Democracy in Action: Political Parties and Electoral Dynamics in India

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Abstract

India, renowned as the world's largest democracy, has a rich tradition of political diversity and a multi-party system that reflects its social, linguistic, religious, and regional variations. The research commences by tracing the historical origins of political parties in India, both before and after independence, which have contributed to shaping the present-day political landscape. This historical backdrop provides insights into the enduring legacies and ideologies that influence contemporary party dynamics.

Subsequently, the research explores the structure and functioning of political parties in India, highlighting their organizational setup, leadership patterns, and decision-making mechanisms. It examines the role of political parties in mobilizing public support, articulating policy agendas, and fostering political engagement. Additionally, the research investigates the impact of financial resources, media, and technology on modern election campaigns and the strategies employed by parties to resonate with the electorate.

Special attention is given to elections as the foundation of democracy. The research delves into the electoral process, encompassing voter registration, election day procedures, and the pivotal role played by the Election Commission of India in ensuring fair and impartial elections. It examines the implications of various types of elections, such as parliamentary, state assembly, and local government elections, on governance and representation.

Furthermore, it addresses the challenges and dilemmas confronted by political parties in India and explores issues such as political polarization, the influence of identity politics, regional disparities, and the emergence of populist movements. The research also scrutinizes the nexus between money, corruption, and politics, while discussing the need for electoral reforms in the quest for a robust democracy.

This research aims to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape India's democratic processes. By examining political parties and elections in-depth, it underscores the vital role of parties as institutions of governance and representation, while highlighting the opportunities and obstacles that lie ahead on India's democratic path.

INTRODUCTION

India, as the world's largest democracy, thrives on a complex and dynamic political landscape shaped by its diverse multi-party system. Political parties are the backbone of democratic governance, acting as conduits for public

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representation, policy formulation, and electoral competition. Their historical evolution, ideological foundations, and operational structures significantly influence the Nation's democratic processes.

Elections, a cornerstone of democracy, give citizens the power to choose their representatives and shape governance at various levels—Parliamentary, State, and Local. However, the electoral process in India is not without challenges. Political polarization, identity-based mobilisation, financial influence, and electoral corruption continue to test the resilience of democratic institutions.

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of political parties and elections in India, examining their historical roots, organisational frameworks, campaign strategies, and electoral mechanisms. It also explores the role of technology, media, and financial resources in shaping modern political campaigns. Furthermore, the research highlights key challenges and the need for electoral reforms to ensure free, fair, and transparent democratic processes. By providing an in-depth analysis, this paper aims to enhance the understanding of India's evolving political landscape and its impact on governance and representation.

Historical Development of Political Parties in India

Political parties have played an essential role in shaping India's political landscape, particularly since the country's independence in 1947. Political parties in India originated in the pre-independence era when the Indian National Congress (INC) was the primary platform for mobilising nationalist sentiment and advocating for independence from British colonial rule. The INC, founded in 1885, provided a unified platform for leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to rally the masses and articulate their aspirations for self-government.

Following independence, India's political party system witnessed significant diversification and fragmentation. New political parties arose, representing a different region, community, ideology, or interest group. This diversification was a reaction to India's complex social, linguistic, and cultural diversity. As a result, India's political

landscape evolved into a multi-party system, with parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), and various regional parties gaining prominence.

India's Political parties are essential because they can mobilise public support, articulate policy agendas, and compete in elections. Political parties act as vital intermediaries between citizens and the government, representing the diverse interests and aspirations of the Indian population. They serve as platforms for political participation, allowing people to express their concerns and contribute to the democratic process.

Furthermore, in India, political parties serve as vehicles for political recruitment and political leadership development. They serve as a springboard for aspiring politicians to move up the ranks, gain experience, and eventually assume positions of power and responsibility. Through their organisational structures, political parties provide opportunities for political education, mentorship, and networking, thereby shaping the future direction of Indian politics.

Political parties' evolution and importance in India have significantly impacted the country's governance and policy-making processes. They impact policy formulation and implementation, as well as the operation of legislative bodies at the national, state, and local levels. The political party system also facilitates government formation by allowing parties to form alliances and coalitions to gain a majority in parliament or state assemblies.

Subsequently, the evolution and importance of political parties in India have significantly impacted the nation's democratic processes, governance, and representation. From the Indian National Congress to the emergence of various regional and ideological parties, these political entities have become essential to India's vibrant democracy.

Evolution of Political Party Landscape: Diversification and Fragmentation

The evolution of political parties in India has been a complex and nuanced journey spanning over a century. As the country's oldest political party, the Indian National Congress (INC) plays a vital role in this evolution. The INC was founded in 1885 as a

platform for Indian elites to express their grievances and seek political reforms from the British colonial government.[1]

According to *Chandra, B. (2000),* the INC gradually transformed into a mass-based organisation advocating for independence from British rule under the leadership of prominent figures such as *Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and later Mahatma Gandhi*. It was critical in mobilising the masses, organising protests, and advocating for nationalist demands, ultimately leading to Indian independence in 1947.

Following independence, India's political party structure saw substantial diversification and fragmentation. The emergence of the first national coalition government in 1977, led by the Janata Party, represented a watershed moment in Indian politics. It made room for forming regional and ideological parties representing unique interests and constituencies.

Several regional parties rose to prominence, addressing the goals and problems of different states' linguistic, ethnic, and cultural communities. *The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh, and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra* are examples of powerful regional parties that have played essential roles in their respective states.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, emerged as a dominant force in Indian politics in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of the BJP coincided with the collapse of the Congress Party's dominance, resulting in a more competitive multi-party system.[2]

The emergence of political parties in India has affected the country's democracy, governance, and political setting. It represents the country's social, cultural, linguistic, and regional diversity, allowing many interests and opinions to be represented in the political process.

Significance of Political Parties in Democratic Governance

Political parties are vital foundations of democracy because they provide political representation, articulate policy goals, and ensure the smooth operation of a vibrant and pluralistic democratic system. Apart from serving as intermediaries between citizens and the government and representing the population's different interests and ambitions, they also serve as a forum for political engagement, allowing people to express their concerns, engage in political debates, and contribute to the democratic process.

Parties provide avenues for grassroots mobilisation, policy lobbying, and public participation through organisational structures. Furthermore, political parties are essential in forming governments and the country's governance. In a parliamentary system like India's, political parties compete in elections, and the party or coalition with the most seats forms the government. The aftereffect of election is that it provides a pool of potential leaders and policymakers who assume positions of power and responsibility. They develop and implement policies that address the needs and aspirations of the populace, thereby shaping the direction of governance.

Political parties play an essential role in legislative bodies, influencing the legislative agenda, debating policies, and holding the government accountable. Parties are essential in the functioning of the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House) in India, shaping legislation, participating in parliamentary committees, and scrutinising the executive. [3]

Further, political parties contribute to the stability and continuity of the democratic process. They preserve a structured political environment by establishing a framework for political competition, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Parties frequently serve as platforms for reaching consensus, forming coalitions, and resolving competing interests.[4] They contribute to governance stability by providing a predictable and orderly mechanism for power transitions through elections.

In a nutshell, political parties are critical to India's democratic governance. They act as vital bridges

1 B. Chandra, "India's Struggle for Independence" *Penguin Books India Pv*t. Limited, 2000.

2 Kohli, A, "Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005: Part I: The 1980s" *Economic and Political Weekly 1251-1259,* 2016.

3 Alf Gunvald Nilsen & Kenneth Bo Nilsen, " Indian Democracy: Origins, Trajectories, Contestations." *Pluto Press,* 2019.

4 Yogendra Yadav. "Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989-99." *Economic and Political Weekly, 34(44/45), 3179-3188.,* 1999

between citizens and the government, ensuring representation, policy articulation, and the smooth operation of democratic institutions. They also contribute to consolidating and strengthening India's democratic system by engaging citizens, developing policies, and participating in the country's overall governance.

Shifts in Political Alignments: Changing Dynamics and Party Alliances

Shifts in political alignments, the rise and fall of dominant parties, and the emergence of regional and ideological parties have characterised the evolution of party systems in India. The party system has undergone significant changes, reflecting the political landscape and the country's diverse social, linguistic, and regional identities.

The *Indian National Congress (INC)* led by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and later her daughter, Indira Gandhi dominated India's early party system and was instrumental in the country's independence movement and subsequent governance. The INC evolved from its inception as a platform for nationalist mobilisation into a mass-based party with a broad ideological spectrum that accommodated diverse viewpoints and interests.[5] Opposition parties such as the Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) gained some support but could not dethrone the Congress. However, the Congress Party's dominance began to erode in the 1960s and 1970s due to various factors, including internal factionalism, growing dissatisfaction with governance, and new political forces.

The Naxalite movement gained traction, led by Maoist-inspired revolutionaries, particularly in West Bengal and other rural areas. Student movements and labour strikes also grew, expressing discontent with the government's handling of social and economic issues. Indira Gandhi's popularity within the Congress Party dwindled due to disagreements over her leadership style and policies. In 1969, the "Syndicate," a faction within the Congress, challenged her leadership and sought to limit her powers. In response, Indira Gandhi on 13th November 1969 split from the Congress party and founded

the "New Congress" or "Congress (Requisitionists)", however later the Congress factions merged.[6]

During that phase, India witnessed significant political developments, including the imposition of a state of emergency from 1975 to 1977. Fundamental rights were restricted during this time, political opponents were imprisoned, and dissent was suppressed. The Emergency also saw a significant state power expansion, with authority centralised in the Prime Minister's Office. The declaration of an emergency sparked widespread protests and opposition from various political parties, civil society organisations, and individuals. Opposition parties, including the Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) and the Communist Party of India (CPI), formed alliances and organised anti-Emergency movements. Key figures in the anti-Emergency movement included prominent political leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai.[7]

Following the end of the Emergency, Indira Gandhi called for general elections in 1977. Indira Gandhi called general elections in 1977 (a watershed moment in Indian politics), despite mounting public pressure and organized opposition which resulted in the Janata Party coalition led by Morarji Desai taking power. It was the country's first non-Congress government. As regional and ideological parties gained prominence, this event signalled a shift towards a more competitive multi-party system. However, internal disputes within the Janata Party led to its fragmentation, and Indira Gandhi's Congress (R) was able to reclaim political ground. In March 1977, the Emergency was officially lifted, restoring civil liberties and democratic processes and Indira Gandhi and the Congress (R) merged with the original Indian National Congress in 1978, ending the split and reuniting the party.[8]

Overall, the political evolution of India from 1970 to 1977 was marked by rising opposition movements, a schism within the Congress party, the imposition of the Emergency, and subsequent resistance that led to the downfall of Indira Gandhi's government—the

5 P.R. Brass, "Factional politics in an Indian state: the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh." *Berkley University of California Press,* 1965.

6 P. Sood, "The Re-emergence of Indira Gandhi: India's Great Age Begins Anew" *New Delhi: S. Chand,* 1981.

7 R. Guha, "India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy" *New York: Ecco,* 2007.

8 S. Bose, "Transforming India: Challenges to the World's Largest Democracy," *Harvard University Press,* 2017.

period played an important role in shaping India's political landscape and reinforcing the importance of democratic values and institutions.

Also, the *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),* a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of the BJP as a significant political force challenged the dominance of the Congress Party and introduced new dynamics to the party system. It established itself as an alternative to Congress and grew its support nationwide. Regional parties rose to prominence simultaneously, particularly in states with distinct linguistic and cultural identities. These parties, such as *Tamil Nadu's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Andhra Pradesh's Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and West Bengal's Trinamool Congress (TMC),* have emerged as influential regional players, advocating for state-specific issues and representing regional aspirations.

The evolution of India's party system has resulted in a complex and diverse political landscape populated by a mix of national, regional, and ideological parties. The design reflects the country's diverse social, cultural, and linguistic identities, allowing diverse interests and perspectives to be represented in the democratic process.

Role of Political Parties in the Election Process

Political parties are essential in the Indian electoral process, serving as the primary vehicles for electoral mobilisation, campaign strategies, and political representation.

Candidate Nomination

Political parties are responsible for selecting and nominating candidates to run for office. They assess potential candidates based on their qualifications, popularity, and loyalty to their party. When finalising their candidate lists, parties consider factors such as regional representation, social diversity, and electoral viability.

In 2019[9], SC ordered that the Criminal antecedents of candidates that form part of disclosures in the nomination form must also include the details of pending FIRs and further issued directions for

9 Public Interest Foundation and Ors., v. Union of India and Anr., (2019) 3 SCC 224

ensuring that due publicity is given to these details in print and electronic media by candidates and political parties which field such candidates.

Campaigning

Political parties develop campaign strategies, create manifestos, and communicate their policy. platforms to voters. Parties use various methods to mobilise public support and persuade voters to vote for their candidates, including public rallies, door-to-door campaigns, media advertisements, and social media outreach.

Party Identification

Political parties provide voters with a framework for identifying and aligning themselves with specific political ideologies or policy positions. Parties assist voters in making informed decisions by presenting their distinct platforms, emphasising their accomplishments, and projecting their vision for governance. Voter behaviour and electoral outcomes are heavily influenced by party identification.

Voter Mobilisation

Political parties mobilize and energise their supporters to vote. They hold voter registration drives, organise rallies and public meetings, and deploy ground-level volunteers to encourage their supporters to vote. On election day, parties also use their cadres and workers to mobilise voters.

Election Monitoring and Management

Political parties send party agents to polling places to observe the voting process, protect their candidates' interests, and report any irregularities. Parties also conduct post-election analysis, scrutinising the results and contesting the consequences if they suspect electoral fraud.

Government Formation

The electoral performance of political parties determines their chances of forming governments. Parties with a majority of seats or pre-election alliances may form a government at the national or state level. The executive power is assumed by the party or coalition that includes the government and is responsible for governance and policymaking.

Candidate Selection and Nomination Strategies

Candidate selection and nomination strategies are critical components of the electoral process,

and political parties in India use various methods to identify and nominate candidates. Regional dynamics, caste, community considerations, electoral calculations, and the party's overall objectives influence these strategies.

Regional Representation

Political parties frequently prioritise regional representation when selecting candidates. They intend to field candidates with a solid connection to the local community and can effectively address voters' regional concerns and aspirations. This strategy assists parties in developing a strong regional base and appealing to voters' sense of identity and regional pride.[10]

Social and Caste Considerations

Caste and community considerations are essential in candidate selection. Parties may choose candidates from specific castes or communities to gain support from those groups. This strategy aims to mobilise caste-based voting blocs by leveraging social identities. Parties frequently use caste arithmetic to form broad-based alliances by balancing caste equations.

Electoral Viability

When making nomination decisions, parties consider the electoral viability of potential candidates. Factors such as the candidate's popularity, previous electoral performance, and ability to garner votes from diverse segments of society are considered. Parties assess a candidate's electoral prospects by looking at their public image, political track record, and communication skills.

Party Loyalty and Internal Dynamics

When selecting candidates, political parties prioritise loyalty to the party. They prefer candidates who have shown allegiance to the party's ideology and have a long history with the party. Internal party dynamics, such as factionalism and power struggles, also have an impact on candidate selection.

Marginalised Groups Representation

Parties may prioritise representation for marginalised groups such as women, scheduled castes, scheduled

tribes, and backward classes. Reservation policies, and efforts to increase inclusivity and diversity within party ranks, can have an impact on candidate selection. Parties strive to portray themselves as inclusive and representative of the general public.

These nomination strategies differ between parties and regions, reflecting India's diverse socio-political landscape. To balance regional representation, social factors, electoral viability, and party loyalty, parties frequently employ a combination of these strategies.

Party Campaigning Techniques and Communication Strategies

During elections, political parties in India use various campaigning techniques and communication strategies to reach out to voters, convey their messages, and mobilise support. These strategies have evolved in response to changes in the political landscape as well as advances in technology and media.

Mass Rallies and Public Meetings

Traditional campaigning techniques used by political parties to connect with large audiences include mass rallies and public meetings. Parties hold these events to demonstrate their strength, generate enthusiasm among supporters, and deliver speeches about their party's vision, policy agenda, and accomplishments. These gatherings provide platforms for party leaders to connect with voters directly and generate momentum.

Door-to-door campaigning

It entails party workers visiting individual households to engage voters directly. This strategy enables parties to interact personally, comprehend voters' concerns and priorities, and establish a personal connection. Candidates and party workers hold conversations, distribute campaign materials, and solicit grassroots support.

Media Ads

Parties use a variety of media platforms to disseminate their campaign messages, including television, radio, print, and online channels. They create advertisements, audio-visual content, and promotional materials to reach a larger audience. Media advertisements highlight the party's

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10 P.K. Chhibber, & I. Nooruddin, "Do Parties Matter for Economic Outcomes? A Study of Political Parties, Elections, and Economic Performance in India." *American Political Science Review, 98(03), 445-461.*

accomplishments, policy promises, and criticisms of opponents. They intend to sway public opinion and shape voter perceptions.

Social Media Outreach

Political parties have embraced digital campaigning techniques as social media platforms have become popular. They engage voters, share campaign updates, and mobilise support through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Parties form dedicated social media teams, launch online campaigns, and work with influencers to broaden their reach and connect with younger and more tech-savvy voters.

Grassroots Mobilisation

Parties use grassroots mobilisation techniques to get their party cadres, volunteers, and supporters involved. They hold training sessions, organise workshops, and coordinate ground-level activities to maximize voter outreach. Grassroots mobilisation entails voter registration drives, local event planning, and mobilising supporters for campaign activities.

Election Manifestos

Political parties create manifestos outlining their policy proposals, vision, and voter commitments. Manifestos communicate the party's priorities, development plans, and promises. They are distributed to the public and serve as the foundation for the party's campaign narrative, emphasising its governance agenda.

Political parties use these campaigning techniques and communication strategies to engage voters, effectively communicate their messages, and mobilise support. The party's resources, target audience, regional dynamics, and technological advancements influence the selection and combination of these strategies.

Voter Mobilization and Party Machinery

Voter mobilisation is an essential aspect of political campaigns in India, and political parties rely on their party machinery to mobilise voters and maximise turnout during elections. The party machinery comprises a network of party workers, volunteers, and supporters responsible for reaching out to voters, encouraging them to vote, and ensuring their support for the party's candidates.

Party Workers at the Ground Level

Political parties have dedicated party workers who serve as the backbone of the party machinery. These workers are assigned to specific constituencies or regions and are in charge of mobilising voters. They campaign door-to-door, organise public meetings, distribute campaign materials, and provide information about the party's candidates and policies.

Booth-level Agents

Parties appoint booth-level agents to manage the party's interests at each polling station. These agents are stationed at polling places to monitor the voting process, ensure the presence of party supporters, and report any irregularities or issues that arise. They are vital in mobilising voters and protecting the party's interests during the election.

Voter Registration Drives

Political parties hold voter registration drives to increase the number of eligible voters and broaden their support base. They organise voter registration drives, outreach programmes, and awareness campaigns to encourage eligible citizens to register to vote. Parties use party workers and volunteers to help document and ensure that potential supporters are included on voter rolls.

Election Campaign Events

Political parties hold various campaign events to mobilise voters and generate enthusiasm among their supporters. These events can range from large-scale rallies attended by party leaders to small-scale meetings and interactions on a local level. Parties use their party machinery to ensure these events are effectively organised and executed, attracting supporters and creating a favourable environment for their candidates.[11]

GOTV Efforts

GOTV[12] efforts are critical for parties to mobilise

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11 M. Vaishnav, "When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics" , *Yale University Press,* 2017.

12 GOTV is an acronym for "get out the vote" or increasing voter turnout in an election. It involves various activities and initiatives to increase voter turnout, including voter registration drives, canvassing, phone banking, digital outreach, and providing logistical support to ensure individuals have the necessary resources and

their supporters and ensure a high voter turnout on election day. Parties use party machinery to remind voters of the election date, encourage them to vote, and, if necessary, provide transportation or logistical support. They use volunteers and party workers to contact voters and emphasise the importance of voting.

Information Dissemination

Party machinery plays a role in informing voters. This includes information about the party's candidates, including their qualifications, policy positions, and campaign promises. Parties use a variety of communication channels, including door-to-door visits, phone calls, text messages, and social media platforms, to keep voters informed about the party's agenda and the importance of their vote.[13]

The effectiveness of the party machinery in mobilising voters can significantly impact electoral outcomes and the overall success of political campaigns. Political parties invest resources, time, and effort in building and maintaining a robust party machinery to maximize voter mobilization and support for their candidates.

Registration of Political Parties

The process of registering political parties holds immense significance in India's electoral system as it upholds the integrity and effectiveness of democracy. The laws governing party registration in India primarily consist of the Representation of the People Act of 1951 and the regulations formulated by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The specific provisions concerning the registration of political parties are outlined in Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, along with

the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order of 1968.

Party registration is critical because it establishes political entities' legal recognition and legitimacy, ensuring that they meet specific criteria and follow legal requirements. This recognition gives voters and stakeholders confidence and allows parties to actively participate in the electoral process, exercise their rights, and fulfil their obligations.

The Political entities meet specific criteria and adhere to legal requirements, from establishing legitimacy and legal recognition to enabling participation in the electoral process, creating a framework for effective regulation and oversight by the Election Commission of India, promoting transparency in campaign finance, and granting registered parties access to benefits and privileges. Party registration, in essence, serves as a fundamental pillar of the democratic process, instilling trust among stakeholders and facilitating fair competition in the electoral arena.

The Madras High Court emphasised in the *Sadiq Ali case*[14] that registering a political party is essential for a political entity to participate in the democratic process. The court highlighted the significance of complying with the legal prerequisites for voter registration as it guarantees equitable and open elections while preventing potential misuse of the electoral system.

Eligibility Criteria for Party Registration

Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, outlines the eligibility criteria for party registration in India. These criteria specify political parties' requirements to be registered with the Election Commission. The following are the primary eligibility criteria:

Membership

A political party seeking registration must have a certain number of registered voters as members. The ECI has established guidelines for national and state parties regarding minimum membership requirements. National parties, for example, must have a minimum of 100 members, whereas state parties must have 25 members.

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information to exercise their right to vote. The primary objective of "get out the vote" campaigns is to engage and motivate potential voters, especially those who may be less likely to participate in elections, such as young voters, minority communities, or individuals who have historically faced barriers to voting. These campaigns seek to overcome apathy, increase awareness of the importance of voting, and empower citizens to exercise their democratic rights.

13 P. Chhibber & K. Kollman, "The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States", *Princeton University Press*, 2004.

14 Sadiq Ali v. Election Commission of India, (1972) 2 SCR 318, (AIR 1972 SC 187).

Office and Office-bearers

Each political party must have an office and office-bearers in at least one state. This requirement ensures that the party has a physical presence and an organisational structure.

Constitution

A written constitution outlining the party's goals, objectives, rules, and organisational structure is required. The party's democratic principles and functioning should be reflected in the constitution.

Discrimination

The constitution and activities of the party should not advocate or promote discrimination based on religion, race, caste, gender, or language. This requirement ensures that political parties adhere to equality and non-discrimination principles.

Financial Transparency

The party must submit audited financial statements and information about its financial sources and expenditures. This requirement promotes transparency in the financial operations of the party and aids in preventing the influence of illicit funds in the political system.

However, it is always open for the ECI to revise these eligibility criteria regularly to address emerging challenges and ensure the integrity of the registration process. The ECI may issue guidelines and notifications specifying the eligibility criteria and requirements for party registration from time to time.

The registration process aims to ensure that political parties meet specific standards of legitimacy, organisational structure, and adherence to democratic principles by establishing these eligibility criteria. These criteria contribute to the integrity of the political party system and ensure fair competition in the electoral process among registered parties.

Application Process for Party Registration

The application process for party registration in India involves several steps and requirements. To begin with, the political party applying must meet the eligibility criteria specified by the Election Commission, including being a voluntary association of individuals who are citizens of India, having a

political objective, and is committed to the principles of *democracy, socialism, secularism, and the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India*, and fulfil the other requirements as mentioned earlier.

The next step in the process is the preparation of a Memorandum. The document should contain essential information about the party, such as its name, address, objectives, and rules and regulations governing its internal functioning. The Memorandum should also outline the party's constitution and structure, leadership positions, and decision-making processes. It also should contain the specific provision[15] that *"the party shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India and the principles of Socialism, secularism and democracy, and would uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India"*.

Once the Memorandum is ready, the applying party submits application[16] for party registration to the Election Commission of India. The application must be filed in the prescribed format within 30 days next following the formation of the political party[17] and accompanied by the necessary documents and fees. The Election Commission provides the application form and guidelines on its official website for the convenience of applicants.

The application made for registration of a body or association to the ECI must contain the following as per the Sub-Section (4) of Section 21A of the Act, namely-

i.   the name of the party;
ii.   the State in which its head office is situated;
iii. the address to which letters and other communications meant for it should be sent;
iv.   the name of the President, Secretary, treasurer and other office-bearers;
v.   the numerical strength of its members, and if there are categories of its members, the numerical strength in each category;
vi.   whether it has any local limits; if so; at what levels;
vii. whether it is represented by any member(s) in either House of Parliament or any State Legislature; if so, the number of such member(s).

Upon receiving the application, the Election

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15 Sub-section (5) of Section 21A of the Representation of People Act, 1951
16 Section 29A (1) of the Representation of People Act 1951
17 Section 29A (2)(b) of the Representation of People Act 1951

Commission verifies the completeness and accuracy of the information provided. A thorough scrutiny of the application is conducted to ensure that the applying party meets the eligibility criteria and fulfils all requirements. The Commission can call for any other particulars as it may deem fit after a thorough examination of the application as mentioned under Sub-section (6) of the Act.

After the initial verification and scrutiny, the Election Commission publishes the application details in the official Gazette and invites objections from the public, if any. It allows individuals or parties to raise concerns or provide information related to the applying party's eligibility, compliance with the law, or any other relevant matters. The ECI carefully evaluates whether the party applying for registration satisfies all legal requirements and adheres to the principles and objectives mentioned in the application.

After considering all relevant factors and providing a fair opportunity for the political party's representatives to present their case, the Election Commission decides whether to approve the party's registration. Once a decision is reached based on the application and any objections received, the Election Commission of India informs the concerned party of its decision, which is considered final.

If the Election Commission is satisfied with the party's eligibility and compliance with the requirements, it grants registration to the party. The ECI then officially registers the party and assigns a unique party symbol, which plays a crucial role in identifying the party during elections. Once a body or association is registered as a political party, any changes in its name, head office, office bearers, address, or other significant matters must be promptly communicated to the Election Commission.

Role of the Election Commission of India in the Registration of a Political Party

The Election Commission of India (ECI), as the constitutional authority entrusted with the responsibility of conducting elections in India, assumes a pivotal role in the registration process of political parties. The ECI serves as the guardian of the electoral process, ensuring that political parties comply with the laws and regulations established by the authorities. Its primary function is to uphold the integrity and fairness of elections by overseeing and regulating the conduct of political parties.

When a body or association seeks registration as a political party, it must submit an application to the ECI along with the required documentation and fulfil specific criteria. The ECI carefully reviews the application and examines the documents provided to determine whether the applying political party meets the eligibility criteria and complies with the prescribed guidelines.

The ECI's role in the registration process includes scrutinizing the submitted documents for authenticity, accuracy, and compliance with the legal requirements. The Commission verifies the party's adherence to the Constitutional principles. It also examines the party's constitution, objectives, and internal organizational structure to ascertain its commitment to democratic principles and internal democracy. The Commission assesses the party's potential for political participation and its ability to contribute to the democratic governance of the country.

If the ECI is satisfied with the organization's eligibility and compliance, it grants registration to the political party. Upon registration, the party becomes eligible to contest elections, use an exclusive party symbol, and avail of certain benefits and privileges as provided by the law.

However, ECI also reserves the authority to de-register or de-recognize a political party under certain circumstances, such as non-compliance with the legal requirements, violation of the party's constitution, or engaging in unlawful activities. The ECI has the power to review and revoke the registration of a political party if it finds sufficient grounds for such action.

In conclusion, the Election Commission of India plays a significant role in the registration of political parties. It ensures that the registration process is conducted in a fair, transparent, and accountable manner. By scrutinizing the documentation, assessing compliance with legal requirements, and evaluating the organization's commitment to democratic principles, the ECI plays a vital role in maintaining the integrity and democratic

functioning of political parties in India.

Benefits and Privileges of Registered Political Parties

Registered political parties in India enjoy several benefits and privileges that are provided by law. These benefits and privileges are aimed at facilitating the functioning of political parties and promoting democratic participation. Some of the key benefits and privileges of registered political parties in India include:

Election Symbol

Registered political parties are allotted a unique election symbol by the Election Commission of India (ECI). This symbol serves as an important tool for recognition and identification during elections. It helps voters easily identify and associate with a particular party.

Contesting Elections

Registered parties possess the right to contest elections at various levels, including parliamentary, assembly, and local elections. They can field candidates and participate in the electoral process. Without party registration, an organization cannot officially participate in the electoral process as a political party.

Party Funding

Registered political parties in India have the eligibility to receive financial contributions from various sources, including individuals, corporations, and other legal entities. They can raise funds for party activities, election campaigns, and organizational expenses. These funds are subject to certain regulations and reporting requirements to ensure transparency and accountability.

State Funding

Political parties that meet specific criteria are eligible to receive state funding. The state provides financial assistance to parties based on their performance in the previous elections. This funding aims to support parties' democratic functioning and reduce the influence of unaccounted money in politics.

Access to Media

Registered political parties are granted access to state-owned media platforms, such as Doordarshan and All India Radio, for campaigning and conveying their message to the public. This ensures equal opportunities for parties to reach voters and disseminate their political agenda.

Election Expenses

Registered political parties are allowed to incur certain election-related expenses, such as campaign rallies, advertisements, and promotional materials, within the prescribed limits set by the ECI. These expenses are subject to scrutiny and disclosure requirements to ensure transparency and accountability in the electoral process.

Party Representation

Registered political parties can nominate their representatives to various election-related bodies, such as the ECI, State Election Commissions, and Election Tribunal. This allows parties to have a say in the decision-making processes related to elections and electoral reforms.

Privileges in the Legislature

Registered political parties that have elected representatives enjoy certain privileges in the legislature, such as the right to speak, vote, and participate in debates and discussions. They have a role in shaping legislation and policies through their elected members.

It is important to note that while registered political parties enjoy these benefits and privileges, they are also subject to certain obligations and responsibilities. They are required to adhere to the code of conduct during elections, follow financial reporting requirements, and maintain transparency in their functioning.

Deregistration of Political Parties

The Representation of the People Act of 1951 was amended in 1988 to include Section 29A, which introduced the definition of political parties and the registration process. Previously, political parties were registered under the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order of 1968. However, the Act does not contain any provisions in Part-IV-A for the de-registration of political parties. There is no specific mechanism outlined in the Representation of the People Act, 1951, for the process of de-registering a political party.

The decision not to grant the Election Commission of India the power to de-register political parties may have been a deliberate choice by the Parliament. This decision aligns with the Constitutional requirement for the Election Commission to function independently and ensure the conduct of free and fair elections. Allowing the Commission to investigate non-compliance with registration conditions could potentially involve the Commission in politically sensitive matters and necessitate monitoring of political activities, programs, and ideologies of political parties[18], which might pose challenges to its impartiality and independence.

In 2016, Dr Nasim Zaidi, the Chief Election Commissioner at that time, put forward 47 proposals for electoral reforms. These proposals aimed to address various issues, such as decriminalizing politics, preventing the abuse of money, promoting transparency in political party funding, making bribery a cognizable offence, criminalizing paid news, and empowering the Election Commission of India (ECI) to countermand elections in cases of bribery and abuse, similar to the countermanding process for booth capturing.[19] Among these reforms, one of the recommendations made by Dr Nasim Zaidi was the de-registration of political parties[20]. It is worth noting that this was not the first time such a recommendation had been made. In 1998, the Election Commission had previously sent proposals to the government, urging amendments to the law to grant the Commission the authority to de-register parties. Similar proposals were also submitted in 2004.

Nevertheless, despite various recommendations and proposals, the law regarding the de-registration of political parties has not been amended. The closest attempt to amend the law occurred in 1994 with the introduction of the Representation of the People (Second Amendment) Bill in Parliament. However, the bill failed to pass and did not become an Act. The proposed bill outlined a mechanism where a complaint could be filed with the High Court having jurisdiction over the main office of a political party. This complaint could lead to the cancellation of a party's registration if it was found to bear a religious name, if its memorandum or rules no longer conformed to the provisions of the Act, or if its activities deviated from the prescribed memorandum or rules[21].

In 2014, the Supreme Court of India requested the Law Commission to assess whether the Election Commission should be empowered to de-recognize political parties[22]. Subsequently, in 2017, the Madras High Court urged the central government to promptly address the Election Commission's 1998 recommendation to amend the Representation of the People Act. The proposed amendment would grant the Election Commission the authority to de-register political parties that violate the Constitution of India[23]. These calls for action highlight the need for legislative measures to empower the Election Commission in dealing with political parties that engage in activities contradicting the principles of the Indian Constitution.

Despite these recommendations to grant the Election Commission the power to de-register political parties, no legislative action has been taken. This lack of power raises concerns about the control over political parties that engage in communal and divisive politics, as well as those registered solely to derive tax benefits provided to political parties under the Income Tax Act of 1961.

It is important to note that the process of deregistration must comply with the principles of natural justice, allowing the concerned political party an opportunity to present its case and be heard. The decision to deregister a political party

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18 Indian National Congress (I) Vs. Institute of Social Welfare (2002) 5 SCC 685.

19 MG Devasahayam, "What is in a Name?" *India Legal,* 2 June 2019, https://www.indialegallive.com/viewpoint/de-registration-of-political-parties-what-is-in-a-name/ Accessed on 3 July 2023

20 Dr. Nasim Zaidi, "Press Information Bureau: Need for undertaking a comprehensive review of the Representation of the People Act," *Press Information Bureau,* 3rd December 2016 https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=154854 Accessed on 3 July 2023

21 Supra note 29.

22 Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan Vs. Union of India (2014) 11 SCC 477

23 "Can EC deregister political parties? Madras HC asks the Centre to take a call." *Times of India* 05 September 2017, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/can-ec-deregister-political-parties-madras-hc-asks-centre-to-take-a-call/articleshow/60368745.cms Accessed on 3 July 2023.

can be challenged before the appropriate court, to ensure the legality and fairness of the decision.

Grounds for Deregistration

Grounds for the deregistration of political parties in India can vary based on legal provisions and case law. The Election Commission has the authority to deregister a party under certain circumstances, ensuring that parties adhere to democratic principles and legal requirements.

The Supreme Court has provided certain exceptions to the lack of power to de-register a political party. It has held that the Election Commission can review its order registering a political party in three situations:

a. when a political party obtained its registration through fraud, under subsection (9) of Section 29A, or

b. on grounds where no inquiry is required, such as when the political party is declared unlawful by the Central Government under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967,

c. or similar laws[24].

Hence, if a political party lacks faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India or fails to uphold the principles of socialism, secularism, and democracy, or compromises the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India as outlined in Section 29A(5), the Election Commission has the authority to revoke the registration of that party. This provision allows the Commission to take appropriate action when the fundamental basis for a party's registration is undermined or violated.

Moreover, engaging in activities that are against the interests of the nation or undermine the sovereignty and integrity of India[25] can lead to deregistration. It may include advocating violence, promoting secessionist ideologies, or supporting terrorism.

Nevertheless, the Election Commission's incidental power cannot be expanded to cover situations where a registered political party explicitly affirms its commitment to the Constitution and the principles of socialism, secularism, and democracy,

24 Indian National Congress (I) Vs. Institute of Social Welfare (2002) 5 SCC 685.

25 Kerala Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samiti v. State of Kerala, AIR 2000 Ker 389

but faces challenges from certain individuals who question this affirmation and demand an inquiry by the Commission. This is because the incidental power of a statutory authority cannot serve as a substitute for a specific and explicit power of review. In such cases, the Commission's authority is limited to the scope and provisions defined by law, and it cannot undertake inquiries or actions beyond those explicitly granted to it.

It is important to note that the grounds for deregistration must be established through a fair and transparent process. The ECI is responsible for examining the evidence and conducting necessary inquiries before taking any action. The decision to deregister a party can be challenged before the appropriate court, ensuring that the principles of natural justice are followed.

Legal Challenges and Appeals

When a political party receives a notice of deregistration from the Election Commission of India (ECI) and believes that it has been unjustly targeted or that the decision is based on incorrect or insufficient grounds, it has the right to challenge the decision through various legal avenues.

The Indian judiciary plays a crucial role in ensuring the legality and fairness of the ECI's decisions regarding the registration and deregistration of political parties. Judicial review allows the courts to examine the actions of administrative bodies, such as the ECI, to ensure that they adhere to the principles of natural justice, reasonableness, and constitutional validity.

The authority for judicial review of the Election Commission's decision to deregister a political party derives from the provisions of Article 226 and Article 32 of the Indian Constitution. Article 226 confers upon the High Courts the jurisdiction to issue writs, such as writs of certiorari, mandamus, and prohibition, to enforce fundamental rights and other legal rights. Similarly, Article 32 grants the Supreme Court the power to issue writs for the protection and enforcement of fundamental rights. These Constitutional provisions empower the judiciary to review the decisions and actions of the Election Commission, including the deregistration of political parties, to ensure that they are in accordance with

the law and do not violate fundamental rights.

In the case of *Indian National Congress (I) v. Institute of Social Welfare & Ors.[26]*, the Supreme Court held that the ECI's decision to deregister a political party must be supported by cogent reasons and must be based on the relevant material. The court stated that the decision must be fair, reasonable, and by the principles of natural justice.

The court examines the facts and circumstances surrounding the decision, assesses the adherence to due process, and evaluates whether the grounds for deregistration are justified based on the relevant legal provisions. The court also considers whether the Election Commission has followed the principles of natural justice, including providing a fair opportunity for the party to present its case and respond to the allegations. It examines the legality of the decision, the interpretation of the law by the Election Commission, and whether the decision is proportionate to the alleged violations committed by the party.

The court's decision may uphold the deregistration, quash the decision and reinstate the party's registration, or direct the Election Commission to reconsider its decision based on specific grounds. The court's ruling is binding and provides clarity on the legality of the deregistration process in that particular case. In *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India[27]*, the SC emphasized the importance of a fair and transparent process for deregistration, highlighting that the decision should not be arbitrary or politically motivated. The court stressed the need for the Election Commission to provide sufficient opportunity for the party to present its case and respond to the allegations.

The judiciary also ensures that the ECI's decision-making process is fair and transparent. In *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms[28]*, the SC directed the ECI to formulate guidelines and norms for the registration and deregistration of political parties to ensure transparency and prevent arbitrary decision-making.

Another significant case is *Sadiq Ali and Anr. v. Election Commission of India[29]*, where the Supreme

Court upheld the power of the Election Commission to deregister a political party for engaging in activities that promote violence or communal disharmony, thereby emphasizing the importance of maintaining the integrity of the democratic process.

In conclusion, political parties have the right to challenge the decision of deregistration through legal channels, primarily through a writ petition in the High Court or the Supreme Court. The court's role is to review the decision, assess its legality and validity, and ensure that the principles of natural justice have been followed throughout the process. These legal challenges play a crucial role in upholding the rights of political parties and maintaining the fairness and integrity of the deregistration process.

Implications and Consequences of Deregistration

When a political party is deregistered, it loses its legal recognition and the privileges associated with registered political parties. The implications and consequences of deregistration include:

Loss of Electoral Rights

A deregistered political party loses its eligibility to contest elections. Section 29A of the 1951 Act states that only registered political parties can contest elections and nominate candidates. Therefore, deregistration prevents the party from participating in the democratic electoral process and seeking political representation.

Loss of Party Symbol

Deregistered parties also lose the exclusive right to use their party symbol during elections. The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, of 1968, grants registered political parties the right to a specific symbol for their candidates. Deregistration strips the party of this right, potentially weakening its identity and visibility among voters.

Financial Implications

Registered political parties in India are entitled to certain financial benefits, including tax exemptions, access to election funds, and state funding for campaigning. Deregistered parties lose these financial privileges, which can severely impact their financial resources and ability to sustain their political activities.

26 (2002) 5 SCC 685
27 (AIR 2006 SC 3127)
28 (2002) 5 SCC 294
29 (AIR 1972 SC 1873)

Loss of Recognition and Influence

Deregistration diminishes the party's visibility and recognition in the political arena. Parties without legal recognition often struggle to garner public support and mobilize resources. They may lose their ability to shape public discourse, engage in policy debates, and influence government decision-making.

Impact on Party Members and Supporters

Deregistration affects the party's members, supporters, and affiliated organizations. Party members may lose their positions and roles within the party structure, and supporters may become disillusioned or disengaged from the political process. Deregistration can disrupt the social and political networks associated with the party, potentially leading to fragmentation or the emergence of new political alignments.

In the case of *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India*[30], the Court held that deregistration can have severe consequences for political parties, and therefore, the decision should not be arbitrary or politically motivated. It also emphasized the importance of a fair and transparent process, ensuring that parties are given a reasonable opportunity to present their case before deregistration is enforced.

Challenges Faced by Political Parties in India

In India, political parties face various challenges that affect their functioning, electoral prospects, and overall democratic governance. The complex socio-political landscape, regional diversity, changing voter preferences, and institutional constraints all contribute to these challenges. Understanding and addressing these issues is critical for parties to remain relevant and effective in the Indian political landscape.

One such reason is "Regional Fragmentation". Due to India's regional diversity, political parties face significant challenges. The country is distinguished by a variety of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identities, which has resulted in regional parties that prioritise specific regional issues and cater to localised interests. National parties frequently struggle to establish a strong presence and electoral traction in every region, necessitating alliances and coalition politics.[31]

Also, Caste-based politics remain a significant issue in India. Parties are frequently tasked with managing caste equations and balancing competing caste interests. The caste-based mobilisation has the potential to splinter the electorate and create social divisions. Parties must navigate these complexities while promoting a broader development agenda that transcends caste considerations.[32]

Political corruption and criminalization pose severe challenges to Indian political parties. Corruption scandals involving politicians erode public trust and tarnish political parties' reputations. The interplay of money, muscle power, and politics threatens the democratic fabric. Parties must address these concerns by encouraging internal transparency, accountability, and ethical standards among their constituents.

Political parties also face recurring challenges from voter dissatisfaction and anti-incumbency sentiments. Dissatisfaction with incumbent governments' performance and disillusionment with political elites can lead to voter volatility and electoral swings. Parties must respond to voters' changing aspirations and expectations continuously, demonstrate good governance, and communicate their accomplishments and plans.

Further, the prevalence of dynastic politics, in which political power is concentrated within specific families, challenges Indian political parties. Political legacies and the concentration of power in a few families can stymie internal party democracy and the rise of new leaders. Parties must promote internal meritocracy, encourage the emergence of grassroots leaders, and cultivate an inclusive and accountable culture.

The absence of Internal Democracy is yet another challenge for the Indian political parties. Many of them struggle with internal democracy,

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30 (AIR 2006 SC 3127)

31 K. Chandra, "Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India, "*Cambridge University Press*, 2004, https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/14522/sample/9780521814522ws.pdf Accessed on 3 July 2023.

32 C. Jaffrelot, "Religion, Caste, and Politics in India", *Primus Books,* 2014.

with decision-making processes that are frequently centralised and opaque. The concentration of power in the hands of a few leaders can stifle dissent, impede the rise of new talent, and limit party members' participation. To ensure inclusivity and broader representation, parties must promote internal democracy, intra-party elections, and mechanisms for more comprehensive consultation.

Addressing these challenges requires political parties to collaborate on introspection, structural reforms, and adapting to changing societal dynamics. By addressing these issues, parties can improve their credibility, responsiveness, and ability to serve as effective democratic representation vehicles in India.

Internal Party Dynamics and Factionalism

Internal party dynamics and factionalism are significant challenges for Indian political parties. The existence of competing groups or factions within a party, often motivated by personal ambitions, ideological differences, or disagreements over leadership and policy matters, is called factionalism. Factional strife can lead to party divisions, infighting, and party unity and effectiveness deterioration. Due to this, intense leadership battles and power struggles may arise between various factions.

Conflicts can arise due to competing ambitions, divergent visions for the party, or disagreements over leadership succession. Leadership battles can erode party cohesion and shift attention away from broader party goals and towards individual or factional interests. Different factions may advocate for policy positions, strategic approaches, and ideological orientations. These ideological schisms can cause factional conflicts, internal divisions, and difficulties in developing a cohesive party agenda. Political parties face a constant challenge in resolving ideological differences while maintaining party unity.[33]

Patronage networks can also contribute to factionalism by distributing favours, resources, and positions within a party. Competing factions may vie for control of the party's resources and the patronage

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33 P. Chhibber & A., "Verma Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India", *Oxford University Press,* 2014.

system, resulting in bitter rivalries. Patronage-driven factionalism can undermine meritocracy, impede party discipline, and erode public trust in the party.

Regional and caste-based factions frequently emerge within political parties in a diverse country like India. These factions represent specific regional or caste interests and compete for party influence and power. Parties face challenges in managing regional and caste-based coalitions while maintaining a broader national appeal, as they must balance local representation and a cohesive national agenda.

Factionalism can have an impact on electoral strategies and campaign coordination. Competing factions may run parallel campaigns, resulting in a lack of coordination and potential vote splitting. Discord among factions can also erode the party's appeal to voters, influencing election outcomes. To maximise their electoral prospects, parties must manage internal divisions and ensure effective coordination.

Addressing internal party dynamics and factionalism necessitates strong party structures, dispute-resolution mechanisms, and transparent decision-making processes. Internal democracy, inclusive representation, and fostering an open dialogue culture can all help to reduce factional conflicts and strengthen party cohesion.

Financing of Political Parties and Electoral Expenditure

Political parties must have adequate funding to carry out their activities, effectively campaign, and participate in democratic governance. However, financing political parties and regulating electoral expenditure poses significant challenges to maintaining transparency and accountability and preventing money power from influencing politics.

Political parties in India receive funding from various sources, including individual donations, corporate contributions, and party members. However, a lack of comprehensive regulations and loopholes in the existing legal framework can create opportunities for illicit or undisclosed funding, raising concerns about vested interests' influence on the political process. Campaigning, rallies, advertisements, and other promotional activities cost huge expenditures in India. It can

create an uneven playing field and give parties with more financial resources an advantage, potentially marginalising smaller or less well-funded parties. To cover these costs, political parties must raise funds.

Moreover, the Party's funding transparency is critical for ensuring accountability and preventing corruption. The opacity surrounding party financing in India, on the other hand, poses a challenge. Disclosure requirements, auditing mechanisms, and public reporting of party funding and expenditure are often inadequate, making it difficult for citizens to assess the financial backing of political parties.

Using unaccounted or "black" money in political funding is a persistent issue. Black money is unreported or untaxed funds frequently used to fund political campaigns. The infusion of black money can undermine the integrity of the political process, distort electoral outcomes, and jeopardise elected representatives' accountability. In India, laws such as the Act of 1951, and the IT Act of 1961 govern party financing and electoral expenditure. However, the effectiveness of these regulations is debatable. Addressing the challenges associated with party financing requires strengthening the regulatory framework, improving enforcement mechanisms, and establishing an independent and transparent oversight body.

The Emergence of Regional and Identity-based Parties

The emergence of regional and identity-based parties is a significant change in India's political landscape. These parties represent the hopes, interests, and identities of specific regions or social groups, posing unique challenges to national-level political parties and changing the dynamics of Indian politics. Regional parties have risen to prominence in India by championing the interests of specific states or regions. They deal with local issues, regional development, and regional autonomy. The rise of regional parties has challenged national parties' dominance, necessitating the formation of alliances and coalitions to secure a broader political base.

Identity-based political parties have emerged to mobilize support along religious, linguistic, ethnic, or caste lines. These parties seek to represent specific identities while also advancing their socio-political

interests. It can lead to identity fragmentation and politicisation, potentially influencing electoral outcomes and policy priorities. These parties often tap into regional imbalances, cultural preservation, linguistic rights, or social justice grievances. The deepening of regional and sub-national cleavages can impact national unity and pose challenges to the governance and integration of diverse regions.

The rise of regional and identity-based parties has necessitated the formation of national coalitions and alliances. National parties should frequently work with regional parties to gain a parliamentary majority or form stable governments. Coalition politics can result in complex power-sharing arrangements, policy compromises, and decision-making challenges.

Further, Regional and identity-based parties elevate specific regional or identity-related issues to the top of the political agenda. These groups influence policymakers by requesting that regional or identity-based demands be met. Such parties' presence can shape policy priorities, creating a more decentralised and diverse policy landscape.

Conclusion

The intricate landscape of political parties and elections in India underscores the dynamic nature of its democracy. From their historical roots in the independence movement to their current roles, political parties continue to be pivotal in shaping governance and political discourse. The Election Commission of India plays a crucial role in ensuring fair and transparent elections and maintaining the integrity of the democratic process.

The registration and deregistration of political parties involve rigorous scrutiny to ensure compliance with legal and democratic principles. Registered parties enjoy numerous benefits, such as access to unique symbols, state funding, and media platforms, which enhance their operational capabilities and public reach. However, deregistration can significantly impact a party's electoral prospects, financial resources, and influence.

The evolving party system, characterized by shifts in political alignments and the emergence of regional and ideological parties, reflects India's

diverse social, linguistic, and regional identities. Major political shifts, such as the rise and fall of dominant parties and significant events like the Emergency, have profoundly influenced the political landscape.

Challenges such as factionalism, regionalism, and identity politics continue to test the resilience and adaptability of political parties. Despite these challenges, political parties remain central to India's democracy, facilitating political participation, representing diverse interests, and contributing to governance and policy-making.

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