



Mains Practice Question

Q. The roots of the most pertinent challenges faced by Indian politics today can be traced to the lack of intra-party democracy. Comment on why Indian polity lacks intra-party democracy. (250 Words)

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Approach

- Start with briefly explaining what is meant by intra-party democracy.
- Discuss the need of intra-party democracy in Indian polity.
- Discuss the reasons for lack of intra-party democracy and suggest some measures.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Prevalence of democratic principles in selection of Party President, working of party and decision making is referred as intra-party democracy. The roots of the most pertinent challenges faced by Indian politics today can be traced to the lack of intra-party democracy in candidate selection and party elections.

Body

Need for Democracy in Political Parties

- **Representation:** The absence of intra-party democracy has contributed to political parties becoming closed autocratic structures. This adversely impacts the constitutional right of all citizens to equal political opportunity to participate in politics and contest elections.
- **Transparency:** A transparent party structure with transparent processes will allow proper ticket distribution and candidate selection. The selection would not be based on the whims of a few powerful leaders in the party but will represent the choice of the larger party.
- **Accountability:** A democratic party will be accountable to its party members, for they will lose elections in the next cycle for their shortcomings.
- **Decentralising power:** Every political party has State and local body units, an election at each level will allow creation of power centres at different levels. This will allow decentralisation of power and the decision making will take place at the ground level.
- **Decriminalization of Politics:** As there is no well-defined process for the distribution of tickets to candidates before elections, tickets are given to candidates on the vague concept of winnability. This has led to an additional problem of candidates with criminal backgrounds contesting elections.

Reasons for Lack of Intra-party Democracy

- **Dynasty politics:** The lack of intra-party democracy has also contributed to the growing nepotism in political parties. With senior party leaders fielding their kins in elections, the succession plans for “family” constituencies are being put in place.
- **Centralised structure of Political Parties:** The centralised mode of functioning of the political parties and the stringent anti-defection law of 1985 deters party legislators from voting in the national and state legislatures according to their individual preferences.
- **Lack of Law:** Currently, there is no express provision for internal democratic regulation of political

parties in India and the only governing law is provided by Section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples' Act, 1951 which provides for registration of political parties with the ECI. However, the ECI's power to require parties to hold regular internal elections for office bearers, and candidate selection is compromised in the absence of any penal provisions.

- **Personality cult:** There is a tendency of hero worship in people and many times a leader takes over the party and builds his own coterie, ending all forms of intra-party democracy. For example, Mao Zedong taking over the People's Republic of China; Donald Trump hijacking the Republican Party of the USA.
- **Easy to subvert internal elections:** The ability of existing repositories of power to subvert internal institutional processes to consolidate power and maintain the status quo is unquestionable.

Way forward

- **Law to Compulsify Elections:** It shall be the duty of the political party to take appropriate steps to ensure holding of elections at all levels. The political party shall hold elections of national and State levels in the presence of the observers to be nominated by the ECI.
- **Amending Anti Defection Law:** The Anti-Defection Act of 1985 requires the party legislators to act according to the party whip which is decided by the diktats of the highest party leadership. One way to democratise political parties is to promote intra-party dissent.
 - The anti defection law can be limited to disqualification of Members only if they vote against their party whip during important events such as no-confidence motions.
- **Empowering ECI:** The ECI shall be competent to inquire into allegations of non-compliance of any of the provisions requiring elections.
 - Penalties for non compliance: ECI should have the penal power to deregister a party until free and fair elections in the party are conducted.

Conclusion

Politics is inseparable from political parties as they are the prime instruments for the execution of democracy in the country. Introducing internal democracy and transparency within political parties is important to promote financial and electoral accountability, reduce corruption, and improve democratic functioning of the country as a whole