Genesis and Evaluaton Political Parties in India

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Abstract

Indian party system is unique. It does not fit into any kind of classification that is generally used to categorise the party systems. It is defined by the singular nature of Indian politics, on the one hand, and the nature of the state-society relationship on the other. In the last two decades, there has been a substantial change both in the nature of politics as well as in nature of relationship between the state and the society. One of the very important manifestations of change is visible in the context of the politicisation of the greater number of people, especially those belonging to the less privileged sections of society. That explains the change in the nature of the party system as well. The distinctive features that defined the party system of India in the first two decades after independence are no more to be seen at present. In order to understand the present nature of the party system, it is important to trace its history and to refer to its political logic in the context of the changing state-society relationship. This article deals with the nature of the party system in India. It aims at underlying the evolution of the party system in the pre and post-independence period. To understand the nature of the party system in India and identify its various characteristics, analyses the changing nature of party system and explains the emerging patterns and discuss the socio-economic and the political factors underlying the changing nature of party politics.

Keywords: evaluation of party system, Indian politics, state-society relationship, socio- economic and political factors, the nature of the party system.

Introduction

Political parties are indispensable to any democratic system[1]. The constitution of India has provided for representative and federal form with the parliamentary democratic government at the Union and in the States. Democratic representative government cannot function without political parties. Political parties formulate, consolidate and express public opinion. They simplify the election process, enlighten the people on political issues and their responsibilities. They act as the best link between the government and the common man. A.D. Lindsay, R.M.Mac Iver, Joseph Schumpeter, Maurice Duverger, Edmund Burke and others have emphasised the significance of Political Parties in democracy. According to Burke, Political Party is a body of men united for promoting the principles of national interest[2]. India has a multi-party system.

Party system is inevitable for the existence of a democratic system. Political parties are the social factors that enlighten, represent and protect the people in a representative democracy. There may be several organizations; the political parties have certain peculiarities. Those are organizational structure and stability, definite objectives, activities on the basis of ideas and principles, General stand points on public issues, ultimate objective of attaining governmental power.

It is the existing political culture that determines the party system of a country. The political culture of a society is the sum total of the values and participatory attitudes that the people maintain. According to the number of political parties that exist in a nation the party system can be divided into single party system, bi-party system or multi-party system. Based on the areas of activity, objectives and interests the political parties can be divided into National party, regional party.

In recent years, we have witnessed a succession of unstable governments, and the reason for such a recurring phenomenon is said to be the archaic and chaotic functioning of political parties. Alliances and coalitions are made, broken and changed at whim, and the balance of power seems to be held not by those at the Union level, but by minor parties on the fringes. No doubt Indian political parties have fragmented over the years. Frequent party splits, mergers and counter split to have dramatically increased the number of parties that now contest elections. In 1952, 74 parties contested elections, whilst in recent years this number has been swollen to more than 177, and has been consistently increasing since 1989. The instability at the Union level or in the States be attributed solely to the growing number of parties, or the malaise with the political system suffers today lies in the functioning and the dynamics of the party system in India.

Political parties and the party system in India have been greatly influenced by cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, traditions of the nationalist movement, contrasting style of party leadership, and clashing with ideological perspectives[3]. The two major categories of political parties in India are National and State, and are so recognized by

the Election Commission of India on the basis of certain specified criteria.

Constitutional and Legal Position

The legal and constitutional position of political parties varies from country to country. In most democratic countries, however, there is neither any direct constitutional provision regulating the functioning of political parties, nor any legal sanction establishing political parties as a necessary governmental institution, although there are some governmental systems, which try to prescribe some conditions for the operation of a party system.

Political parties do not mention directly in the Constitution of India. However, there is one provision in the Constitution which is directly relevant to the functioning of political parties, the Tenth Schedule. The Tenth Schedule of the Constitution was added by the Constitution (Fifty-second Amendment) Act, 1985. It deals with the disqualification of a person for being a member of either House of Parliament (Art. 102(2)) or the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State (Art.191(2)), on ground of defection.

In the absence of a sufficiently detailed constitutional provisions, the major responsibility of framing and administering the rules and regulations governing political parties in India has fallen on the Election Commission, a constitutional body responsible for conduct of elections. The Election Commission of India has the ultimate power to accord recognition and status of political parties to "the association or body of citizens of India." The Election Commission has the power to decide whether or not to register an association or body of individuals as a political party[4].

According to Article 29A (1) and (2) of the R. P. Act, 1951[5] it is mandatory for any association or body of individuals of India calling itself a political party to make an application to the Election Commission for its registration as a political party, within thirty days following the date of its formation. Article 29A (5)[5] requires that the application shall be accompanied by a copy of the memorandum or rules and regulations of the association or body, by whatever name called, and such memorandum or rules and regulations shall contain a specific provision that the association or body shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India, and to the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy and would uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India. And provision to Sub-section (7) of Section 29A provides that no association or body shall be registered as a political party under this Section unless the memorandum or rules and regulations of such as association or body conform to these provisions, i.e. the provisions of Sub-section (5) of Section 29A. The decision of the Commission in this matter is final.

The recognized political parties are accorded the status of a National or State political party in accordance with the provisions of Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment)

Order, 1968[6] as amended from time to time. The number of National parties has been varying from 14 to 4 owing to continuous review of the status based on the performance of the parties. In 1951, there were 14 National parties while presently there are 7 National political parties. The number of National parties was: in 1957 (4), 1971(8), 1977 (5), 1980 (6), 1984(7), 1989 (8), 1991 (9), 1996 (8), 1998 and 1999 (7). There were no National parties in 1962 and 1967 these were at that time called multi-State parties.

It may be noted that political parties in India are also sometimes categorized by observers, academics and political analysts based on their territorial or geographical representation, such as: All India parties, Regional parties and Local parties. This is done by them only as a matter of convenience to argue a particular point, or identify them in a particular way, and do not in any way reflect either any official party classification recognized by the Government or by the Election Commission. Similarly, any identification of a party on the basis of its ideological orientation as a party of the left, right, center, socialist, communist, communalist or leader- centered, etc. bears no official recognition.

Provisions for Recognition

According to Para 2 (h) of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) order 1968, Political party means an association or body of individual citizens of India registered with the Election Commission of India as a political party under Section 29A of the R. P. Act of 1951. As per para 6A of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968[7], as recently amended, a political party shall be treated as a recognized National party, if, and only if, -

Either (A) (i) the candidates set up by it, in any four or more States, at the last general election to the House of the People, or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned, have secured not less than six percent of the total valid votes polled in their respective States at that general election; and (ii) in addition, it has returned at least four members to the House of the People at the aforesaid last general election from any State or States;

or (B) (i) its candidates have been elected to the House of the People, at the last general election to that House, from at least two percent of the total number of parliamentary constituencies in India, any fraction exceeding one-half being counted as one; and (ii) the said candidates have been elected to that House from not less than three States.

According to para 6B of the Aforesaid Order[8], a political party, other than a National party, shall be treated as a recognized state party in a State or States, if, and only if, -

Either (A) i. the candidates set up by it, at the last general election to the House of the People, or to the Legislative

Assembly of the State concerned, have secured not less than six percent of the total valid votes polled in that State at that general election; and ii. in addition, it has returned at least two members to the Legislative Assembly of the State at the last general election to that Assembly;

or (B) it wins at least three percent of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, (any fraction exceeding one-half being counted as one), or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more, at the aforesaid general election.

According to para 6C of the Said Order if a political party is recognized as a National party under paragraph 6A, or as a State party under paragraph 6B, the question, whether it shall continue to be so recognized after any subsequent general election to the House of the People or as the case may be, to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned, shall be dependent upon the fulfillment by it of the conditions specified in the said paragraphs on the results of that general election.

Party System

Party System is defined, following Eckstein, as 'competitive interaction patterns among parties[9]' or, in Duverger's terms, as 'the forms and modes of their coexistence[10], then degree of competition is clearly a crucial variable. Broadly, the party system refers to complex social and political processes that go beyond individual leaders, societal associations, political groups and organizations to an intricate pattern of their interaction and interrelationships. These interaction patterns are governed not only by constitutions, statutes, rules, regulations and institutions, but a whole range of live issues that shape political attitudes and behaviors at critical stages of evolution in a society and polity. The pattern of interaction is reflected in ideologies and personalities, party building and fragmentation, coalescence and split, cooperation and opposition, support and protest, voter mobilization and electoral competition. In multi-cultural society like India, coalition building, takes place at different level, i.e. national, interregional, regional, rural, urban levels, etc. The parties are at the center of Indian politics as in any other major democracies. The choice facing the voters, are simplified by the fact that politician finds it necessary to ally with each other under the party label. Opinion polls in India have repeatedly shown that the people generally vote more for the party than for a candidate.

Genesis and Evaluation of Party System in India

Rajni Kothari has argued in his Politics in India that the party system evolved from an identifiable political centre. This political centre, carved during the nationalist movement, was comprised of the political elite sharing common socio-economic background i.e. educated, urban, upper-caste people belonging mainly to middle and upper classes.

The common social background of the elite resulted in the homogeneity that became a defining feature of the political centre as well as of the party system. The ruling party and the opposition, coming from the same social background, shared the social perceptions and converged on many issues. A consensus, therefore, existed within the system around the basic values.

The Indian National Congress was the institutional manifestation of this political centre. Not only was it an important expression of the nationalist movement but was also a dynamic political organisation that formed the indigenous base for the political system. Accommodating almost all-political groups of political importance, it provided a very crucial political space for political negotiations and bargaining.

Pre-independence Period

The history of Party System in India, can be traced to the institutionalization of the Indian National Congress in the first-ever meeting held on 29 December, 1885, in Bombay, (initially created as a result of efforts of A. O. Hume and prominent personalities of an intelligentsia for controlled public participation and to know public sentiments to avoid the repeat of an incident like one in 1857), which subsequently evolved as an organizational base for India's national movement against British imperialism. As the Congress consolidated organizationally and gained in popularity with people, a process conducive for the crystallization of political parties and political groups, it set in motion the process of different ideas to bloom, rules of political mobilization and competition among a different groups to mobilize people on issues of public importance. Throughout the process, the Congress acted as a pivot on which party system hinged. The evolution of the Congress during the pre-independence period can be broadly divided into three stages during which it not only grew as a movement and a political party, it also developed the Indian Party System. During its first stage, from 1885 to 1905, it remained an elite debating society, petitioning the government for extra privileges for the few, in a manner that has been described as 'politics of mendicancy'[11]. Second stage, spanning over a decade (1905-16), is crucial, as in this period, the great debate between moderates having faith in their strategy of petitions and appeals as well as a good sense of the British and the extremists who were for more aggressive strategy for pressing the demands took place[12]. The Lal (Lala Lajpat Rai), Bal (Bal Gangadhar Tilak) and Pal (Bipin Chandra Pal) extolled the glorious past of India, particularly its militant dimension to raise self-confidence and believed in the statement of Tilak, 'Political rights will have to be fought for'. The moderates always believed in persuasion. Though they cooperated in the Swadeshi and boycott movements as well as the protest against partition of Bengal, the moderates led by Dadabhai Naoroji supported and adopted Swaraj and self-rule as the aim of the Congress movement in 1906 session of the Congress. The two formally split in the Surat session of Congress in 1907, which continued for a decade. Both groups worked separately until

they again came together in 1916. Viewed from the perspective of the emergence of the party system, the struggle between the moderates and extremist factions for more aggressive political tactics, continuing with two contrasting strategies with in party until they split, carrying on with different strategies until they came together, not only reflects maturing of a political party but also demonstrate the beginning of the process of evolution of the party system. The Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1906, largely the effort of Tilak, accepting the demand of the Muslim League for a separate electorate for Muslims and Minorities, implemented since 1906 and provided for in the Act of 1909 in the Provincial and Imperial Legislative Councils was another example of the evolution of the party system.

Third stage, beginning 1916, when Congress took shape of mass movement, came to end in 1946 with formation of an interim Government, defined and developed the rule of game for the operation of the party system as from within the Congress and around it, rival groups developed and learnt the game of politics through collaboration with and in opposition to each other. Gandhi returns to India in 1915 and his joining the nationalist struggle transformed the nature of the movement and Indian politics through the principle of '*ahimsa* and *satyagrah'* and participation of all sections of society. About the change brought to the Congress, Nehru says:

"Gandhi for the first time entered the Congress organization and immediately brought about a complete change in the constitution. He made it democratic and a mass organization. Democratic it had been previously also, but it had so far been limited in franchise and restricted to the upper classes. Now the peasants rolled in and, in its new grab, it began to assume the look of a vast agrarian organization with a strong sprinkling of middle classes. This agrarian character was to grow. Industrial workers also came in but as individuals and not in their separate organized capacity[13]. The transition in the strategy and social base of the Congress, from petitioning to mass politics, from intelligentsia to mass base, by the end of second decade was crucial for the development of the party system in India. With the opening of membership of the Congress organization to masses with each stage of civil disobedience movement during 1920s and 1930s (against the payment of land taxes, land reforms in rural areas of Bihar, Gujarat, Andhra and Uttar Pradesh), the base of the nationalist cadre and leadership widened to include persons from small towns and rural areas. As Congress graduated from being an elite debating club and transcended to represent the aspiration of people during initial years of twentieth century, the conflict within organization and organizational effort to manage such conflicts aided to evolution of a party system. As the Congress got transformed into a mass movement by 1916, the rules for operation of the party system evolved, and rival groups developed. With election becoming a more and more competitive political group began to take shape of parties and parties together of a party system. The events unfolded in order to moderate extremist debate, Gandhi's differences with Jinnah and Subhash Chandra Bose and their parting of ways and the emergence of All India Forward Block in 1939 by Subhash Chandra Bose.

The formation of the Swaraj Party after 1922, Gaya session of the Congress by CR Das over the issue of participation in the provincial assemblies and their return to Congress within five years strengthened the culture of dissent and created an atmosphere of tolerance. The formation of Congress Socialist Party group in 1934, with active involvement of Acharya Narendra Dev and Jaiprakash Narayan, principally opposed with the Gandhian strategy and tactics like Gandhi Irwin Pact of 1931 signified the evolution of a multi-stream and multi-ideology party. Aware of difficulties involved, Jayaprakash Narayan in 1934 told his followers, "We are placing before Congress a program and we want the Congress to accept it. If the Congress does not accept it, we do not say we are going out of Congress. If today we fail, tomorrow we will try, and if tomorrow we will fail, we will try again"[14]. The contribution of CSP within the Congress by advocating different left oriented ideology was an indication of democratization of the party. Though after a prolonged disagreement with Patel group the Socialist felt compelled to leave the Congress in 1945, the existence of the CSP for a decade and half, and its politics contained the seeds of an emerging party system. The formation of Muslim League on 30 December 1906 was an extension of the quest of the Muslim intelligentsia and wealthy elite for a place under the British. It led them to contest the nationalist politics of the Congress and affirmation of loyalty to the Crown. Whether it was the partition of Bengal or question of the separate electorate for the Muslims, the British took special care to see that embers of separate identity existing among the Muslim elite were kept smoldering and were fanned into a raging flame by encouraging conflictual and communal politics of Muslim league.

This shows the emerging socio-economic contradictions that shaped the politics of that time. From its formation in 1906 till it made a demand for a separate state of Pakistan for the Muslims, it remained part of pre-independence party system. The communist party of India was first formed as an emigrant group by the end of 1920, by M.N. Roy, who dispatched several Indian communists trained in Russia to organize a communist movement in India. The party did not play any significant role in the Indian national movement and was banned many times by the British. It received the recognition of the government in July 1942 since it supported the British-Indian War Time Home policy and termed quit India's movement launched by the Congress as anti-people. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was established in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar along with four trusted friends in Nagpur. An active Congressman from 1916 to 1924, he was once general secretary of Nagpur PCC. Activities of Islamic fundamentalist in 1920s across the country led him to believe in need of organizing Hindu society, particularly youth to keep a balance and obviate the possibility of Muslim domination. This was basically 'as a kind of

educational body whose objective was to train a group of Hindu men who, on the basis of their character-building experience in RSS, would work to unite the Hindu community so that India could again become an independent country and a creative society[15]. Even prior to RSS as an immediate reaction of founding of Muslim League, United Bengal Hindu Movement and Punjab Hindu Maha Sabha were established, which culminated in the establishment of Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha. It was later on joined by many Arya Samajis and active supporters and member of Congress like Lala Lajpat Rai and Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, who continued simultaneously in Congress also. The new crop of Mahasabha Leaders like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar remained in active politics. So did Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the leader from Bengal, a prominent congress leader who on the difference over the issue of lenient attitude of Congress towards Pakistan in 1950, quit Congress and founded the BJS with active support of RSS.

Post Independence Era: Congress Domination (1952-1967)

Independence and partition, created a vacuum of sorts in the party system as the Congress virtually monopolized the political arena as the only dominant party by virtue of its identification with the independence movement, but the seeds of the party system were shown during the pre-independence politics. Thus by 1951, the time when preparations for first general election were on, four major group of parties emerged in the India's political arena. The Congress, Socialist Party, Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP), and many smaller state's parties formed the first group that believed in the democratic and secular state as provided in the constitution. The Communist Party of India and the Marxist parties that rejected the western type parliamentary democracy and advocated for Soviet or the Chinese model formed another group. Third group consisted of Hindu sectarian parties like the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), Hindu Mahasabha, Ram Rajya Parishad and so on. The fourth group consisted of parties having regional agendas like Akali Dal, Scheduled Caste Federation, Jharkhand party, Tamilnadu Congress and other regional groups. This was an election of uneven as the Congress enjoyed the mass support among all sections of society by virtue of its identification with the independence movement. In this context, it is significant that the day before his assassination in 1948, Gandhi prepared a proposal, which was to be presented before Working Committee, observing that Congress 'as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine has outlived its use and that 'it must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties. He was in favor of the Congress becoming a non-political, nongovernmental social service society concerned with rural development[16]. The Congress as expected in first general election won 45 % of the national vote and 73 % of the seats (364 out of 489) in Lok Sabha, (Appendix, I). In the State assemblies, the Congress won 68.47 % of seats (2248 out of 3283) with 42.2 percent of vote and got the majority in all but three states, where again, it emerged as the single largest party. Out of 14 parties that entered into the fray as the national party

only five (Congress, Socialist Party, KMPP, CPI and BJS) could retain their status as the national party by garnering more than 3 % of the votes polled the Congress dominance continued till mid 1960's unchallenged except the exception of Non-Congress Coalition in Kerala as early as 1956. In first two-decade post independence, in the absence of fully grown democratic system and Congress party's total domination of political space, the regional sentiments were expressed differently through the Congress party itself where democratization of the party was still intact. The regional pressure that was exerted on the Congress Centre, actually came from regional satraps from within the Congress. This period came to be known as the era of strong Chief Ministers(listed some of these leaders as K.Kamraj of Tamilnadu, S.K Patil of Bombay, N.Sanjia Reddy of Andhra Pradesh, S. Nijalingappa of Mysore)[17], which eventually came to be known as the 'federalisation' of the Congress party[18]. In a way regional pulls were so much in operation that the Congress in 1960s had to work like federal organization whose state units were at times behaving like regional parties, putting all kinds of pressures to force central leadership to succumb to their demands.

Decline of Congress (1967-1989)

The first strain became visible in 1967 in fourth general election, when post Nehru era it won only 40.78 % vote and 54.62 % seat. The party also lost power in eight states. The land reforms in late 1950s, emergence of new landowners on political scene created an impact on the electoral outcome in second half of 1960s. The political awakening of these new classes strengthened democracy and lead to increased participation of peasants in the political process. In 1969, due to growing the party split. As no other group was in the position to fill the vacuum created by the Congress, the group under leadership of Mrs. Gandhi and a group of "Young Turks" regained power. However, the Mrs. Gandhi's era, was characterized by a pyramidal decision-making body emphasized by her own image, undermining and dismantling established structure of the party, confrontations approach towards other parties leading to dissolve of assemblies ruled by opposition parties as well as its own party. During this period, the crude and brutal way in which central leadership of the Congress party resorted to pull down its own government in the states and unceremonious ways in which the Congress Chief Ministers were removed, further reflects the narrowing of political space. However, a determined opposition effectively exploited the contradictions of a centralized and weakened Congress to put it on mat taking advantage of rising corruption and mounting popular discontent on account 18 months long internal emergency (June 1975-January 1977). The polarization of opposition parties into Janata Party in the elections leads to an ouster of Congress from power as the people for the first time had a loose alternative with least division of votes. The dual member ship issue of BJS (of the party and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) rocked the Janata Party, which lead to its split in 1979 by Charan Singh and his supporters and ultimate

down fall of the government shortly. However, the collapse of Janata experiment within two years and return of Mrs. Gandhi with overwhelming majority meant that a final social and political realignment to give a definite shape to an Indian party system was still far away. 1980 witnessed another significant development, the creation of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which in a way addressed the problem of duel membership of BJS. During the period 1980-89 ruled by Congress, significant development took place like assassination of Mrs. Gandhi in 1984 followed by Anti-Sikh riots, general elections and rise on political scene of Rajiv Gandhi by even garnering the support of RSS. BJP under the leader ship of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was adopting Gandhian Socialism. The Janata Party and its variants were competing with Congress (I) for centrist space. The Congress (I) too shifted its ideological posture to court the Hindu Majority vote across north India. Due to compulsion of VHP and RSS, the locks of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya were opened, and darshan was allowed. Later in 1989, the Shilanyas of Mandir was also allowed. The Bofor's case also impacted the political realignment and consolidation.

Emergence of Coalition Era (1989 onwards)

The period 1989-96, witnessed three governments, VP Singh led National Front (Janata Dal), coalition government with outside support from Left and BJP, Chandrashekhar's rump government with outside support from Congress (I), and a full-term Congress (I) government led by PV Narshimha Rao, which began as a minority government but managed the majority through defection allegedly by bribing the defecting MPs. The period experienced upsurge among the socially underprivileged, the backward castes and the dalits towards political awakening,

Leading to implementation of Mandal Commission reports and reservation for the Backwards in Government Jobs. The largest Indian state of Uttar Pradesh was ruled more than once in 1990s and even thereafter by parties and coalitions championing the cause of backwards (SP), and dalits (BSP), which indicated the silent revolution taking place through the ballot in India. The Bihar has been ruled throughout last decade of twentieth century by such forces represented by Lalu Prasad Yadav. Not only do these social groups have leaders and parties representing their cause, increasingly. National parties also resorted to ethnic strategies of political mobilization to seek their support. Despite Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and lack of absolute majority in 1991 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress (I) sorted out the leadership issues and under leadership P V Narshimha Rao completed the five-year term by 1996. In the process, the party suffered as the Congress (I) attempted to gain majority through defections allegedly by bribing the defecting MPs, which created the huge furor in public. Simultaneously, the BJP's political stock soared due to its relatively clean image, seat adjustment with National Front in 1989 and L. K. Advani's Rath Yatra in 1990 for Ram temple in Ayodhya, which made it Main Opposition party in 10th Lok Sabha and emerged as a single largest party in 11th Lok Sabha in 1996 and success in getting

an invitation to form Government by President. However, still short of absolute majority, as it could not attract any ally to sustain it, the government fell within the short period. This experience proved crucial for its coalition strategies later. Subsequently, National Front (a thirteen party coalition led by Janata Dal) with outside support from the Congress (I) remained in power during 1996-98. On fall off the Government in 1998 the BJP itself under leadership of A B Vajpayee, entered into coalition of 18 parties known since then as National Democratic Alliance, which though formed government but fell by one vote as one of the allies pulled out of coalition in 1999. As a result, effort by BJP and NDA to secure the majority in 1999 elections, was far greater. Obviously, the party system in India, have become highly competitive more democratized, in which parties depending on their social bases, internal organization and ideologies have developed complex mode of interactions for their coexistence. In this game of coalition during the period, the BJP has been able to gasp the reality of coalition and federalism better than the Congress. The decline of the Congress was not so much in terms of its own base, as it was in terms its total neglect of the need to see the writing on the wall. The party kept on insisting on fighting elections alone and indeed decried the coalition arrangement as unworkable and unstable[20]. The Congress ultimately realized and put into practice the coalition strategy in a better way than BJP in 2004 election and succeeded in coming back to power. If we analyses the polling data and voting patterns of 1990's elections, there is clear indication of voter's preference for regionally based socio-culturally located parties with distinct economic and caste grouping in society and broadening base of BJP in rural voter, which was earlier seen as urban party. However, the process of federalism and coalition politics is a reflection of the desire to establish links with the national theatre. Increased participation of masses, socially under privileged and weaker section, assertion of different regional, cultural and ethnic groups through regional parties has strengthened democratic polity and governance.

Conclusion

The party system in India, thus, originated from the desire and zeal of the western educated intelligentsia in the late 19th century to form associations for social reforms. The Indian national Congress was resulted of this zeal, as some prominent individuals in the three presidencies felt the need for an organization that approached the government on behalf of the people to make them aware of their requirements. However, at that time, it was transformed into a movement representing the length and breadth as well as social heterogeneity of the country. It also brought together different points of views and ideologies, and in the process functioned as a composite party system.

The emergence of the Muslim League and religion-based nationalism gave firm foundation to the spirit of the party system in the country. Whether and where the Congress party

went wrong in tackling the politics of the League and whether or not it was possible to prevent the partition of the subcontinent is a contentious question. However, it is absolutely clear that in the triangular politics of colonial India, as British discovered the Muslim League as a perfect foil to the Congress, the process of laying the foundation of the party system in the country were set in motion.

The emergence of the entire spectrum of political ideologies also created a firm based on the party system in the country. From the right (the Muslim as well as the Hundu) to the left (even ultra left, as the CPI transformed itself in revolutionary mode for five years from 1946 to 1951) each point on the ideological scale was fully represented. The Congress itself represented political beliefs from the right of the centre to the left of the centre. Organizationally too, the parties began relating to each other as they do in a mature democracy. True, India remained a one party dominant system for over four decades of its post-independence history but seeds of a complex party system were sown during pre independence politics.

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