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Party system in India: An analysis for reforms

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Abstract
Politics is inseparable from political parties as they are the prime instruments for the execution of democracy in the country. Political parties are the breathing air of the political system and they need to be constitutionalized to ensure in-party democracy and to make themselves transparent. Introducing internal democracy and transparency within political parties is important to promote financial and electoral accountability, reduce corruption, and improve democratic functioning of the country as a whole. Most of the parties in India are openly caste or religious-based. The finances of most of the parties are dubious and opaque. Almost all the parties are family fiefdoms; i.e. engaged in dynasty politics. There are no periodical in-party elections in Indian parties. The study debates the importance as well as weaknesses of political parties in India. The study also asserts that if India does not undertake the task of reforming political parties earnestly and urgently, the future of democracy will be in serious trouble.

Keywords: India, political parties, transparency, accountability, democracy

Introduction
The party system is a pillar of an elected representative form of government which acts as link between the electors and the elected. Modern political representative democracies cannot be visualised without the existence and functioning of political parties. Parties make the citizens capable to perform politically and offer them opportunity to influence politics and political decisions. They articulate interests and demands of different sections of society and are expected to take positions on all those issues concerning the general public and the elections are fought based on competition among these parties and issues.

Political parties consist of persons, holding some common views on important public questions and want to control the government with purpose of putting their principles into operation. Political parties are special form of organisations different from other federations, the associations, and the social clubs. A renowned explanation of political parties emanates from Edmund Burke as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principles upon which they are agreed [1]." However, the accuracy of this definition is questioned as it is not generally applicable to the modern political parties and it may fit into the eighteen century England only. R. M. MacIver defined the political party as an "association organised in support of some principle or policy which by constitutional means it endeavours to make the determinant of the government [2]." According to American political scientist Anthony Downs, "a political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election [3]." This definition also does not qualify as a standard definition of a political party. An eminent and appropriate definition of the political parties is given by the Italian scholar Giovani Sartori, who defined political party as: "any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through election, candidates for public office [4]."

The political parties in India are facing various organizational challenges. Since Independence, political parties have failed to observe the basic norms of inner party democracy. The authority in organizational matters has been founded in hierarchical manner through successive layers of party structures. The leadership in most political parties in India may be democratic in appearance but highly oligarchic in reality. Frequent rifts between the national and state party organizations in almost all national parties led to the realization that a national party is over-centralized.

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The diversity of India is another most important feature which has great impact on the party system. There are four underlying social diversities in India: language, tribe, religion and caste [5].

In India, a very sharp erosion in the ideological orientation of political parties has also been witnessed. Party dynamics has led to the emergence of valueless and immoral politics. While Gandhi Ji taught tremendous selflessness, self-sacrifice and service to the people, such inspirational values, the democratic norms and institutions have been destroyed over the years. In the process, both politicians and political parties have lost their credibility, the ultimate value that should bind them with the masses.

Origin and Growth of the Political Parties in India

The history of origin and growth of political parties can be traced from the days of Indian's struggle for freedom in a broad based anti-colonial movement, which encompassed all regions and all sections of society. The mass social awakening eventually crystallized into the framework of party system, initiated by the twin factor of socio-religious reforms and political reactions to colonialism [6].

The cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community, religious pluralism, traditions of the national movements, contrasting style of leadership, and clashing ideological perspectives helped to shape Indian party structure in general and political parties, in particular. The Indian National Congress was the first political party that came into existence in 1885. Prior to that certain groups were formed by some enlightened patriotic Indians but they did not converge them in a political party. After attaining independence, the evolution of the party system presents a history of transformation from one-party dominant system to a complex of multi-party configuration, and to form alliances irrespective of ideological or programmatic commitments for seeking a share in the governance of the country. Strong trends of proliferation, fragmentation, factionalism, and regionalism, are being increasingly witnessed.

Political parties do not as such find any specific mention in the Constitution of India. However, there is only one provision in the Constitution which is directly relevant to the functioning of political parties: the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution that 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 onus of framing and administering the rules and regulations governing political parties in India has been shouldered on the Election Commission of India. 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 [7].

In the recent past, a succession of unstable governments has been witnessed, and the reason for such a recurring phenomenon is on account of the primitive and chaotic functioning of political parties. Over the years, Indian political parties have fragmented. Frequent party splits, mergers and counter splits have strikingly increased the number of political parties that now contest elections. With the emergence of various regional parties, the number of parties contesting Lok Sabha elections has increased from one election to another. The total number of political parties contesting Lok Sabha elections has gone up from 53 in year 1952 to a maximum of 464 in 2014.

Table 1: Participation of Political Parties in General Elections

Year	Party Type	Registered	Participated
2004	National Parties	6	6
	State Parties	56	36
	Unrecognized Parties	702	173
	Total Registered Parties	**764**	**215**
2009	National Parties	7	7
	State Parties	39	34
	Unrecognized Parties	1014	322
	Total Registered Parties	**1060**	**363**
2014	National Parties	6	6
	State Parties	47	39
	Unrecognized Parties	1634	419
	Total Registered Parties	**1687**	**464**

Source: Election Commission, Government of India, Participation of Political Parties in General Elections, Press Information Bureau, Retrieved from: https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=105127

The 16th General Elections saw participation of 464 political parties. This comprises 6 national parties, 39 state parties and 419 unrecognized parties. In the 2009 General Elections, 363 parties participated, comprising 7 national parties, 34 state parties and 322 unrecognized parties. The total number of registered parties was 1,687 before General Elections 2014; this comprised 6 national parties, 47 state parties and 1,634 unrecognized parties. The total number of registered parties was 1,060 in 2009. The increase in the total number of parties from 764 in 2004 to 1,687 in 2014 has been largely due to the rise in the number of unrecognized parties from 702 in 2004 to 1,634 in 2014 [8].

Factors Influencing the Party System in India

In modern age most of the democratic countries adopted 'representative democratic form of the government' in which political parties play an important role and act as a 'link between the electors and elected [9].' As compared to other neighbouring countries it could be said that the democratic system in India has successfully survived, though the emergency traumatized the democratic system, but it was temporal, and the democratic system remained intact. After independence several parliamentary and assembly elections have been conducted successfully, and political parties in India have played a crucial and pivot role in this journey.

The Indian Party system does not follow the Western pattern as it grew in a different atmosphere from the West. First, the struggle by parties for parliamentary institutions in India was against the alien rulers rather than an indigenous, wealthy, aristocratic, ruling class. Another most important is that of the timing [10]. The suffrage was introduced in most of the European countries gradually and after a protracted scuffle. The development of broadening the political base was rather slow permitting stint to various groups to adjust themselves to new political statute. In case of India, the universal suffrage has been introduced all at once. Paul Brass wrote about the party system: "Party politics in India display numerous paradoxical features, which reveal the blending of western and modern forms of bureaucratic organisation and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions. India's leading political party, the Indian National Congress is one of the oldest in the world, yet it has not succeeded in providing the nucleus for an institutionalized party system which can be fitted easily into any one of the conventional categories of the party systems known in the West [11]."

The party system has now moved from a one party dominance system to a multi-party competition, from social cohesion to fragmentation, from a stable pattern to fluidity, from order to chaos as the principle of party competition. One party dominance and its ill effects are things of the past as it has been replaced by coalition government. It has led to the emergence of regional centers of power.

In fact, regional parties had mushroomed in Indian politics in large numbers in recent years. However, barring few states, they have not brought about substantial change and in many states, state governments were replaced by national parties. However, some regional governments like the one in Bihar and Orissa have shown the path. Regional political parties now have become so strong that they are playing very crucial role in the national politics and are ruling in many states and also part of ruling alliance at the central government.

Power-sharing between National and Regional Political Parties

A new development in the Indian political systems has been the emergence of a process of power-sharing between National and Regional parties. The era of coalition politics has dawned in India. Since 1996 coalition governments have been in power at the centre and in several states. The National Democratic Alliance government was formed at the centre in 1999 and in 2004, United Progressive Alliance government was constituted. Though there was a pre-electoral alliance, yet the BJP could muster majority on its own.

The leaders of regional parties have started playing an active and even deterministic role in the organization of the Central Government. The age of coalition politics, which can be described as the natural outflow of a multi-party system, has definitely arrived in the Indian political system.

Weaknesses and Reforms

Presently, there are several reasons for the weaknesses of the party system in India. The main malady about political parties in India has been their proliferation based on considerations of caste, or the personal ambitions of certain individuals seeking shortcuts to power.

In many cases, new parties came into existence as a result of splits in existing parties particularly in state legislatures, deliberately created by some over-ambitious persons for ministerial berths. Most of the parties are devoid of a distinct political ideology of their own, make a mockery of the parliamentary system of democracy, which is based on voter's choice through the elections. The multiplicity of parties created confusion in the minds of the people at the time of the elections, and led to instability in government after one is formed.

The compulsions of coalition politics gave undeserved importance to small parties, which in turn, create a vested interest among individuals for splitting parties and forming new small ones. This has been a major factor in the decline of national level parties, and the weakening of the party system as a whole.

Inner-party Democracy

However, the single most important cause of the decline of national level political parties is the lack of inner party democracy. What a strange phenomenon being witnessed, political leaders loudly proclaim their commitment for the development of a healthy democracy for the nation as a whole, but do not pay due respect to the democratic functioning of their own parties.

Another tendency is the dynastic system of succession on important party posts. This phenomenon was seen, more or less, in all political parties. Most of the leaders of political parties were either nominated from the top or came as dynastic succession. Most of them would not have had any experience in the working of party units at the grassroots level. Their leadership credentials were only tested through elections by the rank and file in the party. Another flaw in the party system is that regular elections are not held at various levels of authority within the party. It is only when elections are held within parties that the persons who command genuine respect and following will be able to come to the top level of leadership in the party. The nomination culture has taken the place of elections which is a undemocratic practice. Not only this, even the choice to the post of chief minister is also left to the party supremo, reducing the election of the leader by the legislature party to a ritual.

Even the selection of candidates for election from a particular constituency is often made by the party high command, and not by the party units in that constituency. This has stifled the democratic functioning of the political parties in India. It is not possible for the High command or the supremo to know the worth of every candidate and for this purpose party management relies on *coteries* at the party headquarters. It means that in actual practice it is the coterie that takes such decisions. The coterie system, which

is the antitheses of democracy, has been the bane of most political parties in India.

Personality-Cult Politics

Personality-cult dominates party politics in India. Most of the parties in India attach more importance to the personality of their leaders than the policies and ideology of the party. Several political parties stand organized around a leader. They blindly follow their party leaders whether they follow the principles of the party or go against the professed policies of the party. It is a well known fact that Indira Gandhi received unconditional support from the members of the Congress. Even the President of the party did not dare to oppose her decision. Now, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are dominating the scene. This has been the case amongst other parties, Swatantra Party had blind faith in C. Rajagopalachari; others who dominated could be cited as Jayaliltha in DMK; Parkash Singh Badal in Shiromani Akali Dal; Harkishan Singh Surjeet in CPI; Lalu Parsad Yadav in RJD; Mulayam Singh Yadav in Smajwadi Party; Narendra Modi in BJP; Balraj Madhok in Jana Sangh (Madhok) etc. The existence of some other political parties were Congress (Jagjiwan Ram), Congress (Urs), Janata Party (JP), Akali Dal (Mann), Akali Dal (Longowal), Shiv Sena, Biju Janata Dal and others reflect the presence of politics of personality-cult in Indian political parties. It has been a practice with the political leaders of India to float their separate political parties.

Existence of some Communalist Parties

A communal party is one which draws its support from amongst the members of a particular community. In this way several Indian political parties can be called communal parties. Muslim League, Majlise Shura, Akali Dal, IML, AIMIM are all in a way communal parties. Some persons particularly of some left ideologists hold that even BJP is also such party because it enjoys the support of mainly (95 percent) of the Hindus. The party believes in the principle of "one country in one nation and one national ideal". Its guiding force is Rashtriya Swaymsevak Sangh (RSS) which renders selfless service to the cause of Hindu nationalism. BJP and its supporters, however, strongly deny such a charge and they describe it as a positive secularist party. Even DMK and AIADMK, right from their beginning remained as militant bodies against the Brahmins, the Vedas, the Puranic Hinduism and all the priestly services of the Brahmins. In, brief, they were anti-Brahmin political parties in Tamil Nadu.

Caste based Political Parties

As the social structure of India is to a large extent based on caste structure and caste identified, political parties could not remain aloof from this phenomenon. In the distribution of tickets and formation of ministries, political parties kept in mind the caste composition of the caste electorate. Though no state of India had been immune from the impact of the caste politics but the states of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra are more infected. For instance, in Bihar, Rajputs lend their support to the Janata Party whereas Adivasis had organized themselves into their own party in the name of Jharkhand Party. In Andhra Pradesh, caste occupies most conspicuous place in politics. In Andhra, Kammas joined the Communist parties and Reddies joined the Congress. Caste politics is both detrimental to the social progress and the national unity. Many caste groups had asserted their right to participate in election and contested for ower, thereby had given a new dimension to Indian politics.

Lack of Transparency

It is expected by the members of a political party that the working of party should be transparent. Transparency was only spoken not practiced, just take one example, where transparency is required most, namely collection of funds by political parties and leaders. The financial matters of party are kept top secret while other aspects of organization are known to people. In fact, secrecy is maintained even within the party. The truth about the total funds and expenditure of the party is confided in only few top leaders of the party. Parties do not publish statements of accounts, though financial matters are discussed in meetings of higher bodies like working committee or the executive committee. No proper accounts are even maintained by parties, though the rules of the party may state that accounts should be properly kept, audited, and published. Nobody bothers about these lapses because very few believe in practicing political morality, though everyone speaks loudly of its virtues.

Role of Political Parties in Criminalization of Politics

The most serious problem being faced by the Indian democracy is criminalization of politics. In the post-independence period, with the assumption of power by the Congress and winning elections gradually became be-all and end-all for the Congress, its attitude changed radically.

At one time politicians hired criminals to help them win elections by booth capturing, now same criminals have entered parliament and the state legislature through notorious electoral malpractices and crimes. They had not only challenged the legitimacy of present electoral system but also the democracy at large. All this shows that democracy in India has largely perverted. Indian politics has been corrupted because the corrupt and criminals have entered it, criminalization of politics has become an all-pervasive phenomenon. The control over the ticket distribution process by the top leadership of the party has led to unprecedented participation of candidates with criminal records and high asset value in the elections. Due to the absence of intra-party democracy and mechanisms in ticket distribution, those who have control over money and muscle power become favoured candidates and political parties are not shy about giving tickets to them.

There were 162 (30 per cent) MPs in Lok Sabha 2009 with criminal cases pending against them. The general elections held in 2014 reached another disturbing milestone by bringing into power 186 (34.25 percent) [12]. Parliamentarians who were facing criminal cases including murder, kidnapping and crimes against women. Political parties have played a big role in the involvement of criminals in politics.

There had, however, not been a serious attempt by these parties to exclude such candidates from contesting elections. From the study undertaken, it appeared that the candidates who contested Lok Sabha 2014 elections, 17 per cent of the total candidates had criminal charges of various kinds pending against them [13]. These candidates were from all major parties, including the INC, the BJP, the AAP and the BSP. On the contrary, political parties had tried to use every possible means to continue this practice [14]. Another

important aspect is award of political patronages on anti-social elements. As the kindness of the politicians reaches to its climax when the criminal is awarded with ministerial berths.

Growing influence of Money Power on Politics

An established parliamentary democracy requires vibrant political parties and competitive elections. Traditionally, political parties in India financed themselves through private donations and membership dues. Though the Election Commission has fixed the upper limit of the money to be spent during elections, yet in reality the money spent is many times more than the prescribed limit and the major portion of this comes from illegal channels and this breed bad politics. Political party preference for wealthy candidates can give rise to a new breed of 'political entrepreneurs' who are ready to invest in running for office in the hope of controlling the levers of government to further enhance their personal wealth. The parties choose criminals as candidates because of their ability to finance their own election campaigns.

Expenditure limits fixed for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in February 2011 are still very low. There is no public funding to parties in India. The absence of public funding means that parties and candidates have to raise and spend money on their own for each election. This appears to have aggravated dependence on illicit funding and institutionalized corruption. Nevertheless, because the real cost of running a successful campaign has not kept pace with the rate of inflation, the high costs have a tendency to induce illegal fund-raising through any means available, including through corrupt means such as kickbacks for regulatory and such other favors while in office.

Politics of Convenience

During the past a few years it is seen that with the purpose to get political power and to remain in power, the political parties often resort to unprincipled electoral alliances and coalitions for securing short term gains. Even these political parties do not hesitate to enter into electoral alliances with communal parties. Sometime the political parties joining together do not have common ideology and it gives rise to the politics of opportunism and the politics of expediency.

For example, during October 1999-May 2004, the ruling alliance (BJP-led National Democratic Alliance) was a collection of several mutually opposed organisations. Trinamool Congress left the alliance to join hands with the Congress in West Bengal. However after few months it rejoined the NDA. The left parties had been continuously opposing the Congress, yet in May 2004, they extended support from outside to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance. RJD of Laloo Prasad and LJSP of Sh. Ram Vilas Paswan are totally opposed to each other in Bihar and yet both are coalition partners in the ruling UPA.

In February, 2002, Bhartiya Janta Party and Bahujan Samaj Party contested the assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh on separate manifestoes and during election propaganda they threw lot of mud on each other. But after the elections BJP and BSP formed a coalition government under the leadership of Ms. Mayawati. In 2017 elections, SP-INC alliance in Uttar Pradesh and BJP-PDP alliance in Jammu and Kashmir [15] are other examples. Similarly, in Jammu and Kashmir, Bhartiya Janta Party and National Conference were opposing one another whereas in Centre both the parties were the constituent of National Democratic Alliance. There are so many such examples which prove that the political parties in India work on the basis of the 'politics of convenience'.

Dynastic Party

A dynastic party is defined as a party which has seen at least one or more successions that are all within a family and which result from the choice of a family head of the party. Dynastic parties do not believe in strong party organisation and do not practice intra-party democracy in both candidate nomination and elections for party leaders and office bearers. The new leader is not selected through a free and fair election but by family clouts to elect the existing leader to be the next.

In Lok Sabha 2004 elections, 20 per cent of the MPs elected boasted of at least one direct family connection in politics; rose to 29 per cent in Lok Sabha 2009 elections. In the run up to Lok Sabha 2014 elections, dynasty was again at the forefront with senior party leaders fielding their sons, daughters and nephews as the succession plans for "family" constituencies were being put in place. For example, P. Chidambaram's son Karti P. Chidambaram was the obvious choice for Sivaganga constituency. Jayant Sinha, Yashwant Sinha's son, contested from his constituency in Hazaribagh on a BJP ticket; Dushyant Chautala, son of Ajay Chautala and grandson of Om Prakash Chautala, contested from Hisar on an INLD ticket and Geetha Shivarajakumar, daughter of the late S Banagarappa, contested on a JD(S) ticket in Shimoga, Karnataka. The son of Chhattisgarh's Chief Minister, Raman Singh, contested on a BJP ticket from Rajnandgaon; Chirag Paswan, son of LJP party's Ram Vilas Paswan, contested from Jamui, Bihar and Sushmita Dev, daughter of the late Santosh Mohan Dev, seven times Member of Parliament, contested from Silchar, Assam. There are many more examples like these all over India. The internal organisation of these dynastic parties is systematically different from the non-dynastic parties. They had led to greater party system instability and voters are less likely to see dynastic parties as representing the interests of the voters.

Conclusion

Primarily, the legal lacunae for regulating the functioning of political parties must be remedied by constitutionalising political parties, which would, in turn, de-communalise these parties and increase their transparency and accountability. There have been proposals in the past to establish a National Election Fund for receiving donations from the public for conducting elections, which may also bring in efficiency to the democratic process of elections. Effective laws that prevent criminals from contesting should be mandatory, as there are numerous sitting Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) facing criminal charges in our nation. Electoral reforms such as abolishing the "first past the post system" and replacement with a system wherein a minimum percentage is to be mandated for declaring the winning candidate must be considered. Increased public participation and judicial intervention are also the need of the hour.

In India, party system has covered a long journey from one party dominance to coalition government. And in this process democracy has further got consolidated. Coalition governments, which are generally associated with

instability, inordinate delay are after initial hiccup running successfully. Change is imminent in party system and Indian democracy is no exception to this. In conclusion, it must be asserted that if India does not undertake the task of reforming political parties earnestly and urgently, the future of democracy will be in serious peril. Hence, it is high time to constitutionalise political parties to ensure in-party democracy, to impart transparency in their finances, and to de-communalise them.

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