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**POLITICAL PARTIES AND PRESSURE GROUPS IN INDIA**

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Abstract

A political party is generally described as an organized body of people who share common principles and cherish certain common goals regarding the political system. A political party operates and seeks political power through constitutional means to translate its policies into practice. It is a body of like-minded people having similar views on matters of public concern. From the above mentioned definitions of political parties, following can be identified as their main characteristics: a political party is an organized group of people; the organized group of people believe in common principles and common goals; its objectives revolve around seeking political power through collective efforts; it employs constitutional and peaceful methods in seeking control over the government through elections; and while in power, it translates its declared objectives into governmental policies. The experience of functioning of political parties in India during the last six decades indicates that by and large they have been instrumental in shaping public opinion, creating political awareness, and imparting political education to the people. They successfully form the governments where they receive the mandate of the people and implement their respective policies and programmes both at the Centre and in the States. They have contributed towards making the institutions and processes of government truly democratic. We can, therefore, say that democracy in India has been strengthened by a competitive and multi-party system. In any country, especially a democratic one, there are large number of organized groups which, directly or indirectly influence politics and government. The members of such organized groups are united in respect of some specific interests that they tend to advance. For example, the workers of a factory are organized in what is called the trade union to promote their interests. Similarly, there are other organized groups. These are called pressure groups or interest groups. India has a very large number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), that is, organizations established by citizens of the country, to pursue certain interests. Many of these organizations act as pressure groups on the government, to promote implementation of policies in their areas of concerns. These organizations are run by ordinary persons who feel strongly committed to certain issues. Many ordinary persons come together informally or formally to share their feelings about different issues and prevailing social injustice.

A democratic government is considered a people's government run by the people themselves. In practice in most of the countries the democratic governments are run by the representatives elected by the people. People also participate in the process of governance through groups known as pressure groups or interest groups. In the present day democratic countries, political parties are considered as essential components for the formation and working of the government. Of course, in some countries like Libya, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, there are governments without parties. These countries are not democratic and political parties are banned there. We can therefore infer that democracies function successfully in countries which have competitive party systems. Political parties actually help the institutions and processes of a government democratic. They enable people to participate in elections and other processes of governance, educate them and facilitate them to make policy choices.

### **Meaning of a Political Party**

A political party is generally described as an organized body of people who share common principles and cherish certain common goals regarding the political system. A political party operates and seeks political power through constitutional means to translate its policies into practice. It is a body of like-minded people having similar views on matters of public concern. Gilchrist defines a political party as "an organized group of citizens who profess or share the same political views and who by acting as a political unit, try to control the government".

### **Characteristics**

From the above mentioned definitions of political parties, following can be identified as their main characteristics:

- ⌚ a political party is an organized group of people;
- ⌚ the organized group of people believe in common principles and common goals;
- ⌚ its objectives revolve around seeking political power through collective efforts;
- ⌚ it employs constitutional and peaceful methods in seeking control over the government through elections; and
- ⌚ while in power, it translates its declared objectives into governmental policies.

### **POLITICAL PARTIES: FUNCTIONS AND ROLE**

The functions performed by the political parties, especially in the context of India, are as under:

- ⌚ they nominate candidates during elections;
- ⌚ they campaign to obtain support for their candidates in the elections;
- ⌚ they place objectives and programmes before the voters through their manifestos;
- ⌚ those securing the majority in elections form the government and enact and implement the policies;
- ⌚ Those not in power form opposition and keep a constant check on the government;
- ⌚ they form opposition when they are in minority in the legislature and constantly put pressure on the government for proper governance;
- ⌚ they educate people and help in formulating and shaping public opinion;
- ⌚ they articulate peoples' demands and convey them to the government; and
- ⌚ they provide a linkage between people and governmental institutions.

In India political parties have been performing the above-mentioned functions quite effectively since independence. They have made representative governments in India both possible and successful for over past six decades. They provide effective links between the citizens and the governments on the one hand, and the electorates and their representatives on the other. They try to cater to people's demands on public matters, and mobilize political participation. Elections without parties would have almost been impossible. In fact, democracy needs strong and sustainable political parties with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good. The experience of functioning of political parties in India during the last six decades indicates that by and large they have been instrumental in shaping public opinion, creating political awareness, and imparting political education to the people. They successfully form the governments where they receive the mandate of the people and implement their respective policies and programmes both at the Centre and in the States. They have contributed towards making the institutions and processes of government truly democratic. We can, therefore, say that democracy in India has been strengthened by a competitive and multi-party system.

### **POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA: THEIR EVOLUTION AND GROWTH**

The establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885 in India is generally considered as the beginning of the formation of parties. To begin with, the Indian National Congress which led national movement was an umbrella organization representing interests of all sections of society. The formative phase of the Indian National Congress was dominated by the Moderates like Dada Bhai Naoroji, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others as well as the Extremists like 'Lal-Bal-Pal' – referring to Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. After the First World War, the Indian National Congress steered the path of India's independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. There also emerged some other political parties during this period like the Muslim League, the Communist Party of India, the Hindu Mahasabha, etc. After independence in 1947, the Indian National Congress transferred itself into a political party in the sense of contesting elections and forming government. It remained a dominant political party up to 1967, as it continued to win elections held in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967 at the Centre as well as in almost all the States. This period is known as 'one party dominant system' in view of the Congress winning majorities whereas the large number of other political parties contesting elections winning only few seats. Since 1967 the party system in India has been in constant flux. In 1971 although the Congress won a majority in the Lok Sabha, in many states various other political parties formed governments mostly in coalitions. After 1977, it appeared that India had moved towards a 'two party system' – the two parties being the Indian National Congress and the Janata Party. But it was only for a very short period. The Janata Party which was in fact a coalition of various factions like the Congress O, the Jana Sangh, the Socialists, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, and the Congress for Democracy split into different factions. The Janata split once again gave advantage to the Congress which returned to power at the Centre in 1980 and remained there until 1989. However, the Congress has not been able to regain its dominant position ever since 1989. Indian party system witnesses a coalition system of government from 1989 onwards. Since 1999 two broad coalitions have come up – one, known as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the second, known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Congress Party. At present in India there is a multi-party system as very large number of parties participate in political process.

## **PARTY SYSTEMS IN INDIA: NATURE, TYPES, POLICIES**

In the earlier years of independence the Indian National

Congress dominated the party system. But the same has not continued and there had been periods of non-Congress governments both at the Centre and in the States. In general, the party system in India has not been a fixed one like a single party system or a dominant one-party system or a two-party system or a multiparty system. The features found in any of the above party systems may be found in India's party system. For many years now, the party system has not been a single-party dominant system as it used to be the case till 1967. It is not now

a one-party dominant system. The Indian party system is not a bi-party system, that existed for a short period between 1977 and 1980. It is more or less a multiparty system because the national political parties depend largely on the support of regional political parties to stay in power at the Centre as well as in some States. Various political parties join hands to form coalition governments as single parties are finding difficult to get majorities by themselves.

### **Dominant Features of India's Party System**

In view of the above, the party system in India displays the following major characteristics:

- ⌚ India has a multi-party system with a large number of political parties competing to attain power at the Centre as well as in the States.
- ⌚ the contemporary party system in India has witnessed the emergence of a bi-nodal party system existing at both national and state/region levels. The bi-nodal tendencies operating at two poles are led by the Congress and the BJP both at the center and in the states.
- ⌚ political parties are not hegemonic but competitive, though many a time we see a particular party aligning with one national political party and then shifting to another on the eve of general elections.
- ⌚ the regional political parties have come to play a vital role in the formation of governments at the Centre. At the Centre, these regional parties support one national political party or the other and seek substantive favours, ministerial berths at the Centre and other financial package for their respective States.
- ⌚ election is now fought not among parties but coalition of parties. Nature of competition, alliance and players is varied from state to state.
- ⌚ coalitional politics has been a new feature of our party system. We have reached a situation where there is no single party government, except in some of the States. There are, as you can see around, neither permanent ruling parties nor permanent opposition parties.
- ⌚ as a result of coalitional politics, ideologies of the political parties have taken a back seat. Administration is run through Common Minimum Programme, which reflects that pragmatism has become the 'ruling mantra'. We have seen political situations where the Telugu Desam Party supported the BJP led NDA in 1999 and CPI(M) backed the Congress led UPA in 2004 without formally joining the government.
- ⌚ parties are keen on focusing on the single emotive issue/s to garner votes. The emotive issues in some of the earlier elections were: *Garibi Hatao* of the 1970s, 'Indira is India' of the 1980s, 'Taking into the 21st Century' under Rajiv in mid-1980s, BJP's 'India Shining' of 1999, Congress' 'Feel Good' in 2004 and 'Aam Aadmi' in 2009.
- ⌚ parties now look for short term electoral gains rather than build lasting social coalitions.

## INDIAN POLITICAL PARTIES: TYPES

Political parties in India are classified by the Election Commission for the allocation of symbols. The Commission classifies parties into three main heads: National Parties, State Parties, and Registered (unrecognized) Parties. The Election Commission grants political parties the status of national parties on three grounds:

1. It should be a recognized political party in four or more states.
2. It should have won at least 4 per cent of the seats in the last Lok Sabha elections or 3.33 per cent of the seats in the assembly elections from the state.
3. All the candidates put by the party should have polled at least 6 per cent of the total valid votes in the elections.

A. The **National Political Parties** have areas of influence extending over the entire country. Since the last general elections held in 2009 the recognized national political parties in India are: the Indian National Congress (INC), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India, Marxists (CPI-M), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

B. The **Regional Political Parties**, as recognized by the Election Commission, are those political parties which receive a certain amount of votes or seats in a State. The Election Commission grants election symbols to the political parties and the candidates who contest elections. The number of regional political parties in the country is fairly large. Some of the leading regional political parties in India include Trinamool Congress (West Bengal), Assam Gana Parishad (Assam), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry), National Conference (Jammu and Kashmir), Samajwadi Party (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand), Shiromani Akali Dal (Punjab), Shiv Sena (Maharashtra), Telugu Desam (Andhra Pradesh).

## POLITICAL PARTIES AND PRESSURE/INTEREST GROUPS

In any country, especially a democratic one, there are large numbers of organized groups which, directly or indirectly influence politics and government. The members of such organized groups are united in respect of some specific interests that they tend to advance. For example, the workers of a factory are organized in what is called the trade union to promote their interests. Similarly, there are other organized groups. These are called pressure groups or interest groups.

### Pressure groups and Interest groups

Generally, interest groups and pressure groups are considered synonyms, but they are actually not. Interest groups are organized groups of people which seek to promote their specific interests. Their characteristics are: (a) they are well-organized, (b) they have certain common interests, (c) the interest that unites the members is specific and particular, (d) the members of such organized groups seek to attain, protect and promote their interests for which they are united. A pressure group, on the other hand, is an interest group which exerts pressure on the government or the decision-makers for the fulfillment of their interests. It is important to make a distinction between an interest group and a pressure group. Interest groups may exist without even exerting pressure on the government or the decision-makers. A group that does not exert pressure to influence or pressurize the authorities in order to

achieve the desired objects, is not called a pressure group. An interest group that exerts pressure on the government to achieve its goals is called a pressure group. All pressure groups are interest groups while all interest groups may not be pressure groups. The following differences between the two groups are significant:

### **Pressure Groups: Role and Techniques**

In the democratic functioning of a polity, pressure groups play a vital role. They seek to promote, discuss, debate and mobilize public opinion on major public issues. In this process, they educate people and widen their vision, enhance their democratic participation and raise and articulate various issues. These groups try to bring changes in public policy. To achieve their objectives and goals, the pressure groups employ various techniques and methods. These include appeals, petitions, demonstrations, picketing, lobbying, and processions. They also write in the media, distribute pamphlets, issue press releases, organize discussions and debates, put up posters and chant slogans. They may carry out satyagraha, that is, a non-violent protest. At times, pressure groups resort to strikes in order to pressurize the legislators, the executive officials, the decision-makers. Often, they resort to boycott.

### **Civil Society Organizations: A New Form of Mass Pressure Tactics in India**

India has a very large number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), that is, organizations established by citizens of the country, to pursue certain interests. Many of these organizations act as pressure groups on the government, to promote implementation of policies in their areas of concerns. These organizations are run by ordinary persons who feel strongly committed to certain issues. Many ordinary persons come together informally or formally to share their feelings about different issues and prevailing social injustice. Civil Society is an interface between the state and individual. Civil Society Organizations broadly refer to the active participation and engagement of men and women in groups – associations, organizations, voluntary agencies on the issues of common concern like environmental protection, price rise, prevention of corruption, etc. The 21st century witnessed the active involvement of people through civil society organizations which could be seen in number of protest movements across country. People take up issues of gender discrimination, child labour, street children and so on, and contribute through individual and collective action. Such organizations are able to mobilize public opinion because these issues are relevant to many people in society. Some of the Civil Society Organizations include Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS, Rajasthan), People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO), Medico Friends Circle (MFC), and many others. Such organizations put pressure on the government for changing policies on many important issues such as corruption, human rights, livelihood of different people, environmental protection, women empowerment, educational and health issues. Civil Society Organizations help to reach out to many people. They provide a channel for people to express their grievances and also work constructively for the change. They point out when the government is not fulfilling its promises to the nation. They attract idealistic and committed young people, even acting as a space for teaching and learning 'good citizenship'. Good citizens are vigilant and alert. Civil Society

Organizations are formed by such vigilant citizens. Many of them struggle for the larger social good, often sacrificing their own comfort, time and energy. Some important leaders of Civil Society Organizations in recent times include Aruna Roy (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan), Ela Bhatt (Self-Employed Women's Association), Medha Patkar (Narmada Bachao Andolan) and Anna Hazare (India Against Corruption). All these organizations involve a large number of people who struggle to bring about changes in State policies. Many of the organizations and groups believe in following non-violent methods.

### **Pressure Tactics**

As pressure groups are concerned with influencing the government, they use various tactics for the same. These are primarily constitutional and peaceful. In India one of the commonly used pressure tactics is Satyagraha, a non-violent protest. As you know it is Gandhi who introduced the idea of Satyagraha and is known all over the world for the same. Although he used these methods in the context of foreign rule, the methods are still relevant. The methods have

been successfully used. For instance, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has influenced the government to improve its policies on the rights of women workers. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan led the people's movement which got the government to bring about the law on 'Right to Information'. Pressure groups also use tactics of holding demonstrations, sitting on dharnas, going on strikes, organizing public meetings, presenting memorandums to legislative committees, promoting their causes through use of media and creation of public opinion.

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