



Ch. – 6 – Lecture Notes

Civics

“Political Parties”

Introduction:

- Political parties are easily one of the most visible institutions in a democracy.
- If you travel to remote parts of our country and speak to the less educated citizens, you could come across people who may not know anything about our Constitution or about the nature of our government.
- But chances are that they would know something about our political parties.
- **Parties have become identified with social and political divisions.**
- About hundred years ago there were a few countries of the world that had any political party: Now there are few that do not have parties.

Why do we need political parties?

- A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.
- They agree on some policies and programs for the society with a view to promoting the collective good.
- **Parties reflect fundamental political divisions in a society. Parties are a part of the society and thus involve PARTISANSHIP.**
- Thus, a party is known by which part it stands for, which policies it supports and whose interests it upholds.
- **A political party has three components:**
 - (i) The leaders, (ii) The active members and (iii) The followers

• Functions:

- Basically, political parties fill political offices and exercise political power. Parties do so by performing a series of functions:
 - (i) Parties contest elections. In most democracies, elections are fought mainly among the candidates put up by political parties.
 - (ii) **Parties put forward different policies and programs and the voters choose from them.** In a democracy, a large number of similar opinions have to be grouped together to provide a direction in which policies can be formulated by the governments. This is what the parties do.
 - (iii) Parties play a decisive role in making laws for a country. Formally, laws are debated and passed in the legislature. Formally, laws are debated and passed in the legislature. But since most of the members belong to a party, they go by the direction of the party leadership, irrespective of their personal opinions
 - (iv) **Parties form and run the government.** As we noted last year, the big policy decisions are taken by the political executive that comes from the political parties. Parties recruit leaders, train them and then make them ministers to run the government in the way they want.
 - (v) Those parties that lose in the elections play the role of opposition to the parties in power, by voicing different views and criticizing the government for its failures or wrong policies.
 - (vi) **Parties shape public opinion.** They raise and highlight issues. Parties have lakhs of members and activists spread all over the country.
 - (vii) **Parties provide people access to government machinery** and welfare schemes implemented by governments.



- **Necessity :**
 - **Every candidate in the elections will be independent.** So no one will be able to make any promises to the people about any major policy changes.
 - The government may be formed, but its utility will remain ever uncertain.
 - Elected representatives will be accountable to their constituency for what they do in the locality. But no one will be responsible for how the country will be run.
 - **The rise of political parties is directly linked to the emergence of representative democracies.**
 - As societies became large and complex, they also needed some agency to gather different views on various issues and to present these to the government.
 - They needed a mechanism to support or restrain the government, make policies, justify or oppose them.
 - We can say that parties are a necessary condition for a democracy.

How many parties should we have?

- In a democracy any group of citizens is free to form a political party. In this formal sense, there are a large number of political parties in each country.
- **More than 750 parties are registered with the Election Commission of India.**
- **One-party systems:** In some countries, only one party is allowed to control and run the government. These are called one-party systems. In China, only the Communist Party is allowed to rule. Although, legally speaking, people are free to form political parties, it does not happen because the electoral system does not permit free competition for power.
- **Two-party system:** In some countries, power usually changes between two main parties. Several other parties may exist, contest elections and win a few seats in the national legislatures. But only the two main parties have a serious chance of winning majority of seats to form government. Such a party system is called two-party system. **The United States of America and the United Kingdom are examples of two-party system.**
- **Multiparty system:** If several parties compete for power, and more than two parties have a reasonable chance of coming to power either on their own strength or in alliance with others, we call it a multiparty system.
- Thus, in India, we have a multiparty system. In this system, the government is formed by various parties coming together in a coalition.
- When several parties in a multi-party system join hands for the purpose of contesting elections and winning power, it is called an alliance or a front.
- The multiparty system often appears very messy and leads to political instability. At the same time, this system allows a variety of interests and opinions to enjoy political representation.
- Party system is not something any country can choose. It evolves over a long time, depending on the nature of society, its social and regional divisions, its history of politics and its system of elections. These cannot be changed very quickly.
- Each country develops a party system that is conditioned by its special circumstances. No system is ideal for all countries and all situations.



Popular participation in political parties

- It is often said that political parties are facing a crisis because they are very unpopular and the citizens are indifferent to political parties.
- **The evidence, based on a series of large sample surveys conducted over several decades, shows that:**
 - (i) Political parties do not enjoy much trust among the people in South Asia.
 - (ii) Political parties are one of the least trusted institutions all over the world.
 - (iii) The proportion of those who said they were members of some political party was higher in India than many advanced countries like Canada, Japan, Spain and South Korea.
 - (iv) Over the last three decades, the proportion of those who report to be members of political parties in India has gone up steadily.
 - (v) The proportion of those who say they feel 'close to a political party' has also gone up in India in this period.

National political parties:

- Democracies that follow a federal system all over the world tend to have two kinds of political parties: parties that are present in only one of the federal units and parties that are present in several or all units of Federation.
- **Every party in the country has to register with the Election Commission.** While the Election Commission treats all parties equally, it offers some special facilities to large and established parties.
- Parties that get this privilege and some other special facilities are 'recognised' by the Election Commission for this purpose. **That is why these parties are called, 'recognised political parties'.**
- **A party that secures at least six per cent of the total votes** in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in four States and wins at least four seats in the Lok Sabha is recognised as a national party.
- According to this classification, there were seven recognised national parties in the country in 2018.

1. **Aam Aadmi Party (AAP):** Formed on 26 November 2012, following the 2011 anti-corruption movement.

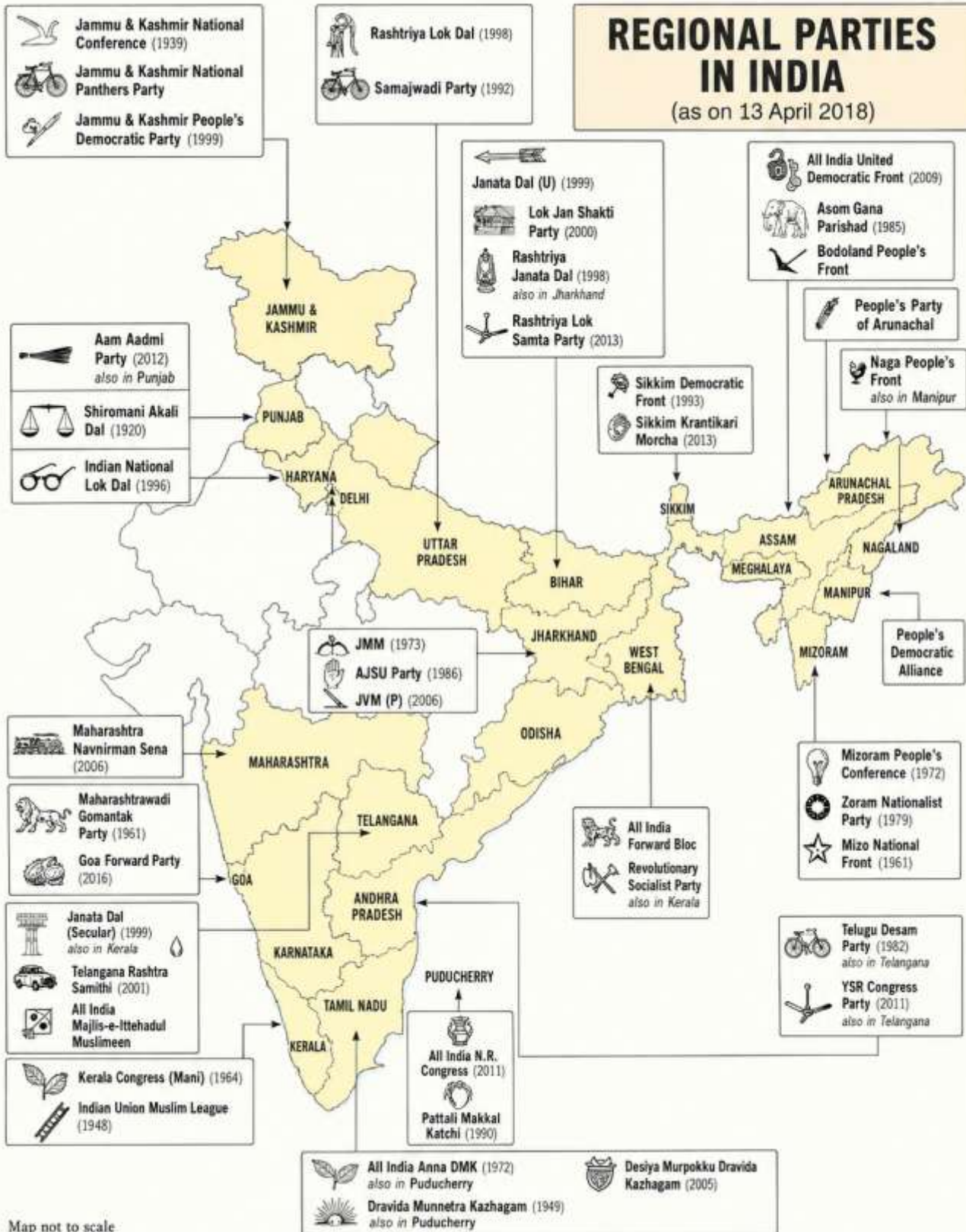
- The party was founded on the idea of accountability, clean administration, transparency and good governance.
- In the year after its formation, AAP emerged as the second largest party in the Delhi Legislative Assembly election.
- It formed a government with the support of Indian National Congress (INC).
- It also emerged as the third front in the politics of Gujarat after 2022 Gujarat Legislative Assembly election.
- Presently, AAP formed governments in Punjab and Delhi. In the Lok Sabha election held in 2019, it secured one seat in the Lok Sabha.



2. **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP):** Formed in 1984 under the leadership of **Kanshi Ram**.
 - Seeks to represent and secure power for the Bahujan samaj which includes the Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs and religious minorities.
 - Draws inspiration from the ideas and teachings of Sahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Periyar Ramaswami Naicker and Babasaheb Ambedkar.
 - **Stands for the cause of securing the interests and welfare of the Dalits** and oppressed people. It has its main base in the state of Uttar Pradesh.
3. **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):** Founded in 1980 by reviving the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh, **formed by Syama Prasad Mukherjee in 1951**.
 - Wants to build a strong and modern India by drawing inspiration from India's ancient culture and values; and Deendayal Upadhyaya's ideas of integral humanism and Antyodaya.
 - **Cultural nationalism (or 'Hindutva') is an important element** in its conception of Indian nationhood and politics.
 - Wants full territorial and political integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India, a uniform civil code for all people living in the country irrespective of religion, and ban on religious conversions.
4. **National People's Party (NPP):** Formed in July 2013 under the leadership of P. A Sangma.
 - NPP is the first political party from North East India to have attained the status of a national party.
 - It believes in diversity of the country and recognizes that different regions have different developmental challenges.
 - The core philosophy of the party is education and employment to all as well as empowerment of all sections of the society.
 - It formed government in Meghalaya and has presence in many of North Eastern States.
 - In the Lok Sabha election held in 2019, NPP secured one seat in the Lok Sabha.
5. **Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M):** Founded in 1964. Believes in Marxism-Leninism.
 - Supports socialism, secularism and democracy and opposes imperialism and communalism.
 - Accepts democratic elections as a useful and helpful means for securing the objective of socio-economic justice in India.
 - **Enjoys strong support in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura**, especially among the poor, factory workers, farmers, agricultural labourers and the intelligentsia.
6. **Indian National Congress (INC):** Popularly known as the Congress Party.
 - One of the oldest parties of the world.
 - **Founded in 1885** and has experienced many splits.
 - Played a dominant role in Indian politics at the national and state level for several decades after India's Independence.
 - Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the party sought to build a modern secular democratic republic in India.
 - A centrist party (neither rightist nor leftist) in its ideological orientation, the party espouses secularism and welfare of weaker sections and minorities.
 - Supports new economic reforms but with a human face.
 - **Leader of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government from 2004 to 2014.** Currently it is the principal opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

REGIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA

(as on 13 April 2018)





State party

- Other than these six parties, most of the major parties of the country are classified by the Election Commission as 'State parties.
- Parties like the
 - (i) Samajwadi party,
 - (ii) Samata party and Rashtriya Janta Dal have national level political organization with units in several states.
- Some of these parties like Biju Janta Dal, Sikkim Democratic Front and Mizo national Front are conscious about their state identity.
- **Over the last three decades, the number and strength of these parties has expanded.**
- This made the Parliament of India politically more and more diverse.
- No one national party is able to secure on its own a majority in the Lok Sabha, until 2014.
- As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with State parties.

Challenges to political parties:

- All over the world, people express strong dissatisfaction with the failure of political parties to perform their functions as well.
- **The first challenge is lack of internal democracy within parties.**
- All over the world there is a tendency in political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top.
- The leaders assume greater power to make decisions in the name of the party.
- Since one or few leaders exercise paramount power in the party, those who disagree with the leadership find it difficult to continue in the party.
- **The second challenge of the dynastic succession is related to the first one.**
- Since most political parties do not practice open and transparent procedures for their functioning, there are very few ways for an ordinary worker to rise to the top in a party.
- **The third challenge is about the growing role of money and muscle power in parties, especially during elections.**
- Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decision of the party.
- In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections.
- **The fourth challenge is that very often parties do not seem to offer a meaningful choice to the voters.**

How can political parties be reformed?

- The Constitution was amended to prevent elected MLAs and MPs from changing parties.
- This was done because **many elected representatives were indulging in DEFECTION in order to become ministers or for cash rewards.**
- The Supreme Court passed an order to reduce the influence of money and criminals.
- Now, **it is mandatory for every candidate who contests elections to file an AFFIDAVIT giving details of his property and criminal cases pending against him.**
- The new system has made a lot of information available to the public. But there is no system of check if the information given by the candidates is true.



- The Election Commission passed an order making it necessary for political parties to hold their organizational elections and file their income tax returns.
- The parties have started doing so but sometimes it is mere formality. It is not clear if this step has led to greater internal democracy in political parties.
- Besides these, many suggestions are often made to reform political parties:
 - (i) A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of political parties. It should be made compulsory for political parties to maintain a register of its members.
 - (ii) It should be made mandatory for political parties to give a minimum number of tickets, about one-third, to women candidates.
 - (iii) There should be state funding of elections. The government should give parties money to support their elections expenses. These suggestions have not yet been accepted by political parties. If and when these are accepted these could lead to some improvement. But we must be very careful about legal solutions to political problems. Over-regulation of political parties can be counter-productive.
- **What are the other ways which political parties can be reformed?**
 - There are two other ways in which political parties can be reformed.
 - (i) One, people can put pressure on political parties.
 - This can be done **through petition, publicity, and agitation.**
 - Ordinary citizens, pressure groups and movements and the media can play an important role in this.
 - If political parties feel that they would lose public support by not taking up reforms, they would become more serious about reforms.
 - (ii) Two, political parties can improve if those who want this join political parties.
 - **The quality of democracy depends on the degree of public participation.**
 - It is difficult to reform politics if ordinary citizens do not take part in it and simply criticise it from the outside.

❖ Glossary

- **Partisan:** A person who is strongly committed to a party, group or faction. Partisanship is marked by a tendency to take a side and inability to take a balanced view on an issue.
- **Ruling Party:** Political party that runs government.
- **Defection:** Changing party allegiance from the party on which a person got elected (to a legislative body) to a different party.
- **Affidavit:** A signed document submitted to an officer, where a person makes a sworn statement regarding her personal information.