Internal Democracy of Political Parties

Why in News?

Many national and regional political parties in India are struggling to maintain democratic structures.

What is the internal democracy of political parties?

- **Internal democracy** – The processes and mechanisms by which party members participate in decision-making and leadership selection.
- It's a crucial aspect of a healthy democratic system, ensuring that the party represents the interests of its members and is accountable to them.
- Key components of internal democracy in political parties include its democratic functioning various aspects of it.
- **Open Membership** - Parties should have open membership policies, allowing anyone who meets the criteria (e.g., age, citizenship) to join.
- **Regular Elections** - Regular elections for party leadership positions, such as party president or leader, ensure that members have a say in who represents them.
- **Internal Party Elections** - Members should have the right to participate in internal party elections for various positions, from local to national levels.
- **Party Conventions** - Party conventions provide a platform for members to discuss party policies, elect leaders, and ratify decisions.
- **Free Expression** - Members should have the right to freely express their opinions and dissent within the party, without fear of reprisal.
- **Fair Competition** - Internal party elections should be fair and transparent, with equal opportunities for all candidates.
- **Accountability** - Party leaders should be accountable to the party membership and subject to internal disciplinary procedures if they violate party rules or principles.
- **Transparency** - Party decision-making processes should be transparent, with information about party activities and finances made publicly available.

What are the challenges to internal democracy of political parties?

- Concentration of Power - The tendency in political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top.
- **Heroism** - India’s multi-party democracy thrives on diversity but often sees political parties driven by individual charisma rather than internal democracy.
- **Dominance of Elites** - In some cases, a small group of elites may dominate a party, limiting the influence of ordinary members.
- **Factionalism** - The formation of factions within parties can undermine internal democracy by creating divisions and hindering consensus-building.
- **Corruption** - Corruption within parties can erode public trust and undermine

democratic principles.

- **Lack of Participation** - Low levels of member participation in party activities can weaken internal democracy and lead to a disconnect between party leadership and the membership.
- **Violation of Party Constitution** - Not keeping membership registers, not holding organisational meetings, and not conducting internal elections regularly.
- **Lack of Transparency** - Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information on what happens inside the party.

What is the role of EC in maintaining internal democracy of political parties?

The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority constituted under Article 324 for administering Union and State election processes in India.

- **Registering Authority** - The EC is the registering authority for all the political parties in our country and thus gives the parties a legal recognition as an entity.
- **Functional Monitoring** - EC monitors whether the political parties are functioning according to their Constitution, by-laws, etc through periodical review of compliance.
- **Oversee Party Election** - Elections monitors whether the elections to their office bearers are taking place regularly.
- **Recognising Party Split** – Whenever there is a split in an election party, EC recognizes a group based on 4 tests political party's symbols order, 1968.
    - Following the party Constitution
    - Majority of the party
    - Majority of the legislature
    - Proceeding according to the by-laws.
- All these four tests are applied every time starting from Sadiq Ali case.

What are the challenges to EC?

- **Limited Jurisdiction -** ECs typically have jurisdiction over elections for public offices, but their authority over internal party matters is often limited.
- **Judicial Ruling** - 2002 ruling of the Supreme Court restricted the EC from going into the political process and anything which is part of the political process per se of political parties.
- **No Deregistration Power** - EC has no power to de-register a political party based on any violation of party's constitutional and not conducting periodic elections.

They can de-register if registration has been obtained on the basis of fraud or other things.

- **Impact of Independence** – When EC becomes political, it becomes susceptible to various political pressures from which it should maintain its distance.
- **Party Autonomy** - Parties often assert their autonomy and resist external

interference, even when their internal processes may be undemocratic.
- **Limited Resources -** ECs may have limited resources and personnel to investigate and address complaints of undemocratic practices within parties.

What lies ahead?

- Consider the wholistic approach of delivering elections on the stipulated time and in a free fair manner.
- Educate the electorate to consider the internal democracy of political parties an important parament while voting for a party.
- Develop clear and specific laws and regulations governing inner-party democracy.

Reference

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