

Research Article

Pressure Groups Role in Indian Politics

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Abstract: Today a large number of pressure groups (interest groups) exist in the country and play definite role in politics though in their general characteristics. Its aim is to influence the administrative and legislative measures of the government and exercise direct and indirect pressures on it so that its interest may be promoted. The Indian business groups have an acute awareness of how the political system operates and what the points of access to it. The important groups are the All-India Kisan Sabha, the Hind Kisan Panchayat, the United Kisan Sabha, the Revolutionary Peasants Convention, the Workers' and Peasants' party and the All-India Kisan Sammelan. The students do not form a distinct class in an economic or professional sense; they do not have their separate political, economic, caste or communal interests.

Keywords: Pressure groups, caste, religion, Business Groups.

Introduction

Pressure Groups are associations which are formed to promote the interests of their members by exercising all sorts of direct and indirect pressure on the government. They are different from political parties. A political party has a broad national base. It represents wider national or sectional interests. It has some common political ideas and certain definite policy and programme. It has a wide organizational network. It contests elections and tries to capture political power. It tries to influence and mobilize public opinion by means of the media of mass communication. A pressure group, on the contrary, is concerned with limited particular interests. It does not fight elections. It does not aim to capture political power and control the government directly. Its aim is to influence the administrative and legislative measures of the government and exercise direct and indirect pressures on it so that its interest may be promoted. A pressure group may be a non-partisan organization of persons united for the achievement of certain principles and for the protection or promotion of material activities and of ideal causes deemed vital to the group's existence or survival.

Pressure groups are organized to promote a bewildering variety of interests and purposes. It is difficult to classify them in a limited number of categories. Without attempting a classification it may be said that more powerful groups are trade associations representing industrial and commercial interests, labour unions, farm organizations, professional associations various reform leagues, and a number of patriotic, religious, cultural and ethnic organizations.

Pressure Groups in India

General Characteristics

The growth pressure groups in Indian has rather been slow. During British rule there were not many pressure groups in the country. Only those groups which represented the traditional

sources of power could exert some pressure on the government to protect and promote their interests. Neither were they well-organized nor did they function openly on modern political lines. It was only in the post-independence period that a variety of conflicting interests began to surface and play some role in politics. Today a large number of pressure groups (interest groups) exist in the country and play definite role in politics though in their general characteristics and style of functioning they differ in varying degrees from such groups in the developed countries of the west (Mackenzie, 1968).

As the pressure groups in India have to function within a loose, disorganized and fragmented multi-party system, they have come to acquire certain peculiar features which sharply distinguish them from such groups in the west. In the first place, there are few pressure groups in India which may be said to be politically committed. Most of them keep on shifting their political affiliations. We can hardly associate a particular pressure group with a particular political party.

Secondly, the pressure groups in India do not function on purely modern political lines; the considerations of caste, religion, region, language exercise a dominating influence on their functioning. Thus they combine in themselves the elements of traditionalism as well as of modernity. On the one hand, they use the modern techniques of financing political parties, inducting their own men in the legislative and executive departments of the governments and directly or indirectly nursing the bureaucracy to promote the interests of their members. On the other hand, they openly exploit caste, communal and family relationships.

Thirdly, the pressure groups in India do not confine their activities to lobbying; they use methods which promote conditions of anarchy and lawlessness in the country. The most common methods they resort to are strikes, bandhs, demonstrations, gheraos etc. In other words, the pressure groups in this country believe more in the efficiency of mob violence than in lobbying. Most of them have, therefore, assumed the form of antinational and destabilizing forces in the political life of the country.

Lastly, although most of the pressure groups maintain a facade of political non-partisanship, they do not hesitate to mobilize the support of the various political parties and groups for promoting their particular interests. Political parties and factions themselves willingly lend their support to the agitating groups in order to acquire a base for themselves in the masses.

Business Groups

Although formally the country is committed to socialism, the private business continues to play an important role in its economic life. The private business is controlled mostly by a few leading families like the Tatas, the Birlas, the Dalmias, the Singhanias, the Thapars etc. These groups try to influence the economic policies of the governments through their organizations like the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the All-India Manufacturers Organization, the Associated Chambers of Commerce etc.

The Indian business groups have an acute awareness of how the political system operates and what the points of access to it are. They try to influence both politicians and bureaucrats. They give massive donations to the political parties in order to establish their influence over legislators and ministers. They finance the election meetings of the parties. Huge sums are required to provide facilities to house and feed the delegates to such meetings. Although the declared aim of the Congress Party is to bring about a socialist pattern of society, the business groups have given the largest contributions to it. They are shrewd enough to realize that there

is no alternative to the Congress. It was for this reason that they never wholeheartedly supported the former Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party. C. Rajagopalachari rightly regretted that “though the heart of the rich is with the Swatantra Party, their money is with the Congress because of compulsions (Macridis and Ward, 1968).”

But the business groups rely more on their contracts with bureaucrats than with politicians. Myron Weiner aptly observes: “Since they have no effective influence on law-makers, Indian businessmen establish high particularistic relationships with individual administrators, who are appealed to on the basis of blood relationship (when it exists), personal friendship or most often financial reward.” Thus, although business pressure has sought to modify policy formation, this pressure has been exerted more often by individual businessmen than by organized lobbies. Business has given its greatest attention, however, to the administration of policy-particularly in those state governments responsive to its interests.

Trade Unions

Trade unions are other important pressure groups in the country. As in other countries, so in India, the main purpose of every trade union activity is to secure for workers higher wages, shorter working hours, better living conditions, protection against retrenchment, old age security, participation in management etc. But a peculiar feature of the trade unions in this country is that their struggle is not so much against the management as against the government, because they realize very well that their demands cannot be conceded without government intervention. It is for this reason that the trade unions are controlled by politicians and political parties. Besides, the political parties find the trade unions as the best means of building up a mass base for themselves.

Jatin Mitra belonging to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha rightly observes: “It is idle to pretend today that any particular trade union centre or a union for the matter of that has been free from control or fight for dominance by political parties. In the last analysis there may be differences of degree alone; otherwise all unions are, more or less, either politically controlled or are currently the scenes of manoeuvring for establishing such control and leadership (Almond and Powell, 1972).

As a result all the leading political parties have come to have their labour wings. The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) is a wing of the Congress, the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is an adjunct of the Communist Party; the United Trade Union Congress is linked up with the CPI (M); the Hind Mazdoor Sabha is a wing of Socialists; and the Hind Mazdoor Parishad is linked with the Bharatiya Janata Party. In addition to these major organizations, there are several affiliated and unaffiliated local unions.

The control of trade unions by political parties has naturally influenced their programme and methods. The Indian National Trade Union Congress supports the Congress and the Congress Governments. The United Trade Union Congress and the Hind Mazdoor Sabha believe in strikes, bandhs and gheraos because they want to paralyse the Congress Governments.

The existence of so many trade unions and their control by political parties reduces their capacity to effectively pressure the Government or the managements. They have, therefore, proved ineffective to secure the interests of their members.

Myron Weiner explains the causes of the failure of trade unions in the following words: “Unions are poorly organized: membership turnover is great, dues paying limited to a few

and is irregular, and union activities are limited to strikes, demonstrations and election work. Only rarely does a union provide services for its members. Rival unionism is rampant, unions, are led by outsiders and control of unions is often in the hands of political parties seeking to use them for their own ends.”

Agrarian Groups

There are a few pressure groups of the peasants also, but they are weak organizationally. The important groups are the All-India Kisan Sabha, the Hind Kisan Panchayat, the United Kisan Sabha, the Revolutionary Peasants Convention, the Workers’ and Peasants’ party and the All-India Kisan Sammelan.

Like the trade unions these organizations also function as wings of various political parties, which use them for furthering their own political interests rather than for promoting the interests of the peasants themselves. Although the peasants constitute a very large sector of India’s population, their organizations have failed to protect and promote their interests. It is due to their disunity and organizational weakness. If they were united they could have exercised considerable influence on the decisions of the governments.

D.N. Singh has rightly observed: “While industrial labour and blue and white collar workers in India have been able to make their presence felt, it is all the more a pity that peasants have not been able to get their due.” What has made the peasant groups less effective is the fact that most of them are run on caste lines and are controlled by scheming politicians. It is unfortunate that no independent leadership has emerged (Avasti, 2017).

Religious, Caste, Tribal and other Groups

There exist in the country a number of pressure groups which function purely on communal, religious, caste or tribal basis, among the religious groups, the Arya Samaj, the Anglo-Indian Christian Association, the Catholic Bishops’ Association, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad are important. Similarly, caste associate icons have been formed which demand special privileges for their respective castes in the form of representation in the legislative bodies, Reservation in government services and seats in educational institutions. There exist tribal groups in the backward regions of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam etc. Some of these groups demand autonomous status for their members. It was the agitation of such tribal groups that was responsible for the creation of the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and the elevation of Manipur and Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to the status of Statehood (Sarma, 2012).

Student’s Organizations

The history of students’ organizations goes back to the pre independence period when the All-India Students’ Union and the All-India Students’ Federation were formed. The former was associated with the Congress and took part in the Non-Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movements launched by the Congress. The latter was a wing of the Communist Party of India and supported the war efforts of the British Governments after the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

In the post-independence period several other students’ organizations have come into existence. These include the National Students’ Union of India (NSUI) of the Congress, the Young Socialist League of the Socialists, the Progressive Student’s Union of the CPM, and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The students do not form a distinct class in an economic or professional sense; they do not have their separate political,

economic, caste or communal interests. They do not function to promote even the educational interests of the student community. They are mere adjuncts of various political parties which use them to further their political or factional interests. It may however be remembered that the Assam agitation was led by the All-Assam Students' Union and the All-Assam Gana Sangrama Parishad. Ultimately they succeeded in capturing political power in the state. This is unique phenomenon in the political life of the country.

Professional Groups

These groups are formally organised which consist of professionally employed persons. They are a part of government machinery and try to exert their influence. These groups include political parties, legislatures, armies, bureaucracies, etc. whenever such an association raises protest it does so by constitutional means and in accordance with the rules and regulations. For example Indian Medical Association, Bar Council of India, BCCI, All India Federation of University and College Teachers.

Ideology Based Groups

Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chipko Movement, Women's rights organization, against corruption group of India.

Anomic Groups

By anomic pressure groups we mean more or less a spontaneous breakthrough into the political system from the society such as riots. Demonstrations, assassinations like Naxalite groups, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, United Liberation Front of Assam, Dal Khalsa.

Conclusion

Pressure Groups are now considered as an indispensable and helpful element of the democratic process. The society has become highly complex and individuals cannot pursue their interests on their own. They need the support of other fellow beings in order to gain greater bargaining power, this gives rise to pressure groups based on common interests. Democratic politics has to be politics through constitution, through negotiations and amount of bargaining is also involved. Thus it is very essential for the government to consult these organised groups at the time of policy formulation and implementation.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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