

What is a political party?

Political party is an important concept in political science. A political party plays an important role in democracy because during the elections, it creates consciousness among the voters. All political parties keep the nation alive politically. They create the interest of the voters in politics, and attract them towards important problems. Various definitions of political parties have been furnished by the political scientists from different angles. The paper cites the definition as furnished by Leacock. He states, "By a political party we mean more or less organized group of citizens who act together as a political unit. They share or profess to share the same opinions on public questions and by exercising their voting power towards a common end, seek to obtain control of the government". Some of the essentials of political parties are: First, the people should be organized. Second, there should be similarity of principles. Third, the aim of a political party should be to attain political power. Fourth, a political party should use peaceful means for attaining political power.

What are the bases for the formation of political parties ?

There are many bases for the formation of political parties. Many people form a political party on the basis of religion. Their aim is to protect the interests of their followers. For instance, the Muslim League, Akali Dal (Punjab), BJP, Jamat-I-Islam etc. are the religion-based parties. In many European countries, Catholic parties have been formed on this basis. The second basis for the formation of the parties is economic. For example, there are many classes in the society, i.e., capitalists, labourers, businessmen and services. Conservative parties protect the interests of the capitalists while the communist and socialist parties protect the interests of the labourers. The third basis for the formation of a political party is racial. For example, in India 'All India Scheduled Caste's Federation' exists in order to protect the interests of the Hindus of lower caste. Fourthly, certain parties are formed on political basis like the Indian National Congress in India. In the beginning, its aim was to protect the interests of the people of India, but later it fought for the freedom of the country. Similarly, the Awami League party of Bangladesh first sought autonomy for the then East Pakistan. But later on, it fought for the independence of Bangladesh from the Pakistani rulers. Fifthly, sometimes the basis for the formation of political parties is psychological or natural difference. Many people consider the old traditions of the society as ideal and they want to review them. Such persons are called reactionaries.

What are the functions of a political party?

There are two functions of political parties. They are: (1) to propagate their ideals and policy: (2) to contest elections. James Bryce says that every party follows four things for its success. First, every party strengthens its organizations. Second, the parties try to increase their membership. Third, they encourage the electorate and supporters through speeches and other means. Fourth, the voters are imparted political education by the parties. Besides, every political party puts up able and intelligent persons for the elections and efforts are made to make them successful through propaganda in the press, through speeches, meetings and processions. Each party tries to defeat its rival and condemns its policies, so that no voter should vote in favour of the rival party. If a party secures a majority, it forms the government, otherwise it acts as opposition and

criticizes the policies of the government and checks the government from becoming absolute in nature.

The advantages of political parties

The following are the advantages of political parties:

1. Political parties reflect the varied human nature of the masses
2. Political parties concentrate on the attention of the voters on big problems
3. Political parties make the working of democracy possible.
4. Political parties create cooperation between the executive and legislature
5. Opposition parties check the absolutism of the government
6. Political parties create awakening among the people
7. Opposition parties point out the short-comings of the government
8. Political parties make the working of the constitution and the government flexible
9. Political parties act as a sort of link between the people and the government
10. Political parties pilot the reforms
11. Political parties impart political education
12. Political parties appoint committees of experts
13. Formation of government is made easier due to the presence of political parties

The disadvantages of political parties

The following are the disadvantages of political parties:

1. National interests are hampered by the selfish propaganda of the political parties
 2. Party system creates factionalism
 3. Political parties crush individuality
 4. Wrong political education of the people
 5. Parties spread corruption
 6. The ruling party makes attractive laws near the election in order to catch the voters
 7. Dictatorship of the ruling party
 8. Unstable government in a multi-party system
 9. Political parties spread communal hatred
 10. The country is deprived of the services of the talented persons owing to the party system
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