

**PARTY PLATFORM AND PROGRAMS BY  
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**POLITICAL PARTIES – ORIGIN AND OBJECTIVE.**

Political party is an organized opinion process. Political party symbolizes an organized group of citizens, professing to share common political views and political ideology. Whether a political party is conservative or revolutionary, union of notables or organization of masses, whether it functions in a pluralistic democracy or a monolithic dictatorship, thread of common function of participation, to varying extent, in the exercise of political power runs through it. It can be by formulation of policies and programs through constitution of a government or by exercising the crucial function of opposition in determination of various policies/programs.

Political parties as homogeneous units originated in Europe and U.S.A. in 19<sup>th</sup> Century. 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed the spread of political parties in their modern form through out the world, particularly Asia – which had started breaking free from the shackles of colonial rule after the first and second world wars.

**CONSTRUCTION OF PARTY PLATFORM.**

Asia witnessed gradual construction of organized political parties in varying degrees in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unique to Asia, a host of factors defined the contours of construction of a party platform – such as (a) social and economic structure, (b) caste, (c) religion, (d) culture, (e) specific issues of ideology, (f) regional aspirations, (g) distinct sub-nationalities, (h) colonial legacies, (i) personality and belief of leaders guiding the freedom movement, (j) nature and experience of freedom movement, etc.

Varied nature of social-political-economic-ideological commitments of political parties have provided the platform i.e. springboard to decide the nature of a country's institutions, policies, programs and final path of governance. For example, single party countries (China, Vietnam, North Korea etc.) professed to bring social and economic equality for establishment of egalitarian society with strong state intervention and control. Similarly, religion has provided an important platform. Political parties in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Afghanistan etc. have creation of Islamic states as a founding agenda. Regionalism has also been used as a platform wherein distinct sub-nationality has become the benchmark for a political movement/party like LTTE in Sri Lanka and Mizo



National Front in India. In the same way, language, caste and culture have been driving force behind the policies and programs of many smaller political parties (e.g. Mohajir Quami Movement in Pakistan and Anna DMK and DMK in India etc.).

To me, this formed the primary foundation as to why certain Asian countries remained stuck in their old past of monarchial and aristocratic order (especially the middle-East countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar etc.), while others successfully established solid democratic foundations with functioning democratic institutions (e.g. India), while still others experimented with a mix of guided democracy (e.g. Pakistan, Indonesia), quasi-Parliamentary or Presidential system (Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Syria etc.) or political systems that were subjugated with strong intervention from armed forces (Myanmar, Pakistan etc.) or hegemony of a single party (e.g. China, Vietnam, North Korea).

### **INSTITUTIONALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS – A PRIMARY AGENDA.**

Emerging out of the colonial rule, Asian countries were least developed in terms of agriculture, education, infrastructure, health, industries, science and technology and had little or no experience of representative political institution. As a result of long unarticulated and suppressed aspirations of the people, political parties had a gigantic task of conflict resolution in the society, establishment of stable and responsive political systems, bring socio-economic change through modernization and development, consolidation of freedom and autonomy earned after long and at times bloody freedom movement as also establish infrastructure of agriculture, education, science and technology etc.

Attainment of these goals became and still remains the basic ingredient of policies and programs of political parties in various countries of Asia.

### **DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT – AN INDELIBLE ANALOGY AND INDIAN CONTEXT.**

Development and democracy are intrinsic to each other. A solidly grounded and functioning democratic system is an essential component of the process of development. This is the primary lesson learnt from functioning of well-organized political parties in Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. India – world's largest functioning democracy- is a living example of this co-relation.

Indian democratic experience and developmental aspirations are in many way history of India's (as also Asia's) oldest political party –Indian National Congress. Ideology, philosophy, policies and programs of Indian National Congress have defined a new model of governance based on social justice,



mutual cohabitation and equitable distribution of resources. This, in turn, provided the moral and ethical fiber for freedom movements as also progress and prosperity across the continents. African continent is its primary example.

India is a witness to determination of a new order of governance by a political party through its platform and programs. How a political party's beliefs, platform and programs can altar the course of history in an entire continent affecting lives of people in world's second most populace country, is to be seen in the Indian context. To understand, it is important to tabulate some of the universally applicable platforms and programs as follows:-

- (a) Faith in Democracy – Right from its origin in 1885, Congress stood for liberty, equality and justice as the foremost pillars of its struggle. It is this platform of democracy that shaped the destiny of India during last 58 years of Independence through 'universal adult franchise', regular elections and everyone above 18 years of age having a right to elect representatives of their choice.
- (b) Secularism - State in India has no religion. State is secular. State permits no discrimination on the ground of religious beliefs. This was an essential fundamental of Indian National Congress since 1885 till today and is reflected in the ethos of a nation that has second largest Muslim population in the world. Despite turbulent times and a few aberrations, India has assimilated its multiple religions by Congress Party's ideology of 'unity in diversity'.
- (c) Gandhian Philosophy and Nehruvian Socialism – 'Non-Violence and Truth' – guiding light of Gandhian Philosophy to the world at large and Nehruvian Socialism i.e. an equitable yet progressive distribution of resources with complete focus on nation building through infrastructure building were the primary platforms around which Congress undertook the task of creating modern day's India - an India on its way to becoming world's biggest economy in next two decades.
- (d) Non-Alignment – During the freedom struggle and thereafter, our Indian National Congress advocated creation of a common platform of non-alignment, opposition to racialism, colonialism and imperialism. This platform has formed the core of India's foreign policy for 58 years attracting to its fold a large number of similar thinking countries.

It is imperative here to describe some path-breaking party programs that changed the very concept of a welfare state:-



- (a) Fundamental Rights – While enacting Indian Constitution in 1952, Indian National Congress codified the world's most elaborate Code of Liberty, Equality and Justice as also a guarantee against discrimination of all kinds i.e. based on race, religion, caste, language, region etc. as 'Fundamental Rights'. This was a true marvel of party's programs and philosophy getting constitutional sanction.
- (b) Constitutional provisions for protection of interests of 'Special Sections i.e. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women' - Indian National Congress's philosophy of an equitable social order was achieved by making special provisions in the Constitution for reservation in government jobs and activities for a deprived section of the populace treated and suppressed as untouchables.
- (c) Empowerment of masses through grass-root democratic institutions- Having given universal adult franchise, Congress promised 'delegated democracy' by creating village and city level constitutionally recognized and financially viable democratic units of governance. Vide two Constitutional amendments, former Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi achieved just that. Over two million elected representatives in villages and towns today shape and govern the destiny of India.
- (d) Path-breaking policies for infrastructure creation – Under Gandhi-Nehru, Congress projected a program of modernization and infrastructure creation in all fields, particularly in the fields of agriculture, irrigation, health, science and technology. These programs of the party have successfully transformed India from the days of infrastructure creation to agricultural/industrial revolution and to present day knowledge hub.
- (e) Education as a Fundamental Right – Indian National Congress's belief of education as a media for transformation of a nation saw India as one of the few countries guaranteeing in its Constitution 'Right of Education' as a Fundamental Right.
- (f) Adult Franchise at 18 years – Congress promised and delivered participative representation and right of governance to the largest section of its populace (52% Indian are below 25 years of age) by statutorily reducing the 'Right of Adult Franchise' to 18 years.
- (g) Employment Guarantee – Prior to 2004 Parliament elections, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, President of Indian National Congress addressed the single biggest problem facing the young today and promised a 'guarantee of employment' by bringing a statute to this effect. India today is one of those nations, which promises an employment guarantee to the



unemployed youth. This is unique and exceptional in a country of over one billion with high unemployment rate and reflects social commitment and program of a political party becoming a national commitment.

Primary fundamentals, platforms and programs of a political party can, thus, altar the course of history in a nation, if implemented diligently and earnestly.

### **CHALLENGES AHEAD.**

In the post cold war world, globalization and economic liberalization have increased the responsibility of political parties. Onus lies on the political parties to provide platforms and programs where economic liberalism symbolizes a humane face rather than rampant capitalism reminiscent of old colonialism. Globalization of ideas about democracy of civil society has changed the way people think. Global political movements have led to debt relief for nations. Globalization has helped millions of people attain higher standards of living and economies to thrive.

What must, however, be remembered, is that globalization has benefited countries that took charge of their own destiny and recognized the role government can play in development rather than relying on the notion of a self-regulated market that would fix its own problems.

What is needed are policies for sustainable, equitable and democratic growth. This will be possible by transforming societies, improving the lives of the poor and giving everyone a chance at success and access to education, health and employment. This is the role that political parties in Asia must fulfill.

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