

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. Critical of the new economic policies that allow free flow of foreign capital and goods into the country. Was in power in West Bengal without a break for 34 years. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, it won about 1.75 per cent of votes and 3 seats.



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. Ruling party at the centre till 1977 and then from 1980 to 1989. After 1989, its support declined, but it continues to be present throughout the country, cutting across social divisions. A centrist party (neither rightist nor leftist) in its ideological orientation, the party espouses secularism and welfare of weaker sections and minorities. The INC supports new economic reforms but with a human face. Leader of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government from 2004 to 2019. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election it won 52 seats.



Nationalist Congress Party (NCP): Formed in 1999 following a split in the Congress party. Espouses

democracy, Gandhian secularism, equity, social justice and federalism. Wants that high offices in government be confined to natural born citizens of the country. A major party in Maharashtra and has a significant presence in Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam. A coalition partner in the state of Maharashtra in alliance with the Congress. Since 2004, a member of the United Progressive Alliance.

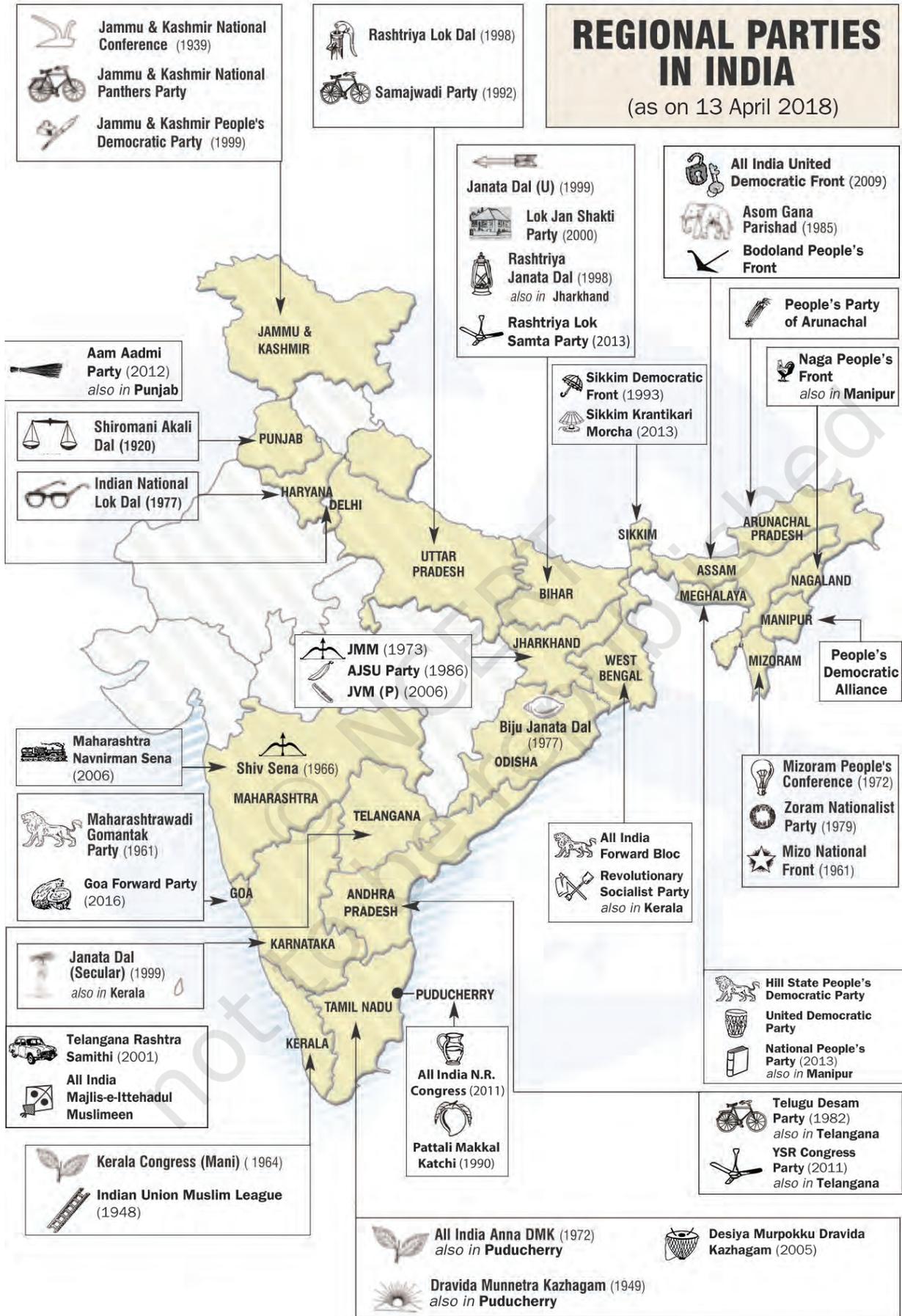
State parties

Other than these seven parties, most of the major parties of the country are classified by the Election Commission as 'State parties'. These are commonly referred to as regional parties. Yet these parties need not be regional in their ideology or outlook. Some of these parties are all India parties that happen to have succeeded only in some states. Parties like the Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal have national level political organisation with units in several states. Some of these parties like Biju Janata Dal, Sikkim Democratic Front, Mizo National Front and Telangana Rashtra Samithi 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. Since 1996, nearly every one of the State parties has got an opportunity to be a part of one or the other national level coalition government. This has contributed to the strengthening of federalism and democracy in our country. (See the map on the next page for details of these parties).

REGIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA

(as on 13 April 2018)

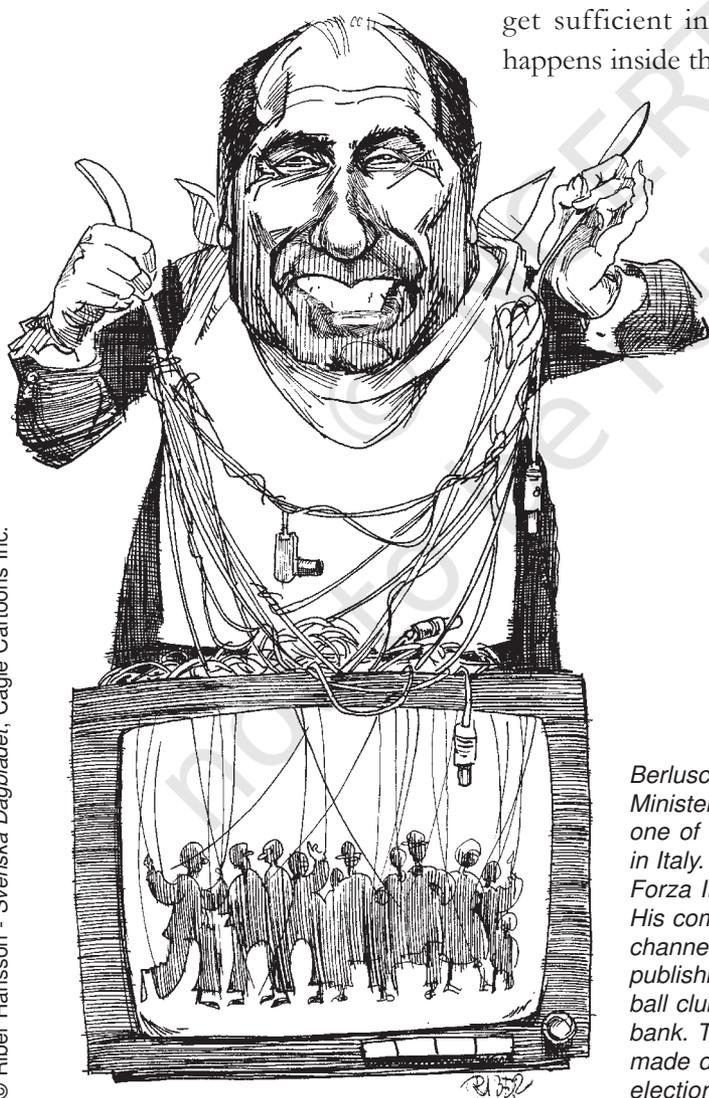


Map not to scale

Challenges to political parties

We have seen how crucial political parties are for the working of democracy. Since parties are the most visible face of democracy, it is natural that people blame parties for whatever is wrong with the working of democracy. All over the world, people express strong dissatisfaction with the failure of political parties to perform their functions well. This is the case in our country too. Popular dissatisfaction and criticism has focussed on four problem areas in the

Berlusconi Puppet Theatre



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working of political parties. Political parties need to face and overcome these challenges in order to remain effective instruments of democracy.

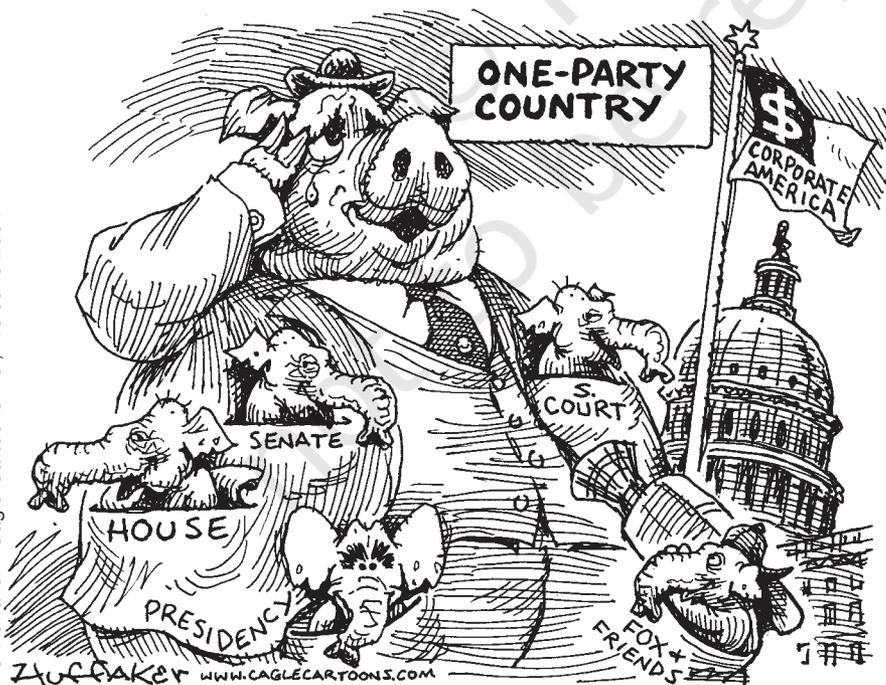
The first challenge is **lack of internal democracy** within parties. All over the world there is a tendency in political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top. Parties do not keep membership registers, do not hold organisational meetings, and do not conduct internal elections regularly. Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information on what happens inside the party. They do not

have the means or the connections needed to influence the decisions. As a result 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

Berlusconi was the Prime Minister of Italy. He is also one of the top businessmen in Italy. He is the leader of the Forza Italia founded in 1993. His company owns TV channels, the most important publishing company, a foot ball club (AC Milan) and a bank. This cartoon was made during the last elections.



Why don't parties give enough tickets to women? Is that also due to lack of internal democracy?



This cartoon was drawn during the Presidency of George Bush of the Republican Party in the USA. The party's symbol is elephant. The cartoon seems to suggest that the Corporate America controls all major institutions of the country.

difficult to continue in the party. More than loyalty to party principles and policies, personal loyalty to the leader becomes more important.

The second challenge of 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. Those who happen to be the leaders are in a position of unfair advantage to favour people close to them or even their family members. In many parties, the top positions are always controlled by members of one family. This is unfair to other members of that party. This is also bad for democracy, since people who do not have adequate experience or popular support come to occupy positions of power. This tendency is present in some measure all over the world, including in some of the older democracies.

The third challenge is about the growing role of **money and muscle power** in parties, especially during elections. Since parties are focussed only on winning elections, they tend to use short-cuts to win elections. They tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money. Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the party. In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections. Democrats all over the world are worried about the increasing role of rich people and big companies in democratic politics.

The fourth challenge is that very often parties do not seem to offer a **meaningful choice** to the voters. In order to offer meaningful choice, parties must be significantly different. In recent years there has been a decline in the ideological differences among parties in most parts of the world. For example, the difference between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party in Britain is very little. They agree on more fundamental aspects but differ only in details on how policies are to be framed and implemented. In our country too, the differences among all the major parties on the economic policies have reduced. Those who want really different policies have no option available to them. Sometimes people cannot even elect very different leaders either, because the same set of leaders keep shifting from one party to another.



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Does this suggest that in democracies people contest elections only to make money? But isn't it true that there are politicians committed to the well-being of the people?



Can you identify which of the challenges described in this section are being highlighted in these cartoons (on pages 83 to 85)? What are the ways to curb the misuse of money and muscle power in politics?

How can parties be reformed?

In order to face these challenges, political parties need to be reformed. The question is: Are political parties willing to reform? If they are willing, what has prevented them from reforming so far? If they are not willing, is it possible to force them to reform? Citizens all over the world face this question. This is not a simple question to answer. In a democracy, the final decision is made by leaders who represent political parties. People can replace them, but only by another set of party leaders. If all of

them do not wish to reform, how can anyone force them to change?

Let us look at some of the recent efforts and suggestions in our country to reform political parties and its leaders:

- 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. Now the law says that if any MLA or

Glossary

Defection: Changing party allegiance from the party on which a person got elected (to a legislative body) to a different party.