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UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE AND THE METHODS OF REPRESENTATION

In an earlier lesson, you have studied that the opening words of the Preamble to the Indian Constitution are: “We, the people of India”. What do these words signify? These words mean that the ultimate authority resides in the people themselves. People exercise authority through the representatives elected by them. These representatives conduct the functions of the government in accordance with the wishes of the people. People govern themselves through their elected representatives. In a country which is vast and has a large population, the establishment of direct democracy is an impossible task, except in some cases at the local level of governance. That is why all modern democracies have representative governments, that is governments elected by the people. In these democracies all adults have the right to elect their representatives. The right to vote is called franchise, or suffrage.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

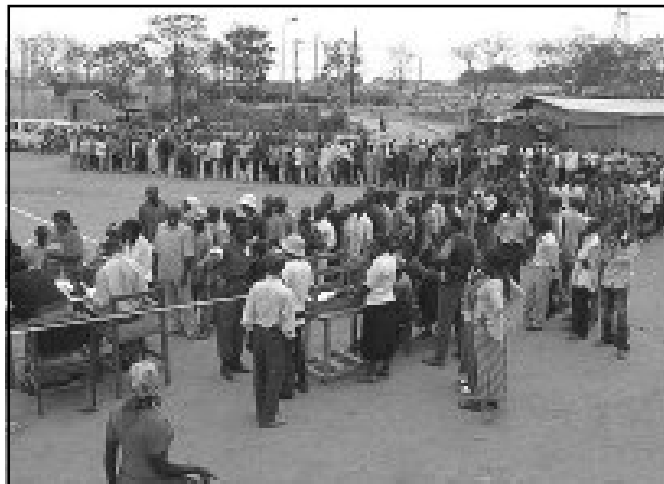
- comprehend the meaning of universal adult franchise;
- explain the significance of universal adult franchise;
- recall that the minimum age for the right to vote differs from country to country;
- recall that in India minimum voting age is 18 years;
- identify the various methods of representation.

17.1 Meaning and Significance of Adult Franchise

The right of the people to vote and elect their representatives is called franchise. The word franchise is derived from the French word ‘*franc*’ which means ‘free’. It means

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free exercise of the right to choose one's representatives. Adult franchise means that the right to vote should be given to all adult citizens without the discrimination of caste, class, colour, religion or sex.



People standing in queue for casting their vote

It is based on equality which is a basic principle of democracy. It demands that the right to vote should be equally available among all. To deny any class of persons from exercising this right is to violate their right to equality. In fact, the spirit of democracy can be maintained only if the people are given the right to vote without any discrimination. The exercise of right to vote adds to the individual's self-respect, dignity, sense of responsibility, and political and civic education. In other words, the system of adult franchise is the bedrock of a democratic system. People are called political sovereign because they possess the right to vote a government into power, or to vote a government out of power. That is why democracy has sometimes been described as a mode of appointing, controlling and dismissing governments by the people.

As provided for, in the Constitution of the land, the citizens cast their votes at regular intervals to elect their representatives to the Parliament, to the Legislative Assemblies, and such other institutions as are essential organs of political power in a democracy. These institutions are called representative institutions precisely because they represent the will of the peoples.

17.2 Universal Adult Franchise: Its Evolution

Historically, adult franchise has been slow in making itself a universal law. In fact one of the major demands in the long-drawn struggle for democracy in the world has been the acceptance of the principle of universal adult franchise, as the basis of ascertaining the wishes of people. Till the second decade of the twentieth century, not all the countries were practising universal adult franchise. Many democratic systems had restricted to male franchise only, based on property, education and other qualifications.

It is interesting to note that most of the western countries, which are known for their long experience of some sort of representative system of governance, introduced adult franchise only in the wake of the First World War (1914 – 18), a war which was proclaimed to be fought by the Allied Powers (Great Britain, France and United States and the allies) to make the 'world safe for democracy'. But while the 'defeated' Germany incorporated the

principle of universal adult franchise in 1919, it took nine more years for Great Britain to extend franchise to women in 1928. In 1918, Britain had granted franchise to limited number of women. It was decided that while all adult men, 21 years of age and above would have the right to vote, women only above the age of 30 years could possess the right to vote. This discrimination was removed only in 1928.

France, the land that gave the popular slogans of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, could introduce the right of universal adult franchise to its people only after the end of the Second World War i.e. 1945. Equally strange is the fact that Switzerland, the home of direct democracy denied the right to vote to women till 1973. India adopted the principle of universal adult franchise when the present Constitution was enacted in 1949 which as you know was implemented on January 26, 1950.

Age of voting

The voting age varies from country to country. In Denmark and Japan, a person, man or woman, is entitled to vote after attaining the age of 25 years. In Norway, the age limit is 23, in Great Britain, the United States, Russia and Turkey it is 18. In Switzerland, it is 20 years. In our country, now the minimum age for exercising franchise is 18 years. The 61st Amendment Act of 1989 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years. There are certain qualifications prescribed for a voter in India. As you have already read, a voter:

- must be a citizen of India,
- must have attained 18 years of age,
- must not be of unsound mind,
- must not have been declared bankrupt by a competent court.



Intext Questions 17.1

1. Universal Adult Franchise means the enjoyment of the right to vote by:
 - a) all adults – both men and women
 - b) only men
 - c) only women
 - d) minors
2. Who among the following do not have the right to vote?
 - a) minors
 - b) aliens
 - c) persons who are of unsound mind/lunatics
 - d) all the above
3. The minimum age for voting in India is
 - a) 16 years
 - b) 18 years



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- c) 21 years
- d) 25 years
- 4. Switzerland introduced Universal Adult Franchise in the year
 - a) 1914
 - b) 1945
 - c) 1928
 - d) 1971

17.3 Methods of Representation

Universal adult franchise enables all citizens to be involved in the governance of their state. They do so by electing their representatives who govern to serve and protect the interests of the people. There are two main methods of electing representatives. These are known as Territorial and Functional representation.

Territorial Representation

This is the most popular method of electing representatives in most of the democratic countries. In this system all eligible voters living in a specified area vote to elect their representative. The total electorate of the country, irrespective of their profession or group is divided into territorial constituencies, which elect one or more representatives. The entire population is divided into constituencies with more or less equal number of voters.

Functional Representation

Functional representation means that representatives are elected by various professional and functional groups like – industrial workers, trading functionaries, medical practitioners, lawyers, teachers, transporters, etc. According to this method separate constituencies are set up for people belonging to specific group. For example, there may be a constituency of teachers who elect their representative.

The electorate is professionally or functionally categorised and each of professional categories is called upon to elect one or more representatives, irrespective of their place of residence in the country. Unlike the territorial representation the electorate is not divided on the basis of territorial constituencies but on the basis of their profession. It is a scheme of representation to various occupational groups.

Constituency

A body of voters who elect a representative is known as constituency. The body of voters may belong to a particular geographical area. The constituencies for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections consist of voters of respective areas. But the constituency for the election of President of India consists of the Members of Parliament and State Assemblies. There may be single-member constituency or multi-member constituency.

Single Member Constituency When only one member is elected from a constituency, it is known as single member constituency. For Lok Sabha elections the whole of India is divided into 543 single member constituencies. Out of these 543 constituencies, every state and Union Territory has a share of certain number of constituencies. The system of

single member constituency is adopted in India, Britain, US, Canada, Russia, Australia, Nepal and Pakistan.

Multi-Member Constituency This system is also known as the ‘General Ticket System’. When more than one candidate are elected from a constituency, it is called a multi-member constituency. Such constituencies exist in Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Italy. According to this system, the whole country is divided into large constituencies and from each constituency many representatives are elected. The political parties get the seats in proportion to the votes they secure in concerned constituencies.

In a multi-member constituency, usually the method of proportional representation is adopted. For being elected, a candidate has to achieve a fixed quota of votes. The voters have to vote for as many representatives as are to be elected from their respective constituencies. They indicate their order of preferences against the names of candidates. We will discuss the details of their method when we study proportional representation.

People, therefore, exercise their right to vote according to electoral system adopted in their respective countries. we shall discuss below the most important systems.



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17.4 Simple Majority System

Simple majority system means that in case of a single-member constituency, the person or the candidate getting the highest number of votes is declared elected. The result is decided by the majority of votes secured by a candidate. Many a time in this system, there is a multi-cornered contest, as the number of candidates is more than two. There are cases where four or five or even more than five candidates contest. In such a situation, a candidate with even less than 50 percent of the total votes gets elected. Such cases are very often found in India, and elsewhere. The system of simple majority system is prevalent in Britain, USA, Canada and some other countries.

This simple majority system is also called the *first past the post system*. Members of our Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies are elected by this system.

17.5 Proportional Representation System

The system of proportional representation is an electoral device to ensure representation of all sections of the people more or less in proportion to their voting strength. Under this system any group, whether it is a political party or interest group will secure representation in proportion to the popular votes it obtains.

J.S. Mill was an ardent advocate of proportional representation. He said, “In any really equal democracy every or any section would be represented not disproportionately, but proportionately. A majority of the electors would always have a majority of representatives; but a minority of electors would always have a minority of representatives.” This system ensures that the number of seats a political party gets in the legislature should be in proportion to the support of the popular votes. Sometimes in the simple majority system it is seen that a party gets more seats in the legislature even though it receives less percentage of votes or a candidate with even less than 50 percent of votes is declared elected. For instance, in India, in 1971 Lok Sabha elections, Congress polled only 46 percent votes yet it managed 351 seats out of 522. That is, even with less than 50 percent votes, Congress won 68 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha. This limitation of the first-past-the-post system may

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be removed through proportional representation system. There are two methods by which proportional representation is secured.

1. The Single Transferable Vote System

It is also called the Hare system or the Andrae Scheme. According to the single transferable vote system each voter can cast only one vote which can be transferred to other candidates, if necessary, according to the preference of the voter. Therefore, this system is also called the preferential system.

This system works under following conditions:

- (a) Every constituency should be a multi-member constituency, electing three or more members.
- (b) A voter has only single effective vote which may be cast in order of preference – first, second, third or as many preferences as there are candidates. The voter writes 1, 2, 3 and so on against the names of the candidates of his choice.
- (c) But the voter cannot cast all his preferences in favour of only one candidate.
- (d) In order to be elected, a candidate must secure a certain quota of votes. The quota is determined by dividing the total votes cast by the number of seats in the constituency.

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{Total number of votes polled}}{\text{Total number of seats in the constituency}} + 1$$

For instance, if the number of seats in a constituency is 3 and total number of votes cast is 20,000. The quota will be

The counting of votes begins with the first preference votes. A candidate securing the prescribed quota on the basis of the first preference votes is declared elected, and his surplus votes, if any, are transferred to the candidates having second preference indicated on the ballot papers and so on.

If one or more seats are left vacant because some candidates do not secure the required quota, the candidates getting least number of votes are eliminated and their votes are transferred according to the preferences of the voters.

This system has been adopted in India for the election of the members of the Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils. This method is also followed for the election of President of India.

2. List System

This is another method of proportional representation. Under this system, large multi-member constituencies are formed and many candidates are elected from each constituency. Each political party submits a list of its candidates for election from a particular constituency. A voter votes not to individuals but to the lists of candidates of different political parties. These votes are indivisible. If 4 representatives are to be elected from the

constituency, the voter has no option to cast 2 votes on one list and 2 on the other list. The voter has to select all the four candidates from either of the list.

A quota is determined, and the candidates are declared elected according to the quota of votes secured by political parties. A party entitled to three seats, according to the quota will declare the first three candidates on its list elected. There are two forms of list system – the ‘bound list’ and the ‘free list’. In ‘bound list’ a voter has no choice except to endorse or reject the entire list of candidates prepared by a political party. But, in a free list, the voter while selecting the list can give his or her own order of preferences for the candidates. List system is followed for elections in Switzerland.

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17.6 Other Minority Representation System

Apart from proportional representation, some other electoral methods have also been devised to ensure adequate representation to the minority groups in the legislature. These systems of minority representation are as follows:

- (1) **Cumulative Vote System:** According to this system a voter has as many votes as the number of seats in the constituency. The voters has options. He or she can cast vote for all the candidates or concentrate all his or her votes for just one candidate.

For example, if 5 members are to be elected, the voter may give his or her vote to only one candidate or distribute it among a few or all candidates. This system, therefore, may provide an opportunity to a well organised minority to elect its representative by cumulating all its votes in favour of its own candidate.

- (2) **Limited Vote Plan:** This system is adopted in a multi-member constituency from where a minimum of 3 candidates are to be elected. Under this system every voter can vote for more than one candidate, but he or she cannot vote for all the candidates. That is why, it is known as the limited vote system. For example, if there are 6 seats in a constituency, every voter will have right to vote only for 4 candidates. The voter has to vote for different candidates of his or her choice, but he or she cannot vote for more than 4 candidates.

17.7 The Second Ballot System

In election, if there are only two candidates contesting election for a single seat, the one who secures a clear majority (at least 50 percent + 1) is declared elected. But when there are more than two candidates, it may be the case that none of the candidates secures an absolute majority. In this case, second ballot is held, which means votes are again cast after a few days. In this second ballot only two candidates, who had secured maximum number of votes in the first poll remain in the field. After voting, one who secures more than 50 percent of votes is declared elected.

For example, in a constituency, three candidates are contesting election. The total number of votes polled are 12,000. Candidate A secures 5000 votes, candidate B secures 4000 votes, and candidate C secures 3000 votes. In such a situation no candidate gets absolute majority, that is 6001 votes. This necessitates holding of a second ballot. The candidate (in this case, candidate C) who has secured least number of votes is dropped. As such, the contest now remains between A and B. If B secures majority at the second poll then B and not A will be declared successful. This system is practiced in France for the election of President and the National Assembly.



Intext Questions 17.2

Fill in the blanks :

1. The first-past-the-post system is commonly known as _____.
2. The multi-member constituency is also known as the _____ system.
3. In India, the elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies are held on the basis of _____ system.
4. The methods by which proportional representation is secured are _____ and _____.
5. Electoral methods to ensure adequate representation to the minority groups in the legislature are called _____ and _____.



What You Have Learnt

In this lesson you have learnt that universal adult franchise is the foundation of a representative democracy. It means that each man or woman after attaining a prescribed age (such as 18 years in India) is entitled to vote in the elections without any discrimination on grounds of caste, creed, religion, language or sex. The citizens exercise their right to vote in order to choose their representatives in elections. Elections are, in fact, the bedrock of democracy and express the sovereign will of the people through the exercise of their free and equal vote.

You have also learnt that there are two alternative systems of representation – Territorial and Functional. Under the territorial system, the country is divided into territorial constituencies and voters of each constituency elect their representatives. Territorial system is quite popular, and in India, the elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies are held on territorial basis. Functional representation implies that the people elect their representatives on the basis of their different occupational and professional affiliations. Thus, teachers, managers, industrialists, traders, workers, etc. elect their respective representatives.

The simple majority system is usually followed in single-member constituencies where the candidate simply securing the highest number of votes is declared elected. This system does not ensure adequate representation to all sections of the electorate. The system of proportional representation is followed to provide representation to the minorities in proportion to their voting strength. Minority representation is also secured through some other methods such as cumulative vote system and limited vote plan.



Terminal Exercises

1. Explain the meaning and significance of Universal Adult Franchise.
2. What is a simple majority system? Explain.
3. Describe the system of proportional representation. What are the two methods of ensuring proportional representation?

4. Explain the methods of securing minority representation other than the proportional representation.



Answers to Intext Questions

17.1

- (1) (a)
- (2) (d)
- (3) (b)
- (4) (d)

17.2

1. Simple Majority System
2. General Ticket System
3. Territorial
4. Single Transferable Vote System and List System
5. Cumulative vote system and Limited vote plan.

Hints for Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to Section 17.1.
2. Refer to Section 17.4.
3. Refer to Section 17.5.
4. Refer to Section 17.6.



Let us ponder over adolescence issues

What are the reasons for changes that occur in the body before attaining adulthood?

These changes happen because of changes in the natural chemicals in the body called hormones. Both boys and girls have hormones but they have different amounts of different hormones. That is why some of the changes that take place are different for girls and boys



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