

Influence Of Regional Parties On National Politics: A Study

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Abstract:

India has the largest democracy in the world and one of the important feature of the Indian Party System is the presence of a large number of regional parties, which basically means “a party operating within a limited geographical area and its activities are restricted only to a single or few states”. India has a multi-party system with recognition conferred to national, state and district level parties. Those political parties who wish to contest local, state or national elections are required to be registered by the Election Commission of India. The status is reviewed periodically by the Election Commission of India (ECI). 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. Registered parties are considered as recognized national or state level parties based upon their party’s objective criteria. These regional parties functions simultaneously with national parties and will have huge influence and impact on national politics. Compared to the 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, such as, usage of river water, creating local job opportunities, meeting the 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. This paper attempts to highlight the role and influence casted by regional parties in exercising national policies and politics.

Key Words: Democracy, Election system, Multi Party system, Regional Parties, Local objectives, Regional demand.

Introduction:

India has the largest democracy in the world and one of the important feature of the Indian Party System is the presence of a large number of regional parties, which basically means “a party operating within a limited geographical area and its activities are restricted only to a single or few states”. These regional parties functions simultaneously with national parties and will have huge influence and impact on national policies. Regional parties 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. Regional parties, aims and follows bottom – top approach. In India, 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.

India is a multi-lingual and a multicultural nation. Vast 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. Several researches have been conducted to understand the role and importance regional political parties and it has been observed 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. 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 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. 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.

Evolution of Regional Party system in India

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. Though 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 national politics. The regional political parties formed governments in several states and tried to give concrete shape to their policies and programmes. Most of the regional parties were headed by disgruntled leaders of the major parties without any cadres of proper

organization. In majority of cases regional parties have come into existence because of the excessive centralism and monopolistic politics of the congress party.

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 every opportunity that exists in the local territorial land must be accorded, first to the people of the region 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. 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 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.

Contributing factors for the growth of Regional Parties:

Growth of Regional Political Parties is gaining momentum, as they fundamentally seek more political autonomy and freedom of operation from central government. It emerges, when states demand separation from the Centre and try to establish an independent identity of their own. 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. 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. Therefore the demand for autonomy, has been a single common motive of regional political parties.

However, there are multiple factors, which led to the growth of regional parties in India. Some of them are:

- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- The desire to capture the power. It is well known that political parties like DMK, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Telugu Desam, Assom 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Role and influence of regional parties on national politics

The role of regional political parties in the Indian political system has been enormous. One hand regional parties have helped in the development of participatory political culture and provided a check against the over shadowing tendencies of the Central government; on the other, they are also a source of strength for the development of the federal process in India. Regional parties are more concerned with the interests of certain groups than with the general welfare of the nation. Regional parties identifies the interest of a particular ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. Growing presence and salience of regional parties is, undoubtedly, the most outstanding aspect of political development in India over the past few years. These have catalyzed a realignment of political process and their impact on the structure and process of politics has been multi directional and far reaching. The regional parties have made a strong impact on the nature of Centre-State relations in India. They are a natural consequence of a democratic system based on adult franchise in multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-linguistic societies like India. Thus, regional party growth is in synergy with entire spirit of democracy.

Observers view regional parties as catalysts for redefining governance. To make their case, they point to the rise of a new class of state leaders, like Nitish Kumar of Janata Dal (United) in the state of Bihar or Biju Janata Dal's Naveen Patnaik of Odisha, who have demonstrated that good economics can also make for good politics.

Regional parties influence over foreign policy is growing. Few can dispute that the role of regional parties as foreign policy actors has grown over time, but it is less clear that recent headline-grabbing tussles signify a new or more significant twist in the struggle for a voice in this arena. Two prominent instances of regional parties inserting themselves into important foreign policy decisions of the central government. The chief of Trinmool Congress Party, Mamta Banerjee personally scuttled a water-sharing agreement that New Delhi had painstakingly negotiated with Bangladesh over the Teesta River. The treaty had been a critical component of the central government's plans to improve relations with its neighbor to the east that is, until Banerjee effectively vetoed the move. Similarly, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Party of Tamil Nadu quit the ruling coalition over the center's support for what the party considered to be a weakly worded UN resolution on the Sri Lankan government's treatment of its Tamil minority. Yet, this kind of foreign policy maneuvering is not as new as is often advertised. Since the opening up of the Indian economy in 1991, states have consistently exercised their newfound economic policy latitude to craft their own strategies to woo foreign investors irrespective of New Delhi's outlook.

Regional parties have provided a place for better representation of local issues like Mizo National Front, putting forward the demands of tribes. Regional parties also have strengthened the federal axis of Indian democracy by providing voice and bargaining powers to the state. They have made the political process more competitive and brought leadership role out of the clutches of major parties only. It has challenged the One Party Dominant system, especially the Congress Era and thus helps in breaking the monopoly of one party. Apart from helping in widening the choices for the voters. Now a voter can vote the party representing the interest of his state. The political awareness of the people have been raised due to the efforts of Regional parties, they look at narrow and local social issues and brought them in front of the public. Therefore generating more political consciousness among masses. They provide a ground for the representation of minority, therefore making democracy successful. As democracy aims at equal representation of both majority as well as the minority. Regional parties also help in preventing tyranny of party in power. As a party which is in power at both centre and state may have a dictatorial and bias attitude. They have played an important role in the times of coalition politics, by providing support to other parties in lieu of benefits for their regions.

Conclusion:

The changing political landscape has brought about new emerging role of regional parties. Emergence, growing number and raising popularity of regional political parties has helped in a new thinking, which admits a positive role that regional parties can play in the process of nation building. Participation of regional political parties in national politics has been a new factor of Indian politics and federalism. Regional parties have provided a place

for better representation of local issues. Regional parties also have strengthened the federal axis of Indian democracy by providing voice and bargaining powers to the state. They have made the political process more competitive and brought leadership role out of the clutches of major parties.

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