

Critically evaluate the importance of political parties in a modern state. Assess their role as effective instrument for mobilizing public opinion.

ANSWER

(1) INTRODUCTION :

Political parties act as the natural bridge between the government and the government. It functions at all three levels: electorate, government, and linkage-related. They mobilize and sensitize citizens from the individual to the national level. They do not only raise political consciousness among citizens, but also build latter's efficacy. Also, they provide a common platform for both ruling and opposition parties to play critical and constructive role in national integration.

(2) Role of Political Parties

(i) At Electorate Level:

(1) Representation of Electorate

Political parties win or lose through electoral mandate. They represent the aspirations and needs of the people at large. They act as conduits ^{the} between government and the governed.

They bring their collective demands and articulate them in the form of legislative agendas.

(ii) Integration of Electorate

Political parties act as natural allies of civil society. They bring people from disparate ethnicity, region, race, religion; etc, onto a single political hub. They ensure territorial national integration in such a way that

the entire nation is integrated into
one political unit.

"political elections are courses in
civics education with parties as teachers" — Samuel
Huntington.

(B) At Government level

(i) Aggregation of Public Demands

Political parties sensitize the citizenry
about the rights and responsibilities. They
aggregate the demands of people at
the local level and represent them
at the national level in assemblies
and parliaments.

(ii) Recruit Political Leaders

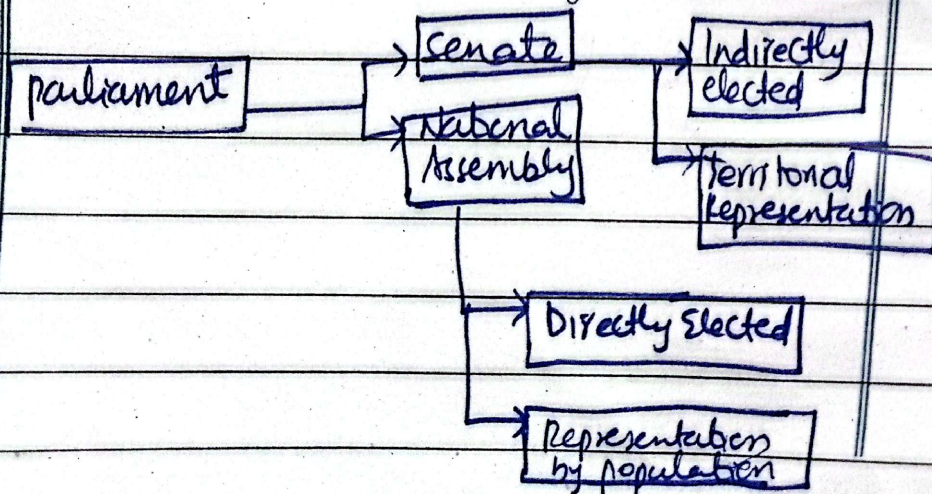
The political parties recruit, train
and prepare them for future
leadership roles. They turn able
individuals into active leaders.

to serve their country in the long-term.
Thus, they select, train, and
sustain a pool of talent for
leadership roles and functions.

(ii) Linkage-Related Role

(1) Hold Government Accountable

These political parties are ruling
parties in the affairs of the
country. Whereas, in opposition,
they hold the government
accountable and help them correct
course for public service delivery.
They ensure territorial national integration
rather than parochial loyalties.



(ii) Institutionalize Opposition's Role

Political parties which lose in elections are institutionalized as opposition party. They are given a credible role in government as an alternative second choice of voters for governing the country. Thus, their critical and constructive role is legitimized as the party in opposition in a highly organized manner. Thus, they act as agents of public scrutiny.

③ Issues in Political Party system

(a) Dynastic Politics (Politics as Family Enterprises)

Political parties, either ruling or opposition, have run them as their family enterprises. They serve their parochial loyalties, not the general public. For instances

the Shaukhs in Punjab, the Bhuiyans in Sindh, and the Khans in KPK have been dominating the political landscape for decades. The same forces keep changing over time.

(2) Personality-Based Politics, not Ideologically Driven

The political leaders in parties revolve around a single party chief. He usually does not communicate with the lower party workers. This top-down approach to leadership has hindered political engagement and civic awareness in its truest sense. This cult-like leadership is devoid of ideology or ideas need to bring true change in the country.

(3) No Institutionalized Internal Democracy

There is no institutionalized internal democratic process in political parties.

The political members are selected, and not elected. The 'electable' members are touted as the party leaders who enjoy fame and influence, but often lack genuine policy vision.

"The introduction of Article 63A in 18th amendment has given extra-constitutional powers to party chiefs to remove members on the pretext of defection." — Ivan Doherty

(4) Criminalizing Dissent within Party

Party system in Pakistan wholly revolves around the top party chief. The party unity is maintained by criminalizing dissent among the members. On the pretext of defection, party chief

party chief can write to speaker of national assembly to remove members based on false allegations.

Thus, party chiefs act as judge, jury and executioner with their respective parties. This translates into broader culture of viewing opposition as a threat to be eliminated, and not as a legitimate alternative for the voters.

(5) Regionalism Politics

Most of the political parties mobilize their votes base in targeted regions. They do so to win votes, while neglecting other parts of the country. This politics of regionalism gives rise to an identity-based politics along ethnic, religion, and ideological lines. This hinders the national integration (territorial) of the country into a single cohesive political unit.

Regional politics
of political parties

→ PPP in Sindh

→ PML-N in Punjab

→ PTI in KPK

(6) Politics - Policy Nexus (Unholy)

The political parties either as ruling or opposition parties, oversee policy formation and implementation.

They usually serve their vested narrow interests by favoring such policies which toe their party line. For instance, PPP members are usually big agriculturalists while PML-N is overrepresented by industrialists and businessmen. Thus, the party chiefs favor such political decisions that reward them, or exempt them from paying the due.

"Tax exemptions by PPP in their tenure speaks volume of the unholy political economy in Pakistan." — Khuram Hussain

Conclusion

Thus, it could be concluded that political parties pose legislative agendas, oversee policy implementation, and are endemic to democracy. However, their role should grow to be more critical and constructive to consolidate the democratic credentials of the country. The politics of confrontation and adversarial nature must be shunned. Thus, their role as agents of public scrutiny should be fortified to support the overall democratic dispensation of the nation as a single, cohesive political unit.