UNIT 1 ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the former Block, you have gained some knowledge on institutions which are the sets of formal and informal rules that shape people’s perception,
their needs and roles. The category of ‘civil society’ also empowers women’s political agency. You have understood the challenges and the strengths before the women’s movement. You also learn the model of equality under the Indian Constitution and the manner in which the courts have expanded the notion of substantive equality while adjudicating over the challenges. This Unit explains the electoral laws, systems, and processes. It also explains the political parties’ and their functions and evolution. We will look at political representation in national and state elections, and women’s participation and the question of women’s representation, why and how it is being hindered.

### 1.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss electoral laws, systems, and processes in place;
- Explain how political parties functions—their evolution and ideological base;
- Describe the representation in national and state elections, and women’s participation; and
- Analyse limitations of electoral systems and factors inhibiting women’s representation in political parties.

### 1.3 BACKGROUND

Since independence in 1947, constitutional parliamentary democracy has been the central political mechanism governing India. The parliamentary system is committed to hold regular, free and fair elections which give opportunity to citizens in the country to choose their representatives and thus contribute in the composition of the government. Elections are conducted at various levels of the federal structure in India. These include elections to elect members of the Lok Sabha (Lower House or House of People), Rajya Sabha (Upper House or Council of States), State Legislative Assemblies (Vidhan Sabhas or Lower House of the People in the States) Legislative Councils (Vidhan Parishad or Upper House of People of States) and of, the President and Vice-President of India. Elections are also held for local bodies such as municipalities, municipal corporations and Panchayati Raj. One level of election is related to other level of election. As a whole, this constitutes a network of election politics in contemporary India and is the basic framework of India’s democratic regime.

Political parties are an established part of modern mass democracy, and the conduct of elections in India is largely dependent on the behaviour of political parties. Although many candidates for Indian elections are
independent, the winning candidates for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections usually stand as members of political parties, and opinion polls suggest that people tend to vote for a party rather than a particular candidate. Parties offer candidates organisational support, and by offering a broader election campaigns, looking at the record of the incumbent government and putting forward alternative proposals for government, help voters make a choice about how the government is run. India has a multi-party system, where there are a number of national as well as regional parties. Some of them have their origin traced back to pre-independence era and the others are formed more recently as an outcome of the evolution of the Indian political system.

1.4 ELECTORAL LAWS, SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Elections are conducted according to the constitutional provisions, supplemented by laws made by Parliament. The major laws are Representation of the People Act, 1950, which mainly deals with the preparation and revision of electoral rolls, and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which deals, in detail, with all aspects of conduct of elections and post election disputes. The Supreme Court of India has held that where the enacted laws are silent or make insufficient provision to deal with a given situation in the conduct of elections, the Election Commission has the residuary powers under the Constitution to act in an appropriate manner (Gill, 2009).

Elections for the Lok Sabha and every State Legislative Assembly have to take place every five years, unless called earlier. The President can dissolve Lok Sabha and call a general election before five years, if the government can no longer command the confidence of the Lok Sabha, and if there is no alternative government available to take over. So far, sixteen general elections have been held in India, with the last one (sixteen) taken place in 2014. Governments have found it increasingly difficult to stay in power for the full term of a Lok Sabha in recent times, and so elections have often been held before the five-year limit has been reached. However, the current Government, of Bharatiya Janta Party formed its majority in the country.

1.4.1 Who Can Vote?

Elections in India are based on the principle of universal adult suffrage that any citizen over the age of 18 (before 1989 the age limit was 21) can vote in an election. During the period of British rule, women were enfranchised on the same terms as men under the Government of India Act of 1935; following independence, the Indian Constitution, adopted in 1949 and functional in 1950, established adult suffrage. The right to vote is irrespective of caste, creed, religion or gender. Only those who are deemed unsound of
mind, and people convicted of certain criminal offences are not allowed to vote. There has been a general increase in the number of people voting in Indian elections. In 1952 61.16 per cent of the electorate voted. By 2009, the turnout for the general election was 58.93 per cent. There have been even more rapid increases in the turnout of women and members of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who had tended to be far less likely to participate in elections, and voting for these groups has moved closer to the national average.

1.4.2 Who Can Stand for Election

Any Indian citizen, man or woman, who is registered as a voter and is over 25 years of age, is allowed to contest elections to the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assemblies. For the Rajya Sabha the age limit is 30 years. Nominations must be supported at least by one registered elector of the constituency, in the case of a candidate sponsored by a registered Party and by ten registered electors from the constituency in the case of other candidates. Returning Officers, appointed by the Election Commission, are put in charge to receive nominations of candidates in each constituency, and oversee the formalities of the election.

1.5 ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Election Commission of India is the highest constitutional authority to conduct elections in India. The power of superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for conducting all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every state and also of the election to the office of the President and the Vice-President are vested with this constitutional authority. The Commission also has advisory jurisdiction in the matter of post election disqualification of sitting members of Parliament and State Legislatures. Further, the cases of persons found guilty of corrupt practices at elections which are decided by the Supreme Court and High Courts are also referred to the Commission for its opinion. The opinion of the Commission in all such matters is binding on the President or, as the case may be, the Governor to whom such opinion is tendered.

The Election Commission is a three-member body (originally, the commission had only a Chief Election Commissioner. From 1 October 1993, the Election Commission became a three-member body), consisting of the Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners, appointed by the President of India. All Election Commissioners have equal say in the decision making of the Commission. The Commission, from time to time, delegates some of its executive functions to its officers in its Secretariat. The Secretariat of the Commission has an independent budget, which is finalized directly in consultation between the Commission and the Finance Ministry of the Union Government.
At the State level, the election work is supervised, subject to overall superintendence, direction and control of the Commission, by the Chief Electoral Officer of the State, who is appointed by the Commission from amongst senior civil servants proposed by the concerned State Government.

1.6 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Parliament is the supreme legislative body in India. It is bicameral with a lower house called as House of People or Lok Sabha, and an upper house called as Council of States or Rajya Sabha.

1.6.1 Lok Sabha Election

Under the constitution of India, the total number of elected members of the Lok Sabha shall not exceed 550. Currently, it consists of 543 elected members, who are chose directly from single member territorial Parliamentary constituencies, that is to say, each constituency elects one member to the Lok Sabha. Thus, the whole of the country is divided into 543 territorial Parliamentary Constituencies. The Constitution also provides for nomination, by the President, of two members belonging to the Anglo-Indian community, if that community is not adequately represented in the Lok Sabha. Elections to the Lok Sabha (and also to Vidhan Sabhas) are carried out using a first-past-the-post electoral system. The country is divided into different geographical areas, known as the constituencies. Different political parties contest the election, though there is no ban on independent candidates for contesting the election. During election, different political parties put up their candidates and people can cast one vote each for a candidate of their own choice, to elect their representatives. The candidate, who gets the maximum number of votes, wins the election and is elected.

1.6.2 Rajya Sabha Election

The members of the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly, rather than by the citizens at large. Rajya Sabha members are elected by each State Vidhan Sabha using the single transferable vote system. Unlike most federal systems, the number of members returned by each State is roughly in proportion to their population. At present, there are 233 members of the Rajya Sabha elected by the Vidhan Sabhas, and there are also twelve members nominated by the President as representatives of literature, science, art and social services. Rajya Sabha members can serve for six years, and elections are staggered, with one third of the assembly being elected every 2 years.
Check Your Progress:

Reflect your views on electoral Laws, systems and processes

Describe the process of Lok Sabha Election.
1.7 ELECTIONS TO STATE LEGISLATURES

Being a federal country that India is, the Constitution gives the States and Union Territories significant control over their own government. The Vidhan Sabhas (Legislative Assemblies) are directly elected bodies set up to carry out the administration of the government in the 25 States of India. In five States, there is a bicameral organization of legislatures, with both an Upper and Lower House (Vidhan Parishad or Legislative Council and Vidhan Sabha or Legislative Assembly). Two of the seven Union Territories, viz., the National Capital Territory of Delhi and Pondicherry, have also Legislative Assemblies.

Elections to the Vidhan Sabhas are carried out in the same manner as for the Lok Sabha election, with the States and Union Territories divided into single-member Assembly constituencies, and the first-past-the-post electoral system used. The Assemblies range in size, according to population. At present there are about 4000 members in the Legislative Assemblies. The largest Vidhan Sabha is for Uttar Pradesh, with 425 members; the smallest Pondicherry, with 30 members.

Vidhan Parishads consist of representatives chosen by the members of the Vidhan Sabhas and local authorities, and also by graduates and teachers in the State having such Parishads. The Governor of the State also nominates certain members to give representation to art, science, literature, social service and co-operative movement. The elections to these Parishads are held under the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote.

1.8 CONSTITUENCIES AND RESERVATION OF SEATS

The country has been divided into 543 Parliamentary Constituencies, each of which returns one MP to the Lok Sabha, the lower House of Parliament. The size and shape of the parliamentary constituencies are determined by an independent Delimitation Commission, which aims to create constituencies which have roughly the same population, subject to geographical considerations and the boundaries of the States and administrative areas.

There are also provisions to ensure the representation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas, with reserved constituencies where only candidates from these communities can stand for election. The number of these reserved seats is meant to be approximately in proportion to the number of people from scheduled castes or scheduled tribes in each State. There are currently 84 seats reserved for the scheduled castes and 47 reserved for the scheduled tribes in the Lok Sabha. Significantly, there is no reservation for women in the Parliamentary and Vidhan Sabha elections, despite the fact that women are underrepresented and in spite of
nearly constituting half of the country’s population. An attempt to reserve one-third of the seats for women candidates was made with the successful passage of the Women’s Reservation (the 108th Constitutional Amendment) Bill in the Rajya Sabha on March 8, 2010. However, its passage from Lok Sabha still remains a stiff challenge.

1.9 ELECTORAL PROCESS

The electoral process in India takes at least a couple of months for state assembly elections with the duration increasing further for the General Elections. Publishing of Electoral Rolls is a key process that happens before the elections and is vital for the conduct of elections. Though the Schedule for Holding the Election is announced by the Election Commission of India well in advance, the actual process begins by a formal declaration, i.e., Notification, by the Election Commission calling upon a constituency to elect its representative. The Filling of the Nomination by those desiring to contest elections follows this. Candidates are given a week to put forward their nominations. The day immediately after the nomination is fixed for the Scrutiny of Nominations by the Returning Officer of the constituency concerned and if the nomination is not found to be in order it can be rejected after a summary hearing. This is followed by Withdrawal of Candidates, if any, from the contest within two days from the date of scrutiny. The next stage of election before the voting takes place is that of Campaigning. This is the time when the political parties put forward their candidate and arguments with which they hope to persuade people to vote for their candidates and parties.

The official campaign lasts at least two weeks from the drawing up of the list of nominated candidates, and officially ends 48 hours before polling closes. During the election campaign, the political parties and contesting candidates are expected to abide by a Model Code of Conduct evolved by the Election Commission based on a consensus among political parties. The model code lays down broad guidelines as to how the political parties and candidates should conduct themselves during the election campaign. It is intended to maintain the election campaign on healthy lines, avoid clashes and conflicts between political parties or their supporters and to ensure peace and order during the campaign period and thereafter, until the results are declared. Once an election has been called, parties issue Manifestos detailing the programmes they wish to implement if elected to government, the strengths of their leaders, and the failures of opposing parties and their leaders. Slogans are used to popularise and identify parties and issues, and pamphlets and posters distributed to the electorate. Rallies and meetings where the candidates try to persuade, cajole and enthusesupporters, and denigrate opponents, are held throughout the constituencies.
Of late, the Election Commission had granted all the recognized National and State parties, free access to the state owned electronic media, the All India Radio (AIR) and the Doordarshan to do their campaigning. The total free time is fixed by the Election Commission, which is allotted to all the political parties keeping in view, their performance during the last election in the state. However, this does not mean that political parties do not spend anything on their election campaign. The political parties and the candidates contesting election spend large sums of money on their election campaign, but there is a legal limit on how much a candidate can spend on his/her election campaign. The final stage of election is **Polling**. With regard to polling, the earlier practice had been to have single day polling, but the recent practice has been to opt for phased polling in which polling takes place on more than one day with a gap of couple of days between the two days of polling. This facilitates the movement of security forces from one place to another, which is engaged in managing the law and order situation during the polling.

If a duly nominated candidate belonging to a recognized party dies at any time after the last date of nomination and before the commencement of polling, the Election Commission orders **Countermanding of Elections**. This is not just a postponement of polling. The entire election process, beginning from nominations is initiated afresh in the concerned constituency. On the other hand, if at the time of polling, a booth is captured by some anti-social elements or polling is disturbed by violence of any kind, the Election Commission may order holding of **Re-Poll** in either the entire constituency or particular booths.

### 1.10 DRAWBACKS OF INDIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

There has been universal appreciation of the Indian electoral system. People have hailed the manner in which elections have been conducted in India. However, there are weaknesses in the system. It has been seen that in spite of the efforts of the Election Commission to ensure free and fair election, there are certain drawbacks in our electoral system. The **role of unaccounted money** in elections has become a serious problem. The political parties collect funds from companies and business houses, and then use this money to influence the voter to vote in their favour. The business contributions are mostly in cash and are not accounted. Many other corrupt practices are also adopted during election such as bribing, intimidation of voters, providing transport and conveyance of voters to and fro the polling stations. The reports of liquor being distributed in poor areas are frequent during election. Earlier criminals used to support the candidates by intimidating the voters at a gunpoint to vote according to their direction.
Now they themselves have come out openly by contesting the elections leading to criminalization of politics. On the other hand, in a number of cases political parties are giving tickets on the consideration whether the candidate can muster the support of numerically larger castes and communities and possesses enough resources. Even the electorates often vote on caste and communal lines. Communal loyalties of the voters are also used at the time of propaganda campaign. Not all political parties have equal opportunity in respect of access to resources. The party in power is always in advantageous position then the opposition parties. There is widespread allegation that the party in power accomplishes misuse of government machinery. Thus our electoral system, from the selection of candidates, to the manner in which funds are raised and spent in election campaigns, is in dire need of significant changes. The Election Commission has made changes in several areas to respond to some of the concerns.

**Political parties and elections**

As any other democracy, political parties represent different sections among the Indian society and regions, and their core values play a major role in the politics of India. India has a multi-party system, where there are a number of national as well as regional parties. The representatives of the political parties who have been elected through the elections run both the executive branch and the legislative branch of the government. Through the electoral process, the people of India choose which majority in the lower house a government can be formed by that party or the coalition. Significantly, elections to local bodies (panchayats and municipalities) are not fought on party basis.

**1.11 NATIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA**

National parties are political parties which have pan-India influence and participate in different elections all over the country. It is not necessary that a national party will have equal strength in all the states; it varies from State to State. A party is recognized as a national party by the Election Commission on the basis of a formula. The political party which has secured not less than four percent of the total valid votes in the previous general elections at least in four States is given the status of a national party. Therefore, the number of national parties has been changing. In the year 2014, Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, Bahujan Samaj Party, Nationalist Congress Party, and Rashtriya Janata Dal were national parties.

All the tables and diagrams are drawn from the given sources:

## Major Political Parties in Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>No. of Seats</th>
<th>Turnout (%)</th>
<th>Indian National Congress</th>
<th>Jana Sangh/BJP</th>
<th>Communist Party of India</th>
<th>Communist Party of India (M)</th>
<th>Janata Party/BLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats (%)</td>
<td>polled (%)</td>
<td>Seats Obtained</td>
<td>Women Elected</td>
<td>Seats (%)</td>
<td>polled (%)</td>
<td>Seats Obtained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>493</td>
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<td>47.8</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>04</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>494</td>
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<td>44.7</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>542</td>
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<td>34.5</td>
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<td>06</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>353</td>
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<td>1984</td>
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<td>206</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>116</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India, [http://eci.nic.in/eci/eci.html](http://eci.nic.in/eci/eci.html)
1.11.1 Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)

Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed as a separate party in 1980 after the fall of the Janata Dal’s government (headed by Morarji Desai) in 1979. BJP is the successor of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS), which merged itself into the Janata Party for the General Election in 1977 (first general election after the emergency era) in which Janata Party swept the General Elections and Congress suffered a heavy defeat and was out of power for the first time since independent Indian parliamentary system came into being in 1950.

![Votes Polled (%) by Jan Sangh/BJP (1952-2009)](image)

**Fig. 1.1:** Votes polled (%) by Jan Sangh/BJP

*Source:* Election commission of India website.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first president of the BJP. Since its formation, BJP has shown a progression in popularity and now BJP is one of the major political forces of India. BJP won just two seats in 1980 general elections and emerged as the single largest party on Hindutva plank for the first time in the 1996 General election. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was sworn in as the prime minister. However, the BJP led government could not prove the majority in the Lok Sabha and Vajpayee was obliged to resign.

![BJP/Jan Sangh in Lok Sabha, 1957-2009](image)

**Fig. 1.2:** BJP/Jan Sangh in Lok Sabha

*Source:* Election commission of India website.
BJP was able to form the Government in alliance (BJP lead alliance NDA) with other political parties during the 1998 and 1999 General Elections. After the 1999 General Elections, BJP’s alliance (NDA) was able to provide a stable government for a full parliamentary term of 5 years. In 2004 general elections, BJP led alliance (NDA) could not win a clear majority and BJP’s independent tally of parliamentary seats were 138. In 2009 General Elections again, BJP and its allies could not perform well and BJP managed to get only 116 seats. On December 2009, Nitin Gadkari took over as the president of BJP, succeeding Rajnath Singh after that Amit Shah became the president of BJP. In 2014 general elections BJP contested 282 seats, it emerged as the single majority party with the leadership of Narendra Damodardas Modi who is current Prime Minister of India.

1.11.2 Indian National Congress (INC)

Indian National Congress (INC) is one of the oldest parties in India. Its membership base makes it the world’s largest political party. It is also known as Congress party. It was founded in 1885 as an organization to lead the independence movement of India. Various congress leaders in the pre-independence era had played a pivotal role in the Indian Independence Movement. In the history of independent India, Congress party has been the dominant force.

![Votes Polled (%) by INC (1952-2009)](image)

**Fig. 1.3: Votes polled (%) by INC**

*Source: Election commission of India website.*

After independence, INC was established as a major political party and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of INC, was elected as the first Prime Minister of India in 1952. Under his leadership, INC won other two elections in succession (1957 and 1962). After Pt. Nehru’s death in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri took over as the leader of congress party and after his death; Indira Gandhi became the next president of Congress in 1966. In
1967, INC was split into two parties. One faction of which was led by Indira Gandhi and the other was led by K. Kamaraj. Later the faction led by Gandhi was recognized as INC. In 1975, Indira Gandhi declared a National Emergency in the face of growing opposition. It curtailed the power of courts and unleashed a police state. After the emergency was lifted in 1977, more congress factions were formed and joined hand with other political parties. The faction which remained with Indira Gandhi was called Congress (I). In 1977 General Elections, Janata Party won by a substantial margin and formed the government. The Janata Party coalition government could not stay for long due to infighting and next General Elections were held in 1980, in which Congress party won the elections with a huge margin and returned to power.

![Congress party in Lok Sabha Elections, 1967-2009](image)

**Fig. 1.4: Congress party in Lok Sabha Election**

*Source: Election commission of India website.*

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, Rajiv Gandhi took over and led the Congress party to a large victory in 1984. In the next General Election 1989, *Indian National Congress* was defeated and in 1991 election campaign, Rajiv Gandhi was also assassinated and P V Narasimha Rao took over as the party president. In the last three decades, the INC has seen huge up and downs. General elections in 1999 saw the INC tally to an all time low. Since then, it has tried to reinvent itself as one of the major political forces in Indian Politics. In the 2009 General Elections, INC performed well and won 206 seats.

### 1.11.3 Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

![Votes Polled (%) by BSP, 1998-2009](image)

*Source: Election commission of India website.*
Electoral Systems and Political Parties

Fig. 1.5: Bahujan Samaj Party

Source: Election commission of India website.

Founded in 1984 by Kanshi Ram, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has evolved into a fast growing political force in the Indian politics. The BSP champions the cause of those sections which belong to low castes, deprived groups and minorities. In fact, these sections of Indian society (the Bahujan Samaj) form the majority of the Indian population. The BSP believes that this ‘samaj’ should be freed from the exploitation of the upper castes by forming their own government. The BSP acquired the status of a national party in 1996. BSP’s influence lies in states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. In 1995 and 1997, BSP was a partner in the coalition governments in Uttar Pradesh. In the UP state assembly election in May 2007, BSP emerged as a single majority party and formed government on its own, with President Mayawati taking position as Chief Minister. In the 2009 General Elections, BSP did marginally better than 2004 General Elections by winning 21 seats.

1.11.4 Communist Party of India (CPI)

Source: Election commission of India website.
Next to the Congress, the Communist Party of India (CPI) is the oldest in India. Apart from its presence in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura, CPI has its pockets of influence in states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Orissa, Pondicherry, Punjab, etc. also. The communist movement began in the early twenties and the Communist Party was founded in 1925. The communists participated in the national movement, though often they had serious differences with the Congress. The communists assert that people should be economically equal and society should not be divided into classes of rich and poor. Workers, peasants and other toiling people who do most of the productive work for society, should be given due recognition and power. The communists were the main opposition in the Lok Sabha throughout the Nehru Era. In the first Lok Sabha they had 26 members, in the second and the third Lok Sabha; they had 27 and 29 members, respectively. In 1957, the CPI won absolute majority in the Kerala Assembly and formed the first Communist government in India. In the early sixties, especially after the Chinese aggression of 1962, there were serious differences among the members of the Communist Party. As a result, the party split into two. Those who broke away from CPI formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist), also called CPM, in 1964.

CPi is a member of the Left Front also, which supported the UPA government (post 2004 elections) from outside (without participating in it), but withdrew support on the basis of difference of opinion on several issues.

1.11.5 Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPM)

The CPM has its strong base in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. It has registered its presence in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra, Orissa and Punjab as well. In the first general election, CPM contested 59 seats out of which it won 19 seats, with a national vote percentage of 4.28. CPM
Electoral Systems and Political Parties

performed poorly in the General Elections of 2009 and was reduced to a level of 16 from its earlier tally of 43 in 2004 elections. Prakash Karat is the current General Secretary of CPM.

Check Your Progress:

*Discus the role of national parties in India.*
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Do you think the Indian electoral system has certain drawbacks, give suitable examples?

1.12 REGIONAL PARTIES IN INDIA

Regional or State parties are political parties which, participate in different elections but only within specific region or State(s). For example, Aam Adami Party, Shiv Sena participates mainly in Maharashtra, Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Akali Dal in Punjab, and Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) in Tamil Nadu and there are other such regional parties. A regional party may gain a majority and rule a particular state. If a party represents more than four states then such parties are considered as national parties.

1.12.1 All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

DMK and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)AIADMK has strong presence in Tamil Nadu and is one of the major political parties of Tamil Nadu state. AIADMK was founded by then celebrity film star, M G Ramachandran (MGR) in 1972 as a breakaway faction from DMK. In 1977, AIADMK came to power ousting DMK from power. They won the 1980 elections despite their poor performance and retained power until 1987. In the post MGR era,
initially there was some crisis about the leadership, later J Jayalalitha took over the party in 1991 and the crisis abated as they won the elections comfortably in 1992. They lost the next state elections to DMK in 1997 and won again in 2002. In the 2004 General Election, AIADMK lost all the seats in Tamil Nadu. Later in the 2006 assembly elections, AIADMK lost elections and DMK returned to power. In the 2009 General Elections, AIADMK won nine seats. In the 2011 assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, where corruption was a major issue, the AIADMK led alliance won with a thumping majority against the DMK led alliance.

### 1.12.2 Asom Gana Parishad

Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came into being in 1985 as a result of 6-year long agitation by All Assam Students Union (AASU) demanding to stop illegal immigrants to Assam from neighbouring countries and the historic Assam Accord of 1985. The AGP was formed under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. AGP won the state election with a huge margin and Mahanta became the chief minister of Assam at a very young age. The party has gone through various splits and re-grouping of factions and is one of the major political forces in Assam. In the 2009 General Elections, AGP contested in an alliance with BJP and won one seat. Chandra Mohan Patowary is the current President of AGP.

### 1.12.3 Shiromani Akali Dal

Founded by Sardar Samukh Singh Chubbal in 1920 as a religious body, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has a strong presence in Punjab. Later under the stewardship of Sardar Tara Singh, SAD attained political recognition. SAD has seen various splits and reorganizations within the party over the period of last four decades or so. The faction led by Sardar Prakash Singh Badal is the one which has most prominent influence in Punjab politics and retains the original name of SAD. Post the win in 2007 Punjab State Assembly,
SAD head the state government with support from the BJP. In the 2009 General Elections, SAD contested in an alliance with BJP as an NDA partner. It won four seats out of 10 contested. The current SAD President is Sardar Prakash Singh Badal.

1.13 POLITICAL PARTIES AND WOMEN

In recent years, political parties in India have come alive to the strengths of the women’s movement and of increased female voter turnout during elections. National as well as regional political parties across the country have also had women leaders in top party positions. From Indira Gandhi to Sushma Swaraj, Brinda Karat, Sonia Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, and Sheila Dikshit, to Uma Bharti, Vashundhara Raje, and Mamata Banerji, India’s women leaders are the epitome of powerful women reaching the highest echelons of governance. Nonetheless, political parties have not necessarily given adequate number of positions to women in their hierarchies.

Despite being conscious of women as a constituency which is reflected in their election manifestos, most parties resort to tokenism and symbolism when it comes to the representation of women. The idea of 33% reservation for women in parliament and state assemblies has been actively endorsed by most of the major political parties. This raises the expectation that many more women would be nominated to contest the elections. However, such stances have not so far translated into more nominations of women candidates during elections. In the inner party structures, in the decision-making levels and the posts within the party, women are even less represented in most political parties. Women have a very low representation. They have an almost negligible involvement in the actual decision-making bodies and rarely influence the more significant party policies. Most often they are relegated to the ‘women’s wing’ of the party where they are required to deal with what are considered to be ‘women’s issues’ such as dowry and rape cases and sometimes on more general concerns like price rise which are considered to affect ‘housewives’. Most of the women’s wings of political parties have very little power and have hardly any say in the decision-making and important policy matters. While traditionally women’s wings should have been stepping-stones for women into mainstream politics, few members of women’s wings have risen through the ranks of party workers.

Most of the women fighting elections belong to the established political families or are proxy candidates. When selecting candidates, political parties want strong and ‘established’ leaders. Women are given tickets only if they have an ‘exceptionally strong’ chance of winning. Political parties assert that it is difficult to get sufficiently qualified women candidates. However, the real reason for the low political representation of women in the formal political structures and decision-making levels seems to lie in the compulsions
of competitive elections and the quest for power by the political parties in a multiparty democracy. Increasingly the compulsions of the political parties to field ‘select’ women candidates is due to narrow majorities, precarious coalitions and hung parliaments that have made power rather than representation the determining factor. While women are mobilized to vote by all the parties, at the stage of distributing tickets for standing for elections, the number of women drops dramatically. At this stage, political parties are driven more by power considerations with an eye on the ‘winnability’ of the candidates from the angle of prospective government formation. Women are considered to have less chances of winning, which is not necessarily true. In fact, this winnability factor is more a presumption than anything else. In India, where most people vote for parties rather than individuals, it follows that if successful parties field women they will win. One way to get substantial women representation in the House is that parties should reserve one-third tickets for women irrespective of whether they win or lose.

1.14   LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we learnt that the three-member Election Commission of India is the overall in-charge of conducting free and fair elections in India. The Election Commission recognizes political parties and appoints officials to conduct and supervise elections. The electoral process begins with the issue of notification by the President. The Election Commission releases the schedule for election and, issues the model code of conduct to be followed during elections. During the election campaign, political parties and their candidates release their respective Election Manifestos. A large number of public meetings and door-to-door campaigns are organized and the electronic media, TV and Radio etc. are used to win the people’s confidence. On the polling day, the Election Commission ensures that voters cast their votes in free and fair manner. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared elected. There has been universal appreciation of the Indian electoral system, but it is still faced with problems like use of money and muscle power, and other corrupt practices. To avoid all this, certain electoral reforms have been introduced from time to time.

Under the multi-party system in India, there are a number of national as well as regional parties. While, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian national Congress are the main national parties, the traditional regional parties have been the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Akali Dal in Punjab, etc. Both the executive branch and the legislative branch of the government are run by the representatives of the political parties who have been elected through the elections. Through the electoral process, the people of India
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choose which party forms a majority in the lower house, thereby forming the government by itself or through a coalition. National as well as regional political parties across the country have had women leaders in top party positions. Nevertheless, the plain truth is that political parties have always chosen to privilege male political aspirants over women in our country—in inner party structures, decision-making levels and the posts within the party, women are less represented in most political parties.

1.15 GLOSSARY

Political Party : A political party is an organized body of people who share certain common principles and goals regarding the political system of a country. The main purpose of political parties is to acquire and retain political power. Political parties that run the government are called the ruling party. In a coalition government, there may be more than one ruling party. Those who sit in the opposition, criticize, and analyze the performance of the ruling party / parties generally or on specific issues are called opposition parties.

1.16 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Explain the role of election commission of India? Do you think that the parliamentary elections are necessary in the country like India?

2) Discuss the process of elections to state legislatures and constituencies and reservation of seats.

3) Analyze the national parties and regional political parties in India with reference to women politicians from respective political parties?

1.17 REFERENCES


Rathod, P.B (1999). Women and Political Representation, Manushi, May-June

Rathod, P.B (1999). Women and Political Representation, Manushi, May-June


1.18 SUGGESTED READINGS

