Rise of Regional Parties In India

In a democracy, political parties provide an agency to the society to gather different views on various issues and to present these to the government. They bring various representatives together so that a responsible government could be formed. They provide a mechanism to support or restrain the government, make policies, justify or oppose them. **India has a multi-party system.**

**Political Parties in India**

- Every political party in India has to register with the **Election Commission.**
- The Election Commission registers political parties for the purpose of elections and grants them **recognition as national or state parties** on the basis of their poll performance.
- **Recognised Parties:**
  - Are given a unique symbol – only the official candidates of that party can use that election symbol.
  - **National Parties:** A party that secures at least 6% of the total votes in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in four States and wins at least four seats in the Lok Sabha is recognised as a national party.
  - **State Parties:** A party that secures at least 6% of the total votes in an election to the Legislative Assembly of a State and wins at least two seats is recognised as a State party.
- According to the **Election Commission of India**, there are **over 2000 political parties in India, which include eight "recognized national" and more than 50 "recognized state" parties.**

**Regional Parties in India**

- Other than the **8 national parties**- Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Nationalist Congress Party, Communist Parties, Bahujan Samaj Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, All India Trinamool Congress and National People's Party; most of the major parties of the country are classified by the Election Commission as ‘**State parties**’. These are commonly referred to as **regional parties.**
• Yet these parties need not be regional in their ideology or outlook. Some of these parties are all India parties that happen to have succeeded only in some states.
• The presence of a number of **ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and caste groups** within the Indian society is greatly responsible for the origin and growth of regional parties.
• In India regional parties are based on themes like— **Identity, Statehood, Autonomy and Development** etc.
  - **Autonomy** consists of demanding greater powers to the states (like the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir).
  - **Statehood** consists of fighting for an independent state within the country (like the Telangana Rashtra Samiti demanded a separate state of Telangana).
  - **Identity** consists of fighting for recognition of cultural rights of a group (like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra or the DMK fighting for the identity of the Dalits).
  - **Development** consists of regional parties believing that only they can bring development to the people of a particular region.
  - Sometimes regional parties create these ‘**cultural specificities**’ for **electoral gains**.

**Evolution of Regional Party**

- Over the last four decades, the number and strength of regional parties has expanded.
- This has made the Parliament of India **politically more diverse**. Regional political parties have emerged to **fulfill regional aspirations**.
- No one national party is able to secure on its own a majority in Lok Sabha. As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with State parties. The regional political parties started playing a crucial role in coalition politics since 1989.
- It is because of the regional political parties that our **party-system has been federalized**. The Centre has begun to address their problems and respond their aspirations through accommodation.
- The evolving nature of our party system has **strengthened the cooperative trends of our federal system**.

**Various Stages of Indian Party System**

**1952-64 : The Nehruvian era of national consensus**

The **Congress Party was the dominant party** and Indian democracy was essentially a **one party system** also termed as ‘**Congress system**’.

- Congress evolved as the party that was like a **big umbrella** under which all communities and interests and ideologies sought and got a place.
- There were **many small parties competing with the Congress** but they acted mainly as a kind of pressure groups.
1964-77: An Uneasy Transition

- With the death of Jawahar Lal Nehru, and 1967 elections posed challenge to dominance of the congress system.
  
  The Congress failed to secure majorities in eight states and its majority in the Lok Sabha was reduced to very narrow 54% of the seats.

- **Regional parties started growing all over the country.**
- The dismal performance of the Congress led to a series of power struggles within congress.
- Ultimately, the party was split in 1969 and Indira Gandhi’s supremacy was established both in the party and the government.
- However, some leaders like Morarji Desai in Gujarat and JP (Jaiprakash Narain) in Bihar carried out a successful movement against Congress corruption and arbitrary rule.
- Their movement peaked in 1975 when Indira Gandhi for the first and only time in Indian history decided to impose Internal emergency.

1977-80: A Period of a New Consensus and Increasing Inter-Party Conflict

- This led to Emergence of a Multi-Party System in India.
- Many smaller parties had come together to fight the Congress dominance rather than any ideological consensus.
- But, the lack of ideologically coherent policy led to fall of Janata party and congress gained rise of power in 1980.

1980-89: Tussle between the Congress at the centre and the newly emerged regional parties at the state level

- Frivolous use of President’s rule under Article 356.
- However, the regional parties got strengthened and started playing a more assertive role in centre politics.
  
  In the eighth Lok Sabha Elections (1984), the Telugu Desam, a regional party of Andhra Pradesh, emerged as the main opposition party.

1989 to 2014: Multi-party system and Coalition politics

- The death of Rajiv Gandhi, corruption cases (Bofors scandal), economic crisis, all set the tone for an era of coalitions that has lasted for almost twenty five years of coalition governments.
- The modern era of coalition politics has come into being as a consequence of the development of the multi-party system.
However, this period is marred by compulsions of coalition.

- Growth of Regional Parties also lead to ‘rainbow’ coalitions, so called because like the rainbow, they last only a short time.
- Policy paralysis and delay in decision making and bills all result from coalitions.
- In times of emergency, coalition coordination can lead to unacceptable delays.
- Coalition government can obstruct the process of decision making and the conduct of decision implementation.
- Coalition government has turned politics of north India into one of competition for vote banks based on caste and community etc.

On the contrary, during times of coalitions, regional parties served as a moderating force upon exclusionary national parties.

- Regional parties fill a vacuum for protecting minorities.
- The coalition politics has led to empowerment for regional parties from the states and has added to India’s search for true federalism.
  - Thus, it paves the way for a kind of electoral federalism.
- Since 1996, twenty three regional parties have been sharing power at the national level. there is a strong sense of Indianness, or what is called a federal unifier.

2014 to now: Resurgence of One-party System?

- Two general elections 2014 and 2019, saw a single party (BJP) on its own getting the full majority, breaking the 25 years of compulsions of coalition politics.
- However the Government is still formed out of alliance of many political parties.
- But the outlook of regional parties, now appears to be changing from conflictual orientation to a tendency of co-operative bargaining in respect of Centre-state relations.
  - Now the financial problems in the Centre-State relations are the main focus of attention.
- Today, the regional parties have provided a new dimension to the process of national integration and nation building

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, their growth is in synergy with entire spirit of democracy.

For Mind Map