

POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Political parties and democracy are closely related. This relationship is reflected

in various indicators of democracy: people's participation in decision-making,

their political mobilization, generating political consciousness among them, articulation of their issues and providing a vision to meet their needs.

Peoples

participate in decision-making process of the government through political parties.

And political parties do so by fielding candidates in elections. Thus, political parties and the candidates fielded by them become channel through which people

participate in decision-making process. These candidates represent people as

members of Parliament or the state legislature. Political parties are practical devices which enable peoples' participation in decision-making. It is not possible

for everybody to directly participate in elections because of large number of population. They do so indirectly by electing candidates in elections who are

given tickets by political parties. Apart from the candidates from political parties,

people can even elect their representatives the candidates who do not belong to

political parties. Such candidates are known as independent candidates. But

political parties are more common and effective devices to represent people than

the independent candidates. Political parties also play democratic role in mobilizing people into movement. In a democracy, the opposition parties are

expected to critique the policies and functioning of the government. Elected members from different parties, along with the independent candidates, participate

in the legislative bodies, contribute to strengthening democracy. The policies framed by a government are result of debate among people's representatives generally fielded by political parties. The parties also contribute to generating democratic consciousness among people. They make people aware of their ideologies and vision about the welfare of the people. Studies show that since the 1990s multiple parties have fielded candidates in elections from various segments of society including marginalised communities such as Dalits, OBCs, women, etc. According to Jaffrelot and Sanjay Kumar the increasing participation of people in election shows the rise of "plebeians". Ashutosh Varshney opines that India is becoming more democratic. Similarly, Yogendra Yadav has argued that there has been democratic upsurge in India. These observations are about democratisation through electoral politics. Since political parties are the main players in electoral politics, it can be said that political parties and party systems have strengthened democracy in India. The situation in the past three decades has been different from what that of the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, parties' contribution to democracy was limited in the sense that the elected leaders generally belonged to the elite sections of the society, and patron-client relationship played a decisive role in mobilization of the voters. Changes in the party systems, their multiplication and rise of parties espousing the cause of

Dalits, OBCs, and growth of consciousness among the people have strengthened democracy during the past few decades.