

tween the national and the regional party system and signifies assertion of the regional parties, on the other. In the past two decades, a number of regional parties with their focus on regional demands have emerged. These regional parties, besides occupying significant political space at the state level are also playing crucial role in the central politics. It is due to their active presence at the national level of politics, that the party system is really acquiring a federal character. As the national parties are dependent upon the regional parties for the formation of government, the latter have increased their bargaining power. With the result, there has been *mainstreaming of regional parties*. The distinction that existed earlier between the regional and the national party has also been blurred. The National parties have become regional in character and the regional parties are increasingly participatory in national politics and thereby acquiring national stature. The Congress and the BJP, the two national parties, for a long time now, have 'regional' rather than 'national' sphere of influence.

- 10) As the 'national' parties are acquiring regional character, *the regional parties are playing important role in setting the national agenda*. What is more important, the regional demands are being forcefully voiced in the national space of Indian politics. Earlier, this was not possible because the regional demands were placed in opposition to the national demands, and therefore, were considered as a threat to the national unity. With the entry of the regional parties at the national level of politics, this is no more the case. The regional and the federal issues are an important part of the political agenda at the national level of party politics. Region or the regional assertions are no more treated as dangerous for the nation.
- 11) This has important implications for the Indian federal structure. With the shift from the single-centred dominant party system to a multi-party system with lot of space for smaller parties located in the states, there is also a definite shift in the centre-state relations. The emerging party system has an *essential component of partnership between the national, regional and the state level parties*. There is, therefore, a basis for a more egalitarian relationship between the centre and the states. Party system itself is providing the institutional set up for the representation of the interest of the states. Many of the regional parties that are playing important role in party politics have been demanding a reorganisation of the centre-state relationship with greater autonomy for the states. With their ascendance, there has developed greater sensitivity towards the regional issues and there has emerged greater consensus on federalism. Even those national parties that have been traditionally favouring a strong centre have been forced to accept the logic of federalism. The dependence of the BJP on Akalis, DMK, TDP, Trinamul Congress, Samta Party and the National Conference, for instance, has resulted in its flexible attitude towards the issues related to centre-state relations.

### 19.6.2 Party System at the State Level

The federal context of the party system makes it imperative not only to emphasise the complexity underlying the relation between the national and the state level party system, but also to analyse the nature of party system at the state levels. Although some similarities can be perceived between the national and the state levels of party politics, yet it is important to note that each of the state may be having its own peculiarities.

At the level of the states, there has been, for quite some time, a keen competition for political power. Yet, there are variations in the way this competition operates. In many states, there is an alternation of power between at least two parties. The party

politics, in these states may be described as the two-party politics. In many other states, politics is not neatly divided between the two parties. There is a multiplicity of parties with the parties bunching themselves in two groups/poles. The party politics of these states may be defined in terms of bi-polarity. There are other states also having a multi-party system but which cannot be neatly classified either as two-party system or systems of bipolarity.

There is, therefore, a lot of fluidity in party politics at the state level. This fluidity operates not only in the nature of party competition but also in the way the political parties are placed in the states. Regional parties are important political actors at the level of the states but that does not mean that national parties do not operate at the level of states. There are different patterns of competition between the regional and the national parties. In some of the states, regional parties are very crucial political actors, but in other states, regional parties do not play that important role. There are some states where national parties do not have significant presence. In some states, party competition takes place mainly among the national parties while there are states where the power alternates between a national and a regional party. In some of the states, the national parties have acquired a regional character and compete with the national or the regional parties. Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Punjab, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, are the states with a strong tradition for regional parties, while UP, Himachal Pradesh, MP, Karnataka, Orissa and Rajasthan have been the states where the competition has been taking place between the national parties. Regional parties have also made strong inroads in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 4

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

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

1) What do we mean by Bi-Polarity in terms of party politics?

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2) Why is the contemporary party politics more representative and more plural?

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3) Why have the regional parties gained more bargaining power?

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4) What is the impact of the contemporary party system on the centre-state relations?

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### 19.7 LET US SUM UP

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The party system in India has undergone major transformation in the last five decades. As a legacy of the National Movement, the Party System in 1947 was characterised by an overwhelming dominance of the Congress party. As the central political institution of India, the Congress completely controlled the power politics for the first two decades after independence. The strength of the Congress lay in its organisational structure and in its ability to accommodate diverse political interests. This peculiarity of the Congress was linked with the homogeneous nature of the political elite whether belonging to the Congress or the opposition.

The party system changed substantially after 1967 with the change in the nature of the socio-economic profile of Indian polity. With the politicisation 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 organisational 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.

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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### 19.8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS AND ARTICLES

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Morris-Janoes, 'Dominance and Dissent: Their Inter-Relation in the Indian Party System', in Morris-Jones, *Politics Mainly Indian*, Orient Longman, Madras, 1978.

Kothari Rajni, *Politics in India*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1970.

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Manor James, 'Parties and the Party System', in Atul Kohli, *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1988.

Pai Sudha, 'The Indian Party System Under transformation: Lok Sabha Elections 1998'. *Asian Survey*, vol. XXXVIII No.9, Sept. 1998.