

## Regional Parties and India Politics: An Analysis

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### Abstract

India, with its diverse cultures, languages, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds, has a multifaceted political landscape. The federal structure of the Indian state, as stated in the Constitution, promotes the emergence of regional political dynamics that often intersect with national politics. Indian regional politics is characterised by its diversity, complexity, and dynamism. Regional parties, which represent the interests of individual states or linguistic regions, play an important role in determining governance and national politics. Many regional parties play important roles in Indian politics, representing the aspirations and interests of individual states or linguistic regions. Regional parties consistently assume pivotal positions in national coalition governments, utilising their support to exert influence over policy decisions at the central level. In addition, they advocate for state-specific matters, influencing policy agendas at both the state and national levels. National political parties frequently form alliances with regional parties in order to secure electoral benefits, resulting in the formation of composite political realignments. Hence, this study seeks to analyse the responsible factors behind the emergence of regional political parties in India. Furthermore, it emphasises the significance of regional parties in the realm of electoral politics, both at the national and state levels.

**Keywords:** Diversity, Elections, Regional parties, National and State Politics.

### INTRODUCTION

In India, a regional party is a political organisation that focuses its activities and operations on a certain region or state of the country, rather than on a national scale. There are many regional parties that focus on issues specific to that region and cater to the interests and aspirations of the people within it (Burki, 1990). They are typically formed to address the concerns and represent the aspirations of a specific state or region. They often advocate for policies that are tailored to the needs of that particular area, such as issues related to language, culture, identity, and regional development (Hazary, 1991). They can vary significantly in their ideologies, political agendas, and levels of influence. While national parties operate across the entire country and contest elections in multiple states, regional parties predominantly focus on elections within their respective states. Their political influence and power base are usually limited to that particular region (Brancati, 2008).

### CAUSES FOR THE EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL PARTIES

The emergence of regional parties in India can be attributed to several factors, reflecting the diverse socio-cultural, economic, and political landscape of the country. Some of the key causes include:

1. **Linguistic and Cultural Diversity:** India is a nation characterised by extensive linguistic and cultural diversity. Various geographical areas possess distinct linguistic, cultural, and customary practices. Individuals frequently exhibit a strong sense of attachment to their regional identities, resulting in the emergence of political parties that specifically cater to these distinct linguistic and cultural communities (Pai, 1990).
2. **Local Issues and Governance:** Regional parties prioritise local concerns that may not be sufficiently addressed by national parties. They prioritise issues such as regional development, linguistic rights, water resources, and infrastructural development (Meena, 2006).
3. **Historical Context:** Many regional parties have their roots in historical movements or regional leaders who played significant roles in their respective regions. For example, parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu or the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh emerged from movements advocating for linguistic and cultural rights (Burki, 1990).
4. **Anti-Incumbency Sentiment:** The formation of regional parties can often be ascribed to the sentiment of opposition towards national parties due to their incumbency (Kumar, 1991). Voters dissatisfied with the performance of national parties may choose for regional alternatives, viewing them as more capable of addressing local issues and concerns.
5. **Federalism and State Autonomy:** The federal structure of India provides states with significant autonomy to states in various policy domains. Regional parties support increased state autonomy and have a vital role in preserving the balance of power in a federal system (Sattar, 2011).
6. **Identity Politics:** Regional parties often leverage regional identities and cultural pride to mobilize support. This identity-based appeal can be potent in regions with strong cultural identities and historical grievances (Pai, 1990).
7. **Local Leadership:** Regional parties are often led by charismatic local leaders who have a deep understanding of regional issues and can connect with voters on a personal level. These leaders can build strong grassroots support bases, which are crucial for the success of regional parties (Meena, 2006).
8. **Regional Socio-Economic Disparities:** Economic disparities between various regions of India have also contributed to the rise of regional parties. Certain regions may feel neglected or marginalized in terms of development and resource allocation by the central government. Regional parties often emerge to address these grievances and advocate for the interests of their respective regions (Hazary, 1991).

9. **Federal Structure of Government:** India has a federal system of government where power is divided between the central and state governments. Regional parties often gain prominence in states where they can assert their influence over state-level politics, leveraging the decentralized nature of the Indian political system (Kumar, 1991).
10. **Identity Politics:** Identity-based politics, including caste, religion, and ethnicity, plays a significant role in Indian elections. Regional parties often mobilize support by appealing to specific caste or religious groups within their respective regions, promising to protect their interests and rights (Sattar, 2011).
11. **Fragmentation of National Parties:** Internal divisions within national political parties can sometimes result in the formation of regional political parties. When national political parties do not sufficiently address the varied regional concerns, dissatisfied factions may separate and establish their own regional organisations (Pal, 2008).

## **MAJOR REGIONAL PARTIES IN ELECTORAL POLITICS**

### **a) The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)**

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) emerged as a social movement in 1949, led by Arignar Annadurai, with the goal of developing language and ethnic consciousness. However, the party entered politics in 1957 and quickly became recognised for its opposition to the Congress-dominated national and state governments' attempts to impose Hindi and other policies. These protests eventually helped the DMK beat the Congress and gain power in 1967, with C.N. Annadurai becoming Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. During his term, he realised the Tamil people's long-standing demand that the state be renamed Tamil Nadu to represent their cultural identity and sentiments. Following C.N. Annadurai's death in 1969, K. K. K. Karunanidhi became Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister and served five terms (Kumar, 1991). He set a record by winning all 13 assembly elections up until 2016. Due to his worsening health, the DMK General Assembly convened in 2018, and M.K. Stalin was elected as the party's president. He is currently the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, championing the Dravidian movement's objectives of social justice and progress above all else. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the party won 18 seats. It won 24 seats in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019.

### **b) The All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)**

The All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) is a notable political party in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Established in 1972 by M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), the party has exerted a substantial influence on the electoral landscape of Tamil Nadu for numerous decades. The party adhered to the principle of forming an electoral alliance with a national party and became victorious in the assembly election of 1977. In the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, it secured twelve seats. However, this did not result in political insignificance for the DMK. The balance of power continuously shifted between the two Tamil parties. Following the demise of MGR in 1988, the AIADMK also encountered divisions. The DMK, under the leadership of Karunanidhi, emerged victorious in the 1989 assembly elections. The consolidation of AIADMK factions under the leadership of Jayalalithaa and a coalition with the Congress Party resulted in its victory in the 1991 assembly election, leading to its return to

power (Kumar, 1991). In the 1996 election, the DMK emerged victorious. Despite the numerous corruption charges against Jayalalithaa, her party emerged victorious in the 2001 state assembly election (Sattar, 2011). It secured only one seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

### **c) The Shiromani Akali Dal**

The Akali Dal, also known as the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), is a notable political party in India, specifically in the state of Punjab. The party is a Sikh-centric state political party in Punjab, India, with a center-right ideology. Founded in 1920, the party is the second-oldest in India, following the Congress party. The formation of the present-day Punjab occurred in 1966. The Akali Dal assumed control of the newly formed Punjab in March 1967 (Kumar, 1991). However, the early governments were short-lived as a result of internal disagreements and power battles within the party. Subsequently, the political party gained more power and party-led administrations successfully served their entire tenure (Sattar, 2011). The party known as "Shiromani Akali Dal" and led by Sukhbir Singh Badal is the one officially recognised by the Election Commission of India, notwithstanding the existence of other parties using the name Akali Dal. The party has a Punjabi agenda that is characterised by moderation. On September 26, 2020, they withdrew from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) due to their opposition to the farm bills. It secured 4 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, it secured two seats.

### **d) The National Conference**

The Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) is a local political party in the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, which are under the administration of India. The All-Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference was established in 1932 by Sheikh Abdullah and Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1939, the group changed its name to "National Conference" to better encompass all the residents of the state. The JKNC has traditionally held significant political sway in the region of Jammu & Kashmir (Kumar, 1991). From 1947 to 2002, and then again from 2009 to 2015, the National Conference held power in Jammu and Kashmir in various capacities. In the 2014 general election, the NC participated in the election as part of an alliance with the Indian National Congress, but they were unsuccessful in winning any seats.

### **e) The Telugu Desam Party**

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) is a prominent political party in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Established on March 29, 1982 by N. T. Rama Rao (NTR), a former actor who later became a politician, this party has played a prominent role in the politics of the region for many years. The party has achieved a majority five times in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and has become the most successful political organisation in the state's history. Presently, it holds the status of the primary opposition party in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly (Sattar, 2011). In the 1984 Indian General Elections, the TDP emerged as the second largest party, securing 30 seats and 4.31% of the votes. This made it the first regional party to become a national opposition party (Kumar, 1991). Nevertheless, in the subsequent election, they were diminished to a mere two seats out of the 42 seats that were

contested. This outcome has persisted as the party's most substantial setback to date. In the 2019 Lok Sabha, it secured a mere 3 seats.

#### **f) The Asom Gana Parishad**

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) originated as a political movement in 1985. The primary objective was to safeguard and advance the interests of the inhabitants of Assam. Subsequently, it underwent a transformation into a political party. The party was officially inaugurated at the Golaghat Convention, which took place from 13–14 October 1985 in Golaghat. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the head of the party, held the position of Chief Minister of Assam for two consecutive terms. His first term was from 1985 to 1990, followed by his second term from 1996 to 2001. The party achieved a significant victory in the 2016 Legislative Assembly Elections by securing 14 out of 126 seats, marking a historic milestone for the party. It exercises power in conjunction with the Bodoland People's Front and Bharatiya Janata Party (Sattar, 2011). Presently, it is a constituent of the North-East Regional Political Front, which comprises political parties from the north-eastern region that have endorsed the National Democratic Alliance (India).

#### **CHANGING TREND OF REGIONAL POLITICS: DECLINING FACTORS**

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards the nationalisation of politics in India (Sattar). Voters tend to prioritise national parties because they believe that national parties can effectively address larger issues, which generally take precedence over regional concerns (Buwa, 2011). Also, when new political actors and parties arise, the political landscape becomes increasingly fractured (Brancati, 2008). The availability of more choices, especially national parties with strong organisational structures and resources, might diminish the impact of regional parties on voters (Meena, 2006). Although regional parties frequently exert considerable influence in national-level coalition governments, they encounter difficulties in preserving their distinct character and policy objectives within larger coalitions (Pal, 2008). This could result in concerns that may not always coincide with the preferences of their local backing. Regional parties face challenges pertaining to the transfer of leadership, internal divisions, and shortcomings in governance within their own territories (Kumar, 1991). Inadequate governance or instances of corruption gradually diminish the confidence and backing of the public, so affecting their electoral success at both local and national levels (Hazary, 1991). Major political parties possess superior resources and media exposure, which allows them to efficiently spread their message throughout many regions. This phenomenon reduces the prominence of regional political parties and pose challenges for their ability to effectively compete at the national level (Burki, 1990). Electoral dynamics are in a constant state of change, as voters are growing more and more concerned with concerns like development, economic growth, and national security. Regional parties that fail to adjust to these evolving agendas struggle to maintain their relevance in national politics (Pai, 1990).

#### **CONCLUSION**

The rise of regional parties in India is a multifaceted occurrence shaped by a blend of historical, socio-economic, cultural, and political elements, reflecting the country's diversity and the aspirations of its diverse population. Regional parties in Indian politics have a crucial function

of expressing the varied regional interests and aspirations within the country's federal system. They contribute to the pluralistic nature of Indian democracy and often wield considerable influence, especially in states where they have a strong electoral presence. Understanding these dynamics is essential for grasping the intricacies of Indian democracy and its federal structure. In the national political landscape of India, regional parties often form alliances with larger national parties to maximize their influence and electoral prospects. These coalitions can either be formed before elections, known as pre-electoral alliances, or after elections, known as post-electoral alliances. Their purpose is to establish coalition governments at either the state or national level. Currently, regional parties are experiencing a decrease in their influence on the national stage. Nevertheless, their impact on state-level political politics is quite powerful in numerous states.

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