

CHAPTER III

ORGANISATION AND IDEOLOGY OF CONGRESS

PARTY

The distinguishing characteristic of the political party is that it has been brought together to influence or control the political institutions of the society.¹ Parties are inseparable to modern politics and absence of parties suggests that a system is being governed by a traditional elite which has to come to terms with the modern world. From this point of view parties are neither good nor bad but simply necessary. If a true federation is to work successfully, there must be enough agreement among the important political parties.²

The danger to parliamentary democracy in India is that the rivalries within the one party monopolising the government, have increasingly assumed the aspect of factionalism rather than genuine differences of policy. The Congress is the only great party in the nation containing within itself so many pressure groups of opinion and the consequence is that the policy has taken second place to position. In the Congress, it has increasingly become a matter not only of why, but of whom, not of whether one or the other programme would be the right one for the country to follow, but whether one or other faction would benefit from this adoption.³

Max Weber identifies a political party as “an associative type of social relationship, membership in which rests on formally free recruitment,... devoted to secure power within a corporate group for its leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members” which “may consist in the realization of certain objective policies or the attainment of personal advantages or both.”⁴ “Party,” commented Jonathan Swift, “is the madness of many, for the gain of a few.”⁵ Michels says, “The modern party is a fighting organization.”⁶ To the Marquis of Halifax, “the

best party is the best kind of conspiracy against the rest of nation.”⁷ According to Maurice Duverger, “it is a collection of communities, a union of small groups dispersed throughout the country (branches, caucuses, local associations, etc.) and linked by coordinating institutions.”⁸ Neumann defines political party, “as the articulating organization of society’s active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of governmental power and who compete for popular support with another group or groups holding divergent views. As such, it is the great intermediary which links social forces and ideologies to official governmental institutions and relates them to political community.”⁹ Raymond Aron observed, “political parties are... voluntary groups, some more organized, some less, which claim in the name of a certain idea of the common interest and of society to assume, alone or in coalition, the functions of government.”¹⁰

The role of political parties in the system of responsible or representative government is not only dominant but creative and comprehensive. Party is the political force that has emerged to make democracy workable in its indirect form, when its classical order had become unworkable in the Western mass societies. Party serves as the firm foundation of representative democracy and performs all its major institutional and functional activities. Party formulates the policies and programmes of government and implements them in furtherance of its objectives. It provides a stable basis for the majority principle in democracy and makes it legitimate and realizable.¹¹

The Organisation and Ideology are the unique characteristics of a political party. The circumstances under which a party is formed, the struggle for power and the desire for survival are the important factors to determine the organisational structure. So we can say that it is the struggle for power and desire for survival which are the keys to understand the changing nature of the organisational structure of the party.¹²

In this chapter an effort has been made to analyze the organisation and ideology of Congress Party in the light of its historical context, environmental setting, the process of internal decision-making, supportive groups and agencies etc.

For the proper functioning of any institution there is a need for its proper organisation. It is the only means through which a political party can attain power and survive. As Key puts it, "political parties are basic institutions for the translation of mass preference into public policy."¹³

With the universal suffrage, then the party system acquires new property. As long as the politicized society remains a relatively small elite society, the party system can remain in a state of flux. But when the society at large, becomes politicized the traffic rules that plug the society into the state, and vice versa, are established by the way which a party system becomes structured. At this point, parties become canalizing agencies, and the party system becomes the system of political canalization of the society.¹⁴

E.E. Schattschneider declares that, "the only kind of organization that can translate in o fact the idea of majority rule is the political party."¹⁵ Riggs, "any organization which nominates candidates for election to an elected assembly is a party." Janda, parties are, "organizations that pursue the goal of placing their avowed representatives in government positions." A party is any political group identified by official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office.¹⁶

Political parties have been the dominant agents in political life of the 20th century India. No other institution attracts as much public interest and public disapproval as do the activities of political parties and their leaders. The importance of party politics is related to the fact that parties provide the organisation for mobilization and participation and the symbols and ideologies for political identification and articulation.¹⁷

The founding, maintenance and growth of new institution are important in all spheres of social action, but their processes are particularly critical in the political sphere. Political institutions are important provision of integrative symbols for affirmation of political community - whether that community be existent and real or fictive and in process.¹⁸

A successful party organisation operating in open competitive environment must be able to: 1) recruit and train its personnel, thereby perpetuating itself as an organisation; 2) to win support (goodwill, money, votes) from population or substantial part thereof; and 3) maintain internal cohesion.¹⁹ Political party is not a group of individuals gathered together for some philanthropic purposes. On the contrary, it is a group, comprising individuals with varying political experiences in the party work.²⁰

A democratic political system is sustained not so much by the ideological structure of the parties competing for power but by the commitment of the parties to values, the rules of game and the norms that the system envisages.²¹

As the Congress consolidated organisationally and gained in legitimacy both with the government and the people, a political process conducive for the crystallization of political parties and political groups was set in motion. Thus in the process of articulating nationalist sentiments and mobilizing the masses - at times highly diverse groups of people - socially, economically and politically - political beliefs and political culture were also shaped.²²

Political organisation and competition, since independence, have centred around the structure of political authority in the larger political system and within the party organisation. The ultimate objective of competition in the Congress has been to establish control over the state machinery or to win strategic position of authority within the party organisation.²³ The conflict between the organisational and ministerial wings of Congress has presented

perhaps the most serious organisational problem.²⁴ Because parties have become almost universal in this century, there is a wide variety of party systems or arrangements of parties.²⁵ Generally speaking, however, one can distinguish between ideological, programmatic and adjusting parties...parties relate themselves positively or negatively to their societies.²⁶

Scholars believe that parties, even when founded to achieve special ideological goals, tend to develop internal bureaucracies over a period of time. This leads to diversification of their aims.²⁷

Like any other social organisation, a party has a life of its own. As a result organisational survival of a party depends on as to how much it adjusts it self to a multitude of demands. Viewing the present party politics scenario in India we can say Congress Party is a significant party. It occupies a distinct position because it has a well defined organisational structure. This chapter focuses on organisation and ideology of Congress Party. In this part of the chapter the organisational structure, functionaries, allied morchas and cells are studied in detail in order to get a broader understanding of Congress Party.

Under the leadership of Nehru, it developed “a highly institutionalized character that is measurable in terms of its effective adaptation with changing times and contexts, its structural and functional complexity, and its autonomous and coherent performance despite social pressures and factionalism.”²⁸

The Congress Party claims to have a large number of members. At the grass roots membership was open to all who paid nominal dues and were not members of any other political party. This rule, therefore, opened the party to masses as primary and active members. The latter category referred to those primary members who qualified by a certain criteria of party activism. Above them, was, a hierarchy of local (sub district, that is, Panchayat or block), district, state, and all-India Congress Committees. The

last three were called the District Congress Committees (DCCs), Pradesh Congress Committees (PCCs), and the All-India Congress Committee (AICC). At the annual Congress session, held at a different part of the country every year, the delegates were the members of PCCs. They elected one eighth of their members to the AICC for a two year term and the AICC delegates elected the president of the party and certain number of their members to the Congress Working Committee (CWC). Thus at the apex were the party President and the CWC, collectively described as party 'high command' which ran the party at the national level on a day to day basis.²⁹ A perusal of the Party Constitution enables one to appreciate the mode of selection of the party members, other functionaries etc. Article V of the Congress Party's Constitution elaborates the membership procedure in detail. It says that any person of the age of 18 or over, who accepts the objectives, basic philosophy and commitments of the party mentioned in articles I and II of the Constitution shall, on making a written declaration in the membership form and on a payment of a prescribed subscription become a member of the party; provided that he/she is not a member of any other political party. The term of membership to all ordinarily, is three years (as decided by National Executive from time to time). With the beginning of new term all members of party will have to fill membership forms again. Membership may cease by death, resignation or removal. At one time a person shall not be a member at more than one place. The triennial subscription paid by the members is distributed in the following proportions among the units.

AICC-10%	DCC- 25%
PCC -25%	Subordinate CCs-40%

A number of articles of Congress' Constitution elaborate the organisational structure of the party which is as under:

- 1) National Level: The President.
- 2) The Working Committee.

- 3) All-India Congress Committee.
- 4) The Parliamentary Board.
- 5) The Central Election Committee.
- 6) The Congress Session.

The National President: The National President is the highest office of the party. The Article XVIII of the Constitution deals with the election of the President.

- a) The chairman of the Central Election Authority will be the ex-officio Returning Officer.
- b) Any ten delegates (All members of the Pradesh Congress Committees shall be delegates to the Indian National Congress) may jointly propose the name of any delegate for the election as President of Congress which should reach the Returning Office on or before date fixed by the Working Committee.
- c) Returning Officer shall publish the names of all persons so proposed so that the person/s concerned may withdraw his candidature.
- d) Those who withdraw, their names are eliminated, then, Returning Officer immediately publishes the names of the remaining candidates. If, there remains one candidate, he is duly elected as President of the next Congress Session.
- e) Working Committee fixes a date, which should not be less than seven days after the final publication of the names of the contesting candidates, each delegate is entitled to record, for the election of a President, his vote in the following manner: if there are two candidates, the delegate would record his vote for one of them on the voting paper. If there are more than two candidates, the delegate should record at least two preferences by writing the figure 1, 2 etc. against the names of the candidates voted for. In such a case, he may give more than two preferences, but any voting paper showing less than two preferences would be regarded as invalid. The

voting papers will be deposited in a ballot box. The PCCs shall immediately forward the ballot boxes to AICC.

- f) On receipt of ballot boxes, the Returning Officer shall count votes of the first preferences. If a candidate secures more than 50% of votes of first preferences, he shall be declared as elected President. If no candidate secures more than 50% of the first preferences, the candidate who has secured the smallest number of the first preferences shall be eliminated. The cycle goes on until a candidate secures more than 50% of votes. This way President of the Congress is elected by an electoral college by proportional representation and single transferable vote method.
- g) If the President elected as above, dies or resigns then the senior most General Secretary will discharge the routine functions of the President until the Working Committee appoints a provisional president pending the election of a regular election by AICC. The President presides over the Congress' Sessions and during his term he exercises the powers of Working Committee when it is not in session.

Working Committee: Article XIV deals with the composition of Working Committee. It consists of the President of the Congress, the leader of the Congress Party in Parliament and 23 other members of whom 12 are elected by AICC, rest are appointed by the President. The president appoints a treasurer and one or more General Secretaries from amongst the members of Working Committee. The President has the power to appoint one or more secretaries/joint secretaries from elected members of AICC. These secretaries, joint secretaries discharge the duties as are assigned by the president. The members of Working Committee are appointed amongst the members of AICC, but those who are not members of AICC may also be appointed, will no longer be a member of Working Committee if he is not elected as member of the AICC within six months of his appointment. The quorum for a meeting of Working Committee is 8 members. Working Committee is the highest

executive authority of the Congress and has the power to carry out the policies and programmes laid by the Congress and the AICC. It is responsible to the AICC.

All-India Congress Committee: According to article XII the All-India Congress Committee is composed of:

- a) 1/8th of the number of PCC members elected by them from amongst themselves by proportional representation according to the system of single transferable vote provided that the number is not less than five; however, four members each are elected from Chandigarh, Andaman Nicobar, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep;
- b) President of the Congress;
- c) Ex-presidents of the Congress;
- d) Presidents of the PCCs;
- e) Leader of the Congress Party in Parliament;
- f) Leaders of the Congress Party in the Legislatures, Legislative Assemblies in UTs and Metropolitan Council;
- g) 15 members are elected by the Congress Party in Parliament according to the system of single transferable vote;
- h) Members co-opted by the Working Committee.

AICC meets twice a year. One hundred or 1/5th of the total number members, whichever is less, is the quorum for a meeting of AICC. It has the power to frame rules in tune with the Constitution and implement the programme of the work as is laid down by the Congress.

The Parliamentary Board: According to Article XXV the Working Committee elects a Parliamentary Board. It is composed of the President and 9 other members including the leader of the Congress Party in Parliament. The Congress President acts as the chairman for the purpose of regulating and coordinating the Parliamentary activities of the Legislative Congress Parties and also frames rules on that behalf.

The Central Election Committee: According to Article XXV AICC elects a Central Election Committee, consisting of members of Parliamentary Board and nine other members for the purpose of:

- a) Making the final selection of the candidates of the State and Central Legislature, and;
- b) Conducting election campaigns.

This committee frames necessary rules to give guidance to the Pradesh Election Committee with regard to selection of candidates and other matters relating to the conduct of election.

Plenary Congress Session: Article XVI says that Congress shall hold a session once in three years. President of Congress and all other delegates are part of it. The PCC which is holding Congress Session makes necessary arrangements. It forms a Reception Committee which works under its general guidance. Reception Committee collects funds for the expenses of Session and makes necessary arrangements for the reception and accommodation of the delegates. The Congress Session considers resolutions recommended by the Subjects Committee. If either AICC or majority of PCCs decides, a special session of Congress can be held. It is organised by the PCC of the Pradesh selected for holding the session says article XVII. It is at the national level that various party organs are fully differentiated in regard to their structure, role and functions.

State Level Party Organisation: The most strategic and decisive party structures are constituted at the level of state. They are decisive in the sense that all directions and control of the party organs at different levels in the state vest in the state party. The important organs of the Congress Party at the state level are: 1) The State Congress Committee called the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC). 2) State Working (Executive) Committee and State Parliamentary Board.

Pradesh Congress Committee: According to Article XI a Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) consists of members elected by the Block Committees. Every Block Congress Committee elects by a secret ballot, a delegate to the PCC such a delegate is a member of PCC. An active member who resides or has his place of business, occupation or profession within the area of PCC is eligible to be a candidate for election as delegate from any Block Congress Committee within the area of said PCC, provided that: a) conditions and conduct of election will be in accordance with the rules prescribed by the Working Committee; b) ex-presidents of PCC who have completed a term of 365 days and have continued to be Active Members; c) presidents of District Congress Committees; d) AICC members who reside in the Pradesh; e) members elected by the Congress Legislature Party and co-opted members by the PCC Executive. PCC decides the proportion in which the Congress fund may be distributed among Subordinate Congress Committees. Every PCC coordinates the activities of the formal organisations. A state that fails to form PCC on or before the date fixed by the Working Committee, may, at discretion of the Working Committee, be disentitled to be represented at the Congress Session. If any PCC fails to function in terms of the Constitution or in accordance with the direction of the Working Committee, the Working Committee may suspend the existing PCC. Each PCC/Regional Congress Committee, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Congress Committee of AICC, constitutes Trust for holding immovable properties belonging to such PCC/RCC and also properties belonging to Congress Committee, namely, DCC, BCC and other committees subordinate to a PCC/RCC. The Board of Trustees should not be less than three trustees and more than nine trustees. The Pradesh Congress Committee is the supreme party organ in the state to guide and direct the activities of the lower organs of the organisation. The term of PCC is three years. The meetings of PCCs and their Executive Committees shall be held regularly within the stipulated time

frame as prescribed in rules, i.e. at least once in six months. No office bearer of PCC levels shall hold an office for more than two consecutive terms.

State Working Committee: The PCC elects a Working Committee consisting of a president, a secretary, a treasurer and other members. All members of PCC with the exception of the co-opted members are entitled to elect the Working Committee. The Executive Committee of the PCC meets at least once in three months. The PCC President is the Chief of Executive Committee. He is vested with the powers to appoint General Secretaries to look party affairs in the state.

Parliamentary Board: The third important organ of the Congress Party in the state is the Parliamentary Board elected by the first meeting of the State Congress Committee (PCC). The President of the State Working Committee and the leader of the party in the legislature are also the members of the Board.

Below the State level bodies are the District Congress Committees, Block Congress Committees or Subordinate Congress Committees and Primary Congress Committees. The organisational pattern of these bodies is almost the same at the state level, except for one difference. At the district level, two Congress Committees, one for the urban areas and other for the rural areas are established to look after the party affairs in urban and rural areas.³⁰

District Congress Committee: Gandhi strove to give Congress a broad based organisation. He established through out the country district units known as District Congress Committees and made them the base of mass organisation and membership.³¹ when we move downward from Pradesh unit, is the district unit. The district party structure occupies a very strategic position in the hierarchy of the party organisation. Its decisive role both in the nomination of candidates for public office and in transmission of policy decision from higher echelons to lower ones is very significant.³²

Article X of the Congress says that a DCC covers an area prescribed by the PCC in its constitution. It is comprised of six members who are to be elected by secret ballot by each Block Congress Committee. All ex-presidents of the DCC, members of the PCC who reside in or have been elected from the district, presidents of the BCCs, members of the Legislature Congress Parties both MPs and MLAs from district, leaders of Congress Party in the local self- government bodies and co-opted members. An Executive Committee is also elected by DCC.

Subordinate Congress Committee: Article IX of the Congress Constitution deals with the composition of Subordinate Congress Committee. The Subordinate Congress Committee so constituted is known by the name Block Congress Committee (Rule under article IX). It is the primary unit of the Congress which is organised at the Block level. PCC constitutes a Subordinate Congress Committee for a Panchayat Development Block or Panchayat Samiti known as Block Congress Committee. In any urban or special area, with the previous approval of the Working Committee, it is constituted by PCC which is also known as the name Block Congress Committee. Every Primary Committee subordinates to the Block Congress Committee. Every Primary Committee elects a delegate to the BCC. BCC consists of the Presidents of the Primary Committees. PCC constitutes other committees such as Village Committee, Area Committee, Neighbourhood Committee and the president of such committee is the co-opted member of BCC without having right to vote.

Primary Committees: According to Article VIII, a Primary Committee is the basic unit of the organisation. All members of the Primary Committee meets at an appointed time and place and elects the President, Vice President and a treasurer and the Executive Committee of the Primary Committee. They are appointed by show of hands.

Frontal Organisations: The Indian National Congress has Frontal Organisations namely, Mahila Congress, Youth Congress, Seva Dal, and National Students' Union of India (NSUI). Each Frontal Organisation has its own Constitution. It should have membership apart from the membership of the Congress Party. Regular elections should be held at every level. A system is developed for close co-ordination among the Frontal Organisations and the parent body. There should be consultations between the parent body and these organisations on policy matters. With regard to the election/selection of functionaries, the autonomy of these organisations is ensured. Each frontal organisation has an advisory body which is headed by the Congress President. Such body is to be appointed by the President in consultation with the respective Frontal Organisations. As far as Indian National Trade Union (INTUC) is concerned, it is not a Frontal Organisation of Congress but it believes in the ideology of Congress Party.

Cells and Departments: According to article XXVI-A, the President has the power to create cells/departments to discharge the responsibilities as assigned to such cells or departments. The Chairman and members of such cells/departments are also appointed by the Congress President. The Chairman of such cells/departments appoints Chairman and members of cells/departments at the Pradesh level after consulting the PPC.

Discipline in the Party

For the smooth running and functioning of an organisation discipline/decorum should be maintained. The Committee executives of the PCCs/TCCs and DCCs have the power of taking action against Congress Committee who commits breach of discipline. Breach of discipline means acting or carrying on propaganda against the Congress, disregarding or disobeying its rules, indulging in fraudulent actions relating to Congress funds, enrolment of members or election to the committees and so on.

Disciplinary action can be taken by giving an opportunity, with at least two weeks notice to the committee or individual concerned, to explain its case or answer. Then the punishment is divided like warning, removal from party posts, suspension from membership, expulsion from the party depending upon the nature of the breach of discipline and the decision taken by the concerned authority. Articles XIX (f) and XXVII (b), deal with the above mentioned matters.

There are also certain weaknesses in the party. The role of the organisational wing of the Congress is, no doubt, vital both for establishing lines of communication and mediation between government and society and for the politicization of social differentiation and cleavages. But it has to be always borne in mind that struggle for power within the Congress is for entry into the seats of government and only at points major crises, the other way round. Such crises are normally with respect to the integrative functions of the Congress system: whenever the system faces a large fissure or a major stalemate whose resolution is vital to the normal functioning of government, the organisational wing acquires ascendancy and assumes the task of re-establishing the cohesion of the system and its consensus. But this is always a temporary phase and its role is essentially thermostatic...³³

The framework of the Congress Party is highly centralized and authority of the organisational machinery runs from top to bottom. But in the practical sense it is not a cadre party with rigid discipline but a loose organisation having highly individualistic nature. This in turn resulted in building personality cults and the warring groups and cliques constructed little empires within the same empire.³⁴ However, the external, mass membership organisation of the party continues to be loosely structured; in fact, the Congress in the 1983's seems to have been more organised within the parliament and legislatures, if we look for 'structures' rather than the immensely wide but largely unorganised mass following of the recent Prime

Ministers. This fact directs attention to two aspects of the Congress phenomenon today: 1) the crucial significance of the parliamentary and legislative wings of the party largely atrophying the organisational wings and; 2) the mass appeal of the Prime Ministers as distinct from the popularity of his party. In the Nehru era, the organisational wing was subordinated to the governmental wing at the national level, but in the states the former tended to perform the role of being the first point of entry and activity for the new political recruits, and it served as a source of internal opposition to the governmental wing of the party, often resulting in gradual displacement of the Ministerialists by the Dissidents.³⁵

Besides this the democratic features of the party can not be underestimated. Various committees of Congress Party at each level are framed democratically. They have been vested with a wide range of problems and issues. Views of lower units are also ascertained before taking final decision. Moreover, the organisational structure of the party is controlled by its senior and experienced leaders. Finally, it can be said that in the countries where interest groups are loosely organised, weak and also ineffective, political parties play a very significant role as an instrument of interest articulation.

The parliamentary system, by its very nature, requires the acceptance of certain rules. Ideologies can not be so rigid that there is unwillingness to compromise. No analysis of the factors involved in the development of a multi-party system in India would be complete without a consideration of the various ideologies, attitudes, moods, feelings and the life of those who take part in politics.³⁶ Ideology has been defined in a number of ways. Each definition has something different to say in the result that there exists no agreement on a standard definition. However, we will not go into the details of entire discussion on ideology. Firstly, it embraces the whole area of individual and societal life including the theory of knowledge, philosophy of

history, social theory, ethics and politics, etc. Secondly, in a much narrower sense, ideology is specifically, used to denote its unbreakable bond with politics.³⁷

The elements of socialism, liberalism, gandhism, conservatism form the objective tradition of Congress thought. In its first place, i.e., before 1920, the Congress ideology was influenced more by Western thought currents than the Indian philosophy. During the early days of Congress the influence of the liberal writers like Milton, Burke, J.S. Mill, Macaulay, Spencer etc., was the dominant factor in the development of its ideology. Then in the beginning of 20th century the writings of the European nationalists and martyrs such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Robespierre, Garibaldi, Mazzini, etc. gained popularity and began to influence the Congress ideology. Then in 1920, with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, came the influence of spiritualistic-idealists of West - Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. Later still, especially after 1927, came, the influence of Marxism-Leninism. At Karachi in 1931 the Congress passed an epoch-making resolution on Fundamental Rights, Labour, Economic and Social Programme, which was pronouncedly socialistic. A plant indigenous in one place can be planted in a foreign soil but it can prosper there only if it can adapt itself to the new soil. Similarly the ideology and programme of Congress was undoubtedly shaped and moulded in the beginning by Western influences, but it could touch the masses only when it was irrigated by the life giving waters of Indian Philosophy.³⁸

All men, all literature and all movements are, more or less, products of their times. They are moulded and shaped by currents and non-currents of their age. The Congress and its ideology and programme were no exception to this rule and were influenced, shaped and moulded by the internal and external circumstances of their times. Among the external factors which influenced the development of the Congress ideology and programme, the most important was the constitutional structure of Britain and its colonies.

The successive world events also played an important part in shaping the Congress ideology and programme. The French and American revolutions, the Italian and Irish struggles for national liberation always remained perennial fountains of inspiration to Indian nationalists and taught them gospel of equality, liberty and fraternity. Equally great was the influence of Soviet revolution of 1917 which gave a new impetus to socialistic ideas throughout the world.³⁹

However, the most important part in the development of Congress ideology and programme was played by the psycho-political conditions in the country and the policy of the government.

The Congress under Gandhi touched the emotions of the multitude. Its message reached every nook and corner of the seven lakh villages of India and captivated the hearts of peasants, which constitute real India. The Congress no longer remained an organisation “for the people” but became one “of the people”. Next to Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru was the greatest architect of the ideology and programme of the 20th century Congress. Another person who influenced the Congress ideology profoundly, though not to an extent commensurate with Gandhi or even with Nehru, was Subhas Chander Bose.⁴⁰

The history of Congress encompasses forces of national freedom, which lead the country to independence and shoulder the responsibility of social and economic change after freedom. Congress’ attempt to foster and strengthen the multi-religious, multi-racial and multi-lingual composite nationalism of the country, has added uniqueness to its character and base. It has helped to build a secular and democratic India and is believed to be a potent instrument to bring about socio-economic change in the country.⁴¹

Congress was, and is, more than the sum of its parts, more than a congeries of social groups promoting their group interests. Congress has been about ideas, about justice, the uplift of the oppressed welfare, the increase of productivity.⁴² It is noteworthy that ever since the birth of Congress, people of

different ideologies have come into its fold. So it won't be an exaggeration to put the fact that Congress could never define clearly the meaning of the concepts like socialism and democratic socialism and so on. Congress lost its credibility in the 1967 Lok Sabha elections, and this led to, it is believed, the split in Congress in 1969. The Congress division in 1969 was significant in a way since it looked like, "a shift from the politics of programmatic commitment."⁴³

A democratic political system is sustained not so much by the ideological structure of the parties competing for power but by commitment of the parties to the values, the rules of the game, and the norms that the system envisages.

The "end of ideology"⁴⁴ debates in western democracies have led people to think that ideology is no longer salient in those societies which have achieved a measure of affluences. Ideology in terms of policy formulation has not been buried. On the other hand, its saliency is accepted by all political parties in societies that are supposed to have achieved affluence. In emerging countries, however, the debate on ideology is very much lively. It is not concerned with specific policy issues but policy issues are sought to be discussed in the framework of a new model of societal arrangement. As such, the saliency of ideology is one of the decisive factors in the political development of emerging nations.⁴⁵

It has been said that the Congress programme for the achievement of the national objectives is a non doctrinaire approach which can not or must not be classified under anyone of the known isms or ideologies. Such an approach enables Congress to have a very flexible set of ideas with which to formulate its programmes and adapt the means to the needs as it goes long.... The party had to accommodate people with different shades of opinion within the larger framework. Besides, as long as this compromising ad-hoc policy is followed in order to adjust or adapt party

programmes to the national objectives and interests, there is no danger to democracy. But if it leads the Congress and this is not an unfounded fear to try to perpetuate it self by dancing to the popular tunes of the time, the party will be working contrary to its own objectives and can actually become a menace to democracy in the country.⁴⁶

The concept of ideological continuum assumes that voters are distributed in one fashion or another along such continuum. It assumes that voters are able to measure the distances between their own positions and those of the competing party on the continuum. It is also assumed that voters cast votes for the party which is perceived to be closest to their own positions.

The Indian society is socially and economically a discontented society, gripped by social discriminations and economic inequalities. Almost half of the population in this society is living below the poverty line. The Congress which has been the ruling party since independence is committed to change this society by parliamentary method - by legislation, by action, adopting planning as a tool of this change.⁴⁷ Ideology in developing areas assumes crucial role in building up the polity and society. In fact all ideologies in these countries are nothing but ideologies of socio-economic development.⁴⁸

The object of Indian National Congress is the well-being and advancement of the people of India, by peaceful and constitutional means, of a Socialist State based on Parliamentary Democracy in which there is equality of opportunity and of political, economic and social rights and which aims at world peace and fellowship.⁴⁹

The long past of India is evidence of the spirit of tolerance which was the basis of life and culture in this country. India has been and is land of many religions and many races and must remain so. The freedom of India can only be based on a recognition of an over riding unity binding together the richly varied cultural life of the country, which should have full play. The aim

of the Congress therefore, been to develop this great country as a democratic secular state which neither favours nor discriminates any particular religion. This Congress reiterates this objective and declares its firm resolve, not to permit communalism or the misuse of religion as a political weapon for anti-national and socially reactionary purposes. The Congress calls upon the country to make a super effort to restore goodwill, peace and harmony among the various communities that form the nation.⁵⁰

Congress committed itself to a purposive politics of socio-economic change, ensuring equality and justice by institutional and structural changes in the state system. For the first time since independence, the very consolidation of political system was decided by reference to a ballot box. This fundamental political issue was posed and decided by reference to a clear commitment to policy goals-removal of poverty and unemployment.⁵¹

In 1999 Mrs. Sonia Gandhi entered politics and took the reins of the party. This was the first time when the party most needed the support of Nehru- Gandhi family. She has led the party in General Election of 2004. The party in her leadership plans the comeback to power. The main agenda for elections have been:

- Generation of more jobs.
- Eradication of poverty.
- Step up public investments in agriculture.
- One-third reservation for women.
- Commission for the problems of north-eastern states.⁵²

In the general elections of 2004, the goal of Congress was to defeat the forces of obscurantism and bigotry. That's why Congress has joined with like-minded political parties in different states. Congress with such parties got united to defeat the BJP.

The Congress has always been a broad national movement than a mere political party in the conventional sense of term. It has provided a broader platform for people from different social backgrounds. For the Congress, Indian nationalism is a nationalism that is not narrow and has equal place for each and every Indian. The Congress is deeply concerned that secularism has been undermined in the past few years. For the Congress secularism means full freedom to preach, adopt or give up faith of any kind. It has respect for all religions. It is a party whose ideology on governance is rooted in democratic values combining sustainable economic growth with social justice. Its ideology also embraces the concept of strong centre working purposefully with strong states and with empowered local-self government institutions. 'Rajniiti se Lokniti, Gram Sabha se Lok Sabha' remains its objective. The Congress Party's priorities, plans and programmes are:

Change with Continuity: Congress has always stressed on economically prosperous, socially just, politically united and harmonious India. It always looks forward for change. In 1950's it worked for land reforms, community development, the public sector and the building of agricultural, industrial, irrigational, educational and scientific and other infrastructure. The years of 1960's and 1970's needed a direct attack on poverty, a whole new approach to explore and exploit the domestic sources of oil, the agricultural growth, nationalization of banks to meet the needs not only of big business houses but also that of farmers, weavers, small and cottage industries and traders. The Congress made all this possible. In 1980s Congress emphasized on science and technology so that India could meet the new challenges of 21st century and it could also usher into the electronics, computers and telecommunications age. The years of 1990s marked the need of broader economic reforms and liberalization and a larger role for private sector to accelerate growth and make India to cope up with the rapidly changing world economic system. The Congress makes a solemn commitment to the people of

India: to restore peace among all its people, to strengthen the secular order through emphasis on social harmony, cultural pluralism and respect for the rule of law, and to ensure a bright and secure economic future for every family in our country.

The law of the land will be enforced without fear or favour to ensure that social harmony and cohesion is maintained throughout the country. There will be no compromise on these six basics:

Samajik Sadbhavna to ensure social cohesion and harmony by taking the strictest possible action against those who promote bigotry and hatred;

Yuva rozgar to accelerate growth of productive and secure employment opportunities by around one crore a year so that each family has a viable livelihood;

Grameen Vikas to improve the income and welfare of kisans and khet mazdoors across the country;

Arthik Navotthan to unleash the creative energies of our professionals and entrepreneurs the cutting edge of our middle class;

Mahila Sashaktikaran to provide for the political empowerment and full educational, economic and legal equality for women;

Saman Avsar to provide for equality of opportunity in every way of dalits, adivasis, OBCs and religious and linguistic minorities.⁵³

These are the prime priorities of the Congress. It stands for the economic and social benefits of the poor in rural and urban India. It favours broadening the economic reforms.

Employment: The Congress prefers to accelerate employment opportunities by reviving economic growth and sustaining it across the country at between 8-10 % per year. For faster and broad based economic growth it maintains that it is an essential requirement for accelerating employment generation. Continued growth in agriculture will create new horizons for more employment opportunities. In other areas of rural development like

horticulture, aquaculture, afforestation, dairying and agro-processing etc., new jobs will also be created. For achieving this purpose new investment, credit, marketing and technology inputs will be provided. To modernise the coir industry, handlooms, power-looms, handicrafts, food processing, wool development, leather, pottery etc., new programmes will be launched. It plans to enact a National Employment Guarantee Act, ensuring to provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment on asset creating public works programmes every year at minimum wage for every rural household. There will be a special focus on textile industry keeping in view the increased competition in world markets. Along with the expansion of credit facilities for self-employment, the service industry will be given all support to fulfil its true employment potential. It not only includes software and IT-enabled services, trade, distribution and transport, financial and telecommunication services but also tourism. The laws and regulations that stand in the growth of the services industry will be undertaken and reformed. The Congress plans to vocationalise secondary education to enhance employability of the youth and to establish at least one training institute in each development block of the country through public private partnerships. To provide a well-knit link between demand and supply for labour it stresses to revamp the employment exchange machinery. On May 1, an annual Rozgar Report to the nation will be released to indicate as to how seriously the Congress takes its commitment to employment growth.

Farmers and Labourers: For allocation of resources the Congress will pursue an Agriculture First strategy. Focusing the poor and backward regions public investment in agriculture will be stepped up covering irrigation, electrification, godowns, marketing, research and extension. In next three years agricultural credit will be doubled. There will be also substantial expansion of institutions lending to the small and marginal farmers. The burden of debt and high interest rates on farm loans will be

eased. The pace of construction of new irrigation wells will be accelerated. The waste land development programme will be revived and watershed development projects will be promoted. Congress would thrive to introduce a special technology and extension programme for dry land farming. Agriculture related activities like dairying, aquaculture, horticulture, fisheries, sericulture, would be encouraged. Farm insurance schemes for both cattle and crop would be implemented. The Congress would ensure the fullest implementation of minimum wage laws for farm labour. For the democratic and autonomous functioning of cooperatives it would bring forward a constitutional amendment.

Women and Children: Congress is committed to reserve one third seats in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha for women. 30% of the fund, flowing into Panchayats and Nagarpalikas would be embarked for programmes related to the emancipation of women and development of children. In all spheres complete legal equality of women would be made a reality. It would encourage all the states to set up family courts. It would strive to make family planning a movement of civil society and not only a government programme.

Education and Health: At least 6% of GDP would be raised and spent in education with at least half of its amount to be spent in primary and secondary schools. The institutions of higher education in science and technology, social sciences and management would be made autonomous. A nutritious mid day meal scheme would be introduced in primary and secondary schools. Boys and girls, belonging to dalit and adivasi communities, would be imparted free education. Disabled would be given special care and attention. For the families which are living below poverty line, a national scheme of health insurance would be introduced.

Panchayati Raj: There would be full devolution of funds, function and functionaries for the Panchayati Raj Institutions that got constitutional status

in 1992, Congress would make it sure that the funds for poverty alleviation and rural development programmes be credited directly to Panchayati Raj bodies.

Food and Nutrition: Congress would strengthen the Public Distribution System (PDS), because huge food grain stocks have been built up and all people are buying less food grains from Ration Depots. Public Distribution System would focus on the Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. Antodya cards for all households at risk of hunger would be introduced.

Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes: Congress believes in the positive action for minorities of all religions and languages. Congress has pledged to extend reservation for economically deprived persons who have not been entitled to such reservations. Congress is committed to set up a Commission for minority educational institutions that would affiliate minority professional institutions to central universities. Congress would also create a consensus on the issue of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and get them a reasonable share of jobs in private sector. All reservation quotas, including those relating to promotions would be fulfilled in a time bound manner. Land less families would be endowed with some land, through the proper implementation of Land Ceiling and Land Redistribution Act. Congress has realized the need to evolve more effective systems of relief and rehabilitation of tribal communities.

Social and Physical Infrastructure: Public-private partnership would form the basis of infrastructure expansion. The railways had suffered over the past few years with rail safety being a prime casualty. It would modernize the vast railway network. Congress would also accelerate the use of country's vast irrigation potential. Congress would launch a special programme so as to ensure that each household would have full access to power. For this public sector has a crucial role to play in power generation and private sector in power distribution. A local community based National

Rainwater Harvesting Programme would be launched to capture at least an additional of 15 of India's rain resources every year. Municipal administration would be reviewed and made financially self-sustaining.

Regional Development: Congress would work for balanced regional development. To combat militancy and to sustain development it would restore law and order in the disturbed areas. A transparent approach to lessen the burden of debts on states would be adopted.

Defence, National Security and Foreign Policy: It would modernize the armed forces and also maintain a credible nuclear weapons programme. A new department of Ex-servicemen's Welfare Department would be set up in the Ministry of Defence. The Congress would make the National Security Council an effective institution. It is firm to end Pakistan sponsored cross border terrorism.

It would expand trade relations with countries of East Asia and China as well and also revive the ties with West Asia and non-aligned countries. It is committed to reaffirm traditional relations with Russia, Japan and European Union. It would engage in various kinds of relations with U.S.A. and also take up leadership of SAARC.

Fiscal Policy: Congress is committed to eliminate the revenue deficit of central government. It would undertake the major tax reforms and make the tax administration citizen- friendly. Value Added Tax would be introduced in trade and industry.

Industry: Incentives for boosting private investment would be introduced. The approval system of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) would be made more transparent. Indian industry would be encouraged in such a manner so as to make its presence geographically felt. The public sector companies, that could revive, would be identified by Congress. It would foster the public-private synergies. It would give autonomy to public sector banks so that they could encourage in every possible way to expand lending,

particularly to agriculture, agro-industry, value added agriculture, small scale industry and infrastructure.

Administrative, Police, Judicial and Electoral Reforms: Public administration system would be made more performance oriented and accountable. Right to Information Act would be made more meaningful. The police force would function in responsible, humane and effective and unbiased manner. Measures would be taken to cut delays in courts at various levels. It would also tackle the root cause of corruption and generation of black money.

Congress (I) promised for clarity, conviction, compassion and consistency in governance and administration.⁵⁴ It would make efforts to remove economic inequalities, eradicate poverty, maintain communal harmony and uplift secularism.

The Punjab congress (I) made certain promises in 2002 which could be described as:

1. It declared to adopt a Model Code of Conduct and maintain probity and transparency in all Government business.
2. It would strive towards 100% literacy by opening new schools, ensuring presence of teachers.
3. Infra structure, i.e., roads, water supply and sewerage would be improved. New colonies to decongest older Mohallas would be developed.
4. The Congress would 4-lane all National Highways and State Highways.
5. Rural development would be the top priority of Congress. Panchayats and other bodies would be given powers.
6. Congress firmly believed in empowerment of SCs, BCs and other poor sections of society. It would take suitable legal steps to

- distribute surplus land among the landless SC families. 150 units of free power would be supplied to all SC, BC families.
7. Congress believed power as the key to all future growth, development and progress. It would go for large-scale power sector reforms and strengthen the State Electricity Board.
 8. It would make vigorous efforts to increase the credit flow from banks and other financial institutions.
 9. Transport is a key sector in the economy of the State. The Congress had decided that the party after coming to power would ensure that there would be no checking by the Traffic Police on highways.
 10. The Congress Party showed its concern for genuine demands of the employees.
 11. Sainik Welfare Board would be made more effective and autonomous.
 12. Congress Party would conduct survey of unemployed youth in the age group of 18-35 years and assess their potential for self-employment.
 13. A gift of Rs.21000/- would be given to the grand children of all Freedom Fighters at the time of their marriage.
 14. Internationally recognized players would be given Government service.
 15. With a view to restore confidence and security to all persons, party would make police force an effective instrument to maintain law and order.

In the nutshell it can be concluded that basis of the strategies adopted by INC from time to time lies in its basic ideology in which party has repeatedly shown its trust and confidence. Party believes in Nationalism, Democracy, Secularism, Socialism, Mixed Economy and Non-Alignment etc. Its ideology is:

Nationalism: Indian nationalism has a peculiar form of its own, which, in the words of Nehru, stands for 'unity in diversity'. It is a land of the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, and the Parsis and all others whose hearts are filled with zeal of patriotism and who proudly call this country as their motherland. It is evident that Congress has ever been committed to the ideal of composite culture and composite nationalism.⁵⁵

Faith in Democracy: Ideology is very much lively. Policy issues are discussed in the framework of ideology. Gandhism is an ideology of spirituality, morality and based on the principles of non-violence, decentralization and democracy.⁵⁶ Democracy is the basic feature of Indian Constitution and has an indelible imprint on the hearts of Indian people. The Congress has strengthened this element. Congress government made 62nd Constitutional Amendment and reduced the age from 21 years to 18 years. This way Congress has contributed a lot in making the masses of India politically self-conscious, economically self-sufficient and capable of running the government of a free and independent India.⁵⁷

Secularism: The Congress reiterates this objective and declares its firm resolve, not to permit communalism or the misuse of religion as apolitical weapon for anti-national and socially reactionary purposes. The Congress calls upon the country to make a supreme effort to restore goodwill, peace and harmony among the various communities that form the nation.⁵⁸ Secularism is the basis of Indian nationalism. Secularism does not mean opposition to religion or irreligiousness - it means equal respect for all religions. It prevents discrimination of any kind against any citizen on the basis of religion. Congress embraces in itself people of all shades. Conversion by choice is allowed, but it can not be done by means of force, fraud, intimidation, temptation and the like. It sanctions atheism. It stands for equal respect for all religions. The Political Resolution adopted at the Bangalore session (1992) said about protection of security, identity and

interests of the religious minorities. It particularly stated that the Congress “will translate into reality the guarantees given by the Constitution of India in the educational and other spheres of the minorities.” In very clear terms it condemned the communal riots that occurred in the state of Gujarat. The political resolution adopted at the Hyderabad session of the Congress (2006) says that the Congress “very frankly rejects and condemns the views espoused by some narrow minded political parties that policy interventions to address the concerns of minorities, as perceived by them, amounts to minority appeasement. Such a view is devoid of any understanding of the founding principles of our constitution as, indeed, of spirit in which the freedom movement brought together people of all faiths and communities.”⁵⁹

A convention on secularism was held in Andhra Pradesh which calls upon all secular and progressive forces to act unitedly and decisively to combat the forces of communal fundamentalism and fascism which is the imperative need of the hour to defend our hard won freedom and to protect its secular democratic character, enshrined in the Constitution of India.⁶⁰

Faith in Socialism: It is another important element in the ideology of Congress. Congress is very clear on socialism. It is the only way to root out poverty and unemployment from India. It is the aim of Congress Party to establish socialist pattern of society. In 1976, under the able leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, 42nd amendment was made in the Constitution and word ‘socialist’ was incorporated in the preamble to the Indian Constitution. It believes in reorganising the national economy in a way so that the resources of the countries are used to the fullest and on the other hand exploitation is checked. The cake of country’s development has to be shared by all. This party strongly believes that social justice is equally important with economic development.

Economic Liberalism: Since 1991, the Congress has deviated a little from its aim of socialism and has discarded the development model of Pt. Nehru. The Narsimha government declared open and liberal economic policies. Controls and restrictions imposed on industry and trade have been withdrawn. Privatization and liberalization in economic sphere are being encouraged. Multi National Companies (MNCs) have been given facilities and have been invited to invest capital in India. The Indian economy has been made competitive and has been attached to the world market. Congress is now in favour of an economy that is largely in tune with international economic system. For the importation of foreign capital and technology full freedom has been given.

Faith in Non-Alignment: The achievement of independence brought new responsibilities to India in international affairs and it became necessary to develop direct and closer relations with other nations. With a view to advance the cause of world peace and cooperation India associated herself with the United Nations. The constant aim of India is to maintain friendly and cooperative relations with all nations and to avoid entanglement in military and similar alliances which tend to divide up the world in rival groups and thus endanger world peace.⁶¹ So Congress decided to adopt the policy of non-alignment and made it the very basis of India's foreign policy. It is a unique contribution of Pt. Nehru. Non-alignment means to remain aloof from power blocs. It is today a basic principle of so many countries in the world. Almost 116 countries are the part of Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). It is a pivot around which India's foreign policy revolves.

One important point to be noted here is that the ideology of Congress covers not only social, economic and political issues in the domestic sphere, it also covers the issues of international politics and economics. At the 82nd plenary session of the Congress held at Hyderabad in January 2006, a resolution on external security and international affairs was

adopted. It proudly affirmed: "India stands tall in the world today because of the sustained philosophical underpinnings of our foreign policy." It expressed its grave concern at the growing tide of terrorism and mad race for nuclear armaments. It expressed resolve of the party in relentless pursuit of peace, firm commitment to multilateral institutions and steadfastness in transparent independence of our decision-making.⁶²

Use of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes: Congress Party is committed to nuclear disarmament and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Congress government led by Mrs. Gandhi undertook nuclear tests in 1974 in Pokharan, Rajasthan for the first time and made it clear that India would use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. BJP government repeated the same thing in May 1998 and cleared its stand on Nuclear energy on the lines of the Congress Party.

Opposition to Racism, Colonialism and Imperialism: Congress believes that foreign policy of India must necessarily be based on the principles that have guided the Congress in past years. It believes in the promotion of racial equality and ending of imperialism and colonialism. It has opposed racism, imperialism and colonialism on international forums. Congress has always supported the movements launched against these evils in different parts of the world.

Supporter of Human Rights: Congress Party is committed to the protection of Human Rights. It believes that there should be no discrimination on the basis of caste, race, religion, colour etc. Every one should have the right to live with dignity and grace. Protection of Human Rights Act 1993, was passed by the then P.V. Narsimha Rao led Congress government. Human Rights Commissions are set up in centre and the states.

Ideologically, Congress is committed to democracy and socialism through peaceful means. The party is fairly wedded to peaceful

and constitutional means to bring about the transformation which has anticipated through its programmes and policies.⁶³

Ideologically, the party was centrist; committed to minority rights, secularism, a centralized form of federalism and mixed economy. Institutionally, the Congress system was of a hierarchical organisation radiating downwards from central to the provincial and district levels, each level working in consonance with the corresponding level of government. However, this system began to crumble as the Congress electoral fortunes deteriorated after 1967.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, parties with mildly ideological aspirations, however modified, have been a major force in shaping their societies and probably the only means, which allows the general population some say in this shaping.⁶⁵ The Congress Party of India is evidence of the spirit of tolerance which was the basis of rich culture of this country. India is multi-religious and a multi-cultural state and it must remain so. The freedom of the country can be maintained by giving recognition to the richly varied cultural heritage of India. The aim of Congress has therefore, been to develop this country as democratic, secular state which neither favours nor discriminates people on any basis but cares for equal development of the people of the country. The state units of Congress Party have no different programme than its national leadership. But in addition the party lays stress on specific regional needs as it has to compete with its contender, Akali Dal, which is a prominent regional party of Punjab.

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