

Professor V.K.R.V. RAO CENTENARY YEAR (2007-2008)



INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE
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ISEC Public Lecture – 6

by

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on

**Indian Democracy at Crossroads: Role of Political Parties in
Inclusive Governance**

on Friday, 28th December 2007 at 5.30 pm

at Jnanajyothi Seminar Hall, Central College Campus, Bangalore-560 001

Presidential Remarks

by

Sri Justice M.N.Venkatachaliah

Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of India

Indian Democracy at Crossroads: Role of Political Parties in Inclusive Governance¹

Dr. Satyanarayana Sangita²

Abstract

India is one of the few post-colonial countries, which has opted and sustained democracy for the last six decades. Elections are conducted regularly and governments changed with different political parties. Unlike many other countries, all sections of society (irrespective of religion, region, caste, sex, and education) are given voting rights to select responsive leaders. Unrestricted freedom for political parties, interest groups and press enable to reflect and articulate diverse views and interests. Institutions like Judiciary, Human Rights, Minority, SC/ST, Women and Election Commissions are given autonomy to act independent of governments to safeguard civil and citizens' rights.

This has enabled India to survive as a nation (disproving the hypothesis of Western scholars) and resolve conflicts (language, regional, religious, and other ethnic) within the democratic framework unlike our neighbours. Parliamentary democracy and federal form of government (sharing power among centre, states and local) have also enabled to articulate the contesting interests of small groups and parties (Muslims, Christians, Bodos, Nagas) through their elected representatives. Democracy has also facilitated persons with humble background and from disadvantaged groups to occupy highest positions (President, PM, CM). Furthermore, it has helped to moderate the extremist persuasions, ideologies, political parties and insurgent groups and separatist movements (like Punjab, North-East, Kashmir) to fall line with mainstream thinking (Democracy has been partly responsible for making India world leaders in areas of information, nuclear, space and bio- technologies).

In spite of sixty years of democracy, India's significant chunk of population is poor, malnourished, unemployed and illiterate. Human development index is very low when compared to semi-democratic countries like China and South-East countries. Sadly, India is ranked as one of the most corrupt countries, according to the Transparency International. Ethnic (religion, caste, language and so on) tensions and conflicts are widespread. Disparities among regions and classes are increasing. Human rights violations are on rise. Radicalism and fundamentalism are spreading to a number of districts. So is also criminalism and corruption. The failure in promoting inclusive governance can be attributed to the improper institutionalization of political party system (single dominant, two party and multiple parties), political parties functioning, ideology and internal democracy.

Political Parties and Governance (Brief Conceptual and Theoretical Review)

Political parties are critical for effective functioning of democracy and inclusive governance. The mobilisation of electorate, the selection of leaders, the formulation of agendas and passing of legislation

¹ Professor VKRV Rao Centenary Year (2007-08) Public lecture at Jnanajyothi Seminar Hall on 28th December 2007 at 5.30 pm.

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are conducted through parties. Parties are, in short, the mechanisms through which power is exercised in a democracy (Mehta, 200:38).

Strong party institutions are vital for the long-term stability and healthy functioning of democratic regimes. Political parties are seen as primary vehicles for integrating diverse social forces within democratic institutions, channelising and processing societal demands, resolving socio-political conflict, defining public policy alternatives, and holding government officials accountable to the citizenry (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; see also Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1989; Dix 1992; Gibson 1996; Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992 cited in Roberts Kenneth M. Roberts et.al., 1999:575).

A stable well-institutionalised party is a key element for effective political representation and governance (Kreuzer and Pettai, 2004: 614). Stable parties are necessary condition for democratic consolidation (Kreuzer and Pettai, 2004: 623). Without stable parties, the public opinion would remain unstructured, electoral accountability limited, interest aggregation ineffective, and governance would be in this process would become inefficient (Kreuzer and Pettai, 2004: 623). Weakly institutionalised party system is responsible for political instability, weak competition among parties, weak party roots in society, which might lead to low legitimacy (Scott Mainwaring, 1998). Moreover, strong and integrative party institutions have been identified as important actors in the political consolidation of economic reforms in emerging democracies (Haggard and Kaufman 1995) (Kenneth M. Roberts et.al., 1999: 575).

Intra-party democracy of political parties has a significant impact on democratic consolidation and representation. Internal party organisational issues such as membership, recruitment, socialisation, training, discipline and resources of the party have profound influence on the outcome. Internal organisational factors (recruitment strategies, centralisation, party discipline, norms of co-operation, and political skills) are responsible for responding to the powerful environmental factors (Gryzmala-Buss, 202:13 cited in Kreuzer and Pettai, 2004: 626).

Relevance of this Public Lecture:

This public lecture analyses Indian party system and internal democracy of major political parties in India. The analysis of the political parties is very relevant in the present juncture when major political, administrative and economic reforms are being initiated (Constitutional Review Committee headed by Sri Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, Second Administrative Reforms Commission by Sri Veerappa Moily, and many such other Commissions on Electoral and Economic Reforms) to promote inclusive growth and governance (efficient, equitable, responsive and accountable). This lecture is also very relevant in the present context of coalition politics and globalisation (liberalisation, privatisation), democratic decentralisation (73rd and 74th Amendment) and civil society assertions (Narmadha to Nandhigram). Finally, this lecture is mainly aimed to highlight the significance of political parties for promoting inclusive governance. Scholars like Atul Kohli attributed the crisis of India's governance in 1970s to the decline of congress party. At the same time, he also attributed the successful implementation of land reforms in West Bengal to the Communist parties (Atul Kohli, 1998, 2002).