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### THE STABILITY OF MULTI- PARTY SYSTEM IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY: A CRITIQUE

Bharati G. Ganawari\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*Government Law College, Holenarasipura- 573211, Hassan, Karnataka, India.

#### ABSTRACT

In the formation of a government, there exist two types of political party system. It is either two or three party system or multiparty system. In many western countries they follow two party systems which give the citizens to vote either of them and bring them to power. But in India we have adopted multi-party system which has its own merits and demerits. The author in this article has attempted to chalk out the pros and cons of both the system and has concluded with a remark as to which system is better.

#### KEYWORDS

Two or three party system, Stability of multiparty system and Democracy.

#### Author for Correspondence:

Bharati G. Ganawari,  
Government Law College,  
Holenarasipura- 573211,  
Hassan, Karnataka, India.

**Email:** [bgganawari@gmail.com](mailto:bgganawari@gmail.com)

#### INTRODUCTION

In the past, in some of the democracies, only the 'haves' *i.e.* the rich people had the right to vote while others were totally ignored. Eventually, women and some other people belonging to different religion, caste, *etc.* also were given right to vote. The constitution of India has removed all such gender based, caste based and money based electorates and introduced universal adult franchise. The prescribed age of the voter is 18 years which is an opportunity being given to the youth to actively participate in the election of the party which will be forming the government. The right to vote is considered as a weapon in the hands of the people. The right to vote is not exercised vigilantly by the people nowadays.

The usual thought is that there will be no loss if one vote of an individual is not exercised. But if all the people start thinking this way, what will be the consequence. Hence, it is required that awareness be spread amongst the people, educated and uneducated, poor and rich, male and female, *etc.*

In a multi-party system, there will be a number of political parties existing. There is no restriction on the number of the parties that can be formed. Anyone can form a party if certain conditions are fulfilled. This is true of democracy. In India we have this multi-party system. But during initial days of independence, for many years, situation remained like a single party system, the Congress party ruling the country for many years and other parties not at all being recognized by the people. Later, it became like a two-party system with BJP joining the mainstream of politics. Presently, with the formation of many regional parties, it is the multi-party system that has emerged in the true sense. A multi party system refers to the system of political party in which more than two parties are allowed to legally operate in the state. These parties compete with each other to gain political power in order to implement their own manifesto policies<sup>1</sup>.

In a multi-party system, various national and regional political parties allow their candidates to contest elections to represent their particular constituencies. Depending on the size and population of the state, each state has a different number of constituencies. The party which gets a clear mandate of the people by gaining a majority of its elected representatives has the right to form the government and the leader of this party will be chosen as the Prime minister.

If we compare our political system with the other democracies in the world, our country stands on altogether a different footing. The Constitution of India guarantees the right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of Part III. So, the people have the freedom to form the political parties on the basis of religion, caste, community, *etc.* This ensures adequate political representation to the various communities. This is not true for nations like the US and UK which are known for a mix of ethnic communities. They have a restricted choice of

political expression. Their choice is limited to two or three parties only. However, this does not represent adequately the different castes, communities, *etc.* The multi party system provides full and free opportunity to form political parties and elect them based on their ideology. In this regard, India has surpassed all democracies worldwide.

A multi party system ensures greater transparency in the good governance. Our country has a diverse population with a variety of religions, castes, communities, sects, cultures, traditions, *etc.* For the overall development of the country it is required that all these religions, castes, communities, *etc.* are adequately represented in the political system. Hence, a multi party system is more advisable for such a diverse country like ours. But this system would work out more effectively in case there is genuine desire to govern and legislate properly in an effective manner. A multiparty system is also advisable for the reason that it brings out a lot of experience into administration and governance. It also has the capability to foster a feeling of unity and security amongst the workers of various political parties. It prevents one political party from becoming more dominating in the governance of the country.

#### **Merits of a Multi Party System<sup>2</sup>**

1. We have the largest democracy in the world and one of the recognized principles of democracy is that the people should be given a reasonable opportunity to freely choose the party they want. A multi party system gives that opportunity to the citizens to exercise the right to opt any of the parties for forming the government.
2. The existence of many parties allows the people to have next choice whenever they are not happy with the work mechanism of one party. A multi party system allows a peaceful change of government. Also, next political party can wait for its turn to govern the country.
3. In multi party system there are many parties to represent all the categories of people where even the minorities will have a say in the formation of the government and hence, every citizen's interest will be considered.

4. In multi party system the increase in choice makes the voter feel better and more secured as compared to single party or two party systems.
5. A multi-party system is more responsive to a change or shift in public opinion. Two-party systems are not as flexible because they have a more or less rigid set of opinions on every issue.
6. A multi-party system prevents the leadership of a single party from setting policy without challenge.
7. For the good governance of the country not only the ruling party should have an opportunity, but also a strong opposition should exist to monitor and control the abuse of powers by the ruling party. This multi party system allows the existence of the opposition parties.
8. India is a country having huge population. A vast number of people can become members of these political parties. The multi party system allows mass population to participate in the political activities thereby giving an opportunity to the people to engage in political activism.
9. The system of multi parties allows transparent and constructive criticism of the various policies of the ruling party (i.e. the government) and hence gives an opportunity to have a check on the discretionary powers of the ruling party and thus prevents the leaders of the ruling party from becoming dictators.

#### **Demerits of a Multi- Party System<sup>3</sup>**

1. This system is very expensive to be adopted. These political parties strive hard to convince the people. They organize rallies, give advertisements in the media, radio and television to attract the voters and take them into confidence. All these tactics need money for the execution.
2. The multi party system may lead to divisions in the country. This can specially be seen in Africa where political parties can be formed on the basis of different tribes, religions or

ethnic groups. The political parties so formed may work for the ideological beliefs of that particular religion or tribe only, thus leaving behind all others' interests. This may cause division amongst different tribes, religions, etc.

3. The multi party system provides the voters plenty of choices. Some of these parties may never have any possibilities of coming into power; still they exist in this system. This huge choice may often confuse the voters.
4. If the voters do not exercise their votes vigilantly or if the percentage of voting is less, then the winning party will actually represent only a minority of the nation.
5. In a multi- party system if the majority votes are split among many parties, it may so happen that a party representing a minority view may prevail over the majority. So, the two party system protects the majority from the minority.
6. In a country having multi party system, often it is seen that in elections no single party gains absolute majority to form the government. As a result, some parties make a coalition to form the government. These coalition governments often are not stable.
7. The frequent consequence of multi party system in elections is the unstable coalition government. These coalition governments often break down and do not allow for continuity of a single government in executing the policies.
8. The existence of multi parties may make every party the rivalry of the other. In an attempt to gain the confidence of the voters these parties to have unhealthy competition amongst them. Hence, malpractices may be adopted during elections. This may hinder the overall development of the nation.

#### **Other Existing Political Systems**

In addition to the multi party system, there are two other options in political systems that are available, namely: single party system and two party or bi-party systems. A single party system is a system in which a single party owns absolute power and there

is no need for the existence any opposition party. A single party dominates the whole political system of the nation. This system is in China where Communist Party of China is the only party existing and the competition is within the party to select President, Prime Minister or any other posts. This system is totally far from democracy. The people have no participation either directly or indirectly in the formation of the government.

The single party system is usually considered to be authoritarian, to the extent that they are politically totalitarian. On the other hand, not all authoritarian or totalitarian states operate based on one-party rule. But very few, especially absolute monarchies and certain military dictatorships, have no need for a ruling party, and they make all political parties illegal<sup>4</sup>.

The bi- party or the two- party system is a system in which only two parties exist and contest the elections, wherein one of them will be the ruling party and the other an opposition party. Here two parties dominate the whole political system of the country. This is near to the democracy. This system is considered as more stable as compared to multi-party system as there is hardly any possibility of disagreement. But the parties here, very well, know that it is only a matter of time to get their turn of forming the government. Because this does not give any further choice, this is not that advisable. This system can be seen in US (the Republican and Democratic parties).

### **Is Multi- Party System Serving the Purpose in India?**

It is considered that in a democratic country with diversity, the multi parties represent different categories of people. These multi parties depict different social, political and economic ideologies as per the wishes of the people. But it is doubtful that this system serves the purpose with which it was introduced and whether it is really working according to the aspirations of the people. The view of multi party system is defended because of the fact that we are the largest democracy in the world and that this system is required to represent the vast variety of people from different religions, castes, communities, sects, etc. Also, the people should be

given an opportunity to choose the kind of government they want to have. Taking the example of US, which also follows democracy, the two party system is considered as adequately representing the people from different religions, communities, ethnic groups etc. from a larger geographical area as compared to India. Because of the two party system the people there may not be able to express their desires and aspirations since they are forced to choose between the two available options only.

It is time for us to consider whether the two party system in US or UK represents democracy effectively or a multi party system represents the largest democracy effectively in our country. In US or UK the gap between 'haves' and 'have- not's is narrower, but the same gap in India is wider. For this reason, though there is a diverse population seen in US it has managed to provide a higher level of equality in terms of social and economic opportunities, unlike in India, where there are large populations of society that remain aloof from all the developmental activities and are still discriminated. Hence, the political frustration of the people in US with two party system would be much lesser than what would be seen in our people if we would have had two party system.

But, considering the other angle, our Constitution guarantees reasonable equality and opportunity to all irrespective of religion, race, caste, creed, *etc.* The discrimination based on these criteria still exists in all parts of the country. The people who are so discriminated look to the political parties formed on the basis of religion, caste, community, etc for their protection. However, this vast number of political parties formed on the basis of religion, race, caste, community, etc. is also responsible for the division of conflicting interests, hence and it is the cause for the social disintegration of the society, thereby adversely affecting the principle of unity. As a result, the communal conflicts have often arisen in our country right from our independence till today. Some of the national and regional parties are aggravating this situation by adopting the vote bank practices. Here if we compare our country with the US or UK, we can see that they have provided a better justice system to enforce equality in the true sense and

thereby fulfill the purpose of ensuring the social justice to all without discrimination. However, there may have been some instances of racial discrimination in these countries. When equal opportunity to all is ensured, the consequences of those incidents are minimized. Hence, the need to have multi parties is not felt there. In contrast, though the multi party system in India seems to provide adequate representation, but the reason people look to the religion, caste, region based parties, is that they want to have protection of their interests etc. in a better way. So, the people defend the existence of regional parties, but this purpose of catering to the aspirations of the people can also be served by the national parties.

The national parties also comprise of the representatives elected by the people of their constituencies. Hence, the trend of the people of showering all the confidence on the regional representatives should undergo a change, thereby replacing it with- reposing confidence in the representatives of the national parties. The existence of these regional parties often leads to the splitting of votes. As a result, the coalition governments are formed with no political stability. The coalition government hardly gets any opportunity of good governance because most of their time is wasted in adjusting with the unjust demands of their coalition partners. By this, even the legislating powers are hindered. The elected members of the coalition government hold back the law making process to get fulfilled their demands. Further, it prevents social, economic and political reforms in the country. The elected members of these smaller parties don't have any contribution in the governance, but when the larger party, either for its survival or for passing a crucial legislation, seek the support of these smaller parties, they make personal profits in horse- trading etc. without any impact on the people who elected them. It can be seen that these smaller parties do not serve any purpose rather than making profits for themselves. This is one of the important drawbacks of the multi party system.

### **Whether a Two- Party system would be suitable for India or Not?**

The coalition governments are frequently seen due to multi- party system. Hence, the two- party system will put an end to coalition governments. The two party system will help one party in gaining clear majority and the other to be placed as the opposition party. The assurances and the declarations made by the political parties during elections in their manifesto will not change as a result of any coalition formed after the election. In the two party system the elected party will be able to work freely without any pressure. It will be possible for the elected government to take crucial measures without bending to the unjust demands of the coalition partners. It is very easy to select one of the two options available, but far more difficult to analyze different policies of the different parties.

### **CONCLUSION**

The foremost important task is- multi parties formed on the basis of the religion, race, caste, community, *etc.* should be done away with. These are the elements of social disintegration in the country. There should be a restricted number of parties that can be formed, say two or three. If some more numbers are to be added to this, then they must be restricted to particular ideologies and such of those parties who get a specific number of seats in Parliament should only remain. If these parties fail to fulfill the minimum criteria, then their representatives who are elected by the people should work as independent candidates.

The formation of regional parties should be avoided since they tend to promote the interests of the particular group, caste, religion, *etc.* The national parties would be a better option to have good governance in the country<sup>5</sup>. It is high time to reconsider the existence of the multi party system in India. There can a debate arranged for the purpose of looking to the next option suitable for our democracy.

The multi party system can be considered as advisable for the countries where development parameters are already very high. But in India we cannot afford to have this. In multi party system the

government needs to bother about the opinion of the public. China, which has single party system does not have to bother about people's opinion<sup>6</sup>. It only has to concentrate on the good governance of the country.

Also, there is a feeling seen amongst the unelected candidates that they feel insulted and humiliated after elections. This kind of feeling is not required here. The party to which this unelected candidate belong to, should take it in good spirit and utilize this as an opportunity to learn from such experience and thereby strive for improvement, so that this candidate is again sent for contesting elections and the possibility of his election be increased. The fact should be serving as a spur to make the electors to double their efforts after learning from the previous experiences correctly analyzed and resend their candidates with increased chances and resources.

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#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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