

DIFFERENT PHASES OF PARTY SYSTEM IN INDIA

The party system in India evolved in different phases from the dominance of single party, the Congress to multiplication of several parties. The following section discusses different phases of the system:

Congress Dominance Era (One-party Dominance vs. Multiple Parties)

As you have read in unit 1, various political parties had emerged before independence. After Independence, except a brief period of the Janata Party rule

(1977-1980), it was the Indian National Congress (INC) that remained one of

the most popular all India level parties in the first half of the twentieth century.

According to Rajni Kothari the concept of One-party dominance explained India's

party system during the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, he described the Congress party

as 'Congress System'. As the leading party, the Congress had obtained an absolute

majority of seats in parliament in the first four general elections. Congress party

enjoyed this position till 1967. The Congress was such a dominant force that it

secured comfortable majorities in almost all the elections to the Lok Sabha

and the State Assemblies in 1952, 1957 and 1962. Though it never secured more

than 48 per cent of the votes in the Lok Sabha elections (the highest being 47.78

in 1957), it always secured comfortable majorities in terms of seats (364 seats in

1952, 371 seats in 1957 and 361 in 1962). In the state assemblies, except for a

few, it secured comfortable majorities almost in all the assembly elections. First

three general elections saw Congress domination in the system that was marked

by multiparty system vs one dominant party in the country. This trend had changed

after the fourth General election, Nehru's demise and split in the party had affected

the Congress dominance in party system. Even though the Congress was the

single dominant party at the centre and in most states, it faced competition from the non-Congress parties in several states. There are several instances of it. The

strongest opposition it came from the CPI in Kerala in the second general election

held in 1957. During the 1960s, the socialist parties, BKD/BLD/LD, left parties,

the Jana Sangha, Republican Party of India, DK, and several other parties in

different states posed a challenge to the dominance of the Congress as a single

party system. They mobilized people on social, economic and political issues.

This resulted in the defeat of the Congress in eight states and formation of the

non-Congress government. With this, ended the dominance of the Congress which

it had enjoyed at the same time both at the centre and in most states. However, it

did not result in complete erosion in the support base of the party. The Congress

continued to enjoy support in several states and at the centre on several occasions.

But it ceased to be a single dominant party after the 1960s.