

2) What is meant by 'dominance coexisting with competition but without a trace of alteration'?

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3) Why were the opposition parties known mainly to be the parties of pressure before 1976?

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4) Why was the Congress party called an umbrella party?

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5) What is meant by 'Centrality of Congress'?

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19.3 CHANGED SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE: DISLOCATION OF POLITICAL CENTRE

Change in the nature of party system in the decades after 1960s, according to Rajni Kothari, was the consequence of the 'changed socio-economic and demographic profile of the polity'. Such a change in the profile of the polity was a consequence of the political mobilisation of the masses as well as the emergence of new political classes. The political mobilisation of the masses was a logical consequence of the electoral politics based upon the principle of universal adult franchise. Frequently held elections helped in increasing the political consciousness of mass of Indians, especially those belonging to the backward and lower castes.

The emergence of the new political classes was directly related to the rise of the proprietary peasant class in rural India in the backdrop of the land reforms. By the beginning of the seventies, the land-owning socially dominant sections belonging mainly to the backward castes had attained sufficient economic strength to demand a share in political power. The entry of these castes into the competitive power politics had far-reaching consequences for the Indian politics. Firstly, there was an increase in the number of those aspiring for a share in power. The domination of the traditional

political elite, therefore, was seriously challenged. Secondly, there was also greater manifestation of a variety of conflicting interests. These new entrants did not share the political blues of the traditional elite. They had not only different demands and different expectations from the political system but they also used a different political language. This had the effect of posing a serious threat to the consensual politics of the traditional political elite in general and that of the Congress, in particular. Unable to integrate and balance varied interests, the Congress was dislocated from its position of centrality.

The changed context of politics was also the result of the assertion of the lower castes. In the politics of numbers, the lower castes and Dalits were brought into politics, initially, in the context of the patron-client relationship. As clients of the locally dominant castes, their numerical strength was used in the interest of their patrons. However, as the momentum to the participatory politics was created, the nature of lower caste politics was also changed. The lower castes and Dalits started acquiring more autonomous role in politics and their mobilisation now came to be related to their political interest. In terms of party politics, this led to the formation of parties reflecting the support and interest of these newly mobilised castes. Formation of the BSP, Samajwadi Party and Janata Dal are the examples of such political formations. These parties clearly reflected the interest of the Dalits and the Backward castes.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of this Unit.

1) What was the impact of the electoral politics based on the principle of Universal Adult Franchise on the politics of India?

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2) Why was the Congress party not so successful in integrating various interests for 1967?

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3) Give some examples of the political parties that were formed for pursuing the particular caste interests.

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19.4 PARTY SYSTEM AFTER 1967

The nature of the Indian polity as well as the party system underwent a substantial change after 1967. This change has been described in varied terms. According to Kothari, this was the beginning of the decline of the dominant party system. While Morris-Jones attributes this to the emergence of 'a market polity' in which the number of opposition parties were brought 'fully into the market place, and competition that had previously occurred within the Congress, was now brought into the realm of inter-party conflict.' A number of new political forces and formations started emerging-making the electoral politics more competitive. All this led gradually to the decline of Congress.

The change in the nature of party system, initially, was much more visible at the state level where the hegemony of the Congress party was challenged through the formation of a number of non-Congress government. The Fourth General election led to the beginning of the politics of coalitions. This election produced truncated majorities of the Congress party. Hence, coalitions were formed in many states with Jana Sangh, SSP, CPI, CPI (M), and a number of regional parties joining the government.

Meanwhile the Congress also started showing signs of its weakness at the central level. One of the initial indicators of the weakness of the Congress was the changing nature of factionalism and the sharpening of the dissidence within the party. Acute factionalism ultimately led to the split of the Congress in 1969. This split, though an internal affair of the party has far reaching consequences for the Party system of India. One of the major consequences of the split was *the decline of the consensual model of Indian politics* and of the party system. The old organisational structure of Congress that was relatively more democratic and with greater linkages at the societal levels, was replaced by a more centralised organisational set-up. This new set up was *pyramidal* in nature. The decision making within the organisation was personalised and there was no space for democratic dissent. All this had the effect of rendering the Congress organisationally very weak.

The decline of the consensual model of Indian politics was not only a manifestation of the organisational problems of the Congress party but also of the changing nature of the state-society relationship. The homogeneity that earlier characterised the nature of the elite was no more available after the mid-sixties. This was also the time when the new classes had started becoming more assertive, specifically claiming a share in political power. It was the impact of such a changed context of elite politics that the Congress failed to maintain its electoral dominance in a number of states.

By the end of the decade of the seventies, the party system both at the central level as well as the level of the states was marked by flux. This was due to the fragmentation that was taking place in political parties. It was a process that was to continue for quite some time. Yet, despite the flux, the competitiveness was a distinct feature of the party politics. The number of political parties that entered the electoral arena was also increased. All this meant that the period of the dominance of the single party was already over. A multi-party system, instead, has evolved.

At the central level of politics, the new context of politics was reflected in the emphasis on consolidation of the opposition parties against the Congress. With the split of the Congress, a 'Grand Alliance' was formed between the Congress (O), SSP, Jana Sangh and the Swatantra. The logic of the alliance was the unity of non-Congress parties with a view to challenge its position of power. This logic led to the formation of the Janata Party in 1977. This party was itself a coalition of five erstwhile parties, the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, Socialist Party, the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), CFD. This new party was successful in breaking the continuity of the