**DEPARTMENT OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS**

**INDIAN POLITICS**

**EDUCATING THE CITIZEN**

**ABOUT:** The demand that political parties function democratically must come from the people

**SYNOPSIS:** Suhas Palshikar gave sound advice to those who wish to set up and run political parties in an appropriately titled article, [‘How to have a good party](http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/politcal-parties-india-party-system-new-old-parties-3099385/)’ (IE, October 24). The article was followed, the next day, [by Sanjaya Baru](http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/politcal-parties-party-system-india-family-politics-3101112/) advising “an institute of management education” to start “a course on managing family-based political parties.”

1. Types of the political parties- There seem to be three types of political parties in India: family-run, coterie-run and individual-run. The labels are self-explanatory and there seems to be no political party that falls outside this classification. All of them seem to be blissfully innocent of the fact that political parties are, at their root, supposed to be instruments of democracy. And instruments of democracy cannot be undemocratic.
2. The commission’s comments in para 3.1.2.1 of its 170th report is worth reproducing in full: “On the parity of the above reasoning, it must be said that if democracy and accountability constitute the core of our constitutional system, the same concepts must also apply to and bind the political parties which are integral to parliamentary democracy. It is the political parties that form the government, man the Parliament and run the governance of the country. It is therefore necessary to introduce internal democracy, financial transparency and accountability in the working of the political parties. A political party which does not respect democratic principles in its internal working cannot be expected to respect those principles in the governance of the country. It cannot be a dictatorship internally and democratic in its functioning outside.”
3. It should not matter whether the party is family-run, coterie-run and individual-run, so long as it has at least a semblance of democracy in its internal functioning. Political parties will not become internally democratic by exhortations of political scientists and political commentators.
4. Therefore, a necessary condition for democracy to survive and to make political parties internally democratic is pressure from citizens. For this, what is needed is “education for citizenship”. So, whether “an institute of management education” starts “a course on managing family-based political parties” or not, it is necessary that institutions of education pay attention to ensuring that their students acquire some knowledge of what it takes to be a responsible citizen.

**Conclusion:** Democracy in the country will survive only if political parties are democratic in their internal functioning. Political parties will become democratic in their internal functioning only if citizens demand that. Citizens will demand that only if they have what Justice Souter called “civic knowledge” or “education for citizenship”. So, while one can intervene at every level, the most basic interventions are required at the level of schools and colleges. This may appear to be a long haul but there really are no shortcuts.

Key Points:

1. Suhas Palshikar: He is an Indian Academic and social and political scientist. He is Director of [Lokniti](http://www.lokniti.org/people_lokniti_suhaspalshikar.php) and was Professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at the [Savitribai Phule Pune University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savitribai_Phule_Pune_University" \o "Savitribai Phule Pune University) from 1989 to 2016. He is also the Chief Editor of the journal [*Studies in Indian Politics*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Studies_in_Indian_Politics) an international peer reviewed journal brought out by Sage. As Chief Advisor (Political Science) along with Yogendra Yadav, he worked on the project of bringing out the class IX to XII political science text books for the NCERT.  Prof. Palshikar was a visiting professor at Brown India Initiative, Brown University and Providence, USA. . He has been teaching courses on Political Sociology, Indian Politics, Party System in India, Political Economy of India and Political Process in Maharashtra.
2. **Sanjaya Baru**: He is an Indian [political commentator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_commentator) and [policy analyst](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Policy_analyst), currently serving as Director for Geo-Economics and Strategy at the [International Institute of Strategic Studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Institute_of_Strategic_Studies).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanjaya_Baru#cite_note-1) Previously he had served as associate editor at [*The Economic Times*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Economic_Times) and [*The Times of India*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times_of_India), and then chief editor at [*Business Standard*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_Standard)*.*