

India has the highest number of voters in the world. Population wise India is the largest democratic country of the world. This amazing democracy is more than six decades old. During this period in India there has been many political upheavals and up and downs. The Indian democracy is sustained due to the dedication and insight of its citizens. We shall study in detail the characteristic features of Indian democracy.

Election in Democracy

In the world many countries have democracy. In spite of democracy there exists differences in Governance of these countries. In a democracy a voter casts his own vote. The right to vote remains the same in each democratic country though the country's Governance may vary. The democracy thrives through the voting process of the voters during the elections. Our country has a Parliamentary System. Parliament is the national institution representing the people. The Parliament of India consists of the President, the Vice President, Rajyasabha, and Lok Sabha. As mentioned in earlier chapter, Rajyasabha is the Upper House of the Parliament and the Lok Sabha is the Lower House of the Parliament. The State has the Legislative Assembly. Some states have the Legislative Council also. A voter is at the centre in forming a Rajyasabha, Lok Sabha, and Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council. In our country all the governing bodies are elected through voting. Thus democracy is realized by elections.

Democracy and Voter

A voter is very important in a democracy. Our country has Universal Adult Suffrage. A person of 18 year of age or above who is enlisted in the voter list can cast vote. A person who has not declared bankruptcy or is not mentally unstable can vote without any discrimination. The Constitution guarantees a right to vote even amidst illiteracy, poverty and many similar issues. The system of Universal Adult Suffrage is based on the principle of 'One Person One Vote.' It is the duty of every citizen to vote without greed or fear. A voter should be aware and vigilant of his right. The Constitution has provided a right to vote to each of its citizens without the discrimination of caste, creed, religion or education. Voting is an important process in democracy. In our country there is a Universal Adult Suffrage. Voting is a right as well as a duty of citizens. Every voter should exercise the right to vote.

Election – The Foundation of Democracy

Election is the foundation of democracy. A festive environment is seen during elections. The people can evaluate their representatives during elections. Any person who has the pre-requisite to contest elections can do so. Candidates belonging to the political parties as well as the independent candidates who do not belong to any political party can contest election. In an election the winning candidate of any party or belonging to a coalition of parties come to power. In a democracy only with the support of the people one can reach to power. In our democracy Parliament is the apex body and the basic foundational block is the Gram Panchayat. Elections are also held in the Institutions of Self Government like the Gram Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat and District Panchayat. Candidates in these Institutions of Local Self Government are chosen through elections. Elections are conducted in Municipality, in towns and Municipal Corporation in cities. Election is the life line of a nation's democracy.

Elections are very important for the political parties as well as the candidates. Election is the barometer of Democracy. Election provides an opportunity to a voter to evaluate the contesting candidates. Election ushers in new political set up or political waves. Election gives a picture of a country's social and economic environment. Election decides the future of the Government. Elections are contested by political parties, independent candidates, as well as a coalition of political parties. In Parliamentary Democracy, the party or a coalition of parties having majority of winning candidates forms the Government and comes in power. The power is obtained as well as maintained by the support of the people. Election being soul of a democracy it is essential that it is transparent.

Public Opinion in Democracy

We have a democratic country. The candidate who wins the election represents the people. In representative system the ruling party would like to regain and retain its power. To regain and retain its power it becomes essential for the political parties to connect with the people. To maintain and run the government, it becomes essential to consider public opinions and thoughts for framing policies or for various questions pertaining to many problems. Public opinion is highly essential for political parties, representatives and organizations. Collective public opinion is extremely important in democracy.

Strong and organized public opinion is very important in Democracy. Malfunctioning of the Government can be presented through public opinion. Public opinion helps in creating such a condition where the Government cannot afford to misrule or neglect the country. Alert and intelligent public that keeps itself informed cannot be misled by the Government. Various mediums in the modern times have proved to be very important in creating public opinion. Let us obtain detailed information of these mediums.

Mediums of Public Opinion Formation in Democracy

To cultivate the human psyche and to create a strong public opinion the various information and broadcasting agencies are very useful. In today's time various mediums are used to transmit information to the public. These mediums contributing to build strong and effective public opinion are :

Print Media : In today's world newspapers, periodicals and journals hold utmost importance in facilitating people to know more about incidences, events and situations taking place nationally as well as internationally. Print media helps people to evaluate their opinions either in favour or against the information presented by them. The same information presented by the print media can create multiple view points in the people. People give different individual responses to the same information and develop individually diverse opinion.

It is essential that the opinions created are true, firm and unbiased. If the print media presents biased or false details then it is possible to create a false public opinion. It is absolutely essential to have 'Freedom of Press' so that a false public opinion is not created by presenting only achievements of the Government and thereby hiding the faults, failures or shortcomings of the Government. Ours is a diverse nation in terms of language, culture and regional varieties. The regional newspapers are much sought after in corresponding regions. Regional newspapers then have an immense contribution in cultivating public opinion. Print media has failed in cultivating public opinion in countries and regions having less literacy rates. In spite of this various organizations, industrial groups and political parties publish their own dailies or periodicals owing to the influence exerted by printed material. The Government also publishes various periodicals and issues providing important information.

Electronic Media : Audio visual media like the radio, television, cinema etc. are important in cultivating public opinion. Electronic media is more effective in the regions of lower literacy rates. It is seen that radio and television are considered far more important than newspapers and periodicals. Live telecast of incidents occurring nationally as well as internationally can be easily made available through the mediums of radio and

television. A public opinion can be created through the serials, dramas and movies which can help portray socioeconomic as well as other problems like untouchability, dowry, exploitation and poverty in an entertaining manner.

In today's world apart from television the arrival and spread of internet has helped people to enjoy news, serials, dramas and movies sitting comfortably in their homes. All these media can create an adverse effect through the presentation of distorted, obscene and violent information. Hence it is essential to monitor and control transmission of harmful content through these important mediums. In a democracy it is desirable that the political parties and NGOs protest against various obscene and violent programmes telecasted by the electronic media.

Today in the fast moving age of technology people can stay in constant touch with each other through the medium of internet or smart cell and exchange thoughts as well as ideas. Electronic media is widely used to cultivate public opinion. Television, radio, personalized radio i.e. FM plays a special role in cultivating public opinion in modern times.

In today's time, rumours spread instantaneously in the absence of facts and details. Hence there remains a danger of false public opinions being generated. Various types of surveys carried out by electronic media help create public opinion. Surveys are carried out to know public opinion with the help of some details. 'Opinion Polls' are presented during the elections. Opinion polls help to estimate the direction of public opinion. Opinion polls are not always true and reliable.

Electronic media are very important in today's time. In a democracy the people and the Government should exercise patience. Electronic media helps to transmit people's thoughts, details and talks to the government and similarly helps transmit details about the various plans and achievements of the government to the people. Radio can reach in distant and remote areas. But as it is only audio media it has been less effective. Television programmes though expensive in nature have gained more public viewership than radio. In a democracy it is desirable that public opinion should be cultivated so as to cater to the needs of the welfare of the nation.

Types of Democracy : Various countries in the world have democracy. There still exists diversity within various democracies of different countries. Our country has a Parliamentary democratic system. In a country like USA there is a presidential parliamentary system. We shall see in detail about the two types of democracies i.e. Parliamentary Democracy and Presidential Democracy.

Parliamentary Democracy

Our country has accepted the Parliamentary Democracy. In a Parliamentary Democracy the President appoints the leader of the party who gets the majority number of seats in the Lok Sabha as the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister forms the Government. The Parliamentary Government is completely accountable to the Lok Sabha. Government remains in power as long as it enjoys the confidence of the majority of the members of the parliament.

Presidential Democracy : Presidential Democracy is the second important type of democracy. In such a type of democracy the President is directly elected by the people. The President remains in power for a specific period as mentioned in the Constitution. Presidential Democracy is prevalent in many countries including USA.

Election System in Democracy

Our country has maximum number of voters in the world. The Election Commission maintains the administration, control and monitoring of the entire process of election. It is essential for any democracy that its Election Commission is independent, impartial and autonomous. It is mandatory to maintain the autonomy of the Election Commission. In the Constitution there is a special provision for the terms and conditions of appointing the election commissioner, their criteria for service, or their removal or suspension from their service. The responsibility and authority to hold elections for the Parliament, State Assembly, Legislative Council, President and the Vice President rest with the Election Commission. The election of our country is carried out by secret ballot. Legislative assembly or the Parliament is dissolved after every five years and then fresh elections are held. The election carried out to elect a new candidate to fill up

vacant place due to death or resignation of the candidate is known as by-election. The dates of election, advertisement, filling and scrutinizing the nomination forms, the dates for withdrawing the nomination forms, the declaration of the final list of the eligible candidates, the allotment of election symbols etc. falls under the work area of the Election Commission. From the time of announcement of the election dates a protocol is implemented by the Election Commission. The Government is bound to abide by the protocol and not carry out any activity or campaign that can affect the public opinion.

The candidates and the political parties come up with their own election manifesto. The election manifesto reflects the proposed plans and works of the party in terms of economic, defence, foreign policy and various problems.

Secret Ballot in Democracy

In our country elections are conducted in a complete independent and secret manner. Indian parliamentary elections are considered to be the largest election process in the world. Various political parties, organizations and independent candidates contest the elections. Each of them presents their works, ideas, and future plans to the voters. It is expected that the voters vote without any benefit, greed or fear. 'Secret Ballot' is given utmost importance in a democracy. A voter has a right to maintain the secrecy of his vote. No one can ask a voter regarding his vote. The amazing process of election maintains the secrecy of each voter's vote. The election commission facilitates the voting of all persons involved with the election process as well as the army personnel too. Two processes are used for voting. (1) Voting by a ballot paper (2) Voting through an Electronic Voting Machine(EVM). Counting ballot papers is more time consuming. Now a days most of the voting is carried out using EVMs. Counting votes in EVMs is less time consuming. It saves time and labour. Voting by using EVM is environment friendly as it does not make use of the paper. If a voter decides to exercise his right to vote but not to cast his vote in favour of any of the contesting candidates, he can use the option of NOTA(None of the Above).

Democracy and Political Parties

India is multi party democracy and hence we have various political parties. Specific criteria are fixed by the Election Commission to validate any political party. Political parties are classified either into National party or Regional party based on certain specific policies and criteria decided by the Election Commission. As per this a party that secures more than four percent of the total votes in the previous general elections, in at least four major states, is identified as a national party and the rest are identified as regional parties. As per the information given by the Election Commission by March 10th, 2014 a total of 1593 national parties were registered. Last year 239 parties were added.

In our country Indian National Congress (INC) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) are the two major political parties. Along with this Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP), Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM) and National Congress Party (NCP) are the other national parties. Apart from this the Shivsena, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party (SP), Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (DMK), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (AIADMK), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Jantadal United (JDU), Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD), are regional parties. Based on the specified criteria any national party can lose its status or any regional party can gain the status of the national party depending on the number of votes obtained by the party. The party forming the Government is known as the ruling party. The party which forms the opposition is called the opposition party.

The opposition party helps form public opinion by democratically opposing the objectionable plans and policies of the Government. But in a healthy democracy it is desirable that the opposition party supports the social and public causes of the ruling party which are aimed at the welfare of the nation. The success of democracy depends on a balanced relationship between the ruling and opposing party. Effective and strong opposition party is a pre-requisite of a good democracy. Democracy is like a chariot. Ruling party and the opposing party are the two wheels of the chariot.

Exercise

1. Answer the following questions in short :

- (1) At what age one gets a right to vote ?
- (2) Which media are used to cultivate public opinion ?
- (3) Which national and regional political parties are active in India ?

2. Explain giving reasons :

- (1) A voter is a life line of a democracy.
- (2) Parliamentary democracy is unique and important.
- (3) Information broadcasting media are highly effective in cultivating public opinion.
- (4) Election is a barometer of democracy.

3. Write short notes on :

- (1) Types of political parties
- (2) Voter and Government
- (3) Election Commission and political parties

4. Distinguish between :

- (1) National party and Regional party
- (2) Parliamentary Democracy and Presidential Democracy
- (3) Print media and Electronic media

5. Fill in the blanks :

- (1) The system of Universal Adult Suffrage is based on the principle of
 (A) One person many vote (B) One person one vote
 (C) One person no vote (D) One person all vote
- (2) The media is less effective in cultivating public opinion.
 (A) Audio visual media (B) Visual media (C) Audio media (D) Print media
- (3) Full form of EVM is
 (A) Electronic Value Machine (B) Electronic Vat Machine
 (C) Electronic Voting Method (D) Electronic Voting Machine

Activity :

- Celebrate National Voter's Day (25th January). Arrange a discussion on subjects like, 'Voting a form of philanthropy'.....'Voting is a right of the voter'.....'Voting makes the Government'.....
- Organize a school level exhibition displaying pictures, charts, photographs etc. on the theme of democracy. Plan a debate competition. Carry out various such activities in school that enhances the spirit of democracy.
- Plan a mock Parliamentary Election process and make the students participate in it.
- Discuss the uses and misuses of the print media and electronic media and enlist them.

Individual uses of print media	Individual uses of electronic media
●	●
●	●
●	●
Individual misuses of print media	Individual misuses of electronic media
●	●
●	●
●	●