



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss how the process of fragmentation of the national party system and emergence of minority or coalition governments in 1960s impacted Indian politics and democracy. (150 words)

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Approach

- Briefly introduce the political situation at centre in 1960's.
- Elaborate on the impacts of political development in 1960's.
- Conclude with a brief comparison of 1960's with present times in context of multiple parties at national and state level.

Introduction

- Nehru and Lal Bahadur shastri passed away in 1960s in quick succession necessitating elevation of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister.
- India was facing numerous challenges- Poverty, war with China and Pakistan, food shortage etc.
- These challenges caused numerous protest led majorly by communist and socialist parties along with other parties at national and state level. This tumult in Indian polity was responsible for emergence of new political parties and their coalitions.

Impacts of fragmentation of polity in 1960's.

- **Breakdown of 'Congress System':** During first decade after independence, Congress remained largely unchallenged, as a large umbrella party. However, with challenges of poverty and price rise, power struggle between Prime Minister and old guard of congress known as 'syndicate', wars with neighbours etc., congress lost its umbrella character and was now dominated by single powerful personality.
- **Emergence of Regional parties based on regional issues-** 1960's saw several regional movement centred upon the regional issues e.g. in Tamil Nadu anti Hindi protest led by DMK, Punjabi suba movement by Akali Dal for separate linguistic state in punjab etc., leading to emergence of multiple political parties successfully contesting assembly elections based on regional issues.
- **Threat of fissiparous tendencies:** Fragmentation of Polity also fuelled secessionist tendencies among various regions, for example secessionist movement in north east and Punjab (Khalistan Movement).
- **Deepening of democracy:** As the new political parties emerged in states there were definite signs of maturing of Indian democracy. In 1967 assembly elections there were 8 states where non Congress government was formed indicating democratic transition of power.
- **Challenges for Federal system:** Prior to 1960 there the federal provisions of constitution remained practically unused. The Centre - State relations were managed with in Congress party itself through informal discussions, as same party was in power in centre and states. After emergence of non congress governments at states there emerged number of conflict between centre and states. The widespread abuse of article 356 to control state government was direct cause of desire of centre to control states despite progressive fragmentation of Indian polity.

- **Emergence of Coalition government as viable alternative:** In 1960's opposition came together to form disparate coalitions to contest elections jointly which proved to be Indian adaptation to deal with the challenges of first past the post system, holding onto power and making government more representative.
- **Challenges of coalition government:** Coalition government threw its own challenges of like unstable governments, emergence of culture of defections, increased conflict between Centre and State etc.

Conclusion

- Thus 1960s have left indelible impression on how the democracy and political system evolved in India. The fragmented polity became permanent feature of India.
- The challenges of coalitions remain same even after introduction of Anti Defection provisions in constitution.
- New political parties keep on emerging in present times, few even able to form government e.g. Aam Aadmi Party thus highlighting fragmentation is natural evolving process in Democracy.

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