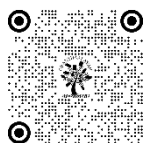


THE ROLE OF REGIONAL PARTIES IN INDIAN POLITICS-A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In a democracy, political parties provide an agency to the society to gather different views on various issues and to present these to the government. They bring various representatives together so that a responsible government could be formed. They provide a mechanism to support or restrain the government, make policies, justify or oppose them. India has a multi-party system. The multi-party system in India has many political consequences. In the event of an election, the norm states that the party with the majority votes wins the election. However, in order to form a government, a party should have a certain number of votes. This need not happen, leading to problems. The majority party has to therefore join hands with a regional party in order to form government. This is where the importance of the smaller regional parties comes into play.

Keywords: Democracy, Regional Parties, Ideology, Power, Rights, Policies, Majority, Multi-Party

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, regional parties have been coming up at regular intervals playing different roles in the country's parliamentary democracy. Some parties like the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Jammu & Kashmir National Conference were even founded before the country gained independence in 1947. But most of the other parties came into existence after the country attained freedom. The growth of state parties, which fall broadly under the rubric of regional parties, picked up particularly after 1967 when the hold of the Indian National Congress, which had spearheaded the freedom struggle, over the country's electorate began to weaken. There are about four dozen recognized state parties and about two dozen more that are not yet recognized by the Election Commission of India. At present, some of them are ruling in their respective states and others are waiting for their turn to come to power. Regional parties need not be regional in their ideology or outlook. Some of these parties are all Indian parties that happen to have succeeded only in some states.

- 1) The presence of a number of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and caste groups within Indian society is greatly responsible for the origin and growth of regional parties.
- 2) In India regional parties are based on themes like– Identity, Statehood, Autonomy Development, etc.
- 3) Autonomy consists of demanding greater powers to the states (like the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir).

- 4) 4. Statehood consists of fighting for an independent state within the country (like the Telangana Rastra Samiti demanded a separate state of Telangana).
- 5) Identity consists of fighting for the recognition of the cultural rights of a group (like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra or the DMK fighting for the identity of the Dalits).
- 6) Development consists of regional parties believing that only they can bring development to the people of a particular region.
- 7) Sometimes regional parties create these 'cultural specificities' for electoral gains.

2. EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL PARTY;

Over the last four decades, the number and strength of regional parties has expanded. This has made the Parliament of India politically more diverse. Regional political parties have emerged to fulfill regional aspirations. No one national party is able to secure on its own a majority in Lok Sabha. As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with State parties. The regional political parties started playing a crucial role in coalition politics in 1989. It is because of the regional political parties that our party system has been federalized. The Centre has begun to address their problems and respond to their aspirations through accommodation. The evolving nature of our party system has strengthened the cooperative trends of our federal system.

2.1. LIST OF SOME REGIONAL (STATE) PARTIES IN INDIA

- 1) Aam Aadmi Party
- 2) All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
- 3) All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen
- 4) All India N.R.Congress
- 5) All India United Democratic Front
- 6) Asom Gana Parishad
- 7) Bodoland Peoples Front
- 8) Pattali Makkal Katchi
- 9) .Rashtriya Lok Dal
- 10) Samajwadi Party

2.2. FEATURES OF REGIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA

The features of an Indian Regional Party are as follows:

- 1) It generally operates within a specific state or specific region. Its electoral base is limited to a single region.
- 2) It articulates regional interests and identifies itself with a particular cultural, religious, linguistic, or ethnic group.
- 3) It is primarily concerned with exploiting the local resources of discontent or preserving a variety of primordial demands based on language, caste or community, or region.
- 4) It focuses on local or regional issues and aims to capture political power at the state level. It has no inclination to expand and control the central government
- 5) It has a political desire for greater regional autonomy of states in the Indian Union.

2.3. CLASSIFICATION OF REGIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA

The various regional parties in India can be classified into the following:

- 1) Those regional parties are based on regional culture and ethnicity. These include Shiromani Akali Dal, National Conference, DMK, AIADMK, Telugu Desam, Shiv Sena, Asom Gana Parishad, Mizo National Front, Jharkhand Mukti Morch, and so on.

- 2) Those regional parties have an all-India outlook but lack a national electoral base. The examples are Indian National Lok Dal, All-India Forward Bloc, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Samajwadi Party, National Congress Party, and so on.
- 3) Those regional parties have been formed by a split in National parties. For example, Bangla Congress, Telangana Praja Samithi, Trinamool Congress, YSR Congress, and so on.
- 4) Those regional parties have been formed by individual leaders on the basis of their charismatic personalities. These are called personalized parties and they are short-lived. Examples are Lok Janshakti Party, Haryana Vikas Party, Himachal Vikas Congress, and so on.

Regional parties have challenged the national parties, gathering popular electoral support, exploiting the national parties' neglect of the political and economic interests of the region or even the state.

One of the oldest regional parties, the Shiromani Akali Dal was established in 1920 by the religious organization Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) to be the principal representative of Sikhs in the undivided Punjab during British rule.

At present, regional parties are ruling, either on their own or in alliance with a national party or with other parties, in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

A major trait of all these parties is that they are controlled and driven by one leader whose writ runs large in party affairs and whose command cannot be challenged. In short, they are controlled by a single leader and his or her confidantes. Immediate family members and relatives invariably wield considerable clout in these parties.

Even parties, which justified their respective existence on some ideological grounds, have been converted into individual fiefdoms or self-interest-preserving outfits with the passage of time. Therefore, the longevity of such parties, under normal circumstances, should be closely linked with the life span of their respective leaders. Another dimension of the regional outfits is that family members, close relatives and friends run the affairs of the party and one of them inherits the legacy of that leader either in his or her times or after he or she passes away.

Recently, the Samajwadi Party (SP) has been in the news because of a long-simmering feud between the supreme leader and his son which broke-out into the open. Therefore, it is interesting to study closely the SP to understand the trajectory of the regional parties and their future. The SP has been ruling the biggest state of the Indian Union since 2012 and had been in power in the state for about a decade since it was founded in 1992. It also shared power at the Centre.

The party was founded by the three times Uttar Pradesh chief minister and former Defence Minister in the government of India, Mulayam Singh Yadav, after he broke away from the Janata Dal. Mulayam's political clout phenomenally grew after the acceptance and implementation of the Mandal Commission report in the early nineties of the last century which overtly strengthened the role of identity politics in north India.

Mulayam became the chief minister of UP first in 1989 and remained in the seat exactly for one year and 201 days. After the defeat of the Janata Dal in the 1991 general elections, he had to step down. Thereafter, he founded the SP and became the chief minister two times. For some time, an overt and covert battle for supremacy within the organization has been going on, but it has never been so open as now, with two distinct factions led by UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav preparing for postMulayam times. While Akhilesh is the elder son of the SP's supremo, Shivpal is Mulayam's younger brother.

Apprehending a challenge to his own authority as well as to the fortunes of the party, Mulayam intervened and crafted a solution which in his assessment would protect his twin goals of remaining politically relevant and retaining power in the biggest state in the coming assembly elections. Notwithstanding the show of unity, enforced by Mulayam, currently being displayed by Akhilesh and newly appointed state SP president Shivpal, there seems to be no doubt that the 25-year-old party is facing an existential crisis. It has developed lots of cracks which are being paper over by the SP supremo.

Realising that his son's move may seriously jeopardise the chances of return to power of the party after the election, Mulayam intervened to placate Shivpal and appointed him the party chief of UP removing Akhilesh from the post. It should have been a clear signal to the Chief Minister but Akhilesh went ahead showing the doors to Shivpal and his father's favourites. Not only that Shivpal was made to head the party in the state but Mulayam ensured that all decisions

of the Chief Minister were taken back. The SP patriarch went a step further and appointed Amar Singh as the general secretary of the party, snubbing the Chief Minister who had called Singh “an outsider”

There is the newly appointed general secretary of the party, Amar Singh. Then there is the leader of the party in the Rajya Sabha, Ramgopal Yadav, who is not only a cousin of the party supremo but is also the ideologue of the party. Then there is Mulayam's second wife Sadhna Gupta and her son Prateek Yadav, who is ambitious and deals in high-value properties. They all have huge stakes in the outcome of the war within the Yadav family. Soon upon assuming charge, Shivpal moved fast and removed seven youth leaders who are close to Akhilesh. Earlier, he initiated action against an MLC of the party who is a close relative of Mulayam's cousin Ramgopal Yadav.

Big the question is whether the enforced truce will last or will crack in the coming weeks and months. Chances are weak because many battles are being fought in the SP. Though the battle has been going on for months, impending Assembly elections early next year seem to have brought the behind-the-scene-tug-of-war into the open. Coming elections, most possibly in February next year, have introduced a sense of urgency to the battle because the distribution of 403 party tickets was at stake – because the strength of any leader will be the strength of the party's elected MLAs and their loyalty.

That is why both Akhilesh as well as Shivpal would like that their respective followers and adherents get the maximum number of tickets to ensure supremacy. Who would occupy the chief ministerial chair after the elections is driving both the two factional leaders. Akhilesh, who was made the chief minister after the 2012 assembly election which gave a clear majority to the SP, ruled the state for four and half years with his hands tied at his back as his decision-making powers were seriously curtailed.

Apart from his father, there are at least three more power centers in the party which are called shots in the state government. Akhilesh's plight became the source of a popular joke that there are four and half chief ministers in the state with Akhilesh being the half and the three being Mulayam, Shivpal, and Azam Khan who was brought back into the party just before the last Assembly elections. With elections staring in the face, Akhilesh was keen to dismiss a largely held public perception that he is just a puppet ruler. He had crafted an image of an honest and well-meaning leader. He wanted to emerge supreme in the battle of supremacy. He was cleverly working to project an image that he could have developed the state much more had he been given a free hand. In a show of apparent defiance, the Chief Minister dropped two of his ministers namely Gayatri Prajapati and Raj Kishore Singh said to be close to his father from his council of ministers on charges of corruption. Then he removed three months old Chief Secretary Deepak Singhal who owes loyalty to Shivpal and appointed his favorite Rahul Prasad Bhatnagar in Singhal's place. Finally, he struck at Shivpal too, divesting important portfolios from him. Akhilesh had earlier blocked the merger of the Quami Ekta Dal (QED) into the SP on the grounds that a merger would bring a bad name to the party. The QED's main patron and financier is a noted criminal, Mukhtar Ansari. The merger was being engineered by Shivpal and had the blessings of Mulayam. Under attack from the opposition on the issue of the bad law and order situation in the state, the Chief Minister had recently asked the state police bosses to adopt a “zero tolerance” policy towards crime in the state. Mulayam made Shivpal the UP chief of the SP in full knowledge and hope that his younger brother knows party workers personally and was the important link between him and the Akhilesh government. Shivpal, not Akhilesh, would play a key role in ticket distribution as his younger brother knew the political ground realities, including the caste combinations in every assembly constituency.

Denied a preeminent role in ticket distribution, Akhilesh may have decided to lie low now, but he may not bear humiliation for long and may strike back at an opportune time. Akhilesh was the party's face but he has been sidelined and this means the loss of the SP's main USP. The SP may have to face the wrath of the electorate and Mulayam's last-minute damage control moves may not prove sufficient for the return of power. Winning elections, after all, is not only management of castes in UP but public perception is equally an important factor. The SP seems to have lost the battle of public perception.

Challenges and troubles currently being faced by the SP are no exception as almost similar threats are inbuilt into systems of almost all the regional parties which have been in power or are struggling to acquire power. For example, the Bahujan Samaj Party was in power in UP four times with every time its unchallenged, rather irreplaceable, leader, Mayawati being the chief minister. The party, founded in 1984, was formed by the late Kanshiram with the purpose of giving better representation to ‘Bahujans’, meaning persons from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Communities (OBCs) as well as minorities. Late Kanshiram had appointed former school teacher Mayawati as his successor and after his death, the BSP's existence and survival depends upon her. Her command cannot be either

questioned or challenged by any other member of the party. A large majority of the Dalit population of the country, particularly of UP, accept her as their leader.

Though the party initially drew its inspiration from Dr B R Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, and Chattrapati Sahhuji Maharaj, after it won the assembly and parliamentary elections in the early 90s, Mayawati shifted her objective and guiding philosophy to crafting an effective electoral strategy to capture power. For many years now, she is the cementing factor that keeps the BSP together. Therefore, it seems difficult to imagine the BSP's future in her absence. Unless she begins to groom her successor, her absence from the political scene, in all likelihood, would push the party to disintegration. At present, there is no single leader in the BSP who could lead the party in her absence.

Another party, mainly based in UP, the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), founded in 1996 by former Union Minister Ajit Singh, has its area of influence in the Jat-dominated districts of the State. Ajit Singh, who inherited the legacy of his father, freedom fighter and former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, has been forging electoral alliances with other political parties, including the national parties, the Congress, and the BJP, to keep his party politically relevant. His son Jayant Chaudhary, one-time Lok Sabha MP from Mathura, is likely to take over the reins of the party from his father.

In Punjab, the 96-year-old SAD has been in power several times. But since 1970, after Parkash Singh Badal became the fourth SAD chief minister of Punjab, the party's main power center has slowly but surely shifted to his family. The SAD and the BJP have been in an electoral alliance and the two have been in power since 2007. Prakash Singh Badal's son Sukhbir Singh Badal holds the deputy chief minister's chair and is also the president of the party. Sukhbir Singh Badal's wife Harsimrat Kaur Badal is a minister in the BJP-led government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In the neighboring State of Haryana, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) was founded in October 1996 as Haryana Lok Dal (HLD) by former Deputy Prime Minister and two times chief minister Chaudhary Devi Lal. The HLD was renamed INLD in 1998. Devi Lal's son, Om Prakash Chautala, who is the current president of the party, has been chief minister four times. Chautala's son Ajay Singh Chautala is the secretary general of the party.

In Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), founded in 1949 by the first non-Congress Chief Minister C M Annadurai as a breakaway faction of the Dravidar Kazhagam led by Periyar E. V. Ramasami, won the State assembly elections in 1967. Since then, the DMK has undergone many changes, including a split in 1972 when its treasurer and popular film actor M G Ramachandran formed a new party called All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). These parties have been alternating in power in the State.

These parties are also developing into personal fiefdoms of their single leaders. The DMK is being controlled by five-time chief minister M Karunanidhi while the AIADMK was first controlled by M G Ramachandran and now by his colleague J Jayalalithaa, who inherited the MGR's legacy after his death in 1987. She has also been the chief minister five times.

Though DMK chief Karunanidhi has informally appointed his younger son M K Stalin his successor, a family feud cannot be ruled out in the party in coming times, particularly when it's now unchallenged leader departs. Similarly, the AIADMK is also programmed to face a crisis as and when present Chief Minister Jayalalithaa departs. To make the situation worse, she has not groomed her successor and has controlled the party with an iron hand.

In West Bengal, the All India Trinamool Congress of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is no different from other regional parties. It is also a single personality-driven party. Her command is the last word, allowing almost no discussion or dissent in the party affairs. The charisma of Banerjee drove the party again to power in the State early this year, defeating the Left parties, which had ruled over the State for more than three decades, and the BJP.

In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana too, regional parties, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), are in power. The TRS, which was founded in 2001 in the wake of agitation for a separate State from erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, came to power in the 2014 assembly elections with its leader K S Rao becoming the first chief minister of the newly carved state. K S Rao is the president as well as the chief minister. His son K T Rama Rao and daughter Kalvakuntla Kavitha are legislators and Lok Sabha MP respectively.

Similarly, the TDP's president N Chandrababu Naidu is also the Chief Minister of Andhra. Since he took over the charge of the party after the death of his father-in-law N T Rama Rao, founder of the TDP, Naidu has been the chief minister for over 17 years in three terms. In Orissa, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which was founded in 1997, came to power three years later and hence been in power. Its founder Naveen Patnaik, son of former chief minister Biju Patnaik, has won four assembly elections in a row. He stepped down as the Minister of Mining in the BJP-led BDA government of

Prime Minister Atal Bihar Vajpayee after the BJD won the assembly election in 2000 in alliance with the BJP. In the 2004 elections, the BJD parted ways with the BJP ending the alliance. Naveen Patnaik, like the leader of most of the regional parties, is the center of power and the sole decision-maker. The BJD, too, has many common attributes of other regional parties.

While all these regional parties are personality driven and are one individual or family-controlled political outfits, their longevity or future depends upon how smoothly power has been transferred to successors. More the number of family members sharing the power, the more the danger of its disintegration as we are witnessing in the case of the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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