

MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM:
A FACTOR FOR PERVERSION OF DEMOCRACY AND
POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN INDIA

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Introduction

India, right from its inception as a sovereign independent political entity in 1947, embraced representative democracy with Multi-Party system as its form of government. The Indian Society, being a multi-ethnic and multi-culture society with divergent interests, policy and decision makers at the political hierarchy, while formulating policies for subsequent implementation, felt the need for accommodate the divergent interests and aspiration of these divergent social groups, co-inhabiting and co-existing in the country. Recognising and accepting this ground reality of the Indian society, multi-party democracy was thought to be the best and the most viable form of party system. It was believed that political parties, in large number, would be the most effective channel of communication between the masses and the government or the party in power. It was also thought that political parties would serve as the agencies through which the most urgent needs of the people are identified and brought to the notice of the government for most urgent attention of the government.

With the adoption of multi-party representative democracy, Election Commission of India was instituted on 25th January, 1950 to frame rules, regulations, criteria, etc. for the smooth conduct of election, and for recognition of political parties at various levels. The Election Commission, thereafter, started according of recognition to different political parties at national, state, regional and local levels. As there had been random recognition of political parties, within a few years the number of political parties multiplied, and , as of now i.e. 2017-18, there are as many as 1866

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registered Political Parties out of which, 56 are recognised as National and State parties; and the rest are registered unrecognised political parties.

Impacts of the adoption of multi-party system on Indian electoral politics.

The existence of a large number of political parties in India, while necessitated by the pluralistic nature of the society, has become a setback for the proper functioning of democracy in the country, and for the maintenance of political stability. In elections to members of Loksabha, and for that matter, to state legislatures and other local bodies, a large number of political parties, in most cases, entered the electoral battle for power, thereby, having certain percentage of vote-share, which eventually leads to the decline in the percentage of vote-share by the winning party or parties. This trend in the electoral politics has a serious negative impact on the functioning of democracy in India. In 2014 (6th Loksabha) election, as many as 484 parties entered the electoral fray, which is 121 more than parties participating in 2009 election. This is an indication of the fact that the number of political party recognised by Election Commission is still on the rise. However, it has to be noticed that while the number of parties contesting in the election is on the rise, the number of parties actually represented in the Parliament is on the decline. In 2009, the number of parties represented in the 15th Loksabha election was 39 while this number has gone down to 35 in 2014 election. BJP led Coalition (NDA) came to power winning a total of 336 seats in Loksabha with a combined vote –share of 38% of the valid vote polled. The NDA coalition parties, though secured near absolute majority of seats, is still more than 12% short of majority in terms of vote-share. It is, therefore, to be established that, with the exception of 1977 election, results of the rest of elections held since independent, are self-explanatory of the fact that, governments formed after each Parliamentary elections are formed not with the mandate of majority of electorates, but are formed with the support and mandate of minority voters. This is a clear case of perversion of democracy in India in the context of democracy as form of government in which majority opinion determines legislation, as defined by Deicey.

The Congress, in 1977 (4th Loksabha) election suffered a humiliating defeat in the history of Indian electoral politics, mainly because of the declaration of the infamous National Emergency by Indira Gandhi led Congress government in 1975, during the periods of which, almost all important opposition leaders were arrested and imprisoned, including Moraji Desai, who after

1977 election became the Prime Minister. The Congress became extremely unpopular with the masses, and was much weakened culminating into its downfall leading to its ultimate dislodge from power in 1977 election by the Janata led Alliance which secured not only absolute majority of seats in the Parliament, but also secured a record vote-share of 51.89% of the total valid vote polled. This happens to be the only exceptional case in the history of Indian electoral politics in which the winning party or parties had a vote-share of more than 50% of total valid vote-polled.

A close and factual analysis of electoral politics of India since independence, therefore, established that, though India adopted multi-party system, the period between 1951 and 1967 has been the period of Congress dominance as it was the Congress by virtue of its uncontested role during the freedom movement, consistently captured power. The Congress from the early 1950s till 1967, got the blessing of the masses for its role in bringing home freedom for the country. However, even during this period, the Congress, the dominant party, could not secure a vote share of more than 50% of the valid vote-polled. The maximum vote share of the Congress was 1984-85 (Loksabha) election in which it secured 48.12% of the total vote polled, which, however, is still some 2% short of majority. In other words, a combination of different political parties contesting in that particular election, together secured the support of more than 51% of the total electorates who actually casted their votes.

In view of the above stated fact, one could come to the conclusion that since the existence of a large number of political parties has created the electoral situation in India in which the majority seats winning parties hardly has a vote share of majority votes, multi-party system is a cause for perversion of democracy in India. However, if one is to define democracy in terms of number of seats secured, Indian democracy could be a democracy in that sense of the term. However, democracy, as is understood, is not about the number of seats won, but it is all about how many people and what percentage of the total population are with the party or parties that formed the government. If democracy is to be a genuine democracy, the government that was formed must have necessarily secured the support and backing of the majority of the electorates, i.e. more than 50% of the total electorates who voted in the elections.

The following table of seats won and vote share by the winning parties from 1951 (1st Loksabha) election to 2014 (6th Loksabha) election reflects the true nature of Indian democracy.

Year of Election	Total No. of Seats	Winning Pol. Parties	Seats won	% of vote share (out of total valid vote polled)
1951	485	INC	364	44.99
1957	494	INC	371	47.78
1962	494	INC	361	44.72
1967	520	INC	283	40.78
1971	520	INC	362	43.07
1977	542	Janata led Alliance	345	51.89
1980	520	INC	362	43.07
1984-85	533	INC	414	48.12
1989	545	INC	197	39.53
1991-92	545	INC	244	35.66
1996	545	Janata Dal	332	NA
1998	545	BJP	286	25.59
1999	545	BJP(NDA)	298	NA
2004	543	INC(UPA)	335	NA
2009	543	INC(UPA)	322	NA
2014	543	BJP(NDA)	336	38

INC= Indian National Congress

UPF= United Progressive Alliance

NDA= National Democratic Alliance

Source: Wikipedia

As seen in the table above, government formed after each General Election was based on the number of seats won, and not on the number of vote-share. In other words, Governments were being formed on the strength of seats won.

As seen above, the formation of governments were being effected on the basis of number of seats won, i.e. a political party or a combination of parties which secured more than 50% of the total seats is called for forming the government even if it has a vote-share of less than 50% of the total valid vote polled. In most cases, as seen above, except 1977 Janata led Alliance government, the rest of governments formed after elections were being effected without taking into consideration as to whether the party or parties that formed the government, received popular support or support of the majority of voters who actually casted their vote. It is, therefore, to be maintained that, multi-party system in India, which is responsible for the emergence of electoral scenario in which the winning party or parties received the support of marginal minority is a cause, the most serious cause for dilution of democracy, thereby, making Indian democracy a diluted democracy.

Reasons for India's adoption of multi-party system

It should, however, be noted that, while multi-party system has its demerits and disadvantages, it does, at the same time, has its own merits and advantages depending upon the type of society where it is being adopted. Normally, the multi-party electoral system is supposed to be the most suitable form of party system in a pluralistic society like that of India's. In India, Multi-Party system is being adopted with the hope that the system would best serve the political aspirations and interests of the divergent ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, etc. groups, co-inhabiting and co-existing in the country. Political parties are being formed at national, regional, state and even at local levels with the hope that they would serve the socio-political and economic interests of different cultural, linguistic, etc. groups living in different parts of the country. Many national, regional and state level parties came up during the last decades with the aim to further the political aspirations of different groups of people living and occupying different regions of India. For example, the MNF (The Mizo National Front) which was formed in the early 1960s to demand secession from India, has become a state level political party after it signed Peace Accord with India in 1986 and the NPF (The Naga Peoples' Front) was formed, first in Nagaland as a State level political party, but becomes a regional party later on when it extended its areas of operation to Manipur. It is a political party established to advance and further the ethnic interest of the Nagas in Nagaland and Manipur. It is, therefore, true that the multi-party system, as

introduced in India, could accommodate the divergent interests of divergent groups of people in the Indian pluralistic society.

Multi-party System destabilises government.

It is, at the same time, to be admitted that the multi-party system has a number of disadvantages, particularly, in the context of Indian system of democracy. One of the most serious disadvantages of multi-party system in India is, it is a cause for political instability resulting from political defection, more precisely, after 1967. Prior to 1967, though there existed several political parties, the Congress remained the dominant party dominating the electoral politics of the country almost entirely. The party started losing its dominant position since 1967; and it started losing its position as the dominant party in several states largely because of the existence of several political parties facilitating political defection from one party to another. By then, no anti-defection law was enacted as yet, and many legislators switched over their loyalty to other parties resulting in frequent change of government or resulting in the fall of government, and subsequent inevitable mid-term poll, which is a costly affair. On many occasions, political defections are being resorted to by legislators, not for disagreeing with their mother parties on principles, policies, manifestos, etc. but are motivated by the prospect for getting a more lucrative positions and portfolios, which are of purely personal in nature and which are in their very essence detrimental to the collective interest of the people and society they represented.

Political defection, a cause for instability

As mentioned earlier, political defection came to surface in the electoral politics of the country after the 4th General Election of 1967. Prior to this, defections did take place when some political personalities like Dr. Raghu Vira, Ashok Mehta and T. Prakashan defected to other parties. However, large-scale defection started only after 1967 General Election. By then, the Congress was much weakened; and in many states it failed to capture power and many state legislatures were left without any party with clear-cut majority, thereby, paving the way for defection or switching over loyalty to other party or parties. The political situation, resulting from the existence of a large number of political parties, provided wide ranging opportunities to opposition parties to form government, which are, however, short lived. In the process, both the Congress and opposition parties started wooing members to join their camps by offering

lucrative positions and portfolios Allegations and counter allegations were made on different problems facing the country and states, including corruptions, scam, etc. As political defections could be seen increasing each year, it was cited that, in Haryana, a particular legislator was said to have changed his loyalty to three different political parties three times a day. It has also been recorded that between March and December, 1967, there were as many as 320 cases of defections in different states, out of the total membership of 3450 state legislators. As a matter of fact, leaving aside the state of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Nagaland, the problem of political defection leading to political instability and frequent change of government was existing almost everywhere and every state. This politics of defection or what was then began to be called as that of 'Aye Ram' and 'Gaya Ram' seemed playing such a prominent role that, in many states, government survived and went out of power on the activities and attitude of these political turn coat. Example: the government of Charan Singh and TN Singh in UP, GN Singh in MP, Rao Birendra Singh in Haryana, Gurnam Singh, Prakash Singh Badal and Lakhman Singh in Punjab, etc. This political turn coat, created a lot of inconveniences to the bureaucracy. There were frequent falls of governments resulting in political instability and delay in decision making process at political level. There were lack of continuation in policies as each government which came to power, instead of continuing the policies and programmes of the previous government, adopt a new policy and programme. This state of affairs continued till 1971 General Election when Congress led by Indira Gandhi swept the polls, both at the centre and in many states, leading to the re-emergence comparative stability for a brief period

Random Political defection

Recognising the negative impact of political defection in India, policy maker at the political hierarchy took step to control large-scale defections both at the centre and at the state legislature by introducing Anti-Defection Act under 10th Schedule of the Constitution (52nd Constitutional Amendment). However, the Act could not fully prevent defection as there were loopholes in it. As per the provision of the Act, defection by 1/3 of the total membership of the party in the House was to be taken as merger with other party, which as per the provision of the Act, does not amount to defection. It is, therefore, to be observed that though the Anti-Defection Law, up to certain extent, lessens the number of political defections, and the politics of defection persists causing instability of government leading to mid-term polls and frequent change of government.

The following table shows the number of defection in the worst effected states between March 1967 and 1970

Sl.No	Name of State	Number of cases of defection
1	Andhra Pradesh	73
2	Bihar	161
3	Gujarat	142
4	Haryana	85
5	Madhya Pradesh	237
6	Karnataka	79
7	Odisha	61
8	Punjab	114
9	West Bengal	269
10	Pundicheri	3
11	Uttar Pradesh	294
TOTAL		1518

Source: Shubangi R, alsocienotes.com

There are, during the same period, i.e. March, 1967 to March, 1970, 12 States in which defections took place comparatively less than states mentioned above

Sl.No	Name of State	Number of cases of defection
1	Assam	2
2	Himachal Pradesh	5
3	Jammu & Kashmir	3
4	Kerala	35
5	Madhya Pradesh	19
6	Nagaland	1
7	Rajasthan	25

8	Tamil Nadu	19
9	Delhi	1
10	Goa	11
11	Manipur	27
12	Tripura	10
TOTAL		158

Source : Shubangi R. alsclencenotes.com

There are, at the same time, defections of independent legislators during this period. As many as 327 cases of defection had been recorded during the same period. In the union Parliament, during the same period, i.e. between March, 1967 and March, 1970, there are 148 cases of defections. Politics of defection played a prominent role in a number of states; and governments survived and went out of power because of political defection of politicians. Defection in India, therefore, was the main cause of political instability causing delay in decision making process at the political level and lack of continuity in the implementation of policies and programmes. This political scenario continued till 1971 General Election in which, Indira Gandhi led Congress swept the polls both at the centre and many states, as a result of which there was comparative stability for a brief period.

Conclusion

A careful observation of the working of Indian representative democracy with multi-party electoral mechanism, would make one to establish that, Indian democracy, in spite of being called the largest democracy, persistently failed to fulfil the pre-requirement of democracy as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. The successive governments formed, except Janata led Alliance government of 1977, after each election were effected not with the mandate of majority electorates who casted their votes, but were formed by a party which security single majority of votes which, however, did not meet the pre-requisite of democracy as the government in which majority opinion determines legislation as defined by Dicey. If one defines democracy as a form of government in which government was formed with the support

of majority members of the legislature, then Indian democracy could be a true form of democracy. However, if one is to agree with Dicey's definition of democracy, then, Indian democracy could not be a true or undiluted form of democracy since successive governments were being formed based on number seats won, and not based on number votes actually received (vote share). This trend in the electoral politics of the country resulting from the adoption of multi-party system, therefore, is a cause, a serious cause, indeed for dilution of democracy.

It has been observed, multi-party system in India is a contributing factor for political instability. The system provides wide ranging opportunities to legislators and Parliamentarian to change their loyalty from one party to another, which, on many occasions, led to the change in government and, sometimes, fall of the government leading to subsequent mid-term poll, costing crores and crores of rupees, which, otherwise, could have been used for development purposes.

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