

Design: Party Political Domain

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Introduction

One can see the beginning of the growth of a formal structure of organised political competition in India in the late 19th century. This institutional structure grew gradually, shaped on the one hand by political 'concessions' granted by the colonial administration, and on the other, by the pressure of demands for greater representation and self-rule by the Indian nationalists. The fear of losing grip over the Indian empire prompted the British to talk, along with repression, a language of political reform. Underlying this fear was the realisation that the growing popular opposition to colonial rule if not 'appeased' with successive piecemeal reforms would threaten the interests of the empire. The association of Indians with the administration was successively increased, though care was taken that this does not lead to an induction of assertive and subversive elements. Negotiations with the Indian National Congress and subsequently, the All India Muslim League, the Princely states, etc., also drove ahead this institutionalisation of electoral competition.

Following the birth of the Congress in 1885, political parties gradually emerged on the scene in the earlier decades of the 20th century to organise specific interests - economic or cultural. They originated either as part of the Congress or outside its fold to demand greater representation, political allowances or economic concessions. The expansion of legislative bodies and franchise, however limited, meant that varied interests had to organise themselves for greater strength to make best use of the available political opportunities. The result was the formation of political parties and competition between them to enter the legislative assemblies through elections under the political reforms of 1919 and 1935.

Subsequently, the members of the Constituent Assembly tried to thoroughly debate the modes of representation and elections to be written down in the Constitution of the free country as the working of democracy was dependent on the choice. The first general elections with universal adult franchise in India in 1951-52 saw 14 national parties and 39 state parties in the electoral competition. These elections drew on and built upon the institutional framework - its systems of franchise, representation, organisation of interests and electoral competition - that had been gradually installed over the years through numerous struggles, negotiations and debates. This paper deals with some of these themes to do with the installation of the structures of electoral competition in India till the time of the first elections. For the purpose of this paper beginning the discussion with representation and enfranchisement under the Government of India Act, 1919 would be an apt place to start.

Political Reforms, Elections and Representation in Colonial India

Representation under the Government of India Act, 1919 ₁

In 1917, the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, had pledged a responsible government for India. This pledge 'took concrete, if disappointingly limited form in the Government of India Act, 1919' (Palmer 1975: 145-46). Responsible government made its beginning, but, only at the provincial level. This responsibility was however nominal as top down control continued. The Provincial Executive comprised Councillors and Ministers. The Ministers were elected and were responsible to the Provincial Legislature, i.e., the latter had the power to remove them. A system called 'dyarchy' was also introduced at the provincial level, which meant that administrative subjects were to be divided into: Reserved and Transferred. The Councillors were in charge of reserved subjects like Police and Land Revenue, and the Ministers of transferred subjects such as Health and Education. Subjects, for the first time, were also divided between the centre and the provincial governments.

At the provincial level, there was provision only for one legislative chamber unlike the Government of India where a provision was made for two. The Provincial Legislature was called the Provincial Council where the elected members had to make up a majority of at least 70 per cent of the total strength. The number of official members could not exceed 20 per cent.

Provincial Legislature/Provincial Council

Ex-officio members + Nominated officials (not more than 20%)	Nominated Non-officials	Elected Members (not less than 70%)
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The Councillors and Ministers who belonged to the Provincial Council together constituted the Provincial Executive.

Provincial Executive

<u>Councillors (maximum number 4)</u> Ex-officio members of the Provincial Council.	<u>Ministers (3 in Presidencies and 4 in other Provinces)</u> Elected members of the Provincial Council.
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Nationalist agitations continuously brought forth the question of enfranchisement. The first Indian Franchise Committee (Southborough Committee) 1918-19, recommended a restricted franchise for the Provincial Councils. Out of a combined population of 22,19,35,050 of the electoral areas of Madras, Bombay, Bengal, U.P., Bihar and Orissa, C.P. and Berar, Assam, the committee enfranchised only 51,79,000 individuals (all men) - a mere 2.3 per cent of the population. The number of people enfranchised differed from province to province. For instance, in Madras and Bombay presidencies more than 3 per cent of the total population was recommended for enfranchisement, but in Bihar and Orissa and in the Central Provinces only 0.9 per cent of the population was recommended.² Property ownership was the sole qualification for getting the right to vote. There were differences in urban and rural property qualifications, which enfranchised urban dwellers more than the rural population a stand justified on the grounds that the standards of property and intelligence were higher in urban areas. The committee, however, proposed the same qualifications for all communities within the same area. The committee did not recommend women's enfranchisement as it felt that women could not be given voting rights at a time when men themselves lacked experience and training in the use of vote (Jha 1976: 29). The committee also recommended the retention of separate electorates for Muslims and the extension of this scheme to Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians and Sikhs in certain provinces. The committee recommended the English system of elections (the first-past-the-post method) as the people lacked any experience of elections whatsoever.

The franchise provisions for the provincial councils under the Mont-Ford reforms (1919) were based on these recommendations but with certain modifications. The provinces differed as far as the voting qualifications were concerned, but property qualifications were the basis of franchise everywhere. The requirement was residence coupled with the payment of a small amount as land revenue, rent or local rates in rural areas and of municipal rates in urban areas (Jha 1976: 35). Payment of income tax was a necessary and common qualification for both urban and rural areas. Women were not given the right to vote, but the provincial councils were authorised to frame rules if they so desired to enfranchise women. Shortly after the implementation of the Act, efforts were made to enfranchise as many women as possible.

The Southborough committee was not in favour of direct elections to the central Legislative Assembly and thus had not made any prescriptions for the qualifications of its electors. The Act of 1919 laid down higher property qualifications for its electors which also varied from province to province. In 1926 the nature of franchise was the following:

Franchise in 1926

Province	Population of electoral areas in 1921	Men electors	Women electors	% of electors to the total population	Proportion of men electors to adult men population	Proportion of women electors to adult women population
Madras	42319000	1365000	116000	3.2	11.6	1.0
Bombay	19292000	759000	39000	3.9	13.4	0.8
Bengal	46241000	1173000	38000	2.5	9.7	0.3
U.P.	45376000	1589000	51000	3.5	12.4	0.4
Punjab	20675000	697000	21000	3.4	11.9	0.5
Bihar & Orissa	33820000	373000	None	1.1	4.6	-
Assam	6735000	250000	3000	3.7	14.2	0.2
C.P.	12780000	169000	None	1.3	5.2	-
Total	227238000			2.8	10.4	0.6

Source: Jha 1976: 180.

The Provincial Legislatures came to have a restricted property franchise of just 2.8 per cent of the population. Less than 7 million of the population had voting rights. Only about 10 men were enfranchised for every 100 adult men. The corresponding number among women was a mere 0.6 for every 100 adult women. Elections took place in 1920, 1923, 1926, 1929-30 and 1933-34 under the Act of 1919, but a fully representative government could not make an appearance.

It was for the first time that through the provisions of the Mont-Ford reforms, the Central Legislature became a bicameral body. The two chambers came to be called the Council of State and the Legislative Assembly, with terms of five and three years, respectively. The Governor General could extend or curtail the life of the Legislative Assembly. The Council of State was a body of the economically privileged - the big landowners, manufacturing classes and rich merchants. This was created with a motive to curb the tendencies of the Legislative Assembly to move towards a stance, which might be uncomfortable for the rulers. A radical stance on any of the issues had to be harnessed and the Council was the place to do it. Huge property ownership was the major qualification for voting for the Council.

The Government of India continued to be 'irresponsible', i.e. not responsible to the legislature but to the Secretary of State in Council and the British Parliament. Out of total of 144 seats in the Legislative Assembly 103 were to be filled through elections - elected members were to be in majority. Franchise was less than half per cent of the population - less than that for the Provincial Legislature. A small majority of elected members was also maintained in the Upper House but franchise was restricted to less than 18,000 of the people in the whole country. A provision of direct elections was constituted for both the Houses, which does not mean much as the franchise was severely restricted.

Community based electorates, which were introduced by the Morley-Minto Reforms in case of Muslims, were further extended by the Government of India Act, 1919. This time the Sikhs were brought within the ambit of special electorates. Thus, for sections covered under special electorates the mode of election became direct. Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians were also to be given representation in Provinces where they had a substantive presence. They were to be nominated. Landlords and Indian Commerce were represented through special constituencies. Provinces got representation in the legislative assembly (central legislature) in accordance with their population and importance.

The voting categories were the following: Mohammedans, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and all others who were not included in the above categories. There were the following special constituencies also: Universities, Landlords, Industry and Commerce. The logic of the system made plural voting permissible. For instance, university graduates and landlords also voted as Sikhs, Muslims etc.

The first legislature was elected in 1920 and continued in office till 1923. Four more elections were held, i.e., in 1923, 1926, 1929-30 and 1933-34. The elections procedure laid down by the Act of 1919 did not see

a full-fledged party system operate within an electoral format, but political parties did get the scope to contest elections to the Councils.³ What marked political parties during the early 20th century was that 'their appeal had not yet extended much beyond the professional classes and students' and 'it was confined mostly to provincial capitals and certain district headquarters' (Misra 1976: 100).

The liberals or moderates who had broken from the Congress in 1918 contested the elections in 1920 and won in big numbers. In the 1923 elections, the Swarajists ousted the liberals and won 45 out of the 101 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Swarajists were a fringe of the Congress who had moved out of the latter and had decided to enter the Councils to disrupt the British administration from within. Whereas in Bengal and the Central Provinces, they got an absolute majority, in Bombay and United Provinces, they had a decisive impact over politics. By 1926, the influence of the Swarajists had waned. They could not hold much ground in the elections that year in face of the increased influence of Hindu nationalists and those who stood for responsive cooperation.

The 1929-30 elections were overshadowed by the civil disobedience movement. A vast majority of electors abstained from voting. After the suspension of the civil disobedience movement the Congress contested the 1933-34 elections to show the government that people were supporting it in its opposition to the Communal Award and the White Paper. The Congress was also demanding a Constituent Assembly constituted on the basis of universal adult franchise.

The total number of voters enrolled for 1920, 1923 and 1926 elections, for the legislative councils in all the provinces was 5293000, 5651000 and 6375000, respectively. The numbers enrolled for the same years for the Central Legislative Assembly were 904746, 990976 and 1128331, respectively (Jha 1976: 59). This increase in the electorate was due to enfranchisement of women, wage-rise which brought more men within the ambit of the vote and greater accuracy in the preparation of electoral roles.

Candidates who contested elections were mainly lawyers, landlords, retired government officials, journalists, teachers and professional politicians. Local caste and community considerations as well as economic standing played an important role in the victory of a candidate.

Representation under the Government of India Act, 1935.

Many of the procedures laid down in 1935 for constituting the legislatures were incorporated in the Constitution of independent India. The Act of 1919 had made a provision for a single chamber at the provincial level. In 1935, a second chamber was introduced in 6 provinces - Madras, Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces, Bihar and Assam. The Government of India Act, 1935, converted the partial responsibility introduced at the provincial level by the Government of India Act, 1919, into complete responsibility. The entire Provincial Executive was made responsible to the Provincial Council and could be removed by it. There was no longer a division of subjects into reserved and transferred, but all subjects were transferred to the charge of popular Ministers. However, the Governor was placed with extraordinary powers and could override the decision of the Ministers in the interests of the British Indian empire.

At the Centre, a part of the Executive was made responsible to the legislature. These were the Ministers. The Councillors in charge of defence, external affairs, ecclesiastical affairs and tribal areas were not responsible to the legislature. They had to report to Governor General. The rest of the subjects were placed under popular ministers, but this did not mean immunity from interference of the Governor General. The latter could intervene at any moment in any matter related to the subjects held by the ministers. The system of direct elections to the central Legislative Assembly which had been introduced by the Act of 1919 was revoked in 1935. The reasons given by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms was that this system was unmanageable, unwieldy and that the country was not yet ready for it.

The Act of 1935 made a provision for a Federal Legislature with two Houses - the Council of State and the House of Assembly. The former was to have 260 members out of which 150 seats were to be held by the British Indian provinces and 104 by the princely states. The Governor General was to nominate members to the 6 remaining seats. The Assembly was to have 375 seats out of which 250 belonged to the British Indian Provinces and 125 to the princely states. There were a total of 11 provinces.

Franchise in 1935

Province	% of Electors
Madras	15.5
Bombay	17.1
U.P.	15.5
Bengal	16.0
Punjab	11.9
Bihar and Orissa	9.3
C.P.	12.5
Assam	12.1
N.W.F.P.	9.9
Total	14.1

Source: Jha 1976: 180

Under the Act of 1935, the size of the electorate went up from seven millions to thirty-six millions.⁴ However, inaccuracies allowed only for 3,01,37,914 voters to be registered for the coming elections. The general voting qualifications were that a person had to be a British subject, 21 years of age, possess a sound mind and not be imprisoned over a long term. The additional voting qualifications were mainly based on property ownership and education and these differed not only from province to province but also between various parts within the same province. The size of the electorate was increased considerably for the provincial legislative assemblies. The system of separate electorates as advocated by the Communal Award was carried forward for the Muslim, Anglo-Indian, European, Indian Christian and Sikh communities. For these communities the franchise qualifications were the same. Seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes and women (separate quotas for women of general category, Sikh, Muslim Anglo-Indian and Indian Christian communities were provided for). For the Scheduled Castes the property qualifications were considerably lowered on account of their socio-economic backwardness. Special qualifications were laid down for women. Minimal literacy qualified them to vote in all provinces. A pensioned widow or the pensioned mother of person who was an officer, non-commissioned officer or soldier of regular military forces, the wife or the widow of a person qualified to vote under the property qualifications of the previous Act of 1919, all became qualified to vote. Seats were also reserved for interests like Commerce, Industry, Mining and Plantation, Landholders, Universities and Labour.

Elections were held in 1937 under the Government of India Act, 1935.⁵ The Congress decided to contest the provincial elections and performed well. It won absolute majorities in the provinces of Madras, Bihar, Orissa, Central Provinces and United Provinces. In Bombay with 86 out of 175 seats, it came very close to getting an absolute majority. The Congress formed ministries in 6 provinces in July 1937. A few months later a Congress ministry was also formed in NWFP and it also came to power in Assam in September 1938. In the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab, Bengal and Sind, both the Congress and the Muslim League did not perform well. The elections clearly indicated that the Muslims defied the one-religion-one-politics reasoning and had different political preferences. They were not voting en masse for the Muslim League, which claimed to represent them solely. The Muslim League won just 4.4 per cent of the total Muslim vote cast. It did not get any seat in the NWFP, got 2 out of 84 reserved constituencies in the Punjab and 3 out of 33 reserved seats in Sind. In Bengal, though the Congress had the largest number of seats, Fazlul Huq of the Krishak Praja Party with the support of the Muslim League formed a coalition ministry. Huq had first turned to the Congress for support and after its refusal had made an alliance with the Muslim League.

The Congress ministries resigned in 1939 after the outbreak of the 2nd World War. The British had declared India to be at war without consulting the elected representatives and the people themselves.

In the 1945-46 general elections after the war, the Congress again performed well. The Congress formed ministries in 7 out of 11 provinces. The Muslim League this time around did well among the Muslims. It won 446 reserved seats out of 495 and formed ministries in Bengal and Sind. In NWFP it had failed, and the Khudai Khidmatgars of the Khan Brothers had emerged victorious. In the Punjab, the Muslim League was the single largest party, but the Unionists formed a ministry with the help of other groups including the Congress and the Akalis.

The Labour Party had won an absolute majority in the general elections in England after the war. A Cabinet Mission was sent to India in 1946 to arrive at a decision on an interim government and Constitution making. Among other matters it recommended the setting up of a Constituent Assembly (CA) for the purpose of making a Constitution. Each province was to have representation in proportion to its population. Seats were reserved for Muslims and Sikhs. As such the number of seats arrived at for the Provinces were 292, the maximum for the Princely States was fixed at 93 and for the Chief Commissioner's Provinces 4. Thus, a total of 389 constituted the CA.⁶ Elections to the CA were held in July 1946. The members were not to be elected through direct elections based on universal adult franchise but by the members of the Provincial Legislative Assembly through the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote. The representatives of the Princely States were to be chosen by the rulers. The Congress leaders accepted this scheme for the formation of the CA.

In the elections held in the Provinces for constituting the CA, the Congress won 211 seats and Muslim League 73. It was not formed as a sovereign body and had to function under the aegis of the British Parliament. It was not even a fully representative body, as it was constituted not on the basis of universal adult franchise, but elected by Provincial Legislative Assemblies constituted under the Act of 1935 through a very limited franchise. Yet 'it was a representative of India, and its internal decision-making processes were democratic' (Austin 1999: 2). The Muslim League boycotted it and the representatives of the Princely States had not been chosen when it first met on 9th December 1946. Yet, the Congress decided to begin the work of building a new Constitution under the chairmanship of Rajendra Prasad. Sixteen members representing the Princely States joined the CA in April 1947.

The Constituent Assembly became a wholly sovereign body on 15th August 1947 and thereby took upon the twin tasks of Constitution making and legislation till a new legislature came into being under a new Constitution. These tasks had to be dealt with in different sittings. The draft Constitution was introduced in the Constituent Assembly on 4th November 1948 by Dr. Ambedkar. It was discussed thoroughly and finalised on 26th November 1949. It was accepted in its final form on 26th January 1950, with 395 Articles and 8 Schedules.

The Constituent Assembly Debates on the Method of Elections

A glance at the debate in the Constituent Assembly over the issue of elections and universal adult franchise would be useful to carry the discussion forward. The members of the Constituent Assembly recognised the need for free and impartial elections and there was a broad consensus that a Parliamentary set up with first-past-the-post system of elections is the most suitable for the country.

On the issue of indirect election of the President of India that was proposed in the draft constitution, the debate centred around the question whether this mode of election should be direct instead of indirect. Professor K.T. Shah from Bihar argued for a direct system of elections for the President, that the latter should be 'elected by the adult citizens of India, voting by secret ballot, in each constituent part of the Union'.⁷ For Shah this was important because according to him the President was the representative of the sovereign people at home and abroad and so he must be in a position to command the confidence of the people. Also, according to Shah, the President ceased to be a party man once elected, which was an added reason why he should be armed with the authority to say that he represents the people.⁸

The House rejected Shah's amendment on the grounds that India had adopted a Parliamentary form of government, in consonance with which, the election of the Head of the State had been made indirect. It was also pointed out that a direct election would make the President campaign from one corner of the country to the other and this would mean that the candidate would be put up by some party or the other. The likelihood was that due to the rough and tumble of elections he would not be able to forget his party affiliations even after his election. On the other hand, an indirect election would mean a greater likelihood for a non-party man to be elected as President, who would be distanced from partisanship.

Dr. Ambedkar in reply to Shah's amendment pointed out that the electorate was too big to be considered for universal adult suffrage for Presidential elections. He said that even if half of the 317 million people of India were entitled to vote, the electorate would be a massive 158.5 million - too big to be handled by the administrative machinery. The shortage of administrative personnel made this unfeasible and in any case,

the President is only a figurehead in India. He does not possess any of the executive or administrative powers, which the President of the United States possesses, so direct elections for a President was unnecessary. Thus, Shah's proposal did not find support.

Another issue that came up was to do with the status of the electoral machinery vis-à-vis the government. Within the Constituent Assembly there was a consensus that the election machinery should be outside the control of the executive government. This matter of insulation from interference by the ruling power was considered so fundamental that there was also a general agreement in the Constituent Assembly that the matter of elections should not be clubbed with a discussion on Fundamental Rights nor be included in the chapter dealing with Fundamental Rights but be discussed as a separate matter and be provided as a separate part of the Constitution. 9 What was acknowledged thereby was the centrality of free and fair elections to a democratic set up.

Articles 289A (presently Article 325), 289B (presently Article 326), 290 (presently Article 327), 291 (presently Article 328), and 291A (presently Article 329) were adopted smoothly without any objections¹⁰ and without much discussion. Article 289A provided that there would be one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency for elections to the Parliament and the State Legislatures and that nobody can be excluded from this or claim to be included in some special electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex. Article 289B set 21 years as the cut-off age for voting.¹¹ There was a debate in the meeting of the Advisory Committee¹² and earlier, whether universal adult suffrage should become a part of fundamental rights or not. The decision of the Advisory Committee, which was accepted by the CA, was that universal adult franchise should be included in a separate part of the Constitution and not in the part listing fundamental rights. Hence, it was clubbed with the part dealing with elections.

By way of Article 290, the CA empowered the Parliament to make from time to time provisions regarding elections to the Parliament and the State Legislatures including matters like delimitation of constituencies, preparation of electoral rolls, etc. Powers were also given by the CA through Article 291 to the State Legislature to make provisions regarding elections to that State Legislature if such provisions were not made by the Parliament including matters like delimitation of constituencies and preparation of electoral rolls. The CA placed a bar on law courts from interfering in electoral matters. This provision was laid down in Article 291A.

Unlike the above-mentioned provisions, Article 289 (presently Article 324), that sought to vest the superintendence, direction and control of elections in an Election Commission, became the subject of an extended discussion.¹³ As Ambedkar pointed out there were two options before the Drafting Committee regarding an Election Commission - one, that there should be in existence a permanent body of 4-5 members to continue in office without any break, or, to have a body appointed by the President at the time when there is an election on the anvil. The Committee took a middle course and proposed to the Constituent Assembly to have permanently in office 1 person called the Chief Election Commissioner so that a 'skeleton machinery would always be available' to handle the in-between work of, say, a bye-election or mid-term election in the event of the dissolution of a House before 5 years and also the revision of the electoral rolls. The proposal was that the President in the event of an election might add other members to the Election Commission.

A more far reaching proposal of the Drafting Committee was that instead of having separate Commissions for the Central Legislature, to be appointed by the President, and each State Legislature, to be appointed by the Governor or Ruler of the State, as provided for in the original Article 289, there should be a single Commission to handle all elections whether of the centre or units. This was a big change, a 'radical change' according to Ambedkar, who proposed it as the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee. This proposal aimed to centralize the election machinery in the hands of a single Commission, who would then be assisted by regional commissioners. These regional commissioners had to work under the superintendence and control of the central Election Commission and not under the provincial governments.

Ambedkar elaborated the reason for this proposed change. The central government had received reports from certain provinces that sections that did not racially, culturally or linguistically belong there were being discriminated against and were excluded from being brought into the electoral rolls by the governments of those provinces. Ambedkar noted that it was to prevent this injustice to the people other than those who belong to the province racially, culturally or linguistically that the Drafting Committee was moving away from the original proposal of having separate Election Commissions and going in for a single

and central Election Commission. Besides this, issues like economic development, unity and integrity of the new nation and border security were weighing on the new state to make it bend towards a strong-centre policy. The Objectives Resolution of 1946 (before partition became a certainty) was for a substantial federalism with a considerable measure of autonomy for the provincial units. Things however changed in the aftermath of partition and the subsequent border skirmishes. Fears grew that problems would magnify if not handled by a strong centre. Many leaders however remained unconvinced. They wanted a greater role for the state governments in governing the polity. In the words of Morris-Jones, 'Many politicians, especially those with strong links with particular regions and their governments, did not share this fright and, moreover, attached great importance to a wide area of state jurisdiction. At several points, therefore, long debates were required; many members remained dissatisfied...' (Morris-Jones 1979: 81).

Another of Ambedkar's proposal was that the Chief Election Commissioner should be irremovable except by the same procedure as applicable to a judge of the Supreme Court. This provision was necessary to meet the objective of non-interference by the executive in the matters of elections. He also proposed to the Constituent Assembly that instead of an independent staff of its own, the Election Commission should borrow staff from the provincial governments for its various tasks like preparation of electoral rolls, revision of these rolls, conduct of elections, etc. This would prevent duplication of machinery and cut unnecessary administrative costs. When the staff would be working for the EC, it would be administratively responsible to the EC and not to the central or state governments, and after the completion of electoral work it will return to the provincial governments for its provincial responsibilities. These were the amendments proposed by Ambedkar to the original Article 289.

Doubts were expressed about including the elaborate procedure and details of elections in the constitution. H.V. Pataskar was of the view that the original Article 289 should be left untouched and be supplemented with an Act of Parliament. This he felt was important because one does not know 'what conditions may prevail after ten or twenty years'.¹⁴ Moreover, as mentioned earlier, many leaders were anxious about the excessive centralization that would result from having a single Election Commission. It was felt that this was an insensitive move, a reversal from the earlier commitment to federalism and would result in disintegration. Also, it did not reflect a healthy democratic practice especially at the beginning of self-rule, and therefore it should not be incorporated in the Constitution. It was said that this amendment takes away not only the 'last vestige of provincial autonomy' but also reflects a 'distrust of our people in provinces'.¹⁵ It was felt that instead of integrating minorities, the amendment is in the direction of perpetuating differences,¹⁶ - one Election Commission would not be in a position to realise the feelings of the people of different parts of the country.¹⁷ It would have a disintegrating effect, which will accentuate differences instead of solving them. There were strong words of indictment from Kuladhar Chaliha against those advocating such centralisation - 'You think you possess better qualities than the men in the provinces, but I know there are people there who are much better than you are...' and 'Why should you think that you have developed the virtue of impartiality which no one else possesses?'¹⁸ This was seen as an injustice to the provinces.¹⁹ It was also remarked that at the inception of democratic rule, this kind of centralisation 'would look more autocratic than democratic.'²⁰ H.V. Pataskar suggested that if people in the provinces are resorting to such unjust practices then action should be taken against them rather than resorting to centralisation.²¹ Questions were raised on centralisation that how would it bring a better state of affairs,²² and there was still a danger that the political prejudice of the central government may prevail.²³ Pataskar alleged that this reversed the process of federation, which was being followed only in form rather than substance. To him this move of centralisation was interference with provincial matters and thwarted the process of democracy.²⁴ He noted that it has become the fashion these days to dub as anti-national any talk in favour of the provinces. To him this was 'entirely wrong'.²⁵

There were also some apprehensions in the House that the Chief Election Commissioner in the existing procedure of appointment would be a party man and therefore not independent of the influence of the executive. Professor Shibban Lal Saksena while articulating these fears said that a presidential appointment meant a prime ministerial appointment, which made a mockery of the independence of the Commission. He felt that Article 289 in its present form did not ensure a complete independence of the Commission from the executive's influence. To ensure complete independence and to see that the Commissioner/s enjoyed the confidence of all political parties Saksena moved an amendment which said that the Chief Election Commissioner's appointment as also the appointment of the other Commissioners should be confirmed by a 2/3rd majority in a joint session of both Houses of Parliament.²⁶ He was in favour of having a permanent commission as there would always be some election or the other at all times and also other kind of work, a suggestion, which was backed by R.K. Sidhwa.²⁷ The opinion on this was that

there should be 3 to 5 members besides the Chief Election Commissioner always in office to carry out the work, which would be heavy even between two main elections. These suggestions and amendments however did not carry much weight with the House and were defeated at the end of the debate.

Saksena also suggested that laws on finer details like the conditions of service and tenure of office etc., of the Election Commissioners should be made by the Parliament and not be the charge of the President as his influence if used could hamper the independence of the Commission. His view was that the Parliament should decide these matters once and for all, so that the scope of tampering with them was nil and the Election Commissioners would not look to the President for favours.²⁸ K.M. Munshi and H.N. Kunzru held similar views on the role of the Parliament on these matters. Kunzru drew attention to the need of safeguards in a situation where everything was being left to the President who was to be advised by the Prime Minister. His view was that the Parliament had to make laws for safeguarding the independence of the election machinery from both provincial and central political influences.²⁹ Munshi was in favour of Ambedkar's amendments, but wanted the Parliament to make laws on details as according to him this would ensure the impartiality and independence of the Election Commission and also the supremacy of the Parliament.³⁰

K.M. Munshi from Bombay and Naziruddin Ahmad from West Bengal backed Ambedkar's arguments. The latter acknowledged the importance of elections to a democracy and stressed the need for it to be handled by a 'competent, independent and impartial body'.³¹ He felt that in the light of the events in the Provinces and the State, the Centre must take charge of all important matters affecting 'the general well being of the country and encroach on the Provincial field'.³² Ahmad gave examples of West Bengal and Greater Rajasthan as instances of party factionalism and quarrels. He underlined the need for central management of elections because of the cases of factionalism and manipulations by the ruling party in the provinces. Munshi as a reply to those arguing for an unbreachable independence of the Election Commission pointed out that the fact that the Chief Election Commissioner once appointed by the President cannot be removed at the President's will ensures the Commission's independence to that extent. Moreover, he added that the Commission should not be so independent as to become a 'super-government'- there is a greater danger if such a body becomes a political power.³³ According to him, the Election Commission must remain to a large extent an ally of the government; not only that, but it must, to a considerable extent, be subsidiary to government except in regard to the discharge of the functions allotted to it by law.³⁴

On the issue of provincial autonomy, Munshi felt that a line had to be followed which was more suited to the country than the 'doctrinaire views of theoretical writers on federalism' or any point of view based on 'theoretical provincial autonomy'.³⁵ and thereby a Central Election Commission was more appropriate than multiple ones. In any case he felt that neither the central governments nor the provisional governments would have anything to do with the elections, it is the Chief Election Commissioner who has to handle them and 'he is practically independent'.³⁶ He felt that in the existing circumstances, where Indian states not accustomed even to 'the little measure of democratic life' enjoyed by the provinces were joining the Union on an equal footing, the Centre had to play a bigger role. Added to these were the areas where provincial autonomy was still taking roots, this augured a larger role for the Centre. He argued that in Indian history, the days of strong central authority were the days of glory and the days of provincial dismemberment were those that were most tragic. He felt that this fatal mistake should not be repeated.

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At the end of the debate the House voted in favour of Ambedkar's amendment for a single Election Commission to be in charge of elections at both the central and provincial levels. A further amendment was incorporated which had to do with the power of the Parliament to make laws regarding the appointment of the Chief and other Election Commissioners as also laws made by it on their conditions of service and tenure of office. The President had to make the appointments of the Election Commissioners subject to the provision of these laws.

Provisions to Ensure Free and Impartial Conduct of Elections

The conduct of elections in India became the responsibility of the Election Commission. Under the Constitutional provisions the Election Commission of India was first set up in 1950 and was entrusted with the task of superintendence, direction and control of all national and state level elections. It was also

given the work of preparation and revision of electoral rolls. To enable the Election Commission to work in a reasonably autonomous manner without undue interference from the government, a provision was made that 'the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court', and that his conditions of service would not be altered to his disadvantage after he took over as the Chief Election Commissioner (Article 324: Clause 5).³⁸ The Election Commission was also vested with residuary powers by the Supreme Court to take decisions on its own on issues where the enacted laws were silent or the provisions were inadequate to handle any electoral matter.

Provisions were incorporated in the Constitution that Parliament would from time to time make laws that would help the Election Commission in conducting elections. Two major laws were framed just after India became a republic - these were the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Representation of the People Act, 1951. These dealt with the allocation of seats and the delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies, and with all aspects of conduct of elections and post election disputes. Universal adult suffrage was made the basis of elections and it 'gave a voice, indeed power, to millions who had previously to depend on the whim of others for even a vague representation of their interests' (Austin 1999: 47). The system of first-past-the-post (FPTP) was adopted where a simple majority of more than 50 per cent votes made a candidate victorious. This system by the logic of its functioning gives more weightage to the seat share of political parties than their vote share. A party could get less than 50 per cent of the vote share or even a minority vote share, but could still manage to get the majority of seats and become the ruling party. The FPTP system was assumed to be the most suited for the Indian conditions. Hardly any debate took place among the constitution-builders regarding its suitability. According to Sridharan, '...the debate on alternative electoral systems and their dynamics and implications for representation...over time, was a debate that did not really take place. Even to the extent that it did, it did not reveal a deep understanding of the dynamics of either the FPTP system or of various PR (Proportional representation) formulae' (Sridharan 2002:355).

The Election Commission began to function in an independent manner through the central, state and district bureaucratic machinery by appointing from among them Chief Electoral Officers, District Election Officers, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, etc., to conduct elections at the state and district levels. These appointments cannot be turned down by the executive (government).

The Election Commission was not always a three-member body. It was a single-member Commission up till 15th October 1989 with only the Chief Election Commissioner as its member. Thereafter, it turned into a three-member body till 1st January 1990. From 2nd January 1990 to 30th September 1993, it again became a single-member Commission. But, from 1st October 1993 it turned into a three-member body once again.

Political Parties

The Indian National Congress formed in 1885 came to represent the Indian national movement before independence and the Indian state for up to two decades after 1947. On the eve of independence, the Congress was the only party which had a country-wide network and a social reach which cut across classes, regions and religions. But what had also grown in the shadow of the Congress led anti-colonial struggle was a political space where political parties could come into existence and a political culture which institutionalised the democratic functioning of a party system. With the gradual growth of a participatory structure of politics, under the watchful eye of the colonial state, political parties came into existence in the early 20th century, some of whom contested the pre-independence elections and then went on to contest the first elections of independent India in 1952. Most of them were limited in their geographical or social reach, representing social, economic or religious interests either in opposition to or in collaboration with the colonial state. Their limitations were compounded by the extremely restricted franchise before independence.

Before independence, besides the Congress, it was the Communist Party of India which had an all-India make up. But because of the interests it represented - the working class - it remained restricted to urban industrial spaces of Bombay and Calcutta. There were also parties like the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha and the All India Muslim League which attempted to build an all-India base, but remained influential in pockets of north, east and centre. These were religion based parties that had come into existence to consolidate their respective community's hold over jobs and positions in the colonial

administration in opposition to the Congress led anti-colonial struggle and typified religious politics with a strong communal streak. They were influential among the upper social and economic strata, though in the 1940s the Muslim League had also acquired a base among the peasantry and small traders. In partitioned independent India, the Hindu Mahasabha gradually disappeared from the political scene, to be succeeded by the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, another Hindu right-wing party formed in 1951, and the Muslim League remained only in Kerala, to play a decisive role in the two-way polarization between the Congress and the Left. The Akali Dal, though a religion based party, was formed as an anti-feudal anti-colonial force to root out the corrupt British supported mahant-management of the gurudwaras in the Punjab in the 1920s. In this struggle the Akali movement forged strong ties with the larger Congress led anti-colonial struggle. Some of them subsequently joined the Congress as also the communist movement. The Akali Dal however largely remained a party of the Sikhs confined to the state of Punjab and carried on largely an anti-Congress politics in independent India.

Parties like the Khudai Khidmatgars of NWFP, the Unionist Party of Punjab, the Justice Party of Madras, the Independent Labour Party of Bombay, etc represented social groups - the Pathans, the Muslims of Punjab and the non-Brahmin castes, the Depressed Classes, respectively - within specific regions in pre-independent India. Not only were these parties confined to particular regions, but also centred round individuals who formed them - Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Sikandar Hayat Khan, Ramaswamy Periyar, B.R. Ambedkar, respectively. They hardly had any organised party structure worth the name that could survive the absence of the founding leaders. The Krishak Praja Party of Bengal represented the peasantry (mainly Muslim), demanded *zamindari* abolition, but again, was confined to one particular region and the hold of one leader, Fazlul Haq.

In independent India, one discerns a similar pattern in the way political parties came to represent socio-cultural, socio-economic, economic, lingual-regional and religio-cultural interests. Some of the political parties continued to exist even after the first elections, some perished/dissolved or merged with other parties thereafter, and some came into existence between 1947 and the first elections. Despite the fact that the Congress remained the dominant party for many years to come after independence, parties were allowed to form and operate freely. Though there were no legal or institutional restrictions on party formation, the highly differentiated and internally diverse nature of the India polity (in terms of caste, community, class and region) made it difficult for most parties to grow beyond the confines of one particular region or group. Specific political ideologies when operating within the Congress had the scope of an all-India influence, but this became severely curtailed once that political faction moved out of the Congress umbrella. It was able to make a dent only in specific limited locations.

When moving forward from the base of origin, the new parties were confronted with novel situations and questions that they were not equipped to handle, and being weak in organisation and resources their problems were compounded. Political parties other than the Congress contested the first elections, but none of them came anywhere near the Congress' socio-economic or regional spread. Many parties received less than one per cent of the votes polled in the first elections of 1951-52. Thereafter, the Election Commission recognized only those parties which had received at least 3 per cent of the vote at a country-wide level (in the 1951-52 elections). In this way, 4 all-India parties and 11 state parties were accorded recognition for the 1957 elections.

According to Myron Weiner, by 1951 four major groups of political parties had emerged (Weiner 1990: 16). He classifies them according to their orientation towards the new secular parliamentary democracy based on the new Constitution. One group, which included the Congress, Socialist Party, Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party and several small state parties, more or less accepted the new secular democratic state. A second group rejected the Western-type parliamentary system and advocated a Soviet or Chinese type of political and economic system. This group was made up of parties like the CPI, the Bolshevik Party of India, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Peasants and Workers Party, etc. A third group also rejected the secular, democratic state, and saw itself as representing Hindu interests. The Hindu Mahasabha, Jan Sangh and Ram Rajya Parishad formed this group. A fourth group was somewhat indifferent to the Constitutional framework, but mainly concerned with some provincial or community interest. The Akali Dal, the Scheduled Caste Federation, the Jharkhand Party, and the Tamil Nadu Congress constituted this group. These parties not only made demands on behalf of their own communities; they were carriers of a group consciousness, sometimes communal, sometimes provincial, and in a few instances tribal (Weiner 1990: 16).

The Socialist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP), the so-called non-communist left parties, were fringe parties that had functioned within the Congress before independence but had broken from the Congress because of differences over either the economic programme (Socialist Party) or the relationship between the party and the government (KMPP) just after independence. They were led by socialists and Gandhians once members of the Congress. Many communists also began their political careers as part of the Congress, and it was in the late 1920s and early 1930s that the Communist Party of India crystallised as a party. It was banned by the government in 1934 and contested elections for the very first time in 1951. The two new Hindu parties, the Ram Rajya Parishad and the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, were formed having a base in the upper caste urban Hindu middle classes of north-central India. They worked in tandem with the Hindu Mahasabha as the Hindu right wing opposition to the Congress till the former faded into oblivion. Most of the small parties contested in a single state except a few like the Shiromani Akali Dal which contested in Punjab and the neighbouring PEPSU, and the Peasants and Workers Party which put up its candidates in Bombay and Hyderabad.

The First Parliamentary Elections.

Holding elections for the first time on the basis of universal adult franchise was a colossal task. In 1949 at a press conference, the Congress president explained this enormity in the following words: 'We expect to get the electorates ready and the electoral rolls printed in a year's time. I want the public to realize the magnitude of this problem. Under the old constitution there were 3 and a half crores of voters out of a total population of 39 crores of undivided India. But under the new Constitution, with adult franchise in partitioned India, we shall have 17 crores of voters in a population of 30 crores...If all the printing presses in India work day and night, the minimum time required to print this list will be at least one year'.³⁹

In all, 14 national parties and 39 state parties participated in the first Lok Sabha elections along with 533 independent candidates.⁴⁰ These were the very first elections on the basis of universal adult franchise, but less than 45 per cent voters came to cast their vote in the first parliamentary elections. Among the voters 'not all of them understood the nature of this new ritual and some were no doubt victims of others who understood it wrongly and too well' (Morris-Jones 1979: 93). The national parties put up 1217 candidates, the other state parties 124 and the independents, as just stated, were 533. Thus, the total number of candidates who contested elections was 1874. Of these, those who won were 418 candidates of the national parties, 34 of the other state parties and 37 independents - a total of 489.⁴¹ A look at the following tables would reveal how the various parties and independents were placed in the first parliamentary elections.

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52

National Parties	Contested	Won	Vote %
BJS	94	3	3.06
BPI	1	0	0.02
CPI	49	16	3.29
FBL(MG)	22	1	0.91
FBL(RG)	6	0	0.13
HM	31	4	0.95
INC	479	364	44.99
KLP	29	1	1.41
KMPP	145	9	5.79
RCPI	2	0	0.06
RRP	61	3	1.97
RSP	9	3	0.44
SCF	35	2	2.38
SP	254	12	10.59
Total	1217	418	75.99%

Source: Election Commission of India Website

BJS=Bharatiya Jana Sangh; BPI=Bolshevik Party of India; CPI=Communist Party of India; FB(MG)=Forward Bloc (Marxist Group); FB(RG)=Forward Bloc (Raikar Group); HM= Hindu Mahasabha; INC=Indian National Congress; KLP=Krishikar Lok Party; KMPP=Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party; RCPI=Revolutionary Communist Party

of India; RRP=Ram Rajya Parishad; RRP=Revolutionary Socialist Party; SCF= Schedule Caste Federation; SP=Socialist Party

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52

State Parties	Contested	Won	Vote %
CNSPJP	6	1	0.22
CWL	3	3	0.31
GP	12	6	0.91
HSPP	1	0	0.01
JHP	7	3	0.71
JUSP	1	0	0.06
LSS	4	2	0.29
PWP	13	2	0.94
SAD	11	4	0.99
SKS	1	0	0.03
TTC	1	1	0.11
Others	64	12	3.52
Total	124	34	8.10%

Source: Election Commission of India Website

CNSPJP=Chota Nagpur Santhals Pargana Janata Party; CWL=Common Weal party; GP=All India Gantantra Parishad; HSPP=Hyderabad State Praja Party; JHP=Jharkhand Party; JUSP=Justice Party; LSS=Lok Sewak Sangh; PWP=Peasants and Workers Party; SAD=Shiromani Akali Dal; SKS=Saurashtra Khedut Sangh; TTC=Travancore Tamil Nad Congress Party.

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52 Independents

Contested	Won	Vote %
533	37	15.09

Source: Election Commission of India Website

The vote share of independent candidates, which stood at 15.09 per cent, was second only to the Congress. The number of victorious independent candidates in the first general elections has been the largest among all the fourteen general elections in India. This is significant as the number of independent candidates contesting elections has gone up but their winnability has declined. Elections definitely have become expensive affairs, but one has to concede that the party system has acquired firm roots. In an environment of greater caste and community assertions, political parties have acquired a new meaning. Their ability to represent issues, voice demands and make assertions much more firmly and effectively than single individuals contesting as independents has to be recognised. Also, collective strength typified by parties is something individuals cannot acquire.

Among the national parties, the Congress alone amassed 364 seats and almost 45 per cent of the popular vote. A well established organisational structure, a written constitution and years of political experience counted for its strengths. Together with these, an adherence to pluralist-secular values (though with compromises here and there) and accommodative politics prepared an influential base for it in diverse regions and among diverse groups. If an entrepreneur saw potential for his growth in it, a low caste peasant saw in it an end to his poverty and social degradation. Congress was not and could not become a party of extremes. Whenever party factions or leaders leaned too much towards an extreme, the party fell ill at ease and eventually eased them out to chart their own course. On the other hand, it was willing to work with groups and individuals who were of moderate disposition.

There were areas however where the Congress was stronger than the others. The table below indicates the regional differentials in the Congress support.

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52

Congress Performance in Regions

Region	Vote %	Seat %
All India	45	73
Hindi Heartland	50	85
South	38	51
West	51	87
East	43	68
North	41	75
Northeast and Islands	25	25

Source: Rudolf and Rudolf 1987 (Reprint 1998): 184.

Hindi Heartland=Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Madhya Bharat, Ajmer, Bhopal and Vindhya Pradesh.

South=Madras, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore-Cochin and Coorg.

West=Bombay, Saurashtra and Kutch.

East=Bengal, Orissa and Assam.

North=PEPSU, Punjab and Bilaspur.

Northeast and Islands=Manipur, Tripura.

As the table indicates the Congress was strongest in the west followed by the Hindi heartland. It was weakest in the north-east and the east and had to face some competition from the CPI (in Tripura, Manipur and West Bengal) and the Hindu parties (in West Bengal). The Congress had emerged first, in terms of number of seats, in all states and union territories except Tripura, where both seats were won by the CPI and it was way ahead of the Congress in votes. The CPI here had won 61.29% of the votes polled and the Congress 25.58%. In PEPSU, the Congress and the Akali Dal had won two seats each, but the Congress had polled more votes than the latter. Similarly, in Manipur, the Congress and the Socialist Party won one seat each, but the Congress was slightly ahead in the number of votes polled.

The Communist parties, of whom the CPI was the strongest, were cadre based tightly organised parties marked by considerable discipline and commitment to the communist ideology. The CPI had grown out of a movement going back to the 1920s, a past of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism and trade unionism. It was primarily an urban party, but after 1947 worked towards building a base among the marginal and landless peasantry. In the south, the CPI led armed struggles to liberate the peasantry from feudal and oppressive conditions in Telengana (Hyderabad) and Thanjavur (Madras) in the late 1940s.

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52 CPI's Regional Base

States/UT	Vote %	Votes	Seats Won
All India	3.29	3487401	16 (489)
Tripura	61.29	96458	2 (2)
West Bengal	9.46	720304	5 (34)
Madras	8.95	1783407	8 (75)
Manipur	8.65	13184	0 (2)
Orissa	5.77	211303	1 (20)
Punjab	5.04	251623	0 (18)

Source: Election Commission of India Website. Figures in parenthesis indicate the total number of seats in the states.

The CPI contested in 14 states and drew most of its votes from the north-east (in Tripura its voter per cent was 61.29%), the east (West Bengal and Orissa) and the south (regions covered in the Madras state).

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52

Hindu Parties: Bharatiya Jan Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha, Ram Rajya Parishad

States/UT	BJS			HM			RRP		
	Vote%	Votes	Seats Won	Vote%	Votes	Seats Won	Vote%	Votes	Seats Won
All India	3.06	3246361	3	0.95	1003034	4	1.97	2091898	3
MadhyaBharat	9.65	188569	0	6.26	122213	2	14.25	278475	0
Rajasthan	3.04	107089	1	1.00	35338	0	9.41	331760	3
U.P	7.29	1244099	0	1.91	325601	1	3.55	606030	0
W.Bengal	5.94	452279	2	4.27	324870	1	0.17	13110	0

The three Hindu parties, upper caste and Hindi-speaking, were parties of the 'Hindi heartland' but within this region their votes came primarily from western Rajasthan, the Gwalior and Guna regions (now in Madhya Pradesh) of Madhya Bharat and the Gonda region of Uttar Pradesh. In the seats tally, it was only in Madhya Bharat that one of the three, i.e., the Hindu Mahasabha emerged second (the Congress was first in all states except Tripura). In Rajasthan and West Bengal, the RRP and BJS were placed third. The second position here had gone to the independents and the CPI, respectively. In U.P., the sole seat won by the Hindu Mahasabha (the only seat won by the Hindu parties in U.P.) made it fourth after the Congress, the Socialist Party and the Independents. Among the three Hindu parties, the BJS which was backed by the RSS, had emerged a stronger party in terms of votes polled, but it was the Hindu Mahasabha which scored the highest in terms of seats gained. The three parties managed a total of 10 seats between them - a tally which was below that of the Socialist Party (12 seats) and just one seat more than Kriplani's KMPP (9 seats). A prominent Bengali leadership of S.P. Mookerjee and N.C. Chatterjee, a highly volatile Hindu-Muslim politics of the past, including partition, and serious communal tensions thereafter in East Pakistan had made them possible to have a foothold in West Bengal politics too.

These parties had a Hindu right-wing communal bent and had displayed their sectarian and conservative character by opposing secular-pluralism and leading campaigns accusing Nehru of Muslim and Pakistan appeasement. S.P. Mookerjee, president of the Hindu Mahasabha and subsequently of the Jan Sangh, had also called for reversal of partition adding fuel to the already tense relations between the two countries.

1st Lok Sabha 1951-52

Socialist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party

States/UT	SP			KMPP		
	Vote%	Votes	Seats Won	Vote%	Votes	Seats Won
All India	10.59	11216719	12	5.79	6135978	9
Assam	19.15	506943	1	-	-	0
Bihar	21.28	2126066	3	-	-	0
Madras	5.29	1055423	2	9.79	1952197	6
Orissa	15.40	563462	1	-	-	0
U.P.	12.94	2208678	2	-	-	0
Hyderabad	13.42	651316	1	-	-	0
Mysore	-	-	0	23.04	650658	1
Manipur	19.26	29372	1	-	-	0
Delhi	-	-	0	7.28	47735	1
VindhyaPrad.	17.78	125480	1	15.03	106071	1

The Socialist Party's vote share in these Lok Sabha elections was next only to Congress' but the number of seats won by it were less than CPI's. In fact, there existed a huge gap between the SP's vote share and the CPI's. The former won 10.59 per cent of the votes and the CPI just 3.29 per cent but the number of seats

won by the two parties was 12 and 16, respectively. This brings forth the much discussed issue of the characteristic of an electoral system based on simple majority. This first-past-the-post method has made it possible for governments to be minority governments and not truly representative of the majority.

Conclusion

The paper attempted to highlight the institutionalisation of organised political competition in India. In an atmosphere of tight colonial control, political parties were formed. They agitated for greater representation in the expanding legislative assemblies and competed for popular support - many of them on the lines of caste and community. On the eve of independence, the Constituent Assembly among other things recognised the fundamental importance of free and fair elections and universal adult franchise for democratic rule. It entrusted the task of conducting elections to an independent Election Commission, which has been conducting elections in India ever since. The structures and mechanisms of electoral practice which gradually evolved were firmly put in place between 1947 and 1951. The first elections saw a multi-party system operate in full swing despite the overshadowing presence of the Congress. Within the parliamentary set up, the Indian party system has matured, and increased politicisation has brought about a proliferation of political parties. This proliferation informed mainly by caste and community ties has seen the one party dominant system giving way to coalitional regimes both at the centre and the states.

End Notes

1. Information on the Government of India Act, 1919 and 1935 collated from R.N. Aggarwala (1956, Eleventh Revised Edition 1980), R.P.Dutt (1940, Reprint 1986), Bipan Chandra et al (1989) and Sumit Sarkar (1983).
2. For details on franchise see Jha (1976: 27-36).
3. Political parties like the Justice Party of Madras, Kisan Party of Bihar & Orissa, the Liberal party, etc contested elections. The Congress did not contest the 1920 elections as it had launched the non-cooperation movement.
4. For details on franchise see Jha (1976).
5. For details on pre-1947 elections and the anti-colonial agitations see Sumit Sarkar (1983), Bipan Chandra et al (1989).
6. For details see R.N. Aggarwala (1956, Eleventh Revised Edition 1980).
7. Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD): Discussion on 13th December 1948.
8. Ibid.
9. CAD: Discussion on 15th June 1949.
10. Except for H.V. Kamath's (C.P. and Berar: General) statement on Article 291 that this aims at over-centralisation not conducive to harmony between the Union and the Units.
11. This was subsequently raised to 18 years by the 61st Amendment Act (1988).
12. Meeting of the Advisory Committee 21-22 April 1947, see B. Shiva Rao (1967: 248-51).
13. CAD: Discussion on 15th June 1949.
14. CAD: H.V. Pataskar (Bombay: General) 16th June 1949.
15. Ibid.

16. CAD: Kuladhar Chaliha (Assam: General) 16th June 1949.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. CAD: Annie Mascarene (Tavancore State) 16th June 1949.
21. H.V. Pataskar 15th June 1949.
22. Ibid.
23. Hirday Nath Kunzru (United Provinces: General) 16th June 1949.
24. H.V. Pataskar 15th June 1949.
25. Ibid.
26. Shibban Lal Saksena (United Provinces: General) 15th June 1949.
27. R.K. Sidhva (C.P. and Berar: General) 16th June 1949.
28. Shibban Lal Saksena (United Provinces: General) 15th June 1949.
29. Pandit Hirday Nath Kunzru 16th June 1949.
30. K.M. Munshi (Bombay: General) 16th June 1949.
31. Naziruddin Ahmad (West Bengal: Muslim) 16th June 1949.
32. Ibid.
33. K.M. Munshi (Bombay: General) 16th June 1949.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. In the Dhanoa case (1991) judgement the Supreme Court ruled out equality in terms of service and manner of removal between the Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners. But, according to the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners' (Conditions of Service) Act, 1994 (originally the Presidential Ordinance 32 of 1993), the other Election Commissioners can only be removed from office in a like manner and like grounds as the Chief Election Commissioner. For details see Madan (1997).
39. 'General Elections May Be Held in February 1951: Dr Pattabhi Explains Report on Linguistic Provinces', *The Hindustan Times*, 9 April 1949.
40. Election Commission of India Website.
41. Statistical figures from the Election Commission of India website.

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