

The Role and Impact of Regional Parties in Indian Politics

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ABSTRACT

India, as the world's largest democracy, boasts a vibrant and diverse political landscape. One of the key features of this landscape is the significant presence of regional parties, which have played a crucial role in shaping the country's political dynamics. This article explores the emergence, evolution, and impact of regional parties in India, examining their influence on national and state politics, their role in coalition governments, and their contribution to the preservation of regional identities and interests. The emergence and evolution of regional parties in India represent a significant shift in the country's political landscape. From their early beginnings in the post-independence period to their current status as key players in both state and national politics, regional parties have fundamentally altered the dynamics of Indian democracy. Their ability to address regional concerns and represent the unique identities of different states has ensured their continued relevance and influence in India's pluralistic society. As India moves forward, the role of regional parties will remain central to the functioning of its democratic polity.

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Introduction: A party is recognized as a "regional party" if it promotes regionalism or builds its support by appealing to regional pride. These parties primarily operate within a specific state and typically focus their electoral efforts there. Their agendas are often shaped by the dominant culture of that state. Some regional parties also extend their influence to neighboring states with similar cultural ties. (Beasley & Kaarbo 2014), The formation of various state parties occurred at different times and for different reasons, with some even tracing their roots back to before India's independence.

India, being a cosmopolitan and multilingual nation, has seen the rise of numerous political parties due to its vast geographical expanse, cultural diversity, the unique blend of societal characteristics, constitutional guarantees of equal opportunities, and adult franchise. Studies have shown that regional parties, compared to national parties, are often better positioned to understand and address regional needs and aspirations. (Blarel & Van Willigen 2021), Additionally, India's extensive linguistic and cultural diversity has fueled separatist sentiments, with people often identifying with their specific linguistic regions. Political parties frequently seek to capitalize on local ethnic and cultural elements. From another perspective, the uneven development across regions has led to feelings of exclusion and alienation, further driving the emergence of regional parties.

The political landscape of India is characterized by its plurality and diversity, reflective of the country's vast cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heterogeneity. While national parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have historically dominated the political arena, regional

parties have emerged as significant players, particularly since the 1960s. (Greene,2019), These parties, rooted in specific states or regions, represent the interests of particular linguistic, ethnic, or cultural groups and have often been instrumental in addressing local issues that national parties may overlook.

Significance of the Study:

India is home to a vast array of cultures, languages, and ethnicities. Regional parties often emerge as the political voice of these diverse groups, advocating for the unique needs and aspirations of specific regions. This study sheds light on how regional identities are politically articulated and preserved in a highly pluralistic society. The decline of single-party dominance at the national level, particularly since the 1990s, has led to the rise of coalition governments in which regional parties play a crucial role. Understanding the influence of these parties on national politics helps in analyzing the stability, policy-making, and functioning of coalition governments in India. This study is essential for comprehending the multifaceted role of regional parties in shaping India's political landscape. It offers critical insights into how these parties influence governance, represent diverse communities, and contribute to the evolving dynamics of Indian democracy.

Objectives:

This article explores the emergence, evolution, and impact of regional parties in India, examining their influence on national and state politics, their role in coalition governments, and their contribution to the preservation of regional identities and interests.

Method:

The present study is descriptive in nature. So the researcher has followed the secondary sources of information. This study depended on previously published studies, reports, and statistics. This secondary data was readily available through online journals and library resources

Emergence and Evolution of Regional Parties

The political landscape of India is marked by its complexity and diversity, reflective of the country's rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and ethnicities. While national parties have traditionally played a dominant role, the emergence and evolution of regional parties have significantly altered the dynamics of Indian politics.(Kailash,2014), These parties, rooted in specific states or regions, have grown in influence and have become critical players in both state and national politics.

Early Origins and Linguistic Reorganization

The seeds of regionalism in Indian politics were sown in the early years following independence. The reorganization of states on linguistic lines in the 1950s and 1960s provided a fertile ground for the rise of regional parties. The demand for linguistic states was driven by the desire to preserve and promote regional languages, cultures, and identities, which were often overshadowed by the broader national narrative.

One of the earliest and most successful regional parties to emerge was the **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)** in Tamil Nadu. Formed in 1949 by C.N. Annadurai, the DMK was rooted in the Dravidian movement, which sought to challenge the perceived dominance of North Indian culture and language. The party's rise to power in the 1967 Tamil Nadu state elections marked a turning point, as it ended the dominance of the Indian National Congress (INC) in the state and set the stage for the proliferation of regional parties across India.

The Rise of Regional Parties in the 1960s and 1970s

The success of the DMK inspired the formation of other regional parties across the country. In West Bengal, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) emerged as a dominant force, leading the Left Front government that ruled the state for over three decades from 1977 to 2011. The CPI(M) combined Marxist ideology with a strong regional identity, focusing on land reforms and social justice.

In Maharashtra, the **Shiv Sena** was founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray, with a focus on promoting the interests of the Marathi-speaking population. The party's rise was fueled by concerns over the perceived marginalization of Marathis in their own state, particularly in Mumbai, the state's economic capital. The

Shiv Sena's brand of regional nationalism and its aggressive stance on issues of language and culture resonated with a significant section of the population, allowing it to carve out a niche in Maharashtra's politics.

In Andhra Pradesh, the **Telugu Desam Party (TDP)** was founded in 1982 by N.T. Rama Rao, a popular film actor who capitalized on the sentiment of Telugu pride. The TDP emerged as a formidable force by challenging the dominance of the Congress party in the state and advocating for the rights and interests of the Telugu-speaking population.

The Impact of the 1980s and the Decline of Single-Party Dominance

The 1980s marked a significant period in the evolution of regional parties, as the dominance of the Indian National Congress began to wane. This period saw the rise of several regional parties that capitalized on local issues and discontent with the central government's policies.

In Punjab, the **Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)**, a party with roots in the Sikh community and religious politics, played a key role in advocating for greater autonomy for the state. The party's demand for a federal structure with more powers to states resonated with the broader narrative of regionalism that was gaining momentum across the country.

The 1980s also witnessed the rise of **Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)** in Assam, which emerged from the Assam Movement, a popular uprising against illegal immigration from Bangladesh. The AGP's success in the 1985 state elections highlighted the growing importance of regional identity and the electorate's desire for political representation that directly addressed their specific concerns.

The Coalition Era and the Consolidation of Regional Parties

The 1990s ushered in an era of coalition politics at the national level, a development that significantly boosted the influence of regional parties. The decline of single-party dominance, particularly that of the Congress, led to the emergence of coalition governments in which regional parties played a crucial role.

The formation of the **National Front** government in 1989, which was supported by several regional parties, marked the beginning of this trend. The subsequent **United Front** government, which came to power in the mid-1990s, was a coalition of multiple regional and left-leaning parties, further underscoring the importance of regional players in national politics.

The **National Democratic Alliance (NDA)**, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the **United Progressive Alliance (UPA)**, led by the Congress, also relied heavily on the support of regional parties to form governments in the 2000s. Parties like the **Trinamool Congress (TMC)** in West Bengal, the TDP in Andhra Pradesh, and the **Biju Janata Dal (BJD)** in Odisha became key partners in these coalitions, influencing national policies and ensuring that regional issues were addressed at the highest levels of government.

The Present Scenario: Regional Parties and Their Continued Relevance

In contemporary Indian politics, regional parties continue to wield significant influence. They have not only sustained their dominance in their respective states but have also played a critical role in shaping national politics. The rise of strong regional leaders, such as Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, Naveen Patnaik in Odisha, and K. Chandrashekar Rao in Telangana, reflects the enduring appeal of regional parties.

Moreover, regional parties have been instrumental in preserving the federal structure of India by advocating for greater devolution of powers to states. They have also played a crucial role in articulating the aspirations and concerns of diverse regional identities, thereby contributing to the overall stability and unity of the country.

The Role of Regional Parties in State Politics

Regional parties have had a profound impact on state politics, often emerging as the dominant political force in their respective states. They have succeeded in forming governments and implementing policies that cater to the specific needs and aspirations of their regional constituencies. For example, the DMK and its rival, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have alternately ruled Tamil Nadu

for decades, shaping the state's socio-economic policies and development trajectory.

In states like West Bengal, the Left Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), ruled for over three decades, implementing land reforms and other pro-poor policies that significantly impacted the state's socio-economic structure. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has played a crucial role in mobilizing Dalit voters and addressing issues related to social justice and caste-based discrimination.

Influence on National Politics

Regional parties have also made their mark on national politics, particularly in the era of coalition governments. The decline of single-party dominance at the national level, particularly since the 1990s, has led to the emergence of coalition governments, where regional parties have often held the balance of power. The formation of the National Front government in 1989 and the subsequent United Front government in the mid-1990s highlighted the pivotal role of regional parties in shaping national policies and government formation.

The rise of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalitions in the early 2000s further underscored the importance of regional parties in national politics. Parties like the TDP, the Shiv Sena, and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) have been key partners in these coalitions, influencing national policy decisions and ensuring that regional issues are given due consideration at the national level.

Preservation of Regional Identities and Interests

One of the most significant contributions of regional parties has been their role in preserving and promoting regional identities and interests. In a country as diverse as India, regional parties have been instrumental in articulating the aspirations of various linguistic, ethnic, and cultural groups. They have often served as a counterbalance to the centralizing tendencies of national parties, ensuring that the unique identities and interests of different regions are not overshadowed by a pan-Indian narrative.

For instance, the Akali Dal in Punjab has played a crucial role in representing the interests of the Sikh community and advocating for greater autonomy for the state. Similarly, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam has focused on issues related to the protection of indigenous Assamese culture and identity, particularly in the context of immigration and demographic changes.

Challenges and Criticisms

Despite their significant contributions, regional parties in India have also faced criticism. Their emphasis on regionalism and identity politics has sometimes led to divisive and parochial tendencies, undermining national unity. Additionally, the proliferation of regional parties has led to political fragmentation, making governance more complex and often leading to unstable coalition governments.

Moreover, some regional parties have been criticized for their dynastic politics, corruption, and lack of internal democracy. For instance, the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar have been accused of promoting family rule and engaging in corrupt practices.

Conclusion

Regional parties in India have played a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape, particularly in representing regional interests and identities. They have influenced both state and national politics, contributing to the emergence of coalition governments and ensuring that regional issues receive due attention. However, their role has not been without challenges, including the potential for divisiveness and political instability. As India continues to evolve as a democracy, the role of regional parties will remain vital in balancing the diverse and pluralistic nature of the country's polity.

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