



REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES : AN INDIAN EXPERIENCE



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ABSTARCT

In India, the regional political parties are playing a prominent role in formation of the government at the centre. In 1966 the regional political parties broke the monopoly of Congress which was a single dominant party in India since independence of our country from the British rule. It was the regional thrust, for socio-economic and cultural interests that made a fundamental change in the political scenario of India. Since, 1967 the regional political parties are emerging with greater political appeal. The regional parties in India control most of the state political affairs. They are emerging as a powerful force and are playing a vital role in the formulation of government at the centre. During last two decades, the rise of regional parties has influenced not only

state politics; but also the national parties and national politics. With sizable electoral support, the regional parties have not only managed to win elections and form state governments, they have also influenced the national politics. Together India's two national parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have roughly polled a little less than 50 percent votes. The vote share of the Congress has declined sharply during last few elections, from 39.5 percent in 1989 to 28.6 percent in 2009. This decline is much sharper when we compare the vote share of the Congress in recent elections to early elections. At the same time, the vote share of the BIP has declined from 25.6 percent in 1998 (the BIP's best performance) to 18.8 percent in 2009. On the other hand, while all regional

parties put together polled a little less than one third of total votes, they managed to win a sizeable number of seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People, lower house of Parliament) in different states. Under these recent conditions, neither of the two national parties, the Congress and the BJP have managed to win a majority of seats in Lok Sabha. The net result is that, in the absence of any single party having a majority in Lok Sabha, political parties have had no choice but to form a coalition government. All of India's national governments since the 1996 Lok Sabha elections have been coalition governments with the regional parties playing a key role in formation of the government at the Centre. Indian politics has moved from an era of single-party rule with the absolute dominance of the Congress from 1952-1989 (with a brief exception 1977-80) to an era of coalition politics. The regional parties have made important inroads in the traditional support base of the Congress amongst Muslim, Dalits and Adivasis. With its declining popularity amongst traditional supporters, the Congress is heavily dependent upon the OBC and the Upper castes for electoral success.

While the Muslim, Dalits and Adivasis do vote for Congress in selective states depending upon the type of electoral contest, their support base has certainly declined compared to the past. There is now some overlap in the support base for both the Congress and the BJP. With the regional parties sure to stay in Indian politics for at least a decade or more, there are only two ways for expansion of the two national parties.

The Congress and the BJP must either enter into alliances with the regional parties or try making inroads into the support base of the regional parties because there is no third route available for these two national parties.

*The regional parties have played an important role in Indian politics at both the state and national level for a little over a decade and will continue to in the coming years. **This paper highlights the role of regional political parties in formation of government at the centre with special reference to the results of 2009 elections in India.***