

## **Party Systems and Indian Federalism – A Study**

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### **Introduction**

A political system known as federalism divides authority among the several tiers of government. In the modern world, federalism has been the most favored form of government. It was caused by particular events like as war, economic hardship, the impact of colonialism, and social and political unrest in numerous nations. The demands of different nations led to the acceptance and adoption of federalism as a political structure. It illustrates how federalism is a dynamic idea. According to Ronald L. Watts, "there is no single pure model of federation that is appropriate everywhere." Instead, the fundamental idea of combining self-rule for certain reasons and shared rule for others inside a same political system so that neither is subservient to the other has been adapted in many ways to suit various situations. Federalism does not adhere to the consistency of structure.

India adopted the federal political system since independence. Historically India was not a federal country. At the time when India was the victim of British colonialism, centralisation was the prominent feature of Indian political system. Britishers ruled over the whole of India through highly centralised political system. They fully controlled all the provinces. The Government of India Act 1919, commonly known as Montague Chelmsford report, was the first tiny step towards federation by introducing Diarchy but it did not get success. Federalism has been given a shape by the Government of India Act of 1935 (hereinafter after referred as "1935 Act"). The 1935 Act introduced the federal structure of India with the process of decentralisation.

India adopted parliamentary form of democracy since independence. In the parliamentary form of democracy political process becomes significant. Political process is a key figure in maintaining the flow of democratization of a country. In the political process of a democracy political parties remain significant players. Political party is group of individuals sharing common ideology with collective aspiration to get into the power. Political parties are inseparable part of any democratic political system. The role increases during the elections process when political parties establish candidates and take part in the elections by regular election campaigns and contesting elections. Political parties, not only contest elections but also prepares grounds for the political socializations. Political parties create public opinion by adopting various means of mass media, print media etc. Social networking campaigns are the recent invention in the electoral process a country. Political parties are adopting modern means of campaigns by which they try to create the favourable public opinion to get benefitted in the election process. "Political parties and the party system in India have been greatly influenced by cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, traditions of the nationalist movement, contrasting styles of party leadership and ideological perspectives faced. The two main categories of political parties in India are National and State, and the Electoral Commission of India recognizes them as such based on certain specific criteria. Regional parties are stronger in many states compared to national parties". Despite the fact that national parties have the dominance in the political system, many regional parties have formed the sub-national government in various states of North and South India entirely based on their own capacities and capabilities.

## **Political Parties and Indian Federalism**

Political parties have played a crucial role in social and political transformation, but party dominance has also undergone enormous changes. A multitude of new parties emerged and many of them became ruling parties at the national, state or both levels. During the decades following independence, the plural and federal character of India's polity quickly asserted itself.

The Congress was the only major political party controlling all the figures of independence during India's freedom fight. The heights of Congress remained unaffected, despite the emergence of numerous new political groups. The Congress party, formally known as the "Indian National Congress," assumed power when India gained its independence in 1947. The term "single party dominating system" refers to the party structure that prevailed during the first 20 years following independence. Despite adopting a multi-party system, India was ruled by a single dominating party. The years of the Indian party system were referred to as the "Congress System" by Rajni Kothari. In the late 1960s, Congress Party influence began to decline. Within two decades of first general elections, the impact of Congress falls down in the year of 1967. Other national and state political parties emerged in the Indian political system. In many states of India, the dominance of Congress became lesser as state political parties formed government there. For e.g., in the state of Tamil Nadu, DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) led coalition formed the government by defeating the Indian National Congress in the fourth legislative assembly elections. The years of 1967 marked structural change in the political system of India. This resulted into competitive party system in place of dominant political system. The massive domination of Congress has eroded that party lost majority in state assembly elections of eight states, namely Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras/Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Rajasthan, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh over sixteen states apart. Haque and Ghosh said that "the national proportion of votes in Congress fell from 44.7% to 40.8%. The election dealt a terrible blow to the dominance of Congress.

However, the return of Indira Gandhi into power flipped the party politics structure of Indian political system. She adopted confrontational posture both towards opposition parties at national level and towards non-Congress governments in various states. The shift in the party system after Indira Gandhi changed the nature of Indian federal system. She removed the governors of non-congress party ruling states. "She created a 'pyramidal type of decision-making structure' in party as well as in government. Indira Gandhi started purging politicians such as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam and Madhya Pradesh. Earlier, all disputes in the party were resolved through the Congress High Command but she started resolving all the conflicts at intra-party level. Jayaprakash Narayan symbolized it as 'Indira is India and India is Indira.' As a result, India was poised towards 'one party dominant system to one-party authoritative rule'".

The shift in power from Indira Gandhi to Rajeev Gandhi led certain hopes for the party politics along with the federal political structure of the country. However, the era of Rajeev Gandhi did not reflect desirable changes as he followed the working practices of his mother. The years of 1989 marked the shift in the structure of political system. The era of coalition government started in Indian politics. Coalition government is the form of government whereby no single party gets majority in the general elections. The era led to the emergence of multi-party rule with coalition politics in India. The beginning of coalition politics changed the dynamics of Centre-state relation to a certain extent. Participation of many regional political parties in the coalition government at the Centre level reflects the significant shift from centralised governance to shared rule and

federal governance. The rise of regional parties at the Centre impacted the federal structure by the formation of coalition government at Centre level. The emergence of regional parties at Centre resulted into weak government at the national level. Instability, lack of collective decisions and incompleteness of tenure were some of the tenets of coalition government. The demands concerning state autonomy increased in the period of coalition government. Every party to the Centre coalition attempts to assert its own geographical, cultural and economic interests in the political process. The regional parties started focusing on the development of their own region instead of focussing on the development of the nation as a whole.

National Front under the leadership of V.P. Singh formed the government at the Centre in 1989. "Singh's National Front government was a coalition among disparate individuals and parties to remain the Congress (I) out of power. The alliance started to fall apart because of the partisan interests and personality squabbles. Under the leadership of Prime Minister, P. V. Narsimha Rao, minority government was formed at the Centre in June 1991. On the one hand, the Rao government was successful in initiating economic reforms, it pursued liberalization and globalization much to the satisfaction of the World Bank- International Monetary Fund (IMP) combine, and side by side it failed to promote value-based politics". The government of Rao successfully completed the tenure. The next Lok Sabha elections witnessed the serious crisis in the political system in India when no party even the coalition got the majority to form the government. However, National government formed but no party got successes in completing its tenure. The 13th Lok Sabha election held on October 1999 (somewhat delayed because of Kargil war) and the BJP-led omnibus alliance of 24 parties [the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)] got a comfortable working majority. Atal Bihari Vajpayee sworn as the Prime Minister of India. The shift in political system arose with the change in the leadership in the 14th General Assembly elections when Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) formed the government. UPA successfully returned to the power for the next tenure in the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister of India. Federal fabric of India witnessed several issues as states were demanding autonomy along with review of Centre- state relations in India. In light of demands by states, Dr. Singh formed Punchhi commission to review the dynamics of Centre- state relations in India. However, the recommendations made by Punchhi Commission did not get structural form much. The year of 2014 witnessed major shift in power as BJP led alliance National Democratic Alliance (NDA) formed the government with the single majority party.

### **Political Party and Indian Federalism From 2014 Onwards**

The 2014 general Lok Sabha election was a turning point in Indian political history. After 1889, it was the reappearance of a single majority party at the center. Even though the BJP was the only majoritarian party to win, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the BJP, created its administration at the federal level. After leading the majority party, Shri Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's prime minister. He pledged to give states a platform to express their opinions and requests about the operation of center-state relations while running for office. Following his appointment as India's prime minister, he introduced the concept of "Cooperative Federalism in India," which sparked several new developments in Indian federalism.

"The process of progressing towards cooperative federalism envisaged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is reflected in the policy initiative like 14th finance commission recommendation to increase in the share of divisible tax pool from 32 percent to 42 percent and transferring 68 percent divisible pool to the states. The larger transfers to the states are accompanied by the significant reduction in the central scheme and rationalization of remaining schemes to give

greater flexibility and control to individual states". Narendra Modi during a programme in Hyderabad said that, "The Centre will join hands with the states in working towards goal since it is possible only with the cooperative federalism, wherein the Centre and states work together". Various new initiatives have been taken in the new era of cooperative federalism in India.

One of the Prime Minister Modi's key projects for India's transition to cooperative federalism is the National Institution for Transforming India, or NITI Aayog. The Planning Commission, which was founded by India's first Prime Minister Nehru, was superseded by NITI Aayog. By claiming that NITI Aayog will have the direct involvement of states in the creation of national policy, something the Planning Commission lacked, PM Modi replaced it. Since the beginning, the fiscal aspect of the relationship between the center and the state has been a major topic of dispute. In the past, states demanded greater financial independence by allocating union tax income to state development projects. In order to promote cooperative federalism, Narendra Modi agreed with the 14th Finance Commission's advice. "Considering all factors, in view, increasing the share of tax devolution to 42 percent of the divisible would serve the twin objectives of increasing the flow of unconditional transfer to the states and yet leave appropriate fiscal space for the union to carry out specific purpose transfers to the states". Centre government by accepting the demands provided autonomy to states in economic sphere to regulate the working as their own way. The Central government and state governments have jointly launched several initiatives and schemes, such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) and the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (Prime Minister's Irrigation Scheme). These initiatives have been designed to address national-level challenges, with the involvement of state governments in planning and implementation. The Prime Minister and his cabinet regularly interact with state governments, seeking their feedback and ideas on policy initiatives. The Inter State Council, which is a constitutional body, provides a platform for the Central and state governments to discuss issues of common interest.

Despite efforts to promote cooperatives federalism, there have been tensions between the Central government and some states. The Present government has to face several criticisms in order to governance. One of the criticisms of National Democratic Alliance is from Parliamentary government to Prime Ministerial government. In the recent years the working of BJP led NDA has changed the political scenario of India and immensely affected the working of Indian federalism. BJP's massive victory in the general elections of 2014 was the return of single party dominance in the realm of Indian political system. Modi government's initial election promises led to the creation of NITI Aayog for the implementation of cooperative federalism in India. NITI Aayog, the replacement of Planning Commission, has many challenges such as grants distribution authority for India, lack of expertise, smaller in size.

### **Conclusion**

Providing the states some financial autonomy is necessary for Indian federalism to operate effectively. The central government should take into account the states' rights to financial freedom. Even though Modi agreed to their demands and the 14th Finance Commission's advice, the state should become less dependent on the federal government in this regard. Effective center-state relations require clear communication and mutual understanding. States should have more autonomy in making choices since they are more conscious of regional and local issues. In order to promote cooperative federalism in India, NITI Aayog is moving forward in this specific direction and using a collaborative strategy. The contentious governor should operate in accordance with the constitution rather than the center government's own existing conditions.

The state list and concurrent list should be less dominated by the center. Only in cases where the states' constitutional mechanism fails may Article 356 of the Constitution be utilized. By fostering a democratic attitude toward states and ensuring that they have adequate representation in national institutions, Indian federalism can be strengthened.

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