



Political Parties  
in South Asia:  
The Challenge of Change

**South Asia Regional Report**  
**Based on research and dialogue**  
**with political parties**



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## **South Asia Regional Report** **Based on research and dialogue** **with political parties**

Lead Author:

K. C. Suri  
Nagarjuna University India

International IDEA Research and Dialogue Coordination:

Roger Hällhag  
Head of the Political Parties Programme

Sakuntala Kadirgamar-Rajasingham  
Head of the South Asia Programme

Maja Tjernström  
Programme Officer, Political Parties Programme

James Gomez  
Programme Officer, Political Parties Programme

### **About this report**

Political parties are indispensable for making democracy work and deliver. Finding the proper conditions for the better internal functioning and effective legal regulation of political parties is of key importance anywhere.

This report is the result of worldwide research and dialogue with political parties. Together with national and regional research partners, International IDEA is improving insight and comparative knowledge. The purpose is to provide for constructive public debate and reform actions helping political parties to develop.

For more about the Political Parties programme, please visit <http://www.idea.int/parties>.

## **Political Parties in South Asia: The Challenge of Change**

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# Foreword

In modern democracies people choose their representatives through periodic elections. Political parties are the only agencies through which people can choose their representatives. Therefore, they are indispensable institutions for democratic politics. However, parties and party systems have undergone a great transformation over the past 50 years. There has been a decline of mass-based parties in the industrial democracies of the West. Often parties are challenged in a variety of ways. Key among them are the changing nature of social relations, the availability of alternative sources of communication and interaction through new technologies such as the Internet and electronic media, and new channels of participation in public affairs through new social movements, civil society organizations or single-issue interest groups; and the growth of a middle class is also making people less reliant on political parties to secure their interests. Although we do not see such a decline of public engagement with parties in the developing countries, we do find parties everywhere facing new challenges in the changed international and domestic environment of the 21st century.

An important aspect of parties and party politics widely reported by scholars and the media is the low level of trust in political parties. It is a paradoxical situation that people feel that parties are essential for the functioning of democracy, but they do not trust such parties to make democracy work. High levels of support for democratic forms of government, coupled with the inability of parties to live up to the promises they make, may explain why more and more citizens are critical towards political parties. There is also a pervasive feeling that parties are dominated by their leaders whose only commitment is to become office-holders, only to secure power and wealth for themselves. This has contributed to growing anti-party sentiments in recent years. If this dissatisfaction with, or alienation from, parties persists, it risks leading to a drift away from democracy. There will be a greater erosion of trust in democracy as citizens judge the democratic process not by what it promises but by its performance. To a large measure this depends on how parties function and deliver on effective democratic governance.

The key question, therefore, is how the parties can cope with these new challenges, recover people's confidence and reorient themselves to contemporary requirements. For this, parties have to become more responsive to the needs of the people while also providing leadership. It is necessary for the health of democracy that more citizens identify and be engaged with political parties, and that people of integrity are willing to join parties and party politics. It is necessary to strengthen and devise




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institutional arrangements by which parties become more internally democratic and more representative. They should be able to legitimately raise the resources necessary to function and to meet election expenses. Parties should also develop the capacity to handle new demands made upon them, particularly to accommodate diverse social groups such as women, minorities and the disadvantaged social groups in their fold.

The focus of this report is on political parties in South Asia. It probes what is happening in the political party domain in South Asia by exploring the following questions: How are parties in the region doing in elections, conducting themselves in public office as well as in opposition, and functioning as organizations in the region? What can the party leaders, public institutions and civil society do to make parties more robust, so that they play an effective role in democratic representation? How are political parties responding to the challenges of change?

South Asia comprises one-fifth of the world's population and is today the largest democratic region of the world, albeit with some variants, with vestiges of military rule and monarchy still prevailing. The region has been the theatre for some of the biggest struggles for democratic development in contemporary times and has contributed to the global understanding of how democracy interfaces with diversity and development, and is challenged to be the vehicle for delivering social justice. Parties of the region have played an active role in decolonization and freedom struggles, in the post-colonial transitions and their attendant social revolutions, marrying democracy with development and social justice.

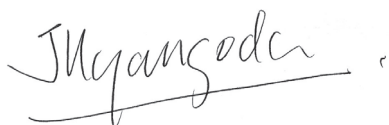
However, this process has not always been progressive and straightforward. Neither has the path been smooth nor uniform across all the countries of the region. From a time when politics and government were seen as a means to serve society and achieve development, parties have now come to be seen more as the vehicle for amassing power and wealth for leaders, by methods both fair and foul. Criminality and corruption among party leaders have increased. Parties are becoming excessively leader-centric and they revolve around the personality of the supreme leader. Populist agendas with short horizons and an obsession with power characterize many parties. Leaders are incapable of, or unwilling to, institutionalize parties. They fail to establish procedures to select party leaders or candidates to stand in general elections, to resolve intra-party differences through debate and discussion, and to increase the participation of members in party activities and the decision-making process. Parties are challenged in their ability to survive beyond the lifespan of the founder leader without invoking or recruiting family members to keep the party alive. Parties are beset with factionalism and internal leadership struggles have often led to splits and desertions. There has been an increasing tendency of intolerance towards dissent. Democratic participation has also included mobilization along ethnic and religious lines, heightening the prospects of sectarian and other conflicts. We find all these problems uniformly present in all



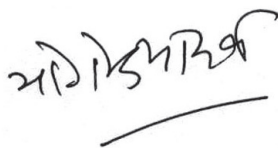
the countries of the South Asian region. They may be more serious in some parties and less so in others. Nevertheless they prevail and even appear as a pattern. Many responsible citizens and social activists complain about this, while many party leaders privately and sometimes even publicly admit it.

The party system in Europe went through its own messy processes of formation and consolidation over a period of centuries, while political parties in South Asia have had to cover much of that ground in 50 years, and that too in a radically different socio-economic context. In today's context popular expectations and demands are high and vociferously articulated. However, despite the challenges and uneven performance, parties in South Asia have something to offer to the world, through their capacities to mobilize people, to devise new forms of interest aggregation and representation, and to ensure that political engagement is a central and live issue to millions of people.

This report is perhaps the first attempt to put together empirical findings on political parties from all the major countries of South Asia. It makes a significant contribution to our understanding of political parties in South Asia, and the author is to be congratulated for his presentation of complex and voluminous material. Its significance lies in that it provides due attention to all the countries in the region under study and presents the overall context in which parties operate. It discusses different aspects of the party systems taking shape in the region, deals with the legal provisions that regulate the conduct of parties and sheds light on the internal management of parties. It addresses the challenges of politics as experienced by the key political actors themselves—that is, the political parties—and concludes with practical recommendations for reforms in the party domain. Yet this report is not just a policy-driven document; its description and recommendations are held together by a carefully thought-through underpinning theoretical framework. We therefore think that this report will be useful to the party leaders, and other political and social actors working for political reforms in South Asia, as well as to researchers and students interested in the study of democracy not only in South Asia, but globally too.



Jayadev Uyngoda  
Director, Social Science Association  
Professor of Political Science  
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka



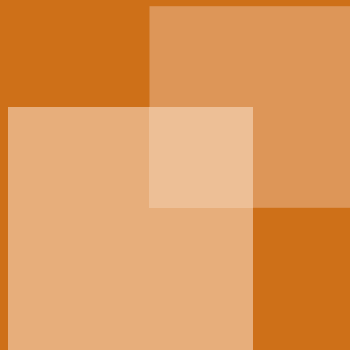
Yogendra Yadav  
Senior Fellow  
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies  
Delhi, India





# **Chapter 1**

## **Methodology**





# Chapter 1

## 1. Methodology

By building systematic, comparative knowledge on political parties, International IDEA aims to explore the possibility of strengthening the institutional arrangements that make parties more effective players in the political system. Although parties are part of our daily discussion, there is little systematic knowledge of how they are regulated and how they function internally in different countries. We know very little about the operational problems they face and seldom think of the challenges they face in the present and in future. The objective of this research project is to contribute to an environment that is conducive to the development of political parties, and thereby to contribute to democracy.

Research on parties so far has not led to the construction of any single ideal type of political party and it may not be possible to do so. So the attempt is not to work out a universally ideal model of a political party, but to examine and collate information on the extraordinary variety of parties that function in different political systems of the world. The results of the study may help parties identify and exchange good practices and learn from one another.

The Programme of Research and Dialogue on Political Parties undertaken by IDEA is being carried out in more than 75 countries. In South Asia, this study was conducted in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Altogether 49 major parties in these countries have been covered for this study (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Political parties researched**

Name of party	Abbreviation
<b>Bangladesh</b>	
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	BNP
Bangladesh Awami League	BAL
Communist Party of Bangladesh	CPB
Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh	JIB
<b>India</b>	
All India Anna DMK	ADMK
Asom Gana Parishad	AGP
Biju Janata Dal	BJD
Bharatiya Janata Party	BJP
Bahujan Samaj Party	BSP
Communist Party of India	CPI
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	CPI(M)
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	DMK
All India Forward Bloc	FB
Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad	GGP
Indian National Congress	INC
Indian National Lok Dal	INLD
Janata Dal (Secular)	JD(S)
Janata Dal (U)	JD(U)
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	JMM
Kerala Congress (Mani)	KEC
Lok Jan Shakti Party	LJSP
Mizo National Front	MNF
Muslim League	MUL
National Conference	NC
Nationalist Congress Party	NCP
People's Democratic Party	PDP
Pattali Makkal Katchi	PMK
Rashtriya Janata Dal	RJD
Revolutionary Socialist Party	RSP
Shiromani Akali Dal	SAD
Shiv Sena	SHS
Samajwadi Party	SP

Name of party	Abbreviation
<b>India cont'd</b>	
All India Trinamool Congress	TC
Telugu Desam Party	TDP
Telangana Rashtra Samiti	TRS
United Goans Democratic Party	UGDP
<b>Nepal</b>	
Communist Party of Nepal – United Marxist and Leninist	CPN-UML
Nepali Congress	NC
Nepali Congress (Democratic)	NC(D)
Rashtriya Prajatantra Party	RPP
<b>Pakistan</b>	
Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan	JIP
Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam	JUI
Muttahida Qaumi Movement	MQM
Pakistan Muslim League (Q)	PML-Q
Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)	PML-N
Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary	PPP-P
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	
Sri Lanka Freedom Party	SLFP
United National Party	UNP
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	SLMC

The study consisted of three questionnaires. The first was about the socio-political and economic environment in which the parties function and about how free or restricted the parties are in carrying out their political and electoral activities in the respective countries. The second questionnaire dealt with the legal provisions that regulate parties. These include the founding of parties, their registration and internal functioning, the rules and regulations for contesting elections, the conduct of election campaigns and the agencies that monitor the conduct of parties. This was done mainly by desk research. Sources of information on the country context and external regulations included constitutions, legislative acts and orders passed by the executive branch; rules, regulations, codes and orders of the election commissions; and judgements of the highest courts in the respective countries. Official statistical reports, reports of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the *Freedom House Index*, the United National Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report*, and Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index*, among other sources, were used for relevant information. For Sri Lanka, the

reports of election monitors such as the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence and the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Survey (KAPS) on the Sri Lankan Peace Process were used. For India, the Data Unit of the Lokniti-CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) provided information on elections.

More crucial for the study was the third questionnaire. This pertains to the organizational structures of the parties and the way in which the parties actually function. Information was collected through face-to-face interviews with the leaders of various parties. In most cases, five leaders from each party were interviewed. Each interview took at least one hour and some required longer. Sometimes it required more than one sitting with a leader. In choosing the leaders for interviews, care was taken to interview at least one of the top party leaders, a people's representative in legislative bodies, preferably at the national level, a woman leader and a youth leader. Additionally, attempts have been made in India to interview a leader coming from a socially disadvantaged group or religious minority. Wherever the treasurer of a party was available, he or she was interviewed. Thus, the account of the internal functioning of parties is primarily based on the information and responses of the party leaders. What is attempted is to develop a self-portrait of parties as presented by party leaders themselves.

Before conducting interviews with individual leaders, the parties were informed about the research project and provided with a copy of information that gave an overview of the research. Leaders were met by making prior appointments. Most of the party leaders were cooperative and willing to spare time. Busy as they were with several other pressing matters, some leaders were not able to spend sufficient time to discuss the questions in depth and some also found that the questionnaire was taking more time than they were willing to give (two or three interview sessions were required for some leaders). Some were reticent and unwilling to respond in detail to some questions with which they felt uncomfortable, such as those concerning the election of leaders within the party, and descriptions of internal party structures and the selection of candidates. For some questions, such as those concerning party income, funding and election campaign expenditure, it was not possible to elicit sufficient and accurate information either because the leaders do not have full knowledge or because they were reluctant to speak about them.

The work began with pre-testing of the questionnaire in Sri Lanka. Afterwards, a three-day workshop on the methodology to be adopted for this programme and to discuss in detail the questionnaire on parties' organizational structures and functioning was held in Colombo in July 2004. Later it was discussed at the meeting of the Lokniti researchers at Bangalore in October 2004. While retaining the global format of the questionnaire, some country-specific questions were included in the questionnaires



for Bangladesh and India. The database on parties that will be developed as part of this research will be of help to those who would like to take a closer look at the working of the parties around the world.

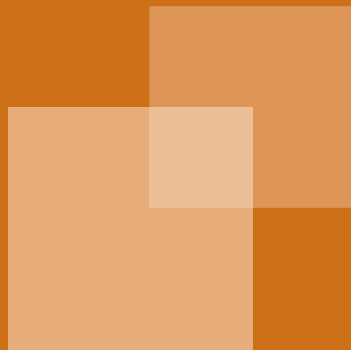
Based on the two questionnaires relating to the country context and the external regulations and environment, as well as the interviews with party leaders, separate Country Reports were prepared for all the five countries. As a sequel to this exercise, the first multi-country Dialogue Workshop was held in Colombo in April 2005 with the participation of party leaders from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The party leaders from Nepal could not attend the Dialogue as they were denied permission to leave the country. Dialogue Workshops on political parties were held in India in December 2005 (Hyderabad), February 2006 (Delhi) and June 2006 (Guwahati); in Nepal in March 2006 (Kathmandu); in Pakistan in April 2006 (Islamabad); and in Bangladesh in October 2006 (Dhaka). The Country Reports were circulated among the participants in all the Dialogue Workshops. Besides party leaders, the Dialogues included academics, representatives of civil society organizations and leading personalities from the media and public life. The Dialogues provided an opportunity for the party leaders to tell others the difficulties and challenges they face and for the public and intellectuals to tell the party leaders how they view parties and how they think the problems in the party domain could be tackled.

The information gathered from political parties during the interviews with the leaders and the discussions at the Dialogue Workshops are the major source for the preparation of this report. This report is the first in a series of regional reports that IDEA will be publishing. When all the regional reports come out, we hope to arrive at some meaningful conclusions on the state of political parties in different parts of the world, the problems and challenges they face in the 21st century and the measures to address them.

A decorative graphic in the top-left corner consisting of three overlapping squares in shades of orange and light beige.

# Chapter 2

## The Context





## Chapter 2

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### 2. The Context

Parties in democratic political systems all over the world perform similar functions, but the way in which the parties perform these functions differs from region to region and even from country to country. This variation may be largely owing to differences in the environment in which the parties function: differences in historical legacies, cultural practices, social relations, economic conditions and political processes. Political parties are open systems amenable to environmental influences more than any other type of organization because they deal with people on a daily basis. Parties are like mirror images of the larger society and represent in the political arena the strengths and weaknesses of the societies in which they operate. The external environment partly explains the differences between the party systems and party types in different countries, and also why parties and party leaders function the way they do. Three major aspects of the context are discussed in this chapter: the socio-political and economic environment, the electoral system and the levels of confidence people of the region have in political parties.

#### ***2.1 Socio-political and economic environment***

South Asia is a region consisting of several religions, languages and cultures. Muslims constitute a majority in Pakistan and Bangladesh while Hindus are in a majority in India and Nepal. Buddhists are a majority in Sri Lanka. Three-quarters or more of the people in each of these countries belong to a specific major religion but the minorities are numerically large and politically significant in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. As religious diversities are coupled with linguistic diversities, these societies are even more complex. Eleven of the top 30 languages spoken in the world are spoken in South Asia. Only Bangladesh is linguistically homogeneous. India has several well-developed languages, such as Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Oriya and Assamese, in addition to Bengali and Punjabi, which cut across national boundaries, as Bengali is the most commonly spoken language in Bangladesh and Punjabi is a major language of Pakistan. Most of India's provinces are organized on the basis of linguistic principle. In Pakistan, a majority speaks a language different from the official language, Urdu. Further, the ethnic diversities in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are enormous (see Table 2.1A).

When religion, region, language and ethnicity,<sup>1</sup> and caste in the case of India, are combined, the situation becomes much more complex. Often these identities overlap or cut across each other. This overlap has been the major source of the emergence and thriving of several parties in recent decades, as they are based on one or a mix of these identities—religion, caste, tribe, region and language. The introduction of democratic politics in the region has given a new orientation to these religious, linguistic, regional, caste or ethnic identities. It has activated them, brought them into the political arena and resulted in some instances in conflict situations. The region has witnessed religious extremism and the political mobilization of people on the basis of appeals to religious identities, which are sometimes combined with ethnicity and nationalism, as in the case of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The ways in which religious ideologies and ethnic identities manifest themselves in the region may differ from country to country. As religious identities are strongly rooted among the people and can be exploited for political ends, parties and rulers feed on them. Pakistan has been made an Islamic republic and in Bangladesh Islam has been declared the official religion. The influence of parties exclusively based on religious ideology has been growing in the region. That is why it is often pointed out that the parties in South Asia appeal to these identities to augment electoral prospects, and thereby exacerbate the pre-existing social divisions. But the activation of the pre-existing social identities by political parties does not necessarily mean their accentuation or reinforcement and a widening of the cleavages; nor does it represent political decay. On the contrary, it can be argued that this process has led to the modification and reconciliation of the old identities through competition and negotiation, and their secular integration into the larger politics, and has positively contributed to the task of nation building and broadening the base of democracy in the countries of the region.<sup>2</sup>

All the countries in the region are primarily agrarian and rural societies, in the sense that about three-quarters of their populations live in rural areas. Feudal land relations are still strong in some parts. The proportion of the labour force occupied in agriculture is high in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. One important source of tension in these societies is the drastic decline of income from agriculture over the years. Two-thirds or more of the people who make a living from agriculture survive on one-fifth of the national income. Rural and urban incomes are highly disproportional. While the industrial democracies of the West have passed through different development

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<sup>1</sup> The words 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' are used in this report mostly to denote identities which in the region are termed 'tribal'.

<sup>2</sup> James Manor (1996) has argued that these identities can be a source by which democracy is augmented under certain conditions or they might lead to democratic institutions being torn apart. In India, for example, people tend to have identities that cut across each other. People do not fix on any one of these identities fiercely and permanently. As a result tensions do not become concentrated along a single fault-line in society and do not produce prolonged and intractable conflict. Where identities, such as ethnicity, religion and language, reinforce each other they tend to develop bitter long-drawn-out conflicts, as in the case of Sri Lanka.

stages, from agriculture to manufacturing and then to services, the countries in South Asia derive much of their income today from services, without having passed through the developmental stage of manufacturing and large-scale movement of people away from agriculture to manufacturing owing to the constraints in the national and global economy. The result has been the degradation of agriculture and the stunted growth of manufacturing.

It is surprising that democracy in the region has been sustained despite the low level of economic development. It contravenes some of the theories that democracy is possible and sustainable only in prosperous and industrialized nations. It is true that democracy in the region is interspersed by authoritarian interludes and is shaky in some countries at times. As a caveat to this exceptionalism, it may also be noted that, while democratic politics has been sustained on the whole, the low level of development has placed a tremendous strain on the polity and parties in the region and has even impaired them. More than a quarter of the population in the region lives below the poverty line. The literacy rates are low for all the countries, except Sri Lanka. All countries rank very low on human development indices. But the expectations of people have grown as a result of democratic politics over the years. Parties of the region, like those in other developing countries, face the challenge of achieving economic development under adverse conditions but within a democratic framework. The demands on parties in the region are therefore severe and beyond their capability. Parties in some countries have not been able to handle the situation. The economic degradation, continuation of feudal relations, lack of employment in agriculture and industry, low national and per capita incomes, and widespread poverty have an adverse impact upon the party political domain, giving rise to populism, authoritarian leadership styles, the fragmentation of parties and the emergence of ethnic- and religion-based parties.

The countries of the region import more than they export. They borrow and spend more than they earn. As a result, the indebtedness of these nations is high (see Table 2.1B). Some of them are heavily dependent on external aid and borrowing. International monetary agencies and global market forces therefore exercise considerable influence on their domestic policies. Several regimes in the region follow the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund guidelines for structural reform and major economic policies. The lending and donor agencies feel that poor governance and weak institutions act as significant constraints on economic development in these countries. But the increasing integration of the economies of these countries with the international markets, given the skewed structure of the international economy, has deleterious results. The growing income disparities among the different classes, the unfavourable perceptions and resentment among the poorer and working classes towards the liberalization policies, high aspirations for improvement in living conditions among the general public, and the expectations of the masses that government should care and provide for their basic needs put the party leaderships in a dilemma, which makes them vacillate between the discourse of liberalization in between elections and the discourse of welfare during elections. In any case, governance has hardly improved under these circumstances.

The countries of the region are involved in wars with each other or with other neighbours. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence. China's war against India had disastrous consequences for India's economy, its polity and the morale of its citizens. All the countries of the region have been ravaged by internecine civic strife and armed secessionist struggles. As a result, governments in the region spend huge amounts on the military. The mutual distrust among the countries, internal civic strife, the violent nature of politics and the mammoth presence of the military have had far-reaching consequences on the polity and the political parties of the region.

India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka emerged as independent countries in the late 1940s. Nepal saw the end of the Rana oligarchy in 1951, but it emerged as a constitutional monarchy only recently after a dramatic democratic revolution in 2006. The newly reinstated Parliament declared Nepal to be a secular state. Demands and efforts are being made to constitute it into a republic. Bangladesh emerged as an independent republic in 1971 after the civil war and partition of Pakistan. Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan follow a cabinet form of government. Sri Lanka follows a presidential form of government (see Table 2.1C).

People in the region have lived through times of political instability, turmoil and turbulence. Except India, all the countries have experienced constitutional change one or more times over the past 50 years. Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan have experienced instability in their political regimes. As in many newly emerged post-colonial societies, Pakistan and Nepal had short-lived democracies. Elected governments were dismissed on a frequent basis in both Pakistan and Nepal. Bangladesh has had long periods of military rule. In all the countries of the region, the heads of state and government or the highest government functionaries have been killed at one time or another by the military or extremists. Political parties were banned in Nepal for 30 years, while they have faced intermittent prohibitions and restrictions in Pakistan. The military in Pakistan and Bangladesh and the king in Nepal have manipulated parties by promoting or patronizing factions with a view to weakening the major parties that contested the non-democratic usurpation of power or military intervention in political affairs. Constitutions have been repeatedly overthrown, frequently suspended or amended several times, paving the way for major alterations. This problem is examined in more detail when the troubled trajectory of development of parties is discussed in chapter 3.

The countries of the region have a poor record of upholding the political and civil liberties of the people or maintaining the rule of law. Reports of national human rights commissions and civil society organizations working to defend human rights report large-scale violations by the government agencies, especially the police and the military and the members of the more powerful entrenched classes. Regimes oscillate between rule by repression and rule by consent. Ruling parties or the ruling elites often resort to curbs on opposition parties and political activities and impose restrictions on individual freedoms. According to the *Freedom House Index, 2006*, Pakistan and Nepal are 'not free'; Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are 'partly free'. Only India is 'free', precariously positioned with a score of 2.5. But these assessments are

vulnerable to alteration with change of the regimes and parties in power. Political and bureaucratic corruption is high. The media regularly carry reports of corruption and scandals by elected public officials and bureaucrats. According to Transparency International, most countries rank very low in their ability to offer clean government. In 2004, Bangladesh was placed at the bottom of the list of countries arranged in descending order from the least to the most corrupt.

### Table 2.1: Country profiles

Table 2.1A: Geography and population characteristics

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Area (thousand sq. km)	144	3,288	141	804	656
Population in 2004 (in millions)	140.5	1,028.6	26.5	150.7	19.7
Percentage of urban population	25	28	12	33	23
Languages* and the percentage of people who speak that language (status of the language)	Bengali 98 (official language). English	Hindi (official language). Bengali; Marathi; Telugu; Tamil; Kannada; Oriya; Assamese; Punjabi; Malayalam and 9 other national languages. English (associate language)	Nepali 48 (official language); Maithili 12; Bhojpuri 7; Tharu 6; Tamang 5; Newar 4; Magar 3; Awadh 2; others 12	Punjabi 48; Sindhi 12; Siraiki 10; Pashto 8; Balochi 3; Hindko 2; Brahui 1; Urdu 8 (official language)	Sinhala 74 (official and national language); Tamil 18; others 8
Religion and the percentage of people following a particular religion	Muslim 83; Hindu 16; others 1	Hindu 81; Muslim 12; Christian 2.3; Sikh 1.9; others 2.5	Hindu 81; Buddhist 11; Muslim 4; others 4	Muslim 97 (Sunni 77 and Shia 20); others 3	Buddhist 74; Hindu 7; Christian 6; Muslim 6
Literacy (%): Total, male and female	43, male 54, female 32	65, male 75, female 54	45, male 63, female 28	48, male 60, female 31	92, male 95, female 91
Life expectancy (years)	63	65	59	62	73
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	61	55	65	71	14
Human Development Index, 2004 (Rank)	138	127	140	142	96

\*English is widely used in all the countries as the language of the educated elites as well as in government affairs, communications and court language.

Table 2.1B: Economy

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
GDP (Purchasing Power Parity; USD billion)	301	3699	42	385	87
GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity; USD billion)	2,100	3,400	1,500	2,400	4,300
GDP composition: Agriculture : Industry : Services	20:27:53	21:28:51	38:21:41	22:25:53	18:27:55
Labour force by occupation: Agriculture : Industry : Services	63:11:26	60:17:23	76:6:18	42:20:38	38:17:45
Population below poverty line	45	25	31	35	22
Budget revenue (USD billion)	6.0	111.2	1.23	15.5	3.8
Budget expenditure (USD billion)	8.6	135.8	1.8	20.1	5.5
Exports of goods (USD billion)	9.4	76.2	0.8	14.9	6.4
Imports of goods (USD billion)	13.0	113.1	2.0	21.3	8.4
External debt (USD billion)	21.3	119.7	3.3	40.0	11.6
Expenditure on military (percentage of GDP)	1.8	2.5	1.0	3.9	2.6

USD = US dollar. GDP = gross domestic product.



Table 2.1C: Polity

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Independence	16 December 1971	15 August 1947	February 1951 (End of Rana rule)	14 August 1947	4 February 1948
Capital	Dhaka	New Delhi	Kathmandu	Islamabad	Colombo
State description	People's Republic	Republic	Kingdom	Islamic Republic	Democratic Socialist Republic
Year of the present constitution	1972	1950	1990	1973	1978
Government type	Parliamentary government	Parliamentary government	Constitutional monarchy / Parliamentary government	Parliamentary government (but now a kind of presidential form)	Presidential form
Composition of Parliament	Unicameral national Parliament with 300 members. Elected by popular vote from single member districts	Bicameral. 543 members of the House of People are directly elected	Bicameral. 205 members of the House of Representatives are directly elected by popular vote	Bicameral. 272 of the 342 members of the National Assembly directly elected by popular vote. Rest by indirect election through party lists	Unicameral. 225 members are elected by popular vote on the basis of modified PR system by district
Duration of Parliament	5 years	5 years	5 years	5 years	6 years
Elections last held	2001	2004	1999	2002	2004
State religion, if any	Islam	--	Hinduism	Islam	--
Transparency International <i>Corruption Perceptions Index 2004</i> : Rank : Score	145:1.5	90:2.8	90:2.8	129:2.1	67:3.5
<i>Freedom House Index 2006</i> : Status : Score	Partly Free:4.0	Free:2.5	Not Free:5.5	Not Free:5.5	Partly Free:3.3

Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index*: Score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts. It ranges from 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt). In the year 2004, the index ranked 146 countries. Bangladesh was placed at the bottom (in the bottom group along with Haiti) of all the countries of the world.

*Freedom House Index*: Each country is assigned a rating for political rights and a rating for civil liberties based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest degree of freedom present and 7 the lowest level of freedom. The combined average of each country's political rights and civil liberties rating determines the overall status of Free, Partly Free, or Not Free. India was rated as a Partly Free country until 1998. PR = proportional representation.

## **2.2 Electoral system**

All countries in the region, except Sri Lanka, follow the plurality or First Past The Post (FPTP) system that came to these countries as a legacy of British rule. The single-member territorial electoral districts, where victory is ensured for the candidate who secures a plurality of votes, has its own merits and demerits and these have been evident in South Asia as well.

Elections have been held on a regular basis in India and Sri Lanka since their emergence as independent countries. But the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka and the religious and secessionist movements in India have at times hindered full-scale or free elections in all the parts of the country. Free and fair elections did not take place in Punjab, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir of India at times when these states were marred by extremist violence. For decades, regular general elections in the northern parts of Sri Lanka could not take place or were only partial.

Elections have been intermittent in Pakistan and mostly have been held under military supervision. General elections on the basis of adult franchise were held for the first time in Pakistan only in 1970, more than 20 years after independence. The military rulers did not respect the outcome and it led to the partition of the country. General Musharraf assumed political power in October 1999 by ousting the elected civilian government. He was elected as the president of the country for a five-year term in a state-managed uncontested referendum in 2002. Later, elections were held to the national and provincial assemblies, but these cannot be said to have been free and fair. The coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) (PML-Q), created and encouraged by the presidency and intelligence agencies, won the elections at the federal level and in provinces. Although prime ministers were changed twice in 2004, the National Assembly or the ruling coalition did not have much role in the changes.

Until 1991 a similar situation prevailed in Bangladesh. The modus operandi was the same: the military takes over, and then allows a transition to civilian rule while keeping tight control on the civilian government thereafter. The only difference in Bangladesh, compared to other countries where the military took over, was that the military chiefs had directly founded parties. But after the restoration of democratic elections in 1991, the situation changed. The military refrained from interfering in elections and the formation of governments. From 1996, Bangladesh developed the practice of holding elections under a party-neutral caretaker government and this practice has now been made constitutional. This arrangement has contributed to the free and fair elections in the country and the stabilization of the electoral system.

Nepal has had many interruptions to its democratic elections. After a gap of 30 years, party-based elections were held in Nepal in 1991. The transition from party-less democracy to party-based democracy appeared at first to be smooth and enduring. But after a decade the government was dismissed and the Parliament was suspended by the king in 2002. Subsequently, the country has been caught up in political and civic

strife. In early 2005 the king declared a state of emergency and assumed all executive powers. The country saw a massive democratic uprising (*Loktantra Andolan*) against the monarch during April 2006. It was led by an alliance of seven parliamentary parties as well as Maoist revolutionaries. Finally, the king had to bow to the pressure and that same month restored the Parliament. The last time elections were held in Nepal was in 1999. A comprehensive redrawing of the country's constitution is likely in the near future.

In 1978, Sri Lanka adopted a modified form of proportional representation (PR), whereby parties secure seats on the basis of their performance in the electoral districts as well as at the national level. Parties present lists of candidates for election in the multi-member electoral districts. Voters have to choose among the lists submitted by parties or groups of independents. Parties that receive a minimum share of votes are qualified to receive seats in the district, which are then distributed on the basis of vote share. In addition, parties receive some bonus seats. Individual candidates are selected in the order in which their names appear on the list, this having been determined by the party leadership. While the PR system in Sri Lanka underscores the centrality of political parties in the formation and conduct of government, observers say that the introduction of the new electoral system has tightened the leadership's control over the parties and has also led to the increase in the number of parties contending for power.

The impact of the electoral system on the party domain in the region does not strictly confirm Duverger's law, but it does not completely refute it either.<sup>3</sup> The FPTP system in these countries has led to an unstable multiparty coalition system instead of a standard two-party system. Nor has it led to the demise of the small parties. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka power alternates between the two major contending parties and it is not possible for any other party to come to power on its own or as a major partner in a coalition. At the same time neither of the two major contenders for power in these two countries is in a position to ascend to power on its own.<sup>4</sup> As in any other country following the FPTP system, in the South Asian countries there is a disproportionality between the percentage of votes secured by the parties and the percentage of seats held by them in the legislative bodies. Sometimes this disproportionality tends to be so high as to cause despair among the losing parties. However, the disproportionality has not always adversely affected the validity and acceptability of the election results.

<sup>3</sup> Duverger's law suggests a nexus between a party system and an electoral system. It asserts that an election system based on the plurality principle leads to a two-party system, while proportional representation discourages the emergence of a two-party system. It also holds that the plurality system marginalizes small parties. Although there can be several counter-examples to Duverger's law, the Indian example stands out as the most significant one.

<sup>4</sup> The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in Bangladesh and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in Sri Lanka could come to power by forging alliances with other parties. Although some of the parties in the alliance are small, their support was crucial for the major party in securing a majority in the respective parliaments.

The electoral systems in the region have given scope for every major party in the region to come to power either alone or in alliance with other parties. In India and Nepal, the communists too could come to power through elections. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) in the Indian state of West Bengal has established a world record of continuing in power without a break for nearly three decades. The biggest achievement of the electoral system has been that most of the communists have virtually abandoned the belief in staging a non-parliamentary revolution and establishing a one-party system, as conventional Marxism–Leninism would warrant. They have learned to work with multiparty competition. The Nepali communist leaders, including the Maoists, have openly acknowledged the change in their thinking. The most important of the several communist parties that exist in India, the CPI(M), has not formally renounced the path of armed struggle, but for all practical purposes it has become social democratic and zealously upholds parliamentary democracy.

### **2.3 Legitimacy of parties**

Public opinion polls, including the various Barometer surveys (Latinobarometer, Afrobarometer, etc.), indicate that the level of trust people have in parties is low all over the world and that it has been on the decline in several regions. Time-series data are not available for South Asia to establish whether the trust levels have declined over time. The State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA) survey, conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, in 2004, which included several questions that were asked in the Barometer surveys in other regions, provides information regarding people's attitudes towards democracy and parties in the region. In South Asia, people's preference for a democratic form of government is high. Most people (about 90 per cent who have expressed an opinion) agree that democracy is a suitable form of government (Table 2.2). The preference for democracy is very high in Sri Lanka, followed by India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. But the level of satisfaction with the way the democracy actually works is less. Thus there is a discrepancy between support for democracy in principle and the support for the actually existing democracies.

If we look at the level of trust in political parties ('a great deal' and 'some' combined), this is low compared with the support for democracy or satisfaction with the working of democracy (Table 2.3). A comparison of the levels of trust in parties across the countries of the region shows that it is relatively high in Bangladesh, followed by Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Again Pakistan stands out, with a markedly low level of trust in parties. It is evident from the survey that the people's preference

**Table 2.2: Attitudes towards democracy****Percentage of total respondents**

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	South Asia
Democracy is suitable to the country	59	69	55	47	73	70
Satisfied with the way democracy works	52	54	31	32	43	43
Prefer a strong leader	52	31	63	38	62	50
Feel close to any party	57	48	29	30	50	43
Sample size	2,504	5,202	3,249	2,681	4,631	18,267

for democracy or a democratic form of government does not automatically translate into satisfaction with the actual functioning of democracy or trust in political parties. Of course such a discrepancy is found in all other regions of the world as well. One interesting feature that emerges from the data is that the level of trust in parties in South Asia is the highest among all the regions of the world.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2.3: Trust in political parties****Percentage of total respondents**

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	South Asia
Great deal	22	13	11	5	5	11
Some	35	23	30	19	27	26
<b>Have trust</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>37</b>
Not very much	13	21	19	16	31	21
None at all	10	24	17	28	26	22
<b>No trust</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>43</b>
No opinion	20	19	24	32	11	20
Sample size	2,504	5,202	3,249	2,681	4,631	18,267

Question: How much trust do you have in political parties?

Why is overall trust in political parties so low? Is it because people see parties and party leaders as deficient? Is it because they see a gap between the promise of democracy and the performance of parties? Is it because their expectations from parties are high,

<sup>5</sup> South Asia comes on top if we look at levels of trust in parties in different regions of the world. It is 37 per cent in the region compared to 26 per cent in East Asia; 22 per cent in Latin America; 11 per cent in Central Europe; and 6 per cent in Western Europe. For Africa it is assessed for the ruling parties and the opposition separately: 46 per cent for the ruling parties and 23 per cent for opposition parties. (Source: Different regional Barometers. For South Asia, the State of Democracy in South Asia survey.)

while the performance of parties is low? Looking at the *World Values Survey* data for the Western countries, Pippa Norris has argued that precisely because people have greater trust in democratic forms of government they tend to become very critical of the performance of the political institutions, including the parties. She points out that such a condition arises because of the gap between the value commitment of the citizens and the reality of political institutions, which fall short of their expectations in their conduct and performance (Norris, 1999). The ‘critical citizens’ proposition may also apply to the South Asian situation.

The situation in the South Asian countries is somewhat complicated when compared to that in some established democracies of the West. The low levels of trust in the Western democracies are in step with the decline in the membership of parties and in the political participation of people. But such a trend is not noticed in South Asia. Party–people linkages seem to be strong in the region, when compared with others. Parties have huge memberships, as we will see in the next chapter. The SDSA survey shows that nearly every seventh voter is a party member. About 40 per cent of people feel close to one political party or another (Table 2.2). People’s participation in politics and election-related activity is also high and has increased over the years, as shown by the National Election Studies of the CSDS over the past decade. How can these apparently contradictory feelings among the people of the region be explained?

The low levels of trust in parties could be due to the degradation of leadership and the decay of parties over time. It could be due to a perception that all party leaders are more interested in maximizing their personal power and wealth and are not really interested in serving the people. Another explanation could be found in the changed nature of democratic politics. In recent decades populism has become a predominant feature of South Asian politics. Populism flows out of the imperatives of electoral politics of a mobilized mass democracy in developing societies. Elections are fought on the slogan of providing people’s basic needs. The level of trust in parties could go down when the leaders are not able to deliver on their promises or people perceive them as insincere in their promises or in enacting and implementing welfare policies. It is not surprising that in all the countries of the region the party in power is more often than not defeated at the next election. But the high level of participation in party-related activity could be because of clientelism as people see parties as conduits through which government favours can be accrued or welfare benefits are distributed. So, when individuals see parties as access points for state benefits, their association with parties tends to be high.

Another aspect for concern is that the level of trust in parties in the region is lower than that in other public institutions (Table 2.4) such as the army, police, judiciary, election commissions, civil services, parliaments and governments. The army stands at the top, followed by the judiciary. National and local governments are far ahead of the parties when it comes to enjoying the trust of the people. It is paradoxical that these democratic political institutions that are controlled by political parties command more respect than the political parties.

**Table 2.4: Trust in political parties compared to other public institutions**

How much trust do you have in	National government	Local government	Parliament	Judiciary	Political parties	Election Commission	Civil services	Army	Police
Great deal of trust	19	20	15	25	11	21	16	40	16
Some trust	37	38	26	35	26	29	35	31	31
<b>Have trust</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>47</b>
Not very much trust	15	16	15	12	21	8	19	8	20
None at all	10	11	14	11	22	9	14	8	24
<b>No trust</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>44</b>
No opinion	19	15	31	17	20	33	16	12	10

Question: I am going to name a number of institutions. For each one, could you tell me how much trust you have in them? Is it a great deal of trust, some trust, not very much trust or none at all?

There could be many reasons for the low level of trust in parties when compared to other institutions and agencies, which are not entirely of parties' own making. First, as Juan Linz says, institutions that are not involved in conflict tend to enjoy more trust. Since parties are involved in competition for power, they tend to attract negative reactions from people. Parties may be the victims of the contradictions inherent in the fundamental role they play in democratic regimes (Linz, 2002: 298). Second, party activity is more transparent than the activities within any other institution. People constantly observe party leaders in their daily activities and whatever they do cannot escape the notice of followers. On the other hand, people have little idea of what happens in the army, judiciary or bureaucracy. The negative features of party politics also tend to be focused upon by the media more than those in any other institution. Therefore the high visibility of party activities, their monitoring by the public and the high degree of exposure in the media may be responsible for the low levels of trust in parties.

The extremely low level of trust in parties in Pakistan is truly alarming. It may have to do with the way the parties function in that country. The levels of trust in other democratic institutions, such as national and provincial governments, parliament and the courts, are also as low as trust in parties. Does that mean there is a kind of overall decay in the Pakistan polity or that people are more pessimistic about the possibility of stable and well-functioning political institutions? It is also possible that the high occurrence of anti-party feelings in Pakistan is partly the result of the hostile propaganda of the military regimes against liberal democracy and that parties are responsible for the ills and degradation of the polity.

Is there a possibility that the dissatisfaction with parties will get translated into dissatisfaction with democracy as a form of government? If so, this is the real danger

confronting the democratic governments in these countries. Judgements are made not on promises but on performance. If people have more negative experiences of a democratic government, they will come to believe that this is the only way democracy can operate. People might drift or be pushed into a situation where they would resign themselves to an authoritarian government if it promises to deliver the goods, as happens in Pakistan at regular intervals or as happened in Bangladesh for a long time earlier. A crisis of confidence in political parties can have grave implications for the quality of democracy. Among the various behavioural consequences that have been associated with this are the erosion of voters' psychological attachment to parties (party identification), a decrease in electoral participation, an increase in electoral volatility, a decline in the number of party members and an increase in support for anti-system parties (Torcal, Gunther and Montero, 2002: 284).

There is another interesting aspect that emerges in the South Asia survey. A majority of people in these countries want a strong leader, who does not have to bother about elections, to rule the country (Table 2.2). Why people prefer a strong leader or what qualities a strong leader is supposed to possess are matters for speculation. Probably people want a leader who can keep the party more disciplined and control the factional strife as well as corrupt practices in the party. Probably they also want a leader who can deliver on development promises. This could be one reason why there is such wide acceptance of strong party leaders who seem to assure people of a good government and the delivery of basic needs. Also, the political culture of the region may be engendering favourable political attitudes towards strong leaders or leaders with extraordinary capabilities. Such a phenomenon has been seen in Latin America with the emergence of powerful leaders (*caudillo*) in parties, even as trust in political parties has declined.

While the value commitment to democracy might be advantageous for political parties, this cannot be taken for granted. Leaders have to take steps to invigorate and strengthen parties and instil confidence in parties among the public. If parties do not mend their ways it may have a negative impact on the perceptions and beliefs of the people. This is the danger that parties must pay attention to.

The legitimacy of the political parties depends to a large measure on free and fair elections in a country. How do people of the region view elections? Asked how they feel about the way elections are conducted in their countries, a greater proportion of the voters of Bangladesh and India felt that elections in their country are 'fair' or 'somewhat fair'. About one-third of the voters in Pakistan and Sri Lanka feel that elections are not fair. Nepal stands between the two positions (see Table 2.5).



**Table 2.5: Voters' perceptions of the fairness of elections**

How fair are elections?	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	South Asia
Fair	54%	37%	17%	9%	18%	27%
Somewhat fair	30%	18%	43%	39%	42%	36%
Unfair	9%	22%	24%	33%	32%	24%
No opinion	7%	13%	16%	18%	8%	12%
Sample size	2,504	5,202	3,249	2,681	4,631	18,267

Source: SDSA Survey of the CSDS, Delhi.

Electoral malpractices have been a source of friction among parties in the region. They have distorted the verdict in specific constituencies, in provinces and on certain occasions at the national level too. In Bangladesh, the losing party usually alleges that the rival party has rigged the elections or resorted to electoral malpractices on a large scale. The use of violence and coercion during elections had assumed such proportions in Bangladesh that commentators call it a 'masthanocracy' (rule by muscle power). In Pakistan, the problem is not merely one of electoral malpractices, but one of manipulation of election results by the military rulers. The losing party or parties have mostly disputed the election results. In Sri Lanka, despite the continuing civic strife, elections have been regularly held. But they are marred by irregularities, violence and intimidation. Elections are regularly held in the northern parts controlled by the armed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). There was a massive boycott of voting in the 2006 presidential elections.

In India, in every election there are reports and complaints of rigging, fraudulent voting and the use of coercion and money or power to influence the voters. There have been occasions when elections in an entire Lok Sabha or Assembly constituency were countermanded and fresh elections held. However, given the vastness of the country and the electorate, these problems are usually regionalized and localized. Also, since most major parties and candidates resort to these practices to a lesser or greater degree, they tend to cancel each other out in the end. The losing parties generally accept the overall results, although contestations take place in specific constituencies. The legitimacy of the government has never been questioned on account of free and fair elections, except for the assembly election in West Bengal in 1972.

### **Conclusions**

Parties in South Asia operate in multi-ethnic and plural societies. These societies are experiencing what Rajni Kothari long ago called the challenge of simultaneous change—of social transformation, nation building, economic development and democratic politics. The South Asian countries have not passed through the same stages that the Western societies passed through over a very long period, and hence the context in which parties in the region operate is significantly different from that of the Western nations, or for that matter the context in other continents such as Africa or

Latin America. Probably the South Asian context is different from that of other Asian countries as well, especially East Asia. Parties here have to constantly negotiate the challenges bred by the interplay of tradition and modernity. While parties make use of the readily available social identities and traditional structures of authority to build and augment electoral support, they have to formally acknowledge and function in the democratic framework. When we say that the nature and functioning of political parties are influenced by the social structure and attitudes, it does not mean that they are mere mirror images of the latter. The challenge before the parties is to represent the larger social reality and at the same time to transcend it. The context matters a great deal, but the success of the parties and the party system as well the stability of democracy depends on the ability of the parties to transcend the limitations imposed by the traditional or given social structures, identities and attitudes and to restructure them.

Similarly the political context. Different forms of government—monarchy, military rule and democratically elected governments—exist side by side in the region. But more importantly, the polities in some of the countries in South Asia have been quite fluid. We have seen this in the way in which polities in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have shifted from one type to the other. The change from one form to the other has become cyclical in Pakistan and Nepal. Democratically elected governments have been pulled down in Pakistan with relative ease, and in Nepal the king could dismiss democracy without much resistance. Recurrent political strife and turmoil has been a constant feature of politics in the region. Elections are marred by ethnic divisions, malpractices and uncertain verdicts. Even when democratic forms of government have existed, they have tended to be partial. The military in Pakistan or the king in Nepal, until recently, exercised heavy influence on the parties and government. In Bangladesh, commentators and political scientists say that the threat of military intervention in politics is not completely ruled out. We shall discuss some of the aspects of this in detail in the next chapter, especially the chequered career of democracy and the political turmoil through which political parties have journeyed in South Asia.

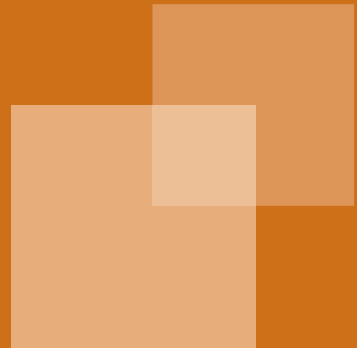
We have seen in this chapter that the legitimacy of parties in the region is not well established. Although political participation and party affiliation among people is high in the region, parties are not well entrenched in the polities. Although the levels of trust in parties are high for the region as a whole compared to other regions, the parties cannot be complacent about this. It is very low in Pakistan. However, we find that the overall underlying trend in the region has been towards democracy, the setbacks and failures of democracy notwithstanding. One reassuring thing we find from the survey data as discussed in this chapter is that support for democracy among people is very high in the region. It is true that the attitudes of people towards politics and democracy in the region are mixed and muted. But it is also true that the democratic aspirations of the elites as well as those of the ordinary people of the region have sustained democracy against multiple and formidable odds and also breathed life into the struggles for the restoration for democracy when it was overthrown by

the military or the monarch. The experience of Bangladesh and Nepal has shown that when parties are united to safeguard the overall framework of democracy it is possible to retain or restore democratic governments. It has proved that the obstacles to democracy, whether they are in the social, cultural, political or economic spheres, are not insurmountable. If democracy fails or does not function well in the region much of the blame goes to the failure of the parties and party leaders rather than to the systemic deficiencies. The long-term trend towards democracy should augur well for the consolidation of parties and their legitimacy provided the leadership shows sufficient vision and will.

A decorative graphic in the top-left corner consisting of three overlapping squares. The top square is light orange, the middle square is a slightly darker shade of orange, and the bottom square is a medium-dark orange.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Changing Party Systems**





## Chapter 3

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### 3. Changing Party Systems

There have been continuities and discontinuities, as well as ruptures and repression, in the course of the evolution of parties in South Asia. There is not a uniform experience or political environment in the countries of the region. While parties have functioned under democracy in some countries, within individual countries some have functioned under democracy at times and under authoritarian regimes at other times. Parties have faced many ups and downs, grappled with multiple tensions, and suffered from serious shortcomings.

The party systems in the countries of the region have been in a state of flux. Compared with the South Asia of the 1940s and 1950s the party landscape has changed significantly. The party systems have undergone dramatic changes in some countries during the last two decades. They are still evolving differently in different countries. Since the countries began their journey towards democracy in the 1950s, several older parties in the region have been eclipsed or have slowly faded out, while others have undergone substantial changes in their organizational structures, policies and programmes, electoral support bases, geographical spread and functioning. Most of the parties have become more pragmatic as they are able to fine-tune and adapt their ideological and policy positions to function within a democratic framework. They combine with other parties to forge alliances or adjust to the changing international economic and political environment. Parties everywhere have been involved in intense political competition. There has been a proliferation of parties, more so in India and Nepal. Parties have been splitting, coming together and splitting again in India, Pakistan and Nepal. This section seeks to provide an overview of these changes and of the still evolving party system.

#### ***3.1 Trajectory of the development of parties***

Parties in South Asia originated during the British colonial period. The Ceylon National Congress and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress in Sri Lanka; Prajaparishad and the Nepali Congress in Nepal; the Awami League in Bangladesh; the Muslim League in Pakistan; and the Indian National Congress (INC, also known as the Congress), the Communist Party, the Muslim League, as well as some regional parties such as the Shiromani Akali Dal, the National Conference, the Forward Bloc or the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in India, are some examples. Some of these parties survived to continue in the post-independence period, dominated the political scene

and continue to do so. Some have faded out quickly, for instance, the Muslim League led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah in Pakistan and the Ceylon National Congress in Sri Lanka.

But the parties and party politics that developed during British rule or Rana rule in Nepal were qualitatively different from the parties and party politics of contemporary times. Parties then were mostly either movements for independence or groups of urban elites, notables and professionals, dependent mainly on the middle and upper classes, as the franchise was limited to those sections of society, whose main function was to deal with the rulers in order to gain access to public office and other benefits. After independence, the biggest challenge for the parties that led the freedom struggles was to transform themselves from movements or goal-seeking parties to office-seeking or governing parties and then move ahead as competitive parties in an environment of universal adult franchise, increased political participation and parliamentary democracy. As a result, some parties disintegrated, some sought to establish one-party rule, and some adapted to the requirements of democratic competition.

The tasks that parties were called upon to perform at the time of independence (or the ushering in of parliamentary democracy in Nepal) were truly immense and overwhelming. They were now expected to put into effect the promise of the freedom struggle. They were to bring about national unity, prosperity to the nation, and freedom and equality among citizens, all at the same time. What the Western nations had achieved over centuries and in stages in an environment of rapid industrialization, parties in South Asia were expected to achieve quickly and simultaneously. Politically the countries were declared democracies, but democracy does not come at one stroke. Parties were entrusted with the task of running democratic governments, for which they were not well equipped, and the societies in which they functioned were not fully prepared for that. This was one source of crisis in the party system in the region. Several post-colonial states have broken down under this pressure. In some countries of South Asia party leaders were not able to work out a consensus on the basic norms and rules required to institutionalize party competition. Building a democratic polity in a developing and changing society needs special leadership qualities: leaders with perseverance, toleration of opposition both within the party and outside, and an ability to concede and compromise; leaders who can see beyond the present and rise above the tendency to promote themselves, their faction or the class to which they belong. The leaders' inability to develop shared values of how to govern the country and what such values would entail in practice had a lasting impact on the party system in some countries. Parties remained weak and the party domain turbulent. Parties also lacked or were deprived of experienced leadership to steer the party ship in the uncharted waters of democracy. In addition to this, parties in some countries faced problems from outside. They were given hardly any time to develop organizationally into cohesive and stable entities, as they suffered long periods of repression and severe restrictions. Political parties in Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh functioned in highly troubled polities marked by repeated interruptions to democracy owing to military rule, the dismissal of elected governments, and the outlawing of political parties (see Table 3.1).

The Muslim League in Pakistan was unable to stabilize as a party in the post-independence period. Once the goal of creating Pakistan was achieved, the party failed to develop a coherent, post-independence programme. The death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1948) caused a setback and created a vacuum in the country that no one else could fill. There was hardly any second line of leadership with comparable national support, reputation and appeal ready to step in. The party gradually came under the control of West Pakistani influences, particularly the Punjabi landlords and bureaucrats, who were more concerned with enhancing their personal power than with building a strong national organization. For several years after independence, the parties were unable to draw up a constitution for the country. By the time a constitution for the country was enacted (1956), a tradition of violating parliamentary norms had already set in. The constitution did not enjoy the full support of all the major parties. For more than two decades, until 1970, there were no elections at the national level. The provincial elections in West Pakistan were marked by vote-rigging and low voter participation.

The promulgation of martial law in 1958 and the ban on political parties set in motion a process that Pakistan is still passing through. After four years General Ayub Khan introduced a system of 'Basic Democracy' and promulgated the Political Parties Act in 1962 to allow political parties under a regulatory framework. General Zia-ul-Haq banned political parties once again in 1977 and amended the Political Parties Act in 1979. The military in Pakistan never had any explicit constitutional role in the government, but has been a key player in the making and unmaking of governments as well as the formation and decimation of parties. Except during the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government during 1971–77, the military top brass since 1958 has either ruled the state directly or closely controlled the parties in power.

Sri Lanka has a longer history of democracy than any other country in the region. Universal suffrage was introduced in the country in 1931. Democracy was never interrupted either by the military or by elected leaders. However, stable political parties did not develop in the pre-independence period. The Ceylon National Congress, which dominated the political scene during British rule, disintegrated soon after independence. But the formation of the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) within a few years of independence was a major step forward. It led to the development of an enduring party system in the country. However, the inability of the UNP as well as the SLFP to extend their influence over the Tamil-speaking population and the emergence of separate political parties claiming to represent the interests of the Sri Lankan Tamils in the north and the north-east of the country created a permanent chasm in the party domain. The identification of the two major parties in Sri Lanka with Sinhala nationalism further alienated the Tamil minority. The result has been the parallel development of parties—those of the Sinhala people and those of the Tamil people. Sinhala and Tamil nationalism fed on each other and grew. The political and party stalemate continues even today.

**Table 3.1: Chronology of turbulent events affecting party development**

<b>Bangladesh</b>	
1975	Government amends the constitution to provide one-party presidential form of government in the place of multiparty system
1975	Mujibur Rahman killed in a military coup
1975–79	Rule by martial law
1981	Ziaur Rahman killed in an aborted coup
1982	Bloodless military coup; constitution suspended
1982–86	Rule by martial law
1986	Constitution restored; presidential elections boycotted by political parties
1991	Return of parliamentary democracy
1995	Parliament dissolved
1996	Opposition parties boycott Parliament elections in February
<b>India</b>	
1975–77	National Emergency; fundamental rights suspended
1976	Parliament's life extended by one year
1984	Prime Minister and INC President Indira Gandhi killed
1991	Prime Minister and INC President Rajiv Gandhi killed
<b>Nepal</b>	
1951–90	Constitutions changed three times
1960	King Mahendra dismisses government and suspends Parliament
1960–90	Political parties banned
1962	Constitution suspended
1990	New (the present) constitution comes into force; restoration of multiparty democracy
1991	First parliamentary elections after 32 years
2001	King Birendra killed in a palace coup
2002	Popularly elected government dismissed; Parliament dissolved; the king takes over
2002–06	Restrictions on party activity—party leaders detained, or kept under house arrest
2006	Restoration of Parliament; abolition of absolutist monarchy
<b>Pakistan</b>	
1951	Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan killed
1954	Constituent Assembly dissolved
1956	Promulgation of the first constitution
1958	National Assembly dissolved; military takes over



Pakistan cont'd	
1958–62	Martial law
1962–65	Rule by military president
1965	War with India
1969	Military takes over
1971	Civil war in East Pakistan; war with India; secession of East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh
1973	New constitution
1977	Military takes over; constitution suspended
1977–85	Martial law
1977	Constitution suspended; parties boycott provincial elections
1979	PPP founder leader Z. A. Bhutto hanged; constitution suspended
1979–85	Political parties banned
1985	Constitution restored with amendments
1988	Eighth Amendment establishing semi-presidential system
1990	PPP government dismissed
1993	National Assembly dissolved and PML-N government dismissed
1996	PPP government dismissed and National Assembly dissolved
1999	Military takes over; constitution suspended.
2001 to date	Rule by military president
2002	Constitution restored
2003	Constitution amended to give more powers to the president.
Sri Lanka	
1959	Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike killed
1972	First constitution
1978	Second constitution establishing an executive presidency
1983	Parliament life extended until 1989
1993	President Premadasa killed
1994	UNP presidential candidate killed
1996	Nation-wide emergency
1999	Assassination attempts on UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe and SLFP leader Chandrika Kumaratunga

INC = Indian National Congress. PML-N = Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. UNP = United National Party. SLFP = Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

In Bangladesh, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, the man who had led the freedom struggle, had his own visions and fears, and was driven by the urge to concentrate power in a single party headed by a strong executive. Immediately after independence the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Muslim League were banned. In 1975, within a few years of coming to power, Mujib had the constitution amended to establish one-party rule in the place of multiparty democracy. He formed a unified national party, the Bangladesh Krishak

Sramik Awami League (Bangladesh Peasants, Workers and People's League). Within months, he and his party leaders were brutally killed by military officers. The country experienced a major leadership crisis. For the next 15 years Sri Lanka went through a series of coups, counter-coups and failed coups. It remained under military or quasi-military rule until the fall of Ershad regime in December 1990.

India too passed through some anxious moments in its transition from one-party dominance to multiparty democracy. It was not easy for the Congress party leaders to reconcile themselves to the reality of losing power to the opposition parties. The party attempted to resist democratic pressure to replace it, as was seen in the imposition of Emergency Rule during the period 1975–77. Leaders of opposition parties were jailed and severe restrictions were imposed on the activities of the opposition parties. But the nation withstood this test. Power was finally transferred peacefully and democratically to a non-Congress political formation in 1977. This was a turning point in party politics in India. From then onwards, a vibrant multiparty system has emerged.

In Nepal, the popularly elected government of the Nepali Congress was dismissed in 1960, within a year of its formation. Political parties were banned. A 'party-less panchayat democracy' was introduced in 1962. The essence of this party-less democracy was the outlawing of people's political participation. Power was concentrated in the king, the military and the bureaucracy. Parties continued to be outlawed for the next 30 years. They had to operate clandestinely or in exile. In 1990 parliamentary democracy was reintroduced under a new democratic constitution. But after an interlude of 12 years (1990–2002), the king once again usurped the power by dismissing the elected government and imposing restrictions on the activities of political parties.

Ironically, the king in Nepal and the military in Pakistan presented their centralized and authoritarian rule as an alternative to the Western model of democracy based on party competition and as a means to promote stability and participatory governance devoid of parties. The advocates of such a system of rule began to speak of 'guided democracy'. During the military rule in Pakistan and Bangladesh, constitutions were amended, abrogated and changed and new ones introduced to serve the interests of the military top brass. What is surprising is that, despite political repression and the hostile atmosphere created by the monarchs and military chiefs, parties in these countries did survive, acted as nuclei for popular resistance to non-democratic dispensations, and, with the restoration of democratic politics, came back to the centre stage.

### *Regime-fostered parties*

During the military regimes in Pakistan and Bangladesh a new trend was seen in party formation and development. The military rulers undermined established parties and fostered new ones, with a view to generating legitimacy, orchestrating support for their rule and keeping control of the civilian government when they decided to permit one. When Ayub Khan introduced a new constitution with a presidential form

of government, he formed a new party in 1962, called the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). Although it had nothing to do with the old Muslim League, it conjured up past memories and images. Following Ayub's model, General Musharraf crafted the transition from military to civilian rule in 2002, without actually losing control over the government. A breakaway faction of the PML (Nawaz), called the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam) (PML-Q), named after the founder of Pakistan, was co-opted for this purpose. In fact, it has now acquired the official PML status and enjoys state patronage. It has emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly and obtained a clear majority in the Punjab Provincial Assembly. President Musharraf, who is also the army chief, played an active role together with the intelligence agencies in fostering the PML-led coalitional governments at the federal level, and at provincial level in Sindh and Balochistan. There have been allegations that the intelligence services in Pakistan make huge payments to the favoured parties and candidates during elections.

In Bangladesh, General Ziaur Rahman emulated the Ayub model. Having consolidated his military rule and become the president of the country, he formed his own party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), in 1978. In the 1979 parliamentary elections the party won a majority of seats and attracted leaders from the opposition, to become a strong party. General Hossain Mohammad Ershad came to power in March 1982 through a military coup and ruled the country until December 1990 when he was forced to resign following massive protests organized by the BNP and the Awami League. Once in power, General Ershad followed General Zia's model by forming another party in 1986, called the Jatiya Party. It soon became stronger as it attracted, like the BNP before it, a large number of leaders from other parties. One interesting aspect of party development in Bangladesh is that the parties founded by the military chiefs survived the founders, acquired legitimacy and became crucial players in parliamentary politics thereafter. These parties thus probably filled the leadership gap in the post-independence period, provided an opening for the dissenters and opponents of the 'national party', offered alternative choices to the electorate and made the transition to multiparty democracy possible. The king in Nepal has also tried to encourage parties that support a monarchy and are amenable to his control, such as the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) or the breakaway faction of the Nepali Congress, but with little success.

One thing becomes clear from this. Even the military and authoritarian regimes in contemporary times do not and cannot do away with parties altogether. They feel the need for parties to establish the legitimacy of the regime and carry on day-to-day government. But what such regimes want are parties that are amenable to their control and interests—so-called 'pocket parties'. However, it is also true that, once the supporting regimes fall, the survival of such parties and party governments is also threatened. The BNP seems to be an exception, as it emerged as an alternative to the 'heritage party', the Awami League. It has matured into a fully-fledged party due to circumstances specific to Bangladesh.

### **3.2 Adversarial attitudes**

The inability of the party leaders in the initial years to develop norms for democratic competition to contest and win elections and to create a capacity for the party to function as a ruling party as well as an opposition party had a lasting impact on the party system in South Asia. These countries had little experience with oppositional politics during the freedom struggle. Thus, the tendency to monopolize power by the party that led the freedom struggle has been evident in many developing nations. Such parties claimed to represent all sections and classes in society. They have sought to present themselves as parties embodying the national spirit and interest. This self-belief became a source of one-party authoritarianism, as ruling parties sought to demonize and de-legitimize opposition or diverse viewpoints. Those who opposed the 'national party' were looked upon with suspicion, if not branded as anti-national. Loyalty to the nation and loyalty to the national party were regarded as one and the same. But the opposition parties saw in this a ploy or tactics of the ruling party to perpetuate itself in power. Distrust and intolerance of the rival parties as well as intimidation and political vendettas have become regular features of party politics in the region. This has been a major source of confrontationist attitudes in the party sphere in some countries, especially in the initial decades after independence. India and Bangladesh have undergone this experience in their own ways.

In India, the Indian National Congress was able to establish its supremacy, as other parties were comparatively weak, small and divided in the initial decades. It was also able to draw upon the legacy of the freedom movement and the resultant popular following, the organizational network developed during that time, and the reservoir of leadership that grew over the years to consolidate itself. As the INC eclipsed other parties, those who aspired to positions and favours had to seek space within the INC fold. It was called an umbrella party or a party of consensus. But soon the one-party dominance began to crack. The opposition parties recovered, developed and asserted themselves. When the Communist Party of India (CPI) came to power in Kerala in 1957, the Congress led a 'liberation struggle' to destabilize the communist government, eventually paving the way for its dismissal. But the opposition showed maturity and fought back, by parliamentary means. By 1967, non-Congress parties had come to power in seven Indian states. In another ten years, the opposition parties were able to dislodge the Congress at the Union level. The diversity of the country, the following enjoyed by the opposition parties, the availability of experienced leaders with commitment to democratic values and their ability to de-legitimize the Congress as the only authentic national party, all contributed to the shaping of the new party system in India. However, the seeds of antagonism that were sown in the initial years engendered a confrontationist idiom in the party domain, which parties find difficult to overcome even today.

Similarly, in Bangladesh the Awami League sought to monopolize power as the legate of the freedom struggle. It closed avenues for the formation and growth of

opposition parties. That proved to be its nemesis. It was violently overthrown by the military, which took advantage of the disenchantment with the authoritarian Mujib government. Later, new parties grew under the aegis of the military rulers. All this made the transition to a multiparty system in Bangladesh much more tortuous. The deep-seated distrust among the leaders of the major parties, their dismissive attitudes towards one another, the inability of the ruling parties to come to terms with the opposition parties, and the violent overthrow of governments and usurpation of power by the military bred permanent antagonism among the leading parties in the country. The Awami League views the BNP as a party that climbed to power over the body of Mujib. The BNP sees the Jatiya Party as the usurper of Zia's legacy. The Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) has an altogether different understanding of politics, as it wants to establish a solid Islamic state in Bangladesh. The communists basically differ from the mainstream parties.

Despite the restoration of the parliamentary form of democracy in 1991, the country has constantly experienced authoritarian tendencies on the part of the ruling party and the agitational politics of the opposition, pushing the nation towards what Fareed Zakaria calls an 'illiberal democracy'. The puzzle is that, despite the convergence on the part of the major political parties towards the centre in terms of economic policy and political ideology, confrontational politics prevails in Bangladesh. The Awami League boycotted the seventh parliamentary elections (1996), which it termed farcical. It refused to recognize the results of the next elections, saying that the elections were rigged. The BNP boycotted the Parliament when the Awami League was in power (1996–2001). The Awami League did the same when the roles were reversed (2001–05).<sup>6</sup> Violent street politics, the boycotting of elections and Parliament, and unwillingness to cooperate with the ruling party to carry out routine government business became regular features of party politics in Bangladesh. One writer has argued that the confrontational politics practised by the major political parties in Bangladesh is a manifestation of the undemocratic (feudal) political culture in which each party seeks to monopolize state power as if the other party does not have the right to exist (Hossain 2000: 509).

In Pakistan and Sri Lanka there is also a great deal of antagonism, distrust and acrimony between parties. In Pakistan, when the PPP came to power in 1988, Benazir Bhutto schemed to overthrow the coalition government of Islam-i Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI, or Islamic Democratic Alliance), an alliance of nine parties in which the PML and the Jamaat were the main partners, and which was headed by Nawaz Sharif, in Punjab. No sooner had the PML come to power in the 1990 elections than Benazir Bhutto conducted a relentless campaign to oust his government. Prime minister Nawaz Sharif called her an enemy of Pakistan, banned Benazir Bhutto from two of the country's

<sup>6</sup> The Awami League, when in opposition in Parliament, walked out of Parliament 70 times. When the BNP was in opposition, it walked out of Parliament 79 times. In the eighth parliament, Awami League abstained from the first and second sessions of the Parliament (Barman et al., 2002: 77).

largest cities and ordered police measures against her supporters. During her second tenure as prime minister, Bhutto hardly allowed any role to the opposition, which itself never missed an opportunity to destabilize the regime. During their tenures as ruling parties, both the PPP and the PML alienated their coalition partners. They did not hide their glee when the president or the military dismissed the government of the rival party, even though this meant a blow to democracy. The acrimony and disunity among parties provided an alibi for the military to intervene and take power into its hands from time to time in the name of bailing the country out of the instability and disorder created by opportunistic and irresponsible parties and leaders engaged in mutual destruction.

Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the leader of the SLFP, after the party's defeat in the 1977 elections, was stripped of her civil rights.

One source of the confrontationalist attitude seems to be the extensive scope for the leaders of the ruling party to amass wealth and the use of state patronage by those in power to augment support for the ruling party and to undermine the opposition parties. Of course, this seems to happen in many regions of the world. One objective of parties anywhere is to gain access to power in order to bestow benefits on leaders and supporters. Indeed, it is for these benefits that the leaders and supporters work for the success of a party in elections. But the extent to which this has happened in South Asia has played havoc with the party system in the region. The supporters of those in power want to get benefits by bypassing the law. State patronage, including appointments to ministries and public office, the sanction of permits, the awarding of contracts and so on, has been used to break the opposition parties or woo leaders from opposition parties.

Defection is a major problem that haunts the parties in the region. Party leaders have been changing parties or breaking parties at will in order to share power or receive the spoils of power. The military rulers in Pakistan and Bangladesh have used defections to undermine or break the ruling party or to patronize the belligerent factions in parties to gather support for the regimes. The ruling parties, meanwhile, have used defections to attract leaders from other parties or shore up their own electoral prospects. In India, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was accused of bribing members of Parliament (MPs) belonging to other parties in order to muster support for his minority Congress government in 1991. In Bangladesh, both the BNP and the Jatiya Party governments used the self-reliant government plan (*gram sorkar*) to allocate resources to local bodies directly in order to induce leaders at local level to switch sides and support the ruling party. Parties in Pakistan are so highly factionalized that it has always been easy to induce defections. This causes resentment among the opposition parties as they see it as unfair and an attack on them when they are vulnerable. But when they come to power they would not hesitate to use the same stick to beat the parties now in opposition. In India, party defections assumed such menacing proportions during the 1970s and 1980s that all parties agreed to enact legislation

(52nd Constitutional Amendment in 1985) to curb defections. Other countries, too, now have similar legislation in this regard, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

Because of the scope for using state patronage for personal and partisan interests, control over the political process and state resources becomes a matter of political life or death for the leaders and supporters of a party. That is why elections and crucial policy decisions precipitate large-scale violence and animosity among the leaders. In Bangladesh, parties routinely take to the streets or resort to *hartals* (strikes) to expose the misdeeds of the government. Commentators on Bangladeshi politics say that what they have in Bangladesh is ‘hartalocracy’. In India, heated debates take place in the legislatures not on policies, but on how the ruling party has misused its power to bestow benefits on its supporters, or on ways in which the ministers and other ruling party people amass wealth illegally. Apart from parties losing the confidence of the people, the political institutions in general—the police, the judiciary and the bureaucracy—also suffer when they come under pressure from the ruling and opposition parties. In Nepal the fight over state patronage led to severe quarrels among parties and also infighting within parties during the 1990s. It reached a high level in the Nepali Congress where the leaders openly made accusations against one another and some left the party. It led to frequent changes of governments between elections. The party crisis in Nepal led to a crisis of governability and undermined democracy.

However, in recent years it has been seen that in South Asia parties can be reconciled and actually cooperate at crucial moments of history. In Bangladesh the two major parties—the Awami League and the BNP—together campaigned against military intervention and agreed to participate in elections under a caretaker government. In Pakistan, the PPP-Parliamentarian (PPP-P) and the PML-Nawaz (PML-N) joined forces in 2006 to oppose military intervention in politics and to work for the restoration of ‘genuine democracy’ in the country. In Nepal, the traditional rival parties worked together in running governments. Seven parties, including the left, have forged a united front with the Maoists to defeat what they called ‘autocratic monarchy’ and establish ‘absolute democracy’.<sup>7</sup> The 12-point agreement signed by the parties stated that the participating parties accept multiparty competition and undertake to consider their mistakes so that such mistakes are not repeated in future. Even the Maoists have affirmed their commitment to multiparty competitive politics. Yet the parties of Nepal have to a long way to go before the principles and practices of democratic politics are internalized.

A durable and robust party system in a country depends not merely on how a ruling party manages state affairs, but also on how it allows the opposition to function,

<sup>7</sup> The seven parties are: the Nepali Congress, the Nepali Congress (Democratic), the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist and Leninist (CPN-UML), the Samyukta Jan Morcha, the Nepal Peasants and Workers Party, and the United Leftist Front.

accommodates its views, conducts elections and complies with the results and allows other parties to ascend to power (the ‘turnover test’). It depends on how the opposition cooperates and opposes the ruling party. It also depends on how both the ruling and the opposition parties gain the confidence of the people. The big test for a democratic party system is how a ruling party, when reduced to the status of an opposition party, retains its organizational viability, how it plays a constructive role as an opposition and how it works its way through to public office again. This is where India and Sri Lanka are relatively more successful than other countries in the region.

### **3.3 Proliferation and fragmentation**

In the past two decades, the party domain in the region has become very crowded with the presence of numerous parties. Several new parties have emerged based on nationalistic, regional, religious, caste and ethnic identities.

The democratic upsurge in Nepal after the introduction of the new constitution in 1990 led to a vigorous growth of several new but small parties. Some of them advocate the rights and interests of the *dalits* (outcastes) and the *janjatis* (indigenous people). For example, the Rashtriya Janmukti party and Janmukti Nepal are *janjati*-based parties. Nepal Dalit Shramik Morcha and the Bahujan Samaj Party are *dalit*-based. The Nepal Sadbhavana Party seeks to promote the rights of the Madhesia Indian community. The number of left-wing parties has also increased greatly. There are about five or six mainstream left parties, apart from the several Maoist groups that do not participate in elections. About 39 parties participated in the 1999 election.

There are 53 parties in Sri Lanka, according to the Department of Elections official website. There are about ten Tamil parties and about five parties that claim to represent Muslims. The Buddhist monks too have their party—Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU). Twenty-four parties participated in the parliamentary elections in April 2004. One view is that the introduction of PR in Sri Lanka has led to the growth of small parties—mostly ethnic-based, religious or extremist. Since the major parties are forced to forge alliances with small parties to form governments, this has reinforced the ethnic divisions on party lines and led to an exacerbation of social tensions.

In Pakistan there are about 71 political parties and 15 of them secured representation in the elections to the National Assembly in 2002; but ten of them have only one seat each. Most of them represent the voices of smaller provinces, such as the Balochistan National Party, the Jamhooree Wattan Party, the Pakhtoonkhawa Milli Awami Party or the independent factions of the major parties. In the case of many Pakistani parties the distinguishing line between a faction and a party is very thin. Even Bangladesh, the least pluralist nation in the region, has witnessed an increase in the number of parties. There are about 120 parties in the country, but only eight of them have representation in the Parliament. The Islamic parties have been gaining in influence.



India has seen the emergence of more and more new parties in recent years. Several national and regional parties took shape as the Janata Party fell apart in early 1980s. The old Jan Sangh reappeared as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) grew in strength as the party of the *dalits*. A number of new regional parties have emerged and captured power in the states. They have filled the void created as a result of the decline of the Congress Party. Yogendra Yadav says that in the social and political churning that India went through during the 1980s, several dormant social identities acquired importance in the context of electoral competition. He terms this the ‘third electoral system’. It heralded a new pattern of party competition in what he calls a ‘post-Congress polity’. Yadav says that the third space became the spring of new political formations (Yadav, 1999). Some others argued that the emergence of new parties was not a result of the mobilization of new groups but rather was largely the result of the desertion of certain elements of the Congress coalition that had once supported it but now opted for different parties. For example, Pradeep Chibber argues that the party system change, especially the anchoring of political parties in social cleavages, is not due to exogenous social changes, such as demographic shifts or the emergence of new issues, but rather is endogenous to party competition (Chibber, 1999: 22). The regional parties, primarily based in a single state, have emerged as important actors in the party system from the latter half of the 1980s and they dominated the political scene during the period of the Third Front governments (1996–99). This process has been referred to as the federalization of the party system in India (Arora, 2003). In the 2004 elections about 230 parties participated; 41 of them secured one or more seats in the Parliament, and most of them are regional parties.

But what should concern everyone is the fragmentation of the established parties—the way parties have been splitting again and again. More often than not the parties split because of the personal ambitions of leaders, either to gain power or to retain power (see box). The highly personalized styles of leadership and the malfunctioning of parties also contribute to the splits. Virtually every major party in the region has split several times. The larger party always calls the other the ‘splinter group’. But often it is difficult to say which is the original party and which is the splinter group. Both claim the original name, legacy and election symbol. The name of leader or some other description is appended to the party name in order to distinguish one from the other. When a party splits, the tussle goes on for a while as to which is the real or original party, until the fate of the party and the splinter group is decided in the elections.

## Party splits owing to leadership rivalries

### India

The Janata Dal was formed in 1986 by uniting the leftover Janata Party, Lok Dal, socialists and the breakaway faction of the INC led by Vishwanath Pratap Singh (V. P. Singh). But within two years two groups walked away from the party. In October 1990 Chandrasekhar formed the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP). Ajit Singh revived the old Lok Dal in 1991. Later George Fernandes and others formed the Samata Party. In 1996, Laloo Prasad left the party to form the Rashtriya Janata Dal. The party split again in 1999, leading to the formation of the JD(Secular). In 1992, Mulayam Yadav left the SJP to form the Samajwadi Party. The Orissa unit formed the Biju Janata Dal in 1997. In 2000, Ram Vilas Paswan formed the Lok Janshakti Party.

### Pakistan

**Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian (PPP-P):** After 1980 many leaders left the PPP to form separate parties. Farooq Leghari (ex-president) formed the Millat Party in 1998. Aftab Sherpao formed PPP-Sherpao and enjoys two National Assembly, three Senate and 13 provincial assembly seats from North West Frontier Province (NWFP). This faction merged with PPP-Patriot (a group of 21 members of the National Assembly) who left the PPP-Parliamentarian to become part of the ruling coalition. The original PPP, headed by Benazir Bhutto, is now called PPP-Parliamentarian.

**Pakistan Muslim League (PML):** General Ayub Khan, with a view to facilitating the transition from military to civilian rule, formed the PML in 1962. Mohammad Khan Junejo established another party with the same name in 1986, which came to be known as PML-Junejo. In 1993, one of the breakaway groups formed the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Sharif (who led the group). The other faction continued as the PML-Junejo. There were other small factions of the PML such as the PML-Functional, the PML-Jinnah and the PML-Zia, which later merged with the PML-Junejo. In 2000, leaders who wanted to support the military establishment joined the PML-Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q), which is the ruling party at present. It was initially headed by Mian Azhar, who was later replaced in 2002 by Chaudry Shujaat Hussain, the current president of the PML.

### Nepal

**Nepali Congress:** After its formation in 1950, the Nepali Congress split several times. It split in 1954 owing to a clash between the prime minister, Matrika Prasad Koirala (M. P. Koirala), and the party president, Bisheshor Prasad Koirala (B. P. Koirala). M. P. Koirala and his group formed the Rashtriya Praja Party. The two again merged into one in 1961. One reason for the absence of splits in the party for the next 30 years could be the ban on political parties. The party split again in 2002, however, each faction claiming to be the real Nepali Congress. The split followed the action of the party president, Girija Prasad Koirala (G. P. Koirala), to expel the prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba (S. B. Deuba) from the party for three years, for asking the king to dissolve the Parliament and hold fresh elections. As the Election Commission recognized the Koirala faction as the official Nepali Congress, S. B. Deuba and his faction registered their party as the Nepali Congress (Democratic).

In Pakistan, for example, the Pakistan Muslim League has split over the years into different groups. Six PML parties (with party suffixes such as Junejo, Nawaz, Jinnah, Functional, Zia and Quaid-i-Azam) participated in the elections in 2002. Five factions later merged to form a united Pakistan Muslim League in opposition to the PML-N. The PPP too, split into several factions/parties. Recently the PPP-Patriot and PPP-Sherpao have merged to deprive Benazir Bhutto of the original party name.

Her party now operates under the name PPP-Parliamentarian. The mergers seem like a conglomeration of factions. Since such mergers are done at the behest of the military establishment it is unclear how long these groupings will last. The number of religious parties has also increased in Pakistan. Six religious parties are now in the Parliament under the umbrella name of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal.

The way in which parties are splitting and merging in Nepal is baffling. The splits in the mainstream parties take place largely because of internal power struggles among leaders of different factions or their attempts to get into power through alliances with others. The Nepali Congress split into two after the 1999 elections—the Nepali Congress and the Nepali Congress (Democratic)—while the RPP has gone through the processes of splitting and merging. That ideology alone cannot act as a cementing force among the leaders is evident from the splits in the communist parties and groups. Khadka (1995) estimated that there were about 20 parties or groups among the communists in Nepal.

In India, the party splits are too many to enumerate. The Janata Party and later the Janata Dal have split so many times that all those parties that sprang up from the same source are called the Janata *parivar* (family). Even the parties that have grown on regional and caste identities have split several times. For example, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), a state party in Andhra Pradesh, has split four or five times. There are about four groups of the Kerala Congress, which claims to represent the interests of the Christians. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has split several times, giving rise to several other bigger and smaller parties. The Akali Dal in Punjab has split several times, and at any point in time many groups claiming the status of the original Akali Dal can be found.

It appears that parties tend to fragment more easily where political elites and the electorate do not find shifting of loyalties for the sake of power particularly objectionable. Fragmentation of parties could also be due to the possibilities that open up in the times of hung parliaments, alliances and unstable governments. The splits could also be attributed to the inability of the major parties to recognize diversities—social, regional, linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnic—and accommodate representatives of these diverse groups in positions of power, either in the party or in governments, in a way that is compatible with their expectations. Another factor that contributes to splits could be the inadequate scope for dissent or institutionalized mechanisms to reconcile or resolve conflicts in parties. Those who oppose the official line or the official leadership or get frustrated owing to the perceived deprivation of positions resort to splitting the original party.

As a consequence of the proliferation and fragmentation there has been much jostling and pushing in the party domain as parties compete for electoral support from the same constituencies. The splintered parties usually adopt a hostile attitude towards each other. The struggles between parties assume the nature of tussles among leaders. Policy issues tend to play a minor role, and at times no role at all, in the party

fragmentation or party competition. The geographical spread of the national parties becomes uneven. The decline of the Congress party in India was attributed to the emergence of several state parties. In Pakistan, the splits have reduced the strength of the two major parties that have taken a position against military interference in politics. Lastly, the formation and running of governments becomes more and more difficult. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in India during 1999–2004 was a coalition of more than 20 parties.

We have so far talked about fragmentation in its literal sense, as the splitting of parties and the emergence of new parties. But one can also see it in the sense in which Sartori defined fragmentation—as a condition in which many parties exist and none of them approaches an effective majority. Viewed in this way, the party system in all the countries of the region appears to be fragmented. But this has to be qualified because we find different degrees of fragmentation in different countries. If we look at the results of the latest elections in the countries of the region, the number of relevant parties, having the support of more than 5 per cent of the electorate, does not exceed four in any country. Let us also see the effective number of parties in different countries for all national elections since they emerged as electoral democracies (see Table 3.2).<sup>8</sup>

The effective number of parties and the change in the index for different countries in the region show that the party system in India and Bangladesh has evolved from a one dominant party system to either a two-party system or a pluralistic model. Sri Lanka has hovered between a two-party system and moderate pluralism. Presently, Bangladesh is more proximate to a two-party model. At the national level, Sri Lanka is close to what is called a two-and-a-half party model, with the presence of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) as a major actor. The fragmented nature of the party system in Pakistan may be an exceptional feature of the 2002 elections, as many factions were present in the election fray and won one or a few seats each. India has experienced a high degree of pluralism. It shows a consistent tendency towards fragmentation at the national level (but it may not be so at the level of the constituent states) since 1989.

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<sup>8</sup> The effective number of parties, in terms of percentage of votes and seats secured by parties in elections to the directly elected chamber of Parliament, is calculated for all the general elections using the Taagepara and Shugart procedure ( $N=1/\sum p_i^2$  where  $p_i$  is the fractional share of the  $i$ -th party and  $\sum$  stand for the summation of overall components). On the basis of the effective number of parties, we may classify a party system into the following categories: if the value of the index is less than 2 it can be considered a one-dominant-party system; if the value is between 2 and 2.5 it can be considered a two-party system; if the value is between 2.5 and 4 it can be considered a system of moderate pluralism; and if the value is 4 or greater the system can be considered one of extreme pluralism (Achard and Gonzalez: 38).

**Table 3.2: Effective number of parties**

Year of election	Effective number of parties	
	% of votes secured	Seats won
<b>Bangladesh</b>		
1973	1.80	1.05
1979	3.59	1.99
1986	3.10	2.71
1991	4.48	3.08
1996	3.47	2.51
2001	2.83	2.08
<b>India</b>		
1952	4.53	1.80
1957	3.98	1.76
1962	4.40	1.85
1967	5.19	3.16
1971	4.63	2.12
1977	3.40	2.63
1980	4.25	2.28
1984	4.00	1.69
1989	4.80	4.35
1991	5.10	3.70
1996	7.11	5.83
1998	6.91	5.28
1999	6.74	5.87
2004	7.47	6.53

Year of election	Effective number of parties	
	% of votes secured	Seats won
<b>Nepal</b>		
1991	4.13	2.47
1994	4.05	2.78
1999	4.09	2.39
<b>Pakistan</b>		
1977	2.14	1.57
1988	2.96	2.81
1990	2.92	2.61
1993	3.19	3.09
2002	5.20	4.38
<b>Sri Lanka</b>		
1956	3.78	2.97
1960	3.68	3.23
1965	3.75	3.50
1970	3.40	2.49
1977	2.96	1.49
1994	2.30	2.56
2001	2.75	2.74
2004	2.68	2.68

The increase in the number of parties should not be looked upon with alarm or as a threat to the stability of democracy in the region. It has a positive side too. The entry of more parties has introduced vibrancy as well as fluidity in the party system. The new parties have helped to highlight the special problems of the different regions, castes and other social groups. Parties that exercised absolute control over government have lost their dominant position. Several new parties have acquired a significant presence in the party system. The relative electoral strengths of the parties have been undergoing changes. Parties can no longer take the electorate for granted. The most important consequence of the growth of new parties is the emergence of coalitions in all the countries of the regions.

### **3.4 Patterns of inter-party competition**

The pattern of inter-party competition is structured by the political context in which parties function. We have noted in the previous chapter that parties in Pakistan and Bangladesh had to muddle through the muddy waters of politics and military control for long periods. Parties floated or supported by the military had swept elections in both these countries. The First Past The Post (FPTP) system had contributed to huge majorities in legislatures disproportional to the vote percentages in India and Sri Lanka (prior to the introduction of PR in the latter). In addition to this, the splits in the established parties and the founding of new parties had affected inter-party competition in all the countries. The pattern of party competition is often measured by an index of electoral volatility proposed by Pederson (1979) to understand stability and change in the party systems in Western Europe. It provides one single quantitative index of the changes in the electoral support received by parties from one election to the next.<sup>9</sup> The index of electoral volatility for different countries in the South Asian region (see Table 3.3) differs across countries as well as over time. The extent of volatility in the region is comparable to that of Latin America during the last two decades. The mean volatility for 13 Western democracies in the elections held during the period 1948–77 was 8.1 (Pederson: 4); it was 22.06 for Latin America between 1978 and 2000 (Payne et al.: 132), and 24.8 for South Asia between 1952 and 2004.

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<sup>9</sup> Pederson's index of electoral volatility is derived by adding the net change (by ignoring the sign differences) in the percentage of votes gained or lost by each party from one election to the next. The total net change (TNC) is then divided by 2, so that the index is simply an expression of the cumulated gains or losses for all the parties contesting in elections. Volatility can result either from shifts in vote from one party to the other, or from the arrival of new parties or the disappearance of old parties. The volatility index for each country is the average of the volatility for all the election periods in that country. Since the mean volatility may conceal variation, the extent of variation can be understood by the corresponding standard deviation for each country.

**Table 3.3: Electoral volatility (by vote percentages)**

<b>Bangladesh</b>		<b>Sri Lanka</b>	
Time span 1973–2001		Time span 1956–2004	
Number of election periods 5		Number of election periods 9	
1973–79	45.9	1970–77	21.9
1979–86	63.0	1977–89	5.9
1986–91	47.0	1989–94	15.5
1991–96	12.2	1994–2001	13.2
1996–2001	13.4	2001–04	11.7
Mean volatility	36.3	Mean volatility	15.1
Standard deviation	22.5	Standard deviation	8.1
<b>Nepal</b>		<b>India</b>	
Time span 1991–99		Time span 1952–2004	
Number of election periods 2		Number of election periods 13	
1991–94	17.5	1952–57	14.3
1994–99	13.8	1957–62	17.3
Mean volatility	15.7	1962–67	15.3
<b>Pakistan</b>		1967–71	18.5
Time span 1977–2002		1971–77	27.8
Number of election periods 4		1977–80	23.3
1977–88	55.4	1980–84	16.0
1998–90	7.2	1984–89	20.2
1990–93	50.7	1989–91	12.4
1993–2002	50.2	1991–96	15.0
Mean volatility	40.9	1996–98	14.3
Standard deviation	22.6	1998–99	7.4
<b>Sri Lanka</b>		1999–2004	7.9
Time span 1956–2004		Mean volatility	16.1
Number of election periods 9		Standard deviation	5.6
1956–60 (March)	29.0	South Asia	24.8
1960 (March)–1960 (July)	23.5	Mean volatility	
1960 (July)–65	6.2		
1965–70	8.7		

Electoral volatility is more than 40 per cent for Pakistan and it is also high for Bangladesh. It is relatively low for Sri Lanka and India. We do, however, find that electoral volatility has been falling in Bangladesh since the third election in 1986. The 1990 election in Pakistan seems to be atypical, because electoral volatility in that country has been otherwise extremely large for all the other elections. The extent of the deviation of volatility for each election around the respective national means shows that fluctuation is least for India, followed closely by Sri Lanka. Pakistan and Bangladesh show a high degree of fluctuation around the mean volatility, as can be seen in the high value of the measure of dispersion for these two countries. It is interesting to note that stability of party support, as measured with the help of the volatility index, is high in India despite its high pluralism in the party sphere and the growth in the effective number of parties over the period under examination.

### **3.5 Emergence of multi-partism**

We have mentioned earlier that one important consequence of the proliferation and fragmentation of parties in the region is the emergence of multiparty systems and coalitions. By a multiparty system we generally mean a party system in which more than two parties have a reasonable chance of obtaining power or sharing power and there is a reasonable chance of an alternation of power among parties. By these standards it can be said that a multiparty system prevails in these countries of South Asia, although it is not fully fledged in some countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (see Table 3.4).

The first condition is met, as more than two parties have exercised power during the last decade or so. The second condition is also met because the party system in these countries is characterized by abundant alternation of power between and among parties. Indeed, it is rare for a ruling party to get a second term. During the years in which Nepal had parliamentary elections, power alternated between the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), with the RPP as a partner. Power changed between the Awami League and the BNP in Bangladesh; between the PPP and the PML in Pakistan; between the SLFP and the UNP in Sri Lanka; and between the BJP and the Congress in India. Thus, the countries have passed the turnover test at least once, although the manner in which this occurred may differ.



**Table 3.4: Electoral performance of parties****A: Bangladesh****Year of election: 2001**

Name of party	% of vote	Seats secured
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)*	42.7	198
Bangladesh Awami League (BAL)	40.1	63
Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh (JIB)	4.3	17
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	7.5	14
Others and independents	5.6	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.2</b>	<b>300</b>

\* Includes the candidates of the Jatiya Party (Naziur) and Islami Oikya Jote.

**B: Nepal****Year of election: 1999**

Name of party	% of vote	Seats secured
Nepali Congress	36.1	111
Communist Party of Nepal – United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML)	30.7	71
Rashtriya Prajatantra Party	10.1	11
Nepal Sadbhawana Party	3.1	5
Rastriya Jana Morcha	1.4	5
Samyukta Janamorcha Nepal	0.8	1
Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party	0.6	1
Nepal Communist Party (ML)	6.4	0
Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (Chand)	3.3	0
Others	4.6	0
Independents	2.8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>205</b>

*C: Pakistan***Year of election: 2002**

Name of party	% of votes	Seats secured
Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam)	25.7	126
Pakistan People's Party-Parliamentarian	25.8	81
Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal	11.3	63
Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Sherif	9.4	19
Muttahida Qaumi Movement	3.1	17
National Alliance	4.1	16
Others and independents	20.6	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>342</b>

*Note:* Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal: (Partners) Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (F), Jamiati-Ulema-i-Islam (Sami), Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan, Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan, Jamiat Ahle Hadith and Tehrik-i-Islam.

National Alliance: (Partners) Millat Party, Sindh Democratic Alliance, National People's Party. This alliance has now formally merged with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League and its constituent parties do not exist as separate entities.

*D: Sri Lanka***Year of election: 2004**

Name of party	% of vote	Seats secured
United People's Freedom Alliance*	45.6	105
United National Party **	37.8	82
Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi***	6.8	22
Jatika Hela Urumaya	6.0	9
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	2.0	5
Eelam People's Democratic Party	0.3	1
UpCountry Peoples Front	0.5	1
Others	1.0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>225</b>

\* The United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA): Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), National Unity Alliance, Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Sri Lanka Mahajana Party and Communist Party.

\*\* The Ceylon Worker's Congress contested on the United National Party ticket.

\*\*\* Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (Tamil National Alliance): All Ceylon Tamil Congress; Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front; Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization; Tamil United Liberation Front.

*E: India***Year of election: 2004**

Name of party	% of vote	Seats secured
Indian National Congress	26.5	145
Bharatiya Janata Party	22.2	138
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	5.7	43
Samajwadi Party	4.3	36
Rashtriya Janata Dal	2.4	24
Bahujan Samaj Party	5.3	19
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	1.8	16
Shiv Sena	1.8	12
Biju Janata Dal	1.3	11
Communist Party of India	1.4	10
Nationalist Congress Party	1.8	9
Janata Dal (U)	2.4	8
Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal)	0.9	8
Pattali Makkal Katchi	0.6	6
Telugu Desam Party	3.0	5
Telangana Rashtra Samiti	0.6	5
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	0.5	5
Lok Jan Shakti Party	0.7	4
Marumalarchi DMK	0.4	4
Janata Dal (Secular)	1.5	3
Rashtriya Lok Dal	0.6	3
Revolutionary Socialist Party	0.4	3
All India Forward Bloc	0.4	3
All India Trinamool Congress	2.1	2
Asom Gana Parishad	0.5	2
J & K National Conference	0.1	2
Muslim League	0.2	1
All India Majlis-E-Ittihadul Muslimeen	0.1	1
Kerala Congress (Mani)	0.1	1
Republican Party of India (Athawale)	0.1	1
Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya)	0.1	1
National Loktantrik Party	0.1	1
Nagaland People's Front	0.2	1
J & K People's Democratic Party	0.1	1
Mizo National Front	0.1	1
Sikkim Democratic Front	0.1	1

Name of party	% of vote	Seats secured
Bharatiya Navshakti Party	0.1	1
Indian Federal Democratic Party	0.1	1
All India Anna DMK	2.2	-
Indian National Lok Dal	0.5	-
Republican Party of India (Gawai)	0.1	-
Independents	3.8	2
Other parties	2.9	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>543</b>

*Source for all tables:* Election Commission reports for various countries; CSDS Data Unit; and International IDEA's Country Reports on political parties.

Changes in the party domain indicate not only a trend towards multi-partism, but the emergence of a multiparty system in which two alliances of parties compete. Alliance politics has increased the scope for power-sharing arrangements among parties. Since no single major party is in a position to secure a clear majority in the national legislatures, they are all compelled to forge alliances. In the rival party alliances, a major party plays the role of the central pillar around which other parties group and alliances are unstable when there is no such dominant party in the alliance. In some countries, the emergence of a third or fourth party has introduced a major variation to the party system. The support of the third party becomes crucial for any major party wanting to form a government. The RPP and the Nepal Sadbhawana Party (NSP) in Nepal; the JVP, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) in Sri Lanka; and the Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh are playing the balancing or pressurizing or supplementing role. Whichever side they shift to, the power scales tip towards that side.

A third force came into existence in India in the late 1980s in the form of the Third Front, a combination of parties other than the INC, the BJP and the left parties. It came to power twice—in 1989 and 1996. Currently, there is yet another front, called the Left Front, consisting of four parties. The question asked in Indian elections these days is not which party will win the elections, but rather which alliance and which party will lead the alliance. The number of parties that hold power at the Union or state level in India is astounding. Perhaps it has no precedent anywhere in the world. Many of the parties that joined the coalitions are very big. There are no longer any permanent ruling parties and permanent opposition parties in India, whether at the national or regional level. Some parties simultaneously play the role of ruling parties at the Union level and that of the opposition at the state level, or vice versa. Forty-three state parties have ruled or shared power either at the Union or state level at some time during the last decade. The pattern of electoral competition and the players in it could be different at the national and provincial levels. Some allies at the national

level fight with each other at the provincial level, or make hard and bitter bargains over sharing the seats, or enter alliances with different parties.

The 1989 election was considered a critical election in recent years, heralding a coalitional party system in the country. The National Democratic Alliance, led by the BJP, that ruled the country during 1999–2004, was a big experiment. There were about 23 partners in it and it ran its full term. In the 2004 elections it was defeated by the rival United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the INC. The loss of a few allies and the poor performance of two or three of its partners resulted in electoral disaster for the BJP. This reversal saw the Congress forming the government. The UPA consists of about ten parties. Thus, the ‘alliance effect’ became crucial in the defeat and victory of parties at the national and state levels. However, the Congress-led alliance did not get an absolute majority in the 2004 elections and survives on the basis of outside support from the Left Front. For a while the Congress stuck to its resolution that it should try to come to power on its own, but it soon realized that alliance formation is the only way to get into power. Attempts are being made to revive the Third Front as an alternative to the Congress- and BJP-led alliances.

Nepal experienced different governments, controlled mostly by alliances of parties: the NC with the RPP and NSP; the RPP with the Communist Party of Nepal–United Marxist and Leninist (CPN–UML) and NSP; and the last one, the NC with the CPN–UML and the NSP. The three major parties—the NC, the CPN–UML and the RPP—have led the governments. The combinations of parties with divergent ideologies might seem strange, but that was how the governments were made. Parties in Nepal have variously been involved in multi-pronged and simultaneous struggle with the monarch as well as the rival parties.

In Bangladesh, the BNP came to power in 2001 by forging an alliance with three other parties, including the major partner, the Jamaat. Bangladesh seems to have stabilized into a bi-nodal two-party alliance system, which approximates to a two-party system.

In Pakistan, alliance formation has become the predominant feature since the 1988 elections, when the PPP formed the government with the support of the Muttahida Qaumi Mahaj (Migrants People’s Movement, MQM) and other parties. In the 1990 elections, the PPP formed the Pakistan Democratic Alliance. The PML–N formed a counter-alliance, the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI), with the Jamaat as one of the four partners. In Sri Lanka, the SLFP formed the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) with five other parties (the JVP, the National Unity Alliance, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party and the Communist Party) and won the parliamentary elections in 2004. Four Tamil parties—including both moderate and militant Tamil parties—have formed the Illanki Tamil Arasu Kachchi (Tamil National Alliance).

**Table 3.5: Party alliances****Bangladesh***Four-party alliance (Ruling):*

Bangladesh Nationalist Party  
 Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh  
 Jatiya Party (Naziur)  
 Islami Oikya Jote

**India***United Progressive Alliance (Ruling):*

Indian National Congress  
 Nationalist Congress Party  
 Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam  
 Pattali Makkal Katchi  
 Marumalarchi DMK  
 Rashtriya Janata Dal  
 Lok Janshakti Party  
 J & K People's Democratic Party  
 Telengana Rashtra Samiti  
 Republican Party of India (Athawale)

*National Democratic Alliance (Ruling alliance during 1999–2004, now in opposition):*

Bharatiya Janata Party  
 Telugu Desam Party  
 Shiv Sena  
 All India Anna DMK  
 Biju Janata Dal  
 Shiromani Akali Dal  
 All India Trinamool Congress

*Left Front (Extending outside support to the ruling UPA alliance):*

Communist Party of India (Marxist)  
 Communist Party of India  
 All India Forward Bloc  
 Revolutionary Socialist Party

**Pakistan**

Pakistan Muslim League (Q)  
 (PML runs coalition government comprising PML, MQM, and PPP-Patriot, a breakaway faction of PPP)

Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal: is the alliance of six religious parties.  
 Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (F),  
 Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (Sami),  
 Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan,  
 Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan,  
 Jamiat Ahle Hadith and  
 Tehrik-i-Islam

National Alliance: Millat Party,  
 Sindh Democratic Alliance,  
 National People's Party  
 \* This alliance has now formally merged with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League and its constituent parties do not exist as separate entities.

**Sri Lanka***United People's Freedom Alliance:*

Sri Lanka Freedom Party  
 Janatha Vimukti Perumana  
 National Unity Alliance  
 Lanka Sama Samaja Party

*Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (Tamil National Alliance):*

All Ceylon Tamil Congress  
 Eelam People's Revolutionary  
 Liberation Front  
 Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization  
 Tamil United Liberation Front

### 3.6 Typology of parties

How does one make sense of the emergent party system in the region? What kind of parties are these? What are their characteristics? What do they want to achieve? What kind of support bases have they? Can they be located on an ideological continuum or by their ideological divergences? An attempt is made in this brief description to look at parties from the dimensions of their founding, ideology and support base (see Table 3.6). Several complex types may emerge if two or more of these different dimensions are combined. The attempt is not so much to work out a typology of parties, but to make sense of the apparent mess in the party domain by arranging parties into groups, going by one or other of the characteristics of a party. Party leaders have been asked to provide information on these aspects. The following description of parties on these dimensions is based on the 'self-portrait' given by the party leaders.

#### *Founding of parties*

Parties anywhere usually begin as small groups founded by one or a few leaders with an objective of winning political power. These leaders might have begun their political life with a mission to achieve, or with a vision for the future of their society or motivated by mere personal ambition to earn recognition, glory and power. It is possible that in the formation and evolution of parties a combination of some or all of these elements in varying proportions is found. In most cases, a few key personalities or one key actor in consultation with others took the decision to start a new party. However, the ways in which the leaders had consolidated and stabilized the parties were different. When the way in which the parties were founded is examined, three broad categories emerge, although there could be an overlap of these categories in the case of some parties.

- Parties that grew out of socio-political movements, such as the Indian National Congress, the communist parties, the Bangladesh Awami League, the Nepali Congress, the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, and so on. Some parties have evolved out of armed insurrectionary groups, which at some point cease waging armed struggle and join the parliamentary stream and the electoral arena.
- A large number of parties are founded as a result of splits in the larger or original or mother party, such as the SLFP, different factions of the Muslim League, the Jatiya Party (Naziur), the Nepali Congress (Democratic), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the All India Anna DMK (ADMK), the Kerala Congress (Mani) (KEC), Shiv Sena (SHS), the Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJSP), the All India Trinamool Congress (TC) and so on.
- A third category consists of parties founded by leaders with little prior overt and active affiliation with any party. They wanted to establish a party to provide an alternative to the electorate as they felt that the state of affairs in the country was bad, or the ruling party or parties were discredited: the PPP, the RPP, the UNP, the

TDP and so on fall into this category. Parties such as the PML-Q, the BNP and the Jatiya Party, created by military leaders, may be included in this category.

Going by the year in which various parties are founded we notice that there are some very old parties, such as the INC, founded in 1885, and some new parties (see Table 3.6). Of the 49 parties studied in this programme, 15 were founded prior to 1950. There are 15 middle-aged parties founded between 1951 and 1980. The number of relatively younger parties, having been founded after 1981, is 19. Most of the parties covered in this study have stable roots in society, although the electoral performance of some of them has differed greatly from time to time.

### *Ideology*

Parties can also be examined in terms of ideology. As a result of the increase in the number of parties, there is now a spectacular range and spread of parties across the ideological spectrum. The party domain looks like a colourful rainbow, with multiple shades within each stripe. At the one extreme are the parties that are waging armed struggle of national and class liberation, such as the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist) or the Maoist Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist). At the other extreme are those that want to establish a state in which religious leaders and pious persons would reign under the Islamic sharia law (such as the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan and Bangladesh) or uphold the monarchy (such as the RPP in Nepal). In between that are several liberal, progressive, leftist and nationalist parties with different ideological stances or shades of ideological differences.

However, difficulties arise when an attempt is made to categorize parties in South Asia on the ideological lines usually applied to the parties in the West. The labels 'right', 'left' and 'centre' are not much in vogue in the region. Except for the left parties to some extent, these labels are seldom used either by political commentators or by the parties themselves in their self-description. Thus it is difficult to locate parties on the right-left continuum. Leaders actually use multiple terms to describe their parties. Most leaders describe their parties through a combination of terms such as democratic, secular, socialist, radical, liberal, egalitarian, social justice, religious and nationalist. Some leaders say their parties are pragmatic, which means that they do not have any well articulated ideology or fixed policy positions. However, secularism and egalitarianism appear to be the common denominators for most of the parties in the region. Of course, the meaning of secularism and egalitarianism may differ from party to party in the region. In India, the parties are obliged, when they register with the Election Commission, to declare their true faith and allegiance to the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy. So they impart different meanings to these terms. The communist parties are the only ones that say Marxism is their guiding ideology.

Parties are not static in terms of ideology. Over time, the ideological positions of parties undergo changes or transitions due to one or several of the factors mentioned below.



- duration: how long a party has been in existence and in power;
- viability: whether the party has become electorally viable, has come into power or hopes to come to power;
- interaction: whether a party is compelled to enter alliances with other parties to retain or capture power; and
- external environment: changes in the national and international economic and policy environment.

Ideology has not posed an insurmountable obstacle to forging party alliances, seat adjustments or coalitions. With the emergence of coalition politics and the improving prospects of sharing or controlling power, parties have become pragmatic and are ready to keep their ideology flexible. The strange alliances that were once unthinkable and the shifts in alliance partners stand as a testimony to this. In Nepal, the communist parties, the Nepali Congress and the RPP could join hands. In Sri Lanka, the SLFP and the JVP have an alliance, although the latter combines militant nationalism with a leftist ideology. In Bangladesh the Jamaat could work with both the Awami League and the BNP. In Pakistan all kinds of combinations have been tried. In India, the BJP, which was considered by others for a long time as a Hindu nationalist party, could combine with parties well known for their secular and socialist credentials. The communists are supporting the INC, which today stands for the policies of liberalization and privatization. For most parties, power strategies acquire more importance than quarrels over ideology or other issues. Partisan conflicts over issues and ideology often reflect problems over power sharing, an inability to reach an understanding for electoral seat sharing or attempts to weaken the ruling party by exposing its wrong or harmful policies or ideology.

Parties have become extremely porous, making possible the entry or exit of leaders, no matter what their ideological posture may be. Some parties declare that they follow an 'open door' policy in this matter. Certain leaders always keep their options open. Where they ultimately land depends on the political situation and the position that might be offered in a party. This can be seen in the way party leaders change, split and merge parties.

Changes in the national and international economic and policy environment also affect the ideological positions of parties. Parties that once stood for a socialist society have later abandoned that course in order to adjust to changing requirements. We may mention the INC, the SLFP, the PPP and the Awami League in this context. They maintain that the meaning and pursuit of socialism have to be different in the changed times. The decline of ideological polarities in the global context has engendered a tendency among parties to jettison extreme positions and move towards more centrist positions.

The longer a party is in existence or in power the greater the tendency to moderate extremist positions and move towards the centre of the ideological plane. Experience

gained through the implementation of different policies, the practical limitations of pursuing a policy regime while in power and the need to secure electoral support from different sections of society all tend to make a party tone down its ideological vehemence. This becomes imperative where parties move from the fringes to the centre of the political stage, having become electorally viable either on their own or in alliance with others. Although some maintain their original ideological positions, this tends to be symbolic or merely rhetorical, aiming to convince the original constituency that the party has not changed. The scope and ability of parties to jettison their extreme positions and move towards the centre of the ideological spectrum may well determine the stability of both the party system and the democratic party competition.

However, alongside the decline of the traditional ideological or programmatic differences, recent times have also seen the emergence of new ideologies in the forms of religion, region, language, caste and ethnicity. When regional identity is combined with religion, culture, language and ethnic identity, it becomes a powerful force. Where these identity issues overlap with other issues, such as economic or foreign policies, they are reinforced. In India, given the nature of its federal polity and pluralistic society (some would call it a nation of nationalities), parties that claim to represent regional interests, culture and aspirations have emerged and grown strong in several states. In Sri Lanka ethnic divisions are powerfully articulated by parties claiming to represent Sinhala and Tamil people.

As noted earlier, parties that claim to represent Muslims have also emerged recently. In Pakistan, parties based on regional nationalism, such as the Awami National Party and the Balochistan National Party, exist, but they are comparatively weak and operate on the fringes of the party system. The Jamaat-i-Islami seeks to convert Pakistan into a more sharia-based state. The MQM, which originally represented the interests of the migrants from India, has come to play a major role in Pakistan's party system. Several other Islamic parties are seeking to strengthen their position in Pakistan.

### *Support bases*

A third dimension of parties is their support base. Most parties in South Asia are 'catch-all' types, appealing to and securing support across communities, classes, occupational groups and castes. Their leaders do not perceive their parties as representing any specific classes but maintain that they are guided in their policies and practice by the interests of the people as a whole, especially the interests of the poor and disadvantaged. How does one reconcile the apparent contradiction between saying, on the one hand, that parties are becoming fragmented and that new parties are emerging on the basis of religious and ethnic identities and, on the other, that parties still remain catch-all types?

This is probably the result of the fact that parties in the region have not evolved the way the parties have evolved in the West. The legacy of all-class unity advocated during the nationalist period probably affected the parties of the region. Parties say that they

have more support from specific sections and are generally perceived by others as parties of specific social groups. But, since parties operate in societies characterized by multiple divisions, especially caste, tribe, lineage, language and religion, it may not be possible for any major party that wants to rule the country to base itself exclusively on any one of these identities. Either a party has to forge alliances, which will modify its exclusivist stance, or it must make attempts to include more groups in the party fold in order to attain electoral viability. Parties that have begun with support primarily from specific social groups tend to become broadly-based, either in response to electoral logic or in order to adjust to consensual politics. At the same time, many parties try to retain the core support base from specific social sections, alongside their catch-all efforts. For example the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab began as a party of Sikhs, but it has now opened its membership to non-Sikhs and wants to draw support from Hindus as well. The BSP in India began almost exclusively as a party supported by the *dalits*, but today it wants to evolve to get as much support as possible from non-*dalit* sections. The communists, who began with support primarily from the working classes, want to extend their influence to the middle classes.

Most parties in South Asia, therefore, are founded by one or a few ambitious leaders, are secular and democratic in their ideological orientations, and catch-all types in their appeal and support bases.

**Table 3.6: Party profiles**

**A: Bangladesh**

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Membership	Splits
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	1978	Nationalist, democratic and liberal	All sections and classes of people, but get greater support from religious, military and business groups	N/A	Some leaders left, but no splits
Bangladesh Awami League (BAL)	1949	Liberal, democratic, secular and nationalist	All groups of people, including ethnic and religious minorities	N/A	1975; 1983
Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB)	1948	Left, socialist	Working classes and oppressed people	N/A	1966; 1993
Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh (JIB)	1979	Islamic and conservative but pragmatic	Religious and business groups	N/A	No splits

**B: India**

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Membership	Splits
All India Anna DMK (ADMK)	1972	Socialist, secular, nationalist	Socially backward classes	10,000,000	1986; 1989
Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)	1985	Socialist, nationalist, regional, secular, liberal	All socio-economic groups, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and language	5,400,000	1990; 2005
Biju Janata Dal (BJD)	1977	Secular, nationalist	All people	1,000,000	No splits, but some leaders left the party
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	1980	Nationalist, positive secularist, pragmatic	Urban middle classes, business groups, and of late farmers, <i>dalits</i> and <i>adivasis</i> (tribes)	30,000,000	No splits
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	1984	Social justice, social democratic	<i>Dalits</i> , backward classes, <i>adivasis</i> and minorities	In millions	No splits
Communist Party of India (CPI)	1925	Marxist	Workers, peasants and middle classes	543,000	1964
Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M))	1964	Marxist-Leninist	Workers and peasants	796,000	1964, 1967
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)	1949	Secular and nationalist	Oppressed sections, economically weaker sections	7,500,000	1961, 1972, 1974, 1977, 1993
All India Forward Bloc (FB)	1940	Socialist, based on scientific socialism	Working classes, peasants, students and middle classes	10,000 active, and 20,000 associate members	1948
Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad (GGP)	1991	Nationalist and egalitarian	Disadvantaged and marginalized groups, poorer sections	About 800,000	No splits

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Membership	Splits
Indian National Congress (INC)	1885	Nationalist, secular, democratic and socialist	All sections, especially the common people	In millions	1967, 1978
Indian National Lok Dal (INLD)	1977	Socialist, secular and nationalist	Farmers and agricultural labourers, small traders	2,000,000	1979, 1982, 1987, 1991, 1996
Janata Dal (Secular) (JD(S))	1999	Secular, socialist and pragmatic	Farmers, workers, <i>dalits</i> , depressed classes	Not consolidated the figures	2006
Janata Dal (U) (JD(U))	1999	Democratic, socialist	Weaker sections, minorities, <i>dalits</i> and <i>adivasis</i>	In lakhs*	2000
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)	1973	Socialist, secular	All groups, but more among <i>adivasis</i>	50,000	1978, 1992, 1999, 2005
Kerala Congress (Mani) (KEC)	1964	Secular	Agricultural classes, depressed groups	200,000	1973, 1976, 1979, 1987
Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJSP)	2000	Socialist, secular	Poor, marginalized sections	2,000,000	2005
Mizo National Front (MNF)	1961	Secular, Mizo nationalist	All people of Mizoram, but more among youth, ethnic and religious groups	400,000	1988
Muslim League (MUL)	1948	Secular	All sections, but more among Muslims, middle classes, and poor	500,000	1972
National Conference (NC)	1939	Liberal, secular, democratic	All sections of Kashmiris but more among peasants, middle classes, workers	N/A	1941, 1955, 1965, 1984
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	1999	Secular and nationalist	All sections, but more among farmers, women, youth and tribals	N/A	Split once

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Membership	Splits
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	1999	National, secular, democratic	All socio-economic groups in Kashmir	5,000	No splits
Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK)	1990	Social justice	Most backward classes, <i>dalits</i> and minorities	6,000,000	1999, 2004
Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)	1998	Socialist, secular	Backward classes, peasants and landless labourers	In lakhs*	No splits
Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP)	1940	Marxist, but anti-Stalinist	Working classes and peasants	45,000	1967, 1971
Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)	1920	Liberal, secular and religious party	Farmers	2,800,000	Numerous splits over the years
Shiv Sena (SHS)	1966	Nationalist, positive secularist	Backward classes, farmers and youth	5,000,000	1992, 2005
Samajwadi Party (SP)	1992	Secular, democratic socialist	Farmers, backward classes, workers, and minorities	4,000,000	No splits
All India Trinamool Congress (TC)	1997	Nationalist, secular, pragmatic	All people	2,900,000	No splits
Telugu Desam Party (TDP)	1982	Secular, socialist	Socially backward classes, middle classes, farmers and business groups	5,755,000 ordinary members 1,958,000 active members	1984, 1995
Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS)	2001	Social justice and development-oriented	All sections of Telangana	1,000,000 ordinary and 250,000 active members	No splits
United Goans Democratic Party (UGDP)	1963	Liberal, secular	All social segments of Goan society	3,000	2003

*C: Nepal*

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Membership	Splits
Communist Party of Nepal-UML (CPN-UML)	1949	Proletarian party	Workers and peasants	400,000	Split several times
Nepali Congress (NC)	1950	Social Democratic	Originally middle classes but now lower and middle classes	1,000,000 of which 20,000 are active	Split several times
Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)	1993	Democratic, liberal, nationalist and monarchist	Originally middle classes but moved closer to disadvantaged classes as well as terai and hill ethnic populations	500,000 of which 30,000 are active members	Split several times
Nepali Congress (Democratic)	2002	Socialist, democratic	Lower middle, lower classes; business people	500,000 general members and 100,000 active members	No splits

*D: Pakistan*

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Membership	Splits
Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan (JIP)	1941	Religious	Religious minded people, middle classes, teachers	20,000	No splits
Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI)	1927	Religious	Religious minded people in NWFP and Balochistan	5 million	Suffered many splits
Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)	1984	Liberal, progressive	Middle classes, students, migrants from India	50,000	No splits
Pakistan Muslim League (PML)	2000	Moderate	Pro-establishment feudals, industrialists, middle class	No figures	Conglomeration of factions
Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)	1993	Nationalist, moderate	Urban people, Farmers, businessmen, middle classes, professionals	In lakhs*	2000
Pakistan People's Party (PPP-P)	1967	Social Democratic	Farmers, workers and students	In lakhs*	Split several times

*E: Sri Lanka*

Name of party	Founded	Self-description	Support basis	Member-ship	Splits
Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)	1951	Socialist and nationalist	Teachers, doctors, Buddhist clergy, farmers and workers	N/A	Some leaders and factions went out, but no split
United National Party (UNP)	1947	Nationalist, pragmatic	The entire population of the country	1,500,00	1951. Later there were no major splits
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC)	1985	Ethnic party	Muslims	30,000	No splits

\* One lakh is one hundred thousand (100,000). N/A = not available.

*Note:* The source of information for the columns 'self-description' and 'support basis' is the interviews with leaders of the parties concerned.

**Conclusions**

To conclude this chapter, it can be stated that the most striking feature of the change in the political party domain in South Asia is the long-term trend towards greater multi-partism, although its specific features vary from country to country. This trend may be further characterized in some countries as a two-alliance or two-bloc multiparty system. Within each alliance, a major party acts as the central pillar. This has been evident in all the South Asian countries over the past two decades. The pattern of inter-party competition is marked by a high degree of electoral volatility, especially for some countries. Second, we find that there has been an increase in the number of parties based on region, religion, caste and ethnicity. This process is variously termed as regionalization, federalization and ethnicization of political parties. Third, the relations between parties, for a variety of reasons, are marked by confrontational attitudes. Fourth, parties tend to be highly faction-ridden, which is also partly responsible for the fragmentation of parties. Fifth, the party systems in the region are not stable. The instability in the party domain reflects the churning and the changes that are taking place in the larger political domain. The continuation, decline or fragmentation of the old parties and the emergence of new ones are taking place in every country. As a result continuously changing equations or shifting alliances are under way.

Although the parties in India are struggling to find a way through this situation to bring some kind of order to political competition, the situation is far from stable. The Third Front experiment in India, a combination of parties other than the INC, the BJP and the left parties, brought important changes during the 1980s and the

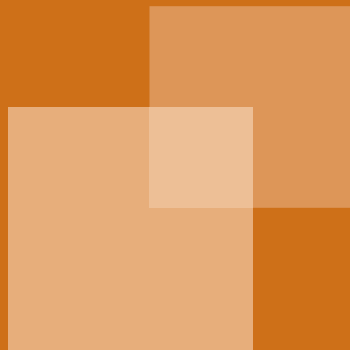


early 1990s. However, it disintegrated in the late 1990s. Some major parties are not able to find space in the present-day rival alliances led by the INC and the BJP, and are struggling to recreate a third alternative. Meanwhile, a two-coalitional party system is taking shape even at the provincial level too. In Bangladesh, alternation in power between the two major parties is slowly becoming the norm. Of all the countries in the region, the party system in Bangladesh seems to be the least complex. With the practice of holding elections under a caretaker government, the electoral results have acquired greater respectability, although confrontational politics still holds sway as party leaders try to settle matters in the streets. In Sri Lanka, parties in the Sinhala and Tamil parts of the country have enjoyed parallel growth. The conditions under which parties operate are different in these parts. The crystallization of electoral competition and the party system in Sri Lanka depends on a solution to the vexed problem of ethnic strife and divisions. The setbacks to democratic politics and the struggles to restore democracy in Pakistan and Nepal have an important bearing on the evolution of the party systems in these countries. The process of the emergence of a two-party coalitional system in Pakistan has been disrupted by the military intervention. The major parties have been sidelined for the time being, but this condition may not remain forever. In Nepal, there have been splits, alignments and realignments among parties. Parties with divergent agendas have emerged and the struggles for the restoration of democracy have forced parties to work together. Regardless of the future of the monarchy there, it seems that multiparty competition has come to stay in Nepal. What kind of party system will evolve depends on the outcomes of the present phase of struggles—who wins and who loses out. But one thing is clear. While the military in Pakistan or the monarch in Nepal may impede the process of open party competition and party governments accountable to the people, they cannot put a permanent lid on the democratic processes, as the parties have acquired their own momentum and dynamism over the past few decades.

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# Chapter 4

## External Regulation





## Chapter 4

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### 4. External Regulation

Comprehensive legislation to regulate the functioning of political parties does not exist in the South Asian countries. The laws that exist are not well designed, as most of them were devised or enacted only in the context of holding elections. Even such laws are not well established because the procedures for their implementation are not clear or the implementing authority is not fully empowered. Parties, too, hardly bother about these legal provisions, as non-compliance does not usually lead to the imposition of penalties or public outcry.

In fact, most of the legal provisions at they exist today are orders issued either by the executive or by the body charged with the task of conducting elections. They are mostly a response to the exigencies that have arisen during the conduct of elections. Most of the rules relating to parties in the region have to be extracted from election-related laws, where parties figure only incidentally in provisions describing the procedures for filing nominations, the conduct of campaigns, the appointment of polling and counting agents, etc. In none of the countries are there laws that lay down rules, without ambiguity and with certainty, for the functioning of parties in such a way as to make it mandatory for parties to elect persons to leadership positions and to choose party candidates to stand for elections on a democratic basis. Legal provisions to establish responsibility for maintaining membership details, managing funds and dealing with other organizational matters barely exist, and this includes any consequences that will befall a party if it does not comply with the rules incorporated in its constitution and by-laws.

The only party law that exists in Pakistan is the Political Parties Order issued in 2002 by the Chief of the Army Staff. It repealed an earlier piece of legislation, called the Political Parties Act, which was passed in 1962 during the post-military rule under the direction of the then military chief, General Ayub Khan, and which was disputed and contested by the political parties. Interestingly enough, the Political Parties Order of 2002 is the only Order in the entire region that directs the parties to maintain internal democracy. In Bangladesh, no party law exists that can be properly called a 'law', except for the references to the formation of parties found in the constitution. In Sri Lanka, too, no party law exists. The introduction of

proportional representation (PR) warranted only the enactment of a series of laws for electing the country's president and members of representative bodies at various levels. In India, some rules relating to the registration of parties are mentioned only in connection with elections to the Parliament and state legislatures, but amount only to the insertion of a small section in the Representation of the People Act in 1989. For a long time India had the distinction of having the longest constitution in the world because the makers of the Indian constitution wanted to ensure that it laid down rules on every conceivable matter that related to the state and society. But nothing was said about parties anywhere in the constitution. Even today parties do not find a mention in the main text, that is, in the articles of the constitution. Their mention occurs in the Tenth Schedule, added in 1985, which seeks to prevent defections from one party to another. Of all the countries in the region, only Nepal has passed a comprehensive piece of legislation on political parties, in 2002, but tragically soon after the enactment it was rendered irrelevant with the suspension of democracy by the monarch.

It is not that parties are not very significant in these countries. Since the inception of the state in these countries, parties have been playing a major role in the management of the state and society. Nor is it that parties in these countries are merely creatures of factions in the legislatures for mobilizing support during elections. A large number of parties in South Asia are internally created parties, parties that grew out of movements and struggles outside the legislature. It is not that lawmakers want to keep the parties at the margins of the polity. They know, much more than anyone else, that parties make crucial decisions on the affairs of the state and society and that millions of people invest their hopes and lives in parties. Lawmakers spend so much time and energy making laws on larger or smaller aspects of social relations and the economy, yet well-designed party laws are not to be found. Is this because the lawmakers do not want such laws, as almost all of them are party leaders and they do not want to be constrained in their political actions? Is it because they believe that the best policy in the party domain is to have as little regulation as possible so as to leave parties free to manage their affairs as they deem it fit? Is it because these leviathans are not amenable to laws?

What are the current legal provisions that regulate the parties in South Asia? What are their deficiencies? How are they implemented? How do parties follow them in practice? What has been the experience? These are the questions discussed in this chapter of the report. Some of these questions also relate to the internal functioning of parties, which is examined in chapter 5. The main objective here is to delineate the rules and regulations that exist in these countries. What more can be done will be discussed in chapter 7.

#### **4.1 Formation, registration and recognition**

In all the South Asian countries citizens are free to form political parties. The constitutions of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka explicitly mention the

citizens' right to form political parties and propagate their views, mobilize public support or stage any other political activity. The constitution of Nepal goes a step further and says that any law, arrangement or decision to restrict the activities of political parties or to allow only one political party would be inconsistent with the constitution and hence would be null and void. In India, freedom to form political parties is derived from the right to freedom, which recognizes the right to form associations. The right to freedom is one of the fundamental rights in the constitution.

In addition to the constitutional provisions, all countries have some rules and regulations relating to the formation, registration and recognition of parties. In Pakistan, the Political Parties Order says that 'political parties play a pivotal role in fostering a constitutional, federal, democratic political culture' and that 'the practice of democracy within the political party will promote democratic governance in the country'. The Order was passed with an objective 'to create a political environment conducive to the promotion of a federal and democratic system'. In Nepal, the Political Parties Regulation Act, 2002, incorporates rules relating to the formation and registration of parties. Sri Lanka has several Acts that regulate elections at various levels, passed in 1981, 1988 and 1990. In India, as mentioned earlier, the Representation of the People Act of 1951 has a specific section (29-A) dealing with the formation and registration of parties.

Except for Sri Lanka, a definition of what constitutes a party is available in the constitutions, or in legal enactments or orders. In India it is much simpler, while in other countries it is more profound and elaborate. For instance:

- *Bangladesh*: A group or combination of persons who operate within or outside the Parliament under a distinctive name and who hold themselves out for the purpose of propagating a political opinion or engaging in any other political activity (article 152 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972).
- *India*: Any association or body of individual citizens of India registered with the Election Commission as a political party (section 29-A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951).
- *Nepal*: Persons who are committed to common political objectives and programmes are entitled to form and operate political organizations and parties of their choice and to generate or cause to be generated publicity in order to secure support and cooperation from the general public for their objectives and programmes and to carry out any other activity for this purpose (article 112 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990).
- *Pakistan*: An association of citizens or a combination or group of such associations formed with a view to propagating or influencing political opinion and participating in elections for any elective public office or for membership of a legislative body (chapter 1, Political Parties Order, 2002).

Political parties have to meet certain other conditions for registration. In Bangladesh, parties should declare absolute faith in the sovereignty of the country. In India, the memorandum of rules and regulations of a party shall contain a specific provision that it will bear true faith and allegiance to the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy and will uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country. The constitution of the party should also contain a provision regarding organizational elections at different levels, the periodicity of such elections, and the terms of the office-bearers of the party. Parties are also required to furnish certain other particulars at the time of registration:

- the principles on which the association is based;
- the policies, aims and objectives it pursues or seeks to pursue;
- its programmes, functions and activities for the purpose of carrying out its principles, policies, aims and objectives; and
- the relationship of the party with the electorate and the popular support it enjoys.

In Pakistan, every political party shall provide a constitution stating its aims and objectives, organizational structure, criteria for membership, membership fee, qualifications and tenure of office-bearers, and criteria for the receipt and collection of funds. On intra-party democracy, the order is more stringent. The constitution of a party shall state the procedure for the election of the party leader and other office-bearers at the federal, provincial and local levels; the selection of party candidates for election to public offices or legislative bodies; and the resolution of disputes between members and the party, including issues relating to the suspension and expulsion of members. Every party is required once every four years to submit a certificate of holding internal party elections to the Election Commission (EC).

In all the countries, parties desiring to contest elections have to register themselves with the Election Commission. In the case of Sri Lanka it is the Commissioner of Elections. No fee or deposit is necessary to register a party, except in Bangladesh where a party has to deposit a nominal amount (5,000 Bangladeshi taka (BDT, or *c.* 72 US dollars (USD)) with the EC for registration. The ECs are the final authority on registration. They can refuse registration of a party where certain conditions are not fulfilled. In Sri Lanka, recognition of parties is granted when the Commissioner is satisfied that the party has been engaged in political activity for the last five years.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In Sri Lanka, parties have to apply for recognition to the Commissioner of Elections. The Election Commission has not yet been constituted, although the constitution has made such a provision through the 17th amendment. In Pakistan the term 'registration' is not used. Parties have to fulfil certain conditions to qualify for the allotment of election symbol. Parties have to provide to the EC a copy of the party constitution, annual audited accounts and certificate of internal party elections to choose leaders.

However, in Pakistan, the two major parties, the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary (PPP-Parliamentarian) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), have not registered with the EC, for different reasons.<sup>11</sup>

In India, it is not compulsory for a party to register with the EC but if it wants to get an election symbol registration with the EC is required. However, there is a distinction between registration and recognition in India. All registered parties need not be recognized parties.<sup>12</sup> Within the recognized parties there are two categories: national parties and state parties. The Elections Symbols (Reservation) and Allotment Order, 1968, lays down the following conditions for the recognition of a political party, which has been in existence for five years, either as a national party or as a state party.

1. A political party will be treated as a recognized state party if:
  - (a) the candidates it puts up have secured at least 6 per cent of total valid votes and it has returned at least two members to the Legislative Assembly; or
  - (b) it wins at least 3 per cent of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly.
2. A political party is recognized as a national party if:
  - (a) the candidates set up by it in any four or more states at the general election to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly concerned have secured at least 6 per cent of total votes and it has returned at least four members to the House of the People; or
  - (b) its candidates have been elected to the House of the People from at least 2 per cent of the total seats and these candidates have been elected from at least three states.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Benazir Bhutto's PPP has been opposed to the registration of parties, as it believes that such registration is against the fundamental right of the citizens provided in the constitution. Earlier, in 1988, the PPP challenged the registration requirements under Zia-ul-Haq and got them annulled by the Supreme Court.

<sup>12</sup> The main benefit that registration brings to parties in India is preference in the allotment of election symbols. Symbols are still considered very important, and they carry a lot of weight with the parties and with the people. When parties split, the quarrel is not much about policies and programmes, but about who should get the party symbol. If the party is recognized, a symbol is exclusively reserved for that party: for a state party in the state, and for a national party throughout the Union. Recognized parties are also entitled to two sets of electoral registers free of charge and broadcast facilities on state-owned radio and television during general elections. But mainly it is the availability of the symbol that makes parties register with the EC.

<sup>13</sup> The criteria for a national party are such that national parties in India, in reality, are multi-state parties: a party with a minor presence in four states can get such a status. Four of the present national parties do not have a significant presence in most of the states but still are considered national. Only the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have a nationwide presence.

In reality, political parties do not take registration seriously or simply ignore it. It may not mean much to them in terms of the benefits it brings. In Bangladesh, the two major parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League, have not registered with the EC. The same is true of other parties with representation in the Parliament, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh (JIB). Registration is not obligatory by law, and so most of the political parties do not bother to register with the EC as there are no special benefits associated with registration.

There is some ambiguity about registration in Nepal. The House of Representatives Members Elections Act of 1991 says that parties that wish to participate in elections and get an election symbol must be registered with the EC. But parties are not obliged to register with the EC under the provisions of the Parties Regulation Act of 2002. As of March 2005, 125 parties were registered with the EC under the 1991 Act, but only eight have registered under the 2002 Act. None of the major parties was registered under the new Act. According to the officials of the EC, parties registered under the 2002 Act enjoy the status of 'legal personality', but they were not sure whether the parties registered under the 1991 Act would also enjoy such status.

#### **4.2 Restrictions and prohibitions**

Legal provisions in some countries also specify what the parties shall not do.

The Sixth Amendment (1983) to the constitution prescribes that no party shall have as one of its aims the establishment of a separate state within the territory of Sri Lanka.<sup>14</sup> Such a stipulation bars some parties, which have the aim of establishing an independent Tamil state, from legal existence and participation in elections.

The constitution of Nepal says that the state can make laws to impose reasonable restrictions on party activities which may undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the Kingdom of Nepal, which may jeopardize the harmonious relations subsisting among the peoples of various castes, tribes or communities, which may instigate violence, or which may be contrary to public morality. Thus parties representing specific ethnic groups cannot use ethnic names of identification in the party name.

The Political Parties Order of Pakistan mentions that the parties should not:

- propagate any opinion or act in a manner prejudicial to the fundamental principles of the constitution of Pakistan;
- undermine the sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan, public order or public morality or indulge in terrorism;

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<sup>14</sup> In Sri Lanka, an alliance of parties seeking to represent the Tamil minority contested elections in 1977 on the ground that their aim was to establish an independent Tamil state. This still remains on the political agenda of some Tamil groups.



- promote sectarian, regional or provincial hatred or animosity; or
- impart any military or paramilitary training to their members.

Governments in all countries can impose a ban on political parties by invoking some of their legal provisions. The federal government in Pakistan can ban a political party if it receives foreign funding or funds from disallowed sources or promotes hatred among sects and communities or indulges in sectarian violence. The Union government or any state government in India can ban a party for anti-national, secessionist and insurrectionary activities.

No official sanctions or bans have been imposed against any major party in the South Asian countries during the past ten years. But what is important is how the legal provisions are interpreted to suit the regimes and how they are actually followed in practice, either to safeguard party freedom or to stifle political opposition. What if the rulers invoke the provision saying that the activities of a party or the presence of a leader would endanger political order and the stability of the country? For example, a large number of parties exist in Pakistan. Sixty-two parties participated in the elections to the National Assembly in 2002. Sixteen of them were successful in securing a presence in the Assembly. Does that mean that all parties have equal freedom to function in Pakistan? The answer is in the negative. The top leaders of the two major parties of that country, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, operate their parties from exile. While Benazir Bhutto runs her party from London, Nawaz Sharif operates his from Saudi Arabia and London.<sup>15</sup> They are not insignificant leaders, since they are both former prime ministers of the country. While the regime-favoured parties are allowed to prosper, the parties opposed to military control are made to suffer and are virtually pushed out of the electoral arena.<sup>16</sup> In Nepal, official sanctions did not go to the extent of imposing bans on political parties but their activities were legally limited during the emergency period. After the royal takeover, a number of party leaders were arrested and jailed for varying periods of time (up to three months) without charges being filed. Party leaders were also prevented from travelling outside the country.

<sup>15</sup> Nawaz Sharif was granted his release from prison on condition that he lives in exile in Saudi Arabia. Benazir Bhutto faces corruption charges and possible conviction if she returns. She says the charges are politically motivated.

<sup>16</sup> In May 2001 the PML-N president, Mian Shahbaz Sharif, tried to return to Pakistan from his three-year exile. This followed a favourable Supreme Court verdict that every citizen of Pakistan has a right to return to his homeland. However, the government arrested him on his arrival at the Lahore airport and deported him back to Saudi Arabia within an hour. Thousands of police were deployed to prevent workers of the party from welcoming the party president. Police tear-gassed and baton-charged PML-N activists, and dozens were detained on this occasion. In April 2004, Makhdoom Javed Hashmi, president of the Restoration of Democracy Movement and acting president of the PML-N, was sentenced to 23 years of imprisonment for alleged acts of defamation of the government and the army. In September 2003, a treason case was registered against six leaders of Balochistan National Party in Quetta on the charge of activities against the role of the military.

### 4.3 Elections and campaigns

#### *Candidates*

There are no legal provisions that regulate the selection of persons to be put forward as candidates in general elections. The matter is left entirely to the parties and it is for the party leadership to decide whom to select, how to select candidates and how many to field in elections. Neither the state nor the EC can interfere in this process.

However, parties cannot choose persons who have been convicted in serious criminal cases. The actual rules vary from country to country:

- *Bangladesh*: Conviction in criminal cases with imprisonment for two or more years disqualifies a person from being a candidate. A period of five years has to elapse after release before such a person can become eligible to contest an election once again.
- *India*: Depends on the nature of the crime and the severity of punishment. Persons convicted of criminal charges are disqualified from being candidates for a period of six years in the case of a fine, and in the case of imprisonment for a further period of six years from their release.
- *Nepal*: Conviction on criminal or corruption charges with imprisonment for two or more years. A period of six of years has to elapse after the completion of the sentence before such a person becomes eligible again.
- *Pakistan*: Conviction in criminal cases disqualifies a person from contesting an election for a period ranging from six to 10 years.
- *Sri Lanka*: Conviction in criminal cases or on charges of corruption is a disqualification. Seven years have to elapse after the last date of the period of conviction before a person can contest elections. However, persons charged in criminal cases, whether in detention or under trial, are eligible to become candidates. Persons holding public office cannot contest elections.

In India, a candidate has to furnish information, in a separate affidavit filed along with his or her nomination, as to whether he/she is accused of any offence punishable with imprisonment for two years or more; or has been convicted of any offence and sentenced to imprisonment for one year or more. A prolonged battle took place over this issue between the parties on the one hand and the EC and Supreme Court on the other. The Supreme Court ordered that such information should be provided to the voters so that they are able to make informed choices. Parties resisted it, but finally passed the required legislation, but not exactly on the lines envisaged by the EC and the Supreme Court. There was much debate and discussion about this in the media and among social activists. This event provides a positive example of how civil society and other institutions can bring pressure to bear on the parties to reform and

of how all of them struggled with the issue to arrive at some consensus with a view to rectifying the problems that the parties face in a country.

Parties cannot withdraw candidates from the electoral arena once the time limit for the withdrawal of candidates is over. In India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, if a candidate dies after the final list of candidates is announced, but before the actual polling takes place, the election in that constituency is postponed and a fresh notification will be issued for the election. Parties can re-nominate the old candidates or field new ones. If a seat falls vacant in the legislature due to death, resignation or disqualification of a member, parties cannot nominate another person to fill that vacancy. A by-election will be held to elect another member for the remaining period to represent that constituency.

The rules in Sri Lanka are somewhat different, with a PR system in force. Parties are required to submit a list for each multi-member electoral district, containing a number of candidates equal to the number of available positions increased by three. If a candidate dies after the closure of nomination period and on the day the campaign ends, the candidate's name is removed from the ballot paper. This is possible because the list contains three additional names. If a candidate dies during the campaign silence period, the party concerned can nominate a substitute. If the vacancy arises after the elections are over, the party concerned can nominate another person to fill the vacancy.

Parties in all countries have the right to appoint polling agents to observe the voting and ensure that only genuine voters are permitted to vote. Parties and candidates also appoint counting agents in places where the counting of ballots takes place. They can check the marks on the ballots, or ask for a recount in the event of controversy. But how effective they are in practice depends on several factors, including the political environment that prevails, the attitudes of leaders and the impartiality of the election officials.

### *Code of conduct*

The Election Commissions of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and India require political parties to observe a code of conduct during the election period.<sup>17</sup> The objective is to ensure that the party or parties in power do not misuse their official position for electoral gain and thus to provide a level playing field for all competing parties. In India and Nepal, the stipulations in the Code of Conduct are very elaborate and stringent. According to the codes, the party in power cannot make use of official machinery, facilities and personnel for electioneering work. From the time elections are announced, ministers or any authorities must not lay foundation stones for new schemes or projects, or make financial grants or make such promises. However, complaints of violations against the Code of Conduct are common. For example,

<sup>17</sup> The Commissioner of Elections in Sri Lanka does not issue any code of conduct for parties.

in the 2004 elections in India there was much controversy about the expenditure by the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government on the eve of elections on advertisements in the print and electronic media. The opposition charged and petitioned to the EC that it amounted to the misuse of office, since the advertisements were aimed at furthering the electoral prospects of the ruling alliance. The ruling parties defended the action by saying that the government wanted to inform the public of its achievements, and since the election schedule had not been announced, the question of violating the Code of Conduct would not arise. Finally, the EC had to intervene and stop the official advertisement spree in the media. After that both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) resorted to issuing advertisements with personal insinuations against the top leaders of the parties. The Supreme Court had to intervene to say that advertisements that amount to personal vilification come under the guidelines of the Code.

### *Party control over members of the legislatures*

Relations between the organizational and parliamentary wings of the party have been an area of contention in the functioning of political parties the world over for more than a century. The means by which to exercise party control of the members of the legislatures has become a big issue in recent years in South Asia. The questions whether members of legislatures should and can have the freedom to vote according to their judgement or must adhere strictly to party directions, whether a member of the legislature can leave the party without losing his or her membership in the legislature, and what kind of rules and practices in this regard are conducive to the development of democracy, are all up for debate. Dissent and refusal to follow the 'party line', whether in the legislature or outside, have been a major source of irritation to the incumbent party leadership. Members of the legislatures changing parties has rattled all the parties in the region, as every party has become vulnerable to defections that lead to the destabilization of governments and weakening of the parties. Every country has enacted legislation in this regard. This is one area where consensus has been possible among parties: to prevent, control and punish defections. Whether parties can misuse this legislation to stifle internal dissent and establish an oligarchy or autocracy within parties is again debatable. This issue needs to be addressed more critically in the context of the internal functioning of parties.

In Sri Lanka, parties can expel a member on disciplinary grounds. Such a person ceases to be a member of Parliament or the Provincial Council, as the case may be, one month from the cessation of party membership. In the event of such a vacancy, the party can nominate another person to fill the post. If the party fails to do this, the Election Commissioner fills the seat with the person from the same party who received the next highest number of preferential votes in the relevant election. If the list is exhausted, a by-election will be held to fill the vacancy.

In India, elaborate provisions are made to disqualify members on the ground of defection. A member of a House, at the Union or state level, belonging to a political

party will be disqualified (cannot remain a member of Parliament (MP) or member of the Legislative Assembly) if he or she voluntarily gives up membership of a political party or votes contrary to any direction issued by the political party.

Those who get elected other than as candidates of a political party (that is, as independents) shall be disqualified from being a member of the House if they join any political party after such an election. However, if at least one-third of the total members of a party in the legislature decide to quit the party and form a separate group, it will be recognized as a separate party and such members will not lose their seats. So the anti-defection law in India does not prevent members of the legislature from criticizing party leaders or from holding different views. The only thing that the member cannot do is to vote against the decisions of the party. In Nepal, if 40 per cent of the members of a party decide to break from the party, a member of Parliament joining such a group will not attract disqualification. In Bangladesh, it is not possible for an MP to leave or change party. If anyone does so, such a person loses his/her seat. In Pakistan, a party can approach the EC to disqualify a member on the grounds of floor-crossing to another party.

### *Campaign expenditure*

Except for Sri Lanka, all the South Asian countries have official upper limits for the amount that candidates and parties may spend on election campaigning. Election campaign expenditure has gone up phenomenally in recent years. Parties and candidates compete with each other to spend more and more, thus creating ever-spiralling election expenditure. The expenditure on publicity, including advertisements in the media, accounts for much of this increase. Candidates also have to spend a great deal on offering allurements and free gifts to voters to go the polling station and vote for the party. The amounts spent on travel, the maintenance of party offices and workers, and meeting the expenses of public meetings and campaign processions are also high. Most parties and candidates spend more than the legally permitted amount. The rules require the parties and candidates to submit accounts of expenditures to the EC, but when it comes to the submission of accounts they show expenditures below the permissible limits. Political observers feel that parties should reach an agreement to curb this extravagant expenditure and keep it within reasonable limits.

In India, the maximum limits for the total expenditure of a candidate in elections to Parliament and the Legislative Assembly are stipulated. The limits vary from state to state depending on the average size of the electorate for parliamentary and assembly constituencies. Each candidate shall submit the account of election expenses to the District Election Officer, who in turn forwards it to the EC. If any candidate fails to submit the account, the EC may declare him to be disqualified for a period of three years from the date of that order. At present the expenditure by the party and the supporters of the candidate are not included in the poll expenses incurred by the candidate. Expenditure by well-wishers has therefore become a means for the candidates to exceed the maximum spending limit, although there is a proposal to include this expenditure as well in the total expenditure incurred by the candidate.

In Pakistan, too, there is a ceiling only on the expenditure by the candidate. Parties can spend as much as they like but such expenditure has to be shown in their annual accounts. In Nepal, there is no legislation on election expenditure; the ceilings are stated in the Code of Conduct issued by the EC in 1996. The amount spent by the political party is also included in the maximum permissible expenditure.

#### **4.4 Party finances**

Party finances have become a major area of concern in recent years both for the monitoring bodies and for the political parties. As parties have to run large organizations, and also spend huge amounts during elections, they are finding it difficult to raise and manage funds. Although rules and regulations in this field have been growing to make party funding more transparent and accountable, they are proving to be either ineffective or insufficient.

In Nepal, political parties are required to submit annual statements of income and expenditure. They must also submit lists of persons or institutions from whom the party has received more than 20,000 Nepalese rupees (NPR; c. 280 USD) as donation. However, there seems to be some ambiguity here. Only parties registered under the Parties Regulation Act of 2002 need to submit the statement of income and expenditure. Other parties are not required to do so. As mentioned earlier, most parties, including the major parties, are not registered under this Act. But the issue of party finance is a low priority on party agendas as they are involved in the larger struggle for the restoration of democracy.

The Political Parties Order in Pakistan prohibits parties from receiving any contribution (including cash, kind, stocks, hospitality, accommodation, transport, fuel and other such facilities) from any foreign firm, company, association or government. Parties can accept contributions and donations only from individuals. The contributions made by members and supporters of any political party shall be recorded. Within 60 days from the close of each financial year, every party shall submit a consolidated statement of accounts to the EC. It should contain annual income and expenditure, sources of funds, and assets and liabilities. The statement shall be accompanied by a certificate signed by the party leader stating that the accounts accurately represent the financial position of the party. Only parties that submit accounts are eligible to contest elections and have an election symbol.

In India, the law relating to party funding and finances has undergone important changes in recent years, with the objective of making it easy for parties to raise funds and also to make it obligatory for parties to become more transparent. Now a party can receive any amount offered to it by any person or company in the country. Individuals and companies get 100 per cent tax exemptions on such contributions. The only requirement is that they have to report all the contributions of 20,000 Indian rupees (INR; c. 430 USD) and above. The treasurer of the party or any other

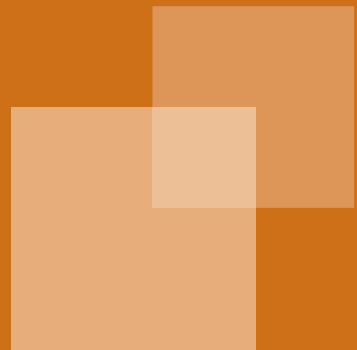
authorized person shall prepare a report of all such contributions in each financial year and submit it to the EC. If a political party fails to submit a report it will not be entitled to any tax relief under the Income Tax Act. However, parties have not developed the practice of accounting for all the income they receive and they declare only very small amounts as their income.

State funding is not available in any of the countries studied. In India and Pakistan recognized parties are given time to present their views and election manifestos on the state-controlled radio and television channels. In Sri Lanka, parties receive a nominal reimbursement based on the number of votes they receive, but this is a pittance and does not cover election costs. In India, a committee appointed to examine this matter has recommended partial funding of the election campaigns of parties from state funds and the Election Commission is in favour of this. A debate has been going on concerning the desirability of state funding and its modalities. In Pakistan, at least three parties—the PML-N, the Jamaat and Tehrik-i-Insaf—are in favour of state funding, and are campaigning in favour of it.

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# **Chapter 5**

## **Internal Functioning**







## Chapter 5

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### 5. Internal Functioning

Most parties in South Asia do not conform to the traditional classification of oligarchic or democratic types—if such pure types exist or existed anywhere in the world. Parties in South Asia do not appear to be simple oligarchies, or incoherent conglomerations of disparate factions. They are neither totally autocratic nor fully democratic, but incorporate elements of autocracy, oligarchy and democracy. They have huge memberships and a massive following, gain power through elections (however imperfect they might be), and exercise power through the constitutional structures. When choosing their leaders, they do not simply go by the principles of majority and contest, although such methods could be used as the last resort. In most parties, the leader manages the party through a consultative process and by working out a consensus. He or she exercises a great deal of personal authority, mostly by virtue of the ability to mobilize popular support for the party. Therefore, most parties in the region are heavily leader-centric while being tempered with a consultative or consensus-building method of functioning.

It is possible to study the internal functioning of parties in South Asia by classifying them according to their different characteristics. All parties are not made from the same mould. There are differences in terms of their organization and functioning, resulting in different types of parties. It is also possible that a party can undergo transformation in terms of its 'constitution' and style of functioning. It depends on the context, the environment in which a party operates, its ideological anchorage and the qualities of the leadership.

Parties that are relatively more ideological tend to differ from those that are less ideologically coherent or that claim to be pragmatic. The internal functioning of a party while in power and while in opposition would also differ. Parties that are involved in staging a social revolution would differ in their style of operation from the mainstream ruling parties. Leaders of some parties in Pakistan are operating from exile and there would obviously be differences between the way those parties operate and those parties which have support from the military rulers. They communicate differently with their cadres and have to depend on the second-level leadership. Parties in Nepal are currently leading campaigns and struggles for the restoration of democracy. The context has changed from that of a decade ago. They have adapted to operating in these difficult, different and more volatile times. They may change further if the situation changes. We therefore find different types of parties in South

Asia, depending on the country we are looking at (political culture), on the political context, and on the ideology and leadership of a party.

One important element in understanding the functioning of parties is the extent of internal party democracy. In South Asia, some parties are tightly controlled by one supreme leader whose word commands in the party. There are parties with a collective leadership where party structures play a role in decision making and the selection of leaders and candidates. At the other extreme there are parties that are loosely structured where a great deal of internal dissent is tolerated. One could surmise when looking at parties that it is not possible to have completely undemocratic parties in a democratic polity. Most parties would fall somewhere along a democracy continuum: some parties are more democratic and some less so. The question then is how democratic functioning can be increased in such a way that parties that are somewhat democratic in their functioning become more democratic and parties that are least democratic become somewhat democratic.

All parties have constitutions. This is a requirement as per the external regulatory framework that exists in all these countries. These constitutions prescribe several democratic rules relating to the election or selection of the party leaders, the formation of the decision-making bodies, the procedures for decision-making, the selection of candidates, the rights of members and their responsibilities, the management of funds and so on. Parties are supposed to observe these rules in the conduct of their internal affairs. But to outside observers there appears to be a big gap between what is laid down in the party constitution/rules and how parties actually work. When asked about this anomalous situation, most party leaders maintain that this is not true. They would say that to the extent possible the party rules are followed in taking decisions and that they have intra-party democracy in their own way. The leaders probably understand the language of their party constitutions differently.

It is interesting to note that most major parties (other than those on the left), regardless of professed ideological differences, geographical spread and longevity, exhibit some common features in their internal functioning. To the extent that these commonalities are present, it is possible to refer to a universal type of party existing and functioning in South Asia, although it is impossible to be oblivious to the distinctions between the parties in the region or within a country. For want of any suitable term these may be termed 'semi-democratic parties'.

Parties in South Asia, like anywhere else, are not business organizations or bureaucracies or purely voluntary associations, although they share some of these qualities. Like business organizations, they are primarily a creation of one or a few leaders. They manufacture public opinion, sell promises, trade in hopes and distribute patronage to their workers and supporters. But they differ from business organizations in some respects because their professed objective is to serve people, not to make profits for the owner or owners. Also, they do not always distribute tangible goods. Like bureaucracies, they have authority structures where the decision-making power flows from the top to the bottom and the lower units accept the decisions of the higher

committees. Unlike bureaucracies they revolve around the personality of the leader. The reference point is not some impersonal rule, but public support. Like voluntary organizations, the principle that underlines any party is voluntary association. People are free to quit a party, join another or form a new one, if for some reason they develop differences with the party with which they are associated.

This is what has been happening in South Asia. The party domain is full of desertions, defections, de-formations, splits and reformations. Yet parties are not simply voluntary organizations, as ideological orientation and personal interest are important elements. It appears that parties combine three elements: leaders who are interested in exercising power; workers who are interested in securing their interests; and members, followers and supporters who derive satisfaction out of identification, security, group solidarity and collective benefits.

Whatever the individual nature and styles of functioning of parties may be, most parties in modern times perform a similar, albeit startlingly complex, array of functions: enrolling members; recruiting and promoting leaders; developing policies and programmes and taking them to people; mobilizing public support; putting up candidates in elections; conducting election campaigns; maintaining organizational cohesion and work for the party's renewal; and running government or, when out of power, organizing opposition to government. Some parties perform these tasks differently and in a more democratic manner than some others. Given the complexities and challenges of the environment in which parties operate in the region, the way these tasks are performed may differ from country to country. The focus in this chapter is to understand the similarities and differences in the ways in which parties in South Asia perform these tasks.

### **5.1 Leadership selection**

In South Asia, the top leader of a party is normally chosen by general consent, rather than contest, as is done for instance in some of the parties in the democracies in the West. In most parties, the top leader, called president, chairperson or general secretary, assumes the position by virtue of his or her role in founding the party, or the popularity, reputation, image and appeal they have among the electorate, or both. It is a kind of 'natural choice'. There would rarely be contenders for this post.<sup>18</sup> In most liberal and social democratic parties, the party chief is routinely re-elected at the national party conventions or conferences. There is a general consensus in the party—among the members, workers and leaders—on the choice of the top or the supreme leader. Where the chief of the party cannot or does not want to assume any party position for some reason, his or her nominee would fill the post (as happened in Shiv Sena in India or the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Pakistan). When the party

<sup>18</sup> For instance, contests for the top party post took place in the Nepali Congress and the Asom Gana Parishad. In the INC, Sonia Gandhi initially won the election for the post of party president, although the contest did not assume any serious nature.

is in power, the tendency is to combine the position of party chief with that of the head of the government or state.<sup>19</sup>

There appear to be two ways of choosing party chiefs:

- The party chief is elected at party conventions and conferences either by general approval or according to the procedure laid down in the party by-laws. Normally there would be no contest or, if there is one, it would be only nominal. Examples are the PPP, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the United National Party (UNP), the Nepali Congress, the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Samajwadi Party (SP).
- Party conventions or congresses elect the highest decision-making body, and this body in turn chooses the party chief. This model is mainly followed in communist parties, for example, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist and Leninist (CPN-UML).

Parties vary a great deal in the method of selection of leaders below the level of supreme leader. Since the choice of the supreme leader in most parties is taken for granted, the selection of the members of the highest decision-making bodies assumes importance in parties.<sup>20</sup> In communist parties, this rank of leaders exercises considerable powers and even directs the top party leader to take a particular course, since core members of the top committee generally work out the 'party line'. The extent of democracy in a party crucially hinges on the way in which these leaders are chosen. Examples of how the top executive bodies are formed in different parties are given in Table 5.1.

The party chief tends to choose people for these top slots who have a considerable popular following in their respective areas, who have a long association with the party, who show promise as future leaders or who are confidants or advisers, whether they have a strong public image or not. If there are factions in the party at the top, either parallel to the party chief, which is rare, or below the chief, which is more common, the chief takes care that different leaders or representatives of the factions are drawn into the highest executive body. Insofar as the factions do not question the supremacy of the chief but are only in competition with each other to occupy as much space as

<sup>19</sup> The party chiefs tend to keep control over the party with a view to pre-empting any possibility of alternative centres of powers developing in the party. The BNP, the Awami League, the SLFP, the PPP, the PML and most parties in India follow or followed this pattern. In Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunge remained the head of the SLFP when she was the president of the nation. In Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia is the party president as well as the prime minister of the country. This practice was followed in the Indian National Congress for several decades. It was recently broken as the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, declined to become prime minister.

<sup>20</sup> The highest decision-making bodies in some parties often serve only as consultative committees for the supreme leader.

possible in the decision-making bodies, it is all the more advantageous for the party chief. A judicious balancing of factions in the committees would ensure the supreme leader's authority by keeping him or her above the factions, while retaining a role in settling disputes amicably. In the parties where some members in the top executive body are elected at the national conventions, usually they would have the approval of the party chief. In communist parties, although it appears that the central committee elects the party general secretary or a smaller executive committee, in reality a small core group decides who should be included and elected to the central committee, which in turn elects this core group to a further smaller committee.

**Table 5.1: Selection of leaders**

Party	Highest executive body	Method of selection
BNP	National Standing Committee	All (15) members are nominated by the chairperson
Awami League	Central Council	President appoints (26) members in consultation with other office bearers
CPB	Central Committee	Elected by the National Council
PPP	Central Executive Committee	All are nominated by president
PML	Central Working Committee	All are nominated by president
UNP	Working Committee	All (50) are nominated by president
SLFP	Central Committee	Elected at the party convention
Nepali Congress	Central Working Committee	Delegates to the national convention elect party president and half (18) the members of the CWC. President nominates the other 18 members
CPN-UML	Central Committee	Elected (35 members) by the National Congress. The Central Committee, in turn, elects the office bearers, including the secretary-general of the party
INC	Central Working Committee	Half (15) of the members are elected at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee (AICC). President of the party appoints the other 15 members. This year all the positions in the CWC are nominated in pursuance of a resolution in the AICC to that effect
BJP	National Executive	All members are appointed by the president
BSP	National Executive	All are nominated by the president
CPI(M)	Central Committee	Elected at the National Congress. Central Committee in turn elects the Political Bureau and the general secretary

## 5.2 Candidate selection

No party in South Asia follows any one procedure for choosing candidates at any level through internal elections. Among the 49 parties surveyed in the region, different ways in which persons are selected as candidates were found. Since Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are unitary governments and India and Pakistan are federal, the processes in selecting candidates are slightly different, but the method is more or less the same.

Despite differences in procedures, parties have some common features when it comes to candidate selection. Candidates are usually selected by consensus among the top party leadership. In most parties, the party chiefs (presidents, chairpersons or general secretaries) have the final say, but they take decisions only after consultations with other party leaders at the relevant level.

Many parties have now developed a practice of receiving applications from aspiring candidates. Some parties collect an application fee, which is mostly nominal. But when there are too many aspirants for tickets because the party has a reasonable chance of winning the elections, income from the application fee can be substantial (as reported in the case of the Awami League). These applications are then scrutinized by a core group of leaders. The name of such a group is different in the different parties, for example, the Parliamentary Board, Political Affairs Committee, Steering Committee or Central Election Committee. In India, the two major national parties, the INC and the BJP, have separate central election committees whose task is to oversee the process of candidate selection. The members of this group are usually the confidants and nominees of the party chief. The group may also consider any other names that are important for the party or popular figures in the constituencies. Sometimes consultations and discussions with provincial leaders take place to ensure a proper balance among different sections of society.<sup>21</sup> Different factions within the party are also given due consideration at the time when selections are made. Some parties have developed a system of gathering information through internal surveys on the potential and possible candidates and their suitability. Parties in power use police and intelligence agencies to get confidential reports on the credentials of the candidates.

The nomination process is generally both prolonged and crucial. It is a warm-up exercise to prepare the provincial and lower-level units for the ensuing electoral battles. Multi-level and multi-layered consultations take place and leaders are involved. Lobbying would be intense at this time, both from the candidates and the factions, to see that as many of their members as possible get in. Leaders have to

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<sup>21</sup> Lijphart (1996) observed that India was a puzzle in the sense that it could be regarded as a consociational democracy, although several necessary conditions for such a model are not present in the country. The answer to this puzzle probably lies in the manner in which parties choose their candidates. Given the regional, religious, ethnic and caste diversities in India, parties take care that the diversities are reflected in the selection of candidates.

manage tensions between groups and aspirants, and threats of desertion and sabotage come to the fore. The internal party democracy, to whatever extent it exists in a party, comes into full play at the time of candidate selection. Consultations with leaders at various levels have a practical side, as the enthusiasm and involvement of the leaders at the intermediary levels are crucial for the success of party candidates. Once this process is over, the committee finally makes recommendations to the party chief, whose decisions are final. In parties that have some kind of collective leadership, the final list of candidates will emerge as a result of balancing the different claims of party leaders or leaders of different factions. Whether the electoral system is First Past The Post (FPTP) or proportional representation (PR), it makes very little difference as far as the method of selection of candidates is concerned. What comes into operation during the process of selecting the candidates in most parties is a kind of consultative democracy. This may be one reason why leaders of most parties say that their parties are democratic, although the selection process may seem very opaque and arbitrary to outsiders.

On the basis of interviews with party leaders, the following factors appear to be important.

- Winnability or winning potential of a candidate has been assigned the most important place by a large number of party leaders. Winnability in turn depends on a combination of factors: the image of the candidate in the constituency, his or her following among and acceptability to the rank and file at the relevant level, and—of increasing importance in recent years—the ability to bear the high election expenses. The electoral system with single-member electoral districts based on plurality of votes that prevails in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan compels the top leaders to choose candidates who are well connected to the constituency and have a considerable following among people. They cannot appoint whomever they like because there is a risk of losing the seat. Interestingly, the situation is not much different in Sri Lanka, although the country now follows the PR system. Perhaps the tradition set by the long practice of the plurality system has retained its influence or the candidates on the party list in the multi-member electoral district act as an interlinking cartel to win votes for the party.
- Standing in the party: This includes the candidate's position in the party, length of 'party life', contribution or service to the party, relationship with high-level leaders, and how active and visible the candidate has been in party affairs. Sometimes loyalty to the party may mean loyalty to the party chief.
- Social background: Parties pay considerable attention to social balancing (by choosing candidates from different religions, castes, tribes and ethnic groups). Seats are often allotted for specific communities depending on their population proportion and geographical distribution. Social background, connections with and prominence in the 'community' matter.
- Competence: This relates to the candidate's ability to manage public affairs, ability to represent and defend the party in the legislatures and aptitude for public speaking.

Closeness to the party chief or senior leaders alone will not secure a ticket for the aspirant if he or she does not have other qualities. Experience of working in mass organizations counts in left-wing parties. Educational qualifications, business or trade union experience and years of party membership do not seem to be of any particular importance. Parties are prepared to give tickets to those who are not yet members, but have chances of winning in the constituency. One consequence of such a selection procedure is that women often get sidelined. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 6 on women's participation.

Where parties nominate members in the national and provincial legislatures (such as for seats reserved for women and minorities in Pakistan's National Assembly) or the members of the upper houses who are indirectly elected (such as the National Assembly in Nepal, the Senate in Pakistan or the Rajya Sabha in India), the top party leadership has more leeway in choosing the candidates. Party leaders who find it difficult to win popular elections, but are considered important for the party, are given tickets. Long service to the party, competence to project and represent the party's views in the legislatures, persons who are not professional politicians but are party supporters, such as businessmen, professionals, those who have made a mark in their respective fields and party intellectuals, are generally preferred for the Rajya Sabha in India or for placement on the national list in Sri Lanka.

Party leaders or committees at the district level normally choose candidates to the local bodies. The provincial party president or the chief minister (the same person may hold both positions) will have the final say if controversies arise at the local level. Candidates to head the district bodies (district panchayats) or mayors of corporations are selected by the state leadership in India.

In choosing the candidate for the top position of the head of the government or head of state, the parties have no specific procedure. In Sri Lanka, which has a presidential form of government, the candidate is chosen from among the top party leaders. The other four countries studied in the region have prime ministerial forms of government. Technically the person chosen to head a government—whether at federal or provincial government level—is chosen by the parliamentary or legislative wing of the party that commands a majority on its own or together with its alliance members, or by the party that emerges as the single largest party. But usually the prospective candidate will have been projected during the election campaign itself. Often the party chief would be the candidate for the top governmental job. The actual election by the parliamentary or legislative wing is more of a ritual that the party goes through to fulfil the constitutional requirement.

### **5.3 Policy/Programme development**

Policies, programmes and election manifestos of parties are generally worked out by the top party leadership. These are discussed in the highest decision-making bodies before they are made public or presented before the party conventions for approval. Consensus is the principle that guides policy formulation in parties. They are usually passed unanimously without any substantial discussion or changes. On occasion experts in the relevant field, within the party or outside, are consulted. If the matter



under consideration relates to or affects provincial units, the opinions of leaders at that level are taken into consideration. Many parties, except those on the left, do not have a single integrated policy document. Leaders of some parties have reported that the objectives set before the party at the time of its founding or the ideals set out by the founder leader(s), or the objectives laid down in the party constitution, are considered as the guiding policy for the party. The party chief and the core advisers have an important role to play in giving shape to the party position or stand on policy issues. This occurs mostly after ascertaining the thinking of other leaders or 'the pulse' of the people. Sometimes what the party chief says acquires the status of policy. The role of lower party committees or the affiliated bodies is limited. If a particular policy or position of the party relates to any of the fields in which the party has an affiliated wing, then the leadership consults the chiefs of these bodies. Usually the chiefs of these bodies at the national level would be members of the highest executive committees of the party, so such consultations would take place at the highest level. Leaders who hold dual positions in the legislatures and party committees are likely to play a greater role in policy formulation, since they would be sensitive to the most pressing issues and their different dimensions and also because they have to present the party position in the representative bodies. In most parties, the chiefs have absolute authority or the final say to make changes in policy position in response to the exigencies of the situation.

In the left parties, the policy document has a privileged position and has long-term relevance. Changes in the document are a serious matter and are carried out through a long-drawn-out process.

Parties in South Asia do not follow the convention of conducting opinion polls to elicit the views of the public or party supporters on policy issues, although some parties keep track of the results of public opinion polls carried out by different agencies. In recent years, some parties have developed facilities to conduct surveys (although they cannot be described as systematic and methodical) to elicit the levels of support for the party policies and what the priorities of the people are. But this is done mainly for electoral purposes. Otherwise, leaders claim that they usually sense the 'mood of the people' at public meetings, party meetings, reports from lower-level committees and interactive sessions with party activists.

#### **5.4 Membership**

Most political parties in South Asia are mass parties and are open to anyone who seeks entry. In terms of membership composition, most parties are pluralistic and secular, broadly reflecting the larger society. In parties that are oriented to a particular religion, culture, caste or ethnicity membership would be mainly from that social category of people.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Communist parties also describe themselves as mass (revolutionary) parties, although they are generally called cadre parties by political commentators, probably because they have paid full-time activists or cadres (called 'whole timers' in India). Religion-based parties are also not considered mass parties, probably because membership in these parties is usually not open for people of other faiths, or because their adherence to a specific religious doctrine, having the status and function of an ideology, imparts a militancy to their activists.

### *Membership strength and registers*

The strength of membership varies greatly. Parties have reported membership that ranges from a few thousand to several million. The INC claims to have a membership of about 50 million. Most parties are lax in the maintenance of membership registers. The higher-level leaders say that they exist at the district level, although the district-level leaders send the list to higher-level party offices. Even where membership registers exist, they are of questionable accuracy. Some leaders claimed huge membership figures, which however do not agree with the reality when their performance in general elections is taken into account. The left parties are more accurate in the membership figures they provide, as they consolidate membership details on the eve of their party conferences, which are held once every two or three years. Several parties, especially the ones founded in recent years, have reported an increase in membership over the past ten years. One observation made by several party leaders is that membership tends to increase when a party is in power or when people see the possibility of it coming to power.

### *Eligibility criteria and enrolment*

The eligibility criteria for joining a party are quite general. Most parties have three common requirements: age, acceptance of party ideals/policies and no membership in any other party. Some parties have two categories of members: primary or ordinary, and active. Certain parties have a probationary period through which a person graduates to become a full member. Members are enrolled on a large scale through what the parties call membership drives. There seem to be several entry routes for becoming members. Many members find their way into parties through the influence of family and relatives. Some join through their activities in mass organizations or affiliated bodies. Others join parties because they are attracted to or inspired by the party leader(s). Some join parties to seek patronage by cultivating party leaders. However, except for parties on the left, neither the party leaders nor the individuals seem to take formal membership seriously. Those who support or identify with the party or belong to the party are considered as members. Usually, local leaders interested in demonstrating the strength of their following or making a claim to a position in the party or a seat in the elections enrol members. However, this leads to the problem of bogus/fake membership in some parties.

### *Training*

Training programmes for members are rare, although parties have reported organizing training camps for election campaign volunteers, youth-wing leaders and people's representatives, especially at local level. Left parties organize political classes for party cadres, functionaries and those who are active in mass organizations.

### *Rights, benefits and responsibilities*

Party members enjoy certain formal rights. They can participate in party meetings. They can elect or be elected to party positions at different levels. More than rights, it is benefits that bring people closer to a party. If the party is in power, they can stake a claim to nominated positions in public offices or corporations. Informal

benefits are more important for ordinary members. Members get some benefits for their family members and also security. For example, the party at the local level is engaged in activities to see that a party worker or his family or his property are not attacked or that they are not implicated in fraudulent cases by rivals or the police; and to extend help when they are in trouble. Clientelism and patronage are important aspects of party organization in South Asia. As party workers get closer to a party, they expect to secure certain personal benefits for themselves or their family members, such as recommendations for employment, loans, house-sites or subsidies. For the more influential members and supporters of the party, benefits could include licences to start businesses or industries, government grants in land and tax concessions, securing contracts to execute public works and so on. As governments in South Asia implement several large-scale welfare programmes, parties become a route through which party workers and supporters seek to secure welfare benefits. Parties have several ways through which they can influence the decision making in identifying the beneficiaries. State paternalism also operates through parties. The state becomes paternalistic because the parties are paternalistic, or vice versa. That is how party presence at the local level acquires great significance for the members and supporters of a party. Party connection becomes important not because of the party's grandiose policies, but because it gives access to the bureaucracy, access to governmental benefits and an assurance to members that they can fall back on party leaders if they need help and support. It is through these benefits that members and supporters identify with a party. Thus the party–state nexus fosters a symbiotic relationship between the parties and the clientele.

Some leaders talked about their predicament: when in power that they find it difficult to meet the flood of expectations and demands from party workers and supporters, while when out of power they find it difficult to keep the flock together as they have little to offer and are under pressure from members' shifting party loyalties.

Most parties lay down some or several responsibilities for party members. The main responsibilities mentioned by leaders are that members participate in party programmes, defend and propagate party views, contribute money and help raise funds, coordinate party activity in localities, enrol members, and vote and support the party in elections. In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on participation in election-related activity. However, whether the party members actually discharge all these responsibilities varies from party to party and person to person. Normally parties do not take the members to task if they do not attend to these responsibilities.

### *Communication*

In most parties communication is occasional, intermittent and fragmented. Usually the frequency and intensity of communication increases during the periods of agitation organized by the party, at election time and when a party is embroiled in internal factional strife. Both formal and informal channels of communication exist in parties. Formal communication takes place mainly through party meetings, party

conferences, delegates' meetings or general body meetings. Party publications are also an important means of communication in some parties. While the left parties publish their newspapers with regularity, this is rare in other parties. Some parties own TV channels which offer a lot of coverage of party affairs.

Informal channels of communications are also equally—if not more—important in actual party life than the formal channels. Party activists, workers and functionaries at the lower level get opportunities for informal interaction with higher-level leaders when the latter tour different areas and when they convey their views on internal party matters. Where factions exist, communication tends to be greater within the faction, and is particularly intense among dissident factions. Parties seem to live in a perpetual state of communication anarchy. In some parties, the chief of the party or the main leaders try to establish a direct line to party activists and local leaders, bypassing intermediate structures. Since charismatic leaders who rely on personal loyalty among party members and activists lead most parties, they tend to maintain open access to party activists.

### **5.5 Organizational structure**

The organizational structure in most parties is more hierarchical than decentralized. Usually the party organizational units correspond to the administrative divisions of the nation. The national parties would have party organizational divisions at the national, provincial and local levels. The provincial parties would have provincial and local units. The degree of centralization of power in a party depends on its geographical spread, its position (in power or in opposition) and the personality of the top leader. In bigger and national parties, the provincial units enjoy some leeway in deciding matters that concern them only. Multiple centres of power exist at provincial level and are tolerated and sometimes even encouraged by the central leaders to keep their grip on the provincial units and prevent the emergence of any powerful leader at that level. In provincial parties, concentration of power tends to be much higher as the leader exercises more concentrated power.

Most of the leaders said that the lower-level committees are autonomous to the extent that their policies do not clash with the position taken by the higher committee; a national or central policy does not exist on the issue to be decided by the lower committee; and the issues are of local importance.

The main function of party units at the provincial and local level is to support the party and party leadership. At their respective levels, they are expected to carry out policies and directions, and organize programmes given by the party, expand and strengthen the party, mobilize support during elections, enrol members and monitor the activities of elected representatives at local level.

Most parties have affiliated bodies. They are called party wings, or affiliated bodies, in liberal parties, and mass or front organizations in left parties. Most parties have youth,

women's, farmers', trade union and student wings. Their strength and functions vary from party to party. Some parties have other bodies called cells to advise the party on matters relating to different occupational groups and socially disadvantaged groups. In some parties it is mandatory for a party member to associate or work with one of the wings or cells. Mass organizations in left parties are more tightly organized. Leaders of these bodies are elected at their respective conferences and party members constitute fractions to control them. In liberal parties, the party chiefs nominate the key functionaries of the affiliated bodies, even where party constitutions prescribe elections. Elections to choose the office-holders of the affiliated bodies seem to be an exception in liberal parties. The main function of the affiliated bodies or the mass organizations is to strengthen the party in the respective groups, and to work to solve their problems by representing them to government or by organizing campaigns and agitations on issues relevant to them.

### **5.6 Discipline**

All parties have provisions in their constitutions to enforce discipline in the party. But disciplinary action against ordinary members is very rare. Even in the case of leaders, parties generally take a lenient view insofar as it does not become a major source of irritation to the higher leaders. Expulsion comes only as the last resort.

However, in recent years the issue of discipline has become a more serious problem. Since power in parties is concentrated in the top party leader, any dissent or questioning of the decisions of the party leader is not tolerated. If there are factions in the party the problem is even greater, because the faction which controls the party looks for an opportunity to get rid of the rival faction from the party. Dissident leaders are generally expelled in the name of 'anti-party activity', without any specific charge being given. The scope for appeal and reconsideration has become very limited. Some party constitutions say that a specific committee should consider disciplinary actions for that purpose. But such committees cannot and do not say anything against the party's supreme leader or the dominant faction. Often they act as a rubber stamp or ex post facto validation to the decision taken by the party chief. This causes insecurity and ruptures in relations among leaders and sometimes it results in a party split or in some members leaving the party to join another.

### **5.7 Financial resources and expenditure**

#### *Income and expenditure*

The main sources of income for parties are donations by companies and individuals, and membership fees. The prominent leaders at national and state levels raise a substantial portion of party funds through their contacts and connections. In some parties, contributions from non-resident citizens are substantial. In Pakistan, parties raise the bulk of their resources from donations by overseas Pakistanis. Money raised by an application fee from aspiring candidates for party tickets could also be

substantial during an election year.<sup>23</sup> Contributions from contractors, businessmen and businesses, and professionals like doctors, engineers etc., add a good amount to parties. Much of the contributions from business people are either under-reported or not reported at all. However, in India, one of the leading business houses, the Tatas, has developed a practice of distributing a certain portion of its net profits to political parties on the basis of the proportion of votes secured by each recognized national party in the most recent election. Contributions from overseas citizens and the diaspora are important for some parties, such as the Tamil parties in Sri Lanka and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Pakistan.

A 'levy' on the income of party members is a source of funding for communist parties. Parties such as the CPI(M) in India carry out mass collections. In some parties, district bodies are expected to contribute funds to the party. Old ways of collecting funds by going round the streets or from door to door have almost been given up. Small amounts do not add much, as party expenditures have gone up greatly. Affiliated bodies/party wings/mass organizations raise their own funds, depending on their activities and requirements. Occasionally some parties do extend help to the affiliated bodies, especially to their women's wings. Most parties, including the left parties, own buildings to house their national, state and district level party offices. Some operate in official accommodation given to legislators, and some in rented premises.

Parties have rules for sharing the income from membership fees and contributions. However, income from membership fees, when compared to funds raised through donors, is meagre in many parties. Membership fees and other regular flows of funds are sufficient for parties to maintain offices and pay staff salaries in a non-election year. A major portion of party funds comes at the time of elections and is spent during those elections. Income and expenditure in an election and non-election year varies greatly, as funds flow in in large amounts during an election period. Advertisements in newspapers, magazines and television take about half the total funds of major parties. Major items of expenditure for all parties include printing publicity material, erecting cut-outs, arches, gates, banners, etc., travel expenses of the leaders and the holding of election rallies. The organization of public meetings, party meetings, staff salaries, transport, party publications and the maintenance of party offices are the main expenditures in a non-election year.

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<sup>23</sup> The Bangladesh Awami League reported most of its income by this method. In the 2001 elections it could gather a substantial sum of 24 million BDT (c. 430,000 USD). In the 2002 elections, Pakistani parties also collected ticket fees from candidates. It was 30,000 PKR (c. 500 USD) for the PML-Q, 25,000 PKR for the PPP and 2,000 PKR for the PML. It was estimated that the PPP collected an amount of about 30 million PKR (c. 500,000 USD). This method may not be seen as bad when it is compared to the illegal collections from aspiring candidates and unreported sources. But there are also controversies in some parties. In India, allegations were made that the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) leader collected huge amounts by this method. In Pakistan, it was alleged that the PPP charged 100,000 PKR from each ticket-holder for the purposes of campaign material and collected a total of 80 million PKR, but had done very little in practice for this purpose.

In the interviews conducted for this research, while some party leaders could provide very rough figures about income, others were not willing to talk about it. The percentage breakdown of income and expenditure is also very rough. There are two possible reasons for this. First, since actual income and expenditure and the officially reported figures vary so much, party leaders are not willing to speak about this. Second, most of the leaders do not seem to know the actual income and funds of the party and how they are spent. This could be because only the top two or three leaders are fully informed on these matters. Those who are confidants of the party chief manage these funds. Parties may be unwilling to disclose accounts completely to the Election Commission (EC), but there should be at least arrangements for the submission of true accounts to the top party committees.

### *Financial reports*

Details of income and expenditure as well as expenditure incurred by candidates during elections are not made public. However, parties are required to submit returns of income and expenditure as well as election expenditure to the EC in accordance with the legal provisions. Not all parties submit returns of income, however; and even where such returns are submitted, they tend to report only the most miniscule of donations, as donors are not interested in getting receipts for the funds they provide, nor do the parties have any system for acknowledging the receipt of such contributions on paper.

For example, 45 parties in Pakistan submitted their accounts to the EC in 2003 and the EC made them public through an official gazette. This step of the EC was a welcome measure. But these reported accounts did not give any reliable figures, as the amounts were only a fraction of what the parties had actually received and spent. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) showed an income of 3.4 million Pakistani rupees (PKR; c. 59,000 USD), while the Pakistan People's Party-Parliamentarian (PPP-P) showed an income of 1,000 PKR. Obviously, the latter would not survive with such a meagre income, and the figure is only to meet the legal requirement of submitting the income accounts to the EC. In India, for the financial year 2003/04, the Indian National Congress (INC) showed an income of 28 million Indian rupees (INR; c. 590,000 USD), the Samajwadi Party (SP) showed 12 million INR, the Communist Party of India (CPI) 0.76 million INR, the All India Anna DMK (ADMK) 0.68 million INR, the CPI(M) 0.2 million INR, and the Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)) 50,000 INR. In the parties of the left, reports of actual income and expenditure are discussed at different levels at the party conferences. In some other parties such reporting is carried out by the executive committees. Some leaders have said that they have internal audit committees to prepare or scrutinize accounts.

### *Funds for election campaigns*

Most of the parties spend huge amounts on election campaigns. They normally supply the election campaign/publicity material that is common to all constituencies, such as cut-outs, banners, hoardings, posters, badges, flags and pamphlets. Some parties provide money to the candidates. In Nepal, the Nepali Congress provided

100,000 Nepalese rupees (NPR; *c.* 1,400 USD) to each candidate in the 1999 general election. However, several parties, including the major parties, do not provide funding in cash, except in cases where the candidate does not have sufficient resources or the candidate has a strong chance of winning but lacks the necessary funds. The expenditure towards the printing and distribution of publicity material, advertisements in the print media and television, and the travel expenses of top leaders in campaign tours is met from central party funds.

In all parties, it is the candidates who raise much of the funds for election campaigns. No limit has been set on these sums. The amount raised by the candidates will depend on the local requirement, and on the ability of the candidate to raise funds from his or her own resources, and from friends and donors who are party supporters and well-wishers. Candidates are not required to contribute to the election fund in a big way.

The candidates are required to submit to the EC an account of the election expenditure incurred by them in the election campaign. But the statements submitted by candidates are invariably within the ceiling limits imposed by the EC, as any excess would invite disqualification. Except Sri Lanka, all countries have ceiling limits for election expenditure incurred by the candidates. Leaders informally admit that actual election expenditure would always be in excess (in a large number of cases by several times) of the legal limits. In Pakistan, conservative calculations estimate that the average figure for election campaign expenditure exceeds the authorized limit of 1.5 million PKR (*c.* 25,000 USD) for National Assembly elections by three times. In Bangladesh it is 800,000 Bangladeshi taka (BDT; *c.* 11,500 USD), but the actual expenditure is always more. In India, it could exceed by seven to eight times the official limit of 2,500,000 INR (*c.* 54,000 USD). Parties and candidates, at least those who are willing to, would be ready to submit more accurate returns if the ceiling limits were increased.

## **5.8 Leader-centrism and dynastic succession**

### *Leader-centrism*

What is found in South Asian parties is not a mere centralization of power, but the concentration of power in one individual leader of the party. Most parties are leader-centred, whether these parties are national or provincial, old or new. When referring to 'a party', this usually means the supreme leader of the party. Party and leader are coterminous. The extent of power wielded by party leaders, or the supreme leader to be precise, is really enormous. This is found in all countries: for example, the PPP, the PML and the MQM in Pakistan, the SLFP in Sri Lanka, the BNP and the Awami League in Bangladesh, and the INC, the BSP or most parties in India. The leader exercises charismatic authority. He or she is the chief motivator, main campaigner and star performer for the party. The entire party, including the legislative wing, revolves around him or her. The chief's word is always final in party affairs. There is little scope for disagreeing or questioning the wisdom of the chief. No one can hope to survive in the party by opposing the top leader. Dissidents in the higher bodies have to either shut up or get out of the party. Party supremos are like modern princes, if not more than that. Exceptions to this pattern do exist, but they are few.



The problem in South Asia is not that parties are creatures of their leaders. The problem is that they are not growing beyond that stage. Even those who split away because they resent the arbitrary and authoritarian style of the supreme leader tend soon to replicate the characteristics of the parent party. Parties that are formed with a claim to represent specific social groups, or to advance the interests of the deprived groups, also tend quickly to develop authoritarian leadership styles. Even those parties, such as the TDP in India, which were founded upon a bitter critique of the authoritarian styles of the established parties, soon turn themselves into authoritarian parties.

Most parties desperately depend on the ability of the supreme leader to mobilize votes. In a charismatic party, to borrow the term from Panebianco (1988), the authority of the supreme leader is often indisputable and incontestable. Such a party does not require a strong organization. In fact the organization may act as an impediment to the exercise of untrammelled authority by the supreme leader. The leader may not even allow any institutionalization of the party. The loyalty of the members and the support for the party among the electorate should be to the person and not to the party. The leader-centrism in some parties reaches to the extent of personality cult or worship. In many parties a tendency is found to unite the head of the legislative wing and that of the party. Thus the legislators and party functionaries are subordinated to the same leader. This is justified by saying that such unity will reduce friction between the legislative and organizational wings and bring unity of command in the party.

Thus it is seen that most parties have strong leaders but weak organizations. Why and how such leadership styles emerge and find acceptance in South Asia needs careful analysis. This includes the factors and influences that contribute to this process: the social relations, cultural values, traditional ethos and patterns of economic development or degradation specific to the region and to each of the countries in the region.

Three plausible explanations can be offered: a cultural explanation; a crisis of governability explanation; and a functional explanation. First, such a leadership style could be the result of the cultural values prevalent in these societies, where people look for symbolic identity and personalities when they make voting decisions or decide on their political preferences. In this case, the image of a party leader is similar to that of a family head who takes care of the people like the members of a family. That is all well and good if the leader is of the philosopher-king type; but even if the leader is made in the Machiavellian mould it does not matter. What matters is that the leader should appear to be extraordinary, either owing to ascribed status or to imagined abilities or proven capacity.

Second, supreme leaders arise in parties partly because people perceive them as an antidote to the erosion of ethics in politics and see them as instruments for good government. When people think that politics has sunk to a point beyond repair, they might look towards a supreme leader who is believed to have the capacity to deliver on his or her promises.

A third plausible explanation could be presented in terms of the functional utility of such a leader to the party. Without a strong leader a party may not be successful in elections. It has been seen that parties that do not have a strong leader at some

point in time throw up such leaders in the course of time who will then lead them to electoral success. In the absence of the institutionalization of arrangements for conflict resolution in parties, a strong leader becomes a necessity for a party for practical purposes. He balances conflicting views, interests and factions in the party and thus safeguards the survival of the party. Otherwise parties face the danger of falling apart, owing either to rampant factionalism or to the prospects of not coming into power, because the capturing of power matters most to those in a party. So for organizational and electoral purposes a strong leader plays a utilitarian function in the party. It could also be attributed to the tendency of other party leaders not to object to such a leadership style, so long as the leader attracts the votes required to win elections. It could also reflect their dependence on the leader for re-election and the tendency to give more importance to the fulfilment of their personal interests than to principles.

Whatever the reasons may be, this phenomenon has far-reaching implications for the functioning of parties. Policies and programmatic positions take a back seat and the leader becomes the rallying point for the party activists and followers. It also means that most parties are not able to develop enduring party structures that survive beyond the lifetime of the supreme leader. Continuity of the organization, in the sense that its life is not dependent on the lifespan of the founder leader(s), is considered to be one of the chief characteristics of a party. But many parties in South Asia seem to be deficient in this respect.

### *Dynastic succession*

Coupled with leader-centrism, the role of family and family members in building, sustaining and running a party is nearly ubiquitous in the political parties of South Asia. The mantle of leadership in most parties is routinely passed on to the son, daughter, brother, widow or some close blood relative of the supreme leader. The heirs to inherit leadership are often groomed. If the expected heir apparent exhibits ambivalence, or remains indifferent or unwilling to enter politics, some leaders in the party or the members of the inner circle of the supreme leader beseech, persuade and put pressure on him or her to assume leadership. This regal tradition has come to prevail in a large number of parties in South Asia.<sup>24</sup> Even those leaders who split a party or establish a new

<sup>24</sup> E.g. the SLFP (the Bandaranaike family) in Sri Lanka; the PPP (the Bhuttos), the BNP (Zia-ur-Rahman's family) and the Awami League (Mujib's family) in Bangladesh; the Nepali Congress (the Koiralas) in Nepal; and the INC (the Nehru family), the RJD (Laloo Prasad's family), the SP (Mulayam's family), the TDP (Nandamuri's family), the DMK (Karunanidhi's family), Shiv Sena (the Thackerays), the BJD (Biju Patnaik's family), the National Conference (the Sheikh's family), the Akali Dal (the Badals) etc. in India. The UNP in Sri Lanka too was a family party for long, but the tradition was broken with the ascension of Premadasa to the top position of that party. Just to cite one instance, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike established the SLFP in 1951. He led his faction, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, out of the UNP to set up a separate party. The party won the national elections in 1956 and he became the prime minister of the country. He was assassinated in 1959. In his place, his widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was chosen as party leader. In the 1960 general elections the party won and formed the government with Sirimavo as the prime minister. She stepped down from the party leadership in 1980 when her civil rights were taken away on charges of corruption and abuse of power. Her son, Anura Bandaranaike, assumed the party leadership. In 1984, Chandrika Kumaratunga, daughter of Sirimavo, left the party, accusing her brother of turning the SLFP into an instrument of the rival UNP government. Anura remained the leader of the parliamentary wing. When Chandrika was elected as president, Sirimavo became the prime minister.

party because they resent dynastic succession or feel deprived of leading positions in the party soon take recourse to the same practice when it comes to the leadership succession in their own parties. Parties that are firmly anchored in some kind of ideology or have a strong organization tend to be an exception to this trend.

Again, there could be several plausible explanations as to why such a trend has been growing in the region over the years. First, the party chief, who often happens to be the founder of the party, sees the party, like a parent, as his creation, as the fruit of his hard work, his own child, which he brought into existence in this world and nurtured with care against all the odds. Parties have come to be treated by founders as their personal property, like businesses or companies, to be bequeathed to family members. Second, politics has become a profitable business, with little investment but big returns. In the initial decades after independence, most politicians did not encourage their children and family members to enter politics as they thought it involved sacrifice and unpaid service. But over time the situation has changed. Parties have become conduits for amassing personal wealth and power, and the leaders are vying with each other to usher their kith and kin into the power games, all in the name of family tradition and service to the people. Third, the people too are willing to accept this kind of succession. They seem to place more trust in the tried and tested families rather than those whom they see as upstarts in politics. This could also be due to the prevalence of ascriptive authority in these societies. Fourth, most party functionaries also find nothing objectionable in this, insofar as it is accepted by people and helps to keep the party as a means of capturing power and position for themselves. They see parties mainly as leader–follower arrangements. Most of them even welcome such a dynastic succession at the top, if it helps their cause. Furthermore, this also enables them to follow such a practice in order to consolidate their hold on party and power at their own level.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever the rationale may be, this regal tradition also poses serious problems for the parties. The ‘palace intrigues’ and struggles within the family cause more harm than good to the parties. In some parties dynastic succession has become a source of friction, as those leaders who feel that they are more competent and deserve the top position after the exit of the supreme leader may leave or split the party once the succession line becomes clear. From these practices it also becomes clear that parties in South Asia are not able to devise and develop channels for leadership promotion through arrangements that are considered fair to everyone in the party and beneficial to the party in the long term.

<sup>25</sup> In the interviews party leaders said that one cannot disqualify someone from entering politics merely because he/she happens to be the son or daughter or a close relative of the party leader. It is for the people to accept it or not. They also stated that, once a family member succeeds as party leader at any level, he has to prove his leadership qualities, his personal worth and merit; otherwise he cannot continue as leader.



# **Chapter 6**

## **Women's Participation**





## Chapter 6

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### 6. Women's Participation

Of all the paradoxes in the functioning of political parties in South Asia, the most striking one is in the domain of women's participation. Women head several major and large parties in the region. Of all the regions of the world, South Asia has had the largest number of women heading governments at one time or another. Except for Nepal, all the South Asian countries have had governments headed by women prime ministers and presidents at one time or the other for one or more terms. These are not mere figureheads. The region has seen some of the most powerful women prime ministers of the world, such as Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wazed. Even today the ruling party in Sri Lanka, the main opposition party in Pakistan and the ruling party in India are headed by women. In India, several large and important parties, such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the All India Trinamool Congress (TC), the All India Anna DMK (ADMK) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), have women party chiefs. The ADMK in Tamil Nadu and the PDP in Jammu and Kashmir are the ruling parties. Bangladesh stands out more impressively. It is the only democracy in the world today, and perhaps ever, where women lead both the ruling and the opposition parties, both inside and outside the Parliament. State power has alternated between these heads of parties since 1991. Yet this has not brought any substantial change for other women in the gender structure of party leadership. Are these women's regimes in South Asia merely part of a patriarchal lineage? Surely, with women heading and leading the governments and parties, the women of South Asia deserve a better place in parties than what they have today.

South Asia has had a vibrant women's movement. Having played an active role in independence movements in the subcontinent, after independence these movements have waged campaigns against oppressive social and political regimes. They have taken up issues concerned with the protection and promotion of their rights as provided for in the constitutions of their respective countries. They have forged links with parties to ensure the success of their struggles and in turn parties have made alliances with women's movements to bolster their electoral support. So far so good. But when the time comes for the selection of candidates for party and political positions, women are relegated to a minor position. Parties are not under pressure from inside or outside to include more women. The male leaders of parties seem stubbornly and successfully to resist any such lobbying or pressure, wherever it occurs.

Parties seek to enlist women's votes by appealing to their concerns and they include women's issues in their manifestos. All parties have women's wings (in Bangladesh during Zia's regime, this was made mandatory for all parties). Many of these wings actively mobilize support for the party but they are not in a position to bring pressure to bear on parties to include more women. At best, their presidents find a position in the central working committee and some women with strong family connections are awarded a place in the candidates' lists, but that is about the limit of their gains. Women who are recognized for their merit are very few. While parties give a great deal of consideration to factors such as caste, community and religion, they seem not to think that gender is an important consideration, except for garnering votes. This maybe a consequence of there not being any significant division along gender lines within their electorates, so that their votes are taken for granted.

Even when parties come to power on the promise of doing something to improve the situation of women, they implement only token measures as gestures of their commitment and do not make any serious attempts towards empowering women politically. This is true even of the ruling parties headed by women. The women leaders of ruling parties and governments are either afraid of tackling this question or indifferent to it. In either case the net result is that women, as far as their political role in parties and government is concerned, remain where they are.

Parties do not differ to any great degree in this matter although they do differ in terms of the political systems in which they function, their socio-cultural milieus, ideologies, age, strength and status, support bases and geographical spread. Whether left, right or middle, new or old, national or regional, major or minor, 'catch-all' types or identity-based, it makes little difference as far as women are concerned. As a matter of principle, some religious parties, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan and Bangladesh, do not take women into their top decision-making bodies. But what about other parties? Their constitutions speak about the need to eliminate gender inequalities and the oppression of women in society at large. Parties say that they want to encourage, give preference to and ensure a due place for women both within the party and when it comes to the choice of candidates. Yet women do not fill the party posts or the legislative bodies in adequate numbers.

The situation is more adverse in the case of small parties, where men have a firm hold on most of the candidacies and seats in legislatures, the reason being, they say, that they are only contesting a small number of seats and these have to be given to prominent leaders of the party. The communist parties address issues relating to gender inequality with more vehemence and they are usually at the vanguard of the struggles for women's rights. But when it comes to the presence of women in the decision-making bodies, nominating candidates or the presence of women in their legislative wings, these parties are no better than other major parties. For example, the Communist Party of India (CPI) fielded proportionately fewer candidates (5.9 per cent) than the Indian National Congress (INC) (10.8 per cent) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (8.2 per cent) in India's 2004 general elections. The CPI does not have a single female member in the Parliament in its contingent of 11 in both houses.

Regardless of these different factors and the inevitable political rivalries and enmities, that all parties should share this quality of under-representation of women in party committees and legislatures is really puzzling and begs the question of whether there is a silent conspiracy among the male leaders of all parties.

The proportion of women in the legislatures of the South Asian countries stood at about 12 per cent in 2000. This total is abysmally low when compared with the women's representation in some of the developed Western democracies, which is as much as 40 per cent. It is much less than the norm established by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995—to achieve 30 per cent women's representation in elected bodies. All the South Asian countries are signatories to the Beijing Platform for Action, signed at that conference. The fact is that it is below the world average of 15 per cent and is even lower than that of some other developing countries in Africa and Latin America (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

**Table 6.1: Women in national parliaments: South Asia**

**Directly elected chambers; as of February 2006**

Country	Election year	No. of seats	No. of women seats	% of women seats
Bangladesh	2001	345	51	14.8
India	2004	543	45	8.3
Nepal	1999	189	12	5.9
Pakistan	2002	342	73	21.3
Sri Lanka	2004	225	11	4.9
<b>South Asia</b>	-	<b>1,644</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>11.7</b>

**Table 6.2: Women in national parliaments: World regions**

**Directly elected chambers; % of total members**

Region	2006
Nordic countries	40.0
Americas	20.2
Europe	19.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	16.5
Asia	16.3
Pacific	12.3
South Asia	11.7
Arab states	8.2
<b>World average</b>	<b>16.8</b>

Source: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

Even the average figure of 11.7 per cent for the whole region is only made possible thanks to the newly created 'nominated membership' for women in the national legislatures of Bangladesh and Pakistan. Analysis of country data shows that some countries fare very poorly in this regard. In Sri Lanka it is less than 5 per cent. Over the last 50 years in India, the situation has improved to some extent, but not in any considerable manner. The nomination status for women in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi legislatures does not give them the authority of elected representatives and it makes them dependent on the mercy of the male leaders of the party for nomination. The number of women's positions in ministries is also deplorably small. Those who are included in the ministries get minor portfolios, with the more powerful ministries that look after internal security, external affairs, defence, finance, industry etc. normally falling in the sphere of men leaders. The only consolation is that the number of women who hold power in the local bodies has greatly increased in recent years in all countries (except in Sri Lanka), primarily as a result of mandatory reservations for women in the local bodies.

This chapter examines whether any legal provisions exist in South Asia to bind parties to ensuring that a certain minimum number of women are present in their lists for election to their representative bodies. It also examines how parties fare in terms of women's participation in party affairs and the public domain, and what kind of measures the parties may be contemplating to ensure an increased presence of women in the party organizations. Women's groups and some parties in South Asia are now engaged with the issue of empowering women and it is hoped that this discussion will supplement this thinking and activity.

There are three ways in which women's participation is ensured now in these countries.

- Reservation of seats by law: The constituencies which are exclusively reserved for women are specified by law. So parties are bound to field women candidates in these places, and so, on aggregate there would be women in elected bodies in the equal ratio determined by law, if not more. For example, in India, when 33 per cent of all positions in the rural and urban bodies are reserved for women, women representatives are found in at least 33 per cent of these bodies.
- Statutory party quotas: These quotas are determined by law but the constituencies are not fixed exclusively for women. Parties are free to choose candidates as per their convenience, provided that they ensure the minimum number of women on their lists as required by the law. The Nepali constitution has this provision.
- Internal voluntary party provisions: Parties allocate to women a specific proportion of seats they contest. But this is a guiding principle to parties and is governed only by internal arrangement. Norms are found in some parties which ensure that a certain number or proportion of women is present in the party committees.



## 6.1 Legal provisions

### *Bangladesh*

In May 2004, the Bangladeshi Parliament amended the constitution to reintroduce women's reservations, as the earlier provision had lapsed. It increased the number of reserved seats from 30 to 45 (in addition to the 300 elected seats). These seats would be filled by indirect election, distributed among political parties on the basis of their respective strengths in Parliament. Before 2001, 30 seats were reserved for women to ensure a minimum representation for women in Parliament. Like in Pakistan, these are extra seats filled by a nomination process by political parties. Bangladesh reserves 33 per cent of seats for women in the local bodies. Two elections have been held, in 1997 and 2003, under the new arrangement.

### *Pakistan*

Sixty seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan have to be filled through proportional representation (PR) based on the percentage of popular vote received by the different parties in general elections. Only parties which secure at least 5 per cent of votes are eligible to nominate women candidates. These 60 seats are not reserved within the general seats, but are in addition or parallel to the 272 directly elected general seats.

In Pakistan as well as in Bangladesh it can be seen that such a nomination system has certain inbuilt disadvantages, even though it ensures a certain minimum presence of women in the Parliament. It effectively confines women to the special quota and excludes them from the general seats. Parties field few women candidates for the general seats.<sup>26</sup> Women are entirely dependent for their nomination and election on the party leaders and the directly elected male MPs. Those elected to the general seats, mostly men, exercise greater power in the party and government. The nominated women lack both a mandate and a power base because they are not elected from a constituency. Thus, the nomination system puts women in what is called a 'glass house'. Some women members feel that they are treated as second-class members of the House, because they enter it by nomination, through the side door, so to say. The prominent female members such as Khaleda Zia and Sheik Hasina in Bangladesh and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan entered parliament by winning general, not nominated, seats.

As an alternative to this nomination system, it has been suggested that a certain proportion of general seats should be reserved for women, or joint electorates are created where voters choose two representatives—one male and one female—to form a specific number of constituencies. There is also a demand, mostly from women's

<sup>26</sup> In the 2002 general election 13 women were elected in the open seats—nine from Punjab, three from Sindh, and one from Balochistan. Out of these the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) (PML-Q) won eight seats and the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary (PPP-Parliamentarian) won five.

groups, that 30 per cent of all seats in the Senate, the National Assembly and the provincial councils shall be reserved for women. Eleven political parties have endorsed the proposal for a 30 per cent quota.

In the year 2000, the government increased the quota for women from 12 per cent to 33 per cent at the district, *tehsil* and union council (village clusters) levels. The 33 per cent quota opened up more political space for women. It enabled 32,000 women to enter the local bodies. But there were problems. The quota was not filled completely, as some political parties and religious groups in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) actually prevented women from contesting the elections in some of the seats and positions reserved for women. They also faced problems of not having adequate financial resources for election campaigning.

### *India*

India does not have any legal arrangement to ensure a minimum presence of women in legislatures at the national or provincial levels. The proportion of directly elected women in the Indian Parliament has been the highest in the region. Even so, it has never exceeded 9 per cent in Parliament and 10 per cent in the provincial assemblies.

With an amendment to the constitution that came into effect from 1994, 33 per cent of all positions at all levels in rural and urban local bodies are reserved for women. These include the presidencies of the elected councils at the district, *samiti* (names differ from province to province) and village level as well as the chairs of municipalities and municipal corporations. As the local bodies come under the purview of the provincial governments, all provinces enacted suitable legislation. Every state now has a State Election Commission which supervises and conducts these elections. Accordingly, 33 per cent of the heads of the local bodies, including the municipalities and municipal corporations, are women. The seats reserved for women rotate among municipalities, constituencies and panchayats (villages or clusters of villages). Elections are held on a party basis. It is not that 33 per cent of the contesting candidates from each party are women. Rather the actual positions are reserved. So, even if a party chooses to contest an election in one place only, and if that place is reserved for women, the party has to put up a woman candidate for that position. In most of the provinces, elections have taken place more than once. When the seats are reserved it has become evident that there is a pool of capable and competent women to contest elections. The new system has brought about a dramatic change in the public face of the parties at the local level. So the general argument of the party leaders that suitable women candidates could not be found in sufficient numbers to field in elections has been proved to be lame excuse. More than a million women have entered the local bodies. They have proved that they are not inferior to men in administering public affairs even though it takes time for more and more women, speaking as a group, to acquire the necessary political skills to conduct campaigns and manage governments and not always to fall back on the support from family members, be it husband, father or brother.

Discussions have been going on in the country for more than five years on the question of whether and how to provide constitutional reservations for women in national and provincial legislatures. Most parties have agreed to the proposal to introduce 33 per cent of reservations for women, and a bill has been officially moved in the previous and the present Parliament. But it was not passed owing to opposition from some parties. Although the ruling alliances could get the bill passed by putting it to vote, they (both the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the previous National Democratic Alliance (NDA)) have taken a position that the bill should be passed only after all parties reach a consensus on the matter. They say that if the provision is created with consensus, its implementation will be enduring and effective and bear positive results. But the critics say that most parties, including those that support the one-third reservations openly, want to dilute the reservations or delay the matter.

### *Nepal*

For elections to the House of Representatives, according to Nepal's constitution, at least 5 per cent of the total number of candidates of any party contesting elections must be women. In 1997, the government passed legislation that reserved 20 per cent of the elected seats in the village development committees (VDCs). At least one woman should get elected to each of the nine wards that comprise a VDC. As a result of this, 35,000 women have won seats at the ward level.

### *Sri Lanka*

Sri Lanka is the only country that does not provide any statutory reservations for women at any level or require parties to ensure that a certain number of women are returned in the elections to the Parliament.

## **6.2 Efforts by parties to ensure women's participation**

Most party leaders could provide only approximate figures about the proportion of women members in their parties. According to the very rough estimates made by the leaders, the range is extremely wide, varying between 5 and 25 per cent for different parties. Most parties have women's wings, but for some parties they exist only in name. These wings mainly work on women's issues and their role in party affairs is not significant. They are looked upon as a means to mobilize support among women during the programmes and campaigns taken up by the party or during the elections. The number of female candidates has been low for all parties in the entire region and as a result the number of women representatives is also low in the national legislatures (see Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3: Women representatives: by party****Number of women members in the Parliament, by party**

Name of party	Women seats/Total seats
<b>Bangladesh</b>	
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	4/193
Bangladesh Awami League	2/62
Communist Party of Bangladesh	--
Jamaat-i-Islam Bangladesh	0/17
Bangladesh total	7/300
<b>India</b>	
All India Anna DMK	1/12
Asom Gana Parishad	0/2
Biju Janata Dal	3/16
Bharatiya Janata Party	15/187
Bahujan Samaj Party	2/25
Communist Party of India	3/16
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	7/57
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	3/18
All India Forward Bloc	0/4
Indian National Congress	22/217
Indian National Lok Dal	1/4
Janata Dal (S)	0/4
Janata Dal (U)	0/9
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	0/6
Kerala Congress (Mani)	0/1
Lok Jan Shakti Party	1/4
Mizo National Front	0/2
Muslim League	0/3
National Conference	0/3
Nationalist Congress Party	2/11
People's Democratic Party	1/2
Pattali Makkal Katchi	0/7
Rashtriya Janata Dal	2/32
Revolutionary Socialist Party	0/3
Shiromani Akali Dal	1/10
Shiv Sena	2/16
Samajwadi Party	4/48
All India Trinamool Congress	1/3

Name of party	Women seats/Total seats
<b>India cont'd</b>	
Telugu Desam Party	2/14
Telangana Rashtra Samiti	0/5
United Goans Democratic Party	
India total	73/787
<b>Nepal</b>	
Communist Party of Nepal - UML	6/71
Nepali Congress	5/111
Rashtriya Prajatantra Party	1/11
Nepal total	12/205
<b>Pakistan</b>	
Muttahida Qaumi Movement	5/24
Pakistan Muslim League	32/153
Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz	5/22
Pakistan People's Party	16/91
Pakistan total	75/386
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	
Sri Lanka Freedom Party*	5/105*
United National Party	4/82
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	0/5
Sri Lanka total	11/225
<b>Total South Asia</b>	<b>178/1903</b>

*Note:* The national legislatures in India, Nepal and Pakistan are bicameral, while they are unicameral in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Figures for Pakistan and Nepal relate to the directly elected houses and for India relate to both the houses.

\* The SLFP and allies.

### **Bangladesh**

Parties have fielded very few women candidates from general constituencies. In 1991, of all the candidates who contested the elections to the Parliament, only 1.5 per cent were women. It was 1.4 per cent in 1996. The percentage of general seats won by women was 1.7 in 1991 and 2.3 in 1996. The constitution of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) stipulates that there should be at least 10 per cent women on the national executive committee. The Jamaat-i-Islami, as a matter of principle, does

not allow any women on party committees. Notwithstanding the fact that both the major parties have been headed by women for decades, parties in Bangladesh seem to be very patriarchal. Party leaders say that they are not able to choose more women for elections because they do not find worthy candidates.

### *India*

No party in India has any provision in the party constitutions or has developed practices that ensure that a certain number of women are selected as candidates in the general elections to the legislatures. Most party leaders in India did feel that women are under-represented in their parties. However, both male and female leaders of the parties maintained that their parties 'encourage' women candidates, that capable women leaders and activists of the party have been given tickets and that women have been given due place and preference in the selection process. All of them observed that one major problem is that they do not find adequate numbers of suitable women candidates to field. The gender equation does not differ significantly even in parties headed by women, although there is some variation. This variation cannot be attributed to any conscious policy to give more tickets or to exclude women but is more likely owing to the circumstances that prevailed at the time of elections. Since there are no legal provisions that either reserve seats for women or require parties to field a certain percentage of women candidates for the legislatures, parties are not under any pressure to include more women, even though the party leaders say that they would like to do have more (see Table 6.4). Compared to the position of women, the number of younger persons selected by parties is much higher.

**Table 6.4: Women candidates in India's 14th Lok Sabha elections, 2004**

**Total seats: 543**

Party	Total candidates	Female candidates	% of total	Seats won
BJP	364	30	8.2	10
BSP	435	20	4.6	1
INC	417	45	10.8	12
CPI(M)	69	8	11.6	5
CPI	34	2	5.9	-
NCP	32	5	15.6	2
All national parties	1,351	110	8.1	30
All state parties	923	66	7.2	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,274</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>44</b>

The INC, the BJP and some other parties in India have provisions to ensure a greater presence of women in the party committees. The INC has recently amended its

constitution to ensure that at least 30 per cent of all positions in the party committees shall be occupied by women. Although it is not clear whether all the provincial committees have followed this stipulation in the organizational elections held in 2005, attempts are being made by the party to stick to this provision as far as possible. The BJP prescribes that a certain number of women have to have seats in the party committees at all levels. The constitution of the All India Trinamool Congress (TC) keeps the minimum requirement at 20 per cent. The Samajwadi Party (SP), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and others have provisions of a different kind. These parties have an omnibus rule that 50 per cent of party positions should be filled by women, socially backward classes and minorities. Thus, although the actual proportion of women in party committees at various levels is unclear, it has been found that these parties have about 25–30 per cent women in the state-level committees.

### *Nepal*

Since the constitution stipulates that at least 5 per cent of candidates fielded by a party shall be women, parties take care to meet this requirement. The Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has a provision that at least 10 per cent of the members of its central executive committee (total strength 40), the highest decision-making body of the party, shall be women.

### *Pakistan*

Parties in Pakistan continue to be heavily dominated by patriarchal attitudes. Women's presence in the executive committees of some of the parties is extremely low. Secular education among women in Pakistan is relatively better than that of its neighbouring Muslim countries. Women's role in the movements against military rule has been very high and women's rights movements have been active in the country. But this is not reflected in the selection of candidates by different parties. Military rule, the growth of religious parties and the Islamization programme might be some reasons for the marginal role of women in parties in Pakistan. The record of the parties in this regard in any case remains very poor. In the 1997 elections, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) gave nine (5.5%) tickets to women out of the total 163 seats it contested, while the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) gave seven (3.9%) out of 178 seats it contested.

In the central executive committees of the leading parties, there are only three (14.3%) women out of a total strength of 21 for the PPP. The PML-N has five (10.6%) out of 47; the Awami National Party (ANP) has two (2.5%) out of 80; and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) has one women member.

### *Sri Lanka*

The share of women candidates nominated by the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), as a percentage of all candidates fielded by these parties during the last two decades, has remained at less than 3 per cent. Other parties

were no better, with the exception of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. Only 4.3 per cent of all candidates in the 2004 elections were women. Women in the two major parties have played a minor role in the cabinets and are rarely appointed to the powerful ministries. Women leaders of minor parties have not been able to enter the Cabinet.

The number of women in the central or working committees of the parties is also very small. The UNP leaders say that they have developed a convention of taking two or three women as members of its Working Committee. The UNP Working Committee has 5 per cent women members and its Executive Committee 8 per cent. The SLFP equivalent has 10 per cent. Nor are there many women at other levels of party organizations. Women tend to play an active role at the local level and in women's organizations but these do not have a significant role in the decision-making process.

For the first time, several women's groups made a representation to political parties prior to the 1994 elections asking them to nominate more women to stand for elections. The Sri Lanka Women's NGO [non-governmental organization] Forum, a broad network of autonomous groups, has been engaged in activities to encourage the political parties to include more women in their nomination lists and to address women's concerns in their election manifestos and campaigns. They are lobbying the parties for legislation to introduce quotas for women, at least at the local government level to begin with.

### ***6.3 What does the situation indicate?***

Thus we find that everywhere in South Asia women are in a very limited number in the middle- and higher-level committees of parties and their legislative wings. Their presence in the top decision-making bodies is often symbolic. Women leaders do not seem to play a significant role in decision making at that level, except parties that are headed by women. While the socio-cultural milieu acts as a structural impediment to women's participation, the patriarchal attitudes and the unpreparedness of the leaders to take measures to provide more space for women in leading bodies reinforce the situation. Parties field very few women candidates in the general elections. As a result, women's presence in legislatures remains low. Legal provisions to ensure a certain minimum presence of women in the legislatures do not exist in India and Sri Lanka, and they are weak where they are in place, as in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

How far do the electoral systems in force in these countries influence the position of women in parties? Is it true, as some leaders pointed out during the interviews, that they could not field more women candidates, although they wanted to, because under the First Past The Post (FPTP) system it is difficult to do so? Since FPTP is based on single-member territorial constituencies, they say that parties cannot risk losing a seat by fielding a woman candidate because the rival party may field a strong and



resourceful male candidate. Given the structural disadvantages women leaders have in these societies, when it comes to campaigning, finding resources that match those of the rival male candidate, vote-buying or using force, the party may suffer, they feel. Thus it should be easier for parties to nominate more women under an electoral system that follows PR based on party lists than it is under the plurality/majority system. But this is not happening in Sri Lanka, which now has the system of PR based on multi-member electoral districts.

The fault may not lie entirely with the political parties. The socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from assuming leading roles in politics are still very strong in these societies. The feeling that the proper place of women is at the hearth and at home and not in public affairs still predominates. The social, cultural and psychological barriers discourage even the most courageous women from running for office either in the party or in the government. Ethnic strife, communal clashes and civil war situations—found in abundance in all the countries of South Asia—deter women from entering the public domain. The growth of corruption, muscle and money power and violence, especially during elections, works against more women assuming leading roles in party and political affairs. They tend to think that doing politics is a man's domain, that it is too complicated, that there is too much corruption, and that it is difficult to push oneself through the rough and tumble of competitive politics. It is virtually impossible for any woman who carries out the normal functions of household responsibilities to ascend the party hierarchy. Mostly it is women who come from prominent political families who tend to get selected as leaders in the party or legislature. In a large number of cases, the male connection catapults women into the limelight—whether in parties or in government. Because of the important role family plays in South Asian politics, some of the high-profile women came on to the political scene to fill the vacuum created by the demise of their husbands or fathers.

But the question is what parties should do to overcome these social barriers. As the organizing elements of society, if they do not show the way, and merely operate within the constraints of a given society, what kind of leadership do they provide? Parties are not needed merely to reinforce the status quo; they are expected to usher in changes, and this is one important area where they can act. When more and more women are entering higher education and employment or taking up various professions on a par with men, when women's movements, whether associated with parties or autonomous, are growing in strength, and when the success rate of women candidates in elections is not bad when compared to that of men, how can parties say that they do not find suitable and worthy women leaders to fill party positions or winnable candidates to be fielded in general elections?

That parties can take measures to empower women has become evident from experience. Parties succeeded in finding sufficient numbers of women candidates

when it was made mandatory. This was amply proved in the elections to local bodies in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Suddenly about one-third of people's representatives in these countries were women. It is also possible to fill party positions with more women if there are provisions in the rulebooks and a leadership willing to enforce such provisions. This has been proved recently in the case of the biggest party in India, the INC. The amended constitution of the party now says that 30 per cent of the committee members at all levels shall be women. When the provincial party leaders sent panels of names to the party's national president for constituting provincial committees without fulfilling this requirement, she returned the lists asking the provincial leaders to ensure that the lists were in accordance with the rule stipulated by the party constitution. Within no time, the lists came back, meeting the requirement of 30 per cent women members. Of course, what the provincial leaders did was to drop the names of some of the male leaders, and put in their place females from the same families. But this is better than having no women at all.

The above two instances make one thing very clear. Whether it is candidates in elections or party positions, parties can find suitable and worthy candidates if they are willing to find women or compelled to do so. We also found that when a certain portion of seats was reserved for women in the local bodies of all the four countries, suddenly more political space became available for women. The result was a quantitative jump in women leaders. Thousands of women, and in the case of India more than a million, have entered the representative bodies as decision makers. Most of them were fielded by political parties. Now a big pool of women leaders is available from which the political leaders can make appointments to higher-level positions. They can no longer ask where the women leaders are. The action of the INC president has shown that if the top leadership decides to change party policy and implement it with determination, it is not at all difficult to find an increasing number of women in the party committees. Why is this not possible for other parties?

Such duplicity can in fact be used as a source for bringing pressure to bear on parties to implement in practice what they say they agree to in principle. Parties say that more women should find a place in parties and elections. The situation may change for the better if the women's wings affiliated to the parties, social activists and other women's groups confront parties with facts and the way parties are operating. The gap between the principle and practice could be a source of resolution of the problem as well. Parties say that they are under constraints in putting into practice what they profess to support. But how long can the male leadership hide behind the excuse of constraints? Can't they find a way out of this contradiction if they genuinely want to?

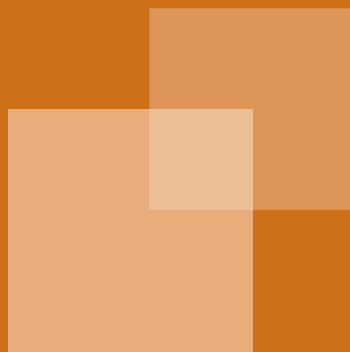
Several parties in Pakistan and India agree that there should be 30 or 33 per cent reservation for women candidates in general elections. The proposal does not have legal force because of the unwillingness of some other parties to consent to it. But what prevents the parties that support the idea of a one-third reservation from fielding

more women candidates on behalf of their parties? They say that they cannot afford to do so as they are afraid of losing a seat to a rival party or parties who are not willing to field women candidates from that constituency. It is actually relatively easy for parties in Sri Lanka to field more women candidates because it has the list system. Legal provisions do help in the empowerment of women by forcing parties to field more women candidates in elections and in providing a level playing field for the parties, but parties also have to show an inclination to adopt measures on their own, when they are absent. When are parties going to face up to this challenge?

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# **Chapter 7**

## **The Way Forward**





## Chapter 7

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### 7. The Way Forward

In the foregoing chapters we have noted three basic paradoxes in the party domain. First, while democracy in South Asia has become broadly-based, parties have become more and more leader-centred and authoritarian in their functioning. Second, while people's trust in the democratic form of government is high, their trust in parties is low. People's political participation has increased, but that has not necessarily increased their trust in parties. Third, while people's expectations of parties have mounted, the capacity of the parties to deliver has declined. These paradoxes might be a result of the very democratic processes in which parties played a major role. Democracy in most of the post-colonial nations has bred serious tensions and pressures in the state and society, which have been difficult to cope with. Authoritarian leadership, populism, an inability to meet the aspirations of people, etc. are the result of rapid democratization without the necessary preconditions or corresponding economic development in which these pressures and tensions generated by the democratic processes could be satisfactorily addressed. The fault lines among the political, economic and social spheres have been manifested in the political tremors that have led to ruptures in democracy—military rule, authoritarian states and persistent divisions and civic strife.

What challenges do parties face and how are they going to handle them? What are the opportunities they have and how are they going to use them? What are the possible reforms that political leaders and the public might consider so that they are strong and discharge their responsibilities well? These are some of the questions addressed in this last chapter.

Given the complexity of the situation prevailing in these countries, parties face different kinds of challenges and they have to find their own ways to address them. One thing is sure: parties cannot remain autocracies and oligarchies if they want to fight against tyrannical and oligarchic regimes. They cannot remain autocracies and oligarchies when they function in democratic polities. In either of these situations, parties have no other option but to be democratic. In other words, parties have to be democratic both in democracies and in non-democracies. While parties represent

the larger socio-cultural reality, they are also the vehicles of change. Parties that lack internal democracy cannot position themselves rightly to handle the problems of democracy in general. Second, as new parties have emerged as contenders for power and while alliances are becoming the norm, parties must adjust to the new realities of sharing power, and the ruling parties need to develop the ability to coexist and work with the opposition.

More important is how the parties address certain other deformities that have crept in over the years. Criminality, corruption, and the use of money and muscle power to win elections have grown at an alarming rate. Parties have unleashed these 'monsters' to gain and retain power, but find it difficult to put them back in the bottle. Several party leaders realize this and feel that they are caught in a vicious circle. Some have come out against these maladies openly and they are widely discussed in society, which is filled with people's disenchantment and discontentment. People have come onto the streets and are agitating against the authoritarian leadership styles, political corruption and electoral fraud of parties. Thus, the time is ripe to address this decay and overcome it. Parties cannot delude themselves for long that all is well. The sooner the growing malady is identified the better for the parties and the societies in which they operate. On the other hand, if the malady is allowed to penetrate deeper and deeper the remedy will become very difficult.

Parties also should realize that the nature of politics has been changing. Given the sweeping changes in information and communication technology, people now have access to information about what is happening around them much more quickly and more directly than before. Party leaders are no longer the only source of authentic information. Parties have experienced erosion of their traditional support bases, such as the trade unions, farmers' movements and students' associations, which have either become smaller as a support group or become more autonomous. The command economies that most of the South Asian countries had for a long period are being dismantled. Thus, when the policy differences between the parties contending for power become minimal, they will have to seek electoral support on different grounds, perhaps on the promises of better governance. Having been under pressure from the global and domestic market forces to further liberalize the economy, they are now under pressure from the poorer sections of the people, who constitute more than a majority of the electorate, to continue with welfare programmes. So the big challenge before the parties in these countries is to achieve what may be termed democratic development.

Why should one be concerned about parties at all, one may ask? It is for them to decide how they function, for good or bad. If the parties are functioning badly, is this not a problem for their members, activists and leaders? Why should it concern citizens who are not party members? The problem is that, if parties crumble under the weight of internal and external pressures, they do not go down alone; they also take the political systems down with them, which surely no one wants. Democratic

advancement today is integrally linked with democratic and well functioning parties. We have seen how the situation gives rise to authoritarian alternatives when parties do not function well. And when the authoritarian regimes come, parties find it very difficult to operate. Second, unlike in some Western democracies where the role of parties has been mostly confined to the selection of candidates in elections, parties in South Asia do play an important role in the day-to-day lives of the people. Their presence is felt everywhere. Millions of people invest their hopes and wager their futures on them. Thousands spend their lives in them. They are the agencies through which people connect themselves with the government and expect benefits to reach them. And that is the reason why the problem of political parties does not remain merely their own, but becomes everybody's problem. The public has a big stake in well functioning parties. And that entitles the public to intervene and demand of parties that they should reform their ways of functioning. The public has the responsibility to bring pressure on parties to change.

### ***7.1 Party reforms: Why do we need them?***

How can parties become more stable, enduring and democratic, so that they discharge their functions well in a democracy? Another set of questions may arise here. Why should parties have intra-party democracy? What good does it do the parties, their followers and supporters and the people at large? Does it help them win power, which is a party's basic objective? Do members and activists really care about how a party functions, so long as the leadership steers the party successfully through elections? Does it matter to the electorate, so long as they have an opportunity periodically to choose, among the competing parties, whichever one they like to govern the country? How does it matter how the leaders run their parties so long as the leaders of the ruling parties or the alliance govern the country according to the law? Do people care whether parties are democratic or not so long as they deliver a government that works?

However, a desired outcome is not possible when the agencies that are responsible for the operation of a system are deformed, weak and unstable. This is true of government. Parties are the operational agencies of government in any modern representative democracy. It is just not possible to imagine democracy without political parties. Parties claim to speak for the people, represent the people, and exercise authority on behalf of the people. People's choice of representatives is virtually limited to the candidates fielded by parties. Representatives vote in the legislatures according to the party direction. So it is not possible to ignore the functioning of parties and talk separately about the functioning of government. Now the two are twinned together more than ever before.

Parties need internal democracy not because we place the principle on a high pedestal, or for the sake of achieving a higher objective, or to satisfy a monitoring authority. Parties need it for their own well-being, for their own stability, legitimacy

and continuity. In brief, they need internal democracy to achieve the very objective for which they come into existence and continue to exist: to win and retain power. In support of this argument one may consider the following.

- Parties need to build an enduring following. They have to gain and keep support from the electorate. Many citizens find internally democratic parties more attractive to associate themselves with or to support. Parties, by definition, are associations, and like any association they need certain democratic principles by which the relationship between leaders and members is regulated. If activists and supporters of a party grow lukewarm towards it, it spells doom for parties, both electorally in the short term and politically in the long run.
- Intra-party democracy also enables a party to maintain live contact with the people and their thinking. Where parties are controlled by leaders who act unilaterally or dictatorially, where dissent, discussion and debate are not given due place, there is always the risk of alternative channels of communication within the party getting clogged, and as a result the party gets isolated from public opinion. This spells danger to the survival and success of parties. Freedom of thought, expression and wider participation in managing collective affairs are of great benefit not only to those who exercise it, but also to those who allow it. And this is the greatest benefit for parties if they have intra-party democracy.
- Sometimes charismatic leaders establish parties or parties emerge out of long-drawn-out socio-political movements. But they have to stabilize and institutionalize over time. Several parties have withered away as a result of their inability either to design rules for the functioning of the party or to transform themselves from a movement party into a competitive party. As the initial enthusiasm tapers off, leadership struggles emerge and splits take place. So parties need arrangements for conflict resolution, policy formulation and day-to-day decision making. This is what is known as the 'institutionalization' of parties. Intra-party democracy facilitates the institutionalization of parties better than authoritarian practices.
- Leadership succession is a major problem faced by parties. One basic feature of a party is that it should continue beyond the lifespan of any particular leader, however great he may be. Once a party is formed it should assume a life of its own. It cannot be bound forever to the direction and control of its architect. A frequent question asked in several parties is: after the leader who? Even in the lifetime of the party architect, if everything is left to the discretion of the founder leader this would create problems for the party. There should be procedures and arrangements to replace the leader when a situation demands it. If procedures for a smooth transition in leadership are not evolved, the very survival of a party may be endangered. Parties that have internal democracy are more efficient in handling such issues than parties that do not.

Parties and party leaders too recognize this in principle. That is why they claim that they are functioning democratically. But parties cannot simply dismiss critics by saying that they are democratic in their own way. They have constitutions and



they are supposed to function according to their constitutions. This is a public commitment they have made and these constitutions stipulate certain minimum operational principles for the democratic functioning of the parties. Parties are not private limited companies. They are associations formed under the law of the land with a solemn pledge to achieve the public good. They have a responsibility to put into practice the principles they swear by. People have a right to demand this from them, because parties fall in the public domain. Parties are as much accountable to the people over their functioning as over their policies.

Can party functioning be regulated by legislation? The need for some regulation of their public affairs has been well discussed in political theory and largely followed in practice. When a matter falls in the public domain, norms and practices are required to guide conduct in relation to it. Laws are needed to enforce these norms and practices, otherwise they remain only as moral laws, which can be violated. In the older democracies of the West, parties have taken a long time to evolve, and this evolution in large measure has depended on the conventions and practices that the parties have worked out through a process of trial and error in order to make parties more responsible and democratic and also to ensure the greatest degree of fairness in political competition. Over a period of time some of these conventions and practices have turned into law so that parties know that any violation of these conventions would attract sanctions. In newer democracies, the development of such conventions takes some time. Where democratic political competition has been accepted as the framework for the organization of the polity but conventions are not sufficiently developed, carefully drawn up laws are necessary not only for the conduct of party competition but also for the conduct of party life. If laws do not exist or where some exist but are not respected by the regimes and parties, and there is no will or capability to enforce the laws, this could lead to anarchy and authoritarianism. This is the dilemma or a challenge that parties in South Asia face.

The next question is how much regulation is desirable and therefore necessary? What are the factors to be kept in mind while designing the rules so that they are fair? How should that be done? How can the rules be made enforceable? It is always better to keep regulation to a minimum: the more the regulation, the more the parties will try to find ways to circumvent it. Excessive legislation may be counterproductive and gives unnecessary power to non-elected institutions over the elected ones. Instead of acting as checks and balances for the parties, these institutions would tend to dictate to parties. Reforms in the party and electoral domains are possible only to the extent that parties are prepared to accept them, and this was evident from the success and failure of previous attempts to bring about party-related laws. So what is needed is a minimum set of regulations that is enforceable and acceptable to parties. It should clearly lay down the parameters for how parties shall function internally and conduct their relations with the electorate as well as other parties.

Rules should be fair in the sense that they are agreeable not only to the dominant parties but also to the smaller and minor parties. They should be applicable to the

present parties as well as parties that might emerge in future. They should not take away the basic freedoms of parties to formulate their objectives, to choose party leaders and candidates in general elections and to conduct election campaigns.

Rules should not be imposed from outside, nor should they be agreed upon out of fear. They should emerge as a result of the participation, consensus and consent of parties. It is generally agreed that those rules which function best are those that are developed by those who will be affected by them, after due deliberation and with mutual consent. Such rules are enduring, effective and widely accepted. This means that they are not considered as something external and that the agreeing parties know the purpose, meaning and implications of these rules. Then they become self-regulatory. This ideal type of democratic reasoning applies to the party domain more than anywhere else. In reality there is no other way of making laws in the party domain because nobody else can make laws for the parties. The lawmaking bodies are composed of legislators who belong to one party or another.

Therefore the parties have to make laws to regulate their own behaviour. This means that legislation by parties on parties would not deprive parties of their freedom, but in fact would enhance their freedom. It would also let people know what they can expect from parties. If this does not happen the consequence will be either anarchy in the party domain or the appointment of someone seemingly standing above the parties who would impose regulations from outside. In both eventualities parties stand to suffer because those who are ill disposed to parties may make laws that either suit their own self-interest or are inimical to the freedom of parties. Society also suffers because parties would not accept these rules.

It is not sufficient to draw up rules and regulations. To have any validity, a rule must be enforceable and must have certainty of outcome. The most important task, therefore, is the enforcement of rules. There must be public institutions, such as courts and election commissions, which are designated to enforce these rules. They should be autonomous from both the state and the parties so that they are impartial and their decisions carry a great deal of acceptability. In addition, laws must specify what penalties will be visited on parties if they violate these rules and regulations.

What rules or laws are needed to make parties in South Asia more enduring, stable, responsive and responsible, so that they adjust to the requirements of modern democracy, are able to grapple with the huge challenges they face and can lead their societies to a better future?

## ***7.2 Some suggestions for party reforms***

### ***Choosing leaders***

The following suggestions are made for party reforms.

- The party chief, the office-bearers and the members of the top executive body of the party should be directly elected by delegates elected for the purpose. There should be a provision to allow a contest for any position and the election process should be open. The rules should be clearly laid down in the party constitution. Several party constitutions presently give this authority to the party president who is usually declared elected at the delegates' conventions or conferences, by consensus. The party chiefs appoint the members of the executive committee through a process of consultations. Democracy through consensus and consultations appears to be the modus operandi of parties. But this does not function well all the time because it depends on the personality of the leader. Consensus and consultation cannot obviate the need for elections. Elections could also be a process of arriving at consensus through consultation. They do not pose a threat to the unity of the party; on the contrary, provided the election process is fair they strengthen the parties. This may be extended to the office-bearers and committee members. And this may be done at every level, not just at the highest level. For example, in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is considering an amendment to its constitution to introduce elections to the position of office-bearers and half of its national executive committee.
- A stable election authority can be instituted in every party to hold periodic and fair elections to choose leading committees and office-bearers at different levels, including the top position. For example, the Indian National Congress (INC) has recently instituted a Central Election Authority to supervise and conduct elections in the party.
- The terms of office-bearers may be limited to a fixed number, maybe two. Some parties already have such a provision. For example, in the Nepali Congress the president can hold the position only for two terms, each of five years' duration. In the Communist Party of India (CPI), the term of the general secretary or state secretaries is limited to two terms. The BJP has a one-term limit for the party president, but this is not followed as it is interpreted as meaning more than one term continuously, so that the same person can be elected again after an interval.
- The principle of one person one position should be strictly followed. Some parties have this provision, but do not always implement it in practice. A tendency has grown in recent years to unite the top position in the party and the leadership of the party's legislative wing, but this paves the way for concentration of power and party strife, rather than unity and stability.

### *Selection of candidates*

The absolute powers of the party chiefs to distribute tickets to candidates often lead to insecurity and uncertainty among aspiring party leaders. It may also lead to sabotage and rebellion by those who think that, although they very much deserve to be nominated, the clique or the coterie around the party chief or the party chief him- or herself has deprived them of that opportunity. On the face of it one person taking all the decisions on the selection of candidates appears to help in reconciling factional

claims and accommodating different interests in society, especially the claims of the socially backward and weaker sections; but in reality it is often riddled with problems. Commentators on the proportional list system in Sri Lanka say that the dependence of aspirants on the party top leader or leaders for inclusion of their names in the list has greatly increased the control of the party chiefs. So long as the party leaders are wise and act in a judicious manner this may not pose big problems, but it becomes a problem when there are factions at the top or proper decisions cannot be taken in choosing the candidates for inclusion in the lists. In this context parties may consider the following.

- Instituting an authority within the party at the national and provincial levels to screen aspiring candidates and take final decisions to select candidates. Most parties now do this through the parliamentary boards or the executive committees of the parties. In India the INC and the BJP have central election committees to look after the selection process.
- Limiting the number of terms for which a person can hold elected positions in a legislative body. It may be limited to two terms at one level (state or federal level in the case of Pakistan and India).
- Instituting or creating procedures by which the members of the party in the constituency will have a say in the selection of candidates for elections.

### *Disciplinary actions*

Disciplinary actions often become a source of controversy and friction in party functioning. Due democratic procedures have to be followed when disciplinary action is taken against any leader or party activist. Party chiefs resort to expelling persons who have become irritants, or who emerge or have the potential to emerge as competitors for leadership positions. 'Anti-party activity' has become the standard ground for expelling inconvenient leaders. Arbitrary actions have often led to crises in parties at various levels, and in extreme cases to splits. Their possibility stifles reasonable and healthy dissent in parties. In this context, parties may consider framing clear rules by which persons subjected to disciplinary action have the right to appeal to higher committees, along with the right to be heard. Even while taking disciplinary action, the party leadership should clearly specify the anti-party activities that attracted the disciplinary action.

### *Membership*

Most parties are deficient in maintaining membership registers, although most leaders claim that they keep membership registers. Where do they exist? The answer is at the local level. The district or local units of parties are responsible for enrolling members, keeping the registers and sending the membership details to the higher committees. This is the formal arrangement in most parties. But this does not necessarily happen this way. Organized local party structures simply do not exist for several parties. Where membership registers exist they are extremely disorderly. Rival factions maintain their own registers. Quarrels at local level often arise in some parties

as a consequence of bogus membership. In the absence of membership registers the leadership selection process becomes quite arbitrary and chaotic. In reality parties do not maintain registers if they have no relevance in party functioning. During the interviews several party leaders stated that they felt that more attention should be paid to party activists and that party workers should not be reduced to the status of clientele to different leaders, as this creates problems in the party. Some leaders felt the need for more organizational scope for sufficient interaction between leaders and workers. In this context, the parties may consider the following.

- Laying down rules about the rights of members to choose the party leaders at the lower level and candidates to stand in elections, and how the membership registers are to be used for these purposes.
- Specifying the means by which formal interaction between different activists, workers and leaders in a party and different levels in the party hierarchy can be institutionalized.

### *Women's participation*

Notwithstanding their public stances, the failure of parties to ensure adequate representation of women in party committees and legislatures is a glaring omission. Parties can think of providing rules in party constitutions to ensure a minimum presence of women leaders in party bodies. Differences persist as to whether an increased presence of women in the legislatures should be achieved through instituting internal party quotas for women or by reserving a proportion of seats in the legislatures. Therefore, the issue can be addressed at two different levels.

- Reserving a certain percentage of positions in party committees and offices for women. As has already been seen, some parties have such provisions. While these parties must try to enforce these provisions, other parties can incorporate such provisions in their constitutions and implement them.
- As for the legislative bodies, if seats are reserved for women by bringing amendments to the country's constitution, parties will be compelled to put up women candidates in such seats. Since four of the five South Asian countries follow the plurality system, based on single-member territorial constituencies, it may not be feasible to leave it to the parties to field a certain percentage of women candidates. In a given party system where parties in the alliance may field candidates in few or several constituencies, it is possible that women would not get elected in sufficient number as parties may place them in losing constituencies. It is better to reserve constituencies for women. However, as seen in Sri Lanka which follows the PR system, it is possible to bind parties legally to include a certain number of women candidates in their lists.

### *Funding*

Party funding and election expenditure have become a critical area in South Asia for both the functioning of parties and, as a result, the functioning of governments.

Election expenditure has assumed perilous proportions in recent decades. Ceiling limits are simply not working. Huge amounts are spent on publicity, travel, campaigning and vote-buying. As voluntary participation in election campaign and local support have declined, parties have to spend money on the maintenance of local party offices, to feed the workers (mostly hired), to hire all the props necessary to conduct campaigns and to bring people to rallies and processions. This research found that the management of funds is the most opaque area of party functioning. Most leaders in the party are not aware of how funds come to the party. Those who are aware of it are not willing to talk about it. In some parties the party chief, assisted by a few confidants, manages the funds. In others, a few leaders mobilize the funds from their influential contacts. In this context the parties may consider the following.

- Bringing in suitable legislation to enable companies and individuals to contribute funds in a way that obviates the feeling of coercion, extortion and underhand dealings. The Indian Parliament passed legislation in 2003 giving 100 per cent tax exemptions on all contributions to parties made by individuals and companies. The only limit is that corporate contributions shall be within a ceiling of 5 per cent of net profits of the year. Some of the leading industrial houses, such as the Tatas, have worked out a formula for making such contributions out of a pool of funds created for the purpose by fixing the donations to individual parties on the basis of their electoral performance in the previous elections. Legislation that would make it easy for parties to mobilize funds and for companies to donate funds more honestly will reduce surreptitious deals with business persons, corrupt practices and anxiety among leaders concerning funds.
- Sri Lanka does not have legal limits on election expenditure but all other countries have maximum permissible election expenditure. However, the law relating to this has often been violated and contains too many loopholes. The argument in favour of ceiling limits is that it provides a level playing field in electoral competition and also acts as a check on election expenditure. But when a law exists and is not implemented it becomes farcical. For example, India has elaborate legislation on this matter and most reports say that candidates spend several times the maximum limits, but so far no candidate has been disqualified on this ground. The only success of the law seems to lie in compelling the candidates to make false declarations on their election expenditure. If parties are convinced that ceilings have to be in place, then they have to work out necessary provisions to define the expenditure and the mechanisms to monitor and implement the ceilings and punish those parties and candidates who violate them.
- In all countries except Sri Lanka, parties are bound to submit their income and expenditure details to the Election Commission (EC) and all parties and candidates have to submit accounts of their election expenditure. How far these statements are true or false is a different matter. But parties should consider making public the accounts submitted to the EC. Giving the public access will not cause damage to parties; instead it will enhance their credibility.

- Parties may consider instituting internal audit committees and presenting the finance reports to the general bodies, party conventions or conferences. Some parties do have such internal committees and discuss the matter in the party conferences. This could be extended to other parties.
- The issue of state funding of election expenses is being discussed in some countries. State funding would have several healthy consequences for democracy. First, it would make parties accountable to the people. Second, it would reduce the reliance of the candidates on private persons and companies for election funds. Candidates who are not financially well endowed or well connected find it difficult to raise funds, even if such persons stand any chance of being chosen as candidates by parties. State funding would be of immense help to such candidates. Third, it would reduce the pressure for the people's representatives to resort to dubious deals to recover the money spent on the election or to secure money to fight the next election. But there are several things to be established in this regard: whether the state support should be in cash or in kind; whether it should be in the form of institutional support such as publicity and transport or making a grant to each party; how much to give, to whom, and in what way; what are the modalities in disbursing the fund; how parties can be held accountable for the funds provided by the state, and who monitors this; etc.
- Related to this is the issue of state funding of parties. Parties need money to maintain their employees and full-time activists. Most parties reported that the membership fee, levies or voluntary individual contributions of members would ordinarily be sufficient to meet this expenditure. But there could be parties that do not have resources to meet this minimum. So parties may receive financial grants from the state on the basis of their performance in the elections. This provides the guarantee for minor and not-so-well endowed parties to survive and compete in elections.

Party reforms will be successful when they are accompanied by electoral reforms. A model code of conduct exists in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The EC monitors it, but it does not have legal status. Since all parties have accepted the model code of conduct in their respective countries it is possible to legislate upon it. Legislation could also be made to empower the EC, with a provision for the parties to appeal in the higher courts, and to take punitive action against parties that do not hold organizational elections in the party, or fail to submit accounts of income and expenditure.

Thus, it appears that reforms in the party domain are possible when the following conditions are met.

- They are brought about in the overall context of political and electoral reforms.
- There are systematic attempts to evolve proper and well considered legislation to regulate the functioning of parties.

- Any legislation has the consent of the parties and their willing cooperation.
- In areas where law is absent or felt to be unnecessary, parties can develop certain healthy conventions in a way that strengthens democratic politics and internal party democracy.
- Major and ruling parties have more responsibility to take the initiative to introduce democratic reforms in the party which would impact upon other parties in the course of time.
- There is not only party law, also clear provisions for the enforcement of such laws.

Parties may not change if pressure is not brought to bear upon them. The role of opinion-makers, the media, civil society organizations and the judiciary is important in this context. But the electorate can bring the greatest pressure on parties to change. This is the opinion expressed by some leaders during the interviews. Unless and until people exercise their reason well and elect the right people to positions of power, nothing will change, they said. Leaders who are honest and principled find it difficult to survive and continue in politics. Parties have a crucial role in bringing about change in the way voters think and vote. One cannot blame the electorate too much, because they have been voting out the incumbent parties, and bringing in the new ones. But their choices are limited only to those that parties offer. So in the ultimate analysis the parties have to take initiative and show the courage to come out with the right policies, select and field the right candidates, and run government in a more responsible way.

No reform is possible without the willingness, cooperation and active participation of parties to reform themselves, because it is they who exercise the necessary legislative powers. The self-regulatory capacity of parties and the will and wisdom to reform among party leaders are crucial. They should realize that the survival and consolidation of democracy and of the parties themselves are the two sides of the same coin. One is not possible without the other. The enlightened and far-sighted party leaders have the onerous task of carrying their parties along with them on the road to reform. Are parties prepared to take up this challenge of change?



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# Abbreviations

ADMK	All India Anna DMK
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad (India)
ANP	Awami National Party (Pakistan)
BAL	Bangladesh Awami League
BDT	Bangladeshi taka
BJD	Biju Janata Dal (India)
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party (India)
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party (India)
CPB	Communist Party of Bangladesh
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI-Maoist	Maoist Communist Party of India
CPN-Maoist	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist and Leninist
CSDS	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
CWC	Ceylon Workers' Congress
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (India)
EC	Election Commission
FB	All India Forward Bloc
FPTP	First Past The Post
GGP	Gondwana Ganatantra Parishad (India)
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IJI	Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (or Islamic Democratic Alliance) (Pakistan)
INC	Indian National Congress
INLD	Indian National Lok Dal
INR	Indian rupee
JD(S)	Janata Dal (Secular) (India)
JD(U)	Janata Dal (United) (India)
JHU	Jatika Hela Urumaya (Sri Lanka)
JIB	Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh
JIP	Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (India)
JUI	Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (Pakistan)
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Sri Lanka)
KAPS	Knowledge, Practices and Attitudes Survey
KEC	Kerala Congress (Mani) (India)
LJSP	Lok Jan Shakti Party (India)

LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka)
MNF	Mizo National Front (India)
MP	member of Parliament
MQM	Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan)
MUL	Muslim League (India)
NC	National Conference (India)
NC	Nepali Congress
NCP	Nationalist Congress Party (India)
NDA	National Democratic Alliance (India)
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPR	Nepalese rupee
NSP	Nepal Sadbhawana Party
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PDP	People's Democratic Party (India)
PKR	Pakistani rupee
PMK	Pattali Makkal Katchi (India)
PML	Pakistan Muslim League
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz
PML-Q	Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam)
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PPP-P	Pakistan People's Party-Parliamentarian
PR	proportional representation
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal (India)
RPP	Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (Nepal)
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party (India)
SAD	Shiromani Akali Dal (India)
SDSA	State of Democracy in South Asia (survey)
SHS	Shiv Sena (India)
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SP	Samajwadi Party (India)
TC	All India Trinamool Congress
TDP	Telugu Desam Party (India)
TRS	Telangana Rashtra Samiti (India)
UGDP	United Goans Democratic Party (India)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNP	United National Party (Sri Lanka)
UPA	United Progressive Alliance (India)
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance (Sri Lanka)
USD	US dollar
VDC	Village Development Committee

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A large number of papers on the working and future of democracy in South Asia, written by scholars from the five South Asian countries as part of the qualitative assessment component of the State of Democracy in South Asia project of the CSDS, are available at the website: <http://www.democracy-asia.org>. These papers seek to answer several questions pertaining to democracy and the party domain, modelled on the framework of International IDEA's Democracy Assessment.

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## About the Author

K. C. Suri is Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. Over the past 20 years he has taught courses in political theory, comparative politics and Indian government and politics. He has been associated with studies of elections in India carried out by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, since 1999, and was the editor of the *Indian Journal of Political Science*, the quarterly journal of the Indian Political Science Association, for the years 2001 and 2002. A Country Researcher in India for International IDEA's programme of research on political parties, he has published numerous books and articles in the area of political economy, Indian democracy, political parties, state politics and social movements.

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IDEA acts as a catalyst for democracy building by providing knowledge resources, expertise and a platform for debate on democracy issues. It works together with policy makers, donor governments, UN organizations and agencies, regional organizations and others engaged in the field of democracy building.

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- **policy proposals** to provoke debate and action on democracy issues; and
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