

INTROSPECTING INTERNAL DEMOCRACY IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the dynamics of internal democracy. It highlights various components of promoting and sustaining democracy in political parties. It tries to focus on the selection of candidates and leaders by different provisions. It also reflects the difficulties faced by the party members in their respective parties. Democracy cannot survive and sustain without practicing and promoting at the party level. Inclusiveness and decentralization are the keys for better selection of leaders. The party which allows all the party members in the decision making process, is going to bring inclusive policies. Internal democracy will lead to transparency and accountability within the political parties. It will promote trust among the party members and a sense of belonging in the decision making process. The author analyzed the data collected from the sample and suggested recommendations based on the findings of the study.

KEYWORDS: Internal Democracy, Political Parties, Selection Process

INTRODUCTION

Political Parties with internal democracy are likely to elect more accountable and transparent leadership. They bring out responsive policies to meet the needs, rights and aspirations of the people. These parties enjoy greater legitimacy and enjoy greater success from the masses. Leaders emerge out of these political parties practice democratic values what they preach externally. They try to establish link between citizen and government and contribute for inclusive governance.

Political parties perform multi-role dynamic functions. These are the forces that create legitimacy of the government and popular consensus. They try to connect people with policies by responding to their specific needs and demands. (Kolson: 1978, Gunther and Diamond: 2001). An idea transforms itself as a public policy and promotes happiness and prosperity among people through the channel of political parties (Yanai: 1999). Political parties open up the bridge to the public to explore the possible alternatives. (Neuman: 1990).

Political parties create conditions to identify and accommodate the leadership in terms of policy priorities and possibilities. Like a family, fighting inside a political parties also take new shape.

Some time they fight on petty issues and forget the real issues of policies and governance. During the time of conflict they violate all the norms, standards and procedures.

How political parties come to a policy conclusion and on what basis? How far political parties practice and promote internal democracy within its own structure. How far they respect the internal processes and possible results. (Sarrow: 2005, Seligman: 1964, Belloni and Beller: 1976).

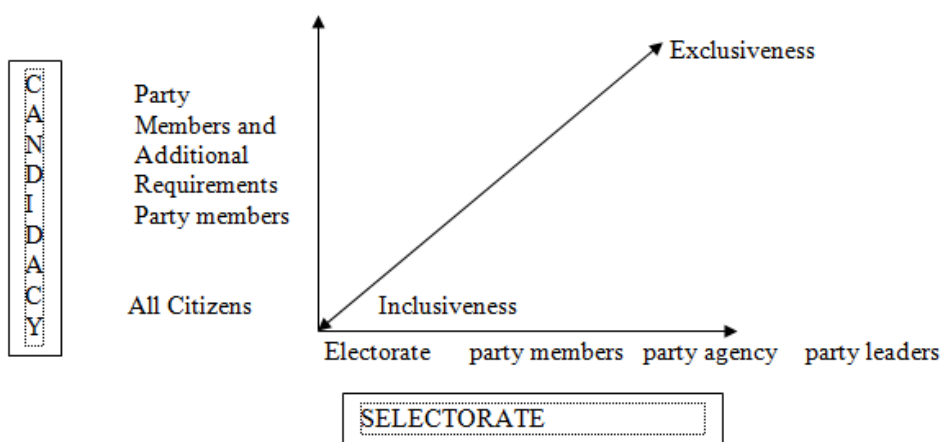
Requirements of Internal Democracy

There are so many arguments and counter arguments in relation to internal democracy. One way it can be determined or examined by looking at the role of basic party members who are the foot soldiers for any development. Whether these members are consulted before taking any decision of leadership selection or policy decision making? This is a grey area which is never answered by the dominant political parties. The party members enjoy all rights and amenities of the political parties in paper but when it comes to practice it is blurred. It is easily understood that the top political elites never want to submit their authority, power and position to the scrutiny of the party workers. All the democratic measures are bypassed to accommodate the elite views and visions. The party workers stand as mere dumb spectators without any real role in taking decision or choosing leadership. They are constantly ignored and if necessary deliberately isolated in the decision making process so that there will not be any kind of halt or obstacles. Sometime they are expelled from their primary membership without a fair hearing. The top elite expect unquestioned submission of the party workers to their decision. Any diversion will come with a price of suspension or removal.

There are two ways to find out the internal democracy in a political party as pointed out by Scarrow. The first one is its inclusive character and the second one is the decentralization in the political parties. How the political parties select their candidates, leaders and public policies determines the degree of internal democracy.

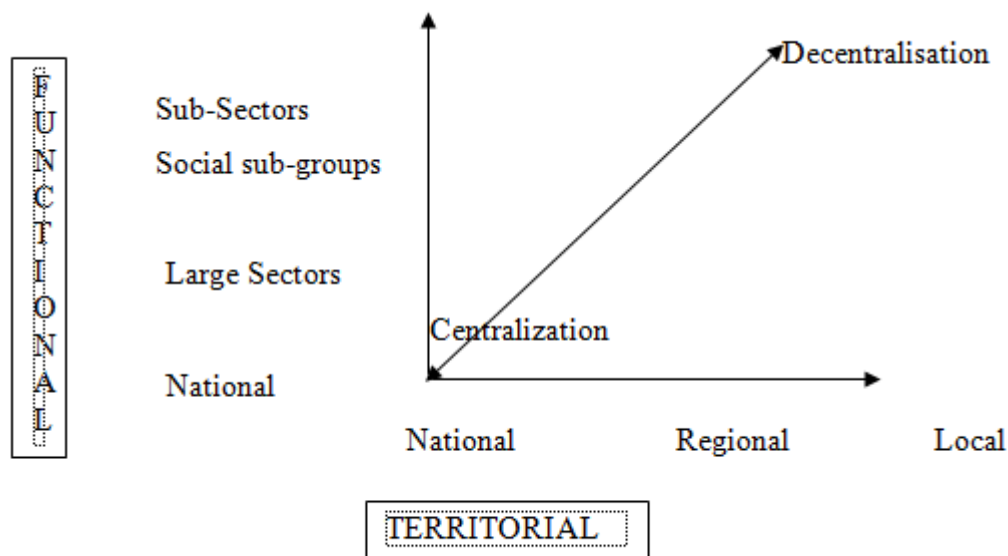
The parties which are more inclusive will give chances for discussion before taking any kind of decision. A political party which functions in central level may take such decisions which are binding on lower levels of party settings. But it is quite opposite in decentralized parties because they focus on the bottom up approach. Decisions flow from the bottom to the top level. Political parties also frame rules and regulations to promote internal democracy. (Sarrow: 2005).

Internal democracy reflects by the political parties themselves. How do they maintain the organizational structures and the role and responsibilities of party members? Some political parties follow hierarchy while others follow elite decision or some kind of discrimination based on different stereotypes. There are also chances that the internal and the external is severely mismatching. The political party can showcase something different to the outside world. Wherever there is internal democracy, it is assumed that the party is more transparent internally as well as externally. They need to conduct internal elections periodically.



Source: Scarrow 2005

Figure 1: Degree of Inclusiveness of Candidate Selection



Source: Scarrow 2005

Figure 2: Degree of Decentralization of Candidate Selection

Political Party Organizations and Selection of Leadership

Political parties build their organizations to realize their common mission and visions. It is only possible if you have the power structure at your disposal. They use different tactics to grab power or to be in power. All the political parties may follow certain objectives and ideologies which they try to promote more frequently. It is very vital to have some organizational structure to deal with the election process. (Scarrow: 2005, Sadasivan: 1977).

One of the vital functions of any political party is selection of leadership. They try to attract different communities, castes or classes to join in their political organizations. The recruitment of strong leadership determines the performance of political parties in the coming elections. Sometimes veterans join the parties having a lot of knowledge and experiences. They also stand as stumbling blocks for any kind of fresh new leadership. Leadership determines how to take the party to the new level having many challenges. It is a tough process because the party has to balance between the experienced veterans with the energetic fresh young leaders to take its mandate to the greater heights. In the long-term, it also determines the stability or instability of the political party. (Seligman: 1964; Wellhofer and Hennessey: 1974; Scarrow: 2005, Sadasivan: 1977). Some leaders prove that they have a strong support base from different sections or communities, which may earn them a party ticket for future leadership. The strength of the leader reflects in the party organization. A strong leader is a mask of the party. It determines future goal of action and reactions.

Sometimes political parties form some kind of board to scrutinize and approve the members who are eligible or not in the party candidate selection process. Internal democracy facilitates young candidates to occupy important positions in the party as well as in the government. It tries to replace the dynastic rule by vibrant young leadership. Every members has a say in the decision making process (Scarrow: 2005, Chousalkar: 1997).

Political Dynamics

One way of selecting leaders is through their dynamic skills. Some leaders are good in speaking and some are good in organizing. They employ these skills to motivate, inspire and instigate their followers to achieve the desired goal.

Some leaders are also extremely good in education which helps them in designing or formulating different policies and plan of action. They are selected because of their technical knowhow. There are also some leaders who have the outstanding qualities of converting challenges into opportunities. (Alam: 1999, Seligman: 1964).

Membership and Ideology

India is one of the functioning democracies, where the rate of turnout is higher among the poor sections rather than the rich and middle class (Hasan: 2005). Every party is functional by its active party workers who come from these poor sections. They perform dynamic role in enhancing the impact of party by enrolling new members. They try their best to induct more and more members. But the cadre based parties may behave differently. They may take some period to induct an individual as a party cadre. All most all the political parties follow certain basic guidelines like paying some subscription fees or doing some party assigned work or filling a form and declaration. (Sadasivan: 1977, Scarrow: 2005)

People might have several logic to join in a political party. Some want to serve the society while others want to capture power and authority. But the political parties always try to keep party members as their messenger of manifestoes or mandates. Leaders also maintain their support base by these party members who ultimately try to promote them. For practical reasons, no political party can face the election without strong party support base. But if they participate in the party decision making then they can dedicate their life for the betterment of the party. Among the members also party identify the possible candidates to fight in the elections. If there is more intra-party democracy, that may attract more people as well as members with strong political base.

Political parties are known by their ideologies. It is party's designed course of action to achieve the desired goal. It tries to focus their thinking process about the socio, economic and political structure. Some political parties are known to have strong ideological bases whereas others have a flexible and fluid structure. If you look at left parties, they are having centralized decision making process. Some parties take decisions conducive to their ideological commitments (Sadasivan: 1977; Scarrow: 2005).

Internal Democracy and Legitimacy

There are always arguments and counter arguments that a party which is internally undemocratic will not promote democratic rights. First that ought to reflect inside the party then the outside. We always cherish certain democratic values and ideas but the parties which practice undemocratic processes and principles, we try to ignore. When a party does something inside and does something outside then the party credibility is questioned. There is no place for an undemocratic party in a democratic country. Where ever there is internal democracy, there is possibility of decentralized leadership and accountability. Internal democracy also tries to empower the citizens as well as party members with transparency. It promotes trust among the party members as well as their positive inclinations among the young leaders.

Research Foundation for Governance in India (RGFI) explains that the political parties have to go long way to achieve internal democracy within the parties. The study titled 'Democracy Within and without' examines the functioning of two national parties of India. (DNA: March 6, 2010). Democracy can flourish if the political parties can practice internal democracy without any kind of discrimination to those who have differences of voices (Kunihiko: 2010). The ultimate power need to rest with the people only in any sustainable democracy. Any individual or institutions bypassing that will defeat the sole purpose of democracy (Alexander, and Christian Welzel: 2011). Through internal democracy, democracy has to overcome the feudal and authoritarian stereotypes and promote universal values (Kaase: 2010)

In Case of Odisha

Odisha is a state having lowest per-capita income. It always comes to limelight for negative reasons rather than positive issues. Odisha is poor, underdeveloped and the people are poverty ridden. It is mainly ruled by Congress since independence and presently ruled by Biju Janata Dal (BJD). BJP also played important role as a coalition partner with BJD for eleven years. But Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on its own have very lower presence in this Hindu dominated state. The underdevelopment of Odisha can be attributed to the political parties who ruled over Odisha. They might have failed to bring internal democracy within their parties and ultimately inclusive policies.

THE METHOD

The researcher adopted mixed method to reflect the internal democracy within political parties.

Data: The researcher collected data from primary sources from MLAs of Odisha Legislative Assembly by using an interview schedule. 45 MLAs (BJP-15 BJD-15 and INC-15) selected in a random basis of selection. To analyze the data, the researcher adopted descriptive analysis to make generalization.

Table 1: MLAs Attend the Political Meeting

	BJD	BJP	INC
Every time	11(73.3)	10(66.6)	8(53.3)
Occasionally	1(6.6)	3(20)	3(20)
Sometimes	3(20)	2(13.3)	4(26.6)
Never	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
Total	15	15	15

Source: Researcher's own Analysis

BJD and BJP MLAs attend more political meetings whereas some INC MLAs attend the meeting sometimes. More and more meetings mean more dialogues and discussions among the members of these political parties.

Table 2: View about Internal Democracy in Their Party

	BJD	BJP	INC
Truly Democratic	12(80)	10(66.6)	11(73.3)
Partially Democratic	2(13.3)	3(20)	1(6.6)
Authoritative	1(6.6)	1(6.6)	2(13.3)
Not Democratic	0(0.0)	1(6.6)	1(6.6)
Total	15	15	15

Source: Researcher's own Analysis

Almost all the parties' MLAs claim that there is internal democracy in their political party. 80% BJD MLAs claim the party is truly democratic within, whereas 66.6% of BJP and 73.3% of INC feel the same. Some MLAs also revealed that their party is authoritative and not democratic.

Table 3: Decision Making During Candidate Selection

	BJD	BJP	INC
Selection Committee	5(33.3)	6(40)	8(53.3)
High Command	3(20)	4(26.6)	5(33.3)
Decided by due Process	6(40)	5(33.3)	2(13.3)
Any other	1(6.6)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)
Total	15	15	15

Most MLAs in INC and BJP claim that the candidate selection is done by the selection committee but the above

data reflects different things. Whereas most of the BJD MLAs cited that candidate selection is decided by due process. There is also substantial role of high command among the political parties like INC 33.3%, BJP 26.6% and BJD 20%. The highest number of MLAs of INC and BJP claim that the candidate selection is done by a selection committee.

We need to be serious about the internal democracy within political parties. We cannot imagine a parliamentary democracy without internal democracy. Political parties' voices various reasons, why they were not able to hold election within the party.

FINDINGS

- It is widely understood that the party decisions are taken at the highest level involving the top functionaries or the party elite.
- The information flows like water always from top to bottom. There is no other way communication available in the political parties.
- If the policies and programmes of the party are determined by involving all the party members, then it will promote acceptability and obligation.
- In theory, political meetings are arranged to discuss and debate but in practice all these exercises have lower implications on the party decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Party members ought to elect their leaders directly without any kind of biasness. The detailed election process needs to be submitted immediately to the Election Commission of India.

Regular meetings ought to be arranged and more and more space for dialogues, suggestions and recommendations need to be facilitated.

Legislate laws to deregister any political parties who did not organize regular internal election. There should not be any nominations by the leaders to prevent any backchannels or wild entry.

Rule of Law should be upheld and any violation by any political parties must face with serious exemplary action.

Democratic institutions needs people who not only preach democracy but also practice democracy within their party system. It promotes the legitimacy of leaders and candidates as they are chosen by a democratic election method.

People not only vote for leaders but also they identify themselves with political parties. Sometimes they go by the party rather than the candidates or leaders. For them, the individual does not matter but the party matters.

The new leaders can challenge the old leaders if there are voices for the new currents and reforms within the party. If the plans are imposed on them without proper consultation then there is a possibility of reaction and negative consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

Senior political leaders do not want to give up their powers and influence inside the party. It means there is less chance for the newcomers. Sometimes the influential leaders try to eliminate opposing voices or groups by different

means. These groups may find it difficult to go with the political party. Senior leaders need to create conditions to facilitate newcomers and they should assimilate and accommodate them in the party system. Political parties need to maintain, develop and promote democratic culture within a party.

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