

National Democratic Alliance: Role and Performance of BJP and its Regional Political Parties

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Modern age is the age of representative democracy. Political parties are an integral part of modern mass democracy. "They are life and blood to every democratic country".¹ Political parties are necessary for the power, proper and smooth functioning of a political system. Democratic political system cannot survive without political parties. In a competitive system, parties are organized to manage the attitude and behavior of the population. Political parties play a crucial role in the political system.² The political party is today regarded as one of the most enduring instruments for the attainment of man's political aims. It constitutes the life of modern politics. "Political parties constitute one set of political institutions that can help narrow the gap between the growth in politicalized demands and governmental effectiveness. Well organized parties as thus became especially crucial."³ The origin and evolution of political parties have been playing due roles in their political system. In some political system several political parties are at work, where as in other, only one or two main and some small political parties at work. As Bryce has observed, "no free and large country has been without them (political parties). No one has shown how representative government could be worked without them." Similar views have been expressed by almost all other political scientists. Allan R. Ball epitomizes such a view when he observed that it is difficult even to image modern political system without political parties.⁴ The political parties are playing an important role in democratic system. In fact, one without the other cannot exist and they are the two sides of the same coin.

The role of the political parties in the political system is almost the source as that of the nerves and arteries in the biological system because they are the supply lines of the political process in a democratic polity.⁵ Every democratic country has its own party system. Like other democratic countries, India has her own party

1 Horst Heaartmann, Political Parties in India, Meerut Parkashan, New Delhi, 1982 p. 240.

2 Myron Weiner, Party Building in A New Nation: The Indian National Congress, University of Chicago, Chicago 1967, p.3

3 Atual Kohali, Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, p.30

4 J.P. Singh, Indian Political System, Shri Sai Printographers, New Delhi 2010 p.23

⁵ J.P. Siwach, Impact of Regional on Indian Political System in Parliamentary Democracy in India, Mittal Publication, New Delhi 1987, p.155

system and with its peculiar system and with a parliamentary form of government. Indian political system has been living with several political parties, national as well as regional which are actively engage in the struggle of power. In the comparison with the other democratic countries of the world, India possesses a large number of parties both at the national and regional level. The contemporary party system in India developed originally in the context for struggle for freedom and since 1950 with the framework of parliamentary democracy, the present character and structure of the political parties emerged.⁶

India's parliamentary system is based on the Westminster model of constitutional democracy, a legacy of British colonial rule. The Parliamentary is comprised of a bicameral legislature: the Rajya Sabha, the 250-member upper house, where members are elected by state legislative assemblies (12 members are nominated by the president), and the Lok Sabha, the 543-member lower house directly elected by the people (with the additional seats reserved for Anglo Indians nominated by the president). In the Lok Sabha, voters elect candidates based on the electoral system where the person securing the largest number of votes in each district wins.⁷ Elections in India, the world's second-most populous country, evoke descriptions like 'spectacle' or 'carnival,' in part due to the overwhelming numbers that participate in the process. In this country of over a billion people, 714 million voters will decide who rules the world's largest democracy for the next five years. In the 2004 elections, over 5400 candidates from 230 political parties participated. Nearly the same numbers of candidates were compete for seats in parliament in 2009. Electoral candidates vie or votes by promising reforms, such as better governance, greater socioeconomic equity, and bolstered efforts at poverty alleviation. However, corrupt politicians with criminal records, caste- and religion-based politics, and allegations of vote-buying continue to mar the democratic process. Meanwhile, the coalition politics of the last two decades, while more inclusive, have resulted in giving outsized power to small parties that have used it to further their short-term agendas.⁸

India has adopted a democratic set up in 1950. This has necessitated the existence and functioning of the political parties. There are many political parties in India. The election commission of India defines a political party as an association or body of the individual citizens of India registered with this commission as a party

⁶ Amitav Paul, *Role of Regional Political in Indian Political Process*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2007 p.147

⁷ Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Bhargava and Balveer Arora (eds), *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000 p176.

⁸ *Ibid*, p2006.

under section-29A of the representation of people act 1951.⁹ India has multi-party system. There are some national political parties and many regional political parties. The history of growth of political parties in India is largely a history of Indian national movement. Party system has its origin in India in 1885 a national party took the shape of a national party and started discussing national problems and demands some concessions for Indians. But after independence, many more parties in India came into being after 1967, Indian parties and the party system have undergone remarkable changes. There is mushroom growth to regional parties over the years. In 1952, 74 parties contested the election, whilst in recent years this number has swollen to more than 177. Presence of some of the regional parties today, neither dare to 'jump' into fray of electoral politics by their own merit without making electoral alliance with the regional, nor did they even think of capturing political power by side tracking them. The regional have now become a force to reckon with the political system of country.¹⁰ There are some major regional political parties like Akali Dal in Punjab.

Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, Telegu Desam party in Andhra Pradesh, AIADMK in Tamilnadu, Trinmool Congress (West Bengal), etc. They are playing most virtual role in state politics but also at centre level. They are make alliance at national level with major national political parties live INC and BJP.¹¹

In 1996 elections is the growing strength of the regional political parties in the politics of India at the national level. The regional parties like DMK and TMC from Tamilnadu, TDP from Andhra Pradesh and AGP from Assam, Samajwadi party from Uttar Pradesh and others come to centre stage of Indian politics in the wake of 11th Lok Sabha election. Now, the regional political parties are playing an important role in the national, state and local level. With the establishment of regional parties rule in a number of states, they have become a crucial element in the Indian politics. Thus the emergence of regional parties has posed the most powerful challenge to India's one party dominant system into multi-party system which continued till 1967. Although political parties were not mentioned in the constitution until the 52 constitution amendment enacted in 1985, the fact remains that representative democratic polity under the constitution presumed a well organized system of political parties. Political parties are an important institution in any democratic polity. Both the party or parties in power and those in opposition

⁹ M.S. Gangambika 'A Glance At the Political Parties in India' Parliamentary Affairs, vol.18, Institute of Parliamentary Affairs, Bangalore, June 1999 p.14.

¹⁰ Saroj Jena Kumar, 'Power Play of Regional Parties in India-An Assessment' Role of Regional Political Parties in India, Mittal Publication, New Delhi p.132.

¹¹ Ibid, pp 150-151.

are essential to the functioning of democratic government. Political parties are inseparable part of modern democracy and in the conduct of elections, the role of political parties is crucial.¹²

National Democratic Alliance

Article 1 of the Indian constitution deals “India that is Bharat, shall be union of states” but Indian federal system is different with American, Swiss or any other federal system. India is a multicultural nation. All the institutions are not same in this social environment and different cultural system. It does not follow the pattern of ‘Melting Pot of America’. India is just a ‘Bowl of Slands’ which supports the unity among diversity. In the long journey of democracy, India has different modes of federalism, centralized federalism, and quasi federalism, federalism of bargaining and cooperative federalism. The changing pattern of Indian federalism is directly concerned with new political mobilization of the government system. Alliances or coalitions between national and regional political parties are the direct outcome of this process. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is a coalition of political parties led by the Bharatiya Janta Party. The NDA is representative of both National interests and regional aspirations. It is the political reflection of India’s unity in multifaceted diversity, rich pluralism and federalism.¹³

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was formed in March, 1998 after the BJP emerged as the largest single party in the elections to the 12th Lok Sabha and, along with its pre-poll and post-poll allies, formed a government of the NDA under the leadership of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The government lost the vote in the Lok Sabha on 17th April 1999 by just one vote, and that to a questionable vote. Elections to the 13th Lok Sabha in September-October 1999 were jointly contested by the constituent parties of the NDA, which won a renewed mandate. The second NDA Government served parliamentary election confirmed survey and exit-poll predictions of a secure victory of the 24-party National Democratic Alliance (NDA). On October 13, 1999, the Bhartiya Janata Party’s Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of the Alliance, took the oath of office as Prime Minister of India, heading a 70 member Council of Ministers. In April 1999, the AIADMK, the regional Tamilnadu party led by Jayalalitha withdrew its support from the government, denying the coalition its requisite majority in parliament as in 1998, there were three basic groupings, though the pattern of alliances was modified as parties split or shifted allegiance. The BJP’s skill in forging the new National Democratic Alliance expanded the number of parties committed to Vajpayee’s leadership to 24. The BJP, setting aside its own Hindu nationalist agenda in favor of a “common

¹² Subhash C.Kashyap, *Our Political System*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2008 p.271.

¹³ Amitya K. Chowdhary, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.40, January, 2005, p.82.

program,” was at the core of the alliance that included regional parties as disparate and ideologically incompatible as the Hindu chauvinist Shiv Sena of Maharashtra and the pragmatic, secular Telugu Desam of Andhra and DMK of Tamil Nadu.

The election results brought Vajpayee’s National Democratic Alliance a majority in India’s 545-seat Lok Sabha, with 299 of the 537 seats contested and 41% of the vote. (Voting in another 6 constituencies had been postponed; 2 seats-for Anglo-Indians-are by appointment). The alliances forged by Vajpayee were the key to victory. BJP won 182 seats, only marginally better than the 179 it won in 1998, but its allies bagged another 117 seats. The Telugu Desam Party of Andhra Pradesh came back with 29 seats; the Shiv Sena won 15; the DMK of Tamil Nadu won 12. Especially important for prospects of political stability are that, despite the number of parties on which the new government is dependent, it will be less vulnerable to the kind of extortion that ultimately brought down the previous Vajpayee government. At least no one party will be able to bring it down, as the AIADMK did in April. The BJP secured 23.8 percent of the vote, slightly below its 25.5 percent in 1998-but in deference to its allies, the BJP contested far fewer constituencies than in 1998-340 seats, down from 384 in the previous election. But if the BJP roughly held its own nationally in seats and votes, it suffered a major setback in India’s largest state, Uttar Pradesh, where voters passed a negative judgment on the BJP state government’s poor performance. The BJP won only 29 of the state’s 85 parliamentary seats-down from the 57 seats it won in 1998.¹⁴

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), does not have a formal governing structure, like an executive board or politburo. This is due to the uncertain nature of political alliances in India. The various issues like seat-sharing in elections, allocation of ministers and Parliament related issues are thus taken care of by the leaders of individual parties. As there are many parties in an alliance with different ideologies, so the disagreement and split voting among the allies is a common case. NDA is an alliance involving various national and regional political parties led by BJP to form the government.

Before the time of 15th Sabha elections, BJP has allied with various political parties. Most of parties which it has tied are already listed in 1999 elections. The BJP tied up with Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, Rashtriya Lok Dal in Uttar Pradesh, Asom Gana Parishad in Assam. The BJP tied up with Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Janata Dal in Bihar and some other parties were, NPF, GJM, KPP. But in the 15th lok sabha elections, BJP alliance badly defaced by UPA, NDA seen many ups and downs during the period of 1998 to onwards. In that period, some regional parties

¹⁴ www.Indianelection.com

are joined it and some others have withdraw NDA, AIADMK of Maharashtra withdraw his support very soon. National Conference withdraw their support from NDA i.e. MDMK, DMK, Pattali Makkal Katchi and Indian Federal Democratic Party. Trinamool Congress of West Bengal withdraw from the alliance at the end of 2007 and Biju Janata Dal of Odsiha left the alliance just over a month before the 2009 elections. Rashtriya Lok Dal led by Ajit Singh has left alliance in 2012 and Janata Dal United of Bihar left alliance on 16 June 2013. New parties that have joined NDA coalition are Haryana based Haryana Janhit Congress (BL) and Maharashtra based Republican Party of India in 2011. At present the NDA has constituent Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and some other regional political parties like Shiv Sena (Maharashtra), Shiromani Akali Dal (Punjab), Asom Gana Parishad (Assam) and Nagaland People's Front (Nagaland).¹⁵ NDA announced Narendre Modi as Prime Minister candidate for lok sabha election 2014.¹⁶

Bhartiya Janata Party

The BJP is a direct successor of the Bhartuya Jana Sangh, founded in 1951 by Syama Pradas Mookerjee, a national leader, former union minister and freedom fighter. Bhariya Janata Party (BJP), Indian political party that espouses Hindu nationalism. The BJP draws its Hindu nationalist creed from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Self-Service Organization), a group founded in 1925 in opposition to Mohandas Gandhi and dedicated to the propagation of orthodox Hindu religious practice. The BJP's direct political antecedent is the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a party established in 1951 that stood in staunch opposition to what is perceived as the evils of Western cultural imperialism. Its principles were retained when the party was renamed the BJP in 1980. Opposed to the secular democracy advocated by the long-ruling Congress party, the BJP objected to the separate code of civil laws for India's Muslims, supported India's nuclear defence capability, and favored restrictions on foreign investment.¹⁷ At first largely a northern party popular in Hindi-speaking areas among urban middle-class traders, by 1989 the BJP had won 85 seats in parliament. In the scored a major success in 1996 general elections, winning the most parliamentary seats (161 of 545) but falling short of a majority. Shortly thereafter, the BJP formed a government, with its leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as prime minister, but it fell prior to a confidence vote. The BJP again garnered the largest number of parliamentary seats in the 1998 and 1999 elections and successfully formed governments, again with Vajpayee as prime

¹⁵ www. Ikavani.in

¹⁶ Times of India, September 14, 2013.

¹⁷ Balveer Arora, 'The Political Parties and the Party System: The Emergence of New Coalitions,' in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Parties and Party Politics in India*: Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002 p504.

minister. In power, the BJP tended to avoid many of the Hindu nationalist issues originally central to it, and promoted economic reforms and development, including foreign investment.¹⁸ Although the BJP moved to distance itself somewhat from the RSS and attract Muslim voters, party members were accused of complicity in the violence that killed perhaps as many as 2000 in Gujrat in Fed-Mar, 2002. The BJP lost the 2004 elections to the Congress party coalition, and suffered additional losses in the 2009 elections. The BJP emerged as the largest single party in the eleventh lok sabha. It failed to stay in government for more than 13 days. Therefore, it managed pre poll alliance with some regional political parties and made NDA as a alliance group of regional political parties.

Major Regional Political Parties and its Role In NDA

Often, a party is easily identified as a 'regional' party if it propagates the ideology of regionalism or thrives on invocation of regional pride. Parties like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) or Telugu Desam Party (TDP) or Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) are quickly recognized as regional parties. However, yet another type of parties needs to be incorporated in the category of regional party. These are parties, which enjoy considerable support only in one state of the Indian union. Such parties may not emphasize their regionalist outlook. They have in fact, an all India perspective but only a regional reach. Forward Block (FB) and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) in West Bengal or Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) in Maharashtra may cited as examples.

BJP is main leading party NDA it managed pre poll alliance with the many regional political parties. The major regional political parties of NDA mentioned as following;

Shriomani Akali Dal

Shriomani Akali Dal has active and central to Punjab political scene since the mid sixties. The Akali Dal has forged a social base of rural peasantry of Punjab. The party draws support from diverse sections in terms of caste and community. Another interesting feature of Akali support base is that it has weak support both among the illiterates and those with higher education. BJP allied with the Shriomani Akali Dal in 1998. In 1996 elections, both parties fought separately and Akali Dal got 8 seats and 35 percent vote. These alliance paid good dividends in 1996 Assembly elections. It was further strengthened when the BJP supported Surjit Singh Barnala's candidature for vice president's post.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid, p532.

¹⁹ Menu, Roy, Electoral politics in India, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999, p.208.

Shiv Sena

For long, politics in Maharashtra was dominated by the congress. Regional parties like PWP, RPI and even Shiv Sena did not matter much. Ironically, Shiv Sena shot into prominence after it underplayed its regionalism and projected itself as a Hindu party. Yet, Shiv Sena identifies itself with 'Marathi' people in the Mumbai-Thane-Konkan region. Outside this region, this party does not invoke regionalism. In the ninties, Shiv Sena emerged as a militant Hindu party of moderately educated youth from both caste and OBCs. In 1995, when Shiv Sena came to power in the state alongwith BJP. In 1996, the Shiv Sena BJP combine won 33 seats and polled 39 percent votes. It had been farily an equal partnership that have gone to strength to strength.

Biju Janata Dal

Biju Janata Dal had alliance with BJD which was the result of the disintegration of the janta dal into splinter groups. Anti congressism was the sole focus. The alliance won 16 out of 21 seats. The BJP won 7 of the 9 seats in 1998. It contested polling 21.99 percent votes and BJD won 9 of the 12 seats polling 27.50 percent votes.²⁰

Telugu Desam

It may not be an exaggeration to say that TDP marks the beginning of the present era of prominence of regional parties. The TDP has successfully polarized Andhra politics between itself and the Congress. In the nineties the party assumed a significant role at the all-India level. In order to retain that position, Chandrababu Naidu swiftly switched over to the National Democratic Alliance from the United Front. The TDP, right from its inception, has proved to be a rallying point for Andhra's peasant OBCs although it does not invoke the ideology of OBC uplift. As a result of N.T. Rama Rao's (NT) charismatic appeal and populist policies, TDP earned popularity among the poor, rural voters, especially among women. It was also supported by SCs and OBCs. It has been further observed that the original social coalition forged by NTR incorporated middle peasants and the middle class from backward castes; but by 1998, while the party electorally assuaged the backward castes, some poor and backward caste shifted to. However, TDP's strong regional development list argument and the following it received, can be understood only in the context of rise of the peasant OBCs the Kammas. By 1980, this section had 13.²¹

²⁰ Ibid, p210.

²¹ Subhendu Ranajn Raj, *Coalition Politics in India Dimensions of Federal Power Sharing*, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2009, pp76-80.

AIADMK and DMK

Politics in Tamil Nadu has been exclusively region-based since mid-sixties. From 1989 the Dravid parties have realized that they can make and unmake national governments. This has changed their perception entirely. Now the two Dravid parties simultaneously adopt a nationalistic and all-India stance as well as revert to shrill regionalist rhetoric. The former is necessary to assert an all-India role while the latter is required to prove that they have not lost sight of their original ideological position. In the case of DMK, observers have noted a drift towards pan-Indian nationalism. As a balancing act, the DMK also initiated Tamil prayers (archanas) in temple in the place of Sanskrit prayers. This move has helped in the Hinduisation of the Tamil culture. Not surprisingly, this move by the DMK was supported by the non-Brahman Saivites who are staunch Hindus. The AIADMK has generally been silent on the question of the non-Brahman legacy of Dravid movement. During AIADMK rule, Tamil Nadu witnessed the spread of Vinayak cult. In this sense both DMK and AIADMK traverse an identical ideological space. It appears from survey data that both parties have weak base among the younger voters. But in most other respects the parties are dissimilar. DMK has equal support among men and women while AIADMK is more popular among the women voters.

The DMK has strong base in urban sections and educated voters while AIADMK is popular among rural and less educated voters. Two thirds of AIADMK voters are either educated upto primary level or not literate at all. Interestingly, large chunk of DMK support comes from upper castes and OBC's; while AIADMK is dependent on OBC's and SCs. Thus, the two parties appear to be leading two different social coalitions in Tamil Nadu.²² Both parties given their important support to BJP since 1998 but AIADMK withdraw its support from alliance very soon.

The party system is an integral institution of democratic government. India's multi party system consists of national parties and a number of regional political parties. However, in this age of coalition government and consequent changes in the political scenario, the regional political parties have become assertive and they are in a position to influence the course of national politics. An example of regional party's assertion was witnessed during NDA government when Akali Dal and AIADMK forced roll back of budget measures to increase the price of fertilizers by the NDA government. The leader of DMK, Karunanidhi, threatened that his party would quit the NDA if the commitments of the national agenda for

²² Bidyut Chakraborty, *Forging Power: Coalition Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p.70.

governance were violated. After provocative statements by Prime-Minister on the Ayodhya issue in December 2000, he was forced to re-emphasize the government's commitment to the national agenda for governance.

The BJP had argued against the use of article 356 in its 1998 election manifesto, but there was pressure from the AIADMK, Samta Party and Trinamul Congress to topple the state government led by their chief opponents. However, such intervention was opposed by other coalition supporters in power in their states, notably the Akali Dal and TDP, who were worried that it could prove to be destabilizing factor. The BJP eventually bowed to the pressure in October 1998, announcing President's Rule in Bihar, but the attempt was rebuffed by President Narayanan who left there were insufficient reasons and a danger that it would be unconditional. A second attempt in February 1999 was stymied by INC's opposition in Rajya Sabha. The BJP's vacillations over the use of article 356 showed that compulsions of coalition politics did not pull all in the same way. For some state parties, the short-term benefit to be gained from imposition of control actually outweighed the destabilizing effects had on center-state relations. For other parties in the coalition, both short term and long term interests were served by government's restraint in the use of article 356. In April 1998, after R Muthiale, from AIADMK, was arraigned on the charges of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income, Jayalalita protested that other members of NDA government (Including Buta Singh, Ramkrishna Hedge & Ram Jethmalani) were also involved in various scams. Trinamul Congress sued the accepted or resignation of portfolios to signals its distance from the BJP, according to prevailing election climate.

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