

Dynamic Democracy: Multi-Party Politics and Electoral Governance in India

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Abstract -

India is a multi-party democratic state. Here the principle of parliamentary democratic government prevails. The presence of multiple parties is observed here for representation, struggle for political power, and gaining government power. The presence of numerous parties of different ideologies in Indian politics is instrumental in ensuring the participation of voices of different sections of people. Since independence, India has adopted a federal structure as well as a system of parliamentary democratic government, which is accountable and responsible to the people. The existence of many groups is observed here due to natural reasons. These parties are divided into three categories by the Election Commission of India - National parties, State parties, and Unrecognized parties.

In India's two decades of continuous central politics since independence, the Indian National Congress won a single absolute majority and formed the government. Although multi-party politics was recognized in Indian politics after independence, it was mainly after the fourth general election of 1967 that multi-party politics emerged.

Based on the democratic principles here adult citizens of the country get their right to vote, and elect representatives and representation which is organized through regular elections. And in this case, the Election Commission of India plays an important role. The Election Commission is a constitutionally independent body, under whose umbrella the elections of different levels of the country are organized and conducted.

Keywords - *General People, Democracy, Multi-party System, Elections, Power.*

I. Introduction

India is the largest multi-party democracy in the world. A multi-party democracy is a type of political system in which more than two political parties exist (Diwakar, 2006). These parties are usually formed based on various interests and ideologies and spontaneously contest the election to gain political power and govern the country or state or local government (Singh, 2018). Central to the smooth running and development of India's multi-party democratic system is a constitutionally independent body called the

Election Commission of India. The Election Commission of India plays an important role in conducting free, fair, and transparent elections in the country, which can strengthen the backbone of democracy (Basu,2015).

II. Multi-party Democracy in India

A multi-party democratic system is established in India with more than two political parties. That is, India is a multi-party democratic state. Present Indian politics has 6 Central parties, 55 State parties, and over 2500 Unrecognized political parties. These parties are formed based on different ideologies and interests; India is a secular democratic state and multilingual state. There are differences in behaviors and needs among people based on region (Bharti, 2022). As a result, the Indian multi-party democratic state ensures representation of people with different interests and views, so that the general people of the country can choose political parties that are compatible with their beliefs and concerns. These parties usually engage in spontaneous electoral contests to gain power and authority in national, state, and local governments. Due to the presence of multiple political parties, decentralization of power is observed between different parties at different levels in India (Singh, 2018; Haque & Ghosh, 2022). That is, any one party generally fails to achieve an absolute majority in the Indian political spectrum.

III. Classification of Political Parties

Political parties in India are mainly divided into three categories by Election Commission - National party, State party, and Unrecognized party and these groups have to pass certain criteria to get certain status (Ramesh, 2022).

According to the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 - A political party may gain or lose the status of a national or state party depending on the fulfilments of the following conditions.

i. National Political Party

All the qualifications that a political party has to achieve to get the status of a national party are-

- a) If the party has won at least 2% of the total Lok Sabha seats from three different states of the country (at present 11 out of 543+2 nominated) or
- b) If the party has secured at least 6% of the total valid votes in any four or more states in the Lok Sabha or Assembly elections or
- c) If the party is recognized as a state party in four or more states.

The six major national parties in present-day Indian politics are - BJP, INC, CPI(M), AAP, BSP and NPP.

ii. Regional / State Political Party

For a political party to be recognized as a regional or state party, the following are the requirements:

- a) The party must win 3% of the total seats or a minimum of three seats in the respective assembly elections or
- b) Assembly elections must get at least 6% of the total valid votes and have at least two MLAs or

- c) The party must secure at least 6% of the total valid votes cast in the Lok Sabha elections and have at least one MP in the respective state or
- d) The party concerned must ensure that it holds at least 8% of the valid votes cast in the last Assembly or Lok Sabha elections.

Examples include DMK in Tamil Nadu, AGP in Assam, BJD in Odisha, TMC in West Bengal, LJP in Bihar etc.

iii. Unrecognized Political Party

Political parties that do not meet even one of the minimum qualifications for either a national or state party are generally classified as unrecognized political parties.

Political parties recognized under the Representation of the People Act, of 1951 enjoy several privileges, like-

- ✓ A national party shall have the exclusive right to preserve its party symbol. That means no other political party in India can use the symbol of that party.
- ✓ In the case of State parties only one party in the concerned State shall have exclusive allotment to reserve the symbol. However, the corresponding symbols may be repeated in different states.
- ✓ Only one proposer is required to file a nomination for both national and state parties.
- ✓ Both national and state parties get TV, and radio telecast facilities during general elections.
- ✓ Both national and state parties can have a maximum of 40 'star campaigners'. On the other hand, unrecognized parties can nominate a maximum of 20 'star campaigners', etc.

IV. One Person One Vote, One Candidate One Constituency

The voting rights of Indian citizens is a fundamental right recognized by the Constitution. According to Article 325 of the Constitution, all adult citizens have the right to vote regardless of race-religion-caste-gender. That is, the principle of One Person One Vote equals One Value has been adopted in India. Similarly, the policy of One Candidate One Constituency has been adopted. According to section 33 (7) of the Representation of People Act, 1951 a person enjoys representation from two constituencies at the same time. On the other hand, section 77 prevents a person/candidate from representing more than one seat in the State Assembly/Lok Sabha at the same time. However, from the first general election in 1951-1952 until 1996, there was no such barring. Although it is still a controversial issue due to various legal complications, the principle of One Candidate One Constituency is applicable. In this regard, the Election Commission of India has adopted a middle path-

- i. If or until this provision is amended, if a person contests from two constituencies at the same time and wins both, a by-election shall be held to vacate one constituency, and all costs of the by-election shall be borne by the candidate concerned, will carry in this case Rs. 5/10 lakh has been levied for State Assembly/Lok Sabha seats.

- ii. If it is not as described above (point I) or if any candidate shows an inability to bear the cost of conducting the by-election in the concerned seat or constituency, then, in that case, the candidate who gets the second highest number of votes shall be declared the winner.

V. FPTP System

The First Past the Post System (FPTP) is also known as the simple majority system or plurality system. It is a simplified process for electing people's representatives in electoral contests (Duverger, 1964; Benoit, 2006). We know that in a democratic system, a candidate must get more than 50 percent of the total valid votes in the respective constituency to win the election. However, due to the multi-party democratic system prevailing in India, the representatives of numerous political parties spontaneously contest the elections in the same constituency. As a result, due to natural causes, a political party or its representative practically fails to get more than 50 percent of the total votes of the respective constituency. So, the First Past the Post System is used for electing representatives in India.

<i>Constituency (X)</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Total Valid Votes</i>	<i>Out of Votes</i>	<i>Valid Vote %</i>
	A	100	30	30%
	B	100	35	35%
	C	100	25	25%
	D	100	10	10%
Total	4	100	100	100%

* *The Above Table Shows an Example Constituency: (X)*

The above table shows that representatives of 4 political parties A, B, C, and D are contesting in a constituency respectively and the total number of valid votes in the respective constituencies is 100. Out of this A got 30 votes, B got 35 votes, C got 25 votes and D got 10 votes. Now it appears that out of these 4 representatives A, B, C, and D - "B" got the highest or maximum number of votes, with a total vote percentage of 35. In this case, the person named "B" or the representative of the political party has won in the respective constituency as per the FPTP system.

That is, according to this rule, if a representative wins the respective constituency or seat, he/she must get the maximum number of votes instead of (50+1%) of the total votes.

VI. Coalition Politics

The party or group of parties that wins an absolute majority in electoral contests forms the government of that party at the national and state levels. A government formed by a combination of two or more political parties is known as a coalition government. In Indian politics, coalition government politics has been going on at the center and in various states since the beginning of the 1990s till the present time (Singh, 2018; Haque & Ghosh, 2022). Coalition politics in Indian politics refers to the combined functioning of multiple parties to gain government power at the national or state level (Ramesh, 2022). These alliances usually take two forms - pre-election alliances and post-election alliances.

* Pre-electoral Alliance

When two or more political parties ally to defeat a strong political party at the national or state level, it is called a pre-electoral alliance.

* Post-electoral Alliance

Post-electoral alliance politics refers to the formation of a government by a joint combination of two or more political parties when one political party fails to secure an absolute majority to form a government. This government is known as a coalition government.

VII. Party in Power

A ruling party refers to a political party or group of parties holding government power. In the context of Indian politics, these ruling parties or groupings hold governmental power at the national and state levels. In the context of national politics, the main leader of this party or group of parties is usually the Prime Minister. This party is responsible for forming the government, implementing policies, making decisions, and even running the country. The same picture is observed in the state politics of India. But in this case, the main leader of the party at the state level holds the post of chief minister and manages the respective state.

In India's national and state-level coalition politics, the party with a near-single absolute majority forms the government through a coalition, sometimes known as the government of the largest party in the respective coalition. An example in current Indian national politics is the NDA government, better known as the BJP government (Bharti, 2022).

VIII. Role of Election Commission

The Election Commission of India plays a very important role in the smooth running and development of the country's democratic process. Its main responsibility and duty are to conduct elections at various levels of the country in a free, fair, and transparent manner (Basu, 2015). The Election Commission of India plays an important role in all the functions of voter list of adult citizens, delimitation of constituencies, issuance of election notification, fixing of the election schedule, verification of candidate nomination papers, receipt of votes, counting of votes, declaration of winning candidate, etc. Also, among the special roles played by the Election Commission of India in the field of elections are-

a) Model Code of Conduct (MCC)

The Model Code of Conduct is a procedure for conducting elections in a free, fair, and transparent manner. In which the Election Commission of India issues guidelines on the conduct of candidates of political parties, guidelines for election manifestos, meetings, processions, and the nature of speeches in meetings, etc.

b) Conduct for By-election and Mid-term Election

Elections to form new Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are called general elections every five years. However, in this case, the Election Commission of India plays a special role in conducting By-election and Mid-term elections.

- ✓ **By-election** – A by-election is also known as a special election. If a seat becomes vacant before the full term of the Lok Sabha or State Assembly due to any reason, the election held to fill the respective seat is called a by-election. These vacancies can be due to various reasons like resignation, disqualification of members, death, etc.
- ✓ **Mid-term Election**- if for any reason the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly is dissolved before the completion of 5 years, the election is called Mid-term Election. Elections are usually held because the government has lost the confidence of the majority in the legislature.

c) Use of Modern Equipment

The Election Commission of India plays a novel and special role through the use of modern machinery in the electoral field. Examples are EVM (s), VVPAT (s), CCTV Camera (s), etc. The Election Commission of India also plays a special role in conducting elections on time in difficult situations. An example is the 2020-2021 assembly elections of states like Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Nagaland, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, etc., which were conducted keeping in view the public health awareness in the Covid-19 Pandemic situation.

IX. Way to Forward

- To prescribe the minimum educational qualification criteria for candidates contesting elections.
- Immediately issue a moratorium on forming new parties in Indian politics.
- Taking strict measures to stop religious speech and propaganda in the political field.
- Stop buying of MPs and MLAs by political parties.
- Imposing restrictions on leaders changing party at least 3 months before Lok Sabha/State Assembly elections.
- Conducting voting and counting processes through a biometric system under CCTV cameras for electoral transparency.

X. Conclusion

In a democratic state as vastly diverse as India, multi-party democracy has flourished due to the active participation of various political parties representing different ideologies and interests. The adult citizens of the country spontaneously elect representatives of their trusted choice. In this case, a very important role is played by the Election Commission of India, conducting the elections of the country without any discrimination by standing in the same line, the same straight line of all adult citizens irrespective of race-religion-caste, gender discrimination, etc., which is an ideal model. With such a large population of multi-party democratic India, it is not an easy task to complete the election process on time. Nevertheless, the Election Commission of India does so by adopting various methods. To uphold the democratic process, the Election Commission of India plays a very important role in protecting the democratic principles of the nation through free, fair, and transparent elections.

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