UNIT 23 PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS

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23.1 INTRODUCTION

Political parties are essential for the effective working of modern democratic states. Professor Harold J. Laski had underlined the importance of parties when he wrote, “There is no alternative to party government, save dictatorship, in any state of modern size. Government requires leaders, leaders require not an incoherent mob behind them, but an organised following able to canalise the issues for an electorate with a free choice.” This statement correctly separates dictatorship, which is one person’s arbitrary rule, from democracy where people make free choice of their representatives to rule, on their behalf. A dictator like Hitler or Mussolini may also lead a party, but then it is a group of sycophants, not a competitive organisation. As Laski says government requires leaders, who in turn must be supported by organised people. A mob has no place in a democratic polity. The organised parties identify issues on which they seek popular verdict. Periodic elections provide opportunities to the parties to present these issues, and if supported by the people they become bases of governance by the representatives elected by the people.

Political parties have multifarious duties to perform. They are the most significant sub-actors who participate in and regulate the political process. They put up candidates, canvass support for them, and if voted to power they govern the state for the specific period. There are different types of party systems but the two-party system is generally found to be in a position to offer two clear alternatives before the electorate, and also provide stable government which is responsible, and an opposition which, in a responsible
manner, keeps the ruling party under constant vigil and check. Democratic process is not allowed to derail. However, many countries have multi-party systems with a large number of parties. These parties provide wider choice to the people, but often lead to instability of government. Political parties are certainly essential to the functioning of democracy. They perform different functions within and outside the realm of politics. Their leadership and policies, internal practices, and the patterns of interaction with other parties and institutions can have profound consequences for the system of governance. As Zoya Hasan says, a party is “a keystone political institution in representative regime”, and parties regularly fulfil three crucial functions. These are: nominating candidates for public offices, formulating and setting the agenda for public; and mobilising support for candidates and policies in an election. Other institutions also perform some of these functions, but as A.H. Somjee says, what distinguishes parties is their emphasis on linkage. Parties are seen, both by their members and by others, as agencies for forging links between citizens and policy-makers. Their important justification is in creating a substantive connection between the ruler and the ruled. But, Giovanni Sartori pointed out that it did not mean that party members are not self-seeking. “The power-seeking drives of politicians remain constant. Even if the party politician is motivated by crude self-interest, his behaviour must depart – if the constraints of the system are operative – from the motivation. Parties are instrumental to collective benefits, to an end that is not merely the private benefit of contestants. Parties link people to the government.”

In this unit you will study various aspects of parties and different types of party systems with their varying roles. Naturally, illustrations will be given from different countries while examining their parties and party systems.

### 23.2 DEFINITION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties are the most important agencies that participate in political processes in a modern state. A party may be defined as an organised group of people, having a clear ideology and based on certain well-defined policies and having clear objectives. A party has a definite leadership, and its ultimate goal is to gain political power and regulate political process by using the power acquired, normally through democratic elections. The above two sentences should enable you to understand the meaning and purposes of political parties. Edmund Burke had defined the political parties in 1770 thus: “Party is a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principles in which they are all agreed.” Professor Laski’s definition mentioned in last section explains the meaning of parties. These are big or small groups of people which are organised to establish their legitimate control over the government of the country, through the process of elections. Representative government cannot function without them.

Explaining the meaning of political parties, in the context of Great Britain, Herman Finer had said that, “The political parties are the two-way communications that bind 50 million people to the 630, who in Commons, exercise omnipotent power.” When Finer wrote this several decades back, the British population was around 50 million, and membership of House of Commons then was 630. There are now 659 members in the
Politics is the struggle for power, and in this struggle organised groups can surely be more effective than unorganised mobs. Some of the parties adopt revolutionary route, while most of them take to evolutionary process and constitutional means. The British responsible government had grown along with the evolution of political parties. It is in this context that Bagehot had said that, “Party government is the vital principle of representative government.” By way of contrast, Laski had opined that, “… nothing appears to us so definite a proof of dictatorship as when the dictator destroys, as he is logically driven to destroy, all political parties save his own.” The primary goal of the parties is to install its leaders in the government, and to ensure their continuation as long as possible. For this purpose, they adopt various methods of securing popular support, including public rallies, distribution of literature, use of media and even organising musical evenings.

Lord Bryce had stated that, “no free large country has been without them. No one has shown how representative government could be worked without them. They bring order out of chaos of a multitude of voters. If parties cause some evils, they avert and mitigate others.” Political parties may not be provided for in a country’s constitution, yet they shine on the political horizon of the state. Parties alone link the profile with the legislature and the executive. Actually the nature of any political system largely depends on the features of its party system. According to R. Bassett, “… the working of any system of representative government is in large measure determined by the nature of the political parties which separate it.” There are other eminent scholars who have said more or less the same thing in their own words. For example, R.M. Maclver defined a party as “ an association organised in support of some principle or policy which by constitutional means endeavours to make the determinant of government.” And, R.N. Gilchrist had written that, “A political party may … be defined as an organised group of citizens who profess to share the same political views and who, by acting as a political unit, try to control the government.” Here it must be emphasised that to be a successful party, its members must generally share the same political views, so that they may act as a single political unit.

23.2.1 Marxist Concept of Parties

According to the Marxist view parties represent classes. This situation can be remedied only with the successful completion of class-struggle resulting in the victory of proletariat. The party that represents the working people alone has the right to exist. The bourgeois parties do not represent true democratic process. Therefore, they must be eliminated. According to Lenin, a party (i.e. the Communist Party) is a well-organised group of chosen elite intellectuals and political activists. It is said to be, a chosen group of intellectuals in the sense that their intellectual knowledge of Marxism maintains purity of Marxian principles and ideology, and shows the correct path to the party. It is a chosen group of political activists in the sense that election processes and party training enables them to be totally loyal to the party and a cause of revolution. This definition of Lenin is obviously suitable for communist parties. Such a party exists permanently in the midst of workers’ movements. It propagates revolutionary ideas, and imparts training of the art of revolution. It assists the working classes in the achievements of its objectives. Prior to the revolution, during the bourgeois period, the party must play a
vital role. The party is required to be instrumental in the destruction of capitalist order, and establishment of dictatorship of the proletariat. According to Lenin, if the party has to play the role of vanguard of working people, then it is essential that it must have full knowledge of revolutionary ideas and rules. The objective of the party is to protect the interests of the proletariat. The Communist Party alone knows what is in the interest of working people. Lenin was of the opinion that the party’s position is similar to a military organisation in the proletariat’s struggle to secure power and in its maintenance. The party is vanguard of the working people which has a pivotal role in class consciousness, and is ever ready to make sacrifices in the interest of the proletariat. The Marxist ideology unites the working people and the party, and its organisation makes it all-powerful.

Communist parties enjoyed constitutional sanction in socialist countries. All other parties were abolished in these countries. There was practically no difference between the party and the government. This is true even today in the socialist countries ruled by the communist parties. The 1977 Constitution of the former Soviet Union described and analysed Lenin’s leadership for the success of the Great Revolution of 1917. The Constitution appreciated the role of the party in the revolution and subsequent governance. The 1982 Constitution of the People’s Republic of China declares the National People’s Congress, under the leadership of the Communist Party, as the highest organ of state power. It declares the party chief to be head of the armed forces of the country.

According to Marxist interpretation of political parties, the parties in capitalist countries represent the class interests. Thus, they are instruments of protection of different classes. They become source and leaders of class conflict. In the capitalist countries, the communist parties protect the working people against capitalist exploitation. They propagate revolutionary ideas, and prepare the proletariat for revolution. Once the revolution succeeds, the communist parties ensure its protection.

23.2.2 Contemporary Views about the Parties

Writing about the newly independent countries of Africa, Coleman had stated that political parties are groups of people, formally organised with a view to establish and maintain formal control over the policies and service-class of the actual, or likely to emerge, sovereign states. This may be done by these groups alone or in combination with other similar groups, through the process of democratic African parties as organised groups aimed at securing political power through elections. He had specified this role for already independent countries or those likely to become independent. Expressing agreement with this view James Jupp had said that any group of people, organised in some manner, with a view to establish control over political institutions of the given society may be described as a political party. Thus, a party requires to be a group of people, formally organised, and having the goal of fighting and winning elections to control the political institutions of the state. These institutions are organs of government, at various levels, and organised groups of people, we may add, should have clearly defined policies for governance.

Sigmund Neumann analysed the political parties on the basis of their ideologies. He drew some valuable conclusions. He opined that in view of sharp differences between
the democratic and authoritarian parties, it was impossible to give a single acceptable
definition. Nevertheless, he said that the purpose of setting up a party is uniformity
within, and distinction from other groups. Essentially, each party has partnership within
a specific organisation, and separation from others on the basis of its particular programme.
This definition is obviously true in case of two or multiparty democratic societies.

On the other hand, in a one-party system there is total absence of competition and
distinct policies and programmes. In fact, many people refuse to accept the parties, in
a single party system, as formal political parties. For them a party must have a second
part, or a competitor, which is missing in one-party states. Thus, in one-party system,
the party becomes totalitarian. Once it manages to acquire power, it retains it by one
means or the other. However, Neumann expressed the view that even in one party states
opposition does exist in one form or the other. Even if there is no opposition, the
authoritarian party always feels insecure due to fear of possible revolt or opposition.
According to Neumann, political party is representative of social interests which acts as
a bridge, a link, between the individual and the society. The success of democracy
depends on the efficient working of parties. Whether the government is parliamentary
or presidential democracy, it cannot succeed in the absence of parties. An unorganised
mob of people cannot govern the state. Its organised form is a political party. The first
President of the United States, George Washington had advocated partyless democracy.
But that could not materialise. Soon, two parties emerged in that country. As a matter
of fact, deeper study of formation of the U.S. Constitution would reveal that there were
two groups even in 1787. They were supporters and opponents of a federal system, and
became fore-runners of the two American parties. In India, for some time there was talk
of partyless democracy. But this view, expressed under the leadership of Jayaprakash
Narain, was more idealistic and hardly practical.

In his analysis of political parties, Maurice Duverger had said that the primary objective
of the parties is to acquire political power, or to share the exercise of such power.
Duverger wrote “… political parties have as their primary goal the conquest of power
or a share in its exercise. They try to win seats at elections, to name deputies and
ministers, and to take control of the government.” That is why, evolution of political
parties coincided with the growth of parliamentary system and electoral processes. The
origin of the parties may be traced in the practice of collection of election funds for
candidates and in the committees constituted to secure supporters and workers for the
victory of candidates. Gradually, members of the legislatures holding similar views and
beliefs in similar ideologies came together leading to the birth and growth of political
parties. While common ideology became the basis of parties in Britain and other European
democracies, that was not the case in the United States. The American political parties
do not have clearly distinct ideologies. These parties came into existence as an outcome
of the process of selection of presidential candidates, managing their campaign, raising
campaign funds and selecting candidates for numerous other electoral offices in the
United States. These parties are even now more concerned with electoral processes,
rather than ideologies.

Duverger is right in concluding that political parties have been established even in those
countries where elections are not held and where even legislatures do not exist. Parties
are found even in the countries which conduct pseudo-elections and have pseudo-parliaments. The so-called elections are held with only one candidate in each constituency, who invariably wins and consequently all members of the legislature belong to only one party. These are called one-party systems. Duverger argues that these ‘parties’ cannot genuinely be described as parties. The word ‘party’ is derived from the Latin terms ‘Pars’, which means part. Therefore, where there is only one party, it is not a part of the whole—meaning part of many parties. Nevertheless, parties are used in the dictatorial or authoritarian regimes to create the ‘farce’ of elections and ‘legislatures elected by the people’. Duverger says, “… the dictatorship uses the single party to establish the appearance of electoral and parliamentary process and give itself a democratic façade.”

Duverger held the view that in the second half of the twentieth century parties were usually associated with ideologies. Marx and Lenin had seen parties as representatives of conflicting classes, but several contemporary scholars like M.I. Ostrogoski, Roberto Michel and Maurice Duverger emphasise structure of political parties. These and other writers lay emphasis on what the parties do, not on what they are. It has become essential for comprehensive study of the parties to analyse their ideologies, social foundations, structures, organisations, and strategies. Political parties can be classified essentially on two bases. These are: structure of parties, and the party system. One cannot ignore other aspects and mutual relations of parties while analysing the structure of parties. From the point of view of structure, Duverger classified study of parties into two categories, which are internal organisation and external organisation.

### 23.3 CLASSIFICATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The classification of political parties that was presented by Maurice Duverger in 1951 became popular, and is now generally accepted. He had classified parties as (i) the elitist or traditional parties, and (ii) mass parties. Later a third category known as the intermediate type of parties was added. This classification is generally organisation-based categorisations.

#### 23.3.1 The Elitist Parties

The parties which are not cadre-based and do not have their support among the masses may be described as elitist or traditional parties. These parties do not throw their doors open to one and all. They are selective in admitting members. The elitist parties are normally divided into (a) the European Type and (b) the American Type.

1) **The European type**: Most of the political parties set up in the nineteenth century are elitist in nature. Many contemporary parties who follow the same approach also come in the elitist or traditional category. Whether these parties are liberal or conservative or progressive, they are against admitting anybody and everybody to their membership. These parties emphasise quality rather than numbers. They seek support of prominent and influential persons. The wealthy people occupy prominent place in these parties. The European parties have their bases in local committees, and have minimum control of central party organisation. However, unlike many parties of Continental Europe, the Liberal and Conservative Parties of nineteenth
century Britain had a powerful central organisation. Now in the twenty-first century central control is increasing in many parties of European and Asian countries also. Similarly, there is a clear distinction in the working of Britain and other European parties. Party whips have a major say in maintaining discipline in these parties inside the legislative bodies. Members of legislatures invariably vote according to the party whips, and often even speak according to wishes of party leadership. Those who defy the whips in Britain or India may be punished by the party which may even include expulsion of defiant members. Legislators in many other countries are free to vote as they wish. They do not care for party discipline. The disciplined parties may be described as ‘rigid’, whereas others can be called ‘flexible’ parties. It is generally believed that elitist parties are flexible while mass parties are rigid. However, elitist parties in Britain, being disciplined, are exceptions. But in case of large scale defiance of party whip, the leadership may look the other side, and take no action. For example, in February 2003 as many as 122 Labour Party members of House of Commons voted against a resolution that sought use of force against Iraq. As Prime Minister Tony Blair was keen on waging a war (in collaboration with the US) against Iraq, the vote of 122 MPs of his own party was massive defiance. Yet, no action was taken against such a large number of members. Since generally British parties are far more disciplined than in other countries, even though they are elitist parties, they may be described as ‘rigid elitist parties.’ The British parties are symbols of liberal democratic system. With the growth of mass parties, even British parties tried to expand their membership, but they could not succeed. In the modern electoral fights, large number of workers is required by the parties. Therefore, they admitted large number of members, yet they did not change their basic features.

2) **The American Type:** The parties in the United States are different from British parties in several respects. But, the prominent differences are (i) the nature of presidential government in a federal set-up, as against British parliamentary democracy in a unitary state and (ii) the U.S. parties have remained limited to the elite, away from the masses. The U.S. parties, as mentioned elsewhere, are essentially election-oriented. The system of party primaries was introduced in the early twentieth century. In the primaries, common citizens, who so desire, participate in the selection of candidates for various elected offices. This system has adversely affected the power of local level party bodies. The primaries have brought party organisation under the control of the people. At the same time highly expensive and complicated electoral process has compelled the parties to strengthen their organisations. The dual process of strengthened party structure and increasing influence of the people has moved the American parties closer to the masses, yet they have not become mass parties. American parties are led by professional politicians, many of whom are not democratically elected. Despite this, American parties have been able to establish better contacts with the masses than most of the European parties. An important feature of contemporary US parties is that their local committees have become very powerful; state committees enjoy lesser powers; and the central organisation is rather weak. Duverger had commented that, “discipline does not extend to the top of political hierarchy; although very powerful at the local level, it is weaker on state level, and practically non-existent at the national level.” Another
feature of American system is lack of party discipline among the members of the Congress. They speak and vote according to their individual decisions. In this respect they are closer to some of the multiparty democracies rather than the British parties.

23.3.2 Mass Parties

The system of parties based on common man’s support began emerging in the early twentieth century. British Labour Party had its origin in the working people’s movement. Later, the communists adopted the system of mass support. Several parties in the newly independent third world countries are generally mass parties. Some of the parties of European countries, like the Christian Democratic Parties and the Popular Republican Movement (P.R.M.) of France may also be placed in the category of mass parties.

1) Socialist Parties: Initially, masses were contacted to donate funds for the labour candidates. These candidates were considered revolutionaries, and industrialists and big business houses declined to give them any financial contribution. In fact these elements were quite opposed to these candidates. In Britain trade unions provided support to these candidates. Later they organised themselves as the Labour Party. The mass parties tried to enlarge their membership, and took contributions from their members. The mass parties preferred contributions from common men and women, rather than the rich business houses. These parties, therefore, did not develop into elitist parties.

The British Labour Party was described as the pioneer of the socialist parties the world over. Democratic socialist parties in several countries followed the British Labour Party. These parties believe in socialism to be brought about by the peaceful democratic means of parliamentary process. They believe in rule of law, rather than violence or revolutionary methods. They sought to abolish capitalism through legislative measures. But, with the commencement of rapid liberalisation in the decade of 1990s, the talk of destruction of capitalism suddenly gave way to adoption of a capitalist path even by democratic parties including the British Labour Party. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, Britain adopted the ‘New Labour’ as their socialist party.

From the Sociologists’ point of view, the socialist parties often face a struggle. They have strange type of conflict between two groups. One, members of the party who elect party leaders and establish party committees; and two, ordinary citizens who elect members of the parliament. Party members try to have their demands conceded as they are organised, and the ordinary voters are not. Socialist parties accept the superiority of the parliament. Therefore, they respect their members of parliament. On the other hand, legislature is ineffective in communist and fascist countries, as the real power is vested in the party concerned. Therefore, party leadership dominates over the members. Many countries in the world had or have socialist parties as important actors in the liberal democratic processes.

2) The Communist parties: The communist parties based on the ideology of Marx and Lenin seek close contacts with the masses. Initially, European communist parties
were organised on the pattern of socialist parties, but after 1924, they were reorganised on the directions of Communist International headquartered in Moscow. They followed the pattern of Soviet Communist Party. The communist parties everywhere are much better organised and disciplined as compared to other parties. These parties attract workers and peasants. But, unlike other parties, their local units are generally not regional in nature; they are organised at places of work. The primary units, or cells, maintain close contacts with the members in their workplaces. This makes it easier for them to convey the party directions and to have them implemented. Besides, the problems of members of a workplace are common. They enthuse greater unity.

Communist parties follow the principle of ‘democratic Centralism’, which implies democratic participation of members in party structure, but centralised decision-making and supervision. However, critics say that there is hardly any democracy in these parties, as all decisions are made by a handful of top leaders, who ensure strict obedience and discipline. At different levels in the party, discussion does take place, but directions of the leadership can never be violated or defied. All information about views expressed in these discussions is conveyed to the party leadership. Parties in the former Soviet Union and in East European countries followed this pattern, which is also observed in China, Vietnam and other communist countries.

No other party anywhere in the world, except perhaps the Fascist parties, is so rigidly based on ideology as the communist parties are. They try to strictly follow the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Chinese Communist Party had its own Maoist interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. But, in the post-Mao period the party has certainly deviated from the rigidity of Mao. Liberalisation and opening up of economy in China has altered the pattern, though it still swears by Marxist ideology. Communist parties in liberal democracies, as in India, still keep on insisting on the relevance of Marxism-Leninism.

3) The Fascist Parties: Fascism is totally opposed to communism. Unlike the communist parties, fascists advocate an all-powerful state. However, there is one similarity. Both believe in one-party rule, and in destroying the entire opposition. They both use force to implement their policies. The fascist parties support open competition and capitalism, but they, like the communists, blindly follow one leader. The disobedience to the leader may mean elimination of members. The Italian Fascist dictator, Mussolini had himself said that his party wanted to follow the communist techniques. Fascists talk of mass-base, but they use armed forces to inculcate military discipline and impart military training to the masses. The fascist youth are not only given military training, but they even wear military uniform, carry out daily disciplined exercises, and are often punished for defiance. The fascist leader takes the route of force to assume power, even as pretension of democratic process may be propagated. Fascism comes to power with the support of capitalists and big business houses. It is vehemently opposed to communism, and destructive of democracy. Violence and wars have been important part of fascist programme.
23.3.3 Intermediate Type Parties

According to Maurice Duverger, there is a third category of political parties that may be described as the intermediate type. These are different from both elitist and mass parties; yet they are closer to the mass parties. These are:

1) **Indirect Parties:** At times a number of big or small committees perform political functions leading to the setting up of a political party. This may be described as an indirect party. The birth of British Labour Party in 1906 was held in somewhat this situation. At that time, the Labour Party did not directly admit members of the party. It began functioning with the association of trade unions, cooperative societies, the Fabian Society and other intellectual bodies. These bodies selected candidates for election, collected funds and carried out their election campaign. Later socialist parties had similar origin in countries like Belgium, Norway and Sweden. In these countries these parties were born in 1940s. Earlier, the same pattern was followed in the formation of Christian Democratic parties in Belgium (1919) and France (1936). All these parties came into existence like traditional parties, but with the difference that their members came not from rich classes, but from amongst the workers and intellectuals.

2) **Parties in Developing Countries:** In the post-Second World War period a large number of political parties have come into existence in the third world developing countries, which Duverger prefers to describe as undeveloped countries. In some of the developing countries, the parties followed the pattern of the United Kingdom or the United States, while in some others one party was established following the Soviet example. In some of the African countries two parties each were formed in their own style. All of them have been described as intermediate type because they were yet to be fully organised as disciplined parties. In post-independent India many parties have been formed. Some of them could not last long. The Swatantra Party was a breakaway group of the right wing of the Congress, but it disappeared. Very large number of small parties or regional parties came into existence. But after a while two or more of them merged into one party, or formed their own party. In the first category are those who separated from the Congress, but after a while rejoined it. In the second category are those who got together as, for example, Janata Party in 1977. But, this experiment did not last long, and many groups emerged out of it. However, one such group, the Bharatiya Janata Party (essentially the new avatar of former Jana Sangh) has grown into a national party, and became leader of a ruling coalition of 1998. In India, there are parties that still follow the Soviet pattern of Communist Party.

There is one problem with this classification of Duverger. At times it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. In his own words, “In all mass parties, the leaders form a group quite distinct from the rest of the membership and from the party militants: this inner circle resembles some with the leadership of traditional parties submerged, as it were, in the heart of a mass organisation.”

23.3.4 Hitchner and Levine’s Classification

In their classification of political parties, Hitchner & Levine opined that normally people are associated with one party or the other on the basis of their personal views, and that
the party membership depends on several other socio-economic forces. Nevertheless, people do associate themselves with one party or the other, taking into account their class, economic interests, hereditary interests, and interests of a particular group. Hitchner and Levine classified contemporary political parties into three categories. These are pragmatic parties, doctrinal parties and interest parties.

Pragmatic parties are normally not committed to any particular ideology. Their policies are adjusted according to the requirements of situations. Most of these parties are usually influenced more by the leader of the day and less by the party ideology. The American parties, the British Conservative Party (and now even the Labour Party), Canada’s Conservatives, India’s Congress Party and Australia’s Conservative party all come in this category. It is believed that the parties are more pragmatic in the two party systems. This is so because they have to represent, from time to time, different socio-economic interests.

The parties that are committed to a particular ideology and believe in certain principles may be described as the doctrinal parties. The policies are often changed or adjusted according to domestic or international environmental changes, but their ideologies remain unaltered. Socialist parties may be included in this category. These, for example, are: the British Labour party, the Socialist parties of Belgium and France, United Socialist Party of Chile, or Komei of Japan. It is not that the left-oriented parties alone are doctrinal in nature. There can be even parties of the right in liberal democracies that fall in this category. For example, the Bharatiya Janata Party in India has a definite ideology, but since 1998 it made several adjustments in its policies and programmes to be able to adjust with its coalition partners. On another extreme, the Communist parties and the Fascists are totally doctrinal parties.

According to Hitchner and Levine, many of the parties in the multiparty system and smaller parties even in the two-party system generally represent particular interests. Thus, these may be described as ‘interest-oriented’ parties. When an interest group converts itself into a party, either temporarily or permanently, it comes in this category. Nature of interests may vary from prohibition-related, to those working for farmers’ interests, or those seeking interests of a caste or community. The Swiss Farmers’ Party, the German Greens, the Irish Nationalist Party of the UK are some such parties. In India, there are a number of such interest-oriented parties. These, for example, include the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the Peasants and Workers Party of Maharashtra, or even the Bahujan Samaj Party committed to the upliftment of the dalits.

The categorisation of different parties, as the one given above, may be very relevant and useful, yet the real nature of parties can be analysed only as actors with a particular party system. It is, therefore, necessary that one must examine the major party system, and then relate individual parties to one of these systems or the other.

### 23.4 PARTY SYSTEM

Some sort of stability comes to exist, on the bases of the long period of evolution in any country’s political parties in respect of their numbers, their internal structure, their ideologies, alliances and relations with the opposition. This gives rise to what may be
described as a party system. A comparative study of different party systems enables us to understand the political systems of the countries concerned. Several recent scholars have offered their classifications of party systems. There is lot of similarity between some of these classifications. Some of these are given below:

**Almond's** classification follows the following pattern:

1) Authoritarian Parties. One of its sub-categories is called totalitarian parties or dictatorships;
2) Dominant Non-Authoritarian (democratic) parties;
3) Competitive two parties; and
4) Competitive multi-parties.

**James Jupp** accepted the above classification generally, but modified it and gave his own version, which is as under:

1) Indistinct (not very clear) bi-partisan system;
2) Distinct bi-partisan system;
3) Multi-party system;
4) Dominant (one-party) party system;
5) Broad one-party system;
6) Narrow one-party system; and
7) Totalitarian system

According to Hitchner & Levine, modern party system may be classified as under:

1) Competitive two-party systems;
2) Competitive multi-party systems;
3) Dominant non-authoritarian systems;
4) Authoritarian party systems; and
5) States without party system.

**Duverger** broadly divided all the party systems into two. These are (i) pluralistic party systems and (ii) one-party systems and dominant party systems. In the first category Duverger included:

1) Multi-party systems; and
2) Two-party systems.

In the second category Duverger included (i) one-party systems; and (ii) the dominant party systems.

Keeping in view these four and some other classifications, we may broadly classify all the parties as: Two-party systems; Multi-party systems; and One-party systems. All the three are discussed below. A reference will be made to the one-party dominant system also.
23.4.1 Two-Party Systems

In modern democracies, there are two or more competitive parties. There are, obviously, at least two parties. None of these is more stable or powerful than the other on a permanent basis. If, however, one party remains in power for a very long period of time and the other continues to occupy opposition benches then it becomes a dominant party system; it ceases to be a competitive two-party system. The leaders and scholars of the United Kingdom and the United States consider ‘dualism’ as the best system. But, it has not become very popular. In the two-party system, there is constant competition between the two parties for securing majority of popular votes and seats in the legislature. Both the parties keep on occupying either the treasury benches or sit in the opposition, though this may not always be alternate. Besides, there may be one or more smaller parties also in the two-party system. But, the smaller parties neither come to power nor do they normally influence the outcome of elections, though at times smaller parties may associate themselves with one or the other major party. At times, a third emerging party may even compete with the major parties, as was done in 1970s by the Liberal-Democratic Party in Britain.

As mentioned above, James Jupp has talked about the indistinct two-party system. The most prominent example of this type is the United States. There are hardly any major differences in the policies of major American parties namely, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Both the parties have very loose discipline in the Congress. At the local level, it is even worse; there is practically no discipline. Normally, in the two Houses of Congress, members vote of their own choice; they hardly receive, or obey, the party line on bills and other issues. Consequently, the differences, if any, in the two parties is often blurred. Many members of both the parties may vote in favour of a motion, and many other members of the same two parties may vote against. As Duverger wrote, “Actually, there is a different majority and a different opposition for each issue. It does not follow party lines.” Duverger is of the opinion that the loose two-party system of the United States is close to the multi-party system rather than the two-party system of Great Britain. Their national organisation is flexible and central control is minimal. In the United States, the two parties take strong pro-leadership line only on the issue of presidential election. Hitchner and Levine go to the extent of saying that, “Actually, they are loose organisations of state parties that unite to some degree for presidential elections.” Election campaign is usually the concern of state units. There are many occasions when majority in the two Houses of Congress (or sometime in one House) is of a party other than the one to which the President belongs. There are party members, in both the parties, who sometimes take pride in campaigning against the party leadership. Party members, who are life long committed to their party, are, nevertheless, not committed to all the programmes of the party. Some other countries of the American continent like Canada, Colombia and Brazil also follow the US pattern of loose bi-party system.

The distinct two-party system, on the other hand, includes two parties with well-defined policies and programmes and clear organisations. Members of both the parties function within the party discipline, and obey the leadership. Great Britain is the best example of such a two-party system. Both have definite organisation, they remain within party
discipline, and members of Parliament ordinarily do not defy their leadership. However, occasionally some members may express reservations as happened in 1990 when many Conservative MPs vehemently criticised Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Europe policy. In a very serious defiance in 2003 over 120 Labour Party members of House of Commons voted against Prime Minister Tony Blair’s whip on his determination to support the United States in its war against Iraq. But no action could be taken by Blair against such a large number of his own partymen. But, these are exceptions. Normally, the party whips are always obeyed. If a member does not obey the party whip, he is expelled from the party, and his future is sealed. It is believed that the Conservative Party represents traditions and elite groups, whereas the Labour is representative of masses and of progress. Despite these differences, both the parties are pragmatic and moderate. Britain now has about half a dozen smaller parties also, but they do not play any important role. Besides the Liberal Democrats (with over 50 members), there are the Scottish National Party, the United Ulster Union and the Plaid Cymru. The smaller parties are capable of creating instability if they get sufficient popular support. In 2001 parliamentary elections, while the Liberal Democrats managed to get 52 seats, none of the smaller parties won more than 6 seats.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand also have two-party systems. The interest-based Labour Parties of Australia and New Zealand do not have narrow outlook. They are also pragmatic and moderate parties. While a number of parties emerged in West Germany after the Second World War, two major parties now constitute German party system. These are Christian Democratic Union, and Social Democratic Party. But, there indeed are a number of smaller parties, including the Greens, who are usually associated with one major party or the other. Some other countries like the Philippines have also adopted two-party systems. The two-party system is said to be a guarantee of success of democracy. Power shifts from one party to the other, and yet stability is maintained. One party rules in a responsible manner and the other offers constructive opposition. There is neither instability of multi-party system, nor authoritarian rule of one party.

23.4.2 Multi-Party Systems

There are several countries that have developed a system of having many parties. Technically, the existence of three or more big parties may be described as multi-party system. In Europe, France, Italy and Switzerland are some of the examples of this system. India has over 40 political parties, big or small, represented in the Lok Sabha. In a multi-party system, three, four or more parties may get together at any point of time to form coalition governments. Such governments generally adopt a common minimum programme for governance, as they do not have commitment to any one ideology. The coalition governments generally do not last long, but there can always be exceptions. In a general election, voters have a wide choice of candidates. Many of them may belong to smaller parties committed to regional or sectarian interests. The winning candidates may not necessarily secure even half of the total votes cast. In a multi-candidate election, the candidate getting largest number of votes is declared elected, whatever percentage of total votes this may be.

France was known for its instability of cabinets, on account of multi-party system, during the Third and Fourth Republics. During the 12-year period of Fourth Republic
(1946-58), France went through as many as 24 cabinets – the shortest being a one-day wonder. That was the reason why a new Constitution adopted in 1958 provided for a pattern of governance in which greater powers rest with the President, and the mechanism of cabinet is such that stability can be ensured even with a multi-party system. However, Italy is still known for frequent changes of government on account of multiplicity of parties. Switzerland has the distinction of having a multi-party system but a stable government. Swiss parties are essentially organised to protect interests of Cantons. The Federal Council, which is national executive, is elected by the legislature, Federal Assembly, for a fixed period of four years. It invariably includes representatives of four or five parties. Members of the Federal Council, once elected remain in office for four years, irrespective of changes in party position in the legislature.

The multi-party system of Italy has been divided between pro-Communist and anti-Communist alliances. However, even the parties of the left participate in the liberal democratic political process. Besides, the Christian Democratic Party and several smaller socialist groups constitute part of the Italian party system. The Turkish party system has six principal parties. As such this is yet another example of multi-party system. India has the distinction of having such a large number of parties that, for some time now, it is impossible for any single party to be able to win majority on its own. For almost 40 years after independence (with the exception of 1977-79 period), Congress Party dominated the Indian political scene. There were indeed several parties in post-independent India, but the Congress was mostly in power both at the Centre and in most of the States. Since early 1990s the position has changed. Several parties formed the United Front Governments in 1996 and 1997, with outside support of Congress and the CPI-M. The elections held in 1998, and again in 1999 threw up hung Parliament, and BJP-led several party coalitions came to power. The 24-party National Democratic Alliance Government led by Atal Behari Vajpayee provided unique stability for over 5 years, which is very uncommon for a coalition of so many parties. The NDA included parties of different hues.

The multi-party system may not be able to provide the stability that is a feature of two party system, yet the competitive nature of several parties enables efficient functioning of democratic government, with occasional hiccups.

### 23.4.3 One-Party System

One-party system implies the existence of only one party in a country. The countries committed to certain ideologies such as Marxism or Fascism normally do not allow the existence of any opposition party. In one-party states, there is, therefore, no opposition. Parties other than the ruling party are either constitutionally debarred, or they are crushed by the rulers. This system originated with the establishment of the rule of the Communist Party of the USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution. While the critics deplored the system as authoritarian rule of the Communist Party, the USSR claimed it to be the rule of the working classes. Mustafa Kemal Pasha's one-party rule in Turkey was claimed to be democratic, while Fascist Party in Italy (1922-43) and Hitler's Nazi rule in Germany (1933-45) were typical examples of the dictatorship of one man who led the only party permitted by him. All other parties were banned and crushed. Their leaders were thrown
in the jails or even executed. Several countries adopted a one-party rule after the Second World War. East European countries, such as Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary came under the rule of their communist parties. In China, Communist Party acquired complete power after the success of revolution in October 1949. Later, a one party communist regime was set up in North Korea. This example was followed later by Vietnam and Cuba. But, certain other countries adopted non-communist one-party regimes. This was done in China, Chad, Ivory Coast, Niger and Liberia in Africa. Many western writers refuse to describe one-party rule as a system, for there can be no party system until there are at least two competing parties.

The term one-party system was initially used after 1930 by certain Fascist writers. Prominent among them were Manoilesco and Marcel Deat. They tried to find similarity between Fascist/Nazi and Communist regimes. However, communist writers strongly opposed any such similarity. The western writers place all one-party systems in one category of non-democratic regimes. James Jupp has described three different forms of one-party rule. These are liberal one-party systems, narrow one-party regimes and authoritarian or dictatorial one-party regimes. In a liberal one-party rule there is internal democracy in the party, leadership is willing to listen to its criticism, and local governments enjoy certain amount of autonomy. Thus, this may be called democratic one-party system. In the rigid or narrow one-party rule the party is under absolute control of a leader, and there is no internal democracy. Elections are not permitted even for party units. The regimes set up as a result of military coups are also rigid one-party states. Actually the distinction between liberal and rigid one-party systems is more formal than real. The extent of internal democracy, if any, depends on the party leadership. The third form of one-party rule is simply authoritarian. The regimes of Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy and of Stalin in the Soviet Union were all described as dictatorial. The Baath Party regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq was also dubbed as dictatorship, where people had no rights or freedoms except to support the dictator and sing his praises. Several developing countries, who adopted the one-party systems, after decolonisation, gradually discarded it in favour of a multi-party democracy.

According to Maurice Duverger, there can be different forms of one-party regimes. Prior to the Second World War, there was strong discipline in the Fascist and Communist parties, whereas the only Turkish party, the Republican Party was closer to the traditional parties. Salazar’s Fascists in Portugal followed the pattern of nineteenth century liberals; it was different from Mussolini’s Fascist Party as it lacked militarily trained youth groups. Secondly, they are dictated by certain ideologies which generally support revolutionary methods, and even encourage violence. Nevertheless, there are major differences between Communist and Fascist Parties. While the former are based in the workers’ movements and seek to abolish private property, the latter have their main support base among the rich, wealthy and industrialists. Thirdly, there are differences in one-party systems on the basis of economic policies and level of development. It may emerge in backward societies as the former Russian empire was, or as Tanzania was. It may even develop in developed and democratic societies also, as in Eastern Europe in post-Second world war period. Besides, the role of a single party may vary. The communist parties become integral part of the state machinery as was the case in the former Soviet Union, or is the case in China today. The distinction between the party
and state is blurred. The Fascist Party, on the other hand was used only as an instrument of governance; it did not become part of the state apparatus. The fascists promote police state, whereas the communists aimed at the withering away of the state. This, however, may never happen.

23.5 ROLE AND EVALUATION OF PARTY SYSTEMS

Political parties are essential for the working of contemporary political processes. Parties, as explained above, are of different types, as are the party systems. The role of a party depends largely on the type of polity in which it functions. Modern democracies are party governments. Persons like Jayaprakash Narain had suggested that a partyless democracy would make for peace and stability. Parties, in their view cause conflict. However, these views may have some merit, but in today’s environment these opinions appear to be too idealistic or utopian.

The role of political parties in a parliamentary democracy is different from the presidential system. In the former the competitive parties formulate public opinion, select candidates and seek election to secure maximum number of seats in the Parliament, so that they are in a position to form their governments. The party or parties that fail to secure majority of seats sit in the opposition and offer constructive criticism. Two-party system is best suited for the efficient working of parliamentary democracy. But, there are many democracies, like India, where many competing parties offer varied choice to the voters. Normally, in a multi-party system no single party may secure a clear majority, but a number of parties enter into coalition to form the government; the others occupy the opposition benches. One-party system is normally found in totalitarian states. It consists of only one party that is often identified with the state. There is lack of opposition which makes the rulers authoritarian. In the presidential system of democracy, parties have relevance only at the time of presidential election. They do not count in the formation of government. In the United States, the directly elected President is neither responsible to, nor removable by, the Congress. Members of the Congress vote freely without affecting the fortunes of the executive. France and Sri Lanka have combined the parliamentary system with a powerful executive President. This has limited the role of parties in these countries.

23.5.1 Evaluation of Party Systems

The two-party system has several merits. It ensures stability of government; it is relatively easy for the Prime Minister to form the Cabinet. Once a person is chosen as leader of the majority party he selects the ministers and entrusts portfolios to them. In a disciplined two-party system the task of the Prime Minister is easy, unless there is a weak leader and unless the party is faction-ridden. In that case, the Prime Minister has to appease various factional leaders. Secondly, there is no room for violence or revolution to bring about change of government. People can easily withdraw their mandate at the time of next election. Even in the presidential system, the choice of the President is easily made by the people, without resorting to violent means. The task of voters is easy in a two-party system, as they have only two alternatives to make their choice. Since there is a strong opposition, its voice is carefully heard by the ruling party, and its views taken
into serious consideration. The ruling party remains vigilant, and the opposition knows that it may be called upon to form the next government. Therefore, it makes only workable suggestions.

The critics of the two-party system have their arguments. They say that this system presents just two alternatives to the voters. Many voters can hold views which are not represented by the two parties. They do not get opportunity to have their true representation in the legislature. Secondly, the majority party can have any legislation adopted by the legislature on the basis of its absolute majority. The opposition does get an opportunity to express its views, but the power of the Parliament is, in effect, limited. Thirdly, members of legislature merely carry out the wishes of party whips, and their initiative is often checked.

The multi-party system is indeed more democratic, as it offers wider choice to the people. Different sections of people find their voice through their representatives, who may or may not ensure proportional representation. In most of the cases, coalition governments are formed which are based on compromises on the policies of various parties. Consequently, ideology often goes into the background. On the merit side, it may be noted that it is more democratic, and none of the parties can become arbitrary or authoritarian. Secondly, the respect of legislature is enhanced as its decisions are taken after due deliberations on the floor of the House; they are not arrived at in the party caucus and then rubber stamped by the legislature. This system ensures representation to all minorities, and also protects their interests. However, on the negative side, the multi-party system breeds indiscipline, and leads to frequent formation and collapse of coalition governments. The leadership has to make compromises, and the government often suffers from indecision. Instability and lack of discipline are major shortcomings of the multi-party system. This system is most unsuitable for crises, when quick decisions are required, but cannot be taken because of the involvement of several parties, ideologies and leaders.

The critics of one-party system find it totalitarian in which wishes of the people are suppressed. Its supporters, on the other hand, hail it as protector of national interests; as quick decisions can be taken, time is not wasted and even unnecessary expenditure is avoided. The Marxists consider parties as representatives of class interests, and if there are several parties, they lead to class conflicts, a situation in which national interest is sacrificed. One party, according to the Marxists, represents the working people and protects them against exploitation. Fascists regard their party as the instrument of governance assisting the leader, so that prestige of the nation is enhanced. Despite these merits, the one-party system is criticised for denying the people an opportunity to have their free will represented. The people have to obey the party and its leader blindly. The system is not only undemocratic, but also destroys the initiative of the people. Western writers, such as Finer are of the opinion that an authoritarian one party should not even be called a party, because rather than being a part of the system, it is the whole, arbitrary and totalitarian political group. Such parties assume all powers, and destroy the leadership qualities of the masses.

An objective analysis of the good and bad points of different party systems leads us to conclude that there can be no system better than well-organised, well-disciplined two party system. It is democratic and ensures stability of government.
23.6 SUMMARY

Political parties are essential for the working of modern democratic states. Professor Laski had correctly opined that the only alternative of party government was dictatorship. In this Unit an attempt has been made to define political parties, examine their nature and relevance. To quote Edmund Burke, “Party is a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principles in which they are all agreed.” In effect, the parties are a two-way communication between the electorate and their representatives.

There are different types of political parties. These include elitist parties which do not throw their doors open to anybody and everybody; they are selective in their membership; and are often guided and led by elitist groups. The mass parties, on the other hand, have their support among the masses; many of them are cadre-based; and are usually committed to a rigid ideology like the Marxist-Leninist ideology, or Fascist or Nazi programmes. The mass parties have a strong leader to lead them. There are also some intermediate type parties, which emerge from groups that may have initially come into existence as interest groups for a section of the community.

Parties are normally studied as constituents of a certain system. There are essentially three such systems namely, two-party systems, the multi-party systems and the one-party systems. British and American parties are of two-party system, though even when there are two major parties as in the United States and Britain, some smaller parties also exist, but they seldom pose a threat to the stability of government which is the hallmark of a two-party system. However, there is a difference in the role of parties in the UK and USA on the basis of the system of government. In the British parliamentary system a party that gets majority of seats in the legislature can have any laws enacted and provides stability to the government. In the US presidential system, the role of parties is limited to the election of the President and the Congress. The tenure of the President being free from the legislature, parties are less assertive and much less disciplined in the US than in the British system.

India, France, Italy, Turkey, Switzerland and many other countries have large number of parties, known as the multi-party system. While the voters have wider choice in the elections, the governments are normally made up of coalition of several parties, subordinating policies and ideologies, and leading to frequent changes of coalitions resulting in instability of government.

Many countries, like China, have a one-party system. Earlier, all the communist party ruled countries like the former USSR, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany etc allowed only the Communist Party. All other parties were banned. The ruling party in such a system is an integral part of the state apparatus; there is little distinction between the party and government. Fascist and Nazi regimes also had a one-party system, based on strict discipline and total obedience to the leader. After decolonisation, a number of African countries, like Tanzania, also experimented with one-party system, though these parties were not of Communist or Fascist type. While single party provides complete stability, it denies freedom to the people to elect their own government. As such it is deemed to be an undemocratic system.
23.7 EXERCISES

1) What, according to Harold J. Laski, is the importance of political parties?
2) Define political parties. What is the Marxist concept of political parties?
3) What is the difference between the European and American type of parties?
4) Explain the nature of socialist and communist parties.
5) Write a note on parties in the developing countries.
6) Describe the features and types of two-party system.
7) Explain the nature of multi-party systems.
8) Distinguish between a dominant party system and one-party system. Discuss the features of one-party system.
9) Attempt comparative evaluation of two and multi-party systems.
10) What is the role of the political parties in democratic polity?