



PARTY POLITICS IN INDIA: A CURSORY GALANCE

Dr. Ashokkumar V. Paled
Assistant Professor, Political Science,
MA., M.Phil., Ph.D. Dip in Gandhian Studies.
Local self-Government & Public Administration.

ABSTRACT

Therefore an elucidation of party politics in India should begin with an understanding of the role of political parties in democratic systems generally. Parties are undoubtedly essential to the functioning of democracy; they perform varied functions within and outside the realm of politics. Their leadership and policies, internal practices, and the patterns of interaction with other parties and institutions can have profound consequences for the system of governance. As a keystone political institution in representative regime, the modern political party regularly fulfils three critical functions: nominating candidates for public offices; formulating and setting the agenda for public; and mobilizing support for candidates and policies in an election. Other institutions perform some of these functions too. What, however, distinguishes parties is their emphasis on linkage. Parties are seen, both by their members and by others, as agencies for forging links between citizens and policy makers. Their raison d'être is to create a substantive connection between the ruler and ruled.

Following a number of studies in the late 1960s and 1970s, political scientists have paid little attention to mapping the growth and decline of parties. However, during the past decade, interest in democracy and electoral politics has grown enormously. India's democracy in the 1950s and 1960s was not seriously competitive. Low levels of competition marked elections in this period. The choice was between the all powerful congress and regionally fragmented opposition. Competition increased owing to the greater importance of electoral politics and participation in the 1970s and 1980s. The past decade has seen a participatory upsurge amongst the marginalized sections of society in terms of the caste hierarchy, classes, and gender. The average voter turnout has been within the range of 55 to 64 per cent in ten last eleven general elections between 1962 and 1999. This exceeded the average level in the United States. Even in the first two elections the aggregate voter turnout was as high as 46-8 per cent. More striking, voter turnout for state assembly elections was close to these levels during the same period, surging to 67 per cent in elections held during 1993-6 India is among the few democracies where the electoral turnout of the lower orders of society is well above that of the most privileged sections. This is remarkable in the absence of laws relating to compulsory voting. The possibility that the lower caste person will vote is much higher than for an upper caste person. This has been accompanied by a significant rise in the more active forms of political involvement, such as attendance at elections meetings, membership of political parties, along with a much greater sense of the political efficacy of the vote.



KEYWORDS: functioning of democracy, general elections, consensual governance.

INTRODUCTION

Not being tied to any particular group or region, the Congress enjoyed a distinct advantage over sectional and regional parties. It is still the party that manages to garner the largest amount of support from the underprivileged. This support, however, comes to the Congress by default and is not the outcome of a systematic effort to create a counter bloc of the underprivileged, or to build a social coalition based on social democratic politics. Moreover, the advantage has been greatly reduced by the salience of the state level as the substantive arena of electoral choice over the past decade. In many a local or regional contest, community or caste based mobilization tactics may be more effective in garnering support than a catch all strategy. Besides the Congress does not any longer pull in the lower castes and classes in sufficient numbers, into its ambit, having to count with left and left of centre parties that possess greater influence among these groups. Yet, the Congress is still quite capable of winning elections: the results of the 1998 assembly elections and its success in the Karnataka assembly elections in 1999 testify to that. Nonetheless, it has been indisputably dislodged from its position of preeminence at the Centre.

Doubtless, the compulsions of power and the demands of running a coalition government, obliged the BJP to adopt moderation. L.K.Advani observed that the moderate phase began in 1996 when the BJP failed to form the government. The party had to tone down emotive identity politics in order to make alliances. Thus, for the BJP, coalition strategy is both an ideological and managerial challenge, which consists of harmonizing ideology with the quest for power. The former BJP president, Kushabhau Thakre, attributed the BJP's growth to its ability to adjust to new situations. To avoid conflicts with to temper its distinctiveness. However, even while grappling with the tensions of coalition politics, the BJP has not deviated from its core commitments, adopting policies that will eventually bring the state government closer to the politics of Hindutva. Most remarkable is the systematic effort to safronize the bureaucracy, educational institutions, and the media. Above all, there has been the vilification of minorities. Despite its protestations to the contrary, BJP has not been able to contain the extremist elements in the Sangh Parivar. The deal between the BJP government and the VHP in Gujarat in December 1999 culminating in laying the foundation stone of the Ram temple in Halmodi, a tribal and Christian village, was reminiscent of similar arrangement that led to the demolition of the Babri mosque. Prime Minister Vajapayee has struggled to distance his government from the political compulsions of the Hindutva agenda and move in the direction of consensual governance.

While there is normal dilution of the BJP's social agenda, its policy of economic nationalism has been completely reversed. The renunciation of swadeshi or economic nationalism constitutes the biggest shift in BJP policy. Wedded to swadeshi for the past five decades, the BJP led NDA government, after just two years in office, has proved to be the most enthusiastic about liberalization and globalization of the economy, and the process has sought to appease foreign investors, rather than the party's swadeshi lobby. Equally significantly, the nuclear policy has been pursued vigorously. The 1998 manifesto promised that it would resume nuclear testing begun by Indira Gandhi in 1974. The BJP government, after less than three months in office, ordered the Pokhran tests on 11 May 1998. It went ahead with the bomb in order to build its political constituency. None of this indicates that the BJP is obliged to stay moderate in power. Similarly controversial issues could force themselves back to their agenda when the party needs to consolidate its support.

In the longer run, therefore, the deeper issue is how moderate should we expect the BJP to remain if it wins a majority in Parliament and can form a government on its own? Is it possible for the BJP to transform itself into a liberal right of centre party, yet at the same time be linked to the RSS fraternity? This is the central issue of Indian politics today. An answer to this question must take into account the uniqueness of the BJP. Among political parties, the BJP is atypical. It has enduring ties with a range of allied organizations, chief among them being the RSS and the VHP. It functions as a party a movement, and government at the state and nation level. Neither the RSS nor the VHP have given up the Hindutva agenda; indeed they regularly reiterate their commitment to it, but they have not mounted pressure on the government for its fulfillment. That Vajpayee managed to distance his government from the Sangh's clutches during his second term in office was largely due to his popular appeal. This does

not however mean that the BJP has liberated itself from the RSS. The three most important leaders of the BJP, which include Prime Minister Vajpayee, Home Minister Advani, and Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, are close to the RSS. Moreover, the RSS knows that its electoral success and its ability to forge strategic alliances are due to Vajpayee's leadership. Furthermore, the RSS has accepted the compulsions of coalition politics and the attendant moderation in the BJP in view of the political protection offered by the BJP government to its activities. This helped the RSS to exert and extend its influence within state and society as it has been doing over the last few years.

The BJP's more astute leaders, as well as other anxious to retain their hold on power, realize that if the party is to usurp the role of the Congress, it will have to prove that it is not a sheep in wolf's clothing. This is however an uphill task because the party is the political outgrowth of an extremist right wing ideologically motivated movement. Given that many of its party cadres come from the RSS and its affiliation to the RSS VHP network has proved decisive in its growth, the BJP cannot afford to break its links with the RSS. Therefore, moderation can change the agenda of the BJP led NDA government, but it cannot modify the fundamental character of the BJP, unless there is a change in its relationship with the RSS. The BJP and its ideological forbears have not had a consistent record. In the late 1960s the Hindu Right embarked upon anti cow slaughter agitation then went through a moderate phase in the 1970s, only to return to militancy in the 1980s, and again back to moderation from 1996. There is little reason to believe that it has settled once and for all into a moderate mould.

Over the past decades, political parties have organized along socio economic fault lines rather than linguistic divides, promising to provide a new dynamic to Indian democracy. The link between ethnic cleavages and the party system is evident from the increased role of caste and community identity in politics, and this has motivated considerable research on the construction of political such identities. The argument has centered on two issues. One has been the impact of ethnic mobilization on mass political sentiments, political partisanship, and changes in voting patterns. The other is the impact of the processes of mobilization on the emergence of an inclusive political arena. These identities have helped the rise of regional, communal, and caste parties. A recent study of Dravidian parties demonstrates that the internal pluralism of parties, and not simply social pluralism, promotes greater representation of emergent groups, the reconstruction of public culture, and tolerance. This is explained through a distinction between organizational pluralism and social pluralism, arguing that social pluralism does not preclude the growth of non pluralistic parties. Parties like the BJP can grow in pluralistic societies, but since they lack internal pluralism, they can sideline pluralistic forces. By contrast, internal pluralism within India's communist parties has facilitated social pluralism and democracy.

There have been major debates among scholars about the significance of language, region, class, caste, community, and ethnic conflicts in Indian society and politics. Conventionally, political discourse on ethnic categories had focused on language and region. After Independence, linguistic identities, culminating in the reorganization of the states, occupied centre stage. Many of the Congress leaders feared that the linguistic division of states would lead to secession from the Union, and the nation would thus disintegrate. That fear has largely proved to be groundless, but the formation of linguistic states has nonetheless reinforced the cohesion of regional identities. These are expressed by the formation of parties such as the DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, the Akali Dal in Punjab, the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra.

Numerous interpretations of Indian politics have argued that social differences associated with the process of economic and political development have provided political parties with either the organizational or numerical support to win majorities in elections. More specifically, it is assumed that the nature of the party system typically mirrors the complexity of social cleavages along lines of religion, caste, language, and region to produce a multi party system. Social cleavage theory has had a significant influence on the perception of links between the social structure and party politics in India. One major weakness of this theory, however, is that it disregards the role of human agency. It simply derives divergence of interests from existing social divisions, without asking why particular differences

are important or become influential only in some regions or why specific cleavages should be politicized in certain situations and what role political actors play in this process. This aspect is singularly important as India's diversity yields a variety of social differences, and these differences can form the basis of very different kinds of parties and distinct party systems at the national and state levels, depending upon the patterns of political mobilization and organization. Social difference that emerge in the course of economic development and state formation become cleavages as a result of political and electoral mobilization. Parties perform an extremely important role in forging links between social classes, caste groups, and party systems.

The contrasting trajectory of the communist parties that came to power in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura stresses the significance of political organization and mobilization in determining the relative salience of social cleavages on patterns of voting and party strategies. The CPI(M) has established an impressive support base in these three states by focusing on distributive policies and radical reforms, rather than the politicization of caste differences. Sustained land reform measures and democratically elected Panchayats have tilted the balance of power in favour of the rural poor in West Bengal, and this has helped the CPI(M) to build a wide circle of social and political support. This has enabled the regime to remain in power for twenty five years. As in most other states, the propertied classes remain dominant in the sphere of production, but unlike other states, they do not control political power. The case of the Left parties is important because it illustrates the very different party played by parties in political, and pluralist, mobilization.

Studies of left parties are concerned with the origins, dilemmas, and outcomes of Left movements. They have focused their attention on the ideology, leadership, and organization of the CPI (M) and its pursuit of incremental reforms within the constraints of a democratic capitalist framework and the predicament about using parliamentary means to achieve radical reform. What has attracted the greatest attention is the resemblance between the CPI (M) and social democratic parties in Western Europe. Examining the extent to which the CPI (M) is a social democratic party might help in mapping the conservative or radical direction of its policies, but will not illuminate the institutional reconstruction undertaken by Left parties in achieving radical change within the existing structural conditions. These include initiatives in the areas of decentralization, federalism, and land reforms.

By contrast, in north and north-western India party strategies politicized caste differences and newly politicized groups made their presence felt through such parties. Particularly significant has been the role of middle and rich peasants and lower and backward castes, traditionally ignored by the Congress, who have in recent years thrown their weight behind the opposition parties. Leaders of lower castes, starting with Charan Singh's Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) in the mid 1960s, later began to organize their own parties to gain greater representation and power for their caste groups. Among these parties, the BSP has attracted considerable academic attention. The party commands strong support among the scheduled castes and rural and urban poor in several states of north India. Significantly its support structure is the direct opposite of the BJP's. Several recent studies focus on ethnic identification, ethnic mobilization, or caste conflict to explain the BSP phenomenon. In South India, pro backward caste parties, such as the TDP, DMK, and AIADMK, have held sway in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu for a much longer period.

The picture that emerges is of an intense power struggle in northern Indian unleashed by the entry of lower castes into the political world. As elections have gained in importance, levels of political participation have climbed. Data on participation shows that more important than the increase in the overall voter turnout, is the change in the social composition of those who participate in political activities. Expanding participation has placed the poor and the downtrodden groups in the caste, class, and gender hierarchy, at the centre of the political system. In the early years after Independence, Congress party leaders used patronage networks to build vote banks among low castes and minorities to win majorities. This rainbow coalition dampened class conflict, thus politicizing other social identities. Indeed the Congress systematically tried to bury the class issue, and its brand of accommodation was a major obstacle to the cross caste mobilization of the poor and disadvantaged. It

pre-empted the emergence of radical movements by making religion, caste clusters, or tribal groups the primary identity through which economic discontent was articulated.

The fragmentation of the Congress coalition into upper caste, backward caste, Muslim, and Dalit groups led to a redrawing of the relationship between social cleavages and political loyalties. It opened up the possibility of the mobilization of both the privileged and the underprivileged. The privileged have indeed been brought together under the BJP banner of ethno nationalism, while the underprivileged have been fragmented by their failure to forge a social bloc to counter the privileged sections. The most obvious reason for this is the emergence of sectional parties that represent distinct social constituencies which are difficult to unite and bring together into a political coalition or alliance.

One of the catalysts in the formation of these parties is the decline of Congress domination and the inability of the BJP to fill the vacuum. In consequence, caste and class clusters that were once part of the Congress coalition have found a voice through other parties. This process was advanced by the implementation of recommendations of the Mandal Commission. The rapid mobilization of socially underprivileged groups has resulted in a realignment of political parties along states, sub-state, and caste lines, creating conflict amongst them and with the upper castes. The heightened caste and communal competition provoked by the combined effect of Mandal and the rise of the BJP has radically changed the social map of politics. This trend has become increasingly evident at the national level since 1989 when state-based parties joined together to form a minority National Front government led by the Janata Dal. Attempting to offer a broad-based centre-left alternative to the Congress, the principal ideological plank of the National Front was the propagation of social justice and the advancement of the interests of backward castes and minorities. However, social justice became synonymous with caste politics, and this led to the party's fragmentation.

The Congress that once commanded overwhelming majorities in the Lok Sabha has lost its hegemonic position. Its continuing decline has however been obscured as the party returned to office in 1991 to form a minority government, and then with the help of pre-poll and post-election allies, was able to govern as a majority party until 1996. It has however ceased to be the natural party of governance. The 1999 election, the third in as many years, was held after the AIADMK withdrew support from the BJP-led government in April 1999. In the elections that followed the Congress national vote level increased to 28.5 per cent but its seat tally was reduced to the smallest ever, down to 114 seats from the 141 it won in the 1998 election. The factors responsible for the poor performance of the Congress were the manner of the dissolution of parliament, its inability to form an alternative government, and its lukewarm response to the Kargil conflict. The success of the armed forces in repulsing the Pakistani intrusion in Kargil helped the BJP to win back the support it has lost in the 1998 assembly elections. Serious difference between the Congress and Samajwadi party (SP) frustrated the Congress hope of forming a government. Even so, the BJP on its own was not able to increase its seats, and in terms of vote share it actually lost nearly two percentage points, declining from 25.6 per cent in 1998 to 23.7 per cent in 1999. However, the BJP-led alliance won the election with a coherent majority. This was due not to the acquisition of new mass support by the BJP but to new allies. The big winners were parties such as the TDP, Trinamool Congress and the Biju Janata Dal. This is evident from the decline of BJP's share of seats from 73 per cent to 61 per cent.

All these changes have altered India's party system, and the transformation has been far-reaching. Two developments stand out. First, there is no longer one-party dominance. The period from 1967 to 1977 witnessed the passage from one-party dominance to a multi-party system. Second, several states have moved towards a two-party system, though the two parties vary from state to state. This change, evident since the 1989 elections, may mark the beginning of a new era in the party system.

Political developments over the last decade make it clear that Indian politics now has a strong lower class thrust. This development in combination with the increased influence of regional and state-based parties mirrors a paradigm shift in politics. Today, both regional and state-based parties are contenders for power in all states except Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. However, the lower caste politics of both the backward caste and Dalit variety is often more focused on local issues and

sectional claims. The lower caste parties do not even attempt cohesion of competing claims and are thus unable to federate as political force at the national level.

Through a conjunction of these processes the creation of new parties and groups and their particularistic strategies parties have increasingly fragmented over the years. Frequent party splits, mergers, and counter split significantly increased the number of parties in the national arena. In 1952, 74 parties contested in the national elections, while in 1998 the number had risen to 177. Single and multi state parties accounted for as many as 220 seats in 1998, and dominated governments in eastern and southern India. The state based parties had increased their share from 8 to 19 per cent of the vote. Two factors have contributed to the multiplication of parties. One has been the growing power of regionalism and regional parties and the other the intensified pursuit of political power rather than disagreement over principle. This explains the fracturing of the Janata Dal in 1999, the formation of the NCP on the eve of the 1999 elections, and splits in the Congress and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh in 1998.

Thanks to India's social diversity and to the first past the post electoral system, a nationwide two party system has not emerged. At the national level, the BJP and the Congress have dominated the electoral contests in 1998 and 1999, obliging the regional parties to regroup around them and to coalesce into two distinct blocs: the BJP and its allies on the right and the Congress party and its allies in the middle. Regional parties such as the TDP, DMK, BSP, SP, and the Left parties retain significant influence and support in several states. At the national level, the organized expression of the 'third front' in the form of the 1996 United Front, a conglomeration of centre left parties, has disintegrated, and most of its constituents have allied with the BJP. The fragmentation of the United Front has benefited both the BJP and Congress.

The 1990s were characterized by the emergence of the state as the effective arena of political competition. The first five general elections yielded one party dominance in which the Congress received over 40 per cent of the vote, while the second largest party could win only 10 per cent. With the exception of the 1967 elections, the pattern in the states was similar, with Congress dominating the state arena as well. In 1977, the Congress lost power to a coalition of opposition parties, but the same coalition did not rule all the states. There is now a two level party system in which the state pattern differs from the national pattern. Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh have two party systems; the pattern is however different in Maharashtra, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura which have evolved a bipolar system, in which a number of parties are clustered at each pole. A third type of multi party system now obtains in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Karnataka. The 1999 elections indicate some change in this pattern, with both Bihar and Karnataka moving in the direction of bipolarity as parties converged around two poles: the BJP and its allies on the one hand and the Congress on the other. A different kind of change has occurred in Maharashtra and West Bengal, Congress splitting to give rise to the NCP in Maharashtra and the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal respectively. This pattern reveals multiple bipolarities, with different pairs of parties/alliances controlling different states.

We are not ready to support a Third Front, Fourth Front or whatever it is called. We will not give our support to anybody else, declared Sonia Gandhi when she failed to cobble together a minority government with outside support after the defeat of the Vajpayee government on 17 April 1999. The decision not to back a Third Front, which would have included the possibility of a government headed by Jyoti Basu, was based on a refusal to accept the need for coalitions at the national level. Paradoxically, the decision of the SP to block the formation of a minority Congress led government fortified the party's determination to secure a single party majority. Time and time again the Congress party has turned its back on coalitions. Convinced about the inherent instability of coalitions, especially an omnibus coalition of the BJP kind, the Congress made an alternative offer: the cohesion and stability of single party rule. Thus the Congress did not commit itself to alliances and searched for a majority of its own. Moreover, the Congress leadership still believes that the Indian electorate has limited faith in coalitions, owing to their repeated failures to continue in power. Persistent conflicts between coalition partners have rendered them unworkable forms of governance. This calculation formed the bedrock of its electoral strategy in the 1999 elections. All that the Congress offered were state specific electoral

adjustments. The party's ambivalence towards coalitions stems from its conception of itself as a coalition of varied interests. In his presidential address at the 1997 plenary session in Calcutta, Sitaram Kesri cryptically dismissed the idea that coalitions are here to stay, observing that the Congress itself has been the most successful coalition. He failed to add that whereas the Congress was a successful coalition from 1947 to 1974, since then it has failed to keep the coalition intact.

The decline of one party dominance is no longer in dispute. The question of interest is how to characterize the current party system. Are we moving from catch all Congress system to a new type of multi party system or a two party system. As argued earlier, there is no pronounced tendency towards a two party system at the national level. What has emerged is a multi party system with two alliance structures at each end and several state based and small parties that are free floating. A mix of bipolarity and multiplicities distinguishes the state level.

The Congress party, an inclusive, dominant party, designed to cross cut ethnic, class, and caste divisions, dominated the first phase of the party system. By contrast, the BJP and a form of sectarian politics dominate the second phase that draws on the cleavages of caste, class, and regional, which overlap. If social integration and coalition building based on a social welfare programme was the objective of a Congress style centrist party, the principal goal of the emerging party system is to secure material and political benefits for particular groups and/or regions. Yet, because it heads a coalition of 23 parties BJP's politics is not simply caste based or community based.

This past decade has seen a sharp rise in political mobilization on the basis of ethnic identities. North Indian politics epitomizes this trend apparent in the emergence of more or less homogeneous parties of the OBC strata and Dalits, and politics in Uttar Pradesh exemplifies the new pattern. Once dominated by the centrist politics of the Congress, new electoral majorities have been built up, with statewide jati clusters constituting the primary social bloc for political mobilization. This occurred in 1989-91 when the Congress vote share dropped 10 percentage points (from 29.7 per cent to 17.4 per cent) and when the Janata Dal, SP and BSP between them managed to garner 40 per cent of the vote. The key to this transformation is the virtual disappearance of the Congress, and its replacement by the BJP, SP, and the BSP. In contrast to the Congress, these parties represent specific social groups, namely the upper, backward, and scheduled castes. However, even in Uttar Pradesh it has not been simply the replacement of a non ethnic had invoked caste and community identities in its political campaigns in the past. Rather, the important change is in the type of ethnic politics that now dominates the political arena. Whereas for the Congress non ethnic interests were combined with ethnic appeals and issues, the three parties mentioned above have made appeals to ethnicity the centerpiece of their political campaigns.

While the new caste and communal militancy has generated several arenas of conflict between upper caste and OBCs and thus might be expected to lead to a hardening of efforts to convert ethnic majorities into permanent majorities, this has not happened. One reason is the size and heterogeneity of the country's constituencies. India's electorate of about 600 millions is divided into 543 constituencies, fewer than those of the British House of Commons. The large heterogeneity of constituencies aids mobilization along multiple cleavage lines. However, heterogeneity does not stop parties from making efforts at playing on such cleavages as those between Hindus and Muslims to their advantage. Clearly, the existence of cross cutting cleavages did not discourage the BJP from mobilizing along the Hindu Muslim cleavage in the 1989-92 period. Other parties also make use of the cleavages of caste and region. Yet, people do not vote exclusively on the basis of their caste or community. Even in circumstance when such interests become paramount, as during the Hindutva and Mandal controversies, a healthy concern for party programmes, policies, and economic interests balanced them. Furthermore, caste is associated with class. On a range of policy issues there are no significant differences between upper and backward castes per se. In fact intracaste differences are likely to outweigh inter caste differences. The difference reflects their different class positions. The key variable is not always caste or community but the perception that a particular party will promote the voter's economic and social well being. This can be seen from the effect of class and caste affiliation on the BJP vote. It is evident from the tendency of scheduled caste and OBCs to favour the BJP. As they climb up the

social ladder. The class base of the BJP vote is perhaps more significant than its caste base, but the BJP is not caste based or class based in any simple reductive sense. Rather, it represents a bloc of caste class privilege.

By contrast, after its inability to secure a majority to preserve its thirteen day government in May 1996, the BJP chalked out a diametrically opposite strategy. It stepped up the search for regional allies. It forged an 18 party alliance for the 1998 election, but even so failed to win a majority. However, after the election it cobbled together a majority by getting the support of the Telugu Desam and the National Conference. For a short period from 1996 to 1998, the influential secular/communal divide shaped coalition building and the choice of alliance partners. The Janata Dal, Left parties, and a number of regional parties formed the government at the Centre, supported by the Congress from outside, in order to keep the BJP out of power. However, the unity of secular forces proved to be short lived. It was confined to the United Front government's term in office, and proved inadequate when pitted against the attractions of anti Congressism. The Congress/anti Congress divide, a legacy of our decades of Congress dominance, proved stronger than the ideal of secular unity in determining alliances. More crucially, anti Congress helped the BJP to marshal support from state based parties, which were bitterly opposed to the Congress. Even Left parties, such as The Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Bloc, and parties such as the SP resolutely opposed the Idea of a Congress led government.

Intense political competition encourages parties to constantly search for new support and thus prevents the growth of centrifugal tendencies in Indian society. Even the BJP cannot afford to parentally exclude other social categories, including Muslims. Because of the heterogeneity at the national, state, and constituency levels, political parties have to appeal to groups not previously part of their core constituency. Hence most parties, including parties of the Right, are under pressure to adopt broad based strategies. In deed the growth of the BJP over the past decade indicates that even a right wing party committed to Hindu majoritarianism cannot disregard, at least in the short run, the pressures India's diversity places on all political parties. Its new social support among the OBCs and its expansion in south India testifies to the tendency of crowding around the middle to gain new support. Another factor contributing to the continued relevance of the centrist option is the enduring influence of the Congress. The Congress though not dominant, is still strong enough to ensure the continuance of centrism. This means that the party will not be torn asunder by a typically Left Right ideological or ethnic polarization.

CONCLUSION:

Therefore an elucidation of party politics in India should begin with an understanding of the role of political parties in democratic systems generally.

The BJP's more astute leaders, as well as other anxious to retain their hold on power, realize that if the party is to usurp the role of the Congress, it will have to prove that it is not a sheep in wolf's clothing. This is however an uphill task because the party is the political outgrowth of an extremist right wing ideologically motivated movement.

Numerous interpretations of Indian politics have argued that social differences associated with the process of economic and political development have provided political parties with either the organizational or numerical support to win majorities in elections.

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