

Foundation Course

Semester 1

10: Party System in Indian Politics

The Constitution of Independent India came into effect on 26th January, 1950. With its adoption India officially became a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. The Indian Constitution has established a parliamentary form of government both at the Centre and at the State. Though the President is the head of the executive, the real powers are vested with the Cabinet and the Prime Minister who are responsible to the Lok Sabha. Similarly Governor is the executive head of the State, but the real powers are exercised through Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers, who are responsible to the Legislative Assembly. The members of Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies are elected through elections by citizens of the country. Hence elections are the base for the formation of governments. Therefore the political parties who contest the elections become part and parcel of political system of the country. In India we have multi party system to ensure the representation of varied variety of people who reside in it. We shall now broadly discuss the party system in India. The party system is the base of democracy. It is a link between people and the government. A political party serves as a platform for people with common ideologies. Every political party aims to contest elections to be a part of legislative and executive organs of the government. Through representation as a multi-party system with the existence of parties at the national and State level. In order to contest elections every party must register itself to the Election Commission of India. The party that wins majority seats in elections forms the government and implements the policies designed by its election manifesto. The party with second majority votes plays the role of opposition in the parliament and keeps a close eye on the functioning of the government.

CLASSIFICATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA

The types of political parties can be broadly classified into following categories:

National Parties :

Any party to be called as national level political party must fulfil following conditions: It must have had its candidates stood for last elections in at least four or more States for Lok Sabha or for Legislative Assembly and secured not less than 6 % of total valid votes in those elections. In addition win at least four seats in Lok Sabha from any State or States. It must have won at least 2 % seats in Lok Sabha from at least three different States. Some of the present national parties are; Congress(I), Bharatiya Janata Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Nationalist Congress Party ,Communist Party of India etc.

State Parties:

The State parties promote regional languages, culture and interest of people of that region. To be recognized as a State party, it must fulfill following conditions: In the last general elections to legislative assembly, the party candidates must have secured not less than 6% of total valid votes and must retain at least 2 members to State Legislative Assembly. Some of the well known State political parties are; Shiv Sena(Maharashtra), AIADMK and DMK (Tamilnadu), TeluguDesam(Andhra Pradesh), Rashtriya Janata Dal (Bihar), the National Conference (Jammu and Kashmir) etc.

FEATURES OF PARTY SYSTEM IN INDIA

Dominance of Single Party:

The party system was introduced in India as an influence of western education. The Indian leaders had realized the importance of united efforts to achieve independence. The political parties, thus, were established to demand for reforms from the British government and eventually complete self-government. Various political parties had emerged before independence as well but it was Indian National Congress (INC) that remained one of the most popular and dominant political party. After independence except for a brief period in the late 1970s the congress dominated the political scene till late 1980s. Congress leaders like J. Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi had dominated the Indian politics for decades. Though many other political parties emerged during that period, Congress was regarded as the largest representative party of the country.

Emergence of multi- party system:

Internal factions led to the split in the Congress and by 1970s many new parties had emerged. In 1977, Janata party was formed which was a coalition of at least five parties. This new party formed the first non-Congress government after independence. The rise of BJP and many regional parties in States reduced the dominance of Congress over Indian politics to a greater extent.

Coalition Party System:

From 1990s an era of coalition started. Failure of big national parties like Congress and BJP to win majority seats in elections has brought numerous small parties to the fore front. The large parties came to be dependent upon smaller parties for the formation of governments. In 1996 the elections led to the formation of 'United Front', a coalition of as many as 13 political parties. Similarly in 1999 a coalition party government of 'National Democratic Alliance'(NDA) was formed with BJP as a largest member of coalition.

Based on Personalities:

Instead of emphasizing on the strong organizational structure, the leaders or powerful personalities of the party are given more importance. Many people join the party because of

the charisma of a party leader for example ; Balasaheb Thackery, Mamta Banerjee, Mayawati, Jayalalitha, Lalu Prasad Yadav etc.

Absence of loyalty to ideology:

Every party is based on some ideology and when people join the party they are committed to its ideology. But the situation is changing fast. Most of the parties are interested in capturing power. Many candidates shuffle between parties to grab position in the government keeping aside the ideological commitment of the party.

Emergence of Regional Parties:

One of the reasons for the decline in the strength of national parties is the emergence of numerous regional level parties. As selfish motives and desire to grab power has prompted many politicians to form independent parties. Each state has almost 2 to 3 strong regional parties. Tamilnadu has become stronghold of DMK and AIADMK; Punjab is dominated by Shiromani Akali Dal; Shivsena is a powerful party in Maharashtra; National Conference is popular in Jammu and Kashmir etc.

Factions within the party:

Personality clashes, race to acquire power, intrigues against each other has led to the weakness of the party. Frequent changing of party has increased factions within the party. Caste and regional loyalties also play a role in dividing the party further.

Emergence of Bi-polar party System:

By 1990s the one party dominance ended giving rise to coalition party government. The politics of alliances led to the polarization of parties. It reflects the diverse political interests. The regional parties are playing important role in the formation of government at the Centre. The non-Congress national as well as regional parties acquired popularity and became viable alternatives. The rise of BJP and BJP led United Front dominated the Centre by creating the second 'pole' in the Indian politics. However, Sonia Gandhi's entry into active politics brought Congress back into the suitable alternatives. The formation of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the control over central government by this Congress led coalition government in recent years has transformed Indian politics into bipolar party system.

Conclusion:

The recent trend of offering support to the government from outside is causing a serious concern to the stability of the government both at the centre and state level. As the parties get to enjoy all the powers without participating in the government and sharing any responsibility. They dominate the government and influence the decision making by giving

threat of withdrawal of support in case of failing to comply with their demands.