

## **Synopsis by Mr. Vinay P. Sahasrabuddhe**

**Title of the thesis:** *Political Parties as Victims of Populism and Electoral Compulsions: A Quest for Systemic Solutions (With special reference to India)*

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### **Thesis**

## **Political Parties as Victims of Populism and Electoral Compulsions: A Quest for Systemic Solutions (With special reference to India)**

### **Synopsis of the thesis**

#### **Why this study?**

All over the world, democracy appears to be well-entrenched and despite the fact that autocratic regimes continue to exist for decades, none of them is accorded any legitimacy. It appears that democracy has become something sacrosanct, notwithstanding the fact that people under some democratic regimes may be thoroughly disgruntled about the quality of governance. Many a time, people are given to understand that they have to tolerate all the lacunae in democratic governance since that is the cost of liberty that they enjoy under it.

Increasingly, people under many democratic regimes including India are becoming pessimistic as they think that no political party can really solve their problems and make their life easier. In response to this observation, political parties say that they cannot help the situation because they are the victims of the present-day system. Their political behavior is conditioned by the system in which they operate. An impression is building that political parties are essentially incapable of coming out of populist and electoral compulsions. Although certain sections of the political class may have developed some vested interests in the system in which they operate, it is prudent to consider that the majority of politicians would like to transcend the present mould of politics. With this presumption, it is further required that a systemic solution to the crises emerging out of populist and election-oriented politics are thought of. Unless this is attempted and a road-map to convert democracy in India into a delivering democracy by way of salvaging political parties from the trap of populism and electoral compulsions is visualized, people may start losing their faith in democracy.

This author was privileged to have a close look at various functional aspects of democracy in India, thanks to the various opportunities that he had during the last thirty years of active public life. Initially as a student activist, later as a journalist, and thereafter both as an institutional head and a party functionary this author could gather enough experiential data to make some general observations. Exposure to the functioning of institutions like universities and training academies for government officials also added to the author's insight. Interaction with key functionaries and grass root level activists of major political parties earlier and during this study later helped the author crosscheck his observations. The author was aghast to find that most politicians are aware of the perversions that have crept in India's political system but they have apparently either –

1. Chosen to ignore these threats and compromise with the situation albeit unwillingly.

2. Surrendered to the circumstances helplessly and have almost abandoned efforts to transform the situation.
3. Decided to make the most of this situation since changing the same is considered as just not possible.

However, instead of stating these observations in conclusive terms, this author has considered them as an agenda for probing into certain aspects of functional democracy in India. These questions could be listed as follows:-

1. Has political leadership in India grasped the enormity of the manifold crises emanating from a decadent political system? Are Indian political leaders aware of the gravity of the impact of institutional degeneration of political parties in India?
2. Have influential leaders who are in commanding positions in their respective parties for a long time and who are seriously into politics, completely lost motivation to transform the situation particularly in their own party and in Indian polity in general? Has this lack of motivation also resulted in an absolute lack of political will for reforms?
3. Is the overall absence of any structured efforts for salvaging political parties and party politics in India from its present mould, a result of inertia and a feeling of helplessness? Or, has the establishment in general and particularly India's politicians developed a vested interest in maintaining a status quo?
4. Are there any possible systemic solutions to the problem of political parties in India succumbing to populist pressures and electoral compulsions? Would the political class be accepting such solutions?

On this background this study attempts at establishing a clear link between efficacy of democracy and effective organisational functioning of political parties. The central argument here being that in India if democracy is to be consolidated, it has to deliver and if it has to deliver, the state of political parties need to be markedly improved upon. Populism and electoral compulsions are the two main obstacles in the way of good governance and effective party organisations alone can withstand these forces. But, building effective party organisations is easier said than done, mainly because of the system in which political parties operate. This study tries to find out as to what kind of systemic changes can help strengthening political parties so as to withstand populist pressures and electoral compulsions. In that context, this study suggests different sets of reforms for bringing about systemic changes that would help arresting the process of degeneration of parties.

### **Hypothesis**

The present study forwards following set of hypotheses.

1. **Politics sans purpose**- Diminishing role of idealism and ideology in the functioning of political parties lead to a situation where people no more believe that politicians pursue politics for some great cause.
2. **All parties are same**- With power-seeking becoming a great leveler, there is a growing similarity in the overall conduct of political parties in India, whether in power or otherwise.
3. **Weak party organisations**. – With dynastic politics ruling the roost, organizational characters of political parties in India are fast weakening. With parties becoming a family affair, cadre and cadre building have become irrelevant face apathy and neglect.

4. **Decline of leadership**- Erosion of authority of the leadership give way to personality cult. Charismatic leaders attaining more importance and those working behind the curtain, for party organisation.
5. **Perennial electoral mode**.- With ideology being pushed to the periphery, unprincipled coalitions on the rise add to instability. This has contributed to the atmosphere of permanent election mode adding to the tendency of politicising all and sundry, with a view to taking political advantage at any opportune time.
6. **Diminishing popular participation in democratic process**. - Similarities in political parties make voters realize that the emerging situation eventually denies them the element of choice. All this adversely affecting popular level of participation in elections and thereby in the overall democratic process.

Political parties are at the core of most of the arguments made above. In addition to these macro-level issues concerning the quality of party competition and representative democracy, there are other key factors supposedly responsible for degeneration of political parties. Generally speaking, these key factors could be described as organizational impact of excessively election oriented party politics in India. These factors are as follows:-

- Growing tendency to always "play to the gallery". Excessive insistence on factors such as image building, publicity mileage and remaining in the limelight.
- Inability and dis-inclination of political parties to educate the masses. Lack of courage to take unconventional, bold/unpopular sounding decisions.
- Growing dominance of money and muscle power making electoral victories as a technique.
- With power-seeking as the prime-agenda party competition taking different shapes. At certain times, it involves fierce hate mongering whereas at other occasions, it just remains make-believe with an element of match-fixing. Popular belief that all politicians are hand-in-glove in reality, has added to the increasing tendency of intense dislike or hate towards the entire political class.
- Lack of ideological motivation having a cascading effect on policy formulation processes. It has lead to a dearth of political will for governing with a particular set of principles. With compromises for continuing in power becoming an order of the day, marked erosion in the quality of governance.
- An individual's ability to get elected (Electability) taking precedence over all other factors. Consequently unabated erosion in the quality of political leadership.
- With most parties realizing that money enables them to hire 'activists', abysmal neglect of cadre building or training of the activists becoming an established trend.

All this calls for a quest for systemic solutions to prevent further degeneration of political parties.

The quest is for a system or a combination of systems --

1. ---that will ensure a greater amount of political stability, with a certainty about the schedule of elections.
2. ---that will substantially reduce the element of "technique" from the electoral exercise, thereby reducing the scope for vote-bank politics.
3. ---that will allow at least some consideration to the ability of candidates, and not just their electability, thereby creating a situation that will encourage good, well meaning and quality people to enter into politics.

4. ---that will help political leadership perform without excessively bothering about the popular reaction. This means, quest for a system, that will help parties take courageous decisions.
5. ---that will discipline the functioning of political parties by strict rules and regulations for their organisational affairs, ensuring intra-party democracy and transparency in financial affairs. Also, that will discourage the political parties from taking up emotional issues to influence the masses.
6. ---that will lay more stress upon consensus and not mere majority by way of head-count, in a process of decision-making, both within the party and the government.

### **Methodology**

The methodology adopted for this research is mainly through compilation of theoretical inputs, tallying them with practical, experiential data and logically building a case for overall systemic reforms for saving political parties in India and thereby preventing further degeneration of party politics in India. A three-way data gathering and analysis was the main component of this methodology. These three components were as follows:-

- a. Experiential data collated by the author during the last over two decades while heading a unique academy for the training of elected representatives and political workers.
- b. Library research focusing mainly on earlier works about party functioning.
- c. Interviews and focus group discussions with senior political leaders and junior party functionaries in India while giving an insight into the actual working of parties.

The data gathered through these sources has been analysed and the Indian experience of representative democracy has been compared with major democracies of the world.

### **Scheme of chapters**

Broadly, this study deals with the core issues involved in six different chapters. The first chapter deals with the backdrop of this study outlining the rationale, motivation, and methodology while presenting a review of literature. The second chapter focuses upon the organic relationship between democracy, parties, populism and electoral compulsions and its reflection in India's political culture. The third chapter analyses the centrality of political parties as institutions and reviews their process of decline. The next chapter (Chapter 4) explains as to how populism and electoral compulsions have influenced political parties, polity and representative democracy in general. The fifth chapter presents a comparative analysis of forms of democracy and the electoral systems adopted with special reference to their impact on political parties. The last chapter (chapter 6) elaborates on various sets of reforms that can be considered as systemic solutions.

**The first chapter** is basically an elaborate outline of objectives behind this study. It explains the backdrop, rationale and motivation behind this particular study. While reviewing literature, it points out as to how political parties in India and their overall functioning has not been adequately analysed in various existing works on party politics in India.

**The second chapter** has two central themes. Initially, it explores the organic link between democracy, political parties, populism and electoral compulsions and later analyses the reflection of this relationship in contemporary political culture in India. The discussion in the second chapter explains as to how various theorists have stressed upon the centrality of the element of choice in a democratic electoral competition.

Democracy is, without doubt; a way of life in the sense that it adheres to a set of values of the human life. But then it can never be denied that democracy after all is, first and foremost a system of governance. Democracy after all has to deliver the goods. The question then is whether democracy has established itself as a far more superior system of governance in the context of its ability to bring about a real change in the living standards of the people at large?

As pointed out by David Broder, there are five distinct factors behind the “widening gap between acceptance and effectiveness of democracy.”<sup>1</sup> These factors are death of ideology, decline of state, decline of religion, low esteem of politics as a profession, and the irresponsible role of media in general. Notably, of these five factors, three (death of ideology, decline of state and low esteem of politics) are directly related to political parties.

On the performance count, or what is being lately described as the “delivering” aspect of democracies, new and emerging democratic governments have more often than not, met with failures. Even after a decade of democratization, here, power is wielded with the same old style that smacks of authoritarianism, elections are still less fair and rule of law continues to be fragile.

Even in established democracies there appears to be an underlying yearning for reforming the system. Not for no reason, as recently as in November 2007 Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India had to appeal researchers to explore whether one-party rule as against multi-party rule is more conducive for countries like India.<sup>2</sup> People who are generally satisfied with democratic governance too are looking for some improvement in the way democracy is implemented or practiced. This also reinforces the issue of quality of leadership in democracies. Dissatisfaction about the political leadership in general, their ability to handle critical issues, their moral bankruptcy and poor quality of performance, etc are some of the key issues that democratic process needs to address. With ability to get elected dominating all other factors, consideration of leadership qualities while selecting a candidate has been taking a back seat. This compels one to look into the organisational character of the political parties.

In India too, the situation warrants early attention. Having tasted almost all the available political parties as parties in government, people are now wondering about the next alternative they can look at. It was certainly not for no reason that when Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackrey<sup>3</sup> used to advocate the necessity to switchover to *Thok Shahi* (dictatorship) in place of *Lok Shahi*, (democracy) people used to respond positively. This, without any doubt, does not augur well for democracy in India.

There is a necessary interrelationship between political culture and the fundamental organic linkages between parties, populism and electoral compulsions. It is this interrelationship which shapes political culture of a country. It is on this setting that one has to view the organic relationship between democracy, parties, populism and elections in the context of India. If elections, parties, electoral campaigns and peaceful transfer of power are the instruments of democracy, India certainly can boast about them. However, whether these

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<sup>1</sup> David Broder. Lecture at the Salzburg Seminar session 384, on Democracy. June 13, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Report about Manmohan Singh’s speech in International Conference on Federalism in New Delhi as appeared in *The Times of India*, Mumbai dated November 6, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Bal Thackrey, is the octogenarian founder-supreme leader of Shiv Sena. Shiv Sena is the main opposition party in Maharashtra. Started as a party that staunchly advocated the sons-of-soil theory initially; Shiv Sena is also known for the radical sounding views and out-of-box thinking of its leadership. Shiv Sena had not opposed the Emergency of 1975 and Thackrey has repeatedly and publicly expressed his dis-enchantment with democracy and preference for some kind of a benevolent dictatorship.

instruments have effectively contributed in developing a culture of democratic functionality is the moot question. If the overall quality of functioning of political parties, voluntary organisations and institutions, legislatures, and media organisations in India today is any indication; institutionalization of the intrinsic democratic spirit is yet to come about.

On the whole, following aspects could be identified as principal features of political culture in India. These are as follows:-

1. Leader centric organisations and Leader-Follower-Voter relationship.
2. Good people with good intentions no more sustainable in power politics
3. Promoting sycophancy, converting party cadres into cheer leaders.
4. Emotional-issue centric electoral politics and the resultant domination of identity issues.
5. Greater role of media in shaping political culture.
6. Politics becoming a business with increased role of money power.
7. Growing domination of market-friendliness in socio-cultural life and public life in general.
8. A general apathy towards duties as voters and citizens of a democracy. Lack of civic initiatives in general.
9. Lack of an institution-building approach in conducting party affairs.

Lack of institution building approach is the end product of excessive electoral orientation that political parties in India have acquired. Partly, it is the electoral system and the Westminster model of democracy under which the present FPTP system operates, responsible for this. Hero worship, sycophancy, greater stress on emotional issues and greater impact of media are direct results of populism. As this study explains, populism and electoral compulsions are both, reasons behind the unabated degeneration of parties as well as the impact of this degeneration. The sum total of the overall consequences of this situation is reflected in a increased levels of apathy and cynicism on the part of the common citizenry.

**In the third chapter**, the discussion then moves to the importance of political parties in representative democracy. Recruitment of individuals to politics is one of the most important functions that parties perform. Joining a political party still remains the most effective option for any one deciding to play an active role in democratic governance especially at the implementation level. Generally speaking, an attraction for a particular ideology, or a leader with a charismatic personality or a liking developed for a set of persons associated locally with a political party, etc, could be the reasons for an individual's entry in a political party. However, in none of these cases, the new entrant is either formally told about the aims and objectives of the respective party or is informally asked about his intentions behind joining the party. As a result, several political parties end up just as any other organisation with few office bearers, several storm-troopers and no particular direction to follow. No wonder, such parties fail in generating any confidence in the minds of the people.

With party affiliated candidates, cultivation of principal-agent relationship is likely to be served more effectively. While it is true that competitive indulgence in partisan politics and its horrendous consequences have prompted some Indian leaders like Jayprakash Narayan (JP) call for promoting a party-less democracy, the concept has largely been looked at as just another utopian idea. Moreover, if parties are considered as an important part of the problem of degeneration of our polity, they also have to be considered as equally important part of the solutions to the crises. The success of representative democracy mainly hinges upon political parties since they constitute its most significant vehicle. For the simple reason that in any

democracy, where the number of electorate runs into several millions, what is always required is a "linkage" institution that "organises, distils and translates" public opinion.<sup>4</sup> When political parties allegedly fail in doing this job properly, two significant aspects of representative democracy viz. popular control and responsiveness are bound to suffer.

It is on this background that the third chapter discusses issues like the ideal and real role of political parties, changing nature of parties, changing party structures and relevance of traditional classification of parties. Discussion in this chapter also analyses impact of factors responsible for changing nature of parties viz. ideology, organisation and leadership. Further, the discussion examines the phenomenon of party decline and its apparent indicators such as falling voter turn out, declining party membership and declining respectability of party work. Besides, this chapter also focuses upon the principal reasons of party decline. Towards end, multi-dimensional impact of the contemporary trend of party decline is also analysed.

**The fourth chapter** begins with a probe into the concept of populism and the phenomenon of electoral compulsions. Both these issues are examined in the broader context of present day party politics in India. The discussion then focuses on the nature of populism and electoral compulsions followed by analysis of how and why politicians succumb to these pressures.. Reasons for political parties falling prey to populism and the damage that this trend may cause to the classical notions of representative democracy is discussed thereafter.

Populism and electoral compulsions are intertwined. At times, basic populist stand points make parties surrender before electoral compulsions while at other electoral compulsions compel parties to take a populist path. Just as populism, electoral compulsions also greatly impact the functioning of political parties. Again, electoral compulsions have an organic relationship with the system in which political parties operate. In India, for example, populism has played the role of a great leveler making our major political parties look alike and function alike. This has discredited them in the eyes of the masses towards whom, ironically; populism is directed. As a consequence, a large section of the voters understandably consider that almost all the parties as unworthy of unstinted support at the national level. With fractured verdicts, parties are forced to go for coalition politics. In the cases of both the major parties in India, the Congress and the BJP, their electoral alliance with regional parties has undoubtedly stunted their growth in those particular regions. Further, their electoral presence has remained limited to constituencies in which they contest as also coalitions have denied them the chance to compete with their alliance partner.

In the Indian scenario, the organic relationship between present electoral system and political parties indulging in populist politics for electoral gains, is much more evident. With abundance of regional, linguistic and religious diversity, parties find it convenient to identify more closely with one (or many of the same type) of the diverse groups or communities and ensure support of the voters belonging to them. This tendency has come to be known as indulging in Vote-Bank Politics. A populist appeal to regional and linguistic identity is the key to Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu, Telagu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Mizo National Front in Mizoram as also capitalizing the agony the underdevelopment of Assam by the Assam Gana Parishad in Assam, and the slogan of "Marathi manoos" (Marathi people) given by Shiv Sena. Playing on religious identity has always remained central to the politics of Akali Dal in Punjab and of course the Muslim League in Kerala and elsewhere. Shaha Bano case of 1987 was a classic example of populist religious politics indulged in by the Congress.

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<sup>4</sup> Everett Carl Ladd "Where Have All the Voters Gone?". xxi

The success of political *Hindutva*<sup>5</sup> of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was a response to this. BJP and its earlier incarnation, Jana Sangha was always known for Hindu oriented politics but it was only after Shah Bano that political *Hindutva* started yielding. No wonder then 'minorityism', 'pseudo-secularism', 'minority appeasement' etc. became a part of the BJP lexicon, and BJP leaders like L.K. Advani and others could popularize *Hindutva* only after 1987.

On this background this chapter analyses the phenomenon of populism and mainly focuses upon the impact of populism on parties as institutions, on party organisation and on governance.

**The fifth chapter** is about major forms of government under representative democracy and major electoral systems, with focus upon impact of forms and electoral systems on polity in general and political parties in particular. In the course of discussion it also covers issues like salient features of Presidential and Parliamentary democracies vis-à-vis political parties. Further this chapter also attempts scanning major established electoral systems in the context of their impact on parties. At the core of the discussion the constant effort is to find out as to how electoral systems help or harm the functioning of parties. This chapter also explores the nexus between the form of democracy, electoral systems and the quality of democracy especially in the context of the overall efficacy of political parties under various forms of democracy.

Electoral compulsions are closely related to the electoral system. Also, as underscored by the famous Duverger Law, the number of parties in a country and consequently the nature of the electoral competition depend on the electoral system a country adopts. With parliamentary democracy under the Westminster system with a First-past-the-post voting system being practiced in India, many have observed that political parties here are perpetually in an election mode. At any given point of time, in one part of India or the other, parties are always preparing for elections and this greatly impacts upon their style of functioning. Also, stability of a government depends on the electoral system and if voters realise that in spite of their participation in voting, elections have been throwing only fractured verdicts, it reflects on their enthusiasm for voting. Generally speaking, behavior of political parties is governed by the electoral system and both these factors together impact upon the quality of democracy. Arend Lijphart's research clearly brings out that "Consensus democracy may be considered more democratic than majoritarian in most respects."

Fifty-seven years after India became a republic, some new trends are becoming discernible. Following the break-down of the Congress system, there is now a clearly perceptible shift. Indian party system has now moved from hegemonic to a competitive multi-party at the national level. Broadly, three coalitional alternatives are emerging although durability of these alliances is always uncertain. At the states, an independent party system is emerging and at times and in certain states it is totally different from the national system. Three clear typologies are emerging. In a large number of states, it is Congress+ versus Regional Party+. In some others, it is Congress+ versus BJP+ and in the remaining; it is between two largely regional alternatives.<sup>6</sup> In other words, while Congress is declining in some key states like

<sup>5</sup> This is a term used by many, including political commentator Swapan Dasgupta with a view to describing the politicization of aggrieved feelings of the majority Hindus in India. Although *Hindutva* literally means Hindu-ness, the political connotations of the term vary from person to person.

<sup>6</sup> Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal, Meghalay, Orissa, Sikkim and Mizoram come in the first category where the polarization is between Congress and regional alternatives. In Himachal

Bihar, UP and Tamilnadu, BJP is still to find an effective foot hold in Kerala, and many states in the North-East. Absence of BJP consequently leads to a vacuum which regional parties come forward and fill. This has added to the fertility of political ground resulting in greater political fragmentation. Obviously, this does not augur well for the evolution of a sound two-party system. Another notable trend is that of anti-incumbency. While this particular element has reinforced the process of polarization of polity, it has also created an altogether different kind of challenge in front of representative democracy. With anti-incumbency becoming an established trend, the element of deterrence of the voters' power, which is inherent to the electoral politics, is getting diluted for obvious reasons. Those in power, now indulge in corruption for a huge collection of illegitimate funds since any way 'they have to forgo power', while those in opposition afford to remain docile since 'anyway the next turn is their'. In the emerging scenario, all serious political parties are facing challenges. If Congress has to maintain its pan-Indian supremacy, it has to institutionalize itself in a sound way. BJP has to emerge as a pan-national alternative while constructing a national consensus about its own acceptability. All other parties, mainly the Communists have to concentrate upon expanding their base and appear as a credible third alternative.

In the absence of any serious efforts to meet these challenges, for a large section of the people democracy may be reduced to just a partisan competition to win formal popular support. This disillusionment about democracy will, as compared to any other developed nation; cost India more heavily and hence a quest for solutions is all the more important in the context of India. Before going deep into the relationship between democracy, political parties, populism and electoral compulsions; the discussion will also look into the salient features of political culture in India.

### **Conclusions and recommendations:**

On this background this study recommends that the necessary link between efficacy of democracy and effective organisational functioning of political parties needs to be institutionalised. Since the present system has effectively blurred this link, enhancing the quality of party-functioning rarely finds a place on the agenda of national discourse. Across the political spectrum, senior and old politicians appear to have lost the zeal for taking initiative for reforms. Those who are young and have at least 20-30 years of active politics ahead are vary of reforms since they apprehend that reforms ( and within the party, even asking for a debate on reforms) may affect their political career. Besides, if political parties, organisations or individuals clamor for reforms, there is always an apprehension that motives will be attached to their demand. The circumstances in which NDA government abandoned any follow-up of the National Commission for the review of the functioning of Constitution are a case in point.

For those who take pride in regular holding of elections and anti-incumbency as an established trend, it is noteworthy that thanks to this trend, some clearly undemocratic traits are emerging. As observed by Justice C.S. Dharmadhikari<sup>7</sup> "those in power, ignore public interest and work on an obviously selfish agenda because they consider it a certainty that they are going to be dethroned no matter how best they govern. Similarly, those in the opposition also ignore genuine public interest and indulge in all sorts of wheeling and dealing as they

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Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Orissa it is Congress + versus BJP+. In states like Tamilnadu, and now Uttar Pradesh, it is a fight primarily between two regional party conglomerations.

<sup>7</sup> As told to the author in an interview in Mumbai on June 27,2007.

believe that in any case the next term in the government is any way theirs. This has taken the perversion of politics to a new low.”

About inertia for systemic change, there appears to be an overriding feeling that the present Westminster model has no better alternative. Although this feeling is baseless, in an atmosphere where political reforms have hardly occupied any central position in India’s national public discourse, doing away with a sense of resignation is extremely hard.

On this background, this study first and foremost recommends initiating a national debate on the need for political reforms and later, on the nature of reforms. Having established that unless parties are compelled to function in a systematic way, representative democracy can not free itself from its shortcomings, this study makes some concrete recommendations along with some general suggestions.

Recommendations—

**A. Constitutional reforms:**

1. Defections at every level and whether that of an individual or a group, should be banned making vacation of seat by the defector, mandatory. Even for an independent candidate, switching loyalties once declared, should automatically attract dis-qualification.
2. A system of 'Constructive vote of no-confidence' should be introduced.
3. A system of recognizing a pre-poll alliance should be in place. Issuing a joint public-declaration explaining the objectives of the alliance and the nature of understanding should be made mandatory.
4. All post-poll alliances should be primarily dis-allowed. The election commission should have the discretion of allowing such alliances, only in exceptional cases with a view to breaking the constitutional dead lock and after filing due affidavits about the common minimum programme and common policy perspectives with a clause for conditions under which alliance could be dissolved.

**B. Constitutional reforms for better functioning of parties:**

It is urgently required that possibilities for introducing a comprehensive law regulating and disciplining the functioning of parties are thoroughly explored. Such legislation should include aspects like recruitment, internal democracy, leadership, human resource development, policy shifts, coalitional arrangements, financial transparency and accountability as well as a strict code of conduct for elected representatives and party office bearers.

On the lines of party supported foundations in Germany (stiftungs), efforts should be made to explore establishing training and research foundations for and by parties with a partial financial assistance from the government. By the time all these reforms are given a serious thought, what can be done urgently is establishing an independent organisation called "Political Party Watch" to monitor parties on certain important counts.

This study recommends following concrete reforms--

1. Reforms for making the process of establishing a new political party more serious and elaborate with a focus on transparency, accountability and internal democracy.
2. Mandatory publication of annual accounts of parties, at the national and state levels.
3. Mandatory publication of Annual report of Party activities.
4. Mandatory maintenance of Party Membership Register at the state and district levels.
5. Mandatory holding of elections for party office bearers under the supervision of Election Commission at least once in every five years.

6. Mandatory establishment of an internal Training, Research and Development Department for every national party, with clear guidelines about some basic Training in Democracy for all party functionaries.
7. Mandatory comprehensive training for all first-time elected people's representatives and party office bearers. Making a provision that no elected official could seek re-nomination without undergoing training.

### **C. Electoral Reforms:**

Measures like Code of Conduct of the Election Commission are in vogue for quite some time. While the focus of this Code of Conduct is mainly on preventing the use of public money/facilities for partisan purposes, that itself is not enough. With a more positive and truly democratic approach, following measures with a clear focus on educating the masses and bringing transparency, could be introduced—

1. Giving incentive for publishing Report to the Electorate by every elected representative at every level, every year.
2. Mandatory publication of the details of candidates' assets in local news papers and on local channels.
3. Mandatory publication of a manifesto by contesting parties at respective levels followed by a mandatory Action Taken Report (ATR) on the manifestoes (even parties that have lost the elections can inform about their efforts to follow up on their promises) by every political party.
4. Considering MCPR as an alternative. -In our quest to find solutions to the problems inherent in the FPTP system, probing as to whether introduction of Mixed Compensatory Proportional Representation (MCPR) will do away with most, if not all; the ills of FPTP merits deeper analysis. Apart from a constant danger of instability and taking recourse to all kinds of unethical tactics to thwart instability, FPTP system also has several lacunae. It over-represents the majority while denying any adequate space for scattered minorities. In a bid to avoid political marginalization, minorities tend to vote en-bloc, leading to some kind of a perpetuation of vote-bank politics. Merits and demerits of PR vis-à-vis the present system of FPTP are discussed at the end of this chapter more elaborately.

### **A Case for Proportional Representation**

There are many individuals, political scientists and constitutional experts, and also organisations, which have been advocating switching over to Proportional Representation (P R). According to them, as compared to the present Westminster Model, PR is more likely to help improve the quality of democratic governance and in effect arrest the growing indifference towards the democratic process, leading to cynicism and eventual lack of faith in democratic ideals. T.M.Joseph, a researcher; after reviewing the relationship between democratic representation and electoral system in India, strongly recommends that “the German model is well placed to feature strongly as it ensures stability, allows constituency representation and provides outcome far more proportional”<sup>8</sup> than our present system.

Organisations like *Janadesh*, a platform for National Campaign for Political Reforms have been very strongly advocating that India should switch over to PR. Claiming that under PR, parties are under almost no pressure to be the biggest and loudest voice and hence less

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<sup>8</sup> T.M.Joseph, “Democracy and Representation in India: Does Electoral System matter ?” in *Gandhi Marg*, Oct-Nov. 2006, p.321.

expenditure is required to win, advocates of PR argue that PR is best suited to reduce corruption.

Even under the Westminster system, competent and honest persons who prefer to remain away from direct electoral politics for obvious reasons can easily enter the legislatures via the upper houses. But, as past experience shows, the parties have largely abused this particular provision of the constitution. Upper houses in state legislatures in India are often used as back-door entry points for veteran politicians who have either failed in the direct elections or who are not confident of facing the electorate. Constitution makers have provided for nominations of certain number of individuals from different walks of public life in the upper houses (In the Rajyasabha and in the Legislative Councils in states). However, past experiences show that this provision has been abused by nominating hardcore politicians under the same.

PR has also been recommended in the 170th Report of the Law Commission of India (1999). The report says, "we feel that a combination of FPTP (FPTP) and the list systems..... may best meet our needs."<sup>9</sup> In order to find solution to this crisis through changing the electoral system, the Law Commission reviewed all the 212 parliamentary electoral systems listed in *The Global Distribution of Electoral Systems* in order to assess what might be the most suitable for us. After an elaborate analysis the commission has recommended a combination of both the present FPTP system and the List system. Besides, as claimed by *Janadesh*, several political parties including CPI(M), DMK, MDMK, The Indian Union Muslim League and *Shiromani Akali Dal* have also supported PR.<sup>10</sup>

Proportional Representation could perhaps be described as the most likely answer in this Quest for systemic solutions to India's democratic deficit. As compared to FPTP, PR will provide greater political stability and more certainty about the schedule of elections. PR provides for a simultaneous voting for an individual as well as for a party and this element is more likely to reduce the technique element that has gripped our electoral system. With the provision of List System, chances for consideration for the ability of a candidate are in a way reinstated. This will automatically encourage entry of good, well meaning and quality people in politics.

Implementing at least some of these reforms and attempting a healthy debate on the advisability of Proportional Representation is a tall order. Ironically, the hurdles in the way of these reforms are again those very factors against whom, systemic solutions need to be found out. Again and again, it is populism and populism alone that has prevented a public discourse on the issues that concern majority of Indians.

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<sup>9</sup> Law Commission Report

<sup>10</sup> A pamphlet by *Janadesh*, Lok Satta, Maharashtra.

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