

INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF DEMOCRACY

CIVICS

Democracy means rule by the people. But people do not take the policy decisions by themselves. It is rather the people's representatives who take decisions on their behalf. Modern notion of democracy is therefore, related to representative government in which the people elect their representatives freely. Democracy is not just about people electing their rulers. In a democracy the rulers have to follow some rules and procedures. They have to work with and within institutions. The **three institutions** play a key role in major decisions—

Legislature — the body taking major decisions

Executive — the body implementing (executing) these decisions, that is, the government and its officers.

Judiciary — the body resolving disputes about these decisions and other disputes

The body of the people's representatives is known as **legislature**. To establish the basis of people's representation, we have the institution of '**election**' based on universal adult franchise and '**political parties**' which sometimes can form coalition governments. When something is started or introduced or established, especially something relating to the law or politics it is called an **institution**.

Universal Adult Franchise

Every person who has just turned 18 years would be registered with the Election Commission in the next upgradation of voters list or electors' list. He/She would be issued a Voter Identity card which he would have to show at the polling station on the day of polling. Universal adult franchise is the right to vote available to every Indian citizen who is 18 years and above without any discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, creed, religion, gender, place of birth, etc. This right enables people to choose their representatives. And if any people's representative went against their interest, they had full right against him/her in the next election.

In early 19th century right to vote was given to only those men who paid a tax or were the army personnel or the landed aristocracy. Women were denied the right to vote. Women got right to vote in 1920 in USA, in 1928 in Britain and in 1944 in France. In 1969, the voting age was reduced in Britain from 21 years to 18 years. In 1971, USA reduced the voting age to 18 years. In India, after independence, the right to vote was given to all the adult citizens (aged 21 or above) without any discrimination of sex, caste, colour, creed, religion and place of birth. In 1981, age of voting was reduced from 21 years to 18 years. Adult franchise is available to all citizens unless they are disqualified on grounds of unsoundness of mind, renunciation of citizenship, convicted of treason, bankruptcy or are debarred for involvement in corruption, crime or promotion of communal hatred.

Universal Adult Franchise establishes equality among people, as it is available to all without any special qualifications for voting like property, education, gender, etc. It helps in the creation of political consciousness among the people. It gives a chance even to the poorest of the country to exercise his/her opinion so that no complaints go unheard. It ensures to safeguard the interests of the minorities. People get an opportunity to change the representatives, therefore, it reduces the chances of a violent revolution.

However, universal adult franchise is an expensive process for the government and the representatives. Illiterate voters may not be able to understand the complex problems and their solutions. Conservative and orthodox masses may be swayed by caste prejudices, regional or religious passions and thus vote to incapable persons.

Elections



A woman labourer casting her vote

An election is a process by which voters of a country vote for their favourite candidates to be chosen as their representatives which can form the government. Elections take place in all democracies. In India, elections take place **once in every five years**. Indian citizens choose representatives to the Parliament (to choose the central government) and the state Legislature (to choose the state government). The first general election in India was held in 1952. Since then fourteen general elections have taken place upto 2009. Compared to the simple voters of 1952, the voters of 2009 have become more aware and alert. They know their mind and are mindful of their own and the country's interests. Successive elections have enhanced and deepened people's commitment to democracy. It has made the Indian voters fully conscious of the power of their vote as the most potent mechanism of change. For example, in 1975, Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, imposed emergency and unexpected limitations on the freedom of people. As a result, people, in 1977 elections, for the first time, voted Congress Party out of power and the Janata Party came to power. The Janata Party government, however, could not live upto the expectations of the people as its leaders started fighting among



themselves. The unity among them did not last for long. As a result, in the 1980 elections, people voted against the Janata Party and Congress came back to power. Elections can be (1) direct, or (2) indirect.

1. **Direct Election :** In a direct election, the voters directly vote for the representatives. In this process the names and symbols of all candidates were printed on a paper called ballot paper. The voters stamped the symbol against the candidate of their choice. Now the computerised machines are used for voting. The key against the name and symbol of the candidate is pressed. In the last the votes for different candidates are counted. The candidate who secure the maximum number of votes in a constituency is elected as the representative. In India, the members of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are elected directly.
2. **Indirect Election :** In indirect election, the representatives elected by the people further elect some persons such as the members of Rajya Sabha, the second house (Vidhan Parishad) in some states and the President of India.

In a direct election, the candidates present their **election agenda** or programme of the work they will do if they would be elected. They seek votes on the basis of this agenda. People consider the various agendas presented by different candidates and vote for the most suitable candidate who will look after their welfare. However, at times, the voters are confused by the false agendas and they vote on the basis of groups of caste, religion or bribe. Moreover, direct elections are very expensive. Indirect elections are not so expensive and the representatives elected by direct elections are intelligent enough to elect suitable persons. However, they too use their votes on the basis of several kinds of selfish groups.

Political Parties

A political party is a political organisation with particular beliefs and aims, which you can vote for elections. The members of a political party share the same opinions on public issues, they seek vote for a common goal and thus seek to form the government. A person can contest an election as an independent candidate or a candidate favoured by a political party. However, if all candidates contest an election independently, the elected representatives will find it difficult to form groups of common viewpoints. But the elected representatives from a political party share common view points.

Functions of Political Parties

1. Parties manage to make all their members work together in harmony irrespective of differences of caste, region, religion, etc.
2. Parties mould the public opinion by issuing literature/statements in the media regarding important problems facing the public and the country. It helps in educating and organising the electorate (voters).

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3. Parties help in the running of the government.
 4. Parties point out the loopholes or anti-people programmes of the ruling party.
 5. The ruling party provides a link between the government and the public.
 6. The opposition parties keep a check on the work of the government.

However, the political parties may adopt unfair means to grab power, that is, to form government and secure the power to rule. Then it may adopt corrupt means to acquire wealth. In case a political party has absolute majority in the government, it seeks to implement its own selfish agenda. Some political parties are formed with narrow caste or communal (religious group) interests in mind. They create harm to the unity of the country. Often the parties in opposition has only one business, just to oppose the government policies, may they be for the people's welfare, by seeking faults in their creation or implementation.

Types of Party Systems

There can be various kinds of party systems in democracies. In some countries only **one party** exists and forms the government. In China there is only one party, the Chinese Communist Party that contests elections and forms government. Earlier, Mussolini's Fascist Party in Italy, Hitler's Nazi Party in Germany ruled solely. The one-party system helps in taking quick and decisive action, specially during emergencies. But it often leads to dictatorship (rule by one man) based on terror. It takes away the fundamental rights of the people.

Dominant Party System is quite similar to one-party system. Many parties exist, but one party dominates the entire country. In India Congress Party dominated the elections and government from 1947–1977 and 1980–89.

In some countries there are two parties or a **bi-party system**. In Britain, there are two parties, Labour Party and Conservative Party. In America, there are two parties, Republican Party and Democratic Party. This simplifies the voters' choice. It gives a stable government and an effective role to the opposition. It provides a ready alternative to the people. However, it may lead to *alternative dictatorship* of one party which enjoys a majority in the Parliament.

In the third type of **multi-party system**, more than two political parties exist. India, France and Italy are examples of the multi-party system. In India, politics is dominated by several national and regional political parties. At the national level, the parties which actually are or have been part of government or capable of forming a government include : Congress (I), Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI) etc. At the regional level, there are Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam, Akali Dal in Punjab, Dravida Munetra Kadgam in Tamil Nadu and many others.

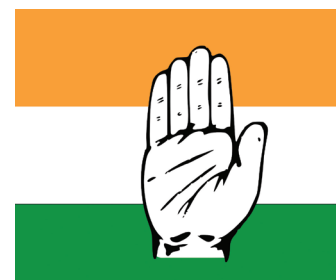
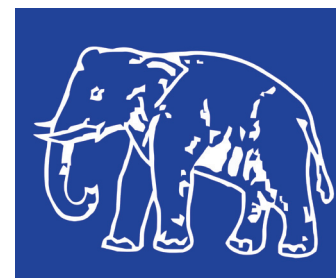
Multi-party system provides a range in the choice of alternatives to the people. It is more and more near to the ideals of democracy as representatives government. However, when clear majority is not obtained by a political party, several parties bargain on forming **coalition government** which could not reach a decision effectively. At every step the constituting parties of the government quarrel with each other to grab greater power of share and accumulation of wealth by unfair means. Many a time representatives defect from one party to the other for their personal gains.

Election Process

For the purpose of the elections, the whole country is divided into areas called constituencies on the basis of calculated population. The voters who live in a constituency elect one representative. Seats are reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their population. At the national level, elections are held for the formation of government at the centre. These elections are called Lok Sabha elections. At the state level, elections are conducted to elect representatives to the Legislative Assemblies. At the local level, people elect the Panchayat members in villages and Ward Members or Municipal Councillors in towns or cities. The election process is conducted and supervised by an independent body called the **Election Commission**.

The Election Commission arranges to prepare **voters list** which contains the names, addresses and photos of all adult citizens aged 18 or above who are eligible to vote. Every voter is issued a Photo Identity card containing the photograph and details of the voter by the Election Commission. The voters have to show their identity cards at the polling booth (the place to cast a vote). The Election Commission fixes and announces the dates of elections. The political parties choose their candidates who file the nomination papers. Independent candidates who do not belong to any political party also file their nomination papers. These nomination papers are scrutinised. Candidates are also offered to withdraw their names, if they wish, before a fixed date. Each candidate is then given an **election symbol** by the Election Commission.

The candidates appeal to the voters on the basis of the principles the candidates believe in and also with promises to implement certain programmes when they come to power. This is called the **election manifesto**. Election campaign takes place through public meetings, door-to-door contact, TV and Radio, distribution of pamphlets, display of banners, etc. Election campaign stops 48 hours before the start of polls (voting). Polling takes place on fixed date when all voters (18 or above) go to cast their vote in the nearest polling booth allotted to them. Voting takes place on Electronic Voting Machines. On a fixed date, counting takes place in the presence of the agents of all the parties and individuals. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes is declared elected. Results are announced by the returning



Symbols of different political parties



officer appointed by the Election Commission. In case of a dispute, a candidate can file an election petition with the Election Commission.

The political party or parties which has/have the largest number of elected representatives forms the next government.

Free and Fair Elections : To conduct free and fair elections, the Constitution has provided an independent body called the Election Commission which conducts elections. The Election Commission consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and two other election commissioners. Election Commission derives its powers from the Constitution. No government machinery can issue orders to it. However, the large number of political parties in India i.e. about 700 confuses the voters. Money power and muscle power is used to win elections. The money spent on elections is recovered through bribes, scams, etc. To ensure free and fair elections, the Election Commission should be given more power so that it can withhold the candidature of a person guilty of corrupt practices.

Coalition Governments

When a number of minority parties come together to make a majority to form a government, it is called a coalition government. Such a government runs a common minimum programme of the constituent parties. The objective of a coalition adjustment is to seize power. Coalitions are often formed to prevent a common enemy from capturing power. Though the coalition partners have ideological differences, they are forced to come to an understanding because they are lured by power.

The coalition government leads to a common minimum programme due to which the government works for the welfare of the people and one party exploitation is controlled. However, the coalition partners are busy in internal fighting leading to delays in important policy decisions.

In India coalition government was formed in 1977, when Janta Party, a merger of four constituents formed the government. Eighth coalition was formed in 1999 known as NDA (National Democratic Alliance), a coalition of 13 parties led by the BJP. The ninth coalition known as UPA (United Progressive Alliance), a coalition of more than 10 parties, led by Congress formed the government in 2004.



Key Words

- » Franchise : right to vote in political elections.
- » Constituency : a district or part which elects one representative.
- » Polling booth/station : a building where people go to vote in an election.
- » Elections : choosing people's representatives after an interval of 5 years.
- » Direct election : in which the voters directly vote for the representatives.
- » Coalition government : a government formed by several political parties with common minimum programme.

- » Political party : a political organisation, whose members share the same opinions on public issues , they seek vote for a common goal and thus seek to form a government.

SUMMARY

- ▶ When something is started or introduced or established especially something relating to the law or politics, it is called an institution.
- ▶ To establish the basis of people's representation we have the institution of 'election' based on universal adult franchise and 'political parties' which sometimes can form coalition governments.
- ▶ In India every person, male or female, aged 18 or above from any caste, creed, religion, etc. has the right to vote.
- ▶ An election is a process by which voters of a country vote for their favourite candidates to be chosen as their representatives.
- ▶ A political party is a political organisation with particular beliefs and aims and which seek vote for a common goal and thus seek to form the government.
- ▶ Political parties manage to make their members work together in harmony irrespective of differences of caste, religion, etc.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. In India, every person aged _____ or above has the right to vote.
a. 18 b. 20 c. 21 d. 22
2. The body taking major decisions is called the _____.
a. president b. legislature c. chairman d. executive
3. Elections in India are held every _____ years.
a. Two b. Five c. Four d. Three
4. The President of India is elected through _____ election.
a. direct b. indirect c. partial d. impartial
5. In India, _____ system is practised in politics.
a. bi-party b. multi-party c. Individual party d. All party

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. The voters _____ is updated before the elections.
2. A coalition government can be formed by _____ or more parties.
3. In the USA, the blacks got the right to vote in _____.
4. An _____ is a process to choose people's representatives.
5. Election _____ contains the programmes and promises of political parties.

C. Match the Following :

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Members of Rajya Sabha | a. Direct elections |
| 2. Members of the Lok Sabha | b. Elections |
| 3. Right to vote | c. Indirect elections |
| 4. Way of choosing representatives | d. Political parties |
| 5. Provides government to people | e. Franchise |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. Elections reduce chances of a violent revolution.
2. Universal adult franchise is important for a representative government.
3. All political parties find place in the government.
4. Coalition government helps in representing the interests of strong sections of society.
5. Money and muscle power are two evils in Indian election system.

E. Define the following terms :

1. Constituency
2. Direct Elections
3. Coalition government
4. Political party

F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

1. What is the term used when all adults are allowed to vote ?
2. In which system are the representatives elected directly by people ?
3. What is the name of the government formed by two or more parties ?
4. What system of political parties is found in India ?
5. Who is the organiser of the elections in India ?

G. Answer these questions briefly :

1. What do you mean by a constituency ? How many representatives are elected from one constituency ?
2. What do you mean by a single party system ? What are its advantages and disadvantages ?
3. What is universal adult franchise ? To whom it is not available ?
4. Write a note on ' Free and fair elections in India '.
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a political party ?

H. Answer these questions in detail :

1. What do you understand by an election ? What is the difference between a direct election and an indirect election ?
2. How is a coalition government formed ? What are its advantages and disadvantages ?
3. What is a bi-party system ? How is its different from a multi-party system ?
4. Give an account of the election process.

PROJECT WORK

1. Find out the party-wise seat distribution of different parties in the Legislative Assembly of your state.
2. Make a report on the last Assembly elections in your state based on the following points—year, name of the parties that contested, number of elected representatives of each party, manifesto of the party that has formed the government, analysis of the promises fulfilled/unfulfilled.