), A.I.T.C., (West Bengal) etc.,

The Parties which do not come under the above two categories i.e., National and state will be

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called as registered but not recognised Parties. At present there are 1027 parties that registered with the Election Commission out of which 980 parties are not recognized by the Election Commission. The total number of unrecognized parties in 2004 were 173, but it reached to 980 by 2009. The total number of State parties in 2004 is 36 and it reached to 40 by 2009.

Our Constitution provides a Federal system in our country, yet it (Our country) has, strong Unitarian tendencies. These centralizing tendencies were reinforced at the political level by the uninterrupted rule of the Indian National Congress at the Centre and in most of the States for nearly 40 years i.e., up to 1989 (except 1977-79). The Congress party retained its majority at the Centre and in most of the States in the first three General elections. However, it suffered a major set back in the fourth General elections. It failed to emerge as a major party in several States namely, Punjab, Haryana, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madras (present Tamil Nadu), Kerala etc., Consequently non-Congress Ministries called as SVD (Samyukta Vidhayak Dal) Governments were formed in the said States. This made the decline of the prominence of Congress party in most of the States and rise of the importance of Regional Parties at the State level.

The Electoral history of India and the record of the Union Government since Independence can be divided into two phases — the first up to 1984, a period of eight elections to Lok-Sabha (1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1971, 1977, 1980 & 1984) resulting in electoral majority of one party (7 times Congress and 1 time Janata Party) and relatively stable governments. The second one starting from 1989 to 2009 marked by a fractured electoral verdicts in Seven successive Lok-Sabha elections (1989, 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004 and 2009) resulting in the formation of minority governments or coalition governments. This shows the gradual decline of National Parties and rise of Regional Parties even at the Centre in formation of the governments after the declaration of results of respective General elections. The details of seats and percentage of votes secured by two major National Parties i.e., Congress and B.J.S/ B.J.P., in all the 15 General elections (Table — I) support the view given above.

Janata Party secured 295 seats and 34.52% votes in 1977 and 31 seats and 18.79% votes in 1980.

Janata Party split into two as Janata (S) and Janata at the time of 1980 elections. Janata (S) secured 41 seats and 9.39% votes in 1980.

The above Table — I gives us clear idea that Congress Party secured majority in 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1971, 1980 and 1984 (required majority is 272) and Janata Party in 1977 but no National Party either Congress or B.J.P. got that bench mark from 1989 onwards. This situation compelled the National Parties to form coalition governments with the help of Regional Parties, Independents, small parties etc.,

The Janata Party which got 295 seats during 1977 elections and formed the government after the elections witnessed several splits in the form of the Janata (S), the Janata Dal, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Biju Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party etc., and these parties became Regional in character.

The Communist Parties, though countrywide in nature, remain confined even to this day to West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The under mentioned Table — II gives us the picture of two Communist Parties i.e., C.P.I., and C.P.I.(M), that secured seats and percentage of votes for 15 Lok-Sabha elections held from 1951-52 to 2009. This shows that never in the history of Independent India the Communist Parties did not get the required number of seats to form the Government at the Centre, though they influenced the Governments of National Front, United Front, N.D.A., and U.P.A. in the political as administrative fields.

If one observes the total number of seats and percentage of votes secured by two National Parties viz, Congress and B.J.P. in the Lok-Sabha elections from 1989, it can be understood that dominance of National Parties is in decreasing trend. No National Party is in a situation to form the Government at the Centre on its own without the co-operation of Regional Parties. Now the importance of the Regional Parties increased in the politics of the Nation. The support of the Regional Parties has become necessity to National Parties to form the Government at the Centre. The formation of “Fronts” in the political scenario of our India viz., National Front, United Democratic Front, National Democratic Alliance (NDA), United Progressive Alliance (UPA) gave prominence to Regional Parties even at the National level. Regional Parties are playing crucial roles in formation of Ministries, no confidence motions against the ministries, passage of bills introduced by the Ruling Party etc.,

The Table — III gives us a clear picture about the increase of Regional Parties from 34 in 1951-52 elections to 159 in 2004 and 157 (including unrecognized parties which are regional in character) in 2009 Lok-Sabha elections. They crossed three digit figures from 1996 onwards. This shows the decisive role played by Regional Parties in formation of the Ministries at the Centre.

The role of Regional Parties at the State level started from 1967 (IV General elections) onwards. In 1967 General [lections in eight States that is in Punjab, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala the Non-Congress Governments came into existence immediately after elections where as in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, the Non-Congress Chief Ministries were formed because, of defections after the declaration of results. This trend in 1967 General elections in those States was due to weak position of Congress Party

and the coming of Regional Parties in the political scenario of the then time. The Political scenario of the fifties and sixties is replete with rivalries among dominant groups within the National Parties. The groups that failed to assert themselves and gain control of party machinery eventually left the party and launched political parties of their own. This led to emergence of Regional Parties in our Indian States.

The Regional Parties were existing since independence. But their role in our politics was not effective due to prominence of Congress Party having stalwarts like, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Shri. K.C.Pant, Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad, Shri. Vallabhbhai Patel and Shri. Morarji Desai etc., Gradually the Regional Parties became stronger in the respective States. When first General elections were held in 1951-52 Akalidal (Punjab), Jharkhand Party (Bihar - Jharkhand Region was in Bihar upto 2000), Ganatantra Parishad (Orissa) were in existence. During second General elections (1957) Akalidal boycotted those elections in protest against the policy of formation of Punjab as bilingual State by the Union Government. The PDF which was existing at that time in Andhra Pradesh though failed to show its prominence, became base for future developments. Jharkhand Party became stronger with these elections in Bihar. By the time of third General elections (1962), Akalidal in Punjab, DMK in Madras (Presently known as Tamil Nadu), Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa strengthened their hold. The IV General elections of 1967 changed the political scenario of Indian Politics at the State level. The Regional Parties had given a shock to single party domination i.e., Ruling Congress in the States viz., Akalidal in Punjab, DMK in Madras (present Tamil Nadu), Bangla Congress in West Bengal, Jana Congress in Orissa, Janakrantal En Bihar, Peasants and Workers Party in Maharashtra, Muslim League in Kerala due to which the Congress Party lost its power in those States and Non-Congress (SVD) Governments were formed by the Regional Parties. But in the Mid-term elections to Lok-Sabha in 1971-72 the Regional Parties lost their prominence in midst of Indira wave. Again they regained their importance from the elections of 1989 at the Union level, though their's predominance is continued from 1967 elections in the States. The Janata party which took its birth in 1977 elections split into number of small parties witnessed the emergence of the Samajwadi Party, the Janata Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Biju Janata Dal from those splits and these parties became Regional in characters stated already in previous paragraphs.

It can be concluded the role of Regional Parties in Indian political system has been both functional as well as dysfunctional. On one hand they have helped in the development of participatory political culture, and provided a check against the dictatorial tendencies of the Union Government and on the other, they are also a source of strength for the developmental of federal process. By virtue of being Ruling Parties in some States and Opposition Parties at the Centre, their contribution for the successful functioning of Parliamentary democracy is no less important, because a political party which rules must also know, how to play the role of an Opposition.

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