Chapter 5: Challenges to and Restoration of the Congress System

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Which of these statements about the 1967 elections is/are correct? (a) Congress won the Lok Sabha elections but lost the Assembly elections in many states. (b) Congress lost both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. (c) Congress lost majority in the Lok Sabha but formed a coalition government with the support of some other parties. (d) Congress retained power at the Centre with an increased majority.

Only (a) is correct. Congress kept a majority in the Lok Sabha, though with its lowest seats and vote share since 1952, while it lost its majority in seven States and could not form governments in two others.

Q2 Match the following: (a) Syndicate; (b) Defection; (c) Slogan; (d) Anti-Congressism with i. An elected representative leaving the party on whose ticket s/he has been elected; ii. A catchy phrase that attracts public attention; iii. Parties with different ideological positions coming together to oppose Congress and its policies; iv. A group of powerful and influential leaders within the Congress.

(a) Syndicate - iv; (b) Defection - i; (c) Slogan - ii; (d) Anti-Congressism - iii.

Q3 Whom would you identify with the following slogans/phrases? (a) Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan (b) Indira Hatao! (c) Garibi Hatao!

(a) 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' is associated with Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, who used it to express the country's resolve in the 1965 war with Pakistan and the food crisis. (b) 'Indira Hatao' (Remove Indira) was the one common programme of the opposition Grand Alliance in the 1971 election, as Indira Gandhi described it. (c) 'Garibi Hatao' (Remove Poverty) is associated with Indira Gandhi and her Congress(R), who used it as a positive campaign slogan in 1971.

Q4 Which of the following statement about the Grand Alliance of 1971 is correct? The Grand Alliance ... (a) was formed by non-Communist, non-Congress parties. (b) had a clear political and ideological programme. (c) was formed by all non-Congress parties.

Only (a) is correct. The Grand Alliance (SSP, PSP, Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party and BKD) consisted of non-Communist, non-Congress parties; the CPI was allied with Indira Gandhi. It had no coherent programme, and it did not include all non-Congress parties.

Q5 How should a political party resolve its internal differences? Here are some suggestions. Think of each and list out their advantages and shortcomings. (a) Follow the footsteps of the party president (b) Listen to the majority group (c) Secret ballot voting on every issue (d) Consult the senior and experienced leaders of the party

(a) Following the party president: it gives quick, unified decisions and clear leadership, but it concentrates power in one person, silences dissent and can turn the party into a personality cult. (b) Listening to the majority: it is democratic and acceptable to most members, but it can ignore the minority's legitimate concerns and may let a numerically strong faction dominate. (c) Secret ballot on every issue: it lets members vote without fear or pressure, but it is slow and impractical for routine matters, and it can deepen factionalism and weaken party discipline. (d) Consulting senior leaders: it draws on experience and often secures consensus, but it favours an entrenched group, as the Syndicate showed, and may ignore younger members' views. A balanced approach would combine open discussion and consultation with majority decision-making, using a secret ballot only for major questions such as choosing a leader (as in 1966).

Q6 State which of these were reasons for the defeat of the Congress in 1967. Give reasons for your answer. (a) The absence of a charismatic leader in the Congress party (b) Split within the Congress party (c) Increased mobilisation of regional, ethnic and communal groups (d) Increasing unity among non-Congress parties (e) Internal differences within the Congress party

(c), (d) and (e) were reasons; (b) was not, and (a) is at best a partial factor. (a) The 1967 election was the first without Nehru and Indira Gandhi was seen as a political novice, which weakened the party's appeal, but the chapter does not present this as the main cause. (b) The formal split came in 1969, after the election, so it cannot explain 1967. (c) Economic crisis, price rise, food scarcity and unemployment sparked protests, the DMK rode an anti-Hindi agitation, and there were serious communal riots. These mobilisations turned voters against Congress. (d) Opposition parties realised that dividing their votes kept Congress in power, so they formed anti-Congress fronts and seat adjustments, following Lohia's idea of non-Congressism. (e) Factionalism within Congress, including the Syndicate's hold on the organisation, weakened the party and encouraged the opposition.

Q7 What were the factors which led to the popularity of Indira Gandhi's Government in the early 1970s?

Several factors raised Indira Gandhi's popularity. (1) She gave the government a Left orientation: the Ten Point Programme, nationalisation of fourteen major banks, abolition of the privy purse, and pushing land reform and ceilings on land and urban property. (2) She won the Congress split by defeating the Syndicate in the 1969 presidential contest, presenting it as a fight between the pro-poor and the pro-rich. (3) Her positive slogan 'Garibi Hatao' built a support base among the landless, Dalits, Adivasis, minorities, women and unemployed youth, while the opposition's only programme was 'Indira Hatao'. (4) The 1971 election gave Congress(R)-CPI 375 seats and Congress(R) alone 352. (5) The 1971 Indo-Pak war and the creation of Bangladesh made her admired as a strong nationalist leader, even by opposition figures, and her party swept the 1972 State elections.

Q8 What does the term 'syndicate' mean in the context of the Congress party of the sixties? What role did the Syndicate play in the Congress party?

In the sixties, the 'Syndicate' was the informal name for a group of powerful Congress leaders who controlled the party organisation. It was led by K. Kamaraj, then Congress president, and included S.K. Patil, S. Nijalingappa, N. Sanjeeva Reddy and Atulya Ghosh. Its role: it ensured that both Lal Bahadur Shastri and later Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister, and it had a decisive say in Indira Gandhi's first Council of Ministers and in policy-making. The leaders expected her to follow their advice. When she asserted herself and relied on advisers from outside the party, rivalry grew and led to the 1969 split. The Syndicate went with Congress(O) and lost power and prestige after the 1971 election.

Q9 Discuss the major issue which led to the formal split of the Congress Party in 1969.

The major issue was the 1969 presidential election. After President Zakir Hussain died, the Syndicate got N. Sanjeeva Reddy, Indira Gandhi's long-time opponent, nominated as the official Congress candidate despite her reservations. She encouraged Vice-President V.V. Giri to stand as an independent and announced popular measures such as bank nationalisation and abolition of the privy purse. Morarji Desai left the government after disagreements on these. Congress President S. Nijalingappa issued a whip for Reddy, while Indira Gandhi called for a 'conscience vote'. Giri won and the official candidate lost, which formalised the split. The Congress President expelled her, and the party divided into Congress (Organisation) under the Syndicate and Congress (Requisitionists) under Indira Gandhi, the Old and New Congress. She presented the split as an ideological contest between socialists and conservatives.

Q10 Read the passage and answer the questions below: '...Indira Gandhi changed the Congress into highly centralised and undemocratic party organisation, from the earlier federal, democratic and ideological formation that Nehru had led...But this...could not have happened had not Indira Gandhi changed the entire nature of politics. This new, populist politics turned political ideology...into a mere electoral discourse, use of various slogans not meant to be translated into government policies...During its great electoral victories in early 1970s, amidst the celebration, the Congress party as a political organisation died...' - Sudipta Kaviraj. (a) What according to the author is the difference between the strategies of Nehru and Indira Gandhi? (b) Why does the author say that the Congress party 'died' in the seventies? (c) In what way, did the change in the Congress party affect other political parties also?

(a) According to the author, Nehru led a federal, democratic and ideological party, in which ideology guided policy and different views were accommodated. Indira Gandhi turned it into a highly centralised, undemocratic organisation built on populist politics, where ideology became mere electoral talk and slogans were not meant to become government policy. (b) The author says the party 'died' as an organisation because its victories in the early 1970s rested entirely on the leader's popularity. Its organisation was weak, internal democracy and factions that had once accommodated differing interests were gone, and it won elections without being a living political organisation. (c) The change altered the nature of politics itself. Other parties also had to compete through populist appeals, slogans and personality-centred leadership instead of ideology and organisation, which pushed many parties towards centralised, leader-dependent functioning.