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Context of the 1990s; Era of Coalitions

The 1990s marked a significant shift in Indian politics characterized by the decline of the Congress Party's dominance and the rise of coalition governments. Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991 and the subsequent economic reforms initiated a new political and economic era. The implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1990 brought the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) to the forefront of political discourse, leading to widespread protests and reshaping political representation.

The era saw the emergence of coalition politics due to no single party securing a clear majority in Lok Sabha elections from 1989 until 2014. Key coalitions such as the National Front, United Front, National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and United Progressive Alliance (UPA) played crucial roles. Regional parties gained prominence, influencing national governance and policy-making. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose as a major political force, forming coalition governments under Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the late 1990s.

Exam Questions

Q1: What were the main causes for the decline of the Congress Party in the 1990s?

Answer: The decline was due to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the rise of regional parties, the Mandal Commission's implementation which shifted political focus to caste-based politics, and the emergence of coalition governments reducing Congress's dominance.

Q2: Define coalition politics and explain its significance in India during the 1990s.

Answer: Coalition politics refers to an alliance of multiple political parties to form a government when no single party has a majority. In India during the 1990s, it led to power-sharing among diverse parties, increased regional party influence, and required compromise in governance.

Rise of Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

The political rise of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) was a defining feature of Indian politics in the 1990s. OBCs, socially and educationally disadvantaged communities, gained political power through affirmative action policies like reservations in education and employment. The Mandal Commission's recommendations in the late 1980s catalyzed this shift, leading to increased political awareness and mobilisation among OBCs.

Political parties such as the Janata Dal and later the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged to represent OBC and Dalit interests. The BSP, under Kanshi Ram, became a significant political force, especially in Uttar Pradesh, advocating for the rights and representation of marginalized communities. Dalit and OBC politics often evolved independently, sometimes competing for political influence.

Exam Questions

Q1: What was the impact of the Mandal Commission on Indian politics?

Answer: The Mandal Commission's recommendations for job reservations for OBCs led to increased political mobilisation of backward classes, reshaped political representation,

and intensified caste-based politics in India.

Q2: Describe the role of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Indian politics.

Answer: The BSP represents Dalits and other marginalized groups, focusing on pragmatic politics to secure political power and improve social and economic conditions. It has been influential in Uttar Pradesh and has participated in state governments.

Communalism, Secularism, and Democracy

The period witnessed the rise of politics based on religious identity, challenging India's secular democratic framework. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) shifted towards Hindutva ideology, promoting cultural nationalism. Key events such as the Shah Bano case and the Ayodhya dispute intensified communal tensions.

The Ayodhya issue, centered on the disputed birthplace of Shri Ram, led to significant political and social upheaval, culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and a Supreme Court verdict in 2019 that allowed the construction of a Ram temple. Despite these challenges, India continued to uphold secularism and democratic principles.

Political competition evolved with the decline of Congress dominance and the rise of BJP as a major force. Coalition politics continued with alliances like the UPA and NDA. A new political consensus emerged focusing on economic reforms, acceptance of backward caste claims, and pragmatic alliances beyond ideological divides.

Exam Questions

Q1: What is secularism and how was it challenged during this period?

Answer: Secularism is the principle of separating religion from government and treating all religions equally. It was challenged by the rise of religious-based politics, especially the

Hindutva movement and communal tensions arising from the Ayodhya dispute.

Q2: Explain the significance of the Supreme Court verdict on the Ayodhya dispute.

Answer: The verdict resolved a long-standing communal dispute through legal means, allotting land for a Ram temple and a mosque, reflecting India's democratic ethos and commitment to pluralism.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the impact of coalition politics on governance in India during the 1990s.

Solution: Coalition politics led to power-sharing among diverse parties, requiring compromise and negotiation. It increased the influence of regional parties and sometimes caused instability but also made governance more inclusive of varied interests.

Example 2: Discuss the political significance of the Mandal Commission's implementation.

Solution: It brought OBCs into mainstream politics, reshaped electoral strategies, and intensified caste-based political mobilisation, altering the political landscape significantly.

Practice Set

Easy

- What is a coalition government?
- Who are the Other Backward Classes?

Moderate

- Describe the political changes in India during the 1990s.
- Explain the role of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Indian politics.

Challenging

- Analyze the impact of the Ayodhya dispute on Indian secularism and democracy.
- Discuss the emergence of a new political consensus in India after 1989.

Answer Key

Easy:

1. A coalition government is formed when multiple political parties join together to form a majority.

2. OBCs are socially and educationally disadvantaged communities recognized for affirmative action.

Moderate:

1. The 1990s saw decline of Congress dominance, rise of coalition politics, economic reforms, and increased role of regional and caste-based parties.

2. The BSP represents Dalits and marginalized groups, focusing on political empowerment and social justice.

Challenging:

1. The Ayodhya dispute heightened communal tensions but was resolved legally, testing India's secular democratic framework.

2. The new consensus involved acceptance of economic reforms, caste-based reservations, and pragmatic political alliances beyond ideology.

Quick Reference

- **Coalition Politics:** Alliance of parties to form government without a single majority.
- **Mandal Commission:** Recommended reservations for OBCs in jobs and education.
- **Hindutva:** Ideology promoting Hindu cultural nationalism.
- **Ayodhya Dispute:** Conflict over the birthplace of Shri Ram, leading to communal tensions.
- **UPA and NDA:** Major political coalitions in India post-1990s.

Glossary

Coalition

An alliance of political parties to form a government.

Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

Socially and educationally disadvantaged communities eligible for affirmative action.

Secularism

Principle of separating religion from government and ensuring equal treatment of all religions.

Hindutva

Political ideology advocating Hindu cultural nationalism.

Reservation

Affirmative action policy providing quotas in education and employment for disadvantaged groups.

Chronology of Recent Developments in Indian Politics

Year	Event	Significance
1984	Rajiv Gandhi becomes Prime Minister after Indira Gandhi's assassination	Congress wins a landslide victory, marking last major dominance
1989	Congress loses majority; National Front forms coalition government	Start of coalition era; decline of Congress dominance
1990	Mandal Commission recommendations implemented	Political rise of OBCs; caste-based politics intensifies
1991	Rajiv Gandhi assassinated; economic reforms begin	Shift to liberalisation; political instability
1992	Demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya	Communal tensions rise; challenge to secularism
1996	United Front coalition government formed	Coalition politics continues; BJP emerges as largest party
1998-1999	NDA coalition government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee	First BJP-led coalition government
2004	UPA coalition government formed	Congress returns to power through coalition
2014	BJP wins majority under Narendra Modi	End of coalition era; single party majority after 30 years
2019	BJP consolidates power with increased majority	Continued dominance of BJP; coalition politics still relevant