SHIFTING TRENDS OF PARTY POLITICS IN INDIA: REGIONALISATION VERSUS CENTRALISATION

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ABSTRACT

Political Parties in India's parliamentary federation become a significant factor to influence the nature and working its federal polity. Mainly two trends of party politics, regionalism and centralism become very crucial to understand the dynamic nature of India's democratic politics in terms of government formation to functioning of its political process.

KEYWORDS: Party Politics, Party System, Electoral Politics, Political Parties, Indian Politics

INTRODUCTION

India as the world's largest democratic parliamentary federation with republican nature, political parties become the significant extra-constitutional factors which not only strengthening its political democracy but also promoting participatory democratic political culture. In Atul Kohli's word "…India's democracy has been strengthen by a political process that has facilitate a modest degree of redistribution of power and of other valued resources such as status and dignity, even if not of wealth"(Kohli, 2001,p.2). India's federal polity has evolved with its dynamic nature of democratic politics to accommodate growing aspiration of its multi-diverse sociological identities. After independence with the first general election in 1952 to recent 2014 general election, India has gone through a series of major transformation effected by its party politics from one party dominant system to fragmented multi-party system where we can find mainly two shifting trends, i.e. regionalisation versus centralisation. With this two trends in party politics, coalition politics specially brings a new dimension in Indian politics with the formation of two types of government at centre i.e. from dominant party style government to multi-party minority coalition (Sharma & Swenden, 2017) along with federalization of party system (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2002,2010, Arora,2003,2013) and new waves of cooperative federalism by giving more bargaining power to states. To observe this trends of party politics in India, different renowned scholars on Indian politics mainly Rajni Kothari (1964) described India's party system from 1947-1967 as 'Congress System' whereas Yogendra Yadav (1999) defined from after 1989 era as 'Post-Congress Polity', whereas Balveer Arora (2000) and K.K. Kailash (2012) described it as 'Binodal party system' by looking period after 1996. In this shifting trends of party politics in India with the rise of a multi-party system from one party dominated Congress system, we have seen two growing tendencies i.e. regionalization in terms of phenomenal growth of multiplication of political parties with diverse regional parties to form multi-party minority coalition government at centre and centralization in terms of dominant role national parties with dominant party style government.

To discuss this trends in India's electoral politics, this paper is an attempt to understand the transformation of the party system in India along with the government formation process in India and to examine how political parties are playing a very significant role in terms of shaping its political process. This paper is divided into three parts where first part will discuss the growth of party system in India and the second part will discuss the transformation of the party system in India and third part will discuss the two trend in Indian party politics, i.e. regionalisation and centralisation in the context of government formation at centre.

POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY

From after first general election in 1952 to 2014's sixteen general elections, India has almost presently 464 registered political parties as per Election Commission of India's 2014 General Election report. If we examine the growth of this multiplication of political parties, we will find a lot of factors which contributed to this growth. As a constitutionally asymmetrical, centralized federation in India, centre has very strong dominant position over its states in terms of power distribution, administrative, legislative, financial as well as in political matters creates over centralizing tendency where states have very limited role in terms of enjoying their status as equal partner through formal arrangements, mechanisms like territorial chamber, i.e. Rajya Sabha, Inter-State Council. In the same way, different sociological factors like the existence of multi-diversities on the basis of caste, language, ethnicity, growing multiple burning issues like regional disparity, unequal development among states, infrastructural backwardness, growing demands for more autonomy etc. factors contributed to

growth its multi-party system (Gogoi, 2017; p.51). Rekha Saxena, M.P. Singh (1996) in this context mentioned some significant factors as green revolution, electoral rise of Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Hindu based political campaign, micro-regional agitation for statehood and autonomy have contributed to growth a multi-party system in India.

The growth of political parties in India started with the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885, and this process is continuing. In India during British rule, there are many political parties emerged along with Indian National Congress. In 1916 in Madras Presidency by mobilising the non-Brahmins, a new political party named Justice Party was formed. Later on from this party by splitting, a new political party emerged as Dravida Kazhagam under the leadership of E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, and again it also faced split in 1972 when M.G. Ramachandran, a famous film star formed another party named All-India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) (Mehra & Singh, 2008). In the same way, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in 1921, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) in 1938 formed before India's independence. The major classification of political parties in India happened first time after 1967 general election when first time Congress party lost its one-party dominance in 8 state elections (Verney, 2011). As per Election Commission of India's criteria, there are three types of political parties in India, i.e. National Parties, State Parties and registered unrecognised parties.

Table 1- The Number of Political Parties from 1952-2014 General Election

Year Of Election	National Parties	State Parties	Registered Parties (Unrecognized)	Total Parties
1952	14	39	0	53
1957	4	11	0	15
1962	6	11	10	27
1967	7	14	4	25
1971	8	17	28	53
1977	5	15	14	34
1980	6	19	11	36
1984	7	17	9	33
1989	8	20	85	113
1991	9	27	109	145
1996	8	30	171	209
1998	7	30	139	176
1999	7	40	122	169
2004	6	51	173	230
2009	7	34	322	363
2014	6	39	419	464

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on general elections from 1952-2014 available at [http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx]

From first general election to 2014's sixteen general elections, the number of total political parties have increased from 53 parties to 464 political parties(**for details see table 1**). Significantly the 1989 general election introduced a new trend of regionalisation of national politics with the compulsion of coalition politics at the centre where a large number of political parties are state parties and registered unrecognised parties, i.e. in general regional parties. By referring James manor (1995), Yogendra Yadav (1999), it can be said that the emergence of regional parties as a natural development in Indian politics to manifest, represent the growing assertion of multi-diverse identity into electoral politics and empowerment of marginalized voice to accommodate, fulfill their aspiration, resource-based demand which national parties unable to address. If we go through the political performance of all these political parties in general elections from 1952 to 2014, we will see a clear picture of the rapid growth of fragmented multi-party system with the federalisation of party system to introduce a significant trend of regionalisation of national politics mainly from 1989 general elections.

Table 2 -Vote and Seat Share of Political Parties in General Elections 1952-2014

Year	National Parties Vote %	National Parties Seat %	State Parties Vote %	State Parties Seat %	Registered Parties Vote %	Registered Parties Seat %
1952	76.0	85.48	8.1	6.95	0	0
1957	73.08	85.22	7.6	6.27	0	0
1962	78.5	89.07	9.28	5.67	1.17	1.21
1967	76.13	84.61	9.69	8.27	0.39	0.38
1971	77.84	87.06	10.17	7.72	3.62	2.5
1977	84.67	88.74	8.8	9.04	1.03	0.55
1980	85.07	91.68	7.69	6.43	0.81	0.19
1984	79.8	87.74	11.56	11.28	0.72	0
1989	79.33	89.03	9.28	5.1	6.13	3.59
1991	80.65	89.44	12.98	9.6	2.21	0.77
1996	69.08	74.22	22.43	23.76		0.37
1998	67.98	71.27	18.79	18.6	16.87	9.02
1999	67.11	67.95	26.93	29.1	3.22	1.84
2004	62.89	67.03	28.9	29.28	3.96	2.76
2009	63.58	69.24	23.6	26.89	7.64	3.87
2014	60.7	62.98	27.73	32.41	8.51	4.6

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on general elections from 1952-2014 available at [http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx]

Table 2 shows the gradual rise of seat share and vote share of state as well as registered unrecognized parties compare to National Parties where after the 1991 general election the vote share and seat share of national political parties has decreased from 80.65 percent vote share and 89.44 percent seat share to 60.7 percent vote share and 62.98 percent seat share in 2014's sixteen general election whereas State political parties vote share and seat share has gradual increase after 1989 general election from 9.28 vote share and 5.1 seat share to 27.73 percent vote share and 32.41 percent seat share in 2014's general election. **Figure 1** mainly shows the increasing level of seat share and vote share of state parties in the general election. This transformation after the 1989 general election shows the clear picture of federalization of party system with fragmented multi-party system by introducing regionalization of national politics with compulsion of coalition politics at centre with the presence of two main political coalitions from 1999 to present time, i.e. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and Congress Party (INC) led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) (Sridharan, 2002; Rudolph & Rudolph, 2010; Arora & Kailash,2012). This trend of coalition politics mainly introduces multi-party minority coalition government by giving more bargaining power to regional parties which plays a very significant role in terms of power equation between centre and state in Indian politics.

TRANSFORMATION OF INDIA'S PARTY SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL POLITICS (1952-2014)

Since independence, India's party system has witnessed the dramatic changes in terms of its shift from one party dominated system to a multi-party coalition dominated system. According to some scholars Balveer Arora, K.K. Kailash, Rekha Saxena and H.Kham Khan Suan (2013), Lloyd I Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph(2002), M. P. Singh(2002) and Rekha Saxena(1996) Akhter Majeed (2005) with the changes in party system from one party dominant system to federalization of party system with coalition dominated system has altered the basic premise of inter-governmental relations and created new dimensions which have impacted the nature and working of India's federal polity. To discuss the shifting electoral trends in Indian politics, we can find three different phases of transition observed by different renowned scholars (Mitra &Pehl,2010 ; Khan,2003) on Indian politics i.e.

The first phase from 1947 to 1967 can be seen as an era of the one-party dominant system. During this period Congress party fully control both centre and state governments till 1967 as one single dominant party with an absolute majority (**see table 3**).

Renowned scholar on Indian politics Rajni Kothari (1964) termed this period as "Congress System" because of Indian National Congress party's strong hegemonic monopoly position in Indian politics.

Table 3: Congress Party's Seat and Vote Share in General Elections: 1952-1967

Year	1952	1957	1962	1967
Seat Share %	74.43	75.71	73.98	54.84
Vote Share %	45.0	47.78	44.72	40.78

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on general elections from 1952-1967 available at [http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx]

This phase was the Congress party's control along with the charismatic leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru which strengthen the centre, and India's federal nature was built up with political homogeneity. In this phase states in India have very limited role due to the rule of the same party both at centre and states where most of the decisions from government formation to administration controlled by the Congress system.

The second phase of transformation began with 1967 general election as well as state elections where for the first time strong hegemonic one-party dominant congress system has been challenged, questioned by changing electoral politics with the emergence of non-congress alternative political parties both at centre (mainly in 1977) and states. In 1967, the first time in nine Indian states Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Punjab etc. formed non-congress state governments through coalition politics. The most significant political development in Indian politics took place in 1977, when for the first time a non-congress coalition government was formed in centre by Janata Party with five different political parties, i.e. Jana Sangha, Congress (O), Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), Samajwadi Party and Congress (D) under the Prime Ministership of Morarji Desai, a former Congress politician. This phase saw the growing assertion of multiple identities manifested through the formation of different regional political parties. With the rise of regional parties in India during this period started the trend of bipolarities between congress versus non-congress which gradually contributed to developing the multi-party system (Sridharan, 2012 a).

The third phase of transformation started with the 1989's general election which becomes a significant milestone in Indian politics by introducing many phenomenal changes as federalisation of party system with regionalisation of national politics where coalition politics become inherent to form national government at the centre. Here we can find the debate of regionalisation versus centralisation in Indian politics. After

1989 and mainly from 1996 to present time coalition become inevitable part in Indian politics both at centre and state level which compel the national parties to come closer to regional parties for making coalition to run the government at the centre. By observing the emerging significance of coalition politics in India, Bidyut Chakrabarty (2006) stated the whole notion of representation of national and regional is being redefined in the context of coalition politics.

REGIONALIZATION VERSUS CENTRALIZATION IN INDIA'S PARTY POLITICS

`   Regionalization versus centralisation is a two crucial trends of party politics in India to understand the dynamic nature of India's electoral politics which is revolving around the centrality over the question of power equation between national and regional parties. This two trend enable us to understand India's democratic politics regarding government formation process at centre as well as the state. Political parties in countries like India, United Kingdom and other democratic states is based on convention but not on the constitutional provisions. In a parliamentary system like India, political parties are the main vehicle in terms of smooth functioning its political process. In Indian context, political parties not only altered the basic premise of inter-governmental relations but also developed a new way of organising inter-state and centre-state relations (Majeed, 2005). Political parties not only responded to the state structural change but also can be seen as a factor of strengthening of the territorial dimension of politics (Hepburn & Detterbeck, 2013). In Indian context when we go through the transformation of party system from one-party dominance to a fragmented multi-party coalition dominated system, we will find two tendencies regionalisation of national politics, or we can say it as federalisation of party system and centralisation in party politics over the question of government formation at centre and in states. After independence with the formation of Jawaharlal Nehru led first Congress's single-party majority government to present 2014's Narendra Modi led BJP's National Democratic Alliance (NDA) surplus coalition government, we can find this two tendencies of party politics in government formation process through two different models of government, i.e. dominant party style government with single-party majority and multi-party minority coalition government. In terms of party politics, we can understand this two tendencies from the perspective of government formation both at centre as well as states and in party strategy, political understanding among national and state political parties. Centralisation in terms of party politics emphasized on the control of national parties in formation of government and political control both at centre as well as states which can be analyzed through the dominant party style government and regionalization in terms of party politics emphasized on the control and influence of regional parties in formation of government both at centre as

well as states and power control through coalition politics. To discuss this two tendencies, we can examine the government formation process at the centre from first general election to 2014's sixteen general elections.

Table 4: Government at Centre Since 1952

Government	Time Period	Type of Government	Governing Parties *
Congress	1952-1957	SPMG	1
Congress	1957-1962	SPMG	1
Congress	1962-1967	SPMG	1
Congress	1967-1971	SPMG	1
Congress	1971-1977	SPMG	1
Janata Party	1977-1980	SC	2
Congress	1980-1984	SPMG	1
Congress	1984-1989	SPMG	1
National Front	1989-1991	MC	5
Congress	1991-1996	SPMG	1
BJP led Coalition	1996-1996	MC	6
United Front	1996-1998	MC	13
BJP(NDA-I)	1998-1999	MC	26
NDA-II	1999-2004	MC	23
Congress (UPA-I)	2004-2009	MC	20
UPA-II	2009-2014	MC	21
NDA-III	2014-present	SCMP	29

Source: Sridharan (2012 b), News Papers and Election Commission of India's Election's Data.

Note-MC- Minority Coalition, SPMG- Single Party Majority/Minority Government, SCPM-Surplus Coalition Majority Party, SC-Surplus Coalition, NDA- National Democratic Alliance, UPA-United Progressive Alliance.

*Governing Parties refers to the number of parties while forming the government as single party majority or multi-party coalition governments.

From first general election in 1952 to 2014's sixteen general elections, India has total 17 central government formed by different political parties. Congress party as a single largest party with an absolute majority has controlled central government for a long decade of 30 years continuously since independence. The first time this Congress hegemony in Indian politics was challenged by Janata Party in 1977 by the formation of a first non-congress government as a form of surplus coalition government at centre with five political parties. But after three years again in 1980 under Indira Gandhi's leadership, Congress came back to power in 1980

with the single-party majority and in 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, her son Rajiv Gandhi formed a single-party absolute majority government at the centre. After 1989 general election, India's electoral politics has shifted to a different direction with the trend of the fragmented multi-party system with coalition politics where state parties become a significant player in terms of forming government at the centre. Though from 1991-1996 under the Prime Ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao formed a Congress party's single-party minority government with outside support from left parties, from 1996 to 2014 India has seen different kind of coalition government under the different political coalition with the involvement of a large number of state political parties. Renowned scholars on Indian politics Balveer Arora (2000) and K.K. Kailash(2016), define this period as the era of federal coalition. During this period India saw the formation of two large coalition block, i.e. from 1998 to 2004 under BJP's National Democratic Alliance (NDA) political coalition with more than 20 state parties and under Congress party's initiative United Progressive Alliance (UPA) from 2004-2014. With the 2014's sixteen general election though BJP won a single party absolute majority after 30 years from 1984 general election but still due to commitment to its pre-poll alliance partners, BJP formed a surplus coalition government at centre with total 29 political parties.

From 1952 to 2014 by analysing this two trend of party politics in India, we have mainly found two types of government at the centre, i.e. dominant party style government and multi-party coalition government as a form of minority or surplus coalition. From 1952 to 1977 under the Congress party's single-party majority government can be seen as a form of dominant party style government and from 1980-1989 and 1991to 1996 Congress party's single party governments are example of dominant party style government where one single national party, i.e. Indian National Congress controlled the political power unilaterally in terms of government formation and enjoying monopoly position. On the other hand another model of government, i.e. multi-party coalition government as a form of minority or surplus coalition can be traced back from 1977 with the formation of Janata Party government with five different political parties(mainly a surplus coalition of two parties) and again in 1989 to 1991 under National Front political coalition with five political parties and from 1996 to 2014 India have different multi-party coalition government formed by different political coalition i.e. United Front from 1996-1998 with 13 political parties, NDA from 1998-2004 with more than 20 state parties and UPA from 2004 to 2014 with more than 20 different political parties and again in 2014 though BJP as a single party won absolute majority with 282 seats but by following the coalition culture it has formed a surplus coalition government at centre with total 29 political parties. Though this government is formed as a form of surplus

coalition but from its activities, political control party is being functioned as dominant party style of government.

With this two trends of party politics in India i.e. regionalization versus centralization, as we have found the formation of two types of government at centre from different times where the regionalization become a dominant trends mainly with 1989 general election. From 1989 general election with the increasing number of state political parties or regional parties have been playing a very significant role in terms of government formation process as king maker party at centre with the compulsion of coalition politics (excluding 1991-1996 Congress Party's Single-party minority government). The trend of centralization could be seen as dominant trend mainly before 1989 general election (excluding 1977 Janata Party government) under Congress party's single party hegemony where in most of the states and centre parallelly controlled by same party with a fully centralized manner where state parties had very limited role. State parties' role can be seen as subordinate role from top down approach. On the other hand after 1989 with the rapid electoral expansion of regional parties from different parts of India as dominant political force in their respective region or states, the participatory democratic politics become more democratize and strengthen with a more inclusive as well as representative manner. With the multi-plication of political parties from total 53 political parties to present 464 political parties, not only led to federalization of party system but also with the regionalization of national politics the whole notion of representation of national and regional is being redefined in the context of coalition politics (Chakrabarty, 2006). So Regionalism over centralism in party politics in India can be seen as positive impact to strengthening its federal polity in a more representative, democratic as well as accommodative way.

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