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NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES

In the previous lessons you have read about the methods of representation and the electoral process. In this lesson you will study about political parties. Political parties exist in every democratic society and even in authoritarian systems. In a political system, parties act as the carrier of ideas, opinions and approaches to social needs and national goals. Parties provide a link between the citizens and the government, between the electorate and the representative institutions. In fact a successful democracy requires a healthy party-system for its sustenance. Political parties are instruments through which citizens choose those who constitute the government. They explain merits and dangers of alternate policies and provide political education to the citizens.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- recognise the importance of political parties;
- identify the different types of party system;
- recall the features of Indian party-system;
- distinguish between national and regional parties;
- describe the ideals and objectives of major national parties;
- appreciate the role of these national parties in sustaining India's democratic system.

19.1 Meaning and Role of Political Parties

Human beings have always organised themselves in groups and larger formations. Political parties have emerged as one of these human organisations. In modern age the ideal form of government is run through one or the other method of representative institutions. All representative governments and representative institutions require the existence of political parties.

A political party is an organised body of people who share certain common principles and goals regarding the political system of a country. The main purpose of political parties is to



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acquire and retain political power. Political parties which run the government are called the ruling party. In a coalition government, there may be more than one ruling party. Those who sit in the opposition and criticise and analyse the performance of the ruling party/ parties generally or on specific issues are called opposition parties. A political party as such should have the following essential features:

- i) it must be an organised body of people with a formal membership;
- ii) it must have clearly spelt out policies and programmes;
- iii) its members should agree with its ideology, policies and programmes;
- iv) it must aim at getting power through the democratic process;
- v) it must have a clear and acceptable leadership; and
- vi) it must focus on broad issues and major areas of government policies.



Intext Questions 19.1

Fill in the blanks:

- a) A political party is an organised body of people whose main aim is to _____ (acquire and retain power/ pressurise government)
- b) Members of a political party _____ common principles, goals and philosophy (share/don't share).
- c) Parties serve as a link between the _____ and the government (citizens/institutions).

19.2 Types of Party System

India has a multi-party system. Indian politics is dominated by several national and regional parties. There are countries where there is one-party system or two-party system. Erstwhile Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had single party systems. Similarly, China has one-party system. Earlier in Germany there existed only one-party – the Nazi Party; so was the case in Italy where the only party was known as the Fascist Party. In a two party or bi-party system there are two main political parties. The United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Australia and New Zealand have bi-party systems. There may exist other parties but their role is generally insignificant. For example in UK, there are two main parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. In the USA the two main parties are the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Japan, France, Germany and Switzerland have multi-party systems.



Intext Questions 19.2

Fill in the blanks:

- a) Erstwhile Soviet Union had _____ (one-party system/ multi-party system).

- b) Germany has a _____ (bi-party system/ multi-party system).
- c) Two main parties of the UK are _____ (Conservative and Labour Parties/Democratic and Liberal parties).



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19.3 Evolution of Party System in India

The evolution of Indian party system can be traced to the formation of the Congress, as a political platform in 1885. Other parties and groups originated later. The Indian National Congress was formed as a response to the colonial rule and to achieve independence from the British rule.

After independence and with the adoption of a democratic Constitution, a new party system emerged in the wake of the first general elections based on universal adult franchise in 1952. In preceding lesson you have learnt about the universal adult franchise in detail. During the post-independence period, the party system passed through various phases.

The first phase is known as the phase of one-party dominance because with the exception of Kerala during 1956–59, the ruling party both at the Centre and in the states was the Congress. The second phase (1967–1975) saw the emergence of a multi-party system in India. In the Assembly elections in 1967, Congress was defeated in eight States. For the first time non-Congress parties formed governments in these states. These parties formed coalition governments. Then came the split in Congress into Congress (O) and Congress (N). However, the Congress again became a dominant force at the Centre after winning 1971 mid-term poll. Then came the emergency period (1975–77) which is known as the authoritarian period of Indian democracy.

With the lifting of emergency, the dominance of Congress ended. In the general elections of 1977 Congress was defeated by the Janata Party. Janata Party came into existence as a result of the merger of many opposition parties. But again in 1980 general elections Congress came back to power and remained in power till 1989.

Janata Party emerged out of the merger of Congress (O) led by Morarji Desai, Bharatiya Lok Dal led by Ch. Charan Singh, Congress for Democracy (CFD) led by Jagjivan Ram and H.N. Bahuguna, the socialists led by George Fernandes and Jana Sangh led by L.K. Advani.

In 1989 elections, the National Front joined government with the support of BJP and the Left Front. But this formation could not last its tenure and elections for the tenth Lok Sabha were held in May-June, 1991. Congress again formed government at the Centre. In 1996 general elections BJP emerged as the single largest party and was asked to form government at the Centre. Since it could not prove its majority within the given time it had to resign. The United Front which was a combination of thirteen parties, formed the government at the Centre with the external support of the Congress and the CPI(M). But this government also could not last its full term. Although the coalition government formed under the leadership of BJP after 1998 elections was defeated in Lok Sabha, the 1999 elections again provided them the opportunity to form government which lasted its full term under a multi-party coalition, known as National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

In the 14th general elections held in 2004, Congress emerged as the single largest party. It formed alliance with like minded parties and formed government at the Centre. The phase

of Indian party system which began in 1989 and is still continuing has been aptly called a phase of coalition politics. No single party has been able to form government on its own at the Centre.



Intext Questions 19.3

Fill in the blanks:

1. The phase 1952–1967 in the Indian Party System is known as _____.
2. From 1975 to 1977 was known as the _____ period.
3. From 1977 to 1988 is known as the Janata Party phase of _____ politics.
4. The United Front government was a combination of _____ parties.

19.4 National Parties and Regional Parties

India has two types of political parties – national parties and regional parties. National parties are those which generally have influence all over the country. It is not necessary that a national party will have equal strength in all the states; it varies from State to State. A party is recognised as a national party by the Election Commission on the basis of a formula. The political party which has secured not less than four percent of the total valid votes in the previous general elections at least in four states, is given the status of a national party.

The number of national parties has been changing. In the year 2006, Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], Communist Party of India (CPI), Bahujan Samaj Party, and the Nationalist Congress Party were national parties.

However, there are other parties in India, which do not enjoy national influence. Their activities and influence are restricted to particular states or regions. Sometimes these parties are formed to voice demands of a specific region. These parties are neither weak nor short-lived. Sometimes they prove to be very powerful in their respective regions. These are known as regional parties. Major regional parties are AIADMK and DMK in Tamil Nadu, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Akali Dal in Punjab, National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Jharkhand, Asom Gana Parishad in Assam and Nationalist Congress Party and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. About the regional parties you will read in the following lesson.



Intext Questions 19.4

Fill in the blanks:

- a) National Party should have secured four percent valid votes in at least _____ states (four/five).
- b) CPI is a _____ party (national/regional).
- c) DMK is a _____ party (national/regional).

d) National conference is a _____ party (national/regional).

19.5 Major National Parties in India

1. Indian National Congress

As you have already read, Indian National Congress was formed in the year 1885 in Bombay. W.C. Bonnarjee was the first President of the Indian National Congress. To begin with, Congress was an organisation of middle class intellectuals who were primarily concerned with political reforms in the British colonial rule. In the twenties under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress became a mass based organisation. The party started enjoying the support of the common people and played a very significant role in the freedom struggle.

After independence Jawahar Lal Nehru became the Prime Minister and led the Congress till his death in 1964. As already mentioned in an earlier paragraph, this was known as the 'Nehru era'. The Congress party won first five general elections in 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1971. In 1975 national emergency was declared which went on till 1977. In the elections of 1977, the Congress was defeated. However, in 1980 general elections, the Congress Party led by Indira Gandhi came back to power. Indira Gandhi was assassinated in 1984 and during 1985 general elections, Rajiv Gandhi was the leader of the party. Congress won the 1985 general elections with a larger majority. In 1989 though Congress could not get absolute majority, it was the single largest party. In the tenth general elections in 1991, Congress again emerged as the single largest party and formed the government at the Centre. In the 1996, general elections Congress could not form government at the Centre. In the 12th general elections in 1998, Congress could get only 140 Lok Sabha seats. In the 1999 general elections Congress's strength was further reduced to 112. But in the 14th general elections Congress entered into alliance with other secular parties and secured the number of seats that provided it an opportunity to form a coalition government.



Intext Questions 19.5

1. Indian National Congress was formed in the year _____ (1885/1895/1975).
2. Under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership Congress became an organisation of the _____ (common people/moderate/rich).
3. National emergency was declared in _____ (1975/1976/1977).

2. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed in 1980. Since then it has extended its influence in the Hindi belt, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Since 1989, it has been trying to extend its base in South India also.

Since its formation in 1980, the BJP has been increasing its number of seats in the Lok Sabha gradually. In 1984, general elections it secured only two seats. In 1989 the number of seats increased to 88. In 1991 general elections BJP's strength in the Lok Sabha increased to 122 which rose to 161 in the 1996 elections. In 1998 it won 180 seats and in 1999 its



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number in Lok Sabha increased to 182. In the 1999 general elections, BJP contested as an alliance partner in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). In the recent 2004 general elections BJP as an alliance of NDA could not get the required majority. It is playing the role of the opposition party. The BJP has emerged as a significant national party but its support base as yet is limited to certain areas, rather than spread all over India.

3. The Communist Parties

The two communist parties are the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]. Next to the Congress, the Communist Party is the oldest in India. The communist movement began in the early twenties and the Communist Party was founded in 1925. The communists participated in the national movement, though often they had serious differences with the Congress. The communists assert that the people should be economically equal and the society should not be divided into classes of rich and poor. The workers and peasants and other toiling people who do most of the productive work for the society, should be given due recognition and power.

The communists were the main opposition in the Lok Sabha throughout the Nehru Era. In the first Lok Sabha they had 26 members, in the second and the third Lok Sabha, they had 27 and 29 members respectively. In 1957, the CPI won absolute majority in the Kerala Assembly and formed the first Communist government in India. In the early sixties specially after the Chinese aggression of 1962 there were serious differences among the members of the Communist Party. As a result, the party split into two. Those who broke away from CPI, formed CPI(M) in 1964. The CPI(M)'s main support base has been concentrated in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, though it has registered its presence in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra, Orissa and Punjab. The CPI has its pockets of influence in states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Orissa, Pondicherry, Punjab, etc. Moreover CPI has been a part of the left front coalition in Kerala and West Bengal. In the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, both the CPI and the CPI (M) were alliance partners of the Congress. They are supporting the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre from outside.

4. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

The BSP acquired the status of a national party in 1996. The BSP champions the cause of those sections which belong to low castes, deprived groups and minorities. In fact, these sections of Indian society (the Bahujan Samaj) form the majority of the Indian population. The BSP believes that this 'samaj' should be freed from the exploitation of the upper castes and by forming their own government. BSP's influence lies in states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. In 1995 and 1997 BSP was a partner in the coalition governments in Uttar Pradesh.



Intext Questions 19.6

Fill in the blanks:

- In the 1984 general elections BJP secured _____ seats (2, 3, 4).
- CPI formed its first state government in the state of _____ (Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh).
- BSP's influence lies in the state of (Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal).

**What You Have Learnt**

In this lesson you have learnt about the political parties in India. Meaning and role of political parties in sustaining Indian democracy has been described. Different types of political parties have also been touched upon in order to give the right perspective about the party system. Evolution of party-system in India has been narrated. After giving a brief definition of national and regional parties, highlights of major national parties like the Congress, the BJP, the Communist Parties and the Bahujan Samaj Party have been given.

**Terminal Exercises**

1. Describe the essential features of a political party.
2. Discuss about the major National Political Parties of India.

**Answers to Intext Questions****19.1**

- (a) get power
- (b) share
- (c) citizens

19.2

- (a) one-party system
- (b) multi-party system
- (c) conservative and labour parties

19.3

- (a) one-party dominance
- (b) authoritarian
- (c) coalitional politics
- (d) thirteen

19.4

- (a) four
- (b) national
- (c) regional
- (d) regional

**Notes**

19.5

- (a) 1885
- (b) common people
- (c) 1975

19.6

- (a) 2
- (b) Kerala
- (c) Uttar Pradesh

Hints for Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to Section 19.3.
2. Refer to Section 19.5.

**Notes****Let us ponder over adolescence issues****How can we enhance our life skills?**

- Understand and feel good about yourself. Have faith in yourself and understand your own strengths and weaknesses. It is essential to have a sense of self-respect.
- Be positive in your attitude towards life. Be ready to learn from experiences even if they are not pleasant.
- In difficult situations, try to identify the cause of problem. Find best solutions available.
- Share your concerns with others and seeking timely help when needed.
- Have a healthy lifestyle and make responsible decisions.
- Seek reliable information and make informed choices and decisions.
- Think of the consequences of your decisions and actions.
- Learn from the experience of others – we can benefit from the mistake of others.
- Manage your stress by sharing your concerns and seeking help from persons like parents, teachers, friends and counsellors.
- Have the courage to say 'NO' to peer pressure.
- Try to be caring and empathetic with persons who need special care and people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Share information on sensitive reproductive health issues.

