UNIT 13 POLITICAL PARTIES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Structure

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Participation is both an activity and an attitude. As an activity it is a social activity. Someone taking a morning walk is not participating in anything. Someone taking part in a 100-meter race does. Someone staying in a neighborhood for a long time without knowing any of one's neighbors is not having a participant attitude. What then is political participation? Of course, we mean a kind of political activity and a kind of political attitude. Since the 50's however it has attracted widespread attention and there seems to be a general agreement among the Political Scientists on the value and necessity of further political participation. But this apparent agreement conceals major disputes both at the levels of political theory and practical politics. Before we explore these we should begin with the concept of political participation itself.

13.2 THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The concept of political participation has been popularised in Political Science by the Behaviouralists. Of course arguments in favor of greater political participation had been advanced by republican and democratic theorists from Rousseau onwards and are still in use by contemporary political theorists. The behaviouralist paradigm rides on a liberal view of politics. Classically, such a view draws a distinction between state and individual on the one hand and public and private on the other; it also leans on the side of the latter categories. Accordingly, when participation is seen as an attitude, it is taken as an individual's favourable orientation to the state or government. That was the basis on which Americans were seen as having a 'participant political culture'. The systematic use of culture and political culture as social science concepts dates only from 1950s. Here the political culture is seen as a shorthand

expression to denote the set of values within which a political system operates. It is something between the state of public opinion and an individual's personality characteristics. According to Gabriel Almond, it is the 'particular pattern of orientations' to political objects in which a political system is embedded. Orientations are predisposition to political action and are determined by such factors as tradition, historical memories, motives, norms, emotions and symbols; the culture, therefore, represents a set of propensities. These orientations may be broken down into cognitive orientations (knowledge and awareness of the political effects), affective orientations (emotions and feelings about the objects) and evaluative orientations (judgment about them). Almond (with Verba) later developed a typology of ideal political cultures or citizen types .Where most people are oriented to the input processes and see themselves as able to make demands and help to shape policies, the political culture is participant; the British, American and Scandinavian political systems best represent this ideal. Similarly, government as the point of reference of individual's activity becomes the feature of political participation as an activity. Thus writes Birch : ' political participation is participation in the process of government, and the case for political participation is essentially a case for substantial number of private citizens (as distinct from public officials or elected politicians) to play a part in the process by which leaders are chosen and /or government policies are shaped and implemented.'

The Communitarians find problem with this Liberal concept of participation because of its 'individualism' and government as the locus of participation .They argue that more important than participation in the process of government through the 'politics of right' is participation at community level for 'politics of common good'. They argue that more important than participation in the process of government is exercise of autonomy which can be developed and exercised in a certain kind of social environment, an autonomy-supporting community, not a government. Thus, Political participation can, then be seen broadly as participation in the political life of the community or civil society with different agents and levels of participation such as running a community health club by a religious group or participating in a N.G.O.-sponsored campaign for literacy. Following the same logic political participation may be for serving political obligation of a democratic citizen to lead a participatory social life and just not for the civil obligation to the government on the question of law and order. Wider political participation must include some degree of democratic control either over or within large-scale economic enterprises, decentralisation of government to smaller units, such as region or locality, considerable use of referenda etc.

13.3 FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The concept of political participation accommodates the following main forms of political participation:

1) voting in local or national elections;
2) voting in referendums;
3) canvassing or otherwise campaigning in elections;
4) active membership of a political party;
5) active membership of a pressure group;

6) taking part in political demonstrations, industrial strikes with political objectives, rent strikes in public housing, and similar activities aimed at changing public policy;

7) various forms of civil disobedience, such as refusing to pay taxes or obey a conscription order;

8) membership of government advisory committees;

9) membership of consumers' councils for publicly owned industries;

10) client involvement in the implementation of social policies;

11) various forms of community action, such as those concerned with housing or environmental issues in the locality.

If we take into account the broad concept of political participation, we can probably increase the list by adding such forms as:

1) Performing social duties such as jury service and military duties;

2) Town/ village meetings and public debate on controversial issues;

3) Various forms of codetermination, such as student-faculty committees in the universities and government advisory committees;

4) Shared project management involving full-scale partnership, delegation or empowerment such as benefit-sharing arrangements or developmental projects;

5) New social movements seeking and promoting personal and collective identity, such as women's movement and movements for ethno-cultural identities.

On the whole there are several levels and forms at which and through which people may participate politically, as involved objects of a process of economic and political transformation set in motion by someone else, as expected beneficiaries of a programme with pre-set parameters, as politically co-opted legitimisers of a policy or as people trying to determine their own choices and direction independent of the state.

13.4 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, DEMOCRACY, AND POLITICAL PARTY

Howsoever the forms of political participation are conceived, political participation represents a political action and naturally involves many social agents that act within definite structural parameters. The structures may be conceived as embedded structures, relational structures and institutional structures. Political party is only one of so many social agents associated with or responsible for political participation. There are other agents such as voluntary organisations, institutional groups and socio-cultural communities. The roles of these agents for political participation are influenced by the nature of variations in the structural arrangements. The relative significance of political party as an agent in relation to other agents is also influenced by such structural arrangements, as is the nature of political participation through the agency of political party. That historically embedded structures affect the form and nature of political participation is obvious. For instance, the emergence of such parties as Jan Sangh or Muslim League in modern India could easily be linked with the concretisation of fuzzy communal consciousness during the British colonial rule, which, for the first time, introduced census and

mapping in India. As examples of the influence of relational structures on political parties one may refer to the caste conflict in Indian society or agrarian relations, the former explaining rise of caste based parties like Justice party or B.S.P. and the latter, party like the Lok Dal. From this angle the political parties ensure participation of different structurally articulated interests and ideologies. How the political parties ensure political participation also depends on the nature of the institutional structure. The nature of participation through political parties, for example, varies according to the nature of the political system. In a few modern dictatorships, such as Hitler's Germany, mass membership in a ruling party was encouraged as a way of mobilising support for government policies. Again, the institutional arrangements such as the electoral systems in a democracy influence the participating role of political parties. The world of electoral systems has been divided into three main families; Plurality-majority systems, Proportional representation (PR) systems, and semi-PR systems. First- Past- the –post (FPTP) system under which candidates are chosen from single member districts, tends to handicap third parties, and by doing this it helps to produce two-party system. It tends to do this if the support of the winning party spreads evenly across the electoral districts. For example a party with 52 percent of votes may win 60 percent of the seats. Naturally in such a situation, the political parties become limited agents of political participation. The usual outcome of PR is a multi-party system and therefore offers the voters greater freedom of choice but tends to make the government less effective as the majority coalitions, in the absence of amplified majority of FPTP become highly unstable. However it would be wrong to suppose that the nature of the party-system is rigidly determined by the nature of the electoral systems. The embedded structures and relational structures have significant effect on the institutional structure in general. Take the case of India. Here we have had regular elections every five years both at national and state levels. If we want to judge the level and nature of political participation in purely institutional terms, we would count number of parties, voters' turnout, election results, number of candidates and so on with the idea that more the number, greater is the participation. However we would miss out the massive level of political participation by party workers and non-voters to the extent we fail to recognise that elections in India is a political festival where participation is more a peaceful demonstration of public will than an exercise of individual's rational calculation that involves every stage of election: getting a ticket, the campaign, and marking the ballot. Here we have a FPTP system. But there have been wide social and regional variations in India. When the support for the Indian National Congress evenly spread across the country, the Party got the benefit of amplified seats. But whenever the social and regional variations were mobilised by new parties, inter-district variations in electoral support reduced that benefit and made way for a somewhat multi-party system. The federal structure with its system of state level elections aided that process. We would discuss the significance of this change for political participation in subsequent section. But before that it may be of interest to have some idea about the value of political participation in a democracy.

13.4.1 Theoretical Debate and Practical Variations

In theory participation is not only a behavioural concept but also a normative concept. Most people think that participation is a good thing but many actually differ regarding the levels of participation desired or relative importance of this or that form of political participation. Participation is often justified in terms of the functional requirements of the political system as leading to better communication or greater compliance on the part of the citizens. Participation

is often considered beneficial for the individual while the benefits may be perceived as profit minus cost, non-material rewards or meeting the psychological needs. Some consider participation itself as valuable, participation in one sphere enhancing participation in other spheres. Most of those who are in favour of restricted participation in democracy tend to adopt a conservative position and doubt the ability of the average citizen but some express reservation against it because participation provides the authorities the opportunity to legitimise their decisions. Some doubt the efficacy of political participation in the area of electoral democracy and favour participation through various forms of community self-government. In practice also we note wide variations about the nature, levels and forms of political participation. In some countries like Australia, Belgium and Italy voting has been made compulsory. The sanctions or penal measures are very mild. But in these cases voter turnout in national elections is very high, involving almost over 90 per cent of the electorate. By contrast the turnout figures for national elections in the United States are very low. However the low voter turnout in the United States is also accompanied by an increase in the number and vitality of single-issue pressure groups. Organisationally, many European parties have developed mass memberships with branches in every town and intensive programmes of local meetings and social activities. Examples of this type of parties may be the British Conservative Party and the German Social Democratic party. The American parties are Lilliputs by comparison. In terms of activity also, the American parties are pale shadows of many of their European counterparts. For instance both the British Conservative party and the Labour Party are heavily into publishing business, have discussion groups, and youth movements.

Both in the United States and Europe however there has been a marked rise in the use of referendums. In the former the campaign for the initiative and referendum began in the Populist Movement of the 1880's and the 1890's. In 1978 the most dramatic change in state laws occurred through the adoption in California of proposition 13, a proposal to cut property tax by more than half. This tendency proved widespread and between 1970 and 1986 there were 158 statewide initiatives passed by voters in 22 states and the District of Columbia. In Switzerland, the voters have decided that their country should join the IMF and the World Bank but not the UN and the European Union. In 1992, Denmark and France held referendums on whether they should ratify the Maastricht Treaty. If we take into account the broad view of political participation, then we may note some recent forms of non-party oriented political participation both in Europe and the United States. In Britain, client-participation has developed many forms like local community health councils, 'patients' participation groups association of tenants, parents and pupils in school's governing bodies. In the USA, the anti-nuclear groups have been very active, while in Germany, it is the environmental groups.

13.5 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA

The above discussion cannot provide an immediate basis of a comparative understanding of the nature and extent of political participation in India or the role of political parties in that regard. For that we must note the specificity of Indian politics and party politics in India. Indian politics are distinctive among contemporary developing societies in having had democratic durability for about fifty years— excepting the brief emergency period——with many paradoxical features like high voter turnout amid high rate of illiteracy and agrarian population, multilevel

electoral process with many electoral areas not yet fully dominated and controlled by organised political parties, coexistence of various organised interest associations with intermediaries between people and bureaucracy, non-party movements, specifically Indian types of interest associations, including religious and caste groups. The Indian party system is also distinctive, showing major differences with its European and American counterparts. Paul Brass writes: 'Party politics in India display numerous paradoxical features, which reveal the blending of Western and modern forms of bureaucratic organisation and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions. India's leading political party, the Indian National Congress, is one of the oldest in the world, yet it has not succeeded in providing the nucleus for an institutionalised party system which can be fitted easily into any one of the conventional categories of party system in the west. The social heterogeneity of India has added to the complexity of the Indian party system. This has increasingly made it impossible for a single set of parties to emerge across the country. Major transformations have taken place since Independence in India's party system. At the center of change in the party system is the rise of the BJP. Irrespective of the nature of changes in the party system, parties have continued to remain in the centre of Indian politics. Opinion polls in India have repeatedly shown that people generally vote more for the party than for the candidate. In some cases parties have been solid, creating deep loyalties that continue from generations to generations, giving election symbols of parties tremendous psychological significance. After the 73rd and 74th Amendments, parties have found a new level of operation in the Panchayat and Nagarpalika institutions. This has widened the reach of election machinery and made political parties even more significant as agents of political participation. Keeping these points in mind let us now note the role of the Indian political parties as agents of political participation.

13.5.1 Political participation through an increasingly competitive party system

Any observer of Indian political scene would not miss the tremendous growth of political parties in power. This growth has taken place both at the national and state levels. This growth has been fuelled by fragmentation of existing parties in terms of vote share, seat share and evolution of electoral alliances at both the national and state levels; the emergence of new political parties like BJP, BSP etc. and new coalitions of parties like NDA.

A long range overview of the Congress Party reveals an increasingly narrowing scope of political participation at within-party level as well as widening political participation outside. Before the transfer of power, the Congress was synonymous with the nationalist movement and represented a mass wave by including within its fold different political groups such as the Communists and the Socialists. This ensured a truly broad based political participation by the Indian masses because the objective of the nationalist movement was an abstract one of Independence. Some restriction of the participatory role of the Congress party took place between 1946-1950 when the party changed from the earlier one that fought for independence. With the knowledge that after the Second World War, independence was forthcoming certain realignments started taking place within Congress. Several secessions took place from the congress involving the Communists, Muslim separatists and the socialists as a result of which within-party participation got somewhat restricted. The most influential account of congress organisation after independence was given by Rajni Kothari in his *Politics in India* (1970). He presented it as a differentiated system in which the different levels of party organisation

were linked with the parallel structure of government, allowing for the dominance of a political centre as well as dissent from the peripheries, with opposition functioning as dissident congress groups. Kothari gave it the simple name 'Congress system'. This ensured political participations mainly through factional conflicts. On this, Brass writes:

Factions contested for control of the important committees at each level through formal elections preceded by membership drives in which competing faction leaders attempted to enroll, even if only on paper, as many member-supporters as possible. Although the factional conflicts which developed often became intense and bitter and were accompanied by frequent charges of " bogus enrolments," they also served to keep the party organisation alive and to compel party leaders to build support in the districts and localities throughout the country.

The 1967 elections marked the trend of political fragmentation sharply. The Congress vote was dropped by almost 5 per cent. It had managed to win only 54 per cent of the seats. Earlier in the previous parliament it had 74 per cent of the seats. In many states it failed to win a majority. In as many as nine states— Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras and Kerala—there came non-Congress governments. Within the party also conflict grew between the Syndicate and Indira Gandhi leading to a split in 1969. The newly formed Congress derived its identity from its leader in real terms. Elections within the party were stopped. Chief Ministers were appointed by the central high command. The massive electoral victory of the party in 1971 further increased political centralization that culminated into the Emergency in 1975. The popular reaction against this was a landmark in terms of political participation. It brought for the first time a non-Congress coalition government, the Janata government, at the centre. The Congress took the opportunity of coming back to power in 1980 against a divided opposition. The eighth general election took place in December 1984 in the shadow of Indira Gandhi's assassination and brought Rajeev Gandhi into power as the leader of the Congress (I). This did not alter the trend of political centralisation within the party. Growing political dissention in the country and controversies of Bofors kickback formed the background of 1989 general elections. The Congress (I) was defeated, securing only 197 seats in the Lok Sabha. The National Front, though it could not win a majority, formed the government with V. P. Singh as Prime Minister with the outside support of the BJP and the Left parties. That government lasted only a year and paved the way for the Chandrasekhar government with Congress-I support that was quickly withdrawn and the ninth Lok Sabha was dissolved less than a year and a half after its formation. Halfway through the general elections, Rajeev Gandhi was assassinated and Congress(I) recovered its position somewhat due to sympathetic and favourable electoral support. Even then it failed to win a majority and became the single largest party with 232 seats. P. V. Narasimha Rao, elected leader of the party was appointed Prime Minister. The Rao regime eventually secured majority by winning over the Ajit Singh faction of the Janata Dal. But the party failed to regain its organisational strength and was set in a path of steady decline which culminated in its removal from power after 1996 elections when BJP emerged as the single largest party but short of majority, and various regional parties like Telugu Desam Party, the DMK, the AGP and Janata Dal , the breakway Congress group in Tamil Nadu , led by G. K. Moopanar and the left parties came together to form a bloc—NF-LF bloc , later called the United Front. However with President S. D. Sharma deciding to invite A. B. Vajpayee of the BJP to form government despite Congress (I) support to the United Front, he formed the government but only for seven days. H. D. Deve Gowda of the Janata Dal next formed the United Front government

with Congress(I) support where for the first time in history a left party—the CPI—joined a government at the centre.In 1996 itself BJP forged alliances with Shiv Sena. In 1998 it strengthened its alliances by a soft Hindutva image and became attractive as a partner for a regional or state based party opposed to the Congress or congress-allied regional rival(Punjub, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Haryana, Orissa) or to a Congress faction (Trinamool congress) versus major regional party(West Bengal). It managed to adopt a national agenda and win post election allies (Chautala's Haryana Lok Dal) and external supporters (TDP, NC) for coalition government at the centre. The Congress failed to return to power as the BJP managed to sustain and expand the same coalition, now formally called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) adding the TDP, Goa's MGP, and the Patel faction of the Karnataka Janata Dal, switching partners in Tamil Nadu and Haryana. The above trends showing the decline of the Congress and rise of new contenders for power at the central level make it clear that a pattern of fragmentation of the party system has been taking place together with electoral alliances, adding to competitiveness of the party system and participation of increasing number of parties in power, may be towards a loose bipolarity at the national level.

The above trend has not been limited to the national level only, but has also affected the states for the general elections between 1967-1989. The phenomena of consolidation of non-Congress vote (Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh etc.), Congress-led alliances of state based minor parties (Kerala, Tripura), a left-front coalition versus Congress (West Bengal) and so on could be seen. The same could be seen for State Assembly elections. Here the Congress party's position eroded even more than for parliamentary elections, and the consolidation of principal challenger parties or alliances at the state level was marked. The process of alliance formation has been complex and multidimensional at state level but it could be noted that they were driven less by ideological considerations or social divisions and more by the imperative to aggregate votes. On the whole, it could be argued that as agents, political parties in India have not only multiplied, but also have also been participating more effectively in the sharing and management of power.

13.5.2 Increased Voter Turnout

Relevant to the study of political participation in India is the fact that voter turnout in India has been steadily rising. In the first general election it was 47.5 and in the 1999 elections the turnout was 59.5 (Zoya Hasan, 2002, p.1). The table below illustrates the steady growth :

Table 2: Election data, Indian Parliamentary Elections, 1952-91

Year	Electorate (in millions)	Polling Stations	Votes polled (in millions)	Turnout (percent)
1952	173.2	132,560	80.7	45.7
1957	193.7	220,478	91.3	47.7
1962	217.7	238,355	119.9	55.4
1967	250.1	267,555	152.7	61.3
1971	274.1	342,944	151.5	55.3

1977	321.2	373,908	194.3	60.5
1980	355.6	434,442	202.3	56.9
1984	375.8	479,214	238.4	64.1
1989	498.9	579,810	309.1	62.0
1991	488.4	594,811	276.8	56.7

Source: Paul Brass, 1997, P.104

The same upward trend in voter turnout can be seen in the case of Assembly Elections also. In a study undertaken on sixteen states, Yogendra Yadav (1998) notes a new phase in democratic politics in India in terms of higher political participation and intensification of citizen's involvement in politics. For figures see Table 3 below:

Table 3: Percentage Turnout in Assembly Elections 1984-1995.

States	**1984-5**	**1989-90**	**1993-5**	**Increase**
Andhra Pradesh	66.7	67.6	71.1	3.5
Arunachal Pradesh	76.3	68.9	81.4	12.3
Bihar	55.1	62.2	61.8	-0.4
Delhi	55.6	54.3	61.8	-
Gujarat	47.7	51.1	64.7	13.6
Goa	71.9	68.7	71.7	3.0
Himachal Pradesh	69.6	66.7	71.7	5.0
Karnataka	66.3	63.8	68.8	5.0
Madhya Pradesh	48.6	52.8	59.0	6.2
Manipur	87.3	80.6	88.8	8.2
Maharashtra	58.3	61.1	72.0	10.9
Mizoram	70.6	80.4	80.8	0.4
Orissa	51.4	55.5	73.8	18.3
Rajasthan	54.0	56.5	60.6	4.1
Sikkim	62.6	69.5	81.0	11.5
Uttar Pradesh	44.8	48.5	57.1	8.6
Total	55.3	60.3	64.2	3.9

Source: Yogendra Yadav, 1998, p.18

Not only has the number of voters, number of candidates also risen dramatically in the 1990's. Yadav writes:

The number of candidates has risen more steadily over the decades, though here again there is a marked acceleration in the 1990's. Beginning with a flat decadal growth rate of about one candidate per constituency , reflecting a steady intensification of electoral contests, it starts jumping by leaps and bounds around the mid-1980's. The 1993-5 rounds have continued this upward trend in number of contestants, taking it past fourteen per seat, and a larger share of independents in it. If the 1960's were characterized by the first democratic upsurge, the 1990s are witnessing the second democratic upsurge in post-Independence India.

The intensification of the electoral process is further revealed by the following facts ; in 1952 the total number of candidates for parliamentary elections was 1874, in 1991 it rose to 8953, there were 132,560 polling stations in 1952, the number rose to 594,797 in 1991 (Hardgrave and Kochanek, 1993,p. 347).

13.5.3 Social Nature of the Party-led Political Participation

In a sense the increasingly competitive party system is a product of the rise and assertion of regional and state based parties. However to overstretch this point would mean an uncritical acceptance of the social cleavage theory of party systems. In a study on Congress some alignments of party organisations were found to be associated with acute social divisions. Congress was found not to be a heterogeneous national party but a coalition of state (and ultimately local) groups whose political rationale are the divisions and conflicts of the state and community in question. However, equally important is the geographical specificity of inter group conflicts. The political significance of group conflicts varies from state to state, to the extent there is variation in the strength of the link between social groups and the parties. In different ways the characterisations of Indian democracy as 'consociational', and 'adversarial' admit that through political party competition, the social divisions of a deeply divided society get expressed. A case to the point is the political assertion of the historically disadvantaged castes in the 1990's. Almost together with the acceptance of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, recent years have witnessed the emergence of the Dalit-Bahujan castes, often trying to encompass the Muslim minority in its fold. The political parties representing these social groups are identified as the Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) , the Samajwadi Party, and sections of the Janata Dal—a phenomenal increase in caste based parties since the old Justice Party, to the point that social pluralism in India gets increasingly reflected in the competitive party system which serves as the agent of political participation. That is to say, a given political party while acting as the agent of political participation often shows internal pluralism in its organisation. In a recent study of Dravidian parties, Narendra Subramanian demonstrates that the internal pluralism of parties, and not simply social pluralism, promotes greater representation and participation of emergent groups, the reconstruction of public culture and tolerance. This does not of course mean that in India all parties show equal amount of organisational or internal pluralism.

The social nature of the increased voter's turnout has not followed many clear patterns. The turnout among men has always been higher than women but the participation rate has improved faster among women than among men. Female turnout increased 20 percentage points from 38.8 per cent in 1975 to 57.3 per cent in 1989. However, its has been noted that the

involvement of women in politics is still largely separate from men .Both the number of women contestants and of representatives show a declining trend in parliamentary and assembly elections, though at local level, due to reservations, women's participation has increased. Since the 1980's there has been a proliferation of autonomous women's groups in most parts of the country and this has added a new social dimension to political participation in India. Voter turnout in urban areas was higher than in rural areas. The state-wise turnout figures broadly indicate that turnout tends to be higher in the southern states, Kerala, in particular, and West Bengal .Yadav, however, notes that one of the characteristics of the new democratic upsurge has been that practically everywhere rural constituencies report a higher turnout. While Muslim turnout in Muslim concentrated constituencies and turnout in reserved (SC) constituencies were not higher than the past, the reserved (ST) constituencies recorded higher than average turnout in Andhra, Gujarat and Maharashtra. So did some backward regions like Vidarbha and Marathwada in Maharashtra, east Delhi and Bundelkhand in UP. If the theory of new social constituency participating in Indian elections is not fully borne out at least there is hardly any doubt that such a constituency is now more intensively mobilised by political parties wherever possible.

13.6 NON-PARTY INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

It would certainly be wrong to completely detach such institutions as trade unions, peasant associations and the universities from the political parties. The latter had affiliations with these and have even today. But many have noted a growing inefficacy on the part of these institutions as agents pf political participation and as controlling influences over the political parties. From the 1980s the change has become perceptible. One consequence of the Green revolution was to localise and disparate existing peasant movements. The globalising forces on the other hand have made the trade unions weak and this in turn reduced their influences on the party organisations, a fact reflected in the lack of importance attached by the parties, even left parties, in naming the trade union leaders among their sponsored candidates for election. The rise in the number of universities and their falling standards has also limited their influences as participating institutions in civil society. Of course several new actors, sometimes called NGOs, have emerged as agents of political participation mainly in regard to the implementation of official programmes or sponsored developmental projects. Their combined volume is not insignificant but it is still too early to assess their significance for popular participation.

There has however been somewhat rising political participation through what have come to be known as 'new social movements'—movements that have arisen as a response to, among other things, the violations of civil liberties and human rights, violence on or gender bias to women , the degradation of environment, destruction of tribal culture or way of life. Some have described these movements as 'counter hegemonic' and noted the following major categories: Women's Movements, Forest Struggles, Anti-Big-dam movements. Usually each of these movements develops independently of the other and keeps itself detached from traditional political parties. There have also been increasing cases of identity assertions and 'autonomy movements', some employing violent means, which represent non-party based channels of political participation in contemporary India.

13.7 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND INDIAN DEMOCRACY

There has indeed been an upsurge in political participation in India with increasing competitiveness of the political parties, increased voter turnout, emergence of new forms of participation such as new social movements, institutions of grassroots politics, local level democracy and political assertions of the historically disadvantaged castes and ethno-regional groups. Apparently this represents a healthy trend towards further deepening of Indian democracy. Do we have a participant culture now in India? Though higher political mobilisation and higher electoral participation do not by themselves contribute to a participant culture, there has been a significant change of popular orientation form dependence on regular administration and traditional authority-symbols of society to people's representatives in everyday life, whether for certificates, aids or arbitration. But this upsurge in participation needs to be understood in the complexity of Indian process of democratisation. It is doubtful as to how much space has been created for a rational individual who exercises his/her sovereign power of citizenship in the electoral arena. This doubt arises not from the non-fulfillment of the basic requirements of procedural democracy like Universal Adult Franchise, rule of law and fundamental rights but from constraints on meaningful rational participation of the individual in democratic process. First, with numerous small parties that are not properly institutionalized and under total control of charismatic leaders, and some big parties showing no interest in promoting institutionalization, the individuals participate with severe constraints because parties are still in the centre of Indian democratic process. Second, several developments tend to constrain voters' right in recent years, such as the aborted attempt to make the qualifications and holdings of the election-candidates transparent, increasing use of electronic voting machines which make it impossible for a voter to 'waste' his or her vote and thereby express disapproval about the candidates. Third, instead of social cleavages being neutralised by political cleavages the latter tend to be grafted on the former in India due to unprincipled mobilisation leading to a 'crisis of governability'. This type of mobilisation and politicisation of masses by parties may have made Indian democracy not more deepening but 'more inclusive'. But the trouble with this inclusiveness is that the terms of inclusion are not always inclusive or modern but often exclusive and promote a step furthering the 'effective creolisation of the modern ideas, ideals and institutions of democratic politics in a non-European setting' (Yadav, 1998,p. 187). Finally, the institutional space for non-electoral modes of efficacious political activity has not grown to a degree found in European settings. On the whole however political parties have proved to be the most effective agents of political participation in India. Indian democratic experience has witnessed new forms of political participation in recent years and a rise in the quantity of political participation- though the exact nature and significance of that for Indian democracy can be disputed.

13.8 SUMMARY

The concept of political participation has assumed a new significance in the Indian democratic process. The credit goes to the Behaviouralists for espousing this concept as an essential aspect for the democratic process. Various forms of political participation include voting in referendums, membership in political parties and pressure groups, government advisory committees, involvement in the implementation of social policies etc. The proliferation of