

A study on the changing political ideologies of parties in India

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Abstract: In recent years, India has witnessed a succession of unstable governments, and the reason for such a recurring phenomenon is said to be the archaic and chaotic functioning of political parties. Political parties are indispensable to any democratic system and play the most crucial role in the electoral process in setting up candidates and conducting election campaigns. Alliances and coalitions are made between political parties, broken and changed at whim and fancy and the residual powers are held not by those at the Union level, but by minor parties on the fringes. There is no doubt that Indian political parties have fragmented over the years. Frequent party splits, mergers and counter splits have dramatically increased the number of parties that now contest elections. In 1952, seventy four parties contested elections, while in recent years, this number has increased to more than 177 and has been consistently increasing since 1989. The research question which needs to be answered is the instability at the Union level or in the States be attributed solely to the growing number of parties or the malaise with which, the political system suffers today lies in the functioning and the dynamics of the party system in India, apart from of course, the other causes in the working of the political system as a whole. 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 style of party leadership and clashing ideological perspectives. The two major categories of political parties in India are National and State and are so recognized by the Election Commission of India on the basis of certain specified criteria. As of today, there are six national parties (seven after the split in the Janata Dal in August 1999) and 38 regional parties recognized as such by the Election Commission of India. Each political party will have its own manifesto to face the elections. This paper attempts to make a comparative analysis of the election manifestos of different political parties.

Key words: Election, Manifesto, Political parties, Promises, National and State strategies.

INTRODUCTION

India's major political parties releases their manifestos, which narrates their future plans for the country or state, if they come to power, to woo the Indian electorates. However, the commitment of political parties to implement to promises and devising policies and programmes for the upliftment of marginalized groups, which routinely confronts deprivations and indignities, is still a question mark. Wikipedia defines manifesto as "A manifesto is a published declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government. A manifesto usually accepts a previously published opinion or public consensus or promotes a new idea with prescriptive notions for carrying out changes the author believes should be made. It often is political or artistic in nature, but may present an individual's life stance. Manifestos relating to religious belief are generally referred to as creeds. It is derived from the Italian word 'manifesto' and some argue that it is derived from the Latin word 'Manifestum', meaning clear or conspicuous. Its first recorded use in English is from 1620, in Nathaniel Brent's translation of Paolo Sarpi's History of the Council of Trent. As Shiv Vishvanathan has rightly put: "Manifestos are acts of communication. They seek to inspire with rhetoric". What is it that political parties are promising to the most marginalised populations being persons with disabilities, Dalits and Schedule tribes, women needs a careful analysis.

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 style of party leadership, and clashing ideological perspectives. The history of origin and growth of political parties in India can be traced to the days of

India's struggle for freedom. The Indian National Congress was perhaps the first political party; it came into existence in the year 1885. There were some groups formed by patriotic Indians before that, but they did not converge into becoming a political party. The Indian National Congress was the natural and inevitable outcome of a national awakening. The evolution of the party system after independence presents a study of transformation from one-party dominant system to a complex of multi-party configuration, in which presently strong trends of fragmentation, factionalism, and regionalism, coupled with the desire to form alliances for seeking a share in the pie of power (irrespective of any strong ideological or programmatic commitments) are being increasingly witnessed.

The present phase in the evolution of the party system is noted for two features. One, the general trend amongst both the national and regional parties to move away from the strict ideological framework of the party of the left or the right. Although in general, they do profess to stick to their party ideology or at least are known by certain ideological labels. But in their actual programmatic support they seem to be more pragmatic in as much as they are not reluctant to give up their ideological instance or put it on back burner, if that helps gain them a share of political power. Such trend has been witnessed both at the national as well as at the State level and parties are less inhibited to share power or coalesce in government formation with the groups, who till the other day were their bitter political opponents. Secondly, since the resultant coalition alliances are neither 'ideological' nor have any common objective to cement them together, they are merely short term tactical arrangements established by ambitious politicians that are rooted in the exchange of mutual benefits and compulsions of power, the mobilization of electorate is done through a strategy of support to regional cum segmental or ethnic issues without giving overriding support either to national or primarily local issues.

The national party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in its 'Sankalp Patra' promises to empower women, SC/ST groups, 'Divyang' and transgender persons to bring them into the mainstream by providing assistance in obtaining loans for self-employment. The manifesto however does not provide any clear cut strategy to fulfill these promises. The BJP manifesto

promises 33% reservation for women in Parliament. It further aims to provide reproductive and menstrual health services to women and sanitary aids at Rs. 1. The BJP Manifesto further commits to provide constitutional protection to SC/ST persons and support entrepreneurial ventures by persons from SC/ST communities. For persons with disabilities, the BJP promises to conduct accessibility audits, provide accessible housing and higher interest rates on fixed deposits by persons with disabilities. For transgender persons it ensures self-employment and skill development. Whereas the Indian National Congress (INC) promises to bring a constitutional amendment ensuring 33% representation of women in the national legislature and in the state assemblies. It aims to enforce the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 effectively, promising to provide night shelters for women workers and review the sexual harassment law. It further promises to establish an Equal Opportunity Commission which will recommend affirmative action strategies to achieve equality in education, employment and in economic opportunities. The Congress promises equal protection of the laws to LGBTQI persons, that it will withdraw the Transgender Bill, 2018 and draft a new Bill in consultation with the LGBTQIA+ community. For persons with disabilities the Congress is the only party that promises that Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution be amended to prohibit discrimination on the ground of 'disability'. This is a huge step forward and should be something that all parties should take up irrespective of the outcome of the elections. It further promises to recognise Braille and sign language. It mandates that it will make all public services and public spaces accessible, and to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) has come up with its manifesto in audio and sign language. This initiative by the CPI(M) should inspire other political parties to look into accessibility concerns of the persons with disabilities while preparing their vision documents. The CPI(M) in its manifesto, aims to enact a law against honour crimes, strengthen the law for maintenance of women and children, grant allowances for deserted women, single women, widows and female headed households. It also promises to make public spaces safer for women and increase punishment for caste based crimes against SC/ST women. The CPI(M) promises implementation of the

provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and the Mental Health Care Act, 2017 supported by adequate budgetary allocations. The CPI(M) specifically addresses the rights of LGBTI persons and ensures that it would pass the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, provide legal recognition to same sex couples similar to marriage such as 'civil union' / 'same-sex-partnerships' and pass legislation so that the partner can be listed as a dependent, for inheritance etc., and also pass a comprehensive anti-discriminatory bill. Both the Congress and CPI(M) promise to enact a central legislation to provide reservations in the private sector for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and a law to prevent and punish "hate crimes such as mob-engineered stripping, burning and lynching. The CPI(M) manifesto is one of the most progressive. The party however is at its historical low in terms of seats it represents. While these promises are significant, they are not enough. Persons with disabilities, women, LGBTI persons, SC/ST communities and religious minorities are some of the most marginalised, especially those at the intersections and their fight for dignity remains a perpetual struggle. It is time that political parties start addressing their concerns if they want their votes.

Review of Literature

Baxter, (1969) work on *The Jana Sangh - A Biography of an Indian Political Party* was the first major work on the Jana Sangh. The study deals in detail about "the Hindu Mahasabha" and the party's ideological and organizational base "the RSS". The foundation of the Jana Sangh by Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the party's manifesto, its performance in the first Lok Sabha election (1952) have been described with the help of tables and maps. A thorough and gripping account of the strengthening and the organizational development of the party during 1957-1962 has been presented. The manifestos, status and the electoral performance of the party in the 1957, 1962 and 1967 Lok Sabha elections have been discussed. The positions of the all India Parties in the Hindi speaking areas, urban v/s rural voters and the Jana Sangh v/s Muslims have been analyzed.

Hartmann (1971) had worked on the nature of political parties in India. The study was devoted to the questions like, how these political parties came into

existence, built up their organization and how these operate in the elections at the centre and the state levels. The study also included the electoral performances of these parties in the midterm poll of 1971 and a discussion on their manifestoes.

Andersen and Damle (1987) examined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its working ways in their co-authored work *The Brotherhood in Saffron*. The study begins with a description of Hindu revivalism including the views of modernists and revivalists, protest against British rule, Hindu world view, revivalist organizations, expansion of communication facilities and revivalist response to Gandhi. The formation and development of the RSS has been discussed at great length. The authors have written about the ideology, organization and training of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, its expansion, and its political aspects in detail. The politics of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the name of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (1957 to 1980) and in the name of Bharatiya Janata Party (1980 to 1985) has been discussed widely. The successes and challenges (1977-1980), the dual membership controversy, acceptance of non-Hindus by the RSS and the shift of its focus to the affiliates, especially the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) also have been analysed.

Malik and Singh (1992) in their co-authored paper have focused their analysis on the Bharatiya Janata Party which has challenged the dominance of the Congress (I) during the 1991 Lok Sabha Elections. The roots of the BJP's ideology have been explored. A thorough and gripping account of the merger of Jana Sangh and its participation in several movements from 1967 to 1980 is given by the authors. The leadership of L. K. Advani after the defeat of the party in 1984 Lok Sabha Elections has been assessed. The authors also have underlined discussion on a Hindu group led by Vijaya Raje Scindia; Hindu Chauvinists group from RSS and the sympathizers of the BJP from middle class. A brief description of the BJP's public policies, electoral strategies and electoral performances from 1985 to 1989 have been given with the help of tables. The 1991 Lok Sabha Election has also been analyzed at the state level with its comparison with 1989 election.

Jaffrelot (1996) has paid greater attention to the Hindu Nationalist movement in Indian politics. In the first

part of the book the author has carefully examined three strategies of Hindu Nationalism (formation of Hindu nationalism, ethno-religious mobilization and the politics of secularism), the formation of Jana Sangh and politics of the RSS and the Jana Sangh. The special focus of the author was the explanation of party building process of BJS/BJP especially in Madhya Pradesh. The second part of the book deals with the oscillation of Jana Sangh between two sets of strategies in terms of ideology, mobilization of support, and its reliance on RSS and its party building pattern specially in the case of Madhya Pradesh. The third part of the book concentrates on the contradictions prevailing during the 1970s, such as; the politics of populism and local cadres of Jana Sangh, the assimilation of Jana Sangh in the J.P. movement, the emergency period and Janata Culture. The fourth part deals with the formation and contradictions of BJP; the formation, actions and working of VHP and the BJP's campaign performance in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections and the ethno-religious mobilization on the name of Lord Ram. The fifth part of the book is about party politics of the early 1990s. Issue related to the Mandir and Mandal commission, the campaigning and performance of the BJP in 1991 election and the Ramjanama bhoomi movement is discussed by the author.

Adeney and Saez (2005) in their edited book Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism provided a sum of the contributions made by scholars on the politics of coalition making and the Hindu Nationalism by the BJP. An academic evaluation of the performance of the NDA coalition, relationship between coalition politics and Hindu nationalism, the promises made by the NDA coalition and what they delivered after the elections have been discussed in the work by various scholars. In addition, the work aimed at linking the outcomes with the coalition politics, exogenous factors and the Hindu nationalist ideological agenda. The performance of the BJP-led coalition from 1999 and 2004 elections also has been evaluated. Finally, the work also aimed at making a contribution to the study of Indian politics, largely by comparing different types of administration, specially a comparison between a government led by a Hindu nationalist party versus one that is led by a non-Hindu nationalist party or coalition. A comparison of policy making by

different governments in India also has been provided by the contributors of this work.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the different manifesto of important national political parties of India.
2. To find out the main areas of electoral strength of the party;
3. To map and analyse the changes, if any, in the areas of manifestos of the party being fine tuned with changing scenario.

Need of the study

The beginning of 21st century saw a sharp rise in political mobilization on the basis of social cleavages based on ascriptive identities, in particular of religion and caste. Casteism, communalism and personality domination have been the main planks around which the fragmentation of political parties has taken place, which has resulted in more caste and class-based political violence in the society. Political parties have invariably exploited these sentiments for gaining electoral support and political mobilisation of the voters. Therefore, a detailed study aimed at understanding the transition in the objectives is necessary. In pursuit of the same, the research topic, "Manifesto of Indian Political Parties: A comparative study" has been undertaken for the study.

Political parties in India and common issues with them

Democratic principles stated but not followed: No political party has been able to observe the basic norms of party democracy. The authority in organizational matters has always been from the top to the bottom through successive layers of party structures. Leaders of political parties in Independent India have not always emerged through a process of democratic elections and promotion from the lower levels to the higher and the top. Thus leadership in most political parties in India may be democratic in appearance but highly oligarchic in reality. Frequent rifts between the National and State party organizations in almost all national parties suggest that highly integrated party structures may soon no longer be appropriate.

Poor representation of women: Political parties cannot remain indifferent towards women who constitute nearly 50% of the electorate. Although almost all parties have attempted to build women organizations to secure their support and make their organization more broad-based, but in practice they have fielded much less proportion of women candidates in the elections giving them proportionately much less representation in the legislative bodies than their actual population strength. In recent times this has been a matter of crucial concern in view of the controversy over reservation of 30% or so of the seats in these bodies.

Training of Members: Training and orientation of new members is one of the important functions of political parties. The parties which are organized on the model of cadre party systematically develop appropriate agencies of training for members. But most Indian parties, except for the Communist parties and the BJP have not followed this model. Parties in India do not have a permanent system of training of their members, and whatever arrangements for training are done are done on ad-hoc basis by national or state level organization.

Need for Funds: To perform various functions and contest elections in an effective manner, every political party requires huge funds. Apart from expenditure of office establishment, full-time-workers, agitations, propaganda and travel, parties have to organize election campaigns. But the financial matters of party are kept secret while other aspects of organization are known to people. Very little is known about finances of political parties. In fact, secrecy is maintained even within a party. Only a few leaders at the higher level know the truth about the total funds and expenditure. Parties do not publish statements of accounts, income and expenditure, though financial matters are discussed at conventions and conferences or in meetings of higher bodies like working committee or the executive committee.

Lack of Ideology and Values in Politics: There has been a very sharp erosion in the ideological orientation of political parties. Party dynamics in India has led to the emergence of valueless politics much against the ideals of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who suggested that the Congress party should be disbanded after the achievement of Independence and

its members should engage themselves in the service of the people. While Gandhiji taught us tremendous selflessness, self sacrifice and service to the people, such inspirational values, the democratic norms and institutions have been destroyed systematically over the last fifty years of the working of the Constitution. In the process, both the politicians and political parties have lost their credibility, the ultimate value that should bind them with the masses. There seems to be a crisis of character amongst the politicians, as the system does not encourage the honest leader. Because of the falling moral standards both in the public and among the leaders, criminalisation of politics and politicization of criminals has become the norm. Due to degeneration of leadership, parties have been entangled in power struggle for the sake of personal ends.

Leadership Quality: The older political leadership had risen from the ranks. The rise was neither sudden nor irrational, and their adherence and commitment to party ideals and ideology was unflinching. They respected party discipline. The present day political leadership seems to be in a tremendous hurry to reach upto the top, and is not averse to use short cuts, dubious methods, money or muscle power to achieve their objective. The entry of the toughs and persons with criminal background to the portals of the legislature is a very serious consequence of these trends.

The emergence of regional parties and the 'withering away of national outlook and spirit' thus sets off another crisis. Candidates come to be selected not in terms of accomplishments, ability and merit but on the appendages of caste, creed and community. Ultimately caste becomes the deciding factor on selection. When 'disparate' political groups with caste-based ideologies compete for space in governance, national goals take a back seat. The more serious repercussion of this development is the political violence that has resulted in many parts of the country, particularly in Bihar, where dominating caste groups openly clash with minority groups resulting in a spate of caste-wars and massacres of innocent people. One caste, in its attempt to obtain political power is committing aggression on the other. The talk of minority interests (especially of a community only) by regional parties is only a smoke-screen to hide caste and regional interests. Caste based politics and

casteism are eroding the 'unity' principle in the name of regional autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Caste and religion have in recent years emerged as rallying points to gain electoral support. Unfortunately there is a tendency to play upon caste and religious sentiments and field candidates in elections with an eagle eye on the caste equations and communal configurations. Exploiting caste sentiments and playing off one caste combination against the other with a political axe to grind, perhaps even more than religious bigotry is the very anti-thesis of rationalism, but the monster of casteism has all of a sudden mysteriously gained wide respectability as a means of empowerment of the subaltern India.

A number of academic and research institutions, political observers and analysts, committees and commissions appointed by the Government of India from time to time and concerned scholars, journalists and academicians in their individual capacities have made a number of proposals for reforms in the party system in India. What is promised and what has been delivered must be the barometer to judge the effectiveness or success of any political party. Therefore, what political parties promises during elections to woo the voters and to what extent, they meet their promises must be evaluated on a continual basis. Manifestos released by the political parties acts as a mirror, which reflect their commitment to voters and the country as a whole.

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