

**Parties under Pressure:
Political Parties in India Since Independence**

K.C. Suri

Professor

Department of Political Science
Nagarjuna University
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

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I have been struggling for almost twenty years to understand the ways in which parties function in India. Over these years, I spoke with leaders of different parties, mostly in the state of Andhra Pradesh, on a variety of issues and questions in the domain of political parties. While such interaction gave some clarity, it also baffled me with contradictory feelings towards parties. It is not possible to name each leader, but I acknowledge their contribution in shaping my understanding of political parties.

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K C SURI

Acronyms

Acronyms used for parties and associations

AC: Arunachal Congress
ADMK: All India Anna DMK
AGP: Asom Gana Parishad
AIMIM: All India Majlis-I-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen
AITC: All India Trinamool Congress
BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS: Bharatiya Jan Sangh
BKD: Bharatiya Kranti Dal
BLD: Bharatiya Lok Dal
BSP Bahujan Samaj Party
CPI: Communist Party of India
CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPIML(L): CPI (Marxist-Leninist) -Liberation
DMK: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
INC: Indian National Congress
INLD Indian National Lok Dal
JD: Janata Dal
JKNC: Jammu & Kashmir National Conference
JKNPP: Jammu & Kashmir Panthers Party
JKPDP: J&K People's Democratic Party
JMM: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
JP: Janata Party
KEC: Kerala Congress
KECM: Kerala Congress-Mani
KLP: Krishikar Lok Party
KMPP: Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party
JSP: Lok Janshakti Party
MDMK: Marumalarchi DMK
MGP: Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party
MNF: Mizo National Front
MNP: Manipur People's Party
MUL: Muslim League
NCP: Nationalist Congress Party
PMK: Pattali Makkal Katchi
PSP: Praja Socialist Party
RJD: Rashtriya Janata Dal

RLD: Rashtriya Lok Dal
RPI: Republican Party of India
RSP: Revolutionary Socialist Party
SAD: Shiromani Akali Dal
SDF: Sikkim Democratic Front
SHS: Shiv Sena
SP: Samajwadi Party
SSP: Samyukta Socialist Party
SWA: Swatantra Party
TDP :Telugu Desam Party
TRS: Telengana Rashtra Samiti
UGDP: United Goans Democratic Party

Other acronyms

EC: Election Commission of India
NDA: National Democratic Alliance
NES: National Election Study
LS: Lok Sabha
UF: United Front
UPA: United Progressive Alliance
WVS: World Values Survey

Summary

The domain of political parties in India has undergone amazing transformation since the time the country became a democratic republic. With the metamorphosis of the old parties, and in some cases their decline, demise or reincarnation, and the emergence of a large number of significant new parties, the party system has changed beyond comparison between what it was in the middle of the 20th century and what it is now. From a time when the political scientists and commentators had worked out theories of one-party dominance or felt anxious about the conduciveness of such a party system for democracy to blossom, we have now reached a situation where too many parties stampede and jostle for space in the party domain. Some see it as a natural, if not desirable, development due to the dynamics of the world's most populous democracy marked by great diversity, cultural pluralism and economic underdevelopment. Others see in it fragmentation and decay of the polity, and apprehend a danger to democracy, to the unity of the country and the stability of governments.

The plural and federal character of our polity has been asserting itself in the party domain for quite some time. Of the 50 parties that are now recognised as National and State parties, 44 have been founded after Independence. Although the theories of one-party dominant system reigned for two decades after Independence, we can say, of course with the benefit of the hindsight, that the future multi-party democracy had its embryonic beginnings then itself. This became more evident during the past two decades when National parties are either marginalized or have become adjuncts to the State parties in major States of the country. Over these years, most parties have performed the role of ruling as well as opposition parties at different levels, simultaneously or at different periods. After the flux and uncertainty of the 80s, a two-coalitional party system has set in at the Union level, in which a large number of parties share power. We saw this in the United Front and more recently in the coalition governments of the NDA and the UPA.

The working of parties over the past 50 years or more can be described as one of partial success. Parties played an immense role as mediating agencies in bringing about democratic transformation in a relatively peaceful manner (compared to several other former colonial countries), in a short span of time, and under conditions that were considered not very conducive to democratic

development. They were instrumental in taking governments closer to the people. Today, all parties contest elections in the name of securing the common good. They maintain that they are committed to protect and promote the interests of the poor, marginalized and the socially disadvantaged.

Parties have exhibited a good deal of ideological flexibility. This has been the strength as well as the weakness of parties. All parties profess adherence to some kind of egalitarian, secular, socialist and democratic principles, although the meaning of these terms vary from party to party. Parties that start with some strong ideological moorings tend to moderate themselves and move towards the centre. Although the leaders and groups who split away from a parent party often proclaim ideological differences and policy disagreements as reasons for parting ways or forming new parties, it is difficult to disentangle them from motivations arising from power calculations and personality clashes.

The representative character of parties also has increased over time. They draw more and more sections of society into the arena of politics and provided avenues for the elites from the weaker sections to manage public affairs, through a process that came to be known as 'social-balancing'. Where and when this accommodation did not keep pace with the pressures, from different social groups, for leadership positions in party and government, new parties have emerged claiming to represent the aspirations of the weaker sections, backward classes, people of specific nationalities, etc. They came to power at the Union and State levels. Secularisation and broad basing of parties, as well as fragmentation of parties, have occurred simultaneously. As different social groups, either through the catch-all parties or through parties of specific castes and communities, get a place in governments, the legitimacy of governments has increased over time.

While the success of parties gives us some satisfaction, their shortcomings cause disquiet. The very success of parties in establishing and working out democracy in the spirit of nationalism, secularism, and socialism gave birth to tensions that parties find difficult to manage or resolve. For some desire more democracy, more power and more benefits from the state. Others feel that Indian democracy has gone awry and they tend to blame it on the populism, paternalism, corruption, and criminality indulged in by party leaders. The latter argument became more strident, as the principles and practice of libertarian democracy became dominant in the changed international environment of globalisation.

Most parties have become centred around one leader who exercises absolute control over the party. The puzzle is that while parties have been instrumental in democratising state and society, they have tended to become internally less democratic. As the capacity of the state to meet these aspirations turned out to be limited and the leaders were excessively interested in perpetuating themselves in power endlessly and in amassing wealth by making use of their position, it became difficult for the parties to manage public affairs. Representative bodies have become arenas of confrontational politics, where rivals launch personal attacks on each other than deliberating upon policies and legislation. Ruling parties are repeatedly voted out in elections due to the anti-incumbency factor. As popular pressures have increased on the parties, the party leaders have found out ways to win elections by resorting to huge expenditure to secure votes, the use of coercion, and the playing up of caste and community identities.

Political parties in India today have to simultaneously attend multiple tasks: to resolve the emergent tensions emanating in society due to rapid democratisation; to manage policy changes in the environment of liberalisation without giving up the Constitutional commitment equality and justice; to forge coalitions and learn to share power; and to reform themselves. Actually, all these tasks are organically connected. So the parties find themselves under great pressure to perform by the delivery of the democratic promise to the people at large and to reform internally by ensuring more democracy within parties.

The need for party reforms is now widely felt in India, including by some of the leaders of different parties. Introspection among party leaders and their willingness to set things right within the party, the ability of people to bring pressure on parties and to choose right leaders, initiatives from the EC and the judiciary, and external legislation that ensures internal democracy in parties are crucial to making both parties and Indian democracy strong and vibrant.

Introduction

The working of political parties in India, over more than five decades after Independence, presents us a contrasting picture of partial success, serious shortcomings and huge challenges. As such it generates mixed or contradictory feelings in us. While the success gives us some satisfaction, the shortcomings cause disquiet, and the challenges leave us in a state of doubt. Actually, these challenges arise as a combined result of the contradictory aspects of the performance and functioning of the parties: their partial success in making democracy work and their serious shortcomings. The shortcomings are many that include a gap between what the party leaders say they stand for and what they actually do; between the expectations of people for more benefits and the inability of parties to deliver; and between the increased authoritarian leadership styles and the larger dynamics of democracy.

In the initial years after Independence, several observers of Indian politics, especially from the West, were sceptical about India's inner strength, political maturity and democratic values to sustain parties that would make democracy work. Now very few would deny the success of political parties in managing in a democratic framework this vast and plural country with social inequalities, poverty, illiteracy and backwardness. Surely, many of us are unhappy with the way parties work today. But very few of us would be willing to envisage a democratic political system without parties. In as much as political parties have become indispensable to the democratic politics of our time, across the world, we can take parties in India as given and seek to explain what has brought the country to such a pass, and explore the ways in which party domain would develop in the times to come. This paper is premised on the view that in any attempt to understand the working of parties in India not much purpose will be served if we take a deprecatory view of political parties, dismissing them as hopeless entities serving only the excessively selfish interests of party leaders. Equally, not much purpose will be served by taking a romantic view of parties.

The world of political parties in India seems to be in an unending flux. Parties have been coming into existence and going out of existence. They have been splitting and coming together. Even those parties that appear to be stable in name have undergone important changes in their content and in the internal arrangement of their constituent elements. The terms fragmentation and

federalisation are often used to characterise this situation. This transformation is often seen in terms of several transitional points – from the emergence of one party dominant system to its break down, to an incoherent multiparty system to the present two-coalitional multiparty system. Over the past five decades, party competition has increased. In their fight for gaining or retaining power, they often they pursued adversarial politics with confrontationist postures, policies and programmes. At the same time they exhibited a great deal of flexibility in shifting stands and alliances when it comes to winning elections or sharing power. This transformation can be also understood in terms of the changes in the internal structuring and functioning of parties, decline in the quality of leadership, increasing criminality and corruption among party leaders, undermining of constitutional and democratic institutions, by both ruling and opposition parties, growth of factionalism, stifling of internal democracy, concentration of power in a single leader, etc. It could also be understood in terms of the social bases of parties and the shifts in them, strategies and tactics adopted by party leadership in managing people and government, and in winning elections and forming governments. The growth of populism, appeals to sentiments such as caste, religion, region, tribe and language, use of money, muscle power and other allurements, and recourse to electoral and political malpractices to gain or retain power, are some aspects of this phenomenon.

As we delve into the matter, the scope of the study of working of political parties seems to expand more and more since this is integrally related to Indian politics, economy and society. Given the crucial role parties play in politics, the study of parties at once becomes a study of politics in general. How India's economy and social structure impact on the structure and functioning of parties also assumes importance. However, the present paper does not attempt upon making a comprehensive analysis of the dialectical relation between these structures. It seeks to arrive at an understanding of what has happened in the party domain since Independence, explain the various aspects of parties in their organisation and functioning at present, and examine the prospect. This it does by seeking answers to the following questions. They are:

- The structure of party competition: What have been the main patterns of party competition? What changes have come about in the parties and the party system and how do we understand these changes?
- Ideology: What have been the ideological positions adopted by different parties? What changes have come over time? How far is ideology relevant in the shaping and working of parties?

- Social base: What are the social and electoral support bases of parties? Are there any changes/shifts in them and if so how and why have they come about?
- Organisation and functioning: How are the formal structures of party organisations? How democratic are they in their internal functioning and how much do parties diverge in this aspect? What are the various leadership styles? Why and how have parties in recent decades become leader-centred and family-centred?
- Performance: What has been the role of parties in democratic transformation of India's polity? How far are parties successful in articulating people's aspirations and acting as agencies that led to the accommodation of diverse groups in governmental structures? How did parties contribute to the legitimacy and stability of the state?
- Challenges and prospects: What are the challenges that parties face? What kinds of interventions are possible to strengthen the parties and their democratic character?

II. Changing Nature of Party Competition

That the nature and working of parties are influenced by the nature of the state and society in which they operate is an agreed notion in literature on party politics. The country's history, national character, culture, traditions, philosophy and economy influence the parties in the way they shape up and function. Also, the legal framework, the electoral system and the political environment influence the working of the parties.

In most of the countries, which were once colonies of the western nations, parties had emerged as associations for the purpose of fighting for national independence. In most of such countries, the party that led the nationalist movement, after attaining independence, could place restrictions on or prohibit other parties and establish one party system because of the absence of other political formations with popular support strong enough to maintain a competitive framework. The party system in India, however, took a different trajectory. The factors that contributed to the sustenance of democratic politics also contributed to the sustenance of parties and party competition in the country. These factors inhibited forces such as the military, bureaucracy and landed gentry to usurp power in India, as happened in several other post-colonial countries.

Cultural pluralism, social diversity, and the existence of multiple philosophical schools had been the major characteristic of the country which must have gone into the process of giving shape to a multiparty system with all its complexities. As Rajni Kothari pointed out, a striking feature of India's historical culture and tradition is its great variety and heterogeneity. This is due to the diversity of ethnic and religious groups, the eclectic rather than proselytising style of integration characteristic of Hinduism; absence of either a unifying theology or a unifying secular tradition, and a highly differentiated social system that has brought functional hierarchies, spiritual distinctions and ritual distances into a manifold frame of identities and inter-dependence. Through centuries India has developed what may be called a 'consensual style' in dealing with problems and issues. The pluralistic characteristics coupled with a consensual style led to the development of a multi-party system in India with some of its unique features (Kothari, 1970a: 152-67).

The long experience in mobilising and organising people, the working of political parties and the politics of representation during the freedom struggle

kept the parties in India in good stead after Independence. During the colonial period, parties emerged as hybrids on Indian soil under the influence of the western political ideas and the ways in which leaders practised politics. Indian parties, therefore, acquired some distinct characteristics in the process of their development. By the time the country became independent it had several parties competing with each other although the Indian National Congress had an imposing presence.¹ Congress is the oldest party in Asia, and older than several other parties in the West. The Communist party of India was older than other such parties in Asia, and by the time India became Independent it had branches in most of the States. The socialists too had wide networks during the freedom struggle. For a long time they worked as groups inside the Congress. They formed separate parties soon after Independence. Several of the present-day Janata or socialist parties claim that socialist legacy. Parties such as the Shiromani Akali Dal, National Conference, Forward Bloc, Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Dravida Kazhagam, etc that emerged during the 20s, 30s and 40s could capture power in the 60s and later. By the time the first general elections were held, India was vibrant with several political parties, articulating different standpoints and competing for power. 53 political parties participated in the first General Elections, although most of them vanished within a decade or reappeared in new incarnations later.

The nature of Indian economy and the changes that were brought about after India became Independent are also important in sustaining party democracy. By the time India became Independent, it was the most industrially developed nation among the former colonies or the new nations that came into existence in the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Although the industrial base was not widespread or strong enough to give rise to a national economy, its growth during the inter-War period gave sufficient scope for the operation of

¹ The Justice Party was formed in 1917 with a view to mobilise non-Brahman sections of the then Madras Presidency; the Shiromani Akali Dal was formed in 1921 to establish Sikh control over gurudwaras; the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1925 to protect the rights of the Hindus; National Conference in 1932 to promote the rights of Kashmiri Muslims; Unionist Party was formed in Punjab in 1936; the Communist Party of India was formed in 1925; the Congress Socialist Party in 1935; the Forward Bloc in 1939; the Revolutionary Socialist Party in 1940; the Radical Democratic Party by M.N. Roy in 1942; and the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1940s to serve the interests of the downtrodden castes. Of course the Muslim League was formed in 1905 and, after a long period of mild constitutional activity, became an active contestant of the Congress in its claim to represent the interests of the Muslims. After the partition it was soon revived in 1948, although largely confined to Kerala.

parties at the national level. The country had a developed middle class, mostly trained in the values of western liberalism, which could articulate the interests of the nation and different sections of society. The progressive legislation and policies pursued by governments, especially that of land reforms, industrial development through planning and promotion of public sector, had transformed social relations and thinking. The policy of non-alignment provided space for autonomy in economic policy-making and manoeuvrability in political matters freeing the country to some extent from the pressures of imperialistic countries that led to political troubles in several developing countries.

The presence of enlightened leaders in parties and their readiness to follow the rules of electoral democracy and to accommodate the representatives of upcoming social groups in their fold helped the party system to consolidate in the initial years. Also the ability of people to see the rationale of the newly established democratic institutions, and their willingness to make use of them for their advancement, also helped the stability of the parties in India. People of the lower classes and castes saw electoral democracy as means to improve their lives, to secure a share in power. The upper classes/castes also tended to be accommodative rather than refusing to reconcile to the changing realities. Principles of socialism, equality and democracy, to which most parties adhered to, paved the way for the success of democratic party politics in the country.

A. Development of Multi-Party System

The evolution of parties and party system in India after Independence may be viewed broadly as consisting of four phases, with each phase having its genesis in the earlier one and flowing into the next one: period of Congress consolidation and dominance (1952-67); consolidation of opposition parties and emergence of multi-party system (1967-89); period of flux (1989-98); shaping of coalitional party system (1998-2004).

It has now become conventional to begin any discussion on political parties in India with the emergence of the Congress dominance during the 1950s and its breakdown during the 60s and 70s. The factors that helped Congress party to assume the role of a dominant ruling party in the wake of Independence and consolidate itself are well known. With partition, the main rival to the Congress, the Muslim League, was removed from the electoral scene. Electoral politics that replaced the politics of freedom struggle had severely constricted the space available to non-Congress parties earlier. Relatively weak as they were, when compared to the Congress during the freedom struggle, they were further rendered feeble under the first past the post electoral system followed in India which enabled the Congress to a gain two-thirds majority in the legislatures (see table 2). The multiplicity of parties and the presence of large number of independents enhanced the chances of victory for the Congress. Thus the presence of other parties in legislatures was much below their popular support. As the Congress eclipsed the non-Congress liberal parties, those who aspired to continue in politics had to seek space within the Congress fold. Its ability to use the nationalist movement's organisational network to mobilise political support and at the same time permit dissenting elements to organise themselves into oppositional factions within the party led to the Congress dominance.²

² Myron Weiner offered several possible explanations for this kind of situation. Firstly, in the critical period (1951-52) opposition parties had little knowledge of how they would be affected by the single-ballot, simple majority system. In the absence of knowledge as to the electoral following for different parties, opposition parties refrained from mergers. Secondly, there was very little to unite these parties. There was no consensus as to the nature of the Indian state or the functions of such a state. Thirdly, even among those parties that seem to agree on basic issues – such as the Hindu parties or the Left parties – there was no willingness to make alignments to improve their electoral prospects. Fourthly, many of the opposition parties were not committed to work within the parliamentary system as a means of achieving power. Some of these parties hoped to achieve power by revolutionary means and were therefore more concerned with correctness of policy than with making compromises that might enlarge their party support and improve their electoral prospects (Weiner, 1957: 262-64).

Congress enjoyed exclusive control over governmental power at the Centre and in most of the States.³ Neither the pre-Independence non-Congress parties nor the newly emerged parties could present a viable alternative to the Congress. India thus produced a 'one-party dominance' model, which is different from one-party system. Much of the focus of political commentators and researchers in those days was naturally centred round the functioning of the Congress party (Kothari, 1964; Morris-Jones, 1964; Kochanek, 1968). They spoke of its accommodative and integrative nature.⁴ The consolidation of the Congress and the weak opposition led to a belief that the Congress system was invincible.

However, the beauty of democracy lies in its ability to provide ground for the working out of the opposition to the dominant idea or institution. Alongside the Congress dominance we also notice the sprouting of the second phase. New opposition parties began to emerge in the 1950s and 1960s. Several leaders within the Congress, who were either disgruntled with the policies of the party or denied access to power, went out of it and formed separate parties – Socialist parties, Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP), Krishikar Lok Party (KLP), Bangla Congress, Kerala Congress, Jana Congress in Orissa, Swatantra, Bharatiya Kranti Dal, etc. Other parties, rooted in long-standing anti-Congress orientations, also began to gain strength: Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, Muslim League in Kerala, DMK in Tamil Nadu, National Conference in Jammu & Kashmir, etc. The Communist party too split on the question of support to the

³ In the first three general elections to the Lok Sabha, Congress won three-fourths of seats; and it ruled in all the States, except a brief interlude during 1957-59 in Kerala.

⁴ Writing on the 'Congress system' in early 1960s, Kothari said that the Indian party system consisted of a party of consensus (Congress) and parties of pressure (non-Congress parties). Inside the margin of the system were several opposition groups and parties, dissident groups from the ruling party, and other interest groups and important individuals. These groups did not constitute an alternative to the ruling party. Their role was to constantly pressurise, criticise, and censure it by influencing opinions and interests inside the margin. Congress was able to remain in power because it was periodically undergoing change and alternation in parliamentary and government personnel. The Congress system also led to a sense of efficacy among the opposition parties, despite no firm hope of assuming governmental power. Morris - Jones spoke about the retentiveness of the Congress – the ability to hold together various sectional interests within one organisation. This character prevented the Congress from becoming a monolithic party. Paul Brass identified faction, a leader-follower arrangement by distribution of power and patronage – as the basic unit of the Congress. The absence of authoritative leadership in the Congress contributed to the growth of factionalism in the party. Kochanek thought that factionalism performed an integrative function in that it broadened the base of participation and recruitment.

Congress party and those who took a vehement anti-Congress position, saying that defeat of the Congress was necessary for the advancement of people's democracy in the country, formed the CPM in 1964, which within three years became the ruling party in Bengal and Kerala.

If the 50s saw the consolidation of the Congress, the late 60s and 70s saw the consolidation of the non-Congress parties. Although the Congress retained power at the Union level in the 1967 elections, the party citadels began crumbling in several States. Opposition parties forged alliances and formed governments in eight major Indian States. Biju Patnaik, who formed the Utkal Congress in 1970, advocated the theory that the future belongs to provincial parties, which championed the hopes and aspirations of the people of their respective regions. Visions of a federal government comprising representatives from different States began to appear on the political horizon. For the first time since independence the Congress suffered massive defections, as the Congress leaders who were dissatisfied had other parties to look to. Several political scientists ably captured the emerging situation. Rajni Kothari spoke of the dominant party model giving way to a more differentiated structure of party competition (1967b). Morris-Jones (1978) emphasised that the new situation brought a number of opposition parties fully into the market place, and competition that had previously occurred within the Congress was now brought into the realm of inter-party conflict.

However, we find only few studies during this period to understand the emergence of the non-Congress parties and the socio-economic processes that gave rise to them.⁵ The focus was more on the disintegrative function of the factions; centralisation of power; and organisational weaknesses of the Congress, especially after the split in the Congress party in 1969.⁶ Among the several interpretations given to the emergence of non-Congress parties and their rise to power, one was that the central leadership of the Congress was divided

⁵ Hardgrave's study of the DMK (1964, 1965 and 1966); Angela Burger's study (1969) of the Jana Sangh, PSP and SP in UP; Jhangiani on Jana Sangh and Swatantra (1967); Hari Kishore Singh on PSP (1959); Wright on Muslim League (1966); Ram Joshi on Shiv Sena (1970); etc.

⁶ Brass (1983) pointed out the disintegration of the Congress organisation as an institutionalised force at the local level. Kochanek (1976) drew our attention as to how the highly centralising and interventionist ways of central leaders had undermined the local level functioning of the party in the early 70s. Sirsakar (1984) observed that the centralisation of power in the hands of the supreme leader through the High Command and the leader orientation of followers reduced the need for maintaining internal democracy.

and was unable to perform its earlier function of moderating and neutralising factional splits in several States. Rival groups were encouraged by the example of blatant factionalism among central leaders.

The agitations led by Jayaprakash Narayan, the imposition of Emergency, in 1975-77 and finally the formation of the Janata party in 1977 brought far-reaching changes in the structure of party competition. The Janata party itself came through the merger of different parties – Socialist Party, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Congress (O) – with long-standing mutual opposition but now united in their will to defeat the Congress. The Congress for democracy under the leadership of Jagjivan Ram joined the party after the election.

The emergence of a viable non-Congress party and its capturing of power at the Centre raised the hope of a two-party system taking shape. But this experiment soon fizzled out with leadership quarrels in the Janata party. After a gap of nine years the non-Congress parties once again came to power in 1989, under the banner of National Front. But it too collapsed within two years. The leaders of these parties, although very experienced and talented, were unable to work out a broad programme to aggregate political groups and to overcome the deep-seated party identities as they were embroiled in suicidal power intrigues. Thus, the non-Congress alliance was unable on both occasions to consolidate the significant support it received from the electorate and continue in power. However, the Janata and National Front experiments proved that it was possible to displace the Congress if the non-Congress parties could come together.

The 1980s was a period of great flux. It saw the emergence of more and more new parties. Several National and regional parties were born as the Janata party began to fall apart. Some old parties took a new avatar, such as the BJP (formed in 1980), which began to gain strength as the major opposition to the Congress at the national level and in some States. The Bahujan Samaj Party began to take shape in the North as the representative of the dalits. New regional parties sprouted, developed and captured power in States: such as the TDP (1983) in AP and the AGP (1985) in Assam. As a result of reconfiguration of politics numerous small parties began to gain strength or emerge: All India Muslim League (1948), Shiv Sena (1966), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (1972), Manipur People's Party, Mizo National Front (1965), J&K Panthers Party, Nagaland People's Party, Nagaland People's Council, Sikkim Sangrama Parishad, Indian People's Front, etc. Due to the fragmentation of major regional parties different

splinter parties of SAD, DMK (the Anna DMK in 1972), Republican Party of India and Kerala Congress began to appear.

The United Front experiment, through which the left, regional and minor parties came to the centre stage of Indian politics and were called upon to play an important role in running the government, heralded new patterns of party competition. The pluralistic nature of India's federal polity began to assert itself in the party domain. Suddenly, the National parties became highly dependent on the regional and small parties to win elections or to form government. From a time when the term regional party was considered not very respectable (often they were described as parochial parties), now they were much sought after. From a time when the national parties dictated to State leaders, and changed Chief Ministers at will, the time has come when regional parties have a significant role in the composition on the Union Government, if not in deciding who the Prime Minister should be. As they gained a voice in national politics, they demanded for a more federal government and more autonomy to the States.

Yogendra Yadav says that in the social and political churning that India went through this period several dormant social identities acquired a new salience in the context of electoral competition (1999). He terms it as the "third electoral system". It heralded a new pattern of party competition in what he calls a "post-Congress polity". Congress was no longer the pole against which every polity formation was defined. The constraint on the voter to vote for or against it was no longer there. Even in those States where there was a direct race between the Congress and its rival, the Congress was no more the natural party of governance. The political space was occupied by three forces: the Congress, BJP and others. The third space became the spring of political alternatives.

James Manor identified two great themes in Indian politics to explain the changes in the parties and party system of India during this period, namely democratisation and decay. According to him, as people at all levels of society became increasingly aware of the logic of electoral politics, a new awakening occurred among the great mass of India's voters. They became more assertive and their appetite for resources from politicians grew. India became increasingly democratic and increasingly difficult to govern. The period also saw a decline in the capacity of institutions to respond to pressures from society. This decay affected most political parties. The awakening of the electorate and the decay of parties combined to generate two major tendencies: (i) the way the elections were won or lost. A change from the days before 1972, when an incumbent at the State and national levels usually won re-election, to a period in which they

usually lost; and (ii) growing divergence between the logic of politics at the national level and the logic of politics in various State-level arenas. Thus this period was marked by greater competition among parties and also by greater instability within many parties. It was a time characterised by abundant alternation between parties in power at the State and national levels, by continued decay and fragmentation within parties and by a tendency towards personalised control of parties (Manor, 1990).

Reasons for the emergence of several strong and viable regional parties during 1980s and later received good attention of political scientists in recent years (Gopa Kumar, 1986; Bhatnagar and Pradeep Kumar, 1988; Manor, 1996; Kohli, 1988; Palshikar, 2003 & 2004b). Some major aspects of this phenomenon can be discerned.

Firstly, the nature of development and the policies pursued by the government during three decades of independence saw the emergence of new political forces. The rise of the aspiring political elites from among the intermediate peasant communities as one major factor that added to the dynamism of state politics has been highlighted by Paul Brass in the context of Uttar Pradesh. This is true of most States. Although this process began much earlier in the southern States, this did not come to the fore for some time as the Congress party accommodated the elites from peasant communities. The strategy of the Congress party in 1950s to enlist the support of the leaders from the intermediate peasant communities to oppose communists and socialists led to the Congress consolidation in some States. With Mrs. Gandhi's attempts to reduce her dependence on the prominent leaders in States due to her experience during 1967-69, to undercut the leaders in States by resorting to populist politics and attempts to directly communicate with the masses, disenchantment set in among those who began to exercise power in their regions. As a result of the popularisation of democracy and superimposition of leaders on State units by Mrs. Gandhi, people who belonged to the intermediate castes began to look for non-Congress parties where they offered a viable alternative to the Congress or formed new parties. The thesis that the emergence of regional bourgeois class at the State level was responsible for the emergence of regional parties needs to be carefully examined (Baru, 2000).

Secondly, we find that in some cases caste demography is coterminous with the geographical boundaries of States. This also contributed to the rise of regional parties. We see this in the phenomena of the growth of non-Congress opposition and regional parties in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa,

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, etc. Wherever the non-Congress regional parties already existed (such as the SAD or the DMK) they got consolidated and quickly rose to power.

The leaders who founded regional parties claimed that the national parties in India did not give due importance to regional aspirations, if not neglecting such aspirations altogether. Hence the need for regional parties. The Congress, especially under Mrs. Gandhi, began to appoint handpicked persons as CMs, who were close to the High Command, regardless of the fact of whether they commanded a following at the State level. This was done to in order to centralise political power and pre-empt any threat emanating from regional “potentates”. This alienated or hurt the more popular and able leaders who either deserted the Congress, to join other parties or formed new regional parties or new leaders.

1989 marked the collapse of the Congress dominance at the national level, and it never recovered afterwards. In terms of its presence in the Lok Sabha, the Congress for the first time in 1996 became the second party, behind the BJP (see table 2). The growth of the BJP after 1989 and its coming to power in 1998 indeed marked a turning point in the history of party politics in the country. That the difference between the first and second parties was reduced to almost to zero showed that the BJP’s performance was not a one-time affair (see table 2). The rapid expansion in the electoral support for the BJP and sudden increase in the number of its MPs in Parliament, and its ability to forge alliances with several parties to come to power marked the party politics of the 1990s. We saw the emergence of bipolarities in the States and at the Centre. While in the States it is in the form of a competition between two parties or between two competing alliances, at the national level it was mainly a competition between competing alliances. As the BJP gained strength, the effort by the Janata Dal and other regional parties of the United Front to work with the third alternative (to the Congress and the BJP) proved to be in vain. The tri-nodal party system that raised hopes in the 1990s slowly melted away.

The formation of alliances and coalition governments at the National and State levels ushered in a new phase in party competition and cooperation. It is amazing that the NDA government at the Centre during 1999-2004 had about 25 partners in it. Deluded by its former glory, the Congress party wanted to come to power on its own. But on the eve of 2004 Lok Sabha elections it finally realised that it could not do so and forged alliances with 16 parties. The ability to rope in the support of the regional and small parties and their electoral performance

decided the fate of the National parties. In 2004 elections, a loss of few allies and the poor performance of two or three of its partner State parties resulted in an electoral disaster for the NDA. The reverse saw the Congress forming the government (Yadav, 2004). Thus, the alliance affect became crucial in the defeat and victory of parties at the national and State levels. The Congress allies added about 10 per cent to the UPA, while the BJP allies added about 14 per cent to the NDA (see table 6).

B. Main Features

If we look at parties in the electoral arena over the past 50 years we find some important features and trends.

1. *Increase in the number of relevant parties*: India has come a long way as far as the structure of party competition is concerned from one-party dominance to a competitive multi-party system in which the number of relevant parties at the national and State levels has enormously increased. It is surprising to note that in a country where political parties did not find a place either in the Constitution or the statutes for two decades after Independence (and even today the word political party does not figure in the articles of the Indian Constitution) the political parties kept on burgeoning and flourishing. The number of parties represented in the Lok Sabha had increased three-fold between 1957, the year in which parties got stabilised, and 2004. In 1989 there was a big jump in the number of who parties participated in the Lok Sabha elections (table 1).⁷
2. *Changes in the status of the National and State parties*: Most of the parties designated as National parties and State parties at the time of first general elections did not exist after 20 years. Of the 14 “national” parties, only four parties retained the National party status by the time of second general elections. Over the past 50 years only the Congress, Communists and the Jana Sangh (later as BJP) seem to be stable among the National parties. The birth and death rate for the State parties is high. They have seen not only serious ups and downs in their electoral fortunes, but several of them lost out in the race to be recognised as State parties and some parties slowly died out.

⁷ However, this could be due to the fact that in 1989, Section 29A was inserted in the RP Act making provision for the registration of political parties with the EC.

Some State parties are more stable, such as the SAD, DMK, National Conference, JMM, MGP, Sikkim Democratic Front, ADMK, RSP, FB, Muslim League, Kerala Congress, and later the TDP, AGP, Shiv Sena, SP, RJD, Trinamool Congress, splinter groups of the Janata Dal and the BJD.

3. *Relative electoral strength of the National and State parties*: The vote share of the National parties had declined by 13 per cent from 1952 to 2004 and most of this was due to the decline of the Congress vote. Of course, there were changes in the share of votes by individual National parties. The number of State parties also increased from 1989, and stood at 44 in 2004. The year 1996 could be the watershed as far as the relative share of votes and seats for the National and State parties are concerned. In that election, the National parties lost 11 per cent vote and 75 seats, whereas the State parties gained 9 per cent vote and 78 seats. Their vote and seat share had increased since 1996. The vote share of the State parties had gone up by more than 20 percent between 1952 and 2004, and within this about 15 per cent increase occurred after 1996. State parties won about 30 per cent seats in the thirteenth and fourteenth Lok Sabhas (see table 3). They grew in strength at the expense of the National parties, as we see a strong inverse relation between the vote share of the National and State parties. State parties today not only play a crucial role in the victory and defeat of the National parties, they control power or function as the opposition, and in some cases as main opposition parties, in almost all the major States, except Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.
4. *Most of the major parties had captured power at one or the other level*. There are no more permanent ruling or opposition parties. Some parties play the role of ruling party at the Union level and that of opposition at the State level or vice versa. Of the 50 odd regional parties, 43 had so far ruled or shared power either at the Union or State level or both (see table 7). Opposition parties have a reasonable chance and hope to come to power at the next general elections.
5. *Indian polity has reached a situation where no single party is in a position to form government at the national level*. At the national level no single party is able to accommodate in it the Indian multiverse – of the class, caste, religious, linguistic, ethnic and regional interests. Thus the latest phase in party politics is characterised by the emergence of a two-coalitional party system, in which the two leading national parties, with more or less equal electoral strength, act as central pillars to the rival coalitions (Sheth, 2005).

Understanding the dynamics of party coalitions has emerged as an important field in Indian politics in recent years (Sridharan, 1999, 2002 & 2004). Balveer Arora describes this competitive multi-party system as “bi-nodal”, a node being a centring point of component parts (2000 & 2003). He sees in this process both the trends of federalisation of the party system and renewal of parties.

6. *Peaceful transfer of power*: The party system in India has seen a peaceful transfer of power among parties. There are only very few exceptions to this when parties refused to participate in elections (Assam, J&K, Punjab and the North-East) or refused to recognise the election result as legitimate. When the Janata party won elections in 1977 the transfer of power was smooth. The parties could put behind them the experience of the Emergency and bring democratic politics back onto the rails. Indeed, there was intolerance towards opposition and it became evident within a decade after Independence. When the communist party won the mandate in Kerala in 1957, it was allowed to form the government, but a “liberation struggle” was launched to destabilise and later to dismiss it. Also there were umpteen times when the ruling party at the Union level, especially the Congress, misused the Constitutional provision (Art. 356) to dismiss duly elected governments at the State level. However, in most cases the aggrieved parties chose to launch democratic struggles, sought redressal through courts, or win back power through elections.
7. *Support for Communist Parties*: In contrast with the dramatic changes in the fortunes of other parties there has been only a marginal decline in the support for the two major communist parties, which participate in elections. Their vote varied from nine to seven per cent between 1957 and 2004. Between the two, the strength of the CPI has considerably declined, while that of the CPM has improved. It, however, hovers between five to six percent from the time of its formation to the present (see table 5). The electoral support for the communists in some States, such as AP, Bihar, Punjab, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu has declined. But this loss is more than compensated for by their consolidation in Kerala and West Bengal. Most of the communist members in the Lok Sabha come from the two States of West Bengal and Kerala. That the Congress or no other party could replace the communist government in West Bengal since 1977 shows the extent to which the communists entrenched themselves in that State. However, they were not able to grow beyond the

three States of Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, despite their resolve and attempts to do so.

8. *Decline of independents*: During 1952-67 independents were serious contenders in elections. Their performance was creditable, both in terms of seats and votes. Probably the factionalism in the Congress and the non-availability of viable alternative parties might have contributed to it. However, from 1971 we see the independents becoming virtually irrelevant. The percentage of independents who lost deposits had been on the rise since independence, but it became significant after 1971. The 1970s and 80s was the period in which viable alternative(s) to the Congress took shape. It was the period of efflorescence of opposition and State parties.

The vote share of independents went down from 19.3 per cent, the all time high, in 1957 to 4.3 per cent 2004, a fall of 15 per cent. More significant is the decimation in the presence of independents in the Parliament. Their number was 37 in 1952 and 42 in 1957, but it was two in 2004, constituting about 0.2 per cent (see table 4). These independents too could win their seats with the support extended by parties. Thus “true” independents have little chance or hope now to win any election in India. As a result, any political leader aspiring to enter legislative bodies or positions of power has to belong to a party. There is almost a complete overlap between the image of a party leader and politician. One interesting aspect in this context is that over the years the vote of the independents, on the whole, did not go to the National parties; instead the State parties gained at the cost of independents. Where only National parties are present in a State, they might have gained at the expense of independents.

C. A Typology of parties

India, acclaimed as the largest democracy of the world, is also a nation with a very large number of parties, very large parties with huge memberships and large turnover of parties. Not only that, we have a bewildering variety of parties – secular, nationalist, socialist, conservative, radical, communist, regional, religious, tribal and caste-based, etc. There is a substantial overlap between some of these characteristics that make any attempt to categorise parties a highly difficult exercise. There is also great variation in terms of organisational structure and functioning that makes any sweeping generalisation risky.

At present, there are about 750 registered parties in India, out of which about 50 are recognised as National and State parties. In the 2004 Lok Sabha elections

about 230 parties fielded candidates. 40 parties have representation of one or more seats in the House. One way of looking at the parties is to outline a typology of parties – going by their geographical spread, status, ideology and objectives, social base, organisation and functioning, etc. We can think of different types of parties based on each of these characteristics, and a combination of these characteristics would give us complex types.

1. Parties are classified on the basis of multiple criteria of representation in the legislative bodies, extent of electoral support and territorial diffusion. Using these criteria, the EC categorises all registered parties, for the purpose of allocation of election symbols, into two types – recognised and unrecognised. Within the recognised parties there are the National and State parties.⁸ Within the State parties we have parties that are recognised as State parties in one State (such as the TDP, BJD, AGP, etc) and parties that are recognised as State parties in more than one State (JDU, SP, RJD, ADMK, AITC, etc).

But the classification of parties into National and State parties is not satisfactory, because a National party under the present definition of the EC need not have a reasonable national presence. The criteria are such that national parties are virtually multi-State parties: a party with minor presence in four States or wins 11 seats in the Lok Sabha from any three States gets such a status. Four of the present national parties do not have significant presence in most of the States. Nor did they get 6 per cent votes in the elections to the Lok Sabha: CPM got 5.66, BSP 5.33, NCP 1.80, and the CPI 1.41. They are treated as national parties by applying the second criterion. In 2000, CPM lost national status temporarily; CPI is in the danger of losing it after 2004 elections; NCP for all practical purposes is limited to Maharashtra; BSP too is confined to a few States.

⁸ A political party will be treated as recognised State party if (a) the candidates set up by it have secured at least six per cent of total valid votes and it has returned at least two members to the Legislative Assembly; or (b) it wins at least three per cent of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly. A political party is recognised as a National party if (a) the candidates set up by it in any four or more States at the general election to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly concerned have secured at least six per cent of total votes and it has returned at least four members to the House of the People from any State or States; or (b) its candidates have been elected to the House of the People from at least two per cent of the total seats (i.e. 11 seats in the House having 543 members), and these candidates have been elected from at least three different States.

That leaves only the Congress and the BJP to have the rightful claim of parties with a countrywide spread. BJP contested in all States, except the States with lone seat where its allies were in the field. It is also true of the Congress party. In States where these parties could not win even a single seat, they polled more than six percent votes, except the BJP in Tamil Nadu (see table 8).

Another difficulty is that some parties that are called State parties by the EC do not consider themselves as State or regional parties. They perceive themselves as national. Actually several State parties are not confined to one State, but exist in several States, whether recognised or not. Parties such as the SP, RJD, JD(S), JD(U), etc. have units and fielded candidates in many States. In terms of votes and seat share too the SP and the RJD are ahead of three national parties, namely, BSP, NCP and CPI. DMK, and SHS too were ahead of two other national parties in this respect (see table 9). CPM, CPI, BSP and the NCP could be called multi-State parties, as their presence and representation in the Lok Sabha is limited to a few States. Thus, we may categorise parties into three types: national, multi-State and single-State parties.

2. In a different way, we may group parties into major and minor parties. Major parties are those who control or share power at the Union or State levels or have a reasonable hope to come to power. All recognised parties come under this category, although the magnitude of such parties vary a great deal – say we have major parties like the BJP and the Congress and small parties such as the Arunachal Congress or the United Goans Democratic Party. Minor parties include small, fringe, and non-serious parties. Sometimes they are referred to as “letterhead parties”. 95 per cent of parties India fall in this category, which are called by the EC as unrecognised. It is very difficult for these parties to become electorally viable and cross the threshold to enter legislative bodies. There is need to study why these minor parties emerge, continue to exist, compete in elections, and so on.
3. A third categorisation is possible by looking at the mainstream parties (most of the parties fall in this category) that accept the unity of the country, legitimacy of the existing political institutions and operate in the given electoral framework, and the anti-system parties that refuse to accept the state and government – such as the revolutionary parties of the

extreme left or the anti-State parties that call for secession of a State/region from India.

4. Another way of looking at the parties is possible if we go by the support bases. Some parties draw support mainly from social groups that belong to one religion, caste or tribal population. Some parties that have more diffused support. Although leaders of most parties claim that they draw support from all sections of society, some parties draw more support from specific social groups: such as the SAD from Sikhs in Punjab, NC in J &K and MUL in Kerala from Muslims; BSP from dalits; SP and RJD from Yadavs in UP and Bihar respectively. Most other parties, whether national or State, tend to be catch-all party types.
5. We may also look at parties by the way they were founded: some parties are formed as a result of movements such as the Congress, SAD, DMK, JKNC, AGP, JMM, etc.; some parties were founded as a result of split in a parent party, such as the NCP, AITC, ADMK, MDMK, KEC, BJD, SP, RJD, JD (U), LJSP, RLD, etc.; a third category of parties could be those which were founded and function to launch struggles to bring about major social and political changes, such as the CPI, CPM and ML parties; and the parties that were formed with an exclusive objective of entering electoral politics and forming government: such as the BSP, TDP, etc.

But here we face a difficulty. We have parties that emerge due to multiple factors or motivations mentioned here. For example, the formation of SP or RJD is due to a split in the parent party, its ambitious leaders formed the party to capture power through electoral politics, but at the same time the leaders would say that they strive for the cause of social justice and secularism. Similar is the case of the BSP, as the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) and the Backward and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) came together to form the new party with a view to secure the welfare and interests of the bahujan samaj.

6. A sixth type is possible if we go by the ideological orientation of the parties: the left parties profess Marxism-Leninism as their ideology. Most other parties simply call themselves as socialist, secular and democratic. Although one may distinguish these parties, according to their relative distance from an imaginary centre, it is difficult to identify

whether a party is ideological, pragmatic and personality based. In some parties all these things go together, say the NCP or the BSP. Secondly, the extent to which ideology plays a role in the formation of a party and its functioning is often debatable. We shall return to this aspect in detail in the next section.

If we combine several of these features we get more complex types: such as major regional mainstream parties, national ideological parties, personality based national parties or regional parties that appeal to specific castes or communities, and so on.

Let us first examine the aspect of ideology in the party domain.

III. Ideology

The nationalist movement and the different perceptions for the attainment of independence provided the broad framework for the ideologies of political parties in the country. Nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy became the main planks of the Congress during the last leg of the freedom struggle (say from 1920s) and remain so till now. We also see a tendency during the nationalist movement to emphasise the need to forge a new nationalist identity based on the rejuvenated Hindu values and thought, although the meaning of the term Hindu is always prone to multiple interpretations. The communists wanted to unite the freedom struggle with social revolution leading to the establishment of the rule of the proletariat and peasantry guided by Marxism-Leninism. Thus we see three broad ideological tendencies during the formative years of political parties in India – an eclectic ideology based on socialism and secularism, the Hindutva ideology and the Marxist ideology. Of course there were parties based on religious identities, such as the Muslim League and the SAD which visualised religious communities as separate political entities.

To begin with there were ideological differences within the Congress party, with people holding what are called rightist, centrist and leftist positions. Those individuals and parties outside the Congress took positions on one side or the other of the ideological tendencies inside the Congress. Thus, much of the inner debates in the non-Congress parties till 1967 were about the character of the Congress party and how to align with one or the other of the tendencies inside it. Those who proclaimed their opposition to the Congress policy of giving a big role to the state in regulating, directing and changing the national economy and raising the public sector to the commanding heights came out of the Congress and founded the Swatantra party in 1959. They advocated the end of what they called the license-quota-permit raj. Swatantra party could be the only party in India that stood for a kind of liberal, rather libertarian, ideology on the Indian soil. But such an experiment soon fizzled out. Probably the libertarian principles do not suit Indian culture or the country was not yet ripe for this liberal group to strike roots.

The split in the Congress in 1969 was seen by some as a break between those who stood for socialism, known as radicals led by Mrs. Gandhi, and the conservative elements, led by the old guard of the party, called the Syndicate.

But the extent to which ideology played a significant role in determining positions of party leaders during this split was doubtful. The birth of the “New Congress party” under Mrs. Gandhi’s leadership was attributed more to the changed style of functioning of the Congress rather than to any changes in party ideology. The later developments showed that Indira Gandhi’s ideological vehemence and radical slogans were only a means to establish herself as an undisputed leader in the party.

During the freedom struggle, socialists had put up a spirited advocacy of socialist policies and could influence the Congress position to some extent. Socialist groups sprang up in various parts of the country during the 30s and they continued till 1948 as part of the Congress with an objective to bring change in the policies of the party that would emancipate people from foreign rule as well as native exploitation. Thereafter the socialist party underwent several splits and reunions. In 1951 Kripalani formed the KMPP, but after the 1952 elections, in which the Socialists polled about 16 per cent votes, the KMPP and the SP merged to form the PSP, so that an anti-Congress non-communist leftist opposition could be forged. In 1955 Lohia left the PSP and revived the old Socialist party. Again in 1964 SSP was formed as a result of the merger of the Socialist party with the PSP.

The relation between the Congress and the socialists was always ambiguous. There were differences on cooperating with the Congress, which were in a way responsible for the splits in the Socialist party. Their ideological opposition to the theory and practice of communism and the formal adoption of the objective of building a socialistic pattern of society by the Congress made their positions virtually indistinguishable from that of the Congress and drew some of them closer to the Congress. Narendra Deva and Lohia opposed any tie up with the Congress. In 1953 talks were held between Nehru and JP on cooperation between the Congress and the PSP. In 1962 Ashok Mehta was expelled from the PSP and he joined the Congress Government as a Cabinet Minister at the Centre.

The most vigorous opposition to the Congress on the basis of ideology came from the communists. Soon after Independence, they waged an armed struggle in some parts of the country to overthrow the Indian state, although they soon gave up that course and participated in the first general election. The ideological debates on the character of the Indian state, path to revolution in India, and strategy and tactics led to several splits in the communist party. However, their participation in elections and success in forming and running governments at the State level firmly placed them in the arena of parliamentary politics. India is the

only country in the world where a communist party could come to power through parliamentary means and control governments within a capitalist state. But the sailing was not easy in the initial years. The dismissal of the communist government led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad in 1959 sparked a bitter struggle between the CPI and the Congress.

Interestingly, the inner party debates on the character of the Indian state and revolution in the undivided CPI got entwined with the controversy on the character of the Congress party and cooperation with it. In the process, a major section of the CPI moved closer to the Congress to form a united front with it. The other section took a hostile attitude, which formed the CPM in 1964. The split in the CPM and the formation of the CPI(ML) and other revolutionary organisations based on Maoism in 1967 and the splits within splits of these groups and parties show the salience of differences over strategy and tactics for the communists. However, a closer examination of the splits among the communists reveals the interpenetration of leadership rivalries, personality clashes, organisational matters, and programmatic positions.

The rise of the BJP and the strategies it adopted to augment its electoral base became an important theme in the study of political parties in India in recent years. The attempt of the BJP to forge unity among the Hindus based on the fears that the Indian State and political leaders, especially that of the Congress, were indulging in policies and programmes to appease the Muslims and that the Hindu culture and religion are in the danger of getting marginalized paid rich political dividends (Singh, 2004; Hansen, 1999; Malik and Singh, 1995; Graham, 1993). Christophe Jaffrelot (1993) thinks that as a result of the growing sense of vulnerability among the Hindus and communalisation of politics under the auspices of the Congress, the BJP during the 1980s returned to militant strategies and could efficiently implement them. Militant Hindu identity was once again refashioned through a strategy of stigmatisation and emulation of the “threatening Other.” During the 1990s it played down its earlier elitist, Brahmanical image in favour of militant nationalism. It kept the momentum by combining ethno-religious mobilisation with appeals to sectional interests. Yogendra Yadav and Palshikar have analysed the emerging trends in India’s party domain relating them to the rise of the BJP. Its ability to jell with the way the new middle class in India wanted to redefine the nation and articulate the cultural and material aspirations of this class helped the BJP to consolidate (Yadav, 1999; Palshikar, 2004). There is also a pragmatic dimension to the BJP. Oliver Heath (1999) has argued that the rapid political and geographical

expansion of the BJP and its emergence as a main political force was due its ability to delicately redefine itself and its social base and forge alliances with regional parties having different social bases.

In the working of parties, caste, religion, language and region have also acquired ideological overtones. Religion has been an active element in the party domain before and after Independence. Today we have parties that claim to represent the interests and culture of specific religions. Origins of some of these parties can be traced to the pre-Independence period. The Muslim League during the freedom struggle instilled in the minds of Indian Muslims that they constitute a separate political community (quam). Islam and Urdu provided the two distinguishing marks. Their position as minority and the rise of Hindu communalism in the North made some Muslim elites to capitalise on their sentiments. But after the partition, a large number of Muslims remained in India, constituting a large chunk of the world's Muslim population. The Muslim League was revived in 1948, although there were splits in it later. The AIMIM in AP is the continuation of the Majlis of the Nizam period. Mainly based in the Hyderabad city, it almost exclusively appeals to the Muslims of the State.

In Punjab, the rise of the SAD had its roots in religion and its membership is restricted to Sikhs only. In Sikhism religion and politics seem to be inextricably united. The leaders of the SAD believe that the Sikhs constitute a separate political community (the panth). The Akal Takht is the highest seat of religious and political authority for the Sikhs. The SAD successfully carried out a campaign for a Punjabi Suba (separate State for Sikhs) that excluded the Hindi-speaking areas where the Hindus were in preponderant numbers, and include areas where the Sikhs were in a majority. In the 70s and 80s it carried out a militant struggle for Khalistan, a separate nation-state for the Sikhs. The struggle for Khalistan showed how powerful the religious ideology would be and how it sways leaders and followers. But SAD was never a united party, as it saw successive internecine factional struggles. There are Christian parties too in the country, as in Kerala.

However, one positive feature of politics in India is that despite of the existence of the parties claiming to represent people of specific religious beliefs, the followers of those religions do not support such parties en masse. We find Muslims vote in large numbers for parties other than the Muslim parties even where the latter are present. And the same is true of the Sikhs. There are substantial sections of the Sikhs who support the Congress, Communist parties and the BSP.

Some times, language and region also acquire the nature of ideology. India has some of the most highly developed and rich languages of the world. Most of the regions of India are coterminous with linguistic nationalities. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the terms “region” and “nation” in some of the Indian languages. Some regard India as a nation of nationalities or a multi-national country. If we leave out the Hindi-speaking States, most others are unilingual States and that provided fertile soil for the emergence of regional parties. As language and region coalesce, regionalism took the form of linguistic nationalism. When they are further combined with religion, culture or ethnic identity, it becomes a powerful force. That is what we witnessed in the South, West, and East, in the emergence of several regional parties and separatist groups. The consolidation of the Tamil Dravid parties, the rise of the Shiv Sena, TDP, AGP, BJD (and its earlier version the Utkal Congress), National Conference and PDP in J&K, JMM, Trinamool Congress, etc. shows how “region” has the potential to assume the form of an ideology.⁹ However, we must add that the regional parties and linguistic ideologies had the positive effect of acting as a counterpoise to other ideologies such as religion and caste to some extent.

In States that witnessed strong linguistic regional movements we saw the decline of the National parties and the consolidation of regional parties. It has become a struggle between the National parties that decried the use of “parochial” regional and linguistic identities for partisan purposes and the State parties that championed them. The relations between the Union government and the States ruled by State parties were always strained. Regional identity and interests remained a potential issue for political mobilisation as long as the Congress ruled at the Centre. Often this took the form of Central-State relations problem. Leaders of regional parties demand more powers to the States (reflected in the slogan of strong States) in a federal framework (cooperative

⁹ The Dravidian parties championed Tamil nationalism. The DMK wanted a separate nation in the 1960s. Similar movements rocked Punjab, Assam and the whole of North East. The issue is still burning in J&K and the North East. In Punjab, the Sikhs combined religion and Punjabi language with a separate script. In Assam it was “Assamia” identity directed against Bengalis, especially the large-scale influx from Bangladesh. The Shiv Sena combined language, religion and region in a curious mix to champion the Maratha cause. The TDP (literally *desam* means country) under NTR’s leadership won the election on the basis of appealing to the Telugu pride – self-respect of the Telugus. Most leaders of regional parties say these parties were founded to protect and promote the interests, culture and honour of the regions which the national parties ignored, suppressed or remained indifferent.

federalism or true federalism). We should note here that in case of most of the regional parties 'regional' has nothing to do with anti-national. They are as much nationalistic as the national parties are. The founder of the TDP, N.T. Rama Rao, described his party as a regional party with national perspective. The thing is that they compete with the national parties for power, and for this they articulate the 'regional aspirations' and often take belligerent postures towards the Congress. The BJP, the more nationalistic of the national parties, has quickly grasped this and forged alliances with these parties. The Congress too recognises this now, but does so only grudgingly, as it is yet to come to terms with the reality of coexisting with the regional parties.

Although it may be possible to some extent to locate a party ideologically going by the core principles, values and objectives for which the party stands we should not overemphasise the role of ideology in party politics. Ideology is not static for any party, just like for any individual or group. It undergoes transformation along with time and experience, the compulsions of practical life and in interactive struggle with rival ideological tendencies. Usually we find a tendency for those who take an extreme position at the formation of a party to get moderated, and slowly move toward the centrist ideological position. This "central tendency" works more in democratic political systems, which makes party system more stable in the long run.

Also, when we speak of party ideology we cannot assume homogeneity among the perceptions of leaders, activists and followers. Whether and to what extent party leaders and members think and act on the basis of ideologies is debatable. Sometimes it is very difficult to know whether the differences within and between parties are due to ideology, policy perceptions, partisan considerations, personality clashes or power calculations of the individual or the faction. Thus, we notice a few aspects in this context. Firstly, we cannot think of monolithic parties in terms of ideological positions. Sometimes leaders and parties get fired and gripped by ideology and remain so under the spell of ideological incantation for varying periods of time. And this grip may vary from individual to individual and from time to time. Secondly, those who show ideological vehemence might actually do so out of practical considerations, to keep the group together in the face of threats from within or without: to ward off threats from rival groups and factions within or outside the party or settling disputes over sharing power. Thirdly, most of the time the ideological position of a party is itself the result of a series of compromises among top party leaders with different views, but presented as the synthesised view of the party.

Fourthly, ideology at times could be merely a cover for tactics in mobilising electoral support.

Another difficulty is that parties in India, except the communist parties, do not perceive themselves under the categories of left, right and centre. For example, opponents of the BJP may call it rightist, but the BJP leaders do not perceive their party to be so. It seems these categories do not simply exist in the lexicon of several languages of India or people's imagination. If you ask party leaders as to how they would describe their parties, they would say secular, socialist, radical, democratic, nationalist, etc, but not right or centre.

Most of the parties and party leaders in India do not perceive themselves nor are presented by their followers as representing any specific classes. They maintain that the interest of the people as a whole, especially the interests of the poor, disadvantaged and the backward, guide their policies and practice. Probably, this is due to the fact that parties in India did not evolve the way the parties had evolved in the Western nations. In some of those countries they had evolved through class struggles or at least taking open class partisan positions. In India, except the communist parties, and the recently emerged dalit parties, all other parties appear to be, using Kirchheimer's term, catch-all parties.

The Congress party, Swatantra, Socialists, Janata Party, Janata Dal and the BJP or most of the regional parties cannot be simply termed as parties of this or that interest or alliance of specific interests. That these parties and their policies might favour some sections of society more than others, attract electoral support more from certain social sections, or dominated by some sections should not lead us to the conclusion that parties in India represent sectional interests only. Even those parties that begin in such a manner slowly graduated into parties of general interest, or become a part of larger alliance that speak for the society as a whole. For example, SAD, DMK, SHS, RJD, SP, JMM, BSP and even the CPs to some extent.

Formally all parties in India are secular, socialist and democratic, as it is mandatory for the parties to declare true faith in these principles while they register with the EC. In reality also parties claim adherence to socialism and secularism, of course imparting their own meanings to these terms. Take secularism. Even parties that appeal to people on the basis of caste and religious identities and are founded to promote the interests of particular communities regard themselves secular. For instance, the SAD, Muslim League, National Conference, or Kerala Congress. BJP and Shiv Sena too stand by secularism, but

say that they stand for positive secularism, meaning thereby that they oppose pseudo-secularism and appeasement of minorities for the sake of creating vote banks as practiced by several other parties. Similarly socialism. Almost all parties in India claim to be socialist or egalitarian. SP, RJD, JD(U), etc. are the new incarnations of the erstwhile socialist parties. BSP understands it as the emancipation and empowerment of bahujans. Congress has its own enigmatic brand of socialism. BJP was founded with an objective to achieve socialism, of course that of Gandhian kind. Several State parties too stand for socialism. For example, C.N. Annadurai, the founder of the DMK, proclaimed in 1963: "We are Left, have always been so and will continue to be so".

This may have to do partly with the way Indian parties have evolved and the way the values of secularism and socialism have been internalised in the Indian psyche. The multi-cultural nature of the Indian society makes parties secular. The widespread poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, etc. make parties socialist or at least tend to compel to profess socialism.

Except in the initial years after Independence, ideology did not become a bar to forge alliances among parties. The Communists and the Muslim League fought elections in Kerala together. Both the Congress and the CPI could forge alliances and together they could arrive at electoral understanding with caste-based parties in that State. The coming together of the socialists, former Congressmen, and the Jana Sangh to form the Janata party showed that ideology is not a hindrance in party chemistry. That the communists played an important role in bringing the non-Congress non-BJP parties together and these parties offered the position of Prime Minister to Jyoti Basu, the PB member of the CPM, show that the ideologies have different meaning on the Indian soil. The ease with which the parties had changed sides and forged new alliances, and at times with those who were treated untouchables, is surprising.

The pattern of party alliances, competition or desertions after 1999 has been like the *kolatam* dance (persons dance with a pair of short sticks used to make sound when tapped together or tapped against other person's sticks) in which dancers move in circles and each person keeps moving and changing partners by turns smoothly and constantly, breaking out and coming into the circles. In recent years, ideology is used more for posturing and propaganda. Free passages are allowed through the apparent ideological walls to allow a multi-way flow across parties. Thus we find the relation of any party with any other party not fixed on ideological positions. Parties are always ready to make compromises due to electoral compulsions and political vicissitudes. The coalitional

arrangements change as per the requirements of the situation. Some of the socialists joined hands with the BJP in 1998 and they were happily together since then. DMK or the ADMK switch sides between the NDA and the UPA. In UP, the BSP formed government with the support of the BJP. Its leader Kanshi Ram once said that the party was ready to take support from any party willing to help the BSP to come to power. SAD and National Conference became partners in the NDA. Somnath Chatterjee, a veteran CPM leader could preside over the Parliament, and all parties respect him. Theoretically, any party could fit into the UPA, except the BJP. The Third Front, born, dead and struggling to take shape again, can accommodate any party except the BJP and the Congress; and the NDA can take any party except the Congress and the communists. These exclusions and preferences are more due to party competition and electoral considerations, rather than ideological warfare.

The loss of salience of ideology, whatever that was there earlier, could be due to the end of hot or cold ideological warfare at the global level, or the changing perceptions of people, leaders and followers at the ground level about parties. Ordinary people anyway hardly bother about these purportedly ideological quarrels. For leaders and followers pragmatic politics have become the norm of the day. Parties are increasingly looked upon as means to serve personal interests. Now we see less and less leaders having fixed party loyalties. This becomes very evident from the way leaders change, split or merge parties: when they are denied tickets in elections or denied positions or some other expected benefit and are offered the same by other parties. In 2004 elections we saw leaders who kept their “options open” till the last day of nominations. The parties too now follow an “open door policy” in accepting factions and leaders from other parties. Even in parties that claim firm ideological anchorage, such as the BJP or the CPI, we saw a similar trend. The country has travelled a long way from the “principled” politics of 1950s to personalised politics. During the last two decades or so, we hardly see struggles or movements by parties to bring about social reform or economic restructuring of the society based on ideological positions. Surely, in recent years, ideologies have taken a back seat in the struggle to get into power or gain access to it. Whether this ideological irreverence or promiscuity or flexibility and keeping the party walls highly porous to allow a two-way flow augurs a better democratic future or not is a matter of opinion.

IV. Support Base

Parties all over the world are known for drawing their support largely from specific social classes. In circumstances where the support from one section is not sufficient to cross the threshold to win an election, they strive to keep the primary base of the party intact, and win elections with the support of others. In India, the multi-structured society with different regions at different stages of development, the continuous redefining of social relations, the presence of religious minorities in substantial numbers, identities based on caste, the large number of dalits, and the different settings in which the adivasis live make the picture somewhat different and complex. Over the past 50 years the social bases of parties had undergone some changes – both at the all India and State levels.

More than class or gender, caste seems to be an important factor to understand the social bases of parties. It is interesting that the term class is used as a synonym or a euphemism for caste in India's vocabulary of politics. The demographic distribution of castes in most States is such that no party with votes from merely one caste can aspire to come to power. It has to seek support from other castes or other parties with following in other castes, in order to secure a working majority in legislatures. That is the reason why we find attempts by parties to co-opt persons from different castes, especially the numerically large castes.

Although most societies are known to have social inequalities of some kind, in India such inequalities have come to be settled in the form of caste within a hierarchical order. Industrial development, urbanisation, occupational mobility, spread of education and egalitarian values, equality of opportunity through a system of reservations in education and employment, etc. have virtually broken down the caste system. Today, castes have virtually ceased to be communities, except for the purpose of matrimonial relations. Precisely because of the weakening of the caste system, large-scale mobilisation of people on the basis of caste identities has become possible. The democratisation process and the elections reinforced the caste identities in the political arena. Of course, political scientists have been speaking of this since 1950s. Rudolph thought that the caste associations were vehicles for the operation of democracy in India where tradition and modernity blend in a fine way (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1969). Kothari and others believed that as India gets modernised caste gets politicised

as the parties and leaders find in it a readily available institution to make use of (Kothari, 1970a).

The Congress received support from all the castes, communities and classes for almost three decades after Independence. While the communists got considerable support from workers, peasants and agricultural labourers, they were confined to a few regions. The socialists and the Swatantra received support primarily from the middle castes and classes. After the defeat of the Congress in several States and the depletion of its strength in the Lok Sabha in 1967, the New Congress under Mrs. Gandhi changed strategies to build electoral support. For example, Brass argued that the rise of middle peasantry and the intensification of conflict between the middle status (so-called backward) and the upper castes characterised party politics in UP since 1952. It had major consequences for the structuring of party competition in UP and for the differentiation of the rural support bases of the competing parties. The BKD and the SSP mobilised the bulk of the discontented backward caste vote. With the formation of the BLD in 1974, substantial section of middle caste middle class peasantry rallied behind it. The middle castes provided the central core of opposition to the Congress in most States. In response the Congress under Mrs. Gandhi adopted the strategy of uniting the opposite extremes of the social spectrum – the upper and lower (dalit) castes – against the middle castes. Thus it sought to isolate parties principally based among the middle castes by pre-empting them in having allies above or below them by capturing and integrating the upper and dalit castes in its patronage and protection system (Brass, 1985).

The victory of the Janata party could be seen as the reassertion of the middle segment once again. When the Janata experiment failed, these sections extended support to the regional formations. And thus we see in the 1980s the emergence of several regional parties. Of course, this did not take a uniform pattern in the entire country. Situation varied from State to State. Pradeep Chibber (1999a and 1999b) took the view that the rise of opposition parties and the electoral decline of the Congress party was not a result of the mobilisation of new social groups but rather was due largely to the elements of its coalition that had once supported it now opting for different parties. Party system change, especially the anchoring of political parties in social cleavages, was not due to exogenous social changes, such as demographic shifts or the emergence of new issues, but rather was endogenous to party competition. The replacement of one-party dominant system by state-specific parties was explained as resulting from pre-existing social cleavages that are state specific. Since the cleavages were state

specific, only state-based parties could emerge. However, we cannot ignore how and in what ways the pre-existing social cleavages get articulated and crystallised into parties. The emergence of the SAD in Punjab, Lok Dal in UP, DMK in Tamil Nadu, the regional parties in the North-East, etc. could be attributed to the mobilisation of latent social and primordial identities onto the political arena.

However, after the 1980s, attempts were made in some States, especially in Bihar and UP, to forge parties mainly on the basis of overwhelming support from certain castes. With the emergence of an urban middle class among the lower castes, largely due to the state policies of land reforms, reservations in education and employment, consolidation of horizontal identities among them and, given their numerical strength, elites from these castes broke away from the catch-all parties and formed caste-specific parties to stake their claim for power. How do these shifts actually take place and how does one party eat into other's support base could be interesting themes for study. The Mandal and the anti-Mandal agitations brought this issue to the fore in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The rise of the BSP, with solid support from the dalits and that of the SP in UP, the Samata and the RJD in Bihar, the PMK and Puthiya Tamilagam in Tamil Nadu can be understood in this context ((Kanchan Chandra, 2004; Verma, 2004; Jaffrelot, 2003; Pai, 2002). They could come to power on their own or in alliance with others. The decline of the Congress in UP and Bihar was mainly attributed to the walking out of various caste groups from the Congress fold in favour of caste-based parties, such as the SP, BSP, RJD, and the BJP. While the BSP advocates the establishment of a dalit-bahujan state by ending the *manuvadi* state, the SP and RJD stand for strengthening social justice. As each of these parties – the BSP, SP, BJP, and the RJD – walked away with a slice of the rainbow coalitional structure of the Congress, it became mutilated and got marginalized (Yadav, 1999). It is not surprising that leaders with a socialist background were in the forefront of organising the social justice parties.

As Yogendra Yadav observed the Congress is no longer the rainbow party that it used to be. It now depends more on the votes from dalits, adivasis, Muslims and Christians. In 2004 elections it received almost two-thirds of the votes of these communities. The BJP has developed a 'new social bloc' of the upper strata comprising the upper castes and upper classes. While the BJP succeeded in drawing heavily from its smaller core constituency and supplementing it with selective support from other sections in different parts of the country, the Congress support in its wider constituency had thinned down.

Moreover, the Congress was restricted to picking up the remainder vote of those communities that were not courted and captured by other parties (Heath and Yadav, 1999; Yadav, 2004).

Analysis of the data from the National Election Study (NES) conducted by Lokniti-CSDS shows that the social bases of the Congress differ from region to region, depending on the fact whether it is pitted against a National party, such as the BJP, which draws much of its support from the upper castes and classes, or the communist parties such as in Bengal and Kerala, which draw more support from the working classes and lower castes, or the regional parties, which are equally catch all parties. The data showed that Congress still gets votes in larger number from the dalits, adivasis and Muslims in states where it confronts the BJP, where as the BJP draws more of its support from Hindu upper castes and upper and middle classes. But in States dominated by the Left the profile of the social base of the Congress would be similar to that of the BJP in other States. BJP's support shows some evenness in several States mainly because it forged alliances with the regional parties, which enjoy support across castes, classes and other communities (Heath and Yadav, 1999).

V. Organisation and Functioning

The classical view of parties highlighted the crucial importance of organisation in political parties (Duverger, 1964; Schattschneider, 1942; Michels (1911), 1962). Parties are considered as organisations that perform a variety of functions. Weiner and LaPalambora viewed parties as complex organisations that require (i) continuity in organisation – an organisation whose expected life is not dependent on the life span of current leader(s); (ii) manifest and stable permanent organisation at the local level, with regularised communication and other relationships between the local and national levels; (iii) self-conscious determination of leaders to capture and to hold decision-making power alone or in coalition with others, not simply to influence the exercise of power; and (iv) a concern on the part of the organisation for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support (1966: 6). But one characteristic that distinguishes party from other organisations, as Weber pointed long ago, is voluntary adherence of members to it.

In the study of political parties in India there is a tendency to pigeonhole them into oligarchic (Michels' formulation) or stratarchic (Eldersveld's phrase) models (Pantham, 1976; Prasad, 1980; Kumar, 1990). These descriptions may be useful as heuristic devices or paradigmatic constructs, but in reality we do not find such full-fledged oligarchic or democratic parties (Satyamani, 1996). Their working varies from party to party depending on the way it has evolved, its ideology, its position as ruling or opposition party, the geographical spread of the party, leadership styles, etc. As all parties that operate in a democratic polity need to follow certain democratic norms in their functioning, it is not possible to find parties of extreme types. In their functioning most parties in India seem to be mixed types, falling somewhere between the two extremes of oligarchic and democratic models.

To be registered as a political party with the EC, parties are bound to have constitutions and byelaws that prescribe democratic rules for their functioning, where the functionaries should be elected at different levels. However, the leaders and supporters of most parties hardly bother about the written rules, and much less adhere to these rules. For several parties it would be difficult even to trace a copy of the party constitution and byelaws. In any case, the founders of parties take sufficient care at the time of drafting the constitution to embed riders, restraints and emergency provisions that enable them to exercise extensive control over lower units and functionaries. In several parties, the party

presidents are vested with powers to remove any party functionary, to abolish committees at any level and to take decisions without consulting party committees.

Most parties in India reflect pluralism and heterogeneity that is there in the larger society. Only those parties that restrict their membership to followers of a particular religion may have some degree of homogeneity. All parties in India are mass parties, although the communist parties, especially the CPM, have more rigorous rules for admission, organisational ethos, and requirements of ideological conformity. Somehow, the communist parties and the BJP have come to be considered as “cadre parties”. But the classification of parties into cadre and mass parties may not be very relevant now.

Except in the communist parties and the BJP, membership in most parties is nominal, although all parties formally lay down certain conditions to become members. Some parties have two categories of members – ordinary and active. But in practice there is hardly any distinction between a follower, supporter and member. People often say that “we” belong to this or that party or this or that is “our” party. Membership is not very important. The rival leaders in a party at the local level enrol members more as a demonstration of their strength, and often the leader who takes up the ‘membership drive’, or some one on his behalf, pays the subscription amount for the ‘enrolled’. Most parties do not maintain membership registers and even where they are kept very few bother about them. The registers when maintained, and whatever maintained, find little use. In the Congress party, whenever there is a proposal to hold organisational elections, we hear about bogus membership lists. In most parties, elections seldom take place. Leaders are chosen through ‘consensus’. Party functionaries at the district level and the chiefs of affiliated bodies are usually the nominees (who are variously described as the leader’s men or pocket functionaries) of the higher leaders or the top leader.

For many party identification is not a very fixed one, although some individuals and families still claim generational or genetic affiliation to some parties. This fluidity has increased over time and more so in recent years. Individuals change loyalties as they find better prospects in some other party or due to disenchantment with the leadership styles. Though a change in party identity of a leader is often attributed to policy differences, a closer examination reveals that it is due more to non-fulfilment of personal desires, interests, factional rivalries, personality clashes, or the impossibility of coexistence in the same party.

The availability of the option to switch party identities, in an environment of high competition in the party domain, is likely to lead to two different consequences. Sometimes they compel the party top leadership to pay heed to the views of the leaders below and cater to their interests to the extent possible. Sometimes such a condition may lead to strengthening oligarchic and autocratic leadership, as the dissidents choose to leave the party without carrying on the fight against the autocratic leader or the few who control the party.

Parties that stem out of movements or were found with idealism in the formative years soon turn into 'normal' parties. Over time, fierce intra-party competition for patronage and benefits becomes a normal or routine feature in such parties. The intensity increases if it is a ruling party. Those who join parties with some amount of idealism gradually fall in line and become "realistic". Pragmatic leaders, who have the capacity to manipulate things in their favour and bestow benefits on followers/supporters, come to the forefront.

Congress still seems to be a type in itself. Since Independence it remained a loose and open organisation, approximating to the four theoretical constructs of party proposed by Eldersveld. Congress leaders tolerate local autonomy, initiative and inertia. Dissent and factional rivalry are recognised. Some treat it as a healthy sign and desirable one at that. Some times the top leaders even encourage factional activity at the State level to ensure that no single leader or faction gets entrenched. The party appeared for long as a coalition of castes and factions without the pretence of organic unity. It had also evolved norms for cooption of leaders from different castes and communities. Perhaps because of this the Congress proved to be resilient in Indian politics despite recurring electoral debacles. As recent studies have shown, this feature of the Congress did not work in the States like Bihar and UP, which was why the backward classes and dalits deserted the party in those States. The BJP in recent years has become almost like the Congress in its functioning, although the hangover of ideology, deference to the elders, and organisational discipline could be still found in larger quantity in that party than in the Congress. The first generation leaders, such as Vajpayee and Advani, command personal power in the party.

In their styles of functioning, we find most parties leader-centred, whether these parties are national (such as the INC, BSP and the NCP), multi-State (such as the SP, RJD, Shiv Sena) or State based (such as the TDP, BJD, TRS, SAD or the National Conference). The leader exercises, to use Weber's term, charismatic authority, or in Indian idiom, we might call it "glamour". This we find more in State based parties, since the organisational pyramid in these

parties, unlike the national parties, does not extend beyond the State boundaries. Here in such parties, the leader exercises absolute control. The top man/woman is the chief motivator, main campaigner and star performer for the party. His/her words are commands in the party; party image is coterminous with his/her image. The entire party, legislative wing, and following revolve around him/her. The chief has the final say in all party matters and disputes. There cannot be any “number two” in the party, because that renders the authority of the party supremo only relative, one of degree. There is very little scope for disagreement with or criticism against the party boss. No one can hope to survive in the party by opposing the top leader. A dissident in the higher party bodies has to either shut up or get out of the party. The anti-defection law seem to have made the party chiefs more powerful than earlier. They are like “modern princes”, may be more than that.

A “charismatic party”, as described by Panebianco (1988), does not require strong party organisation. Actually, the supreme leader would not allow any institutionalisation of party machinery or the committees as he tends to see them as many impediments in the exercise of personal power. The loyalty of party workers should be to the person and not to the party. However, at the district / local level the State parties do not differ much from the Congress: factions are allowed and encouraged, fierce competition for patronage and power goes on, the only condition being the unwavering loyalty to the party supremo. Look at the TDP, DMK, ADMK, Shiv Sena, SAD, Trinamool, BJD, AIMIM, National Conference, INLD or any such party. Thus, we see most parties led by strong leaders with weak organisation. Secondly, we find in recent years, a decline in party organisations: most parties revolve around Ministers, people’s representatives, and others who hold positions of power in government. Some times, party organisation becomes active only when the party is in opposition. Why and how such leadership styles have become universal in the party domain in India is something to ponder over. Is it due to the vestiges of feudal relations and values in our society? Is it due to the cultural traits of Indians that they seek strong and paternalistic leaders? Is it that in a country like ours “cult-personalities” are inevitable? We need social psychologists or cultural anthropologists to tell us why this has happened.

In several parties, we find a tendency to unite the head of the legislative wing and that of the party. Both the legislators and the party functionaries are subordinated to the party leader. This is justified by saying that such a unity would reduce the friction between the legislative and organisational wings and

bring unity of command in the party. But the experience shows that this is done to exercise unhindered authority. The Congress party followed this practice for a very long time, and most other parties imitated it.

In the initial decades after Independence most politicians were reluctant to encourage their sons, daughters, wives or sons-in-law to enter into politics. These days, we see a tendency in most of the parties to give a prominent place to sons or close relatives of the top party leader and / or groom and anoint him/her as heir to the party throne. Most of the party leaders say that their occupation is service to people. And they want to bring their kith and kin too to serve the people! The communist parties, and the BJP to some extent, are exceptions to this trend. In the case of the BJP, this trend may set in as time goes on, as the old guard retire and as the party functionaries reap the “benefits” of being in power or in main opposition.

Why are parties becoming family-centred? Some tentative explanations may be possible: (a) Parties need to manage huge funds, especially for election expenditure. Huge party funds, especially when in government, are mobilised by the top leader. They need to be channelled through and managed by reliable and trustworthy persons and the leaders find such persons in the family and depend on them; (b) The party chief, who often happens to be the founder of the party, sees the party as his child, his creation, his own. Parties are conduits for political power and political power is the conduit through which personal wealth and party funds could be amassed. So party leadership needs to be bequeathed like personal property, like the way it happens in business houses. Some times attempts at such successions have caused serious troubles in some parties, such as the DMK and the Shiv Sena; (c) The culture and traditions of the country are also important. In India, as elsewhere in South Asia, family bond is strong and lineage commands respect, which give rise to ascriptive authority. People seem to trust members of the ruling families more and more easily than the upstarts or the ones without family roots in the party to direct the party affairs along with the chief or after him; (d) Most of the party functionaries also do not see any problem in accepting such leadership succession. Some even welcome it or say that you cannot disqualify someone from entering politics merely because he/she happens to be the son or daughter or a close relative of the party chief. However, they would add that those who succeed the party chief or exercise power of no.2 in the party should have leadership qualities and come to occupy position on personal worth or merit.

The communist parties present a somewhat different type. Leninist conception of party still dominates, of course mostly in theory but to some extent in practice. The principles of democratic centralism make the leaders formally adhere to procedures, but in reality the centralisation of powers, tend to be high in these parties. However, we need to distinguish between centralisation (which we see in the CPs) and concentration of powers (which we see in parties like the TDP, Shiv Sena, BSP, etc). Actually the principles of democratic centralism, namely all party organs from top to bottom shall be elected, that the minority shall carry out the decisions of the majority, and the lower party organisations shall carry out the decisions and directives of the higher party organs, apply to all parties. This is nothing very peculiar to the communist parties, as some tend to make it out. Like other parties, the communist parties too have the provision that vests the higher committees with power to dissolve the lower level committees for violation of directives or failure to adhere to party policies. The difference lies in the way these principles are operated, as these principles in a communist party lead to a tightly knit organisation. The belief that the party is built from above also applies to other parties, but the difference is that the top leadership in the communist parties is always conscious of this belief, leading to excessive control and supervision over the local committees. However, it must be added that communist parties believe in and practice what is known as “collective leadership”. No one leader can dictate the “line” to the party, although some leaders do exercise more authority than others within the core leadership.

We will be mistaken if we believe that this formal democracy in CPs amounts to real democracy. Parties in which unit/branch meetings take place at regular intervals, or where party conferences take place as per the rulebook need not score high on the scale of democracy. They need not be efficient or successful in elections either. We may even say that rigid organisational structures militate against inner party democracy. This is what we saw in the communist parties in the former socialist countries, where the party apparatchiks completely dominated the party. This we see to some extent in the communist parties in India too. Democracy is not just to keep the rulebook always on top of the table and use it to stifle dissent or scare dissidents and sanitise the party. Where there is a top down approach and where this is rigorously implemented, parties tend to be less democratic. Every thing seems to be democratic on the face of it, so far it is rule based. But what actually prevails in the party could be oligarchy, as Michels observed long ago.

One puzzle is that while the polity has been increasingly democratised, leadership in parties has been moving in the opposite direction – towards authoritarianism. The emergence of one single indisputable party leader has become one of the major characteristics of Indian parties. His/her family members get involved in running the show, and a bunch of confidants gather around him/her forming a coterie or inner circle where most of the decisions are made.

Again this practice was copied from the Indira's Congress. Since the Congress had been the mother of most parties in India, all the parties that had a congenital link with that party, seem to have developed the same characteristics over time. The umbilical chord is cut but the genetic characteristics are already inherited. We see it in the parties of the Congress parivar and the Janata parivar. Even parties that do not have blood relationship with the Congress emulated the model with much gusto.

However, it is interesting to note that most functionaries in different parties seem to be very satisfied with the ways in which parties operate. Only those who decide to leave the party complain about the undemocratic or autocratic style of the party chief. If you ask them, when they are in the party, they would say that their party is more democratic than other parties, or democratic in its own way. It matters very little to them if the functioning of their party appears to be undemocratic to an outsider.

VI. Performance

How do we evaluate the performance of parties? It depends on how we see the purpose and role of political parties. Some see parties simply as vote-getting machines or associations whose purpose is to secure power for their leaders. But such a perspective would not help us much in evaluating the performance of parties. Some approaches to the study of parties say that it is through parties people get access to government, seek to fulfil their individual, group, sectional or collective interests and get a feeling that they are able to control and change governments. Duverger (1964) thought that parties bring people into the political arena, gives the common man a voice in politics and makes it possible to form a ruling elite. Others have emphasised the role of parties in crystallising policy issues, deal with the public in their day-to-day problems, and mobilise support or opposition to governments. Keeping these aspects in view, we shall try to evaluate the performance of parties in India.

Parties in India on the whole acted as key agencies of democratic transformation in the country. In a society that had a long history of social inequalities and dogged by poverty and backwardness it is not easy to bring freedoms to all in an equal measure that too in a swift manner. At the time India became a republic, the democratic political structure came in a big way. Its polity was much ahead of its social and economic structure. Leaders of India are aware of this contradiction between political democracy and socio-economic structure. Political parties had precisely tried to grapple with this new situation and tasks. Change in social relations and values cannot be brought in a jiffy nor can the pace be forced at will. In any democracy it has to happen only through reconciliation of all sections to the changing realities, which is more slow and irritating to those who want swift radical changes. Parties popularised notions of equality and freedom among people and also moderated the extreme demands for individual liberty and social equality. Both change and stability are important. Thus, even those parties that stood for radical changes are compelled to implement incremental changes when they come to power.

Accommodation, cooption and social balancing of diverse interests and groups have been the mantras in running the parties and governments. In a way the composition of parties has remained secular. When a party came to power it took sufficient care to see that different castes, communities and geographical regions get represented in the government. Parties did use social identities, such

as caste, region and religion for electoral purposes. On the surface, it appears that parties have exacerbated social divisions and tensions for their narrow interests. We should realise that the working of parties that claimed to represent sectional interests or have apparently worked to accentuate social cleavages has ultimately led to more social cohesion. By mobilising people around slogans of justice and equality and articulating the interests of the socially disadvantaged and deprived groups, parties could bring them into the political arena as partners, moderate social cleavages, and mitigate tension. Otherwise the alienation of these sections from parties and hence from government would have grown over time. On the contrary, some may complain that the parties have not done enough to bring about social equality. But we should also realise that any hasty attempts to wipe out age-old inequalities would have been counter productive. It is better if these social inequalities and conflicts are thrown open for negotiation and reconciliation in a democratic manner. That is what parties in India did. They did not try to reinforce social inequalities or to perpetuate the dominance of the entrenched groups/castes. They moved at a slow pace keeping it in tandem with changes in social relations. True, they have done this under pressure and more pressure might be needed to move ahead. It is therefore not surprising that those who castigated the Indian government during the 70s and 80s, for its failure to bring about social justice and radical transformation, are now, in the face of the liberalisation onslaught, voicing concern about the reversal of the progressive secular and socialist policies of the initial decades and are emphasising the need to defend the democratic spaces that were available to the disadvantaged social groups in the earlier decades.

Parties enabled the democratic institutions in India to work with a large measure of success. The parties in the initial years of post-Independence did work for the realisation of the noble objectives of the Indian Constitution. Parties grappled with the sudden expansion of democracy in 1950 through the sanctioning of basic freedoms and adult franchise. The bitter struggle among the socialists, communists and the Congressmen were both over sharing power and also shaping policies. The parties became the forums where intense discussions and debates were held on the possible policy alternatives for governments. The ability of the parties during the 50s and 60s to fight the Congress policies, although from different and often divergent perspectives, to mobilise people on the basis of alternative programmatic standpoints showed the vibrancy of parties in India. The attempts to resist the authoritarian rule, and the way the non-Congress parties focused on the need to protect the basic freedoms, strengthened the democratic fabric of the nation.

Unlike in several African, Asian, and Latin American countries, the legitimacy of party governments at the national level was never questioned. On few occasions, there were hiccups at the State level when the losing parties did not recognise the legitimacy of winning parties: such as elections in Bengal (1972), Assam, Punjab, J&K and some North-East States. They were more in the nature of exceptions than rule. Even when the Union government dismissed the State governments ruled by opposition parties by misusing the Article 356, the aggrieved parties accepted to function within the constitutional framework. They sought corrective justice through courts, mobilising public opinion through agitations, or through a fresh electoral verdict. Although there have been anti-system parties such as the ML groups, they could not undermine the legitimacy enjoyed by the parliamentary parties.

The transfer of power from one party to the other has been, by and large, peaceful in the country. Parties are prepared to sit in the opposition and wait for the next opportunity. There were instances of intolerance by the ruling party at the Union level towards the governments ruled by other parties which were not friendly to it – the way it happened in the wake of Janata party victory in 1977 and in the wake of Congress staging a comeback in 1980. Party leaders on the whole did not indulge in politics of vendetta. Whenever they did they reaped bitter experiences.

The emergence of regional parties and parties that are based on the support from specific social groups, increasing dependence of National parties on the regional parties for the formation of governments at the Centre, and the instability of the coalition governments have been a source of concern for some. But we should look at the positive contribution of these emergent features of our party system to India's democracy. One can say that the legitimacy of the governments and the representativeness of political parties had increased with the emergence of parties that claim to represent the interests of specific regions, classes and communities. The increasing presence of the legislators from the OBCs, and the proportional representation to the SCs and the STs, make the parties sensitive to their demands and interests. Since leaders from these groups dominate parties such as the BSP, SP, RJD, LJSP, DMK, TDP, JMM, and so on, they are in a position to integrate these sections with the larger society in a much better manner. The identity of the socially backward groups with these parties might have also increased the identity of these groups with governments, as these parties became ruling parties.

The NES data gives us some useful clues to understand some of these issues. About 41 per cent of the respondents in 2004 said that regional parties are better for governance at the State level. If we take away those who had no opinion their proportion goes up to 60 per cent. Only 28 per cent voters disagreed with this view. Similarly, half the respondents did not see anything wrong with the formation of coalition governments. One important achievement of parties is to adjust with the changing political reality as is evident in the functioning of coalition governments. By including a number of parties in power sharing agreements, coalitions have contributed to the legitimacy of the governments. Coalitions in India at the national level seem to survive because: (i) they are socially and politically broad based and territorially representative; (ii) consolidation of coalitions compel parties to join one or the other formation; (iii) the presence of a major party, as the mainstay around which all other parties revolve, ensures stability; (iv) a common programme provides framework for policy; (v) pre-poll alliances bind the parties under a moral obligation to remain with the coalition; and (vi) coalition partners are willing to learn lessons from experience (Patil, 2001).

The levels of trust parties enjoy among people are considerable, although low and one would wish that they were higher for healthy functioning of government and democracy. The data that emerged out of the India component of the World Values Survey (WVS) conducted in 2001 and the National Election Studies (NES) of 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004 provide us important information on the perceptions of citizens of India on the role and performance of political parties. The WVS data show that about one-third of the respondents have a great deal of confidence in political parties, and the proportion of people having confidence in political parties was more among the lower classes and castes, which goes up to 40 per cent. Actually the confidence levels were low among the upper classes and castes (Shastri, 2002).

NES'04 data also show that three-fourths of the Indian population disapproved the idea of party-less political system. If we exclude those who had no opinion, the proportion goes up to 90 per cent (table 12). Equally interesting is the finding that a nearly half of the voters feel that the party is an important consideration for them while they make voting decisions (table 10). Another 32 per cent said that they go by candidate. Only 10 per cent said that caste / community is the main consideration. The distribution of the sample respondents was more or less even among people with different caste, class, education, occupation and rural-urban background. The Survey data also shows

that favourable conditions exist for the working of democracy and parties. About 53 per cent of voters have strong liking for one or the other political party, while only 22 per cent have strong dislike for any political party. The proportions of people with liking and disliking for parties go up with the levels of education, occupation and class status. About 14 per cent have reported membership in political parties (table 11). This is considerable by any standards.

Some of the findings from these data and their implications for future democracy in India need careful analysis. It appears that the common people are critical of parties and leaders, but they are not so unhappy with them as we tend to imagine. Probably, party leaders are more accessible to people and communicate with them well. Also, leaders cannot survive in politics by obsessive aggrandisement of their selfish interests or hope to win elections by merely feeding people with false slogans or caste or community sentiments. To vote favourably, electors expect immediate tangible benefits from parties. Followers expect leaders to do 'works' for them, even against rules. These days a leader who does not do 'something' to 'help' party supporters and followers in "need" and instead talk of principles is treated as 'useless'. Thus parties in India seem to perform three functions at the same time: gain power and wealth for leaders; bestow patronage on the supporters and functionaries at the intermediate level; and render service to the people. The success or failure of parties and party leaders depend on how well they balance these functions.

One major complaint against parties by the middle classes is that parties have resorted to populist policies and programmes. Some accuse the parties of indulging in competitive populism. Populism can be understood as making fantastic promises by leaders, whether in opposition or government. Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the first to resort to it in 70s to beat the rivals in and out of the party and to mobilise electoral support. Later others too took to this course, and some could out do her in this game. But in a way populism is an expression of the changing times, where the parties are made sensitive to the immediate needs of the people. Parties are under pressure from the electors – to perform on their long-term promises and also do certain things for them immediately. *Thus, it could be a result of rapid political democratisation in a situation of underdevelopment.*

VII. Challenges and Prospects

During the past five decades or so, parties in India have responded to the upsurge of aspirations of people by shaping a welfare state and a participative democracy. Parties provided avenues for the elites from different social sections to enter the political arena and share power. But they were unable to keep pace with the aspirations of the upcoming elites or sort out competing leadership claims in an amicable manner. As parties came under pressure they have been splitting again and again, or new parties have come to the fore.

While, parties have been instrumental in democratising the way in which authority/power is constituted in the society, the way in which authority is constituted in parties moved in an opposite direction. One basic feature of party is that it should survive and continue to grow beyond the life span of any particular leader or regardless of the exit of any helmsman. But this we do not find in several parties – there is hardly collective leadership, or a leadership core. It is getting narrowed down to a leader or his family members. Power in the party and government are getting concentrated in one supreme leader, who reigns supreme like Hobbes' sovereign. But as there is democratic framework of polity, they cannot afford to appear as autocratic, but show that they are amenable to the wishes of the people and party followers. Parties face the biggest challenge to overcome this situation, and unless they meet this challenge the Leviathans may crumble.

While the credit for sustaining the democratic framework of politics goes to the parties to some extent, they also partake the blame for the ills that plague the polity today such as corruption, criminality and bad governance. While parties profess service to people, clean politics, etc. their practice is at variance, especially in recent decades, as we see more and more leaders excessively preoccupied in fulfilling their self-interest beyond any reasonable limits. Sensible leaders in different parties feel and point this out but a feeling of helplessness also envelops them in this regard. While people's faith in democracy has remained intact or has increased, their faith in the ability of parties to provide democratic governance is low. This is repeatedly proved in the defeat of the ruling parties almost in every election, exceptions being only a few.

The increasing role of money and criminals in party and electoral process are talked about widely today. Several party leaders are also acutely aware of this problem. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha, on the occasion of Golden Jubilee of

Indian Independence, spoke of the need to wage a second freedom struggle to end corruption and criminality in politics. The then President of India spoke about this. The Vohra Committee pointed out the politician-police-criminal nexus in the country. The Chief Vigilance Officer is seized with the matter. Indira Gandhi described it as a global phenomenon, but we find it assuming horrendous proportions in this country. We need to explain why this has happened. Several interpretations are plausible.

Political and party elites use money and muscle power as means to overcome the problems of mass democracy. Like the way the method of representation had been invented to overcome the inconveniences of direct democracy and keep power safely in the hands of the elites, party leaders may be resorting to the use of money and muscle power to get through the elections in a mass democracy. In the olden days structured violence and social domination were helpful to win elections. When such means are no more feasible, at least to the extent to win election, parties and candidates have resorted to market principles – setting price for vote for which the possessors of the commodity are willing to part with. Where that is not possible or sufficient, coercion is employed.

Winning elections has become a costly affair, and parties need huge amounts of funds to meet this situation. Party leaders try to accumulate sufficient funds for re-election. Although parties always fielded candidates in elections on the basis of their ‘winnability’, the prerequisites for this have changed over time. Some 30-40 years ago winnability was basically related to the candidate’s popularity, social support base, etc. Now winnability depends on one’s ability to spend huge amounts in election, and employ people to ensure victory. It has become virtually impossible for a person without “means” to think of becoming a candidate of an established party with a hope of winning an election. Increasingly, party seats are offered to “sound parties” – rich traders, contractors, dealers in real estate, retired officers, business people and industrialists, and wealthy professionals. Candidates spend huge amounts of money in election campaign – to buy votes or to offer allurements to voters – and they expect high returns on this. One of the reasons for growing criminality in politics could be due to the failure of the law and order agencies, bureaucracy and the judiciary. Parties increasingly accept and receive criminals into their fold and field them in elections because they find acceptance for such candidates among the electorate.

However, we cannot single out parties for their unethical practices. Nor can we blame them alone for all the ills in our society. It is not as if we have vicious

parties in a virtuous society. The decay among the parties and leaders also should be seen in the overall decay that had set in our society – in bureaucracy, judiciary, businesses and academic institutions. Every one wants to acquire wealth, power and fame as much as possible. As power, wealth and fame go together, a person seeks to acquire them by whatever means possible. If these are well gotten, it is fine. If they are ill gotten, they are equally fine, since the persons go unpunished by the law or uncensored by the public. Exceptions are those who are either saints or incapable of such things due to their position or capabilities. However, the problem arises in the case of parties because: (a) party leaders voluntarily come forward to lead us, guide us out of our troubles, make promises to usher in a good life for all but we find that they not only fall terribly short of what they promised, but even do things that go completely against what they initially offered; (b) their visibility is high and their activities are under constant public gaze. Hence we easily become aware of the gulf between what they profess and what they do; (c) we still imagine party leader in the mould of those who led freedom struggle under Gandhian values – as one who should serve people selflessly, stand by what he professes and resist the lure of power and wealth. When we see only a caricature of that in experience, we become angry or pessimistic.

We also find a growing concern about the declining quality of leadership; increasingly inability of parties to intervene in policy process and policy making in the representative bodies; and the way party functionaries desert, split and destroy parties for their selfish ends. Parties have come to be increasingly looked upon by leaders, functionaries and supporters as means to fulfil personal interests. Representative bodies are more arenas for party leaders to attack each other and settle personal scores, than to as spaces to deliberate upon policies and legislate. Party leaders spend much of the time in the Parliament and Legislative Assemblies on party quarrels or matters that involve issues relating to swindling public wealth.

We are living in an era of liberalisation and deregulation. Parties earlier had played an important role under the command economy. It is assumed that in a deregulated economy, the leverage of parties in the distribution of valued goods would go down. The public sector, centralised planning and huge funds available with the government are factors that shaped the thinking and practice of parties in India for a long time. The structure of the international and Indian economy, the attempts to universalise the model of capitalist democracy, and the models of economic development presently pursued by the governments at the

State and Union levels might cause problems, perpetuate dependent development and increase inequalities among the people. The problem is that parties in India have to continue with the earlier commitment to bring about equality but reckon with the new policy regime.

The very structure of the global economy is such that irrespective of ideological and programmatic differences, and the commitment of the parties to the autonomous economic development of the country, any party that comes to power is compelled to liberalise. It is their responsibility to convince people that these policies would promote their welfare. Party leaders are answerable to the people; have to win electoral battles and face people's wrath. This puts the parties in a dilemma. They talk of reforms with a "human face" or enhancing expenditure on "social sector". Often they are accused of speaking with two tongues. Some think tanks are unhappy with this dualism of the politicians and brakes applied by them to the reform process, because they do not realise the difficulties of parties in managing the people. There is pressure for reform from above and pressure to perform from below. How to negotiate this uphill task of achieving economic development under the global neo-liberal regime and meet demands from various sections of people for better life is a big challenge that parties face.

Discussions have been there on the need for party reforms. This is the biggest challenge before the parties, because no reform is possible without the willingness, cooperation, and active pursuit of reform by leaders of parties, who exercise the necessary legislative powers. Self-regulatory capacity of parties and the will and wisdom for self-reform among leaders is crucial. They should realise that survival and consolidation of democracy are crucially hinged upon the health of political parties.

But this does not come about on its own.¹⁰ In the present circumstances change in the working of parties is possible to some extent when pressure is

¹⁰ We have seen recently the resistance of parties, transcending party ideologies, policy positions and party statuses, to the directives of the EC for the declaration of assets and criminal record by candidates in the elections to the legislatures.

brought on them. The role of opinion makers, civil society organisations and the judiciary is important in this context. But the pressure has to come mainly from below. So it depends on the ability of the electorate to choose right people as their representatives. Indian electorate has shown maturity to vote out parties for bad governance, but the question is: are they able to bring in parties that could provide good governance? Several party leaders feel that unless awareness grows among people in this direction, nothing can be achieved in making parties more responsive and representative. We also need a social transformation where caste identities are diluted in the political arena and corruption and criminality are curbed in the society at large so that parties function and perform better. Economic and industrial development, improved employment and better living standards for the people would make parties to function better.

We also need regulations that make it mandatory for the parties to function in a democratic manner, including the election of party functionaries and selection of candidates. Excessive regulation may be counterproductive, but a consensus could be worked out on the need for party reform and where and how such reform could be initiated and implemented through legislation. There is the model code of conduct. There are rules by the EC which make it mandatory for parties to hold elections to the policy and decision making bodies, to submit statements of income and election expenditure by parties, and these can be given legal status. EC has come out with several recommendations on party and electoral reform and these can be considered by the Parliament. Therefore, what the country needs is a larger agenda, in which the role of parties has to be redefined and their functioning regulated.

Table 1: Number of parties recognised, participated in the Lok Sabha elections and represented in the Lok Sabha after Independence

Year	Participated in the election	Recognised parties			Represented	With at least 10 seats	With at least 1% vote share
		National	State	Total			
1952	53	14	39	53	22	3	10
1957	15	4	11	15	12	3	6
1962	27	5	11	17	20	5	8
1967	25	7	14	21	18	8	9
1971	53	8	17	25	24	7	11
1977	34	5	15	20	18	4	8
1980	36	6	19	25	17	7	8
1984	33	7	17	24	21	5	12
1989	113	8	20	28	24	6	10
1991	145	9	28	37	24	7	10
1996	209	8	30	38	28	11	13
1998	176	7	30	37	39	8	16
1999	169	7	40	47	38	11	15
2004	230	6	36	42	40	10	15

Source: Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Table 2: Position and performance of the Congress and the 'Second party' since 1952

Year	Total seats	Congress Performance			Relative position of the Congress compared to the "second" party					
		% of vote	Seats won	% of seats	Second party vote	Difference	Second party seats	Difference	% of seats	Difference
1952	489	45.0	363	74.2	10.6 (SP)	63.7	16 (CPI)	347	3.3	71.0
1957	494	47.8	371	75.1	10.4 (PSP)	64.7	27 (CPI)	344	5.5	69.6
1962	494	44.7	361	73.1	10.0 (CPI)	63.1	29 (CPI)	332	5.9	67.2
1967	520	40.8	283	54.4	9.3 (BJS)	45.1	44 (SWA)	239	8.5	46.0
1971	518	43.7	352	68.0	10.4 (INCO)	57.5	25 (CPM)	327	4.8	63.1
1977	542	34.5	154	28.4	41.3 (BLD)	-12.9	295 (BLD)	-141	54.4	-26.0
1980	529	42.7	353	66.7	19.0 (JP)	47.8	41 (JNPS)	312	7.8	59.0
1984	514	49.1	404	78.6	7.7 (BJP)	70.9	22 (CPM)	382	4.3	74.3
1989	529	39.5	197	37.2	17.8 (JD)	19.5	143 (JD)	54	27.0	10.2
1991	534	36.4	244	45.7	20.1 (BJP)	25.6	120 (BJP)	124	22.5	23.2
1996	543	28.8	140	25.8	20.3 (BJP)	5.5	161 (BJP)	-21	29.7	-3.9
1998	543	25.8	141	26.0	25.6 (BJP)	0.4	182 (BJP)	-41	33.5	-7.9
1999	543	28.3	114	21.0	23.8 (BJP)	-2.8	182 (BJP)	-68	33.5	-12.5
2004	543	26.5	145	26.7	22.2 (BJP)	4.5	138 (BJP)	7	25.4	1.3

Source: Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Note: Actually Congress was the second party in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Lok Sabhas. BJP has greater strength than the Congress during the period. However, the purpose of the table is to show the performance of the Congress vis-à-vis other parties, BJP is shown as the second party for the 1996, 98, and 99.

SP: Socialist Party

PSP: Praja Socialist Party

CPI: Communist Party of India

BJS: Bharatiya Jana Sangh

INCO: Indian National Congress (Organisation)

BLD: Bharatiya Lok Dal

JP: Janata Party

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

JD: Janata Dal

SWA: Swatantra Party

CPM: Communist Party of India (Marxist)

JNP(S): Janata Party (Secular)

Table 3: Vote share for National and other parties since 1952

Year	Vote share				Seats share					
	All National parties	State parties	Other registered parties	Total for state parties and other parties	Total seats	All National parties	State parties	Other registered parties	Total for state parties and other parties	% of seats held by state parties and other parties
1952	76.00	8.10	--	8.10	489	418	34	--	34	6.95
1957	73.08	7.60	--	7.60	494	421	31	--	31	6.28
1962	78.50	9.28	1.17	10.45	494	440	28	6	34	6.88
1967	76.13	9.69	0.39	10.08	520	440	43	2	45	8.65
1971	77.84	10.17	3.62	13.79	518	451	40	13	53	10.23
1977	84.67	8.80	1.03	9.83	542	481	49	3	52	9.59
1980	85.07	7.69	0.81	8.50	529	485	34	1	35	6.62
1984	79.80	11.56	0.72	12.28	514	451	58	0	58	12.86
1989	79.34	9.28	6.13	15.41	529	471	27	19	46	8.70
1991	80.58	13.08	2.08	15.26	534	478	51	4	55	10.30
1996	69.08	22.43	2.20	24.63	543	403	129	2	131	24.13
1998	67.98	18.79	10.87	29.66	543	387	101	49	150	27.62
1999	67.11	26.93	3.22	30.15	543	369	158	10	168	30.94
2004	62.89	28.90	3.96	32.86	543	364	159	15	174	32.04

Source: Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Table 4: Decline of independents

Year	No of independent candidates contested in the Lok Sabha election	Seats		Percentage forfeited deposits	Percentage of votes secured
		Won	Percentage		
1952	533	37	6.94	67.54	15.90
1957	481	42	8.73	67.36	19.32
1962	480	20	4.18	78.91	11.05
1967	864	35	4.04	86.26	13.78
1971	1134	14	1.23	94.00	8.38
1977	1224	9	0.74	97.22	5.50
1980	2826	9	0.32	98.87	6.43
1984	3878	5	0.13	98.79	7.92
1989	3409	12	0.32	98.90	5.25
1991	5546	1	0.02	99.69	4.16
1996	10639	9	0.08	99.70	6.28
1998	1906	6	0.31	99.11	2.37
1999	1945	6	0.31	99.13	2.74
2004	2377	2	0.21	99.37	4.25

Source: Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Table 5: Vote Share of Left parties' (CPI and CPM)

Year	Party	Vote	Seats
1952	CPI	3.29	16
1957	CPI	8.92	27
1962	CPI	9.94	29
1967	CPI	4.95	23
	CPM	4.44	19
	Total	9.39	42
1971	CPI	4.73	23
	CPM	5.12	25
	Total	9.85	48
1977	CPI	2.82	7
	CPM	4.29	22
	Total	7.11	29
1980	CPI	2.59	11
	CPM	6.15	36
	Total	8.73	47
1984	CPI	2.70	6
	CPM	5.72	22
	Total	8.58	28
1989	CPI	2.57	12
	CPM	6.55	33
	Total	9.12	45
1991	CPI	2.48	14
	CPM	6.14	35
	Total	8.62	49
1996	CPI	1.97	12
	CPM	6.12	32
	Total	8.09	44
1998	CPI	1.75	9
	CPM	5.16	32
	Total	6.91	41
1999	CPI	1.48	4
	CPM	5.40	33
	Total	6.88	37
2004	CPI	1.41	10
	CPM	5.66	43
	Total	7.07	53

Source: Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Table 6: Alliance affect

Vote for allies of the two major parties

Year	Congress allies	BJP allies
1991	2.1	0.8
1996	0.9	4.6
1998	0.3	10.6
1999	5.7	17.0
2004	10.1	13.7

Source: Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Table 7: Extant Parties that rule(d) or share(d) power either at national or State level or Both (at least once)

S. No.	Name of the Party	Party Status	National level	State level
	<i>National Parties that ruled or shared power at both the levels</i>			
1	Indian National Congress	National	√	√
2	Bharatiya Janata Party	National	√	√
3	Communist Party of India	National	√	√
4	Janata Dal (United)	National	√	√
5	Nationalist Congress Party	National	√	√
	<i>National Parties that ruled or shared power at State level only</i>			
6	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	National		√
7	Bahujan Samaj Party	National		√
	<i>State Parties that ruled or shared power at both the levels</i>			
8	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	State	√	√
9	Asom Ganatantra Parishad	State	√	√
10	Biju Janata Dal	State	√	√
11	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	State	√	√
12	Indian National Lok Dal	State	√	√
13	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	State	√	√
14	J&K National Conference	State	√	√
15	J&K People's Democratic Party	State	√	√
16	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	State	√	√
17	Pattali Makkal Katchi	State	√	√
18	Rashtriya Janata Dal	State	√	√
19	Rashtriya Lok Dal	State	√	√
20	Republican Party of India (Athawale)	State	√	√
21	Shiromani Akali Dal	State	√	√
22	Shiv Sena	State	√	√
23	Samajwadi Party	State	√	√
24	Telugu Desam Party	State	√	√
25	Telengana Rashtra Samiti	State	√	√
	<i>State Parties that shared power at national level only</i>			
26	All India Trinamool Congress	State	√	
27	Lok Jan Shakti Party	State	√	
	<i>State Parties that shared power at State level only</i>			
28	All India Forward Bloc	State		√
29	Indian Union Muslim League	State		√
30	Janata Dal (S)	State		√
31	Kerala Congress (Mani)	State		√
32	Kerala Congress (Joseph)	State		√
33	Kerala Congress (Jacob)	State		√
34	Kerala Congress (Balakrishna Pillai)	State		√
35	Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party	State		√
36	United Goans Democratic Party	State		√
37	Mizo National Front	State		√
38	Mizoram People's Party	State		√
39	Manipur People's Party	State		√
40	Federal Party of Manipur	State		√
41	Revolutionary Socialist Party	State		√
42	Sikkim Democratic Front	State		√
43	Sikkim Sangram Parishad	State		√

**Table 8: Political parties contested or won seats in different States or Union Territories
in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections**

Contested: √
Won: X

State / UT	Name of the Party										
	INC	BJP	CPM	CPI	BSP	NCP	JDU	SP	RJD	JMM	TC
Andhra Pradesh	X	√ 8.41	X	X	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Arunachal Pradesh	√ 9.96	X	--	--	--	--	--	√	--	--	
Assam	X	X	√	√	--	--	√	√	--	--	
Bihar	X	X	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	--	
Chattisgarh	X	X	√	√	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Goa	X	X	--	√	--	√	--	--	--	--	
Gujarat	X	X	√	--	√	√	--	√	--	--	
Haryana	X	X	--	--	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Himachal Pradesh	X	X	--	--	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Jammu & Kashmir	X	√ 23.04	√	--	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Jharkhand	X	X	√	--	√	--	--	√	X	X	
Karnataka	X	X	--	--	√	--	√	√	--	--	
Kerala	√ 32.12	√ 10.38	X	X	√	--	--	--	--	--	
Madhya Pradesh	X	X	√	√	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Maharashtra	X	X	√	√	√	X	--	√	--	--	
Manipur	X	√ 20.65	--	√	--	√	--	--	--	--	
Meghalaya	X	√ 8.63	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	X
Mizoram	√ 45.67	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Nagaland	√ 25.78	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Orissa	X	X	--	--	√	--	--	√	--	X	
Punjab	X	X	√	√	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Rajasthan	X	X	√	√	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Sikkim	√ 27.43	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Tamil Nadu	X	√ 5.07	X	X	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Tripura	√ 14.28	√ 7.82	X	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	√
Uttar Pradesh	X	X	√	√	X	--	X	X	--	--	
Uttaranchal	X	X	X	X	√	--	--	X	--	--	
West Bengal	X	√ 8.07	--	--	√	--	--	√	--	√	X
Delhi	X	X	--	--	√	--	--	√	--	--	
Pondicherry	--	√ 35.65	--	--	√	--	--	--	--	--	
	INC	BJP	CPM	CPI	BSP	NCP	JDU	SP	RJD	JMM	TC

Notes:

1. * Union Territories.
2. -- BJP allies (NDA partners) contested and won the lone seat each in Mizoram (MNF), Nagaland (NPF), Sikkim (SDF) and Lakshadweep (JDU); Congress ally PMK won the lone seat from Pondicherry.
3. As per the definition of the Election Symbols and Allotment Order 1968, the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Union Territory of Pondicherry are States
4. The INC and the BJP secured more than five per cent vote in all States where they have contested but not won any seat.
5. Percentage of votes secured by the BJP and the Congress are given where have contested but could not win a seat.

Table 9: Electoral Performance of select political parties in the Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-2004 (Percentage of votes secured)

Year / Name of party	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004
National parties														
INC	44.98	47.78	44.72	40.78	43.68	34.52	42.69	48.01	39.53	36.64	28.80	25.83	28.30	26.53
BJS / BJP	3.07	5.97	6.44	9.35	7.36	--	--	7.40	11.49	20.04	20.29	25.59	23.75	22.16
CPI	3.29	8.92	9.94	4.95	4.73	2.82	2.59	2.70	2.57	2.48	1.97	1.75	1.48	1.41
CPI(M)	--	--	--	4.44	5.12	4.29	6.15	5.72	6.55	6.14	6.12	5.16	5.40	5.66
BSP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.07	1.80	4.02	4.67	4.16	5.33
NCP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.27	1.80
State parties														
JKNC	--	--	--	0.14	--	0.26	0.25	0.40	0.02	--	--	0.21	0.12	0.13
PDP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.08
SAD	0.99	--	0.72	--	0.87	1.26	0.71	1.03	0.14	0.03	0.76	0.81	0.69	0.90
INLD	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.53	0.55	0.50
SP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3.28	4.93	3.76	4.32
RJD	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.78	2.79	2.41
LJSP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.71
CPIML	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.24	0.24	0.25	0.33	0.33
JMM	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.34	0.53	0.41	0.36	0.27	0.47
GGP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.05	0.05	0.18
SHS	--	--	--	--	0.16	--	0.07	--	0.11	0.79	1.49	1.77	1.56	1.81
TDP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	4.06	3.29	2.96	2.97	2.77	3.65	3.04
TRS	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.63
JD(S)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.91	1.47
JD (U)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3.10	2.35
KEC (M)	--	--	--	0.22	0.37	0.26	0.18	0.10	0.02	0.14	0.10	0.13	0.10	0.05
MUL	0.08	--	0.36	0.28	0.28	0.30	0.24	0.09	--	0.01	--	0.22	0.01	0.19
DMK	--	--	2.01	3.79	3.84	1.71	2.14	2.28	2.34	2.06	2.14	1.44	1.73	1.81
AIADMK	--	--	--	--	--	2.95	2.36	1.59	1.50	1.61	0.64	1.83	1.93	2.19
PMK	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.52	0.46	0.16	0.42	0.65	0.56
MDMK	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.37	0.44	0.44	0.43
BJD	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.00	1.20	1.30
TRMC	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.19	2.42	2.57	2.07
FB	0.08	0.55	0.72	0.43	0.66	0.34	0.51	0.42	0.42	0.41	0.38	0.33	0.23	0.35
RSP	0.44	0.26	0.39	--	0.49	0.45	0.65	0.47	0.62	0.63	0.63	0.55	0.41	0.44
AGP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.00	0.02	0.54	0.76	0.29	0.32	0.53
MNF	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.03	0.03	0.02	--	0.05

Table 10: Important consideration in voting

	Candidate	Party	Caste/Community	Something else	No opinion	Total
Class						
Very poor	28	45	11	5	11	8102
Poor	31	45	11	5	8	9369
Middle	35	46	7	5	7	5186
Upper class	38	44	6	5	6	4457
Caste/Community						
Upper castes	36	47	6	5	6	4261
Peasant proprietors	34	44	8	4	10	2221
Upper OBCs	31	45	11	4	9	5357
Lower OBCs	33	44	9	5	9	4315
SCs	25	48	14	5	8	4230
STs	27	45	11	6	10	2164
Muslims	33	43	8	5	11	2797
Others	36	43	6	6	10	1763
Education						
<i>Non-literate</i>	24	44	13	6	14	9477
Primary	30	49	9	5	7	6170
Matric	37	45	8	5	5	6483
College and above	43	45	4	4	4	4701
Occupation						
Higher professionals	42	44	3	4	7	945
Lower professionals	37	48	6	4	5	3336
Traditional service	38	43	9	4	7	528
Workers	31	49	9	5	6	3094
Farmers	31	44	12	5	9	5534
Agricultural workers	26	48	12	5	9	5689
Other occupations	32	42	9	6	11	7983
Location						
Rural	30	45	11	5	9	21377
Urban	37	46	6	5	6	5735
Total	8581 31.7%	12268 45.2%	2582 9.5%	1351 5.0%	2330 8.6%	27112

All figures are in percentage points.

Source: National Election Study, 2004, Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Question wording:

While voting, what is the most important consideration for you, the candidate, the party, your caste/community's interest or something else?

Table 11: Membership and Liking for political party

	Member ship in any political party	Liking for any political party	Dislike for any political party	Total
Class				
Very poor	11	51	18	8101
Poor	13	53	22	9369
Middle	15	56	23	5186
Upper class	18	56	26	4455
Caste/Community				
Upper castes	12	58	26	4261
Peasant proprietors	11	56	20	2221
Upper OBCs	19	53	23	5357
Lower OBCs	12	51	19	4315
SCs	14	56	21	4231
STs	13	44	13	2164
Muslims	12	53	25	2799
Others	13	50	19	1765
Education				
<i>Non-literate</i>	10	44	15	9477
Primary	13	55	21	6171
Matric	16	60	26	6483
College and above	19	60	30	4701
Occupation				
Higher professionals	19	60	30	945
Lower professionals	17	59	28	3336
Traditional service	12	55	18	528
Workers	17	57	22	3093
Farmers	14	56	22	5535
Agricultural workers	12	53	21	5688
Other occupations	12	47	18	7984
Location				
Rural	14	53	21	21377
Urban	15	54	24	5735
Total	3710 13.7%	14428 53.2%	5823 21.5%	27112

All figures are in percentage points.

Source: National Election Study, 2004, Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Note: If we exclude the respondents who have no opinion on these questions, the percentages would go up by 3 to 4 per cent.

Question wording:

Are you a member of any political party?	No	Yes	D.K.
Is there any political party, which you particularly like?	No	Yes	D.K.
Is there any political party, which you particularly dislike?	No	Yes	D.K.

Table 12: People's views on certain party-related issues

	Regional parties are better			Coalition government			Party less political system			Total
	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Nothing wrong / No alternative	No to coalition government	No Opinion	No	Yes	No Opinion	
Class										
Very poor	37	22	42	40	15	45	67	9	24	8102
Poor	41	28	31	51	16	34	72	9	19	9369
Middle	43	32	25	55	17	27	77	9	15	5186
Upper class	46	37	17	61	20	20	78	9	13	4457
Caste/Community										
Upper castes	40	39	21	60	18	22	79	9	12	4261
Peasant proprietors	46	24	30	52	15	33	75	8	18	2221
Upper OBCs	41	27	32	49	17	33	70	11	19	5357
Lower OBCs	40	28	32	50	16	35	71	10	19	4315
SCs	38	24	37	44	17	39	69	7	24	4230
STs	42	23	35	44	11	45	69	7	23	2164
Muslims	45	27	28	50	18	32	74	9	18	2797
Others	43	28	30	52	15	34	72	8	20	1763
Education										
<i>Non-literate</i>	31	18	51	45	10	55	61	8	31	9477
Primary	44	26	30	51	16	33	73	10	18	6170
Matric	48	34	18	61	20	19	79	10	11	6483
College and above	49	42	9	66	24	10	85	9	6	4701
Occupation										
Higher professionals	44	40	16	65	20	15	78	12	10	945
Lower professionals	48	37	15	64	20	16	81	9	10	3336
Traditional service	40	28	32	46	19	35	71	9	20	528
Workers	43	26	31	52	19	29	73	10	17	3094
Farmers	43	27	30	52	16	32	74	8	17	5534
Agri. workers	38	23	39	42	14	44	65	10	25	5689
Other occupations	39	27	34	47	14	39	71	8	21	7983
Location										
Rural	40	26	34	48	16	37	70	9	21	21377
Urban	47	35	18	59	19	22	80	10	11	5735
Total	11144 41.1%	7624 28.1%	8344 30.8%	13599 50.2%	4429 16.3%	9084 33.5%	19581 72.2%	2443 9.0%	5088 18.8%	27112

All figures are in percentages.

Source: National Election Study, 2004, Data Unit, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi.

Question wording:

Compared to National parties, regional/local parties can provide better government in states. Tell me, to what extent do you agree with this statement – fully agree, somewhat agree somewhat disagree or fully disagree?

Fully Agree Somewhat agree Somewhat Disagree Fully Disagree No Opinion

Some people believe that there is no harm in a coalition government. Others believe that in special circumstances there is no alternative to it. While, for others, a coalition government is not good in any case circumstances. What is your opinion in this regard? Nothing wrong in it No alternative to coalition No coalition government in any circumstances D.K.

Suppose there were no parties or assemblies and elections were not held- do you think that the government in this country can be run better?

No Yes D.K.

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