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The Functioning of Party System on Post-Reform India

Ranjan Kumar Mohanta, Research Scholar in Political Science, North Orissa University, Takatpur, Baripada

Our experiences with political parties in India have not been altogether happy one, but parties have been prominent features of our political life as our founding fathers have adopted a parliamentary democratic political system. Political parties in India, imperfectly but discernibly, have been significant in performing functions such as political aggregation, articulation, socialization & participation & thus they have been important components of Indian political system. But after seventy one years of independence we have not been successful in our attempts to achieve the goal set in the Constitution. Electoral politics & political parties have not been successful in establishing democratic socialism. Till today we have not achieved social & economical freedom which is the superstructure of all other freedoms. Hence, it is high time for rethinking about India's political system, political parties & electoral politics.

In this article an attempt has been made to list four on the functioning of political parties in post-reform India. Here, firstly "political parties in India are personality-oriented"-holds true when we see the functioning of party system in India.

In post-colonial days all political parties in India considered themselves as both apolitical party & a mobilisational movement. Neither the statesmen nor the national elites ever thought of institutionalizing party system in India. They never thought it fit to bring a legislation defining & presenting roles, organizations, ethics & behavior of political parties in India. And that is the source of great distortions that have occurred in the electoral politics in the last sixty one years.

In sharp contrast to the political system, the parties are undemocratic. In every party we will find a Supremo – Sonia Gandhi in Congress, Vajpayee – Advani in BJP, Jyoti Basu in CPM, Nabin Pattnaik in BJD, Lalu in RJD, Nitish Kumar in JD(U), Bal Thackeray in Shiv Sena, Mamata Banerjee in Trinamul, Jayalalita in AIADMK, Karunanidhi in DMK, Chandrababu Naidu in Telugu Desham and so on.

Only due to the radical steps taken by T.N. Seshan as the CEC of India & being pressurized by his successors, now we see the formations of working committees showing periodic elections to different

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party posts in a democratic manner which again in democratic outwardly. From lowest to the highest ring each party is manned by men & women nominated by its unelected leader. No party today follows its constitutional procedures in running its affairs.

While our democratic politics is secular & can't circle around personalities, the parties are entirely personality oriented & thrive on personality cults rather than ideology.

Party factionalism is hardly ever caused by differences over principles, but almost always by personal rivalries to hold key posts, etc. which is sharpened by caste, religion, region & ethnic factions.

No political party today is bound by a set of rules & regulations of its own making. A party constitution/ memorandum submitted at the time of registration is a private document. It can't be enforced by a court of law. The leader or the chief of the party therefore is free to behave with utmost arbitrariness.

So from the above discussion we can certainly say that parties are revolving around persons than principle.

Secondly –“place of ideology is secondary in Indian party system”- also holds true as its close to the first one.

As we have accepted, adopted & implemented a written constitution for our governance & polity, party ideology here means the ideology of the constitution enshrined in the preamble & chapter-IV of the Constitution of India.

Polity of any nation is influenced by the societal elements. We fought freedom movement to make India free from British control & also to make ourselves free from poverty, caste, religion, authoritarianism, Zamindari system, backwardness etc. In India we have left parties like CPI, CPM, SUCI, Forward Block etc. We have also rightist party like BJP. At the same time, we have centrist parties striking balance between left & right- like Congress.

In our electoral politics we see many interesting happenings. In West Bengal we saw Congress & Trinamul Congress fighting with each other in the parliamentary elections. But in the post-election period, we saw a coalition between two in the Center, where Congress & Trinamul joined together. In Odisha, to the local bodies elections of 2007, we saw BJD & BJP fighting with each other, while there was a



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coalition government of both in the state. Similarly in Goa we see a coalition of BJP & Congress in the formation of state government. In South earlier Jayalalita was with NDA (BJP) & now she is with Congress & Karunanidhi with NDA now. So from these instances we can conclude that the place of ideology is secondary in Indian party system.

Thirdly -“Coalition is now the trend in Indian politics”-is also true today in Indian situation.

We saw the dominance of Congress since 1952. In 1977 for the first time we saw a coalition government of four-Congress (O) CFD, Lok Dal & Jansangh to make Janata Dal in the centre. We also saw a coalition government of V.P. Singh with BJP & Left in the centre. Since 90's we see a regular trend towards coalition in the centre. We saw Vajpayee with 23 parties & again becoming failure with 13 in the next term. Therefore, we see a regular trend towards coalition with BJP & Congress taking the lead-we see NDA & UPA-respectively. This is due to the fact that there is a decline in the national party & the rise of regional party in states.

The single dominate party system has finally come to an end. The political system has become truly pluralistic & will be more so in the coming years. The single dominated party system concealed India's great diversities. But now the emergence of a multi-party system has awakened India's diverse linguistic & ethnic groups to demand their own political identities. Now, at the national level a larger party is depending upon the support of small parties to remain in power. Before 90's a change in the national government influenced the life of state government, but in 90's we see the reverse.

This is due to the fact that people's identities are becoming pluralistic too. So our highlights on coalition trend remains valid.

Lastly -“in a post-reform India we see a gap between people/citizen & party”-also holds true to some extent.

The post-reform India after 1991 is really different, where we see outside force deciding for ourselves, what to produce, what to use & even what to eat is not under our preview. It is the Market of MNCs. The state has joined with WTO. The state signed the proposal of World Bank in 1991. So our budget-the economic nerve centre -is prepared by the direction given by DFID. The government or the party/parties in power are not thinking about the choice/selection of the citizen/people, rather they are thinking about



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outsiders (MNCs/ TNCs)- as if their absence will bring a disaster to the country. So we are inviting them resentment among people/citizen on various projects like POSCO, Vedanta in Odisha & Tata in West Bengal etc. Here we see a gap between citizen's choice & the choice of government. The trend is today to attract more foreign investment. If they go back, that will hamper our image at global level. So our governments/parties are always with them. When Dunkel came BJP opposed it severely. But when same BJP came to power in the next election, Vajpayee invited Clinton to India, who came with 150 Companies to start business here. So we see a gap between popular choice & the choice of the government/party.

It can be concluding on the above issue, we can say that democratization of party system is very much essential. Today, there is no democracy within the party. Hence, there is need for emerging inner party democracy within political parties & need for audit of their party accounts & funds. So there is need for a people's non-political movement to have an India based on equality-social, economic, political, federal & gender-based. But such an India cannot be formed on the basis of borrowed blue-prints. It has to be invented a new. We achieved our freedom through Indian method of struggle-Non-violence. But we tried to govern ourselves through western model of democracy-Parliamentary Democracy. Here, we made the mistake. So we want participatory democracy in the place of present one, which will be based on ancient Indian culture with Gandhian principles.