
UNIT 1 DEVELOPMENT OF STATE POLITICS IN INDIA

Structure

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

State politics as a specialised field of politics in India developed in the post-independence period. The states of Indian Union assumed the form of distinct identities following their reorganisation in 1956. Prior to their reorganisation, they were placed in four categories — A, B, C and D states. But it was only in the 1960s that the political scientists felt the need to study state politics as a specialised subject. The disquieting developments during the 1950s and 1960s in several states prompted a large number of them to study politics in different states. In an attempt to place the state politics in India in a perspective, two seminars were held in the USA in 1961 (University of Chicago) and in 1964 (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) with the initiative of Myron Weiner. The scholars working on nine of the seventeen states in India presented their findings in the latter. The report on the first seminar was published in *Asian Survey* of June 1961. The papers presented in the seminar of 1964 were published in the first book on state politics *State Politics in India* (1968) edited by Myron Weiner. In the similar vein, Iqbal Narain edited a book *State Politics in India* (1976) which was the first attempt to cover politics of all states in India including Assam and Jammu and Kashmir. Its predecessor, Weiner's book, did not cover all states.

State politics has undergone significant changes in the post-independence period. It has emerged from the periphery of the national politics to the centre stage in the politics of India. Since the 1990s the states have become partners in the coalition governments at the centre. Earlier they occupied secondary position in relation to the centre in India's politics. Now they are in a position to not only set the agenda for the politics in India but have become partners in the formulation of the state policies. The states participate in the national politics by becoming members of one or the other coalition partners. They represent different regional and social forces.

The purpose of this unit is to familiarise you with the development of state politics in India. This unit does not analyse the state politics. Analysis of subject matter state politics will be done in

other units of this course. The present unit discusses how the patterns of state politics have changed in India since the 1950s. The main issues which are covered in this unit include changes in the status of states in the regional and national politics, the issues and problems, leadership patterns and political parties and political processes. The focus of the unit is show how the patterns of state politics have developed over a period.

1.2 STATE POLITICS: THE 1950s–1960s

State politics in the first two decades after independence grew under the influence of centre, which focused on the pursuit of the nation-state building in India. During this period the Nehruvian model of development and the single party dominance of the Congress signified the politics in India. State politics was mainly a replica of the national politics. The central government occupied a dominant position in the Indian political system where the state occupied the secondary place. Under the directive of the centre, the state governments introduced several measures in order to contribute towards nation-building, like land reforms, and community development programmes. The Congress party shared power at the centre and in a large number of the states. Different factions within the Congress representing sectarian interests in the states were appendages of the faction leaders at the national level. The fact that the dominant party reigned in the centre and several states simultaneously gave the impression that there was a common pattern of politics in the states and centre. The governors, as appointees of the sympathetic governments at the centre, with a few exceptions, remained non-controversial. No doubt, it was a dominant pattern. But along with this, there also emerged dissenting patterns simultaneously within state politics. These developments challenged the dominant pattern of politics: the dominant position of Congress and secondary position of state politics. Within a few years of independence the Naga and Mizo insurgencies started in the North-East India, Plebiscite Front movement started in Jammu and Kashmir, and the demand for reorganisation of states was raised in south India. Even the parties with different ideological persuasions from that of the Congress played a significant role during this period in the politics of states. The socialists and the Left together in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and West Bengal, Jana Sangha in north Indian States, the Akali Dal in Punjab mobilised the people on difference issues against the Congress. These developments had set a tone for a pattern of state politics which was to emerge in India in the near future. The dalit movement led by the RPI in Maharashtra and UP, and the Dalit Panther in the Maharashtra, the cow protection movement of the Jana Sangha, RSS and their affiliates in north India; socialist movements for the spread of Hindi language and opposition to the imposition of Hindi language in Tamil Nadu and demand for secession of Madras / Tamil Nadu from India were the early examples of ethnic dimension to the patterns of the state politics. The Congress hegemony was also challenged by conservative parties like Swatantra in Gujarat and Rajasthan. These developments had prompted Selig Harisson to call the 1950s as the “most dangerous decade”. The dominant pattern of state politics was challenged even from within the Congress. Faction leaders within the Congress were not behind in creating their respective social bases. Even while being members of Congress, they consolidated their own bases in their respective states. This, in fact, resulted in the trading of charges between various faction leaders. The example of Charan Singh is among the most appropriate here. He had already carved out a base for himself within the intermediary and backward classes of UP, while he was still in Congress. The faction fight between Charan Singh and other Congress leaders had resulted in the split of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh and the emergence of a very powerful regional and rural force in the politics of

the north Indian states. This pattern found its expression in the defeat of the Congress in several states in the general election in 1967 and formation of the coalition governments in 1969. It set a new trend in the politics in the states of Union of India.

1.3 RISE OF REGIONAL FORCES AND STATE POLITICS: THE 1970s

Changes in the patterns of state politics during the 1960s-1970s took place in the backdrop of the demise of Jawaharlal Nehru – the decline of the Congress system and rise of Indira Gandhi who personalised the Congress and institutions of governance. One of the most significant feature of the state politics between the late 1960s and the 1970s had been the rise of the rural rich or the kulaks especially in the areas which had witnessed the Green Revolution. The most relevant examples are those of Jats in UP, Haryana and Punjab; Yadavs and Kurmies in Bihar and eastern UP; Reddies and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh; Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka, etc. Charan Singh formed Bharatiya Kranti Dal with the focus mainly on the agrarian agenda. He provided leadership and forum to a strong section in the state politics in north India for two decades (1967-1987). He, along with the state level leaders in Bihar and Haryana, dominated the politics of north India during this period. In a large number of the states strong regional leaders with formidable social bases among the agrarian classes emerged on the lines of Uttar Pradesh. These leaders and parties focused on the regional issues and demanded revamping the centre-state relations. The role of the governor who was perceived to be sympathetic to the dominant party - the Congress came to be questioned and demand for changing centre—state relations arose. These developments became decisive in the state politics in the subsequent years.

The process of coordination between the regional leaders and the political parties became conspicuous. Some of these leaders graduated to be the national level leaders. These leaders drew their strength from the regional/state politics (despite having graduated to the national politics) and led regional political parties. Imposition of emergency provided an opportunity to several state and national leaders and parties to come together against the dominant Congress. Regional and national parties formed the Janata Party at the national and state levels, and formed the governments in the centre and the states. The Janata Party-led governments both at the centre and in the states introduced certain measures which had repercussions for the state politics. The appointment of the Mandal Commission and introduction of reservation for the backward classes in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh set the new trends which were significant both for the state and national politics.

The state level leaders and political parties challenged not only the leadership and organisation of the Congress symbolised by Indira Gandhi, but also sought a stronger place for the states in the centre-state relations. Conclaves of the opposition leaders, appointment of Rajammannar Commission in Tamil Nadu the resolution of the Left Front in West Bengal and appointment of Sarkaria Commission in 1983, etc., for revamping of the centre-state relations, were some of the most significant examples of rising significance of the regional political forces during the late 1960s-early 1980s. The leadership of the Congress and Indira Gandhi was challenged by the J P movement and Gujarat agitation in the 1970s. Unable to meet the challenge of the regional forces, J P movement and verdict of Allahabad High Court against Indira Gandhi, the centre to

imposed emergency in the country for twenty months (1975-1977). The post-emergency era saw the elevation of the regional leaders like Charan Singh to the national politics. Along with this, state level leaders like Karpoori Thakur in Bihar, Devi Lal in Haryana, Ram Naresh Yadav and later Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP and in several south India states started pushing their programmes in the central politics.

1.4 STATE POLITICS: THE 1980s ONWARDS

1.4.1 Assertion of Identities

The developments since the 1980s further contributed to the changing phase of the states politics in India and states' role in the national politics. These developments were – frequency of coalition politics at the national and state levels, globalisation, emergence of yet another generation of leadership, assertion of multiple identities based on ethnicity, i.e., caste (dalits and backward classes), tribe, language; the farmers' movements, insurgency in North-East, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab, and autonomy movements. Movements of different social groups have come to be known as new social movement. Though these developments were caused primarily as a result of the state policies, yet these were distinct features as compared to the earlier period.

The assertion of the dalits and backward classes in the North in the recent period has only contributed to the politics of similar assertion in the south which took place much earlier. Politicisation of the dalits in north India in the form of the BSP, of the backward classes in the form of various incarnations of Janata Dals in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and also the non-party fronts related to various castes as well as the religion further added new dimension to the state politics in India.

The period also witnessed the rise of the rich farmers in the form of BKUs (Bharatiya Kisan Unions) in UP and Punjab, Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra, Khedyut Samaj in Gujarat and Karnataka Rajya Ryatha Sangha in Karnataka. These groups also had their earlier incarnation in the 1970s when they were addressed as kulaks in the north as well as the south. But there was difference between the trends of the 1970s and those of the 1980s. While the former as the product of the green revolution and the land reforms mainly sought the share in the political power and favourable terms of trade for agricultural products, the latter focused on the issues related to the market economy. The new social forces raised multiple demands in different states. These demands were reflected in the form of reservation, the creation of the new states and greater allocation of resources from the centre to the states.

1.4.2 Impact of Globalisation

The state politics took a new turn towards the end of the last decade of the twentieth century. Globalisation has weakened the position of the centre on the one hand, and enabled the states to be autonomous players in the national as well as state politics. The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) did not have an even impact on all states; some states have benefited from it while others lagged. In fact, liberalisation has resulted in competition among states to seek investments. Some observers feel that it has created disparity among the states. Some states have become more advanced while others have become more backward.

Lawrence Saez's book *Federalism Without a Centre* shows that globalisation has enabled the states in India to act as independent entities to pursue their agendas; they can now negotiate

directly with the international donors, and enter into agreement with different agencies. Of course, this has to be done with the consent and approval of the central government. It was not possible in the pre-globalisation phase. Globalisation has also resulted in the erosion of inter-governmental institutions. Saez argues that the inter-governmental cooperation has given way to “inter-jurisdictional competition”.

During the phase of globalisation even the party system has witnessed changes. In most of the states two or more than two parties emerged as principal parties. West Bengal presented an exception where one party remained the dominant force. Even here, it has been able to wield power in collaboration with other like-minded parties in the form of Left Front. State level parties are oriented towards specific regions, religion or caste. These parties are able to exercise their influence through pre and post election alliances, fronts and partners in the coalition governments. The most glaring examples in this regard are: BSP with its base in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Indian Rashtriya Lok Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Nationalist Congress Party, Akali Dal in North Indian States; Biju Janata Dal in Orissa in East; Telugu Desam Party, AIADMK and DMK in South, and Shiv Sena in western India. In North-East India regional political parties abound.

The role of political parties is generally focused on electoral mobilisation. But emergence of new social forces like the dalits and OBCs has also added to the non-electoral mobilisation in the state. The latter, however, gets linked to the electoral mobilisation also.

The proliferation of political and social forces does not allow a single force to dominate the state politics; at the same time all of them want a share in political power. While there are broad ideological basis of the formation of coalitions or political fronts of both the ruling and opposition, the main causes of their formation are based on practical and political considerations.

1.4.3 Insurgencies and State Politics

Besides the issues discussed so far in this unit, the insurgency and related issues occupy a central place in the politics of several states especially in North-East India, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. These are also related to the self-determination movements. These developments not only impact politics of respective states but also have serious repercussion on national politics of the country. The problems of insurgency are related to the issues of development, inter-ethnic relations and autonomy. While insurgency is directed against the nation-state or its referents, in several instances it gives birth to the ethnic riots and conflict among the ethnic groups. Problems of insurgency is not new to India. As mentioned earlier, India faced such problems immediately after the achievement of Independence like Naga and Mizo insurgency in the North-East India, Plebiscite Front agitation in Jammu and Kashmir, demand for a separate sovereign state for Tamil speaking population in south India, etc. But it was from the 1980s that insurgency has spread to more states. While the rise of the state leaders and parties till the 1970s challenged the dominant party system, insurgency movements question the homogenising “nation-building” approach of the centre in support of “federation-building” approach. In some cases insurgency has been a by-product of autonomy movement or the movement against the outsiders. In the process new groups demand autonomy or self-determination. Such examples abound in the North-East India. For example, supporters of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) movement, Bodo’s and Karbi’s movements were once part of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) agitation in Assam. Having felt neglected by the dominant groups within the AASU agitation, they resorted to their separate agitations demanding sovereignty or autonomy within the Indian union.

1.5 SUMMARY

State politics in India has developed through phases. For around two decades following independence, especially since most of the states assumed their distinct identities in the wake of the reorganisation of states in 1956, state politics largely followed the pattern of the national politics. The Congress then known as single dominant party, generally controlled the governments both at the centre as well in the states. However, the state politics which assumed the distinct form by the end of the 1960s was a precursor to the defeat of the Congress in 1967 general elections in several states and formation of non-Congress governments in 1969. There emerged regional leaders and political parties with their strong social bases. Reasons for these developments lay in the factionalism within the Congress in several states and popular mobilisation of the people by the opposition parties in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Emergency gave an opportunity to the state level leaders with regional bases to come together on the same platform.

By the 1980s rise of the identities based on caste, region, religion and ethnicity and that of the new generation of leaders, with their regional bases and parties, agendas of the states got a prime place in politics of India. Coinciding with the impact of globalisation and dilution in the role of the nation-state, states in India have come to occupy a centre stage in Indian politics. The states, the regional political parties and leaders are playing decisive roles in the national politics. They do so as members of coalitions or within the political space outside political institution. This was not possible before the 1990s. Therefore, we can say that state politics has entered a new phase where states are no longer the followers of the centre but are decisive participants in the national politics.

1.6 EXERCISES

- 1) What were the dominant features of state politics in India in the first two decades following independence?
- 2) Why did the Congress system or the dominant party system decline?
- 3) Explain the impact of identities on the state politics in India.
- 4) What is the relationship between globalisation and state politics in India?