



## Circulation of power among elites: A study of political dynasties in India

Ms. Vaishali Ramteke

Assistant Professor, Government College Baktara,  
Affiliated to Barkatullah Uiversity, Bhopal (M.P.)

Date of Submission: 04-08-2024

Date of Acceptance: 15-08-2024

### Abstract:

Since independence, India has seen the rise of numerous political dynasties at both national and state levels. Despite adopting a liberal constitutional democracy based on modern representative institutions, the tradition of hereditary succession has persisted through powerful political families. These families have significantly influenced India's democratic discourse. Political parties, central to political life in any modern democracy, including India, play a key role in this phenomenon. It is essential to examine how the Indian party system, particularly since the 1970s, has reinforced the prominence of political dynasties within both party organizations and representative institutions, shaping the country's political landscape.

**Keywords:** Political dynasties, Power elites, Political representation, Democracy

### I. Introduction:

The Theory of circulation of power among elites given by Pareto and Mosca is relevant in every modern society and nation as more and more number of small minorities play influential and critical role in social and political affairs. Political systems involve individuals who wield power to create policies based on the needs and demands of various groups. One could argue that in democratic countries having regular elections, the power elites and masses are co-dependent, therefore distribution of power must be more uniform, however in India, large diversity in social groups and classes has bred powerful dynasties over time despite it being a democracy. Analysing the connection between these individuals and their actions is crucial. Understanding how elites influence policy and how policy affects elites are both essential for grasping and theoretically explaining the dynamics of a political system, particularly through the lens of elite circulation. Mosca's concept of "new social forces", which introduced the idea of "elite circulation," is especially relevant in the context of

developing countries where political trajectories are often influenced by varying rates of modernization and democratization (Zartman, 2019).

### Political dynasties in India: State-wise review

Dynastic politics is evident right from **Jammu and Kashmir**, the northernmost state of the country, where two families — the Abdullachs and the Muftis — have wielded significant influence for decades. Among these, the Abdullachs stand out as the more prominent, with at least four members from three generations having served as chief ministers. The current leader of the National Conference (NC), Omar Abdullah, has held the position of J&K chief minister, following in the footsteps of his father, Farooq Abdullah, who has led the state multiple times and also served as a union minister during the UPA 2 government from 2009 to 2014. Omar's grandfather, Sheikh Abdullah, known as 'Sher-e-Kashmir' (Kashmir's lion), founded the NC and served as both the prime minister of Kashmir and later as chief minister.

The family's connection to leadership in the state extends further. Farooq's brother-in-law, Ghulam Mohammad Shah, was chief minister in the 1980s, and Sheikh Abdullah's brother, Sheikh Mustafa Kamal, held a ministerial position in the state. Additionally, Sheikh Nazir, Farooq's cousin, was the NC's longest-serving secretary-general, a role he maintained for nearly three decades until his death in 2015.

On the other hand, the Mufti family has also been influential, with Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the founder of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and his daughter, Mehbooba Mufti, both having served as chief ministers. Sayeed's son, Tassaduq Mufti, a cinematographer, is the latest member of the family to enter politics.



In **Punjab**, the Badal family has been a dominant force in politics for decades, with Parkash Singh Badal, the founder of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and a four-time chief minister, leading the way. His son, Sukhbir Singh Badal, now serves as the president of SAD and was the state's deputy chief minister from 2009 to 2017. Sukhbir has also been a Lok Sabha MP and briefly held a ministerial role in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led government during its 13-month tenure in 1998. Sukhbir's wife, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, is a Lok Sabha MP and has served as a minister in the Modi government. Harsimrat's brother, Bikram Singh Majithia, a controversial figure, is also involved in SAD politics and was a state cabinet minister during the Akali rule. Parkash Singh Badal's brother, Gurdas Singh Badal, although now estranged, has also served as a parliamentarian. His son, Manpreet Singh Badal, was once a rising star in SAD but shifted to the Congress after falling out with the family.

Captain Amarinder Singh also has several family members involved in politics. His wife, Preneet Kaur, is a three-time Lok Sabha MP and served in the Manmohan Singh cabinet during UPA 2, while their son, Raninder Singh, is also with the Congress. Amarinder's mother, Mohinder Kaur, was a Congress leader and a former MP.

**Haryana** is home to numerous political families, but a bitter feud has brought intense focus on one of the most prominent—the Chautalas. The conflict has split the family, with Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) patriarch and former chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, along with his younger son Abhay Chautala (Leader of the Opposition in the Haryana Assembly), pitted against his elder son Ajay Singh Chautala and Ajay's sons, Dushyant and Digvijay.

Om Prakash Chautala is not the first in his family to enter politics; his father, Devi Lal, was India's deputy prime minister from 1989 to 1991 and also served as Haryana's chief minister. Om Prakash's estranged younger brother, Ranjit Singh, has also been a member of the Haryana assembly.

Another powerful political family in Haryana is the Hoodas. Ranbir Singh Hooda, a Congress politician, was a freedom fighter and a member of the constituent assembly. His son, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, an influential Jat leader, served as the

state's chief minister, while his grandson, Deepender Hooda, is a Congress MP.

Industrialist O.P. Jindal was also a prominent politician and minister in the state, with his wife, Savitri Jindal, also serving as a minister. Their son, Naveen Jindal, is a former Lok Sabha MP from Kurukshetra.

Additionally, former chief minister Bhajan Lal's family remains influential in Haryana politics. His son, Kuldeep Bishnoi, and Kuldeep's wife, Renuka, are both MLAs. In 2017, Bishnoi merged his party, the Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC), which was a breakaway faction of the Congress led by Bhajan Lal, back into the Congress.

#### The Himachal Clan

Veteran Congress leader Virbhadra Singh, despite losing in the 2017 assembly elections, holds the distinction of being Himachal Pradesh's longest-serving chief minister. His wife, Pratibha Singh, has served as a Lok Sabha MP, and their son, Vikramaditya Singh, was elected to the state assembly for the first time in 2017.

#### Delhi's Dikshits

Sheila Dikshit, a three-time chief minister of Delhi, led the Congress to successive assembly victories in 1998, 2003, and 2008, before suffering a significant defeat to the Aam Aadmi Party in 2013, where she also lost her own seat. Her father-in-law, Uma Shankar Dikshit, was involved in the freedom movement and served as a union minister in Indira Gandhi's government in the early 1970s, later becoming the governor of Karnataka and West Bengal. Sheila's son, Sandeep Dikshit, is a former Lok Sabha MP.

In **Chhattisgarh**, while the political influence of the Jogis may be waning, their dynasty remains prominent. Former Chhattisgarh chief minister Ajit Jogi formed the Janta Congress Chhattisgarh after he and his son, Amit Jogi, were expelled from the Congress. Ajit's wife, Renu Jogi, was an MLA from the Kota assembly seat in Chhattisgarh. She left the Congress to join her husband's party after being denied a ticket.

In **Jharkhand**, the Sorens also have a significant political presence. Shibu Soren, head of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, has served as the state's chief minister, a position also held by his son, Hemant Soren. Shibu's other son, Durga, who



passed away in 2009, was also an MLA, and his wife, Sita, served as MLA.

Heartland states like **Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh** are home to established political dynasties. In Rajasthan, Sachin Pilot, the deputy chief minister, is the son of the late Rajesh Pilot, a senior Congress leader. His mother, Rama Pilot, has also held political office.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Scindia family has a cross-party influence. Matriarch Vijaya Raje Scindia was a leading figure in the Jana Sangh and BJP, with daughters Yashodhara and Vasundhara Raje becoming key BJP leaders. Vasundhara served as Rajasthan's chief minister twice. Her son, Dushyant, is a BJP MP. Meanwhile, Vijaya Raje's son, Madhavrao, and grandson, Jyotiraditya, were senior Congress leaders and Jyotiraditya Scindia after joining BJP is current Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region.

In **Uttar Pradesh**, the Yadavs of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the family of Chaudhary Charan Singh are notable. Mulayam Singh Yadav, former UP chief minister, founded the SP, which is now led by his son Akhilesh Yadav. The Yadav family has seen internal conflicts, with Akhilesh taking control of the SP, while his uncle Shivpal Yadav broke away to form his own party. Mulayam's daughters-in-law, Dimple and Aparna Yadav, are also active in politics.

Chaudhary Charan Singh's son, Ajit Singh, founded the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), and his grandson, Jayant Chaudhary, was a former MP.

In **Bihar**, Lalu Yadav, a former chief minister and union minister, leads a political family with his wife Rabri Devi, sons Tejashwi and Tej Pratap, and daughter Misa Bharti all being involved in politics.

The Bahuguna family, originally from Uttar Pradesh, has influence in both UP and Uttarakhand. Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna was a former UP chief minister, while his son Vijay Bahuguna, a former Uttarakhand chief minister, and daughter Rita Bahuguna Joshi, was cabinet minister in UP government, continue the family's political legacy.

**Maharashtra** is also dominated by influential political families.

At the forefront are the Thackerays of the Shiv Sena. The party was founded by Bal Thackeray, who brought in an era of ultra-right, staunchly pro-Marathi politics in the state. His son, Uddhav Thackeray, led the Shiv Sena before it split into two factions; Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena led by Shinde and Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) led by Thackeray., while his nephew, Raj Thackeray, broke away in 2006 to form his own party, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS). Despite early momentum, the MNS has struggled to make a significant impact on the state's political landscape. Uddhav's son, Aaditya Thackeray, served as cabinet minister in Maharashtra government.

Another powerful family is the Pawars. Sharad Pawar, a veteran politician who has served multiple terms as Maharashtra's chief minister and held key union minister portfolios, founded the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 1999 after splitting from the Congress. His daughter, Supriya Sule, represents Baramati in the Lok Sabha. His nephew, Ajit Pawar, served as Maharashtra's deputy chief minister.

The Munde family is prominent in the BJP. Gopinath Munde, a five-time MLA who became a union cabinet minister just a week before his death in 2014, was recognized as the party's 'OBC face'. His brother-in-law, Pramod Mahajan, another senior BJP leader and a potential chief minister, was assassinated at the height of his career. Currently, two of Gopinath Munde's daughters are in politics—Pritam, who is an MP, and Pankaja, who is a state cabinet minister. Gopinath Munde's brother, Panditrao Munde, left the BJP to join the NCP, and his son, Dhananjay Munde, was cabinet minister in Maharashtra government. Meanwhile, Pramod Mahajan's daughter, Poonam, is also an MP.

The Chavan family is another influential Congress clan in Maharashtra. Shankarrao Chavan served twice as the state's chief minister and held several key union ministerial roles, including finance, defense, external affairs, and home. His son, Ashok Chavan, and his wife, both served as MLA.

In the **eastern region** of India, Pranab Mukherjee, a former President, veteran Congress leader, and ex-union minister, passed on his Jangipur Lok Sabha seat to his son, Abhijit Mukherjee, who was



an MP. Pranab's daughter, Sharmishtha Mukherjee, joined the Congress in 2014 and ran unsuccessfully in the 2015 Delhi assembly election for the Greater Kailash constituency.

In **Odisha**, BJD leader and Lok Sabha MP Tathagata Satpathy comes from a political family. His mother, Nandini Satpathy, served as the state's chief minister, and his father, Devendra Satpathy, was a Lok Sabha MP.

In the Northeast, the Sangma family from Meghalaya holds significant political influence. Their political journey began with Purno Agitok Sangma, a former Meghalaya chief minister and Lok Sabha Speaker, who co-founded the NCP with Sharad Pawar in 1999. In 2013, he launched the National People's Party. His daughter Agatha Sangma is a former Lok Sabha MP and was a Minister of State in the UPA 2 government. His son, Conrad Sangma, is the current Chief Minister of Meghalaya, while his elder son, James Sangma, was a senior state minister handling key portfolios.

In **Assam**, Sushmita Dev, a Congress MP from Silchar, is the daughter of veteran Congress leader Santosh Mohan Dev and Bithika Dev, who was an MLA from Silchar.

Pradyot Deb Barman, part of the **Tripura** royal family, was appointed president of the state Congress. His father, Kirit Bikram Deb Barman, was an MP, and his mother, Bibhu Kumari Debi, has been an MLA, MP, and minister in the state.

In **Karnataka**, the Deve Gowda family is often called Karnataka's "Appa-Makkala Paksha" (father-sons' party). Former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) leader H.D. Deve Gowda, along with his sons, forms one of the state's most influential political families.

Former Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa remains the BJP's primary mass leader in Karnataka. His sons, B.Y. Raghavendra and B.Y. Vijayendra, are also active in politics.

In **Andhra Pradesh**, N.T. Rama Rao (NTR) founded the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1982, but it is his son-in-law, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who has assumed the political leadership. Naidu took control of the party in a 1995 coup but included NTR's son, Harikrishna, and another son-in-law, D. Venkateshwara Rao, by making Harikrishna a legislator and Venkateshwara

Rao a minister. NTR's wife at the time, Lakshmi Parvathy, who triggered the crisis leading to Naidu's takeover, briefly ventured into politics before stepping away. NTR's daughter, Daggubati Purandeswari, is another successful politician in the family. A two-time Congress MP from the Bapatla and Visakhapatnam constituencies, she joined the BJP after Telangana was formed.

The late Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR), who died in a plane crash in September 2009, has seen his children continue his political legacy. His son, Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, broke away from the Congress in 2010 and launched the YSR Congress in 2011.

**Telangana** Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhara Rao (KCR) has navigated numerous political challenges to establish his family as the "first family" of the newly formed state of Telangana. Disillusioned with the TDP, KCR founded the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) in 2001.

KCR's son, K.T. Rama Rao, began his political career in the Andhra Pradesh assembly elections of 2009, while his daughter, K. Kavitha, is the MLC for Nizamabad.

In Tamil Nadu, the Muthuvel Karunanidhi family exemplifies dynastic politics. The late Karunanidhi, who passed away last year, was a five-time chief minister and DMK leader since 1968. M.K. Stalin, the current DMK president, has emerged as the political successor to his father, climbing the party ranks. Karunanidhi's daughter, Kanimozhi, from his third wife Rajathiammal, has been a Rajya Sabha member since 2007. His nephew, Murasoli Maran, who died in 2003, and grandnephew, Dayanidhi Maran, have also held prominent roles as senior leaders and former union ministers.

## II. Conclusion:

Dynastic politics is prevalent across India, with influential families holding power in various states. These are power elites across different states and wield the highest governing power in states as well as in India's politics. There is need for more diffusion of power and representation of non-political background representatives from masses for the elections and governing process to become more transparent and effective. The widespread nature of family-based politics in India is harmful for democratic politics in India in long run.



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