Chapter 16: Political Parties

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Exercise 16.1 — Short and Long Answer Questions

Q1 State the various functions political parties perform in a democracy.

SOLUTION

Political parties fill political offices and exercise political power by performing a series of functions:

1. Parties contest elections. In most democracies elections are fought mainly among candidates put up by political parties.
2. Parties put forward different policies and programmes and the voters choose from them. A party reduces a vast multitude of opinions into a few basic positions which it supports.
3. Parties play a decisive role in making laws for a country. Since most members of the legislature belong to a party, they go by the direction of the party leadership.
4. Parties form and run governments. They recruit leaders, train them and make them ministers to run the government.
5. Those parties that lose the elections play the role of opposition, voicing different views and criticising the government for its failures or wrong policies.
6. Parties shape public opinion. They raise and highlight issues, and many pressure groups are extensions of political parties.
7. Parties provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes; it is easier for an ordinary citizen to approach a local party leader than a government officer.

Answer: Parties contest elections, put forward policies and programmes, make laws, form and run governments, act as opposition, shape public opinion, and provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes.

Q2 What are the various challenges faced by political parties?

SOLUTION

Popular dissatisfaction with political parties has focussed on four problem areas:

1. Lack of internal democracy: There is a tendency towards concentration of power in one or a few leaders at the top. Parties often do not keep membership registers, hold organisational meetings or conduct internal elections regularly, so ordinary members cannot influence decisions.
2. Dynastic succession: Since parties lack open and transparent procedures, top positions are often controlled by members of one family, which is unfair to other members and bad for democracy.
3. Growing role of money and muscle power, especially during elections. Parties tend to nominate candidates who can raise lots of money, and rich people and companies who fund parties influence their policies; in some cases parties even support criminals who can win.
4. Parties often do not offer a meaningful choice to the voters, as ideological differences among parties have declined and the major parties differ little on economic policies.

Answer: Lack of internal democracy, dynastic succession, the growing role of money and muscle power, and failure to offer a meaningful choice to voters.

Q3 Suggest some reforms to strengthen parties so that they perform their functions well?

SOLUTION

Some reforms suggested to strengthen political parties are:

1. A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of parties, making it compulsory for them to maintain a register of members, follow their own constitution, have an independent authority to judge party disputes, and hold open elections to the highest posts.
2. It should be made mandatory for parties to give a minimum number of tickets, about one-third, to women candidates, and there should be a quota for women in the decision-making bodies of the party.
3. There should be state funding of elections, where the government gives parties support for election expenses, either in kind (petrol, paper, telephone) or in cash based on the votes secured in the last election.

Two other ways can help: people can put pressure on parties through petitions, publicity and agitations, and those who want change can join political parties, since the quality of democracy depends on public participation.

Answer: Regulate parties' internal affairs by law, reserve about one-third of tickets for women, introduce state funding of elections, and use public pressure and participation to push reforms.

Q4 What is a political party?

SOLUTION

A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.

Parties reflect fundamental political divisions in a society and involve partisanship, so a party is known by which part of society it stands for, which policies it supports and whose interests it upholds.

Answer: A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.

Q5 What are the characteristics of a political party?

SOLUTION

The characteristics of a political party are:

1. A party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.
2. It stands for certain policies and programmes which it supports, reducing a vast multitude of opinions into a few basic positions.
3. It reflects fundamental political divisions in society and involves partisanship, standing for a part of society, particular policies and particular interests.

A political party has three components: the leaders, the active members and the followers.

Answer: A party contests elections to hold power, supports particular policies and programmes, and reflects a section of society; it has three components — the leaders, the active members and the followers.

Q6 A group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government is called a _____.

SOLUTION

The chapter defines a party as a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.

Answer: Political party.

Exercise 16.2 — Match the Following

Q1 Match List I (organisations and struggles) with List II and select the correct answer using the codes given below the lists: List I — 1. Congress Party, 2. Bharatiya Janata Party, 3. Communist Party of India (Marxist), 4. Telugu Desam Party. List II — A. National Democratic Alliance, B. State party, C. United Progressive Alliance, D. Left Front. Codes: (a) 1-C 2-A 3-B 4-D (b) 1-C 2-D 3-A 4-B (c) 1-C 2-A 3-D 4-B (d) 1-D 2-C 3-A 4-B

SOLUTION

1. Congress Party leads the United Progressive Alliance (C).
2. Bharatiya Janata Party leads the National Democratic Alliance (A).
3. Communist Party of India (Marxist) leads the Left Front (D).
4. Telugu Desam Party is a State party (B).

So the correct pairing is 1-C, 2-A, 3-D, 4-B, which is option (c).

Answer: (c) 1-C, 2-A, 3-D, 4-B.

Exercise 16.3 — Multiple Choice Questions

Q1 Who among the following is the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party? A. Kanshi Ram B. Sahu Maharaj C. B.R. Ambedkar D. Jotiba Phule

SOLUTION

The Bahujan Samaj Party was founded by Kanshi Ram.

Answer: A. Kanshi Ram.

Q2 What is the guiding philosophy of the Bharatiya Janata Party? A. Bahujan Samaj B. Revolutionary democracy C. Integral humanism D. Modernity

SOLUTION

The guiding philosophy of the Bharatiya Janata Party is integral humanism.

Answer: C. Integral humanism.

Q3 Consider the following statements on parties. A. Political parties do not enjoy much trust among the people. B. Parties are often rocked by scandals involving top party leaders. C. Parties are not necessary to run governments. Which of the statements given above are correct? (a) A, B, and C (b) A and B (c) B and C (d) A and C

SOLUTION

Statements A and B are correct: parties do not enjoy much trust among people and are often rocked by scandals involving top leaders.

Statement C is wrong, because parties are a necessary condition for a democracy — modern democracies cannot exist without them.

Hence the correct option is (b) A and B.

Answer: (b) A and B.