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INDIA AND SIGNIFICANCE OF INNER-PARTY DEMOCRACY OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Prof. Dr. T.S.N. Sanyal

Introduction

In any type of democracy¹, political parties are pillars for its proper functioning. Political parties may be of single-party system², two-party system³, and multi-pronged system⁴; they add value to the stature of democratic governance. They play a role to build moral, cultural, liberal values in governing a country, either through their direct participation as a ruling party or in opposition to assist the government. However, in majority of nations generally, there appears to be lack of legal sanctions in regulating the activities and discipline for the functioning of a political party. For many of us, especially in a country like India, it is a fairy tale, about the functioning and internal matters of a party. A country administers on the principles of natural law and social justice, is it not paradoxical, that no regulation or law address the functioning of political parties and accountability of theirs towards society and State in Indian context.

After 65 years of independence, and 62 years of the adoption of Constitution, is it not time for introspection on the functioning of political parties at various levels of governance? The political parties be left free, high and dry to their whimsical musical bonds of party formulations and internal administration to their own parameters of governance. Why all the committees on reform process on democratic governance has not touched upon an important subject? This paper seeks to examine to address the issues connected to inner-party democracy of political parties; do they need to bring in under legal sanctions to regulate their internal affairs? It proposes to bring in the absence of regulation in what way they could contribute by adhering to democratic lane of discipline to promote good governance in the economically interdependent 4th phase of globalised world especially in a coalition era.

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¹ Democracies normally referred to as communist democracy, liberal democracy, institutional democracy, etc. For the meaning and types of democracy see Giovanni Paul, *Democracy: Crisis and Renewal*, South Asian Edition, 2009.

² The communist regimes of democracy in Russia and China and other countries wherein single-party democracy prevails.

³ In England and USA two-party systems prevails.

⁴ India and other countries are example of multi-party system.

Evolution of Political Party

In the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, political parties are seen as a bond born out of units of family in a society. The philosophy advocated by various philosophers from Cicero to modern times, all most all philosophers in one way or other suggest that man cannot live without an association and dependence on others and unit of family. This in turn gave for the development of society, social hierarchy of institutions, which eventually paved the way for the establishment of State. In the process of establishment of State, the moral, ethical, and cultural values led for the evolution of political parties to regulate and orient the creation of legal order.⁵

A political party is a group of people joins with a common ideology to offer their services to fulfill the aspirations of people through their leadership with an aim to capture governance of a State. According to Mphahlele Likoti a political party: "is ... a group of people who share a common conception of how and why State power and resources should be organised and utilized."⁶

According to Dwyse and Hughes⁷ political parties are associations that are organized with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition with other similar associations, over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or prospective State.

Basically, political party is an association of group of people join together to address the aspirations of people with an aim to capture the governance of a country to administer the State, in order to establish economic, political, and cultural tranquility according to the principles of constitution and established legal norms and values. For this purpose, they join under an umbrella (referred to as 'party') with similar interests and fight elections on their own or few parties jointly with common understanding on various issues.

Formation and Role of Political Parties

In the process of formation of people, they recruit people from various strata of society with an aim to build organizational skills amongst its cadres.

⁵ Hugo Grotius, *Hugo Grotius on the Law of War and Peace*, Cambridge, 2012.
⁶ Mphahlele Likoti, *Investigating Intra-party Democracy in Lesotho: Focus on the Lesotho Congress Party and Basotho National Party*, *EISA Occasional Paper No 1*, 2005, p 1.
⁷ Stephen Kajiwira, *Political Party Alliance and Formation: A Case Study of Lesotho*, Atlantic International University, Unpublished Research Work, 2008.

After establishing cadre, they expand their administrative base of the party under different layers of administration within the party, such as local units, regional units, national unit, and chief administrative unit of party. Through this, they elect their leaders to occupy various positions. Along with formation, they inculcate the values of party and educate their cadres with political philosophy of the party.

In the next stage, they filter information gathered by cadres and orient it with policy perspectives of the State and party, and then formulate their own policy or agenda. They place the information of their policy perspectives with the respective bodies of State (in the case of India, it is Election Commission of India) to receive recognition of State as a political outfit to fight for elections to capture power with an aim to achieve the tenets of governance with their state ideology.

After fulfilling initial legal formalities, they fight elections with an aim to attain power. If capture power as per the provisions of constitution, they start administering the country to meet the expectations of people through policy formulations of them, aligning with constitutional and legal parlance. The party or parties in case of an alliance capture power truly non-biased to an inclination to one-upmanship, and steer the nation to meet the expectations of people on one side, and on the other, establish justice according to constitutional and legal objectives. At the same time, the aim of every political party need to continue in power and wield to maximum length of time, at no point of time, they should resort to political gimmicks, money and muscle power. It is applicable to all parties in unison. The opposition parties need to be more cautious in their approach and need to be true watchdogs of the ruling party. They need to be alert always not only to criticize the government on every count, but also warn and advise with precision whenever the ruling party try to sideline in fulfilling their perspectives for which they are voted to power.

Features of a Political Party

In any democracy to attain the ideals of law, and to have transparent governance, political parties need to have a democratic vision among party lines. To achieve these objectives, a number of factors are necessary.⁸ Among the various factors, some are

⁸ The factors mainly require for a political party are: organization set up, regular induction of fresh members, political wings to work on different aspects, common policy perspectives, integration with public, manifesto, inner party democracy, ideology, grass roots level organization structure, efficient leadership, regular elections within the party system, free and fair discussions among the members of the party, transparent accounting systems etc.

democracy, organizational set up, ideology, manifesto, ensuring the rights of party workers etc., are chief factors fundamentally vital to achieve the objective of rendering service to people, and to workout solutions to fulfill aspirations of public, especially that of developing sections of a society.

Inner-party Democracy

Inner-party democracy is vital for a proper and smooth functioning of political parties. The political process of making and running the government can be democratic only when the parties act in real terms for the promotion of adequate internal democracy. Only those parties and leaders can give democratic character to the content and process of State, which practice democracy in the entire process of their party affairs and business.

To maintain inner-party democracy, every party must conduct regular organizational polls in a free manner without any interference from top leadership. Each party must have organisational set up in reality to make it function in coordination with the lower ladder of the party or cadre based considerations. Democracy is not just about periodically electing leaders and public office-bearers. It is set of social norms that govern our conduct and behavior. Therefore, practice of fundamental principles, method, and ideals of democracy is must without exception, in all social and public life, which alone can contribute to democratization of society, State, and public institutions.

Ideology

An ideology is a philosophy or set of principles that underlies a political programme. Identification of the characteristic role of a political party is associated with its ideology. The ideology describes nature and attitude of a political party. The ideology of a party needs to reflect not only sentiments of people, but also specify objectivity of the party with a specific scheme to achieve such aspiration. This could, including promotion of intra-party democracy, inner-democracy of a country. The ideology is hub of a political party to bring in changes in the governance of a country and to boost its economic, socio, cultural perspectives both in internal and as well that of external relations.

Manifesto

The ideology of a political party reflects the principles and policies that it pursue. All the objectives and what the party would like to pursue if voted to power. The written document printed in with a set of objectives to address the problems of the country and the means with which it is going to work, described as 'manifesto'.

If a party is a national party, it addresses the national interests and a regional party is limited with few regional aspects that are important for the region or State. However, in the era of coalition politics, many a times, the regional parties became partners of the government at the national level without broadly defining their national objectives. However, in tune with its regional interests, they enter into agreements with the majority party, their role and objectives otherwise referred to as common minimum programme. In such a case, they need to come to a broad consensus on the agreed principles and then publish it for the clear understanding of the working nature and the role that they play in the alliance as a coalition partner. Such draft though not qualified to term as manifesto, it can better be referred as common programme of the political alliance, or conglomeration of the alliance.

Any party's manifesto, or the common minimum programme of an alliance need to ably justify policy formulations, the overall direction to address the socio, economic, cultural and legal aspects of a nation, spell out clearly the ways and means to achieve them.

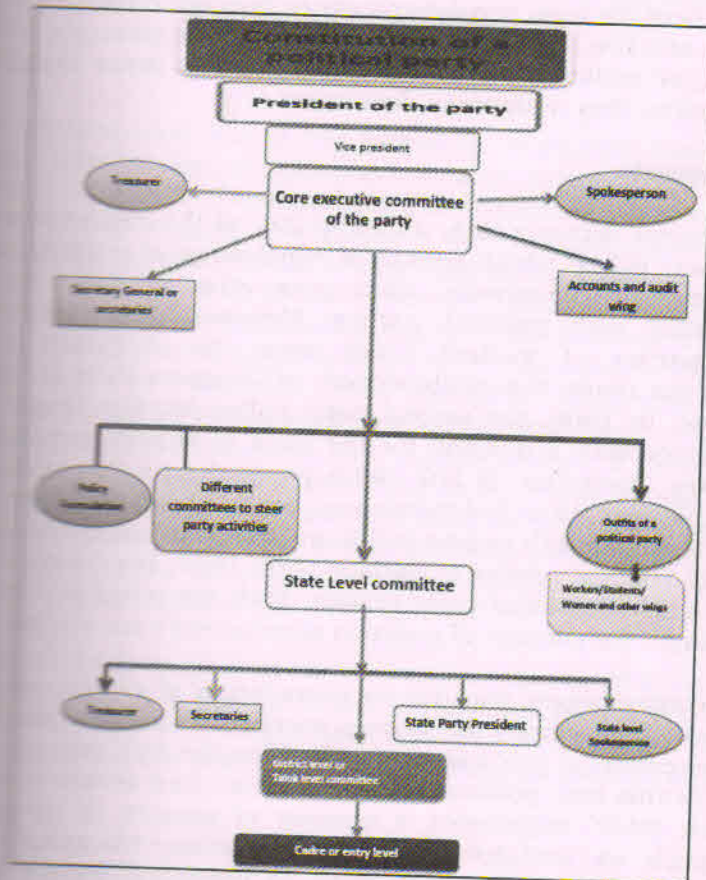
- **Organizational Structure**

It is one of the basic tenets of law, every political party needs to have an organizational structure. This structure is vital to meet the expectations and policy formulations of a political party. In order to have a well-defined organizational structure, every party needs to have a constitution. The constitution is considered as the epitome of the party. Based upon the constitutional perspective of a party, people who wish to join could understand their role as a party and its objectives whether suit them or not.

Distant from policy formulations, every party need to have a well defined organizational structure from the primary level to top level. Such an organizational chart normally categories powers and functions of each wing of a party, which makes the top brass of the political party to lay down their policy formulations according to needs of people, or issues that need to address. In some countries, especially in Africa, communist countries, the organizational structure of political parties is defined through such means.⁹

⁹ Ostrogorski, M., Clarke, Frederick, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, Vol 1, 1922; also see the *Organization and Political Parties Act, 2001* Uganda; Holfmeister, Wilhem, Grabow, Karsten, *Political Parties Function and Organisation in Democratic Societies*, 2011, pp 25-56. Available at: ww.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_7671-1442-2-30.pdf?120920114742, accessed on January 15, 2013.

Apart from structural perspectives, it needs to specify ways and means to admit and expel or remove members of a political party. It further specifies powers and functions of each organ of a party, and their responsibilities to achieve political ambitions of the party in accordance with the constitution of its own. Once voted to power, at times, they may have to compromise with their party manifesto either due to legal obstacles or in a coalition to accommodate and adjust necessities of other political parties or partners of coalition.



The above chart is illustrative to easily understand the main structure and functions of a political party in the contemporary era in Indian context.

Political Parties and Governance

Political parties participate two ways in governance either directly as the party in power or indirectly as opposition. When elected to power directly in government, party leaders are expected to

promote their party's ideology and carry out its legislative agenda. The role of opposition is to render constructive criticism of governmental policy and prevent abuses of power. This role is essential for ensuring good governance, minimizing mistakes and corruption, and protecting the rights of citizens. Without an effective opposition, there is no ongoing check on the power of government. An active, vigilant opposition keeps the government 'on its toes' always. It not only prevents abuse of power but also encourages more efficient policymaking and implementation. For such a smooth functioning, there is a need for legal regulations either through constitution or by enactment of a law. If political parties distort their messages, mislead the public, or incite ethnic or racial animosity in order to influence public opinion, they undermine democracy.

Indian Scenario

In India except Sections 29A, 29B and 29C of the Representation of People's Act, 1951¹⁰ which speaks of registration of political parties with the election commission, there is no other provision or law in India dealing with political parties. However, the institution of political parties of modern times owes its allegiance to pre-independence times, the establishment of Congress Party in 1885 by A.O. Hume. In 1906, the second party called Muslim League came into existence with a demand for the voice of Muslim population in the country. Thereafter, in late 1920s paved the way for evolution of political parties. After Independence, especially during late Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi's regime laid foundations for establishment of a number of political parties in India.¹¹ Until 1989, the country mostly ruled by single dominant party system. With the prime minister ship of V.P. Singh, the concept of coalition government's era started.

In the contemporary era, due to degradation of values, moral and ethical principles among the various entrants as political parties, the basic conception of political parties became the hub only to capture power. For this end, political parties became trend setters to compete with each other, engineered a number of aspects in the political arena; such as anti-defection, criminalization, blackmail tactics, relegation of power of a party solely to president, puppet form of

¹⁰ Section 29A deals with registration with the Election Commission of Associations and Bodies as political parties; Section 29B deals with political parties entitled to accept contribution; Section 29C deals with declaration of donation received by the political parties. The 52nd amendment deals with anti-defection law.

¹¹ For brief summary of political parties development in India, see Kesalu, Satri Venk. Genesis and Evaluation of Political Parties in India, *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 2(2), 56-62, February, 2013, pp 56-61. Available at <http://www.isca.in/IJSS/Archive/v2i2/10.ISCA-IRJSS-2012-014.pdf>, accessed on February 28, 2013.

political internal organization and a number of activities which could be termed as politics of *aya ram gaya ram* way of dealing party matters.

To repair the situation, to recommend remedial mechanism, a number of committees and commissions dealt with a host of issues on electoral reforms.¹² However, the National Committee to Review the Working of Constitution alone suggested a need for a regulation of political parties with a specific law and its inner-party democratic system.

Conclusion

In the contemporary era of neo-liberalism to achieve social justice, minimal interference of government and political parties is a necessary ingredient. This would not only transform the country to meet the concept of good governance of the 4th phase of globalization, but also helps to make India a truly egalitarian country. As rightly observed by Seth, D.L.: "The crisis of governability cannot be understood without understanding changes that have occurred in the party system. Elections not only serve as events around which these changes can be observed, but electoral outcomes, besides determining political fortunes of individual candidates, reflect long-term changes, often irreversible, in the party system. If the clue to the recovery of the representative system is to be found through 'normal politics', it becomes all the more necessary to understand what has happened to the party system over a series of elections and whether there is any scope of retrieving the principle of representation through a restructuring of the party system."¹³

The important factor is that for the smooth running of a democracy, political parties, and their internal functioning play a crucial role. Apart from a number of suggestions rendered by various committees and commissions, the following needs meritorious consideration:

¹² Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms (1990), Vohra Committee Report (1993), Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections (1998), Law Commission Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws (1999), National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001), Election Commission of India: Proposed Electoral Reforms (2004), the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission (2008), and Ambika Soni Committee (2013). See for the suggestions of various committees and commissions except 'Ambika Soni' which is yet to take off its work, *Background Paper on Electoral Reforms*, prepared by the Core Committee of Electoral Reforms, Ministry of Law and Legislative Department, Government of India, 2010.

¹³ Sewer, V., Arora, R. (eds.), *Crisis of Representation, Indian Government and Politics at Cross Roads*, 1995, p 81, *op. cit.* in Roy, Ramashray, *Making the Party System in India Work*, in Pai Panandiker, V.A., Kashyap, Subash C. (eds.), *Political Reforms: Asserting Civic Sovereignty*, 2001, p 273.

- It is better to replace the Representation of People's Act, 1950 with a new enactment as Election and Political Parties Regulation Act. Such an amendment need to integrate the election aspects, rules, and regulations for the proper functioning of political parties.
- Taking into consideration of international politics, which play a vital role in the era of economically globalised world, a demarcation to rationalize the number of national and regional parties is required.
- Any policy matter and decision on any issue relating to the party or governance, if the party is in power, it need to be taken only on the basis of majority decision than on the present system of High Command.
- Entry of members needs to be bringing in at regular intervals. Members elected on any party wish to leave the party for any reason, in case if they are elected representatives, they need not only resign for the party and be made responsible to bear the election expenditure, if election takes place before the expiry of period of the term of Legislature.
- Every member need to be allowed to take in the decision-making process instead of nomination to various posts and colonial legacy of family members being appointed to various posts of the top brass of party be discouraged.
- Regular elections from cadre based to party president are to be conducted in real spirit instead of fulfilling the criteria through various other means.
- No candidate is given seats by party president or top brass of a party without the candidate being approved by all committees of the party.
- Any person wants to join in any party be trained well with the policy formulations of the party and be kept on a probationary membership for a period of two years. During this period, they need to be trained on various aspects such as party organization, constitution of the country, legal, legislative and decision-making process. At the end of training, every candidate needs to be tested by written or oral examination, consisting a team of academic experts and top brass of party and members of the election commission that functions at various levels.
- No single person should be allowed to continue as president or any other top post of party more than 2 or 3 terms or upto age of 70 years whichever is earlier.
- Family members of a party need not occupy all the important positions. This needs to be discouraged. The decision taken by a core committee of a party, if disapproved by lower cadre.

such decision, or issue needs wider approval of the party from grass root level onwards.

- Regular intervals, party conventions be conducted to sharpen the knowledge of the members to well equip policies of party.
- Criminals be desisted from entering into party. If any allegation or a criminal case filed in any court of law, such members need to keep away from party activities including the decision making process of a party, until the law of the land clears them.
- Any candidate employ malpractices in election or in the party be debarred to be a member of the party permanently.
- The candidate to lead a State or national election needs approval well in advance in a democratic process by the party.
- At any point of time, political parties should not give seats to candidates based on money and muscle power, but need to be chosen by party through democratic process.
- In case of coalition governments, the coalition be entered before election process and a common agenda of policy formulations be circulated to public well in advance. The choice of candidate be democratically be endorsed to hold the office of the country/State by all political parties.

Democracy is not periodically electing political leaders and governmental functionaries. Political process and the sustenance of political parties with values, moral, ethical process of party democracy is crucial. A party with a clear vision, democratic in its internal affairs alone could lead a country to prosperity. Political parties being the chief mentors of the process of democracy, leaders chosen based alone could fulfill the dreams of people and fulfill the wishes of the framers of the Constitution.¹⁴

Deterioration of parties in India in the last few decades is pathetic when compared to that of the functioning of established political parties. Among various reasons for the degradation of political parties style and handling of inner-party matters, lack of attention by educated people and middle class is an obvious one. To rectify the system, the duty lies on the political parties and people to join hands to steer India into a developed country, before the advent phase of globalization takes places.

Therefore, it is obvious that political parties need to concentrate and strengthen their party system, which is vital for the sustenance of democracy than to think of capturing power at regular intervals.

¹⁴ Ibid. Chandra, Inner-party Democracy.

¹⁵ <http://www.chandraprasai.com/innerpartydemocracy/fes>, accessed on February 27, 2013.