

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusion**

No modern political system, particularly no democratic political system that exist are known to have function without political parties that together go on to form a party system. A party system can said to be a constellation of numerous political parties that yield political power from time to time and share intricate inter-relationships among themselves over sharing of power. Political groups or parties are said to have remained engaged in the struggle to come to power. No free and large countries have been without them (political parties).

A similar phenomenon has been witnessed by India as well. Political parties have undoubtedly played a decisive role in the process of democratization. It will be difficult to conceive of India's democratic system and its journey without mentioning about the crucial role played by the various political parties. India's population exhibited a homogeneous character and comprised of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, Sikhs and Jains. Naturally ever since the pre-independence period (since the 19th century) the Indian political system has been marked by the presence of multiple parties that existed to speak for these varied communities. Similarly, parties representing various sections and class also existed in the political system. Amongst these groups and parties the Indian National Congress (INC) was the strongest and the most representative. India has been so representative because it was a colonized country and was under the repressive rule of the British Empire which was making India hollow from within. Hence, a nationalistic trend emerged in India during the pre-colonial days in the urge for right for self-determination. The greatest opponent of British Imperialism was the Indian National Congress (INC) which was then the most organised medium to express the dissidents of the pre-independent Indian's. Various socio-religious reform movements, political protests, spread of western liberal ideas awakened mass consciousness of the people. Hence the people under the committed leadership waged a struggle against the exploitative British regime. It heralded a struggle for power between the British imperial authority and the Indians and between the Hindus and the Muslims over the rate and method of transfer of power from

British to the Indians. With this process the journey of the Indian party system originated. In the post-independence era, British Imperial authority and Muslim League was replaced by numerous other political parties that strove hard to acquire power and form the government.

Party system is an indispensable component of democratic politics. The Indian Party system has witnessed dramatic changes since independence. It has produced surprising results with its vast menu of choices. It has facilitated realignment in power structure and the basic dynamics of the society. Hence as stated in the beginning of the work through the work we have made an attempt to seek answers to certain questions which are as follows: 1. What are the central features of the Indian party system since 1989? 2. What are the various causes that have contributed to the changes in the nature of the Indian Party System in the recent period? How have the decline of the Indian National Congress, the growth of the BJP and the expansion of the Regional parties bring transformation in the Indian Party system? 3. What are the central features of some of the selected state party systems that have evolved since 1989? What are the factors that have contributed to the growth of the various state party systems in different regions of the country? 4. Is there any similarity between the state party systems and the National party system? If not what are the factors that have contributed towards the bifurcation of the party system between the national and state level? 5. What changes are likely to take place in the Indian Party System and the state party systems in the near future?

We have noted that the Indian Party system has traversed a long journey from a Competitive Multi-Party System with Congress predominance as a majority party to a Competitive Multi-Party System which remained Fragmented and Binodal since 1967 followed by a Partial Restoration of Congress Party as the majority party in a fragmented multi-party system from 1980 till 1989. However, the Congress Party was not able to retain its regained status in the Indian Party System. The inability of the Rajiv Gandhi government (1984-1989) to live up to the expectations of the Indian masses sealed the fate of the party with the ninth general election and a trend of coalition era cemented its base since 1989. Rajiv Gandhi was politically a novice and could not prove his political acumen. His name got attached with the famous Bofors scandal. This led to the loss of credibility (besides numerous other significant factors,

like the Shah Bano case, the minority appeasement, etc.) of the Rajiv Gandhi led Congress (I) party in the eyes of the common people. Ultimately, the people of India gave its verdict again for a non-Congress party headed by V.P. Singh. It was formed mainly on the plank to oppose the corrupt Congress (I) government. Since then series of collapse/downfall of non-Congress government occurred leading to acute instability of the Indian Party System. As none could evolve as the able government and an alternative to Congress (I) hence to arrest this problem of instability the people again gave their verdict for the Congress (I). It came back to power in 1991 under the leadership of P.V. Narashima Rao. The 1991 Congress-led coalition government had completed its tenure but still the party could not regain its pro-people image. It could not impress the masses about its sincerity (to serve the interest of the common masses). It ultimately experienced one of its most serious debacles in 1996 when the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as an alternative to Congress (I). Hence, the Indian Party System witnessed a significant reconfiguration when the Hindu nationalist party came to power at the union level and once again relegated Congress (I) to the position of an opposition party.

BJP, the successor of BJS, since its inception in 1980 has improved electorally. It was not able to emerge as a viable and permanent alternative. Its fanatic fundamentalist predispositions, pro-rich policies, inability to adhere to poll promises, frequent involvement with massive corruption charges enabled Congress (I) to oust it from power with the 2004 general election. The 2004 general election marked the 'rejuvenation' of Congress (I). Mrs. Sonia Gandhi had launched the 'Jan Sampark' programme (a populist initiative) to establish direct contact with the masses apart from various other populist measures which included apologetic politics, pro-people policies, extensive campaigning, rallies, brain storming sessions, selling of hopes and aspirations for a better tomorrow through committed and energized leadership, socio-economic programmes, etc. All these measures reaped benefits only in the 2004 Lok Sabha election when the INC saw a revival as the ruling party by defeating the BJP-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government. The 2009 Lok Sabha election marked its 'resurgence' in a major way. It had performed well and crossed the 200 mark on its own. BJP-led NDA stood distant second. Even in the state assembly polls held during 2009 the Congress party had revived in almost all the states. The achievements of the 2004 Congress-led UPA (United Progressive Alliance)

government had been significant and visible. Hence the people of India bestowed them with a chance to rule for the second consecutive term. The party had done away with its inhibitions and reservations with the coalition politics and with the Pachmari session it had gracefully accepted it. The party had been the largest partner to the United Progressive Alliance. With 2009 Lok Sabha election the Congress-led UPA government tasted a comprehensive victory and played an assertive and dominating role as the coalition maker. The perfect blending between electoral promises and performance has actually facilitated in the resurgence of the Congress (I) party.

However, the Congress Party was not able to withhold its position in the Indian party system. With the 2014 general election the Indian party system witnessed one of the thundering developments when it placed BJP as the ‘majority party’ in the Indian party system. The claims to provide development and upliftment to all irrespective of caste, community, creed, religion, etc. through the motto ‘*sabka saath, sabka vikas*’ (collective effort inclusive development), the much-hyped Gujarat model of development and the assurance of good days lying (*aache din aane wale hain*) ahead if Narendra Modi-led NDA government voted to power caught the fancies of the people .

Despite of the laudable performance of the BJP in the 2014 election when it fetched for itself absolute majority of seats in the Lok Sabha polls the Indian Party System could not do away with its fragmented character which has taken its roots most particularly since 1967. As because many of the states of the Indian Union like Telangana, Seemandhra, Odisha, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Puduchery, Bihar, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh that went to assembly polls subsequently, voted for non-BJP parties such as TRS, TDP, BJD, SDF, AIADMK, Congress-DMK alliance, JD(U)-RJD alliance and Trinamool Congress respectively retaining the fragmented nature of the party system. Although the early signs of fragmentation of the Indian Party System was visible from 1957 when Kerala voted in favour of a Communist-led government. State-specific issues like the issue of political succession, conflict over political opportunities, rising aspirations of political leaders for sweeping powers were some of the initial reasons that led to the dwindling of the undisputed status of the Congress Party over the Indian party and the political system. Hence, the party system became incohesive in nature and lost its uniformity permanently since 1967

and henceforth remained bifurcated into two levels. Some coherence and uniformity was visible only till the 1962 general election and with the subsequent assembly polls. However, the Congress Party could never establish itself as the dominant party<sup>1</sup> because with every Lok Sabha polls its number of seats and vote shares has fluctuated<sup>2</sup>. Infact with the 1967 Lok Sabha polls its tally of seats dropped to 283 and it has never secured more than 50 percent of votes. During the period from 1952 till 1971 when the Congress Party had enjoyed the status of ‘Majority Party’ by bagging more than half of the Parliamentary votes, few states had voted in aberration. In Travancore-Cochin and Madras, Congress has failed to acquire absolute majority and had formed government in coalition. In Madras, Congress allied with CPI with the 1952 assembly polls. In Kerala in 1957 CPI-led coalition government came to power. Due to internal dissensions and ideological incongruence it collapsed and the state came under the Presidential rule. Following this the Congress Party could come to power in the state.

In a competitive multi-party system, INC could keep itself ahead of other parties for two decades only because the Indian Party System could not produce any potential alternative for the electorates to vote for. Hence, INC remained as the natural choice of the people. Praja Socialist Party (PSP) could never increase its electoral prospect in the country. Its electoral performance has never been brilliant. The states too lacked any potential alternative to INC till 1967. However, since the late sixties in lot many states INC failed to acquire absolute majority on its own and non-Congress coalition governments under the banner of SVD government came to power in these states. The Congress had an excellent organisational strength with a soaring membership since the pre-independence period. This trend continued even after independence for a considerable span of time. The Indian Party system lacked a very strong opposition as

---

<sup>1</sup>A “majority party” is one which by itself possesses more than half of the parliamentary seats. However, a dominant party is one that holds the majority over a long period of political development. See Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their organisation and Activity In Modern states*, 1955, pp.307-309.

<sup>2</sup> In 1951 Congress secured 364 seats, in 1957 it bagged 371 seats, in 1962 it won 361 seats, it could win 283 seats with the 1967 Lok Sabha polls, in 1971 general election it bagged 352 seats and in 1977 it secured its lowest tally of seats with 154 seats since independence (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence till 1971 (for two decades in the absence of any prime alternative) Congress could capture more than half of the Parliamentary seats in a competitive multi-party system. Only in 1977 when the opposition got united and Congress could no longer mediate dissidence due to loss of internal democracy and excessive authoritarian manner of functioning of Mrs. Indira Gandhi then INC was reduced to the position of an opposition party in the Indian party system at the national level as well as in many states such as UP, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, etc.

well. The stature of the INC as an ‘umbrella party’ also enabled it to emerge as the majority party in the competitive multi-party system where other parties existed but they played a very disenchanting role in the Indian party system. Not until 1967 when opposition acquired a robust role in the Indian Party System.

The heterogeneous and diversified nature of the Indian society also facilitated the growth of a bifurcated and hence a fragmented party system. With each passing year the people (voter’s) of the country became more vocal and conscious and yearned for a better tomorrow. Hence they ventured into looking for alternatives. With circulation of new political elites and with diminishing returns from Congress as a party and as a government people sought for alternatives. Hence, people voted for different political affiliations and this trend made the fragmented nature of the Indian Party System more defined. Hence, the Indian Party System saw the rise of Regional satraps riding on the plank of region-specific grievances and aspirations. Since the late sixties, the Indian Party System has witnessed reconfiguration by repetitive attempts by political novices such as Congress (O), Janata Party (JP), Janata Dal (JD), Bharatiya Janata Party(BJP), Bharatiya Kranti Dal(BKD), Bharatiya Lok Dal(BLD), Jan Morcha (JM), Dravida Munnetra Kahagam (DMK), Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal(United) (JDU), Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), Shiv Sena (SS), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM),Telugu Desam Party( TDP), Akali Dal (AD) to emerge as alternative at the both the national and state level. These political parties have time and again formed governments in the states by replacing Congress from power and have also acted as coalition partners at the union level. The Shiv Sena with its ‘son of soil’ ideology in coalition with BJP could replace Congress from power in the state of Maharashtra which had been since independence been a strong bastion of the Congress party. The state of Maharashtra had withstood the anti-Congress tide of 1967 and 1989. Similarly parties like AIADMK and TMC have facilitated the downfall of 1996 BJP-led coalition government at the centre.

During the era of anti-Congressism in the sixties, Congress failed to secure the majority of seats in many states and non-Congress coalition government under the banner of the Samyukt Vidhayak Dal ( SVD) government came to power in as many as nine states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras and Kerala. Internal infighting over political opportunities,

defection, primordial loyalties and administrative inefficiency by the ruling Congress government were some of the immediate reasons in these state that led to bifurcation of the Indian party system and rise of multiple state party systems. However, what we notice is that in present times elections are fought and won on the plank of four Ps namely, **Popularity and Populism, Performance and Positivity**, where populist policies promises to satisfy the pangs of hunger for comprehensive development and vigorous election campaign by a popular leader raises people's hopes and aspirations to achieve development for the electorates yearning always for a better tomorrow. However, survival and continuity of the popular government depends on the symmetry between 'proclamations' and 'performance'. The state party systems as well are largely guided by these parameters. Hence not mere legacy or lip services counts but it is the ability to create a balance between rhetoric, intent and action that matters in the Indian Party System at both the national and state level. The ascendance of the BJP as the majority party at the national level is largely the outcome of the effort by the party to religiously adhere to the above mentioned parameters (during its election campaign for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and subsequent assembly elections). However, BJP can retain its newly acquired status of the 'majority party' in a competitive multi-party system only if it is able to cement its credibility through its diligent performance, probity and dedicated and sincere implementation of the poll promises. Infact, in the recent years with the assembly polls in the states like UP, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala have voted in the line of the above mentioned parameters of performance, populism, popularity and positivity. As long the respective parties in power in the states are able to adhere to these parameters religiously they will enjoy the support of the people and will not be voted out of power.

Hence, describing the Indian Party System as a Congress System was nothing short of an exaggeration and a hyped myth. Indian Party System has since 1957 reflected the diversified nature of the Indian society by producing varied state party systems and assorted composition of the central government with each passing years as the democratic ethos of the Indian electorates got more matured. The party system of the country reflects the expectations of the Indian electorates from the serving government and the failure and success of a political party in power. The Downfall of the Congress Party as the majority party, rise of non-Congress alternatives at the

national level since 1977 and at the state level from as early as 1957 testifies to the fact.

Presently (with the Lok Sabha election held in 2014) the Indian Party system still stands fragmented into two levels. At the national level the Indian Party system has acquired a competitive multi-party system with Bharatiya Janata Party's predominance as the 'majority party' since the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election held in 2014. The trend of bipolarization, fragmentation and coalition politics have not evaporated completely at the state level. The party system still remains bipolarized with Congress and other parties at the other pole trying to revamp them both at the national level. Infact, with many of the recent assembly elections lot many of the states like Bihar, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Puducherry, Sikkim, Odisha, etc. voted for non-BJP alternatives which testifies to the fact that Indian party system still stands bifurcated and fragmented in nature. People pass their verdict depending upon the state-based needs as well as based on the parameters like populism, popularity, performance and positivity. Indian party system not only presents a messy picture for itself but it has a history of producing surprising electoral verdicts. Hence any sea changes, reconfiguration and realignments in the near future within the party system at both the national and state levels cannot be brushed out.