



Concept of the Week (PSIR Optional)

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Analysis of Party system in India

- Zoya Hasan underlines the critical role political parties have played in establishing democratic politics in India. Hassan underlines how party system in India does not fit into the mould of western liberal democratic parties or even the conventional theories in the West.
- The existence of multiple social cleavages and the variations across states has restrained a single type of political system from existing all across the country.
- According to Hasan, political parties display numerous contradictory features, which reveal the blending of different forms of modern organization and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions.
- Hassan points to some important features of the Indian party system including
 - One remarkable feature of political parties in India since the 1990s has been their tendency to move away from ideological frameworks to become 'pragmatic parties'. The ideological differences between parties are minimal, and hence they are likely to adopt the same mix of policies when in power.
 - Hasan points to change in India's social structure—from an elite-mass structure to one with a substantial middle class sandwiched between these two poles—and the parties' need to continue to cater to a range of groups.
 - Thirdly, very few parties have properly institutionalized the norms of recruitment and membership. Most parties are mass parties, and very few restrict their membership. Even the BJP does not restrict its membership to the majority community, notwithstanding the primacy it may give to the advocacy of their interests.
 - All mass parties tend to be highly centralized. Only the CPI(M) and the BJP can be loosely described as cadre parties dominated by groups of activists. Even these two parties, however, no longer fit the description of cadre parties.
 - The structure of decision-making in most parties is highly centralized. One major issue of concern is the widespread prevalence of the 'high command' culture.'
 - A remarkable feature of Indian politics is that parties have become a preserve of families and are subservient to one supreme leader.