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Glory of Regional Political Parties: with special reference to Karnataka

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Abstract:

India boasts of being largest democracy in the world. In such political system and democracy, political parties, both national and regional play an important role. India has a multi-party system with recognition accorded to national and state and district level parties. The status is reviewed periodically by the Election Commission of India (ECI). Other political parties that wish to contest local, state or national elections are required to be registered by the Election Commission of India. Registered parties are considered as recognized national or state level parties based upon their party's objective criteria. A recognized party enjoys privileges like a reserved party symbol, free broadcast time on state run television and radio, a consultation in setting of election dates and giving input in setting electoral rules and regulations. As per recent publication from Election Commission of India (2018), the total number of parties registered in India is 2,598, out of which, 8 are National parties, 52 are recognized as State parties and 2,538 are unrecognized parties.

One of the important feature of the Indian Party System is the presence of a large number of regional parties. Regional party means "a party which generally operates within a limited geographical area and its activities are restricted only to a single or few states". Added to this, compared with more comprehensive objectives of national political parties, these regional parties represent the interest, needs and requirements of a particular area. Regional parties necessarily concentrate on specific issues concerning, such as, usage of river water, creating local job opportunities, meeting a local needs of the people etc., In simple words, regional parties differ from National parties both in terms of their objectives, outlook, operations as well as the interests they pursue.

Key Words: Democracy, Regional requirements, Local needs, Regional demands, Political party.

Introduction:

Regional parties, aims and follows bottom – top approach. Therefore, their operations, objectives, functioning is restricted to a particular geographical area, these regional parties merely seek to capture power at the state or regional level and do not aspire to control the national government or administration of the entire country. It must be noted that in India, the number of regional parties is much larger than the national parties and in some of the States such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir etc., the regional parties play a decisive role in local administration or in government formation. Most of the time, due to their poor strength, they might not come to power independently. But it is a known and agreed fact that many a times, in the political scenario, these regional parties were truly the king makers, if not kind themselves. Huge geographical land area of India, with diversified culture, unique blend of characteristic features of Indian society, constitutional provisions ensuring equal voting rights, opportunities, universal adult franchise and several other factors of the Indian society, has given rise to a large number of political parties in India. Due to this, India, apart from having largest democracy in the world also known for having largest number of regional political parties with huge memberships. According to an estimate, more than 190 million India's population is being governed by regional parties.

India is a multi-lingual and a multicultural nation. Significance and role of regional political parties in India, cannot be traced during pre independence era. However, since independence many regional political parties have emerged in India and gained significant influence in some states. Some political observers opines that this trend is a clear demonstration of the 'resurgence of regionalism' on the ground that there are more regional parties are existing in India not only that, with passage of time, more and more regional parties are coming to power, this growing trend would bring more balance in the political power between central and various states. Several research have been conducted in this direction to understand the role and importance regional political parties and it has been concluded that regional parties are in a better position and able to understand regional demands and aspirations, in Comparison with National parties. Added to this linguistic and cultural diversities prevalent in India, gave rise to separatist tendencies.

Formation and classifying India, on linguistic basis, the process, which started in 1956, laid the foundation for the creation of regional parties. People living in a particular linguistic region tend to identify and attach themselves with that region. Political parties also try to exploit the regional ethnic and cultural factors. From another perspective, uneven development of regions also brought about a sense of discrimination and alienation leading to the formation of regional parties.

Since the first general elections in 1951-1952 the Indian political system has experienced the emergence of several regional and sub-regional political parties. Regional parties were generally formed due to factionalism in the congress or other political parties, which were completely dissolved when accommodated in the power circles or absorbed by the parent organizations. Some of the political parties had no particular ideology except to gain power. Most of such parties were headed by disgruntled leaders of the major parties without any cadres of proper organization. In a majority of cases these parties have come into existence because of the excessive centralism and

monopolistic politics of the congress. Particularly after the fourth general elections in 1967, the emergence of regional political parties to power and the crucial role played by these parties in some of the state is noteworthy. Hence, regional political parties, which manifest 'regionalism', started becoming more and more prominent. Regionalism is a feeling or an ideology among a section of people residing in a particular geographical area featured with unique language, culture, tradition etc. and the feeling of nativity and a sense that that they are the sons of the soil and every opportunity that exists in the local territorial land must be accorded, first to the people of nativity and not to the outsiders. The feeling of regionalism may arise either due to the continuous neglect of a particular area or region by the ruling authorities or it may spring up as a result of increasing political awareness of backward people that have been discriminated against. Quite often some political leaders encourage the feeling of regionalism to maintain their hold over a particular area or group of people. The term Regionalism has two connotations. In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region is preference to the country or the state. In the positive sense it is a political attribute associated with people's love for their region, culture, language, etc. with a view to maintain their independent identity. While positive regionalism is a welcome thing in so far maintaining as it encourages the people to develop a sense of brotherhood and commonness on the basis of common language, religion or historical background. The negative sense of regionalism is a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country. In the Indian context generally the term regionalism has been used in the negative sense.

Causes for the growth of regionalism:

With the passage of time, regionalism has grown excessively in India in general and in Karnataka in particular. Two reasons are worth mentioning over here. They are:-

Growth of Regional Political Parties started gaining momentum, as they fundamentally seek more political autonomy and freedom of operation from central government. These regional political parties try to have their own political identity and want to be free from the clutches of the central government. Increasing interference by the Centre in the local affairs of the states has hurt the regional feelings and local interest. Therefore the demand for autonomy, has been a single common motive of regional political parties. The other important reason, which led to the growth of regional political parties in India, has a negative perspective shade of regionalism. It emerges, when states demand separation from the Centre and try to establish an independent identity of their own. Disputes between states over sharing of river water, importance given by the states to the language of majority and to people of their own states in job opportunities has also given rise to feelings of regionalism. Migration of people from backward state to a developed state for employment opportunities have often resulted in a hostile attitude against the migrants.

However, there are multiple factors, which have also resulted in the growth of regionalism in India. Some of them are:

- To protest the policy actions of the central government, when central government tries to impose a particular ideology, language or cultural pattern on all people and groups. For example: southern states of India, resisted imposition of Hindi as an official language because of the apprehension, that this would lead to domination of

the North. Similarly, in Assam anti-foreigner movement was launched by the Assamese to preserve their own culture.

- Continuous neglect of an area or region by the ruling parties and concentration of administrative and political power has given rise to demand for decentralization of authority and bifurcate of unilingual states. On occasion 'sons of soil theory' has been put forth to promote the interests of neglected groups or areas of the state.
- The desire of the various units of the Indian federal system to maintain their sub cultural regions and greater degree of self-government has promoted regionalism and given rise to demand for greater autonomy.
- The desire to capture the power. It is well known that political parties like DMK, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Telugu Desam, Asom Gana Parishad, Janata Dal (s) etc., have contested the election by putting forth the local problems and promising solution to those, if they come to power.
- Interaction between the forces of modernisation and mass participation has also largely contributed to the growth of regionalism in India. As the country is still away from realizing the goal of a nation state, the various groups have failed to identify their group interests with national interests, hence the feeling of regionalism has persisted.
- Growing awareness among the people of backward areas, that they are being discriminated against, has also promoted feeling of regionalism. Local political leaders have fully exploited this factor and tried to feed the people with the idea that the Central Government has deliberately trying to maintain regional imbalances by neglecting social and economic development of certain areas.

Objectives of the study:

- ❖ To identify the importance of regional political parties in Indian political system.
- ❖ To know the causes for the growth of regional political parties in India
- ❖ To analyze the factors responsible for the growth of regional parties in Karnataka.

Regional Political Parties in Karnataka:

Despite regional parties operate within very limited area and pursue only limited objective, they have played significant role both in the State as well as in central politics. The regional political parties formed governments in several states and tried to give concrete shape to their policies and programmes. Probably the greatest service rendered by the regional political parties is that they have focused the attention of the people in remote areas on various political and economic issues and contributed to their political awakening. Above all, the regional parties have been able to impress on the national political parties that they cannot put up with their attitude of indifference towards regional problems and have compelled them to take keen interest in the resolution of their problems. In short it can be said that the regional political parties have not only profoundly affected and influenced the regional politics but also left tremendous impact on the national politics. Karnataka Politics has long been featured by a sea saw struggle between two dominant communities of the state viz., Lingayats and Vokkaligas. However, from few decades, Dalit has been the new addition.

Karnataka is a state consisting of 30 districts is divided into four administrative divisions namely Bangalore, Mysore, Belgaum and Gulbarga. (Karnataka Gazetteer, 2011). Politically, Karnataka has its own Legislative Assembly (Vidhana Sabha) and Legislative Council (Vidhana Parishad), which has 224 and 75 members respectively. Karnataka has carved its own unique path in the evolution of political parties and its political process since independence. In 1881, the “Peoples Representative Assembly” was established in the princely state of Mysore by Dewan C. Rangacharlu. It contributed to the development of administration and politics in Karnataka. This was one of the major contributions of the rule of Dewans in Mysore. Later, up to the period of the formation of responsible government in Mysore, several institutions and organizations were formed based on caste, community and age. It also influenced the development of political parties in Karnataka such as Vokkaligara Sangh, Lingayath Education Association and other communal associations. In December 1917, the backward class community started a non-brahmin organisation called the “Praja Mitra Mandali”. This was the first political party that originated in Karnataka and S. Chennaiah was the first president of it. However, in 1938, the “Mysore Congress”, a strong political party, originated in Karnataka. The first session of the Mysore Congress was held at Shivapura in April 1938 under the leadership of T. Siddalingaiah. A regional political party, the Kannada Chaluvali Vatal Paksha was established for the protection of language, land and water of Kannadigas in Karnataka under the leadership of Vatal Nagaraj. In 1999, H. D. Devegowda started Janata Dal (Secular), a regional political party in Karnataka. Earlier, it allied with the Janata party. Later, other political parties followed to play a role in Karnataka politics and these included Karnataka Janata Party (KJP) and BSR Congress.

Despite the fact, that these regional political parties in Karnataka, have failed to get and win majority seats, which enables them to form government and to take control of ruling, no one can deny the fact that, they have played decisive role in government formulation, either being a part of it or by extending their support as a coalition or through outside support. As earlier witnessed in Karnataka, these regional political parties, are capable of winning only few seats. The number of assembly seats they are able to win lies either in single digit or maximum double digits (as is the case with Janata Dal (secular). However, these parties played a crucial role in government formation, when majority party lacked the needed majority. It was clearly evident in 2018 elections. Karnataka having 224 Vidhana Sabha constituencies, the magic number was 113. No political party making that magic number, were strongly looking at regional political parties like Bahujana Samajwadi Party in Karnataka, which had won 1 seat, KPJP, which had won one seat and independent candidates, who won out of their own personal charm.

Therefore, regional political parties, though operate within very limited area and pursue only limited objective, they have played significant role both in the State as well as in central politics. Regional political parties are in a better position and able to understand regional demands and aspirations, in Comparison with National parties. Hence it is rightly denoted as “resurgence of regionalism”.

Conclusion:

Regional party operates within a limited geographical area and its activities are restricted only to a single or few states. Added to this, compared with more comprehensive objectives of national political parties, these regional parties represent the interest, needs and requirements of a particular area. Regional parties necessarily concentrate on specific issues concerning, such as, usage of river water, creating local job opportunities, meeting a local needs of the people etc., Probably the greatest service rendered by the regional political parties is that they have focused the attention of the people in remote areas on various political and economic issues and contributed to their political awakening. Therefore, regional political parties, though operate within very limited area and pursue only limited objective, they have played significant role both in the State as well as in central politics.

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