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INDEX

Sr. No.	Title	Author	Subject	Page No.
1	Antibacterial activity of Bauhinia tomentosa Linn	S. Jasmine Mary,Dr. A .John Merina	Chemistry	1-2
2	Impact of Personal Loan Offered by Banks and Non Banking Financia ompanies in Coimbatore City	Dr. A. Vinayagamoorthy, M.Somasundaram, C. Sankar	Commerce	3-6
3	Sustainable Rural Development: A Case Study of Kalewadi Nirmal Gram, District Satara (Maharashtra)	Dr. Anandrao S.Patil	Commerce	7-10
4	Financial Performance Of Cadila Pharmaceuticals Ltd. &Cipla Pharmaceutical Ltd	Archana J. Bhoot	Commerce	11-12
5	The Role Of Advertisement In Buying Behaviour	Dr. K.Krishnakumar,K. Radha	Commerce	13-15
6	Business Performance Effectiveness with the Aid of Total Quality Management	Dr. Vipul Chalotra	Commerce	16-17
7	Women Entrepreneurial Success-Key Indicator Analysis	Dr.S.Valli Devasena, Priyadarshini	Commerce	18-19
8	Mentoring: A Tool For Lifelong Learning In Organizations	Dr.Sandeep Tandon, Mrs. Shelleka Gupta	Commerce	20-24
9	Energy-Efficient MAC Layer Protocols in Ad hoc Networks	Ajay Shah, Hitesh Gupta, Mukesh Baghel	Computer Science	25-28
10	“E-Governance Initiatives in Gujarat- A Case Study”	Prof. Priyank Gokani, Prof. Dr. H. N. Pandya	Computer Science	29-30
11	Impact of Carpet Weaving Activity on Rural Poor: (A case study on migrated weavers’ households in West Bengal)	Chittaranjan Das,Dr. Swarup Kumar Jana	Economics	31-33
12	Role of Finance Commision in Fiscal Transfers in India	Prof. P. Dhiraviyam	Economics	34-37
13	Human Resource Practices in Banks Some Myths and Realities	Dr. K.Kaliyamurthy,**Mrs. J. Shymala Devi	Economics	38-41
14	Employer-Employee Relationship In Co-Operation	Dr. Rohit N. Desai	Economics	42-43
15	Industrialization And Sustainable Development	Pallavi C. Vyas	Economics	44-46
16	Impact Of Teacher Absenteeism On The Quality Of Education At Government Elementary Schools	Dr. Praveena, K. B	Education	47-49
17	Relevance of Remote Sensing and GIS in Water Resoureces Engineering	Kaushikkumar R. Mayani, V. M. Patel	Engineering	50-51
18	Optimization of the Irrigation water Efficiency	Kiran R.Shah, PROF.A.I.Lalani	Engineering	52-54
19	Corporate Social Responsibility- An Analytical Case Study	Soheli Ghose	Finance	55-57
20	The story of colour	Kashyap Parikh	Fine Arts	58-59
21	Impact of Dietary Intake of Pregnant Women on Neonatal Outcome in North Chennai	Sudha S	Home Science	60-62
22	Some Initiatives of Rural Development through Rural Tourism and Mgnreg	Prof. D. Gunaseelan	Hotel Management	63-66
23	Innovative Methods in English Language Teaching	K.Rajkumar, Dr.P.Nagaraj	Literature	67-69

24	Leadership in Management	Dr.A.Jayakumar K.Kalaiselvi	Management	70-72
25	Leadership Styles in Organizations an Empirical Study	Dr.S.Saraswathi	Management	73-75
26	A Study of Job Stress Among Working Women in Government & Non Government Organization	Hetal M. Patoliya	Management	76-77
27	Achievement Evaluation Of Regional Rural Banks In India	Bind Kumar Tiwary	Management	78-81
28	Human Factors to Minimize the Human Error and Improving Patient Safety	Sanjay Saproo,Dr. Sanjeev Bansal,Dr. Amit Kumar Pandey	Management	82-86
29	Wealth Maximization in TATA Power Company Limited – An Empirical Study	R.Muruga Ganesh, Dr.A.Somu	Management	87-89
30	An Issues In Carbon Accounting Practices In India	Mr. Akhilesh N Shukla	Management	90-92
31	Motivation Of Employees In Public And Private Educational Institutions	T. Srinivasarao, Dr.S. Teki(Doms) ,Dr. M. Venkatasubba Reddy	Management	93-95
32	The Gap Analysis Of Hospitality Services: A Case Study	Dr. N. Ramanjaneyalu, Mr. Kiran Koppad	Management	96-100
33	Causes Of Stress And Affect Of Stress Indicators On Level Of Stress Among The Women Employees In It Sector	Sathyapriya.J,Dr.P.Amuthalakshmi, B.Aparna	Management	101-105
34	Social Marketing Effect on Knowledge and change in Attitude for prevention of STI/HIV/AIDS among Trucker's in Odisha	Mr. Prasanta Kumar Parida	Marketing	106-107
35	Rate Pressure Product In Type 2 Diabetic Cardiac Autonomic Neuropathy	Dr Rishu Segan	MEDICAL SCIENCE	108-109
36	Evaluation of rapid precurarisation technique using Rocuronium and Atracurium	Dr. Kalyani S. Konday, Dr. Daisy V. Jokhi	Medical Science	110-113
37	Prevalence Of Subclinical Thyroid Dysfunction In General Population: Focus On Tsh Co-Relation With Bmi	Dr. Kalyan Gaud, Ms. Shilpa Jaiswal	Medical Science	114-115
38	Static Sphere Of Dust Of Uniform Density Using Isotropic Line Element	Dr.M.A.Gaikwad	Science	116-117
39	Role of Political Parties in Urban Development	Dr. N.M. Sali	Social Science	118-119
40	Home range and habitat selection of Grey francolin (Francolinus francolinus) using radiotelemetry.	Sarita Rana	Zoology	120-122

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Role of Political Parties in Urban Development

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Introduction

In recent years, reputation of both parties and leaders are in a state of disarray,. Parties and politicians have been accused of eroding the democratic system by practicing and maximizing their personal gains and influence. In short, political parties willfully pursue their own narrow political interest at the expense of the greater common good. However, without their political organization and mobilization, the democratic system would not have worked. Major transformations have taken place since Independence in India's party system. The writings on these in fact examine and evaluate changes both within political parties and the party system. At the centre of these change in the party system is the rise of the BJP in India and in Karnataka. Therefore an elucidation of party politics in India should begin with an understanding of the role of political parties in democratic systems generally.

Political parties are considered by many as intermediate organizations between the citizen and the state. They are regarded as having an important place in a democracy, carrying the weight of expectations and aspirations upwards from citizen to state. Similarly they also take the responsibility of formulating the public policy for the betterment of their citizens downwards, from state to citizen. This in the words of political science is known as interest articulation and interest aggregation. In this process, they perform multiple functions and develop multiple personalities.

Significance of Political Parties

Political parties are central to India political life. Their role in political mobilization, governance, the formulation and implementation of economic and social policy, ethnic conflict, separatist movements. and the working of democracy has long been the focus of analysis. Their centrality arises from the fact that they are the key link between individual and state, and society. Political parties provide the crucial connection between social process and policy makers, and influence debates and policies on issues affecting the interests of various social groups in the political system.

As more and more people participated in the democratic process, competitive politics and the party system have undergone a major change over the past two decades. The Congress and the ruling BJP led National Democratic Alliance face dissension at all levels extending from differences between the BJP and organizations it is affiliated with, such as the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and between the party and its coalition partners.

To understand the significance and implications of these developments, many of which are spurred by electoral and political change, it is useful to distinguish two important phases in the development of the party system. Single party dominance, moderate levels of political participation, and elite consensus characterized the first phase. This has given way to a second phase of greater democratization and the opening up of the political system to non elite participants. The latter has resulted in the unfolding of unexpected political patterns. These include the replacement of the Congress system with multi party competition, an intensification of party competition, the fragmentation of parties and emergence of coalition politics. Particularly significant is the decline of single party dominance, the rise of the BJP as the single largest party in Parliament, and the advent of coalition politics. Coalition governments have come into their own because the last five parliamentary elections have failed to produce a single party majority. Equally important is the democratic upsurge amongst the hitherto underprivileged sections of society and their perceptible influence on the working of democracy and political institutions. Two issues are particularly vital. The fist concerns the effect of institutional variables, principally, the electoral system and federalism, on the party system. The second pertains to the role of social cleavages, more precisely, the relationship between social cleavages and political mobilization. These shifts raise number of questions of general interest for students of Indian politics. What are the conditions under which parties and party system change? How has the party managed to cope with social change? How do we understand the contemporary party systems and its impact on democracy? Do these political parties have a set agenda? Do political parties have different levels of operation? Do they foresee development? Do they contribute to urban expansion and growing expectations?

Current Status

The intensification of competitive politics has changed the party systep1 from being a rivalry between national pm1ies into one between alliances and coalitions of national and state parties. The nineties have witnessed a succession of minority or coalition governments. The Governments formed in 1989, 1990, 1991, 1996, 1998, and 1999 were coalitions of several parties. The BJP led government formed in 1999 is he eighth since 1989. In 1996, a fourteen party United Front government was formed, which was supported by the Left parties. It retied on the Congress to offer support from outside the government, with the aim of preventing the BJP, the largest party in parliament, from coming to power. The minority coalitions in 1989 and 1996 were toppled when their supporters outside the government, the BJP and the Congress respectively, withdrew support, whereas the 1998 coalition government fell after the AIADMK, a member of the coalition, withdrew support. The last two elections have seen the formation 'of four successive governments with a total of 25 parties contributing to governmental majorities, either as coalition partners or as 'supporters of minority governments from outside. Many small parties have acquired disproportionate influence because the few seats they held were crucial to forming a government. Even the smallest of parties, even ones with a member or two. can drive hard bargains with the larger parties, which need their support either for a majority or to shore up regional bases. Party divisions in Tamilnadu exemplify the process. With Dravidian ideology in retreat, many groups that formerly supported the Dravidian movement have formed parties of their own. The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Pattali Makkal Katchi, the Tamilzhaga Rajiv Congress, ad Puthiya Tamizhagam are break way groups from the DMK and AIADMK; the Tamil Manila Congress broke away from the Congress party.

Trends in the last few elections suggest that a parliamentary majority is difficult to achieve in normal elections. Notwithstanding the BJP's claim that it favors coalitions, .even if it wins

a majority on its own, it's long term political project demands a decisive majority so that it can reduce its dependence on other parties and can pursue its core policies. The Congress has not been able to win an electoral majority since 1984.

Still, the party has not given up the hope of attaining a single party majority in the Lok Sabha. Even some of the most ardent Congressmen acknowledged at a brainstorming camp in Panchamarhi in October 1998 that there are some regions, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, for example, where the Congress has little alternative but to ally with state based parties, if it wants to come to power. Yet, the central Congress leadership perseveres with the policy of assailing regional parties as the principal obstacle to single party rule.

While coalition governments have become the order of the day, capacity to govern. Parties and politicians have changed their loyalties so rapidly that sustainable coalition building has proved impossible. The formation of four governments and the necessity for three general elections after 1996 raised ungainly apprehensions of instability and lack of governance. The twelfth Lok Sabha lasted a mere thirteen months, arousing anxiety about its impact on economic development. Political stability remains elusive because of the shifting calculations of rival parties in the political arena, which raises doubts about the viability of coalitions In a situation of rapidly changing alliances.

Thus, Party politics in India has confronted numerous challenges. Not only has the Congress system destroyed itself, but the fragmentation of the Congress coalition has triggered a new emphasis on self-representation which raise questions about the party system and its capacity to accommodate diverse interests, and also form stable state and national coalitions. An important test facing the polity is to evolve a party system or political parties that can effectively articulate and aggregate a variety of interests. This requires parties to project broader appeals.

The democratic ideal is strong parties with well developed political identification, programmatic goals, and organization. These are rare everywhere. In India, numerous small parties have emerged principally s vehicles for influential and charismatic leaders to gain power. Such leaders rarely advocate the institutionalization of parties, because parties as institutions constrain individual discretion and the personal power of charismatic leaders. Leaders of such parties, some of which may be little more than pressure groups, tend to avoid membership of umbrella coalitions and aspire to wield direct power to maximize their own influence and that of their constituencies. Well developed parties often emerge from below. The growth of the two communist parties and the from below. The growth of the two communist parties and the DMK, AIADMK, Telugu Desam, and SSP indicate this possibility. However these parties are confined to a few states. Furthermore, not all parties from below become institutionalized. On the contrary, leaders like Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh, M.G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu. N.T.Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh showed no interest in promoting the institutionalization of their parties. This is true of national leaders too: Indira Gandhi destroyed the Congress as an institution. The development of the Congress after the 1969 split was in sharp contrast to its organizational development in there Independence period.

With all their deficiencies, India's myriad political parties have played a crucial role in organizing a competitive multi party based democracy and in forming representative party based governments. thus avoiding the challenges of non party, plebiscitary democracy, and strong executive leadership grounded in populist authoritarianism. Parties remain the best means of ensuring that government has a popular basis and social conflicts are mediated and settled within a process of accommodation and compromise. Even frequent elections have not alienated the majority of voters: to the contrary, they appear to give the mass of voters a sense of control over government. None of this. of course. minimizes the seriousness of the dilemmas facing India's political parties and the political system. The overriding problem is the persistent inability of governments to deliver on their promises, and the inadequacies of parties in responding to the preference of all its citizens. Yet, despite the erosion of the institutional edifice of democracy, which so preoccupies intellectuals generally, and political scientists in particular, the Indian electorate to judge by its 60 per cent turnout in national elections appears satisfied with the extraordinary range of choices that the parties offer.

There is consequently an urgent need for rebuilding, both within individual parties and in relations among them. Since his election victory in the last week of 1984, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had begun, somewhat hesitantly, the process of rebuilding within the formal institutions of state. He had also, at least for the time being, restored a modicum of civility to relations between his ruling Congress-I party and the opposition, and this has in turn led to an improvement in relations between the central government in new Delhi and opposition controlled governments at the state level. Rajiv Gandhi had also indicated, through scorching criticisms, that he was well aware of the wretched condition of his own party. But he may also have missed his opportunity to rebuild it. If that is indeed true, then he could eventually experience the kind of vulnerability that caused him and his mother before him to seek all out confrontation with opposition parties. It could even lead civilian elites to abandon hope in parties and in open, competitive politics. Now it is the turn of Mr. Rahual Gandhi and the generation leaders like him in other parties too. It is however dependent on time to find answers to the hopes of people in political parties.

Urbanization Process

Ever since 2500 BC, urban places have placed an important role in the evolution of India's cultural, political, economic and social life. Throughout this long period 4500 years the proportion of the country's total population living in urban areas has fluctuated between five and twenty five per cent. These statistics, however, hide the more significant events of the rise and, fall of individual cities and of systems of cities, which made lasting impression south country's cultural and social advancement. The influence of cities, past and present, on our way of life, cannot by any standards be considered as a simple, one-dimensional process. On the other hand, the emergence, spatial spread, growth and decline of cities, have meant different things at different points in time and space. There are, in fact, not one but several processes of urbanization at work at any given point in time and space. These processes are interdependent and inter related, yet varied in terms of their underlying causes and the manifestations of their impact. The history of urbanization in India reveals, broadly, four processes of urbanization at work throughout the historical period. These are: a) the emergence of new social relationships among people in cities and between people in cities and those in villages through a process of social change; b) the rise and fall of cities with changes in the political order; c) the growth of cities based on new productive processes, which later the economic base of the city; and d) the physical spread of cities with the inflow of migrants, who come in search of a means of livelihood as well as a new way of life. All these processes have been enriched by the influences of other world cultures; in particular those form west Asia and Europe. This being the process of urbanization, in the modern period, on one hand there is on the other hand, a paradigm shift that is taking place in the formation, functioning, and practices of political parties in India today. As there is urban expansion one can see that there is more political activity the indulgence of political parties seem to be on an increase in all walks of life. This process has lead to the debate about the role of political parties in the process of Urbanization and hence the importance of this study.

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