

Democratic Politics

Chapter-1-POWER SHARING

Belgium and Sri Lanka

Belgium

- A small country in Europe.
- Borders with France, the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg.
- Population of a little over one crore, about half the population of Haryana.
- The ETHNIC composition of this small country is very complex. Of the country's total population, 59 per cent lives in the Flemish region and speaks Dutch language. Another 40 per cent people live in the Wallonia region and speak French. Remaining one per cent of the Belgians speak German.
- The capital city Brussels, 80 per cent people speak French while 20 per cent are Dutch-speaking.
- The minority French-speaking community was relatively rich and powerful. This was resented by the Dutch-speaking community who got the benefit of economic development and education much later. This led to tensions between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities during the 1950s and 1960s.
- The tension between the two communities was more acute in Brussels. Brussels presented a special problem: the Dutch-speaking people constituted a majority in the country, but a minority in the capital.

Sri Lanka

- An island nation, just a few kilometers off the southern coast of Tamil Nadu. It has about two crore people, about the same as in Haryana.
- Major social groups are the Sinhala-speakers (74 per cent) and the Tamil-speakers (18 per cent).
- Among Tamils there are two sub-groups.
- Tamil natives of the country are called 'Sri Lankan Tamils' (13 per cent). The rest, whose fore fathers came from India as plantation workers during colonial period, are called 'Indian Tamils'.
- Sri Lankan Tamils are concentrated in the north and east of the country. Most of the Sinhala-speaking people are Buddhist, while most of the Tamils are Hindus or Muslims.
- There are about 7 per cent Christians, who are both Tamil and Sinhala.

In Belgium, the Dutch community could take advantage of its numeric majority and force its will on the French and German-speaking population. This would push the conflict among communities further. This could lead to a very messy partition of the country; both the sides would claim control over Brussels. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala community enjoyed an even bigger majority and could impose its will on the entire country. Now, let us look at what happened in both these countries.

Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka

- ⑩ Sri Lanka emerged as an independent country in 1948.
- ⑩ The leaders of the Sinhala community sought to secure dominance over government by virtue of their majority.
- ⑩ As a result, the democratically elected government adopted a series of MAJORITARIAN measures to establish Sinhala supremacy.

- ⑩ In 1956, an Act was passed to recognize Sinhala as the only official language, thus disregarding Tamil.
- ⑩ The governments followed preferential policies that favored Sinhala applicants for university positions and government jobs.
- ⑩ A new constitution stipulated that the state shall protect and foster Buddhism.
- ⑩ All these government measures, coming one after the other, gradually increased the feeling of alienation among the Sri Lankan Tamils.
- ⑩ They felt that none of the major political parties led by the Buddhist Sinhala leaders were sensitive to their language and culture.
- ⑩ They felt that the constitution and government policies denied them equal political rights, discriminated against them in getting jobs and other opportunities and ignored their interests.
- ⑩ As a result, the relations between the Sinhala and Tamil communities strained overtime.
- ⑩ The Sri Lankan Tamils launched parties and struggles for the recognition of Tamil as an official language, for regional autonomy and equality of opportunity in securing education and jobs. But their demand for more autonomy to provinces populated by the Tamils was repeatedly denied.
- ⑩ By 1980s several political organizations were formed demanding an independent Tamil Eelam (state) in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. The distrust between the two communities turned into widespread conflict. It soon turned into a CIVIL WAR.
- ⑩ As a result thousands of people of both the communities have been killed. Many families were forced to leave the country as refugees and many more lost their livelihoods.

Accommodation in Belgium

- The Belgian leaders took a different path. They recognized the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities.
- Between 1970 and 1993, they amended their constitution four times so as to work out an arrangement that would enable everyone to live together within the same country.
- The arrangement they worked out is different from any other country and is very innovative. Here are some of the elements of the Belgian model:
- Constitution prescribes that the number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers shall be equal in the central government. Some special laws require the support of majority of members from each linguistic group.
- Thus, no single community can make decisions unilaterally.
- Many powers of the central government have been given to state governments of the two regions of the country. The state governments are not subordinate to the Central Government.
- Brussels has a separate government in which both the communities have equal representation. The French-speaking people accepted equal representation in Brussels because the Dutch-speaking community has accepted equal representation in the Central Government.
- Apart from the Central and the State Government, there is a third kind of government.
- This 'community government' is elected by people belonging to one language community Dutch, French and German-speaking – no matter where they live.
- This government has the power regarding cultural, educational and language-related issues you might find the Belgian model very complicated. It indeed is very complicated, even for people living in Belgium. But these arrangements have worked well so far.

- They helped to avoid civic strife between the two major communities and a possible division of the country on linguistic lines. When many countries of Europe came together to form the European Union, Brussels was chosen as its headquarters

Why power sharing is desirable?

- Firstly, power sharing is good because it helps to reduce the possibility of conflict between social groups.
- Since social conflict often leads to violence and political instability, power sharing is a good way to ensure the stability of political order.
- Imposing the will of majority community over others may look like an attractive option in the short run, but in the long run it undermines the unity of the nation.
- Domination of the majority is not just oppressive for the minority; it often brings ruin to the majority as well there is a second, deeper reason why power sharing is good for democracies.
- Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy.
- A democratic rule involves sharing power with those affected by its exercise, and who have to live with its effects.
- People have a right to be consulted on how they are to be governed.
- A legitimate government is one where citizens, through participation, acquire a stake in the system.

Forms of power sharing

- The idea of power sharing has emerged in opposition to the notions of undivided political power.
- For a long time it was believed that all power of a government must reside in one person or group of persons located at one place.
- It was felt that if the power to decide is dispersed, it would not be possible to take quick decisions and to enforce them. But these notions have changed with the emergence of democracy.
- One basic principle of democracy is that people are the source of all political power. In a democracy, people rule themselves through institutions of self-governance. In a good democratic government, due respect is given to diverse groups and views that exist in a society. Everyone has a voice in the shaping of public policies. Therefore, it follows that in a democracy political power should be distributed among as many citizens as possible.

In modern democracies, power sharing arrangements can take many forms. Let us look at some of the most common arrangements that we have or will come across.

- **Power is shared among different organs of government, such as the legislature, executive and judiciary.**
- Horizontal distribution of power because it allows different organs of government placed at the same level to exercise different powers. Such a separation ensures that none of the organs can exercise unlimited power.
- Each organ checks the others. This results in a balance of power among various institutions.
- In a democracy, even though ministers and government officials exercise power, they are responsible to the Parliament or State Assemblies.
- Similarly, although judges are appointed by the executive, they can check the functioning of executive or laws made by the legislatures.
- This arrangement is called a system of checks and balances.
- **Power can be shared among governments at different levels –**
- a general government for the entire country and governments at the provincial or regional level.
- Such a general government for the entire country is usually called federal government.

- In India, we refer to it as the Central or Union Government
- The governments at the provincial or regional level are called by different names in different countries.
- In India we call them State Governments. This system is not followed in all countries.
- There are many countries where there are no provincial or state governments. But in those countries like ours, where there are different levels of government, the constitution clearly lays down the powers of different levels of government.
- This is what they did in Belgium, but was refused in Sri Lanka. This is called federal division of power.
- The same principle can be extended to levels of government lower than the State government, such as the municipality and Panchayat.
- Let us call division of powers involving higher and lower levels of government vertical division of power.
- **Power may also be shared among different social groups such as the religious and linguistic groups.**
- ‘Community government’ in Belgium is a good example of this arrangement.
- In some countries there are constitutional and legal arrangements whereby socially weaker sections and women are represented in the legislatures and administration.
- The system of ‘reserved constituencies’ in assemblies and the parliament of our country.
- This type of arrangement is meant to give space in the government and administration to diverse social groups who otherwise would feel alienated from the government. This method is used to give minority communities a fair share in power.
- **Power sharing arrangements can also be seen in the way political parties, pressure groups and movements control or influence those in power.**
- In a democracy, the citizens must have freedom to choose among various contenders for power.
- In contemporary democracies, this takes the form of competition among different parties.
- Such competition ensures that power does not remain in one hand.
- In the long run, power is shared among different political parties that represent different ideologies and social groups.
- Sometimes this kind of sharing can be direct, when two or more parties form an alliance to contest elections. If their alliance is elected, they form a coalition government and thus share power.
- In a democracy, we find interest groups such as those of traders, businessmen, industrialists, farmers and industrial workers.
- They also will have a share in governmental power, either through participation in governmental committees or bringing influence on the decision-making process.

Chapter-2-Federalism

What is federalism?

- Federalism is a system of government in which the power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of the country.
- Usually, a federation has two levels of government. One is the government for the entire country that is usually responsible for a few subjects of common national interest.
- The others are governments at the level of provinces or states that look after much of the day-to-day administering of their state.
- Both these levels of governments enjoy their power independent of the other.
- In this sense, federations are contrasted with unitary governments. Under the unitary system, either there is only one level of government or the sub-units are subordinate to the central government.
- The central government can pass on orders to the provincial or the local government.
- But in a federal system, the central government cannot order the state government to do something.
- State government has powers of its own for which it is not answerable to the central government. Both these governments are separately answerable to the people.

The key features of federalism:

- Two or more levels (or tiers) of government.
- Different tiers of government govern the same citizens, but each tier has its own JURISDICTION in specific matters of legislation, taxation and administration.
- Jurisdictions of the respective levels or tiers of government are specified in the constitution. So the existence and authority of each tier of government is constitutionally guaranteed.
- The fundamental provisions of the constitution cannot be unilaterally changed by one level of government. Such changes require the consent of both the levels of government.
- Courts have the power to interpret the constitution and the powers of different levels of government. The highest court acts as an umpire if disputes arise between different levels of government in the exercise of their respective powers.
- Sources of revenue for each level of government are clearly specified to ensure its financial autonomy.
- **The federal system thus has dual objectives: to safeguard and promote unity of the country**, while at the same time accommodate regional diversity.
- Therefore, two aspects are crucial for the institutions and practice of federalism.
- Governments at different levels should agree to some rules of power-sharing.
- They should also trust that each would abide by its part of the agreement.
- An ideal federal system has both aspects: mutual trust and agreement to live together.
- The exact balance of power between the central and the state government varies from one federation to another.
- This balance depends mainly on the historical context in which the federation was formed.
- There are two kinds of routes through which federations have been formed.
- The first route involves independent States coming together on their own to form a bigger unit, so that by pooling sovereignty and retaining identity they can increase their security.
- This type of **'coming together' federations** include the USA, Switzerland and Australia.
- In this first category of federations, all the constituent States usually have equal power and are strong vis-à-vis the federal government.
- The second route is where a large country decides to divide its power between the constituent States and the national government. India, Spain and Belgium are examples of this kind of **'holding together' federations**.

- In this second category, the central government tends to be more powerful vis-à-vis the States. Very often different constituent units of the federation have unequal powers. Some units are granted special powers.

What makes India a federal country?

- Let us begin with the Constitution. India had emerged as an independent nation after a painful and bloody partition.
- Soon after Independence, several princely states became a part of the country.
- The Constitution declared India as a Union of States.
- Although it did not use the word federation, the Indian Union is based on the principles of federalism.
- All the features of federalism apply to the provisions of the Indian Constitution.
- The Constitution originally provided for a two-tier system of government, the Union Government or what we call the Central Government, representing the Union of India and the State governments.
- Later, a third tier of federalism was added in the form of Panchayat and Municipalities.
- As in any federation, these different tiers enjoy separate jurisdiction. The Constitution clearly provided a three- fold distribution of legislative powers between the Union Government and the State Governments. Thus, it contains three lists:
 - **Union List** includes subjects of national importance such as defense of the country, foreign affairs, banking, communications and currency.
 - **State List** contains subjects of State and local importance such as police, trade, commerce, agriculture and irrigation.
 - **Concurrent List** includes subjects of common interest to both the Union Government as well as the State Governments, such as education, forest, trade unions, marriage, adoption and succession..
- All States in the Indian Union do not have identical powers.
- Some States enjoy a special status. Jammu and Kashmir has its own Constitution.
- Many provisions of the Indian Constitution are not applicable to this State without the approval of the State Assembly.
- Indians who are not permanent residents of this State cannot buy land or house here.
- Similar special provisions exist for some other States of India as well.
- There are some units of the Indian Union which enjoy very little power. These are areas which are too small to become an independent State but which could not be merged with any of the existing States. These areas, like Chandigarh, or Lakshadweep or the capital city of Delhi, are called Union Territories. These territories do not have the powers of a State. The Central Government has special powers in running these areas.
- This sharing of power between the Union Government and the State governments is basic to the structure of the Constitution.
- It is not easy to make changes to this power sharing arrangement.
- The Parliament cannot on its own change this arrangement.
- Any change to it has to be first passed by both the Houses of Parliament with at least two-thirds majority. Then it has to be ratified by the legislatures of at least half of the total States.
- The judiciary plays an important role in overseeing the implementation of constitutional provisions and procedures. In case of any dispute about the division of powers, the High Courts and the Supreme Court make a decision.
- The Union and State governments have the power to raise resources by levying taxes in order to carry on the government and the responsibilities assigned to each of them.

How is federalism practiced?

- Constitutional provisions are necessary for the success of federalism but these are not sufficient.
- If the federal experiment has succeeded in India, it is not merely because of the clearly laid out constitutional provisions.

- The real success of federalism in India can be attributed to the nature of democratic politics in our country.
- This ensured that the spirit of federalism, respect for diversity and desire for living together became a shared ideal in our country.

Linguistic States

- The creation of Linguistic States was the first and a major test for democratic politics in our country.
- If you look at the political map of India when it began its journey as a democracy in 1947 and that of 2006, you will be surprised by the extent of the changes.
- Many old States have vanished and many new States have been created.

- Areas, boundaries and names of the States have been changed.
- In 1947, the boundaries of several old States of India were changed in order to create new States. This was done to ensure that people who spoke the same language lived in the same State.
- Some States were created not on the basis of language but to recognize differences based on culture, ethnicity or geography. These include States like Nagaland, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand when the demand for the formation of States on the basis of language was raised; some national leaders feared that it would lead to the disintegration of the country.
- The Central Government resisted linguistic States for some time. But the experience has shown that the formation of linguistic States has actually made the country, more united. It has also made administration easier.

Language policy

- A second test for Indian federation is the language policy. Our Constitution did not give the status of national language to any one language. Hindi was identified as the official language.
- But Hindi is the mother tongue of only about 40 percent of Indians. Therefore, there were many safeguards to protect other languages.
- Besides Hindi, there are 21 other languages recognized as Scheduled Languages by the Constitution.
- A candidate in an examination conducted for the Central Government positions may opt to take the examination in any of these languages. States to have their own official languages. Much of the government work takes place in the official language of the concerned State.
- Unlike Sri Lanka, the leaders of our country adopted a very cautious attitude in spreading the use of Hindi.
- According to the Constitution, the use of English for official purposes was to stop in 1965.
- However, many non- Hindi speaking States demanded that the use of English continue.
- In Tamil Nadu, this movement took a violent form. The Central Government responded by agreeing to continue the use of English along with Hindi for official purposes. Many critics think that this solution favored the English- speaking elite. Promotion of Hindi continues to be the official policy of the Government of India.
- Promotion does not mean that the Central Government can impose Hindi on States where people speak a different language. The flexibility shown by Indian political leaders helped our country avoid the kind of situation that Sri Lanka finds itself in.

Centre-State relations

- Restructuring the Centre-State relations is one more way in which federalism has been strengthened in practice.
- How the constitutional arrangements for sharing power work in reality depends to a large extent on how the ruling parties and leaders follow these arrangements. For a long time, the same party ruled both at the Centre and in most of the States. This meant that the State governments did not exercise their rights as autonomous federal units.
- As and when the ruling party at the State level was different, the parties that ruled at the Centre tried to undermine the power of the States.

- In those days, the Central Government would often misuse the Constitution to dismiss the State governments that were controlled by rival parties. This undermined the spirit of federalism.
- All this changed significantly after 1990. This period saw the rise of regional political parties in many States of the country. This was also the beginning of the era of COALITION GOVERNMENTS at the Centre.
- Since no single party got a clear majority in the Lok Sabha, the major national parties had to enter into an alliance with many parties including several regional parties to form a government at the Centre.
- This led to a new culture of power sharing and respect for the autonomy of State Governments. This trend was supported by major judgments of the Supreme Court that made it difficult for the Central Government to dismiss state governments in an arbitrary manner.
- Thus, federal power sharing is more effective today than it was in the early years after the

Constitution came into force.

Decentralization in India

- A vast country like India cannot be run only through these two-tiers.
- States in India are as large as independent countries of Europe. In terms of population, Uttar Pradesh is bigger than Russia; Maharashtra is about as big as Germany. Many of these States are internally very diverse.
- There is thus a need for power sharing within these States.
- Federal power sharing in India needs another tier of government, below that of the State governments.
- This is the rationale for decentralization of power. Thus, resulted a third-tier of government, called local government.
- When power is taken away from Central and State governments and given to local government, it is called decentralization.
- The basic idea behind decentralization is that there are a large number of problems and issues which are best settled at the local level.
- People have better knowledge of problems in their localities. They also have better ideas on where to spend money and how to manage things more efficiently.
- Besides, at the local level it is possible for the people to directly participate in decision making. This helps to inculcate a habit of democratic participation.
- Local government is the best way to realise one important principle of democracy, namely local self- government. The need for decentralization was recognized in our Constitution.
- Since then, there have been several attempts to decentralize power to the level of villages and towns.
- Panchayat in villages and municipalities in urban areas were set up in all the States. But these were directly under the control of state governments.
- Elections to these local governments were not held regularly. Local governments did not have any powers or resources of their own. Thus, there was very little decentralization in effective terms. A major step towards decentralization was taken in 1992. The Constitution was amended to make the third-tier of democracy more powerful and effective.
- Now it is constitutionally mandatory to hold regular elections to local government bodies.
- Seats are reserved in the elected bodies and the executive heads of these institutions for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.
- At least one-third of all positions are reserved for women.
- An independent institution called the State Election Commission has been created in each State to conduct Panchayat and municipal elections.
- The State governments are required to share some powers and revenue with local government bodies'. The nature of sharing varies from State to State.
- Rural local government is popularly known by the name panchayati raj.

- Each village, or a group of villages in some States, has a gram Panchayat. This is a council consisting of several ward members, often called panch, and a president or sarpanch.
- They are directly elected by all the adult population living in that ward or village. It is the decision-making body for the entire village.
- The Panchayat works under the overall supervision of the gram sabha. All the voters in the village are its members.
- It has to meet at least twice or thrice in a year to approve the annual budget of the gram Panchayat and to review the performance of the gram Panchayat.
- The local government structure goes right up to the district level.
- A few gram panchayats are grouped together to form what is usually called a Panchayat samiti or block or mandal.
- The members of this representative body are elected by all the Panchayat members in that area.
- All the Panchayat samitis or mandals in a district together constitute the zilla (district) parishad.
- Most members of the zilla parishad are elected.
- Members of the Lok Sabha and MLAs of that district and some other officials of other district level bodies

are also its members. Zilla parishad chairperson is the political head of the zilla parishad.

- Similarly, local government bodies exist for urban areas as well.
- Municipalities are set up in towns. Big cities are constituted into municipal corporations. Both municipalities and municipal corporations are controlled by elected bodies consisting of people's representatives.
- Municipal chairperson is the political head of the municipality. In a municipal corporation such an officer is called the mayor. This new system of local government is the largest experiment in democracy conducted anywhere in the world.
- Constitutional status for local government has helped to deepen democracy in our country. It has also increased women's representation and voice in our democracy.
- While elections are held regularly and enthusiastically, gram sabhas are not held regularly.
- Most state governments have not transferred significant powers to the local governments nor have they given adequate resources.

Chapter-3-Democracy and Diversity

Civil Rights Movement in the USA (1954-1968) refers to a set of events and reform movements aimed at abolishing legal racial discrimination against African-Americans. Led by Martin Luther King Jr., this movement practiced non-violent methods of civil disobedience against racially discriminatory laws and practices. African-American,

Afro-American, Black American, or Black are the terms used to refer mainly to the descendants of Africans who were brought into America as slaves between the 17th century and early 19th century.

The Black Power

Ⓢ Movement emerged in 1966 and lasted till 1975, which was a more militant anti-racist movement, advocating even violence if necessary to end racism in the US.

Origins of social differences

- Ⓢ Social differences are mostly based on accident of birth.
- Ⓢ Normally we don't choose to belong to our community. We belong to it simply because we were born into it.

- ⑩ We all experience social differences based on accident of birth in our everyday lives.
- ⑩ People around us are male or female, they are tall and short, and have different kinds of complexions, or have different physical abilities or disabilities. But all kinds of social differences are not based on accident of birth.
- ⑩ Some of the differences are based on our choices.
- ⑩ For example, some people are atheists. They don't believe in God or any religion.
- ⑩ Some people choose to follow a religion other than the one in which they were born.
- ⑩ Most of us choose what to study, which occupation to take up and which games or cultural activities to take part in. All these lead to formation of social groups that are based on our choices.
- ⑩ Every social difference does not lead to social division. Social differences divide similar people from one another, but they also unite very different people.
- ⑩ People belonging to different social groups share differences and similarities cutting across the boundaries of their groups.
- ⑩ It is fairly common for people belonging to the same religion to feel that they do not belong to the same community, because their caste or sect is very different. It is also possible for people from different religions to have the same caste and feel close to each other.
- ⑩ Rich and poor persons from the same family often do not keep close relations with each other for they feel

They are very different. Thus, we all have more than one identity and can belong to more than one social group. We have different identities in different contexts.

Overlapping and cross-cutting differences

- ⑩ Social division takes place when some social difference overlaps with other differences.
- ⑩ The difference between the Blacks and Whites becomes a social division in the US because the Blacks tend to be poor, homeless and discriminated against.
- ⑩ In our country *Dalits* tend to be poor and landless. They often face discrimination and injustice.
- ⑩ Situations of this kind produce social divisions, when one kind of social difference becomes more important than the other and people start feeling that they belong to different communities.
- ⑩ If social differences cross cut one another, it is difficult to pit one group of people against the other. It means that groups that share a common interest on one issue are likely to be in different sides on a different issue.
- ⑩ Consider the cases of Northern Ireland and the Netherlands. Both are predominantly Christian but divided between Catholics and Protestants. In Northern Ireland, class and religion overlap with each other.
- ⑩ If you are Catholic, you are also more likely to be poor, and you may have suffered a history of discrimination. In the Netherlands, class and religion tend to cut across each other. Catholics and Protestants are about equally likely to be poor or rich.
- ⑩ The result is that Catholics and Protestants have had conflicts in Northern Ireland, while they do not do so in the Netherlands.
- ⑩ Overlapping social differences create possibilities of deep social divisions and tensions.
- ⑩ Cross-cutting social differences are easier to accommodate. Social divisions of one kind or another exist in most countries.
- ⑩ It does not matter whether the country is small or big. India is a vast country with many communities. Belgium is a small country with many communities. Even those countries such as Germany and Sweden, that were once highly HOMOGENEOUS, are undergoing rapid change within flux of people from other parts of the world. MIGRANTS bring with them their own culture and tend to form a different social community. In this sense most countries of the world are multi-cultural.

Homogeneous society:

⑩ A society that has similar kinds of people, especially where there are no significant ethnic differences.

Migrant:

⑩ Anybody who shifts from one region or country to another region within a country or to another country, usually for work or other economic opportunities.

Politics of social divisions

⑩ At first sight, it would appear that the combination of politics and social divisions is very dangerous and explosive.

⑩ Democracy involves competition among various political parties.

⑩ Their competition tends to divide any society. If they start competing in terms of some existing social divisions, it can make social divisions into political divisions and lead to conflict, violence or even disintegration of a country. This has happened in many countries.

Range of outcomes

⑩ Take the case of Northern Ireland that we referred to above. This region of the United Kingdom has been for many years the site of a violent and bitter ethno-political conflict. Its population is divided into two major sects of Christianity: 53 per cent are Protestants, while 44 per cent are Roman Catholics.

⑩ The Catholics were represented by Nationalist parties who demanded that Northern Ireland be unified with the Republic of Ireland, a predominantly Catholic country. The Protestants were represented by Unionists who wanted to remain with the UK, which is predominantly Protestant.

⑩ Hundreds of civilians, militants and security forces were killed in the fight between Unionists and Nationalists and between the security forces of the UK and the Nationalists.

⑩ It was only in 1998, that the UK government and the Nationalists reached a peace treaty after which the latter suspended their armed struggle. In Yugoslavia, the story did not have a happy ending.

⑩ Political competition along religious and ethnic lines led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia into six independent countries. Such examples lead some people to conclude that politics and social divisions must not be allowed to mix.

⑩ They think that it would be best if there are no social divisions in any country. If social divisions do exist in a country, they must never be expressed in politics.

⑩ At the same time every expression of social divisions in politics does not lead to such disasters.

⑩ We have already seen that social divisions of one kind or another exist in most countries of the world.

⑩ Wherever they exist, these divisions are reflected in politics. In a democracy it is only natural that political parties would talk about these divisions, make different promises to different communities, look after due representation of various communities and make policies to redress the grievances of the disadvantaged communities.

⑩ Social divisions affect voting in most countries. People from one community tend to prefer some party more than others. In many countries there are parties that focus only on one community. Yet all this does not lead to disintegration of the country.

Three determinants

⑩ Three factors are crucial in deciding the outcome of politics of social divisions.

⑩ **First** of all, the outcome depends on how people perceive their identities. If people see their identities in singular and exclusive terms, it becomes very difficult to accommodate.

- ⑩ As long as people in Northern Ireland saw themselves as only Catholic or Protestant, their differences were difficult to reconcile.
- ⑩ It is much easier if the people see that their identities are multiple and are complementary with the national identity.
- ⑩ A majority of Belgians now feel that they are as much Belgian as they are Dutch or German-speaking. This helps them to stay together.
- ⑩ This is how most people in our country see their identity: they think of themselves as Indian as well as belonging to a state or a language group or a social or religious community.
- ⑩ **Second**, it depends on how political leaders raise the demands of any community. It is easier to accommodate demands that are within the constitutional framework and are not at the cost of another community.
- ⑩ The demand for 'only Sinhala' was at the cost of the interest and identity of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

- ⑩ In Yugoslavia, the leaders of different ethnic communities presented their demands in such a way that these could not be accommodated within a single country.
- ⑩ **Third**, it depends on how the government reacts to demands of different groups. As we saw in the examples of Belgium and Sri Lanka, if the rulers are willing to share power and accommodate the reasonable demands of minority community, social divisions become less threatening for the country.
- ⑩ But if they try to suppress such a demand in the name of national unity, the end result is often quite the opposite.
- ⑩ Such attempts at forced integration often sow the seeds of disintegration.
- ⑩ Thus the assertion of social diversities in a country need not be seen as a source of danger. In a democracy, political expression of social divisions is very normal and can be healthy. This allows various disadvantaged and marginal social groups to express their grievances and get the government to attend to these. Expression of various kinds of social divisions in politics often results in their cancelling one another out and thus reducing their intensity. This leads to strengthening of a democracy.
- ⑩ But a positive attitude towards diversity and a willingness to accommodate it do not come about easily.
- ⑩ People who feel marginalized, deprived and discriminated have to fight against the injustices.
- ⑩ Such a fight often takes the democratic path, voicing their demands in a peaceful and constitutional manner and seeking a fair position through elections. Sometimes social differences can take the form of unacceptable level of social inequality and injustice.
- ⑩ The struggle against such inequalities sometimes takes the path of violence and defiance of state power.
- ⑩ However history shows that democracy is the best way to fight for recognition and also to accommodate diversity.

Chapter-4-Gender, Religion and Caste

Gender and Politics

- This is a form of hierarchical social division seen everywhere, but is rarely recognized in the study of politics.
- The gender division tends to be understood as natural and unchangeable. However, it is not based on biology but on social expectations and stereotypes.

Public/private division

- Boys and girls are brought up to believe that the main responsibility of women is housework and bringing up children.
- This is reflected in a SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR in most families: women do all work inside the home such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, tailoring, looking after children, etc., and men do all the work outside the home.
- It is not that men cannot do housework; they simply think that it is for women to attend to these things.
- When these jobs are paid for, men are ready to take up these works. Most tailors or cooks in hotels are men.
- Similarly, it is not that women do not work outside their home. In villages, women fetch water, collect fuel and work in the fields. In urban areas, poor women work as domestic helper in middle class homes, while middle class women work in offices. In fact the majority of women do some sort of paid work in addition to domestic labour.
- But their work is not valued and does not get recognition the result of this division of labour is that although women constitute half of the humanity, their role in public life, especially politics, is minimal in most societies. Earlier, only men were allowed to participate in public affairs, vote and contest for public offices. Gradually the gender issue was raised in politics.
- Women in different parts of the world organized and agitated for equal rights. There were agitations in different countries for the extension of voting rights to women. These agitations demanded enhancing the political and legal status of women and improving their educational and career opportunities.
- More radical women's movements aimed at equality in personal and family life as well. These movements are called FEMINIST movements.
- Political expression of gender division and political mobilization on this question helped to improve women's role in public life.
- We now find women working as scientists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, managers and college and university teachers which were earlier not considered suitable for women.
- In some parts of the world, for example in Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland, the participation of women in public life is very high.
- In our country, women still lag much behind men despite some improvement since Independence.
- Ours is still a male-dominated, PATRIARCHAL society.
- Women face disadvantage, discrimination and oppression in various ways:
 - The literacy rate among women is only 54 per cent compared with 76 per cent among men. Similarly, a smaller proportion of girl students go for higher studies. When we look at school results, girls perform as well as boys, if not better in some places. But they dropout because parents prefer to spend their resources for their boys' education rather than spending equally on their sons and daughters.
 - No wonder the proportion of women among the highly paid and valued jobs is still very small. On an average an Indian woman works one hour more than an average man every day. Yet much of her work is not paid and therefore often not valued.

- The Equal Wages Act provides that equal wages should be paid to equal work. However in almost all areas of work, from sports and cinema, to factories and fields, women are paid less than men, even when both do exactly the same work
- In many parts of India parents prefer to have sons and find ways to have the girl child aborted before she is born. Such sex-selective abortion led to a decline in child sex ratio (number of girl children per thousand boys) in the country to merely 933 There are reports of various kinds of harassment, exploitation and violence against women. Urban areas have become particularly unsafe for women They are not safe even within their own home from beating, harassment and other forms of domestic violence

Women's political representation

- Yet issues related to women's wellbeing or otherwise are not given adequate attention.
- This has led many feminists and women's movements to the conclusion that unless women control power, their problems will not get adequate attention.
- One way to ensure this is to have more women as elected representatives.
- In India, the proportion of women in legislature has been very low. For example, the percentage of elected women members in Lok Sabha has never reached even 10 per cent of its total strength. Their share in the state assemblies is less than 5 per cent. In this respect, India is among the bottom group of nations in the world.
- India is behind the averages for several developing countries of Africa and Latin America.
- In the government, cabinets are largely all-male even when a woman becomes the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister.
- One way to solve this problem is to make it legally binding to have a fair proportion of women in the elected bodies. This is what the Panchayati Raj has done in India.
- One-third of seats in local government bodies – in panchayats and municipalities – are now reserved for women.
- Now there are more than 10 lakh elected women representatives in rural and urban local bodies.
- Women's organizations and activists have been demanding a similar reservation of at least one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. A bill with this proposal has been pending before the Parliament for more than a decade.
- But there is no consensus over this among all the political parties. The bill has not been passed.
- Gender division is an example that some form of social division needs to be expressed in politics. This also shows that disadvantaged groups do benefit when social divisions become a political issue.

Religion, communalism and politics

- This division is not as universal as gender, but religious diversity is fairly wide spread in the world today.
- Many countries including India have in their population, followers of different religions.
- As we noticed in the case of Northern Ireland, even when most of the people belong to the same religion, there can be serious differences about the way people practice that religion.
- Unlike gender differences, the religious differences are often expressed in the field of politics Consider the following:

- Gandhiji used to say that religion can never be separated from politics. What he meant by religion was not any particular religion like Hinduism or Islam but moral values that inform all religions. He believed that politics must be guided by ethics drawn from religion. Human rights groups in our country have argued that most of the victims of communal riots in our country are people from religious minorities. They have demanded that the government take special steps to protect religious minorities.
- Women's movement has argued that FAMILY LAWS of all religions discriminate against women. So they have demanded that government should change these laws to make them more equitable.
- All these instances involve a relationship between religion and politics.
- But they do not seem very wrong or dangerous. Ideas, ideals and values drawn from different religions can and perhaps should play a role in politics. People should be able to express in politics their needs, interests and demands as a member of a religious community. Those who hold political power should sometimes be able to regulate the practice of religion so as to prevent discrimination and oppression. These political acts are not wrong as long as they treat every religion equally

Communalism

- The problem begins when religion is seen as the basis of the nation. The example of Northern Ireland in Chapter 3 shows the dangers of such an approach to nationalism.
- The problem becomes more acute when religion is expressed in politics in exclusive and partisan terms, when one religion and its followers are pitted against another.
- This happens when beliefs of one religion are presented as superior to those of other religions, when the demands of one religious group are formed in opposition to another and when state power is used to establish domination of one religious group over the rest.
- This manner of using religion in politics is communal politics.
- Communal politics is based on the idea that religion is the principle basis of social community.
- Communalism involves thinking along the following lines.
- The followers of a particular religion must belong to one community.
- Their fundamental interests are the same. Any difference that they may have is irrelevant or trivial for community life.
- It also follows that people who follow different religions cannot belong to the same social community. If the followers of different religion have some commonalities these are superficial and immaterial.
- Their interests are bound to be different and involve a conflict. In its extreme form communalism leads to the

Belief that people belonging to different religions cannot live as equal citizens within one nation.

- Either, one of them has to dominate the rest or they have to form different nations this belief is fundamentally flawed. People of one religion do not have the same interests and aspirations in every context.
- Everyone has several other roles, positions and identities. There are many voices inside every community. All these voices have a right to be heard. Therefore any attempt to bring all followers of one religion together in context other than religion is bound to suppress many voices within that community.
- Communalism can take various forms in politics: The most common expression of communalism is in everyday beliefs. These routinely involve religious prejudices, stereotypes of religious communities and belief in the superiority of one's religion over other religions. This is so common that we often fail to notice it, even when we believe in it.

- A communal mind often leads to a quest for political dominance of one's own religious community. For those belonging to majority community, this takes the form of majoritarian dominance. For those belonging to the minority community, it can take the form of a desire to form a separate political unit.
- Political mobilization on religious lines is another frequent form of communalism. This involves the use of sacred symbols, religious leaders, emotional appeal and plain fear in order to bring the followers of one religion together in the political arena. In electoral politics this often involves special appeal to the interests or emotions of voters of one religion in preference to others.
- Sometimes communalism takes its most ugly form of communal violence, riots and massacre. India and Pakistan suffered some of the worst communal riots at the time of the Partition. The post-Independence period has also seen large scale communal violence.

Secular state

- Communalism was and continues to be one of the major challenges to democracy in our country. The makers of our Constitution were aware of this challenge.
- That is why they chose the model of a secular state. This choice was reflected in several constitutional provisions that we studied last year:
- There is no official religion for the Indian state. Unlike the status of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, that of Islam in Pakistan and that of Christianity in England, our Constitution does not give a special status to any religion.
- The Constitution provides to all individuals and communities' freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion or not to follow any. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.
- At the same time, the Constitution allows the state to intervene in the matters of religion in order to ensure equality within religious communities. For example, it bans untouchability.
- Understood in this sense, secularism is not just an ideology of some parties or persons. This idea constitutes one of the foundations of our country. Communalism should not be seen as a threat to some people in India. It threatens the very idea of India. That is why communalism needs to be combated.
- A secular Constitution like ours is necessary but not sufficient to combat communalism. Communal prejudices and propaganda need to be countered in everyday life and religion-based mobilization needs to be countered in the arena of politics.

Caste and politics

Caste inequalities

- Unlike gender and religion, caste division is special to India.
- All societies have some kind of social inequality and some form of division of labour. In most societies, occupations are passed on from one generation to another. Caste system is an extreme form of this.
- What makes it different from other societies is that in this system, hereditary occupational division was sanctioned by rituals. Members of the same caste group were supposed to form a social community that practiced the same or similar occupation, married within the caste group and did not eat with members from other caste groups.
- Caste system was based on exclusion of and discrimination against the 'outcaste' groups.
- They were subjected to the inhuman practice of untouchability.
- That is why political leaders and social reformers like Jotiba Phule, Gandhiji, B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker advocated and worked to establish a society in which caste inequalities

are absent Partly due to their efforts and partly due to other socio-economic changes, castes and caste system in modern India have undergone great changes.

- With economic development, large scale URBANISATION, growth of literacy and education, OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY and the weakening of the position of landlords in the villages, the old notions of CASTE HIERARCHY are breaking down.
- Now, most of the times, in urban areas it does not matter much who is walking along next to us on a street or eating at the next table in a restaurant.
- The Constitution of India prohibited any caste-based discrimination and laid the foundations of policies to reverse the injustices of the caste system.
- If a person who lived a century ago were to return to India, she would be greatly surprised at the change that has come about in the country.
- Yet caste has not disappeared from contemporary India. Some of the older aspects of caste have persisted.
- Even now most people marry within their own caste or tribe. Untouchability has not ended completely, despite constitutional prohibition. Effects of centuries of advantages and disadvantages continue to be felt today.
- The caste groups that had access to education under the old system have done very well in acquiring modern education as well.
- Those groups that did not have access to education or were prohibited from acquiring it have naturally lagged behind. That is why there is a disproportionately large presence of 'upper caste' among the urban middle classes in our country.
- Caste continues to be closely linked to economic status

Caste in politics

- As in the case of communalism, casteism is rooted in the belief that caste is the sole basis of social community.
- According to this way of thinking, people belonging to the same caste belong to a natural social community and have the same interests which they do not share with any one from another caste.
- As we saw in the case of communalism, such a belief is not borne out by our experience. Caste is one aspect of our experience but it is not the only relevant or the most important aspect.

Caste can take various forms in politics:

- When parties choose candidates in elections, they keep in mind the caste composition of the electorate and nominate candidates from different castes so as to muster necessary support to win elections. When governments are formed political parties usually take care that representatives of different castes and tribes find a place in it.

- Political parties and candidates in elections make appeals to caste sentiment to muster support. Some political parties are known to favour some castes and are seen as their representatives.

Universal adult franchise and the principle of one-person-one-vote compelled political leaders to gear up to the task of mobilizing and securing political support. It also brought new consciousness among the people of castes that were hitherto treated as inferior and low. The focus on caste in politics can sometimes give an impression that elections are all about caste and nothing else. That is far from true. Just consider these:

- No parliamentary constituency in the country has a clear majority of one single caste. So, every candidate and party needs to win the confidence of more than one caste and community to win elections.
- No party wins the votes of all the voters of a caste or community. When people say that a caste is a 'vote bank' of one party, it usually means that a large proportion of the voters from that caste vote for that party.

- Many political parties may put up candidates from the same caste (if that caste is believed to dominate the electorate in a particular constituency). Some voters have more than one candidate from their caste while many voters have no candidate from their caste.
- The ruling party and the sitting MP or MLA frequently lose elections in our country. That could not have happened if all castes and communities were frozen in their political preferences.
- Clearly, while caste matters in electoral politics, so do many other factors. The voters have strong attachment to political parties which is often stronger than their attachment to their caste or community. People within the same caste or community have different interests depending on their economic condition. Rich and poor or men and women from the same caste often vote very differently. People's assessment of the performance of the government and the popularity rating of the leaders matter and are often decisive in elections.

Politics incaste

- ⑩ We have so far looked at what caste does to politics. But it does not mean that there is only a one-way relation between caste and politics. Politics too influences the caste system and caste identities by bringing them into the political arena.
- ⑩ Thus, it is not politics that gets caste-ridden; it is the caste that gets politicized. This takes several forms: Each caste group tries to become bigger by incorporating within it neighboring castes or sub-castes which were earlier excluded from it.
- ⑩ Various caste groups are required to enter into a coalition with other castes or communities and thus enter into a dialogue and negotiation.
- ⑩ New kinds of caste groups have come up in the political arena like 'backward' and 'forward' caste groups.
- ⑩ Thus, caste plays different kinds of roles in politics. In some situations, expression of caste differences in politics gives many disadvantaged communities the space to demand their share of power. In this sense-caste politics has helped people from Dalits and OBC castes to gain better access to decision making. Several political and non-political organizations have been demanding and agitating for an end to discrimination against particular castes, for more dignity and more access to land, resources and opportunities.
- ⑩ At the same time exclusive attention to caste can produce negative results as well. As in the case of religion, politics based on caste identity alone is not very healthy in a democracy. It can divert attention from other pressing issues like poverty, development and corruption. In some cases caste division leads to tensions, conflict and even violence.

Popular struggles in Nepal and Bolivia

Movement for democracy in Nepal

- Nepal witnessed an extraordinary popular movement in April 2006.
- The movement was aimed at restoring democracy. Nepal, you might recall, was one of the 'third wave' countries that had won democracy in 1990.
- Although the king formally remained the head of the state, the real power was exercised by popularly elected representatives.
- King Birendra, who has accepted this transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, was killed in a mysterious massacre of the royal family in 2001.
- King Gyanendra, the new king of Nepal, was not prepared to accept democratic rule. He took advantage of the weakness and unpopularity of the democratically elected government.

- In February 2005, the king dismissed the then Prime Minister and dissolved the popularly elected Parliament.
- The movement of April 2006 was aimed at regaining popular control over the government from the king. All the major political parties in the parliament formed a Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and called for a four-day strike in Kathmandu, the country's capital.
- This protest soon turned into an indefinite strike in which MAOIST insurgents and various other organizations joined hands. People defied curfew and took to the streets. The security forces found themselves unable to take on more than a lakh people who gathered almost every day to demand restoration of democracy.
- The number of protesters reached between three and five lakhs on 21 April and they served an ultimatum to the king. The leaders of the movement rejected the half-hearted concessions made by the king. They stuck to their demands for restoration of parliament, power to an all-party government and a new constituent assembly.
- On 24 April 2006, the last day of the ultimatum, the king was forced to concede all the three demands. The SPA chose Girija Prasad Koirala as the new Prime Minister of the interim government. The restored parliament met and passed laws taking away most of the powers of the king. The SPA and the Maoists came to an understanding about how the new Constituent Assembly was going to be elected. This struggle came to be known as Nepal's second movement for democracy. The struggle of the Nepali people is a source of inspiration to democrats all over the world.

Bolivia's Water War

- The story of Poland and that of Nepal apply to the struggle for establishing or restoring democracy. But the role of popular struggles does not come to an end with the establishment of democracy.
- People's successful struggle against privatization of water in Bolivia reminds us that popular struggles are integral to the working of democracy.
- Bolivia is a poor country in Latin America.
- The World Bank pressurized the government to give up its control of municipal water supply.
- The government sold these rights for the city of Cochabamba to a multi-national company (MNC). The company immediately increased the price of water by four times. Many people received monthly water bill of Rs 1000 in a country where average income is around Rs 5000 a month.
- This led to spontaneous popular protest.
- In January 2000, a new alliance of labour, human rights and community leaders organized a successful four-day general strike in the city.
- The government agreed to negotiate and the strike was called off. Yet nothing happened. The police resorted to brutal repression when the agitation was started again in February. Another strike followed in April and the government imposed martial law.
- But the power of the people forced the officials of the MNC to flee the city and made the government concede to all the demands of the protesters. The contract with the MNC was cancelled and water supply was restored to the municipality at old rates. This came to be known as Bolivia's water war.

Democracy and popular struggles

- These two stories are from very different contexts.
- The movement in Nepal was to establish democracy, while the struggle in Bolivia involved claims on an elected, democratic government.

- The popular struggle in Bolivia was about one specific policy, while the struggle in Nepal was about the foundations of the country's politics.
- Both these struggles were successful but their impact was at different levels.
- Despite these differences, both the stories share some elements which are relevant to the study of the past and future of democracies. Both these are instances of political conflict that led to popular struggles.
- In both cases the struggle involved mass mobilization. Public demonstration of mass support clinched the dispute. Finally, both instances involved critical role of political organizations. We can therefore draw a few conclusions from these examples:
 - Democracy evolves through popular struggles. It is possible that some significant decisions may take place through consensus and may not involve any conflict at all. But that would be an exception. Defining moments of democracy usually involve conflict between those groups who have exercised power and those who aspire for a share in power. These moments come when the country is going through transition to democracy, expansion of democracy or deepening of democracy.
 - Democratic conflict is resolved through mass mobilization. Sometimes it is possible that the conflict is resolved by using the existing institutions like the parliament or the judiciary. But when there is a deep dispute, very often these institutions themselves get involved in the dispute. The resolution has to come from outside, from the people.
 - These conflicts and mobilizations are based on new political organizations. True, there is an element of spontaneity in all such historic moments. But the spontaneous public participation becomes effective with the help of organized politics. There can be many agencies of organized politics. These include political parties, pressure groups and movement groups

Mobilisation and organisations

- ⑩ We noted that the call for indefinite strike was given by the SPA or the Seven Party Alliance in Nepal.
- ⑩ This alliance included some big parties that had some members in the Parliament. But the SPA was not the only organization behind this mass upsurge.
- ⑩ The protest was joined by the Nepalese Communist Party (Maoist) which did not believe in parliamentary Democracy.
- ⑩ This party was involved in an armed struggle against the Nepali government and had established its control over large parts of Nepal.
- ⑩ The struggle involved many organizations other than political parties. All the major labour unions and their federations joined this movement.
- ⑩ Many other organizations like the organization of the indigenous people, teachers, lawyers and human rights groups extended support to the movement.
- ⑩ The protest against water privatization in Bolivia was not led by any political party. It was led by an organization called FEDECOR. This organization comprised local professionals, including engineers and environmentalists.
- ⑩ They were supported by a federation of farmers who relied on irrigation, the confederation of factory workers' unions, middle class students from the University of Cochabamba and the city's growing population of homeless street children. The movement was supported by the Socialist Party.
- ⑩ In 2006, this party came to power in Bolivia. From both these examples, we can see that in a democracy several different kinds of organizations work behind any big struggle. These organizations play their role in two ways. One obvious way of influencing the decisions in a democracy is direct participation in competitive politics.

- ⑩ This is done by creating parties, contesting elections and forming governments. But every citizen does not participate so directly.
- ⑩ They may not have the desire, the need or the skills to take part in direct political activity other than voting.
- ⑩ There are many indirect ways in which people can get governments to listen to their demands or their points of view. They could do so by forming an organization and undertaking activities to promote their interests or their viewpoints.
 - These are called interest groups or pressure groups. Sometimes people decide to act together without forming organizations.

Pressure groups and movements

- Pressure groups are organizations that attempt to influence government policies.
- But unlike political parties, pressure groups do not aim to directly control or share political power.
- These organizations are formed when people with common occupation, interest, aspirations or opinions come together in order to achieve a common objective.
- In the course of the discussion above we came across entities that are not quite an organization.
- The struggle in Nepal was called a movement for democracy. We often hear the word people's movement to describe many forms of collective action: Narmada Bachao Andolan,
- Movement for Right to Information, Anti-liquor Movement, Women's Movement, Environmental Movement.
- Like an interest group, a movement also attempts to influence politics rather than directly take part in electoral competition.
- But unlike the interest groups, movements have a loose organization. Their decision making is more informal and flexible. They depend much more on spontaneous mass participation than an interest group

Sectional interest groups and public interest groups

- Usually interest groups seek to promote the interests of a particular section or group of society. Trade unions, business associations and professional (lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc.) bodies are some examples of this type.
- They are sectional because they represent a section of society: workers, employees, business-people, industrialists, followers of a religion, caste group, etc. Their principal concern is the betterment and well-being of their members, not society in general.
- Sometimes these organizations are not about representing the interest of one section of society. They represent some common or general interest that needs to be defended.
- The members of the organization may not benefit from the cause that the organization represents.
- The Bolivian organization, FEDECOR is an example of that kind of an organization. In the context of Nepal, we noted the participation of human rights organizations.
- These second type of groups are called promotional groups or public interest groups.
- They promote collective rather than selective good.
- They aim to help groups other than their own members. For example, a group fighting against bonded labour fights not for itself but for those who are suffering under such bondage.
- In some instances the members of a public interest group may undertake activity that benefits them as well as others too. For example, BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Communities

Employees Federation) is an organization largely made up of government employees those campaigns against caste discrimination.

- It addresses the problems of its members who suffer discrimination. But its principal concern is with social justice and social equality for the entire society.

Movement groups

- As in the case of interest groups, the groups involved with movements also include a very wide variety.
- The various examples mentioned above already indicate a simple distinction. Most of the movements are issue-specific movements that seek to achieve a single objective within a limited time frame.
- Others are more general or generic movements that seek to achieve a broad goal in the very long term.
- The Nepalese movement for democracy arose with the specific objective of reversing the king's orders that led to suspension of democracy. In India, Narmada Bachao Andolan is a good example of this kind of movement.
- The movement started with the specific issue of the people displaced by the creation of Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada River.
- Its objective was to stop the dam from being constructed. Gradually it became a wider movement that questioned all such big dams and the model of development that required such dams.
- Movements of this kind tend to have a clear leadership and some organization. But their active life is usually short.
- These single-issue movements can be contrasted with movements that are long term and involve more than one issue.
- The environmental movement and the women's movement are examples of such movements.
- There is no single organization that controls or guides such movement. Environmental movement is a label for a

Large number of organizations and issue-specific movements.

- All of these have separate organizations, independent leadership and often different views on policy related matters. Yet all of these share a broad objective and have a similar approach.
- That is why they are called a movement. Sometimes these broad movements have a loose umbrella organization as well. For example, the National Alliance for Peoples' Movements (NAPM) is an organization of organizations.
- Various movement groups struggling on specific issues are constituents of this loose organization which coordinates the activities of a large number of peoples' movements in our country.

How do they influence politics?

Pressure groups and movements exert influence on politics in a variety of ways:

- They try to gain public support and sympathy for their goals and their activities by carrying out information campaigns, organizing meetings, filing petitions, etc.

- Most of these groups try to influence the media into giving more attention to these issues.
- They often organize protest activity like strikes or disrupting government programmes. Workers' organizations, employees' associations and most of the movement groups often resort to these tactics in order to force the government to take note of their demands.
- Business groups often employ professional lobbyists or sponsor expensive advertisements.
- Some persons from pressure groups or movement groups may participate in ~~of~~ bodies and committees that offer advice to the government.
- While interest groups and movements do not directly engage in party politics, they seek to exert influence on political parties.
- Most of the movement groups take a political stance without being a party. They have political ideology and political position on major issues.
- The relationship between political parties and pressure groups can take different forms, some direct and others very indirect:
 - In some instances, the pressure groups are either formed or led by the leaders of political parties or act as extended arms of political parties.
 - For example, most trade unions and students' organizations in India are either established by, or affiliated to one or the other major political party. Most of the leaders of such pressure groups are usually activists and leaders of party
 - Sometimes political parties grow out of movements. For example, when the Assam movement led by students against the 'foreigners' came to an end, it led to the formation of the Asom Gana Parishad. The roots of parties like the DMK and the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu can be traced to a long-drawn social reform movement during the 1930s and 1940s.
- In most cases the relationship between parties and interest or movement groups is not so direct. They often take positions that are opposed to each other. Yet they are in dialogue and negotiation. Movement groups have raised new issues that have been taken up by political parties.
- Most of the new leadership of political parties comes from interest or movement groups.

Is their influence healthy?

- ⑩ It may initially appear that it is not healthy for groups that promote interest of one section to have influence in democracy.
- ⑩ A democracy must look after the interests of all, not just one section. Also, it may seem that these groups wield power without responsibility.
- ⑩ Political parties have to face the people in elections, but these groups are not accountable to the people. Pressure groups and movements may not get their funds and support from the people. Sometimes, pressure groups with small public support but lots of money can hijack public discussion in favour of their narrow agenda.
- ⑩ On balance, however, pressure groups and movements have deepened democracy. Putting pressure on the rulers is not an unhealthy activity in a democracy as long as everyone gets this opportunity.
- ⑩ Governments can often come under undue pressure from a small group of rich and powerful people.
- ⑩ Public interest groups and movements perform a useful role of countering this undue influence and reminding the government of the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens.
- ⑩ Even the sectional interest groups play a valuable role. Where different groups function actively, no one single group can achieve dominance over society.
- ⑩ If one group brings pressure on government to make policies in its favour, another will bring counter pressure not to make policies in the way the first group desires.

⑩ The government gets to hear about what different sections of the population want. This leads to a rough balance of power and accommodation of conflicting interests

Chapter-6 Political Parties

Why do we need political parties?

- ⑩ Political parties are easily one of the most visible institutions in a democracy.
- ⑩ For most ordinary citizens, democracy is equal to political parties. If you travel to remote parts of our country and speak to the less educated citizens, you could come across people who may not know anything about our Constitution or about the nature of our government.
- ⑩ But chances are that they would know something about our political parties. At the same time this visibility does not mean popularity.
- ⑩ Most people pretend to be very critical of political parties. They tend to blame parties for all that is wrong with our democracy and our political life.
- ⑩ Parties have become identified with social and political divisions.
- ⑩ Therefore, it is natural to ask – do we need political parties at all? About hundred years ago there were few countries of the world that had any political party.
- ⑩ Now there are few that do not have parties.

Meaning

- A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.
- They agree on some policies and programmes for the society with a view to promote the collective good.
- Since there can be different views on what is good for all parties try to persuade people why their policies are better than others.
- They seek to implement these policies by winning popular support through elections
- Thus, parties reflect fundamental political divisions in a society. Parties are about a part of the society and thus involve PARTISANSHIP.
- Thus a party is known by which part it stands for, which policies it supports and whose interests it upholds. A political party has three components:
 - the leaders,
 - the active members and
 - the followers

Functions

What does a political party do? Basically, political parties fill political offices and exercise political power. Parties do so by performing a series of functions:

- Parties contest elections.
- In most democracies, elections are fought mainly among the candidates put up by political parties. Parties select their candidates in different ways.

- In some countries, such as the USA, members and supporters of a party choose its candidates. Now more and more countries are following this method. In other countries like India, top party leaders choose candidates for contesting elections.
- Parties put forward different **policies and programmes** and the voters choose from them.
- ⑩ Each of us may have different opinions and views on what policies are suitable for the society. But no government can handle such a large variety of views. In a democracy, a large number of similar opinions have to be grouped together to provide a direction in which policies can be formulated by the governments. This is what the parties do.
- ⑩ A party reduces a vast multitude of opinions into a few basic positions which it supports.
- ⑩ A government is expected to base its policies on the line taken by the **RULING PARTY**.
- Parties play a decisive role in **making laws** for a country.
- Formally, laws are debated and passed in the legislature. But since most of the members belong to a party, they go by the direction of the party leadership, irrespective of their personal opinions.
- Parties **form and run governments**.
- As we noted last year, the big policy decisions are taken by political executive that comes from the political parties.
- Parties recruit leaders, train them and then make them ministers to run the government in the way they want.
- Those parties that lose in the elections play the **role of opposition** to the parties in power, by voicing different views and criticizing government for its failures or wrong policies. Opposition parties also mobilize opposition to the government.
- Parties shape public opinion.
- ⑩ They raise and highlight issues. Parties have lakhs of members and activists spread all over the country. Many of the pressure groups are the extensions of political parties among different sections of society. Parties sometimes also launch movements for the resolution of problems faced by people. Often opinions in the society crystallise on the lines parties take.
- Parties provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes implemented by governments.
- ⑩ For an ordinary citizen it is easy to approach a local party leader than a government officer. That is why, they feel close to parties even when they do not fully trust them.
- ⑩ Parties have to be responsive to people's needs and demands. Otherwise people can reject those parties in the next elections.

Necessity

- We need political parties because they perform all these functions. But we still need to ask why modern democracies cannot exist without political parties.
- We can understand the necessity of political parties by imagining a situation without parties.
- Every candidate in the elections will be independent. So no one will be able to make any promises to the people about any major policy changes.
- The government may be formed, but its utility will remain ever uncertain.
- Elected representatives will be accountable to their constituency for what they do in the locality. But no one will be responsible for how the country will be run.
- We can also think about it by looking at the non-party based elections to the Panchayat in many states.

- Although, the parties do not contest formally, it is generally noticed that the village gets split into more than one faction, each of which puts up a panel' of its candidates. This is exactly what the party does.
- That is the reason we find political parties in almost all countries of the world, whether these countries are big or small, old or new, developed or developing.
- The rise of political parties is directly linked to the emergence of representative democracies.
- As we have seen, large societies need representative democracy. As societies became large and complex, they also needed some agency to gather different views on various issues and to present these to the government.
- They needed some ways, to bring various representatives together so that a responsible government could be formed. They needed a mechanism to support or restrain the government, make policies, justify or oppose them.
- Political parties fulfill these needs that every representative government has. We can say that parties are a necessary condition for a democracy

How many parties should we have?

- In a democracy any group of citizens is free to form a political party. In this formal sense, there are a large number of political parties in each country.
- More than 750 parties are registered with the Election Commission of India. But not all these parties are serious contenders in the elections.
- Usually only a handful of parties are effectively in the race to win elections and form the government.
- In some countries, only one party is allowed to control and run the government. These are called one-party systems.
- Although, legally speaking, people are free to form political parties; it does not happen because the electoral system does not permit free competition for power.
- We cannot consider one party system as a good option because this is not a democratic option.
- Any democratic system must allow at least two parties to compete in elections and provide a fair chance for the competing parties to come to power in some countries, power usually changes between two main parties.
- Several other parties may exist, contest elections and win a few seats in the national legislatures. But only the two main parties have a serious chance of winning majority of seats to form government.
- Such a party system is called two-party system.
- The United States of America and the United Kingdom are examples of two-party system.
- If several parties compete for power, and more than two parties have a reasonable chance of coming to power either on their own strength or in alliance with others, we call it a multi-party system. Thus in India, we have a multi-party system.
- In this system, the government is formed by various parties coming together in a coalition. When several parties in a multi-party system join hands for the purpose of contesting elections and winning power, it is called an alliance or a front.
- For example, in India there were three such major alliances in 2004 parliamentary elections– the National Democratic Alliance, the United Progressive Alliance and the Left Front. The multi-party system often appears very messy and leads to political instability.
- At the same time, this system allows a variety of interests and opinions to enjoy political representation.

- So, which of these is better? Perhaps the best answer to this very common question is that this is not a very good question. Party system is not something any country can choose. It evolves over a long time, depending on the nature of society, its social and regional divisions, its history of politics and its system of elections. These cannot be

Changed very quickly. Each country develops a party system that is conditioned by its special circumstances.

- For example, if India has evolved a multi-party system, it is because the social and geographical diversity in such a large country is not easily absorbed by two or even three parties. No system is ideal for all countries and all situations.

National political parties

- Democracies that follow a federal system all over the world tend to have two kinds of political parties: parties that are present in only one of the federal units and parties that are present in several or all units of the federation. This is the case in India as well.
- There are some country- wide parties, which are called ‘national parties’.
- These parties have their units in various states. But by and large, all these units follow the same policies, programmes and strategy that is decided at the national level.
- Every party in the country has to register with the Election Commission. While the Commission treats all parties equally, it offers some special facilities to large and established parties.
- These parties are given a unique symbol – only the official candidates of that party can use that election symbol.
- Parties that get this privilege and some other special facilities are ‘recognised’ by the Election Commission for this purpose. That is why these parties are called, ‘recognised political parties’.
- The Election Commission has laid down detailed criteria of the proportion of votes and seats that a party must get in order to be a recognised party.
- A party that secures at least six per cent of the total votes in an election to the Legislative Assembly of a State and wins at least two seats is recognised as a State party.
- A party that secures at least six per cent of the total votes in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in four States and wins at least four seats in the Lok Sabha is recognised as a national party.
- According to this classification, there were six national recognised parties in the country in 2006. Let us learn something about each of these parties.

Indian National Congress(INC):

- ⑩ Popularly known as the Congress Party. One of the oldest parties of the world.
- ⑩ Founded in 1885 and has experienced many splits.
- ⑩ Played a dominant role in Indian politics at the national and state level for several decades after India’s Independence.
- ⑩ Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the party sought to build a modern secular democratic republic in India.
- ⑩ Ruling party at the centre till 1977 and then from 1980 to 1989. After 1989, its support declined, but it continues to be present throughout the country, cutting across social divisions.
- ⑩ A centrist party (neither rightist nor leftist) in its ideological orientation, the party espouses secularism and welfare of weaker sections and minorities.
- ⑩ Supports new economic reforms but with a human face.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):

- ⑩ Founded in 1980 by reviving the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh.
- ⑩ Wants to build a strong and modern India by drawing inspiration from India's ancient culture and values.
- ⑩ Cultural nationalism (or 'Hindutva') is an important element in its conception of Indian nationhood and politics.
- ⑩ Wants full territorial and political integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India, a uniform civil code for all people living in the country irrespective of religion, and ban on religious conversions. Its support base increased substantially in the 1990s.
- ⑩ Earlier limited to north and west and to urban areas, the party expanded its support in the south, east, the north-east and to rural areas.
- ⑩ Came to power in 1998 as the leader of the National Democratic Alliance including several state and regional parties.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP):

- ⑩ Formed in 1984 under the leadership of Kanshi Ram.
- ⑩ Seeks to represent and secure power for the bahujan samaj which includes the *dalits*, *adivasis*, OBCs and religious minorities.
- ⑩ Draws inspiration from the ideas and teachings of Sahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Periyar Ramaswami Naicker and Baba saheb Ambedkar.
- ⑩ Stands for the cause of securing the interests and welfare of the *dalits* and oppressed people.
- ⑩ It has its main base in the state of Uttar Pradesh and substantial presence in neighboring states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Delhi and Punjab.
- ⑩ Formed government in Uttar Pradesh several times by taking the support of different parties at different times.

Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M):

- ⑩ Founded in 1964.
- ⑩ Believes in Marxism-Leninism. Supports socialism, secularism and democracy and opposes imperialism and communalism.
- ⑩ Accepts democratic elections as a useful and helpful means for securing the objective of socio-economic justice in India.
- ⑩ Enjoys strong support in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, especially among the poor, factory workers, farmers, agricultural labourers and the intelligentsia. Critical of the new economic policies that allow free flow of foreign capital and goods into the country.
- ⑩ Has been in power in West Bengal without a break for 30 years. In 2004 elections, it won about 6 per cent of votes and 43 seats in the Lok Sabha. Currently supports the UPA government from outside, without joining the government.

Communist Party of India (CPI):

- ⑩ Formed in 1925. Believes in Marxism-Leninism, secularism and democracy. Opposed to the forces of secessionism and communalism.

- ⑩ Accepts parliamentary democracy as a means of promoting the interests of the working class, farmers and the poor.
- ⑩ Became weak after the split in the party in 1964 that led to the formation of the CPI (M). Significant presence in the states of Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- ⑩ Its support base had gradually declined over the years. It secured about 1.4 percent votes and 10 seats in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections.
- ⑩ Advocates the coming together of all left parties to build a strong left front. Currently supports UPA government from outside.

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP):

- ⑩ Formed in 1999 following a split in the Congress party.
- ⑩ Espouses democracy, Gandhian secularism, equity, social justice and federalism. Wants that high offices in government be confined to natural born citizens of the country.
- ⑩ A major party in Maharashtra and has a significant presence in Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam. A coalition partner in the state of Maharashtra in alliance with the Congress. Since 2004, a member of the United Progressive Alliance.

State parties

- ⑩ Other than these six parties, most of the major parties of the country are classified by the Election Commission as 'State parties'.
- ⑩ These are commonly referred to as regional parties. Yet these parties need not be regional in their ideology or outlook.
- ⑩ Some of these parties are all India parties that happen to have succeeded only in some states. Parties like the Samajwadi Party, Samata Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal have national level political organization with units in several states.
- ⑩ Some of these parties like Biju Janata Dal, Sikkim Democratic Front and Mizo National Front are conscious about their State identity.
- ⑩ Over the last three decades, the number and strength of these parties has expanded. This made the Parliament of India politically more and more diverse. No one national party is able to secure on its own a majority in Lok Sabha.
- ⑩ As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with State parties. Since 1996, nearly every one of the State parties has got an opportunity to be a part of one or the other national level coalition government.
- ⑩ This has contributed to the strengthening of federalism and democracy in our country.

Challenges to political parties

- We have seen how crucial political parties are for the working of democracy. Since parties are the most visible face of democracy, it is natural that people blame parties for whatever is wrong with the working of democracy.
- All over the world, people express strong dissatisfaction with the failure of political parties to perform their functions well. This is the case in our country too.
- Popular dissatisfaction and criticism has focused on four problem areas in the working of political parties.
- Political parties need to face and overcome these challenges in order to remain effective instruments of democracy.
- The first challenge is **lack** of internal democracy within parties.

- All over the world there is a tendency in political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top. Parties do not keep membership registers, do not hold organizational meetings, and do not conduct internal elections regularly.
- Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information on what happens inside the party.

They do not have the means or the connections needed to influence the decisions.

- As a result the leaders assume greater power to make decisions in the name of the party.
- Since one or few leaders exercise paramount power in the party, those who disagree with the leadership find it difficult to continue in the party.
- More than loyalty to party principles and policies, personal loyalty to the leader becomes more important.
- The second challenge of dynastic succession is related to the first one. Since most political parties do not practice open and transparent procedures for their functioning, there are very few ways for an ordinary worker to rise to the top in a party.
- Those who happen to be the leaders are in a position of unfair advantage to favour people close to them or even their family members. In many parties, the oppositions are always controlled by members of one family. This is unfair to other members of that party. This is also bad for democracy, since people who do not have adequate experience or popular support come to occupy positions of power.
- This tendency is present in some measure all over the world, including in some of the older democracies.
- The third challenge is about the growing role of **money and muscle power** in parties, especially during elections.
- Since parties are focused only on winning elections, they tend to use short-cuts to win elections. They tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money.
- Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the party. In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections. Democrats all over the world are worried about the increasing role of rich people and big companies in democratic politics.
- The fourth challenge is that very often parties do not seem to offer a **meaningful choice** to the voters.
- In order to offer meaningful choice, parties must be significantly different. In recent years there has been a decline in the ideological differences among parties in most parts of the world. For example, the difference between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party in Britain is very little.
- They agree on more fundamental aspects but differ only in details on how policies are to be framed and implemented.
- In our country too, the differences among all the major parties on the economic policies have reduced.
- Those who want really different policies have no option available to them. Sometimes people cannot even elect very different leaders either, because the same set of leaders keep shifting from one party to another.

How can parties be reformed?

- In order to face these challenges, political parties need to be reformed.
- The question is: Are political parties willing to reform? If they are willing, what has prevented them from reforming so far? If they are not willing, is it possible to force them to reform? Citizens all over the world face this question.
- This is not a simple question to answer. In a democracy, the final decision is made by leaders who represent political parties.

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- People can replace them, but only by another set of party leaders. If all of them do not wish to reform, how can anyone force them to change?

Let us look at some of the recent efforts and suggestions in our country to reform political parties and its leaders:

- The Constitution was amended to prevent elected MLAs and MPs from changing parties. This was done because many elected representatives were indulging in **DEFECTION** in order to become ministers or for cash rewards.
- Now the law says that if any MLA or MP changes parties, he or she will lose their seat in the legislature. This new law has helped bring defection down.
- At the same time this has made any dissent even more difficult. MPs and MLAs have to accept whatever the party leaders decide.
- The Supreme Court passed an order to reduce the influence of money and criminals.
- Now, it is mandatory for every candidate who contests elections to file an **AFFIDAVIT** giving details of his property and criminal cases pending against him.
- The new system has made a lot of information available to the public. But there is no system of check if the information given by the candidates is true. As yet we do not know if it has led to decline in the influence of the rich and the criminals.
- The Election Commission passed an order making it necessary for political parties to hold their organizational elections and file their income tax returns.
- The parties have started doing so but sometimes it is mere formality. It is not clear if this step has led to greater internal democracy in political parties. Besides these, many suggestions are often made to reform political parties
- A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of political parties. It should be made compulsory for political parties to maintain a register of its members, to follow its own constitution, to have an independent authority, to act as a judge in case of party disputes, to hold open elections to the highest posts.
- It should be made mandatory for political parties to give a minimum number of tickets, about one-third, to women candidates. Similarly, there should be a quota for women in the decision making bodies of the party.
- There should be state funding of elections. The government should give parties money to support their election expenses. This support could be given in kind: petrol, paper, telephone etc. Or it could be given in cash on the basis of the votes secured by the party in the last election.
- ⑩ These suggestions have not yet been accepted by political parties. If and when these are accepted these could lead to some improvement.
- ⑩ But we must be very careful about legal solutions to political problems. Over-regulation of political parties can be counter-productive. This would force all parties to find ways to cheat the law.
- ⑩ Besides, political parties will not agree to pass a law that they do not like. There are two other ways in which political parties can be reformed.
- ⑩ One, people can put pressure on political parties. This can be done through petitions, publicity and agitations.
- ⑩ Ordinary citizens, pressure groups and movements and the media can play an important role in this.
- ⑩ If political parties feel that they would lose public support by not taking up reforms, they would become more serious about reforms.
- ⑩ Two, political parties can improve if those who want this join political parties.

- ⑩ The quality of democracy depends on the degree of public participation. It is difficult to reform politics if ordinary citizens do not take part in it and simply criticize it from the outside.
- ⑩ The problem of bad politics can be solved by more and better politics.

Chapter-7-Outcomes of Democracy

How do we assess democracy's outcomes?

- ⑩ It emerged from that conversation that democracy is a better form of government when compared with dictatorship or any other alternative. We felt that democracy was better because it:
 - Promotes equality among citizens
 - Enhances the dignity of the individual;
 - Improves the quality of decision- making;
 - Provides a method to resolve conflicts; and
 - Allows room to correct mistakes.
- Are these expectations realized under democracies? When we talk to people around us, most of them support democracy against other alternatives, such as rule by a monarch or military or religious leaders.
- But not so many of them would be satisfied with the democracy in practice. So we face a dilemma: democracy is seen to be good in principle, but felt to be not so good in its practice. This dilemma invites us to think hard about the outcomes of democracy.
- Do we prefer democracy only for moral reasons? Or are there some prudential reasons to support democracy too? Over a hundred countries of the world today claim and practice some kind of democratic politics: they have formal constitutions, they hold elections, they have parties and they guarantee rights of citizens.
- While these features are common to most of them, these democracies are very much different from each other in terms of their social situations, their economic achievements and their cultures.
- Clearly, what may be achieved or not achieved under each of these democracies will be very different. But is there something that we can expect from every democracy, just because it is democracy?
- Our interest in and fascination for democracy often pushes us into taking a position that democracy can address all socio-economic and political problems. If some of our expectations are not met, we start blaming the idea of democracy.
- Or, we start doubting if we are living in a democracy. The first step towards thinking carefully about the outcomes of democracy is to recognize that democracy is just a form of government.
- It can only create conditions for achieving something. The citizens have to take advantage of those conditions and achieve those goals..

Accountable, responsive and legitimate government

- In a democracy, we are most concerned with ensuring that people will have the right to choose their rulers and people will have control over the rulers.
- Whenever possible and necessary, citizens should be able to participate in decision making, that affects them all.
- Therefore, the most basic outcome of democracy should be that it produces a government that is accountable to the citizens, and responsive to the needs and expectations of the citizens. Before we go into this question, we face another common question: Is the democratic government efficient? Is it effective?

- Some people think that democracy produces less effective government. It is, of course, true that non-democratic rulers do not have to bother about deliberation in assemblies or worry about majorities and public opinion.
- So, they can be very quick and efficient in decision making and implementation.
- Democracy is based on the idea of deliberation and negotiation. So, some delay is bound to take place. Does that make democratic government inefficient?
- Let us think in terms of costs. Imagine a government that may take decisions very fast.
- But it may take decisions that are not accepted by the people and may therefore face problems.
- In contrast, the democratic government will take more time to follow procedures before arriving at a decision.
- But because it has followed procedures, its decisions may be both more acceptable to the people and more effective.
- So, the cost of time that democracy pays is perhaps worth it. Now look at the other side – democracy ensures that decision making will be based on norms and procedures.
- So, a citizen who wants to know if a decision was taken through the correct procedures can find this out. She has the right and the means to examine the process of decision making. This is known as transparency.
- This factor is often missing from a non-democratic government. Therefore, when we are trying to find out the outcomes of democracy, it is right to expect democracy to produce a government that follows procedures and is accountable to the people.
- We can also expect that the democratic government develops mechanisms for citizens to hold the government accountable and mechanisms for citizens to take part in decision making whenever they think fit.
- If you wanted to measure democracies on the basis of this expected outcome, you would look for the following practices and institutions: regular, free and fair elections; open public debate on major policies and legislations; and citizens' right to information about the government and its functioning.
- The actual performance of democracies shows a mixed record on this.
- Democracies have had greater success in setting up regular and free elections and in setting up conditions for open public debate. But most democracies fall short of elections that provide a fair chance to everyone and in subjecting every decision to public debate.
- Democratic governments do not have a very good record when it comes to sharing information with citizens. All one can say in favour of democratic regimes is that they are much better than any non-democratic regime in these respects. In substantive terms it may be reasonable to expect from democracy a government that is attentive to the needs and demands of the people and is largely free of corruption.
- The record of democracies is not impressive on these two counts.
- Democracies often frustrate the needs of the people and often ignore the demands of a majority of its population. The routine tales of corruption are enough to convince us that democracy is not free of this evil.
- At the same time, there is nothing to show that non-democracies are less corrupt or more sensitive to the people.
- There is one respect in which democratic government is certainly better than its alternatives: democratic government is legitimate government. It may be slow, less efficient, not always very responsive or clean.
- But a democratic government is people's own government.

- That is why there is an overwhelming support for the idea of democracy all over the world.
- As the accompanying evidence from South Asia shows, the support exists in countries with democratic regimes as well as countries without democratic regimes.
- People wish to be ruled by representatives elected by them. They also believe that democracy is suitable for their country.
- Democracy's ability to generate its own support is itself an outcome that cannot be ignored.

Economic growth and development

- If democracies are expected to produce good governments, then is it not fair to expect that they would also produce development? Evidence shows that in practice many democracies did not fulfill this expectation.
- If you consider all democracies and all dictatorships for the fifty years between 1950 and 2000, dictatorships have slightly higher rate of economic growth. The inability of democracy to achieve higher economic development worries us.
- But this alone cannot be reason to reject democracy.
- As you have already studied in economics, economic development depends on several factors: country's population size, global situation, cooperation from other countries, economic priorities adopted by the country, etc.
- However, the difference in the rates of economic development between less developed countries with dictatorships and democracies is negligible. Overall, we cannot say that democracy is a guarantee of economic development. But we can expect democracy not to lag behind dictatorships in this respect.
- When we find such significant difference in the rates of economic growth between countries under dictatorship and democracy, it is better to prefer democracy as it has several other positive outcomes.

Reduction of inequality and poverty

- ⑩ Perhaps more than development, it is reasonable to expect democracies to reduce economic disparities.
- ⑩ Even when a country achieves economic growth, will wealth be distributed in such a way that all citizens of the country will have a share and lead a better life? Is economic growth in democracies accompanied by increased inequalities among the people? Or do democracies lead to a just distribution of goods and opportunities? Democracies are based on political equality.
- ⑩ All individuals have equal weight in electing representatives. Parallel to the process of bringing individuals into the political arena on an equal footing, we find growing economic inequalities.
- ⑩ A small number of ultra-rich enjoy a highly disproportionate share of wealth and incomes. Not only that, their share in the total income of the country has been increasing.
- ⑩ Those at the bottom of the society have very little to depend upon.
- ⑩ Their incomes have been declining. Sometimes they find it difficult to meet their basic needs of life, such as food, clothing, house, education and health.
- ⑩ In actual life, democracies do not appear to be very successful in reducing economic inequalities.
- ⑩ The poor constitute a large proportion of our voters and no party will like to lose their votes.
- ⑩ Yet democratically elected governments do not appear to be as keen to address the question of poverty as you would expect them to.
- ⑩ The situation is much worse in some other countries. In Bangladesh, more than half of its population lives in poverty.

⑩ People in several poor countries are now dependent on the rich countries even for food supplies.

Accommodation of social diversity

⑩ Do democracies lead to peaceful and harmonious life among citizens? It will be a fair expectation that democracy should produce a harmonious social life. We have seen in the earlier chapters how democracies accommodate various social divisions.

⑩ We saw in the first chapter how Belgium has successfully negotiated differences among ethnic populations. Democracies usually develop a procedure to conduct their competition.

⑩ This reduces the possibility of these tensions becoming explosive or violent. No society can fully and permanently resolve conflicts among different groups. But we can certainly learn to respect these differences and we can also evolve mechanisms to negotiate the differences.

⑩ Democracy is best suited to produce this outcome. Non-democratic regimes often turn a blind eye to or suppress internal social differences. Ability to handle social differences, divisions and conflicts is thus a definite plus point of democratic regimes.

⑩ But the example of Sri Lanka reminds us that a democracy must fulfill two conditions in order to achieve this outcome:

- It is necessary to understand that democracy is not simply rule by majority opinion. The majority always needs to work with the minority so that governments function to represent the general view. Majority and minority opinions are not permanent.
- It is also necessary that rule by majority does not become rule by majority community in terms of religion or race or linguistic group, etc.
- Rule by majority means that in case of every decision or in case of every election, different persons and groups may and can form a majority.
- Democracy remains democracy only as long as every citizen has a chance of being in majority at some point of time. If someone is barred from being in majority on the basis of birth, then the democratic rule ceases to be accommodative for that person or group.

Dignity and freedom of the citizens

⑩ Democracy stands much superior to any other form of government in promoting dignity and freedom of the individual. Every individual wants to receive respect from fellow beings.

⑩ Often conflicts arise among individuals because some feel that they are not treated with due respect. The passion for respect and freedom are the basis of democracy.

⑩ Democracies throughout the world have recognised this, at least in principle. This has been achieved in various degrees in various democracies. For societies which have been built for long on the basis of subordination and domination, it is not a simple matter to recognize that all individuals are equal.

⑩ Take the case of dignity of women. Most societies across the world were historically male dominated societies.

⑩ Long struggles by women have created some sensitivity today that respect to and equal treatment of women are necessary ingredients of a democratic society.

⑩ That does not mean that women are actually always treated with respect. But once the principle is recognised, it becomes easier for women to wage a struggle against what is now unacceptable legally and morally.

⑩ In a non-democratic set up, this unacceptability would not have legal basis because the principle of individual freedom and dignity would not have the legal and moral force there. The same is true of caste inequalities. Democracy in India has strengthened the claims of the disadvantaged and discriminated castes for equal status and equal opportunity.

⑩ There are instances still of caste-based inequalities and atrocities, but these lack the moral and legal foundations. Perhaps it is the recognition that makes ordinary citizens value their democratic rights. Expectations from democracy also function as the criteria for judging any democratic country.

⑩ What is most distinctive about democracy is that its examination never gets over. As democracy passes

One test, it produces another test. As people get some benefits of democracy, they ask for more and want to make democracy even better.

⑩ A public expression of dissatisfaction with democracy shows the success of the democratic project: it transforms people from the status of a subject into that of a citizen. Most individuals today believe that their vote makes a difference to the way the government is run and to their own self-interest.

Chapter-8

Challenges to Democracy Thinking about challenges

⑩ Democracy is the dominant form of government in the contemporary world. It does not face a serious challenger or rival.

⑩ Yet our exploration of the various dimensions of democratic politics has shown us something else as well.

⑩ The promise of democracy is far from realized anywhere in the world. Democracy does not have a challenger, but that does not mean that it does not face any challenges. At different points in this tour of democracy, we have noted the serious challenges that democracy faces all over the world.

⑩ A challenge is not just any problem. We usually call only those difficulties a 'challenge' which are significant and which can be overcome. A challenge is a difficulty that carries within it an opportunity for progress. Once we overcome a challenge we go up to a higher level than before.

⑩ Different countries face different kinds of challenges. Can you recall the map of democratic governments in the year 2000 that was included in your textbook? At least one fourth of the globe is still not under democratic government.

⑩ The challenge for democracy in these parts of the world is very stark. These countries face the **foundational challenge** of making the transition to democracy and then instituting democratic government. This involves bringing down the existing non-democratic regime, keeping military away from controlling government and establishing a sovereign and functional state.

⑩ Most of the established democracies face the **challenge of expansion**. This involves applying the basic principle of democratic government across all the regions, different social groups and various institutions.

⑩ Ensuring greater power to local governments, extension of federal principle to all the units of the federation, inclusion of women and minority groups, etc., falls under this challenge. This also means that less and less decision should remain outside the arena of democratic control. Most countries including India and other democracies like the US face this challenge.

⑩ The third challenge of **deepening of democracy** is faced by every democracy in one form or another. This involves strengthening of the institutions and practices of democracy. This should happen in such a way that people can realise their expectations of democracy.

⑩ But ordinary people have different expectations from democracy in different societies. Therefore, this challenge takes different meanings and paths in different parts of the world. In general terms, it usually means strengthening those institutions that help people's participation and control. This requires an attempt to bring down the control and influence of the rich and powerful people in making governmental decision.

⑩ We have noted or hinted at these challenges in all the various examples and stories that we studied in our textbook of Class IX and in the earlier chapters of this book. Let us go back to all the major stops in our tour of democracy, refresh our memory and noted own the challenges that democracy face sin each of these.

Thinking about political reforms

⑩ Each of these challenges is linked to the possibility of reforms. As mentioned above, we discuss challenges only because we think these can be overcome.

⑩ Generally all the suggestions or proposals about overcoming various challenges to democracy are called ‘democracy reform’ or ‘political reform’.

⑩ We are not going to give her a list of desirable political reforms, for there cannot be any such list. If all the countries do not have the same challenges, it follows that everyone cannot follow the same recipe of political reforms.

⑩ We cannot prescribe a procedure for car repair without knowing which model the car is, what the defect is and what tools are available, where the car has broken down, etc Can we at least have a list of such reforms for our country in today’s context?

⑩ We can develop some proposals for reforms at the national level. But the real challenge of reforms may not lie at the national level. Some of the crucial questions need to be thought at the State or local level. Besides, such a list may become irrelevant after sometime.

⑩ So, instead of that let us think of some broad guide lines that can be kept in mind while devising ways and means for political reforms in India: It is very tempting to think of legal ways of reforming politics, to think of new laws to ban undesirable things. But this temptation needs to be resisted. No doubt, law has an important role to play in political reform.

⑩ Carefully devised changes in law can help to discourage wrong political practices and encourage good ones. But legal-constitutional changes by themselves cannot overcome challenges to democracy. This is like the rules of cricket.

⑩ A change in rules for LBW decisions helped to reduce negative batting tactics. But no one would ever think that the quality of cricket could be improved mainly through changes in the rules. This is to be done mainly by the players, coaches and administrators. Similarly, democratic reforms are to be carried out mainly by political activists, parties, movements and politically conscious citizens.

- Any legal change must carefully look at what results it will have on politics. Sometimes the results may be counter- productive. For example, many states have banned people who have more than two children from contesting panchayat elections. This has resulted in denial of democratic opportunity to many poor and women, which was not intended. Generally, laws that seek to ban something are not very successful in politics. Laws that give political actors incentives to do good things have more chances of working. The best laws are those which empower people to carry out democratic reforms. The Right to Information Act is a good example of a law that empowers the people to find out what is happening in government and act as watchdogs of democracy. Such a law helps to control corruption and supplements the existing laws that banned corruption and imposed strict penalties.

- Democratic reforms are to be brought about principally through political practice. Therefore, the main focus of political reforms should be on ways to strengthen democratic practice. As we discussed in the chapter on political parties, the most important concern should be to increase and improve the quality of political participation by ordinary citizens.

- Any proposal for political reforms should think not only about what is a good solution but also about who will implement it and how. It is not very wise to think that the legislatures will pass legislations that go against the interest of all the political parties and MPs. But measures that rely on democratic movements, citizens’ organization sand the media are likely to succeed.

Redefining democracy

- We began this tour of democracy last year with a minimal definition of democracy. Do you remember that? This is what Chapter 2 of your textbook said last year: democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people. We then looked at many cases and expanded the definitions lightly to add some qualifications: the rulers elected by the people must take all the major decisions;
- Elections must offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers;
- This choice and opportunity should be available to all the people on an equal basis; and
- The exercise of this choice must lead to a government limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizens' rights.

You may have felt disappointed that the definition did not refer to any high ideals that we associate with democracy. But in operational terms, we deliberately started with a minimalist but clear definition of democracy. It allowed us to make a clear distinction between democratic and non-democratic regimes.

You may have noticed that in the course of our discussions of various aspects of democratic government and politics, we have gone beyond that definition:

- We discussed democratic rights at length and noted that these rights are not limited to the right to vote, stand in elections and form political organizations. We discussed some social and economic rights that a democracy should offer to its citizens.
- We have taken up power sharing as the spirit of democracy and discussed how power sharing between governments and social groups is necessary in a democracy.
- We saw how democracy cannot be the brute rule of majority and how a respect for minority voice is necessary for democracy. Our discussion of democracy has gone beyond the government and its activities. We discussed how eliminating discrimination based on caste, religion and gender is important in a democracy.
- Finally, we have had some discussion about some outcomes that one can expect from a democracy.

In doing so, we have not gone against the definition of democracy offered last year. We began then with a definition of what is the minimum a country must have to be called a democracy. In the course of our discussion we moved to the set of desirable conditions that a democracy should have. We have moved from the definition of democracy to the description of a good democracy.

How do we define a good democracy? What are its features? Which are the features a democracy must have to be called a good democracy? And what must not take place in a democracy if it is a good democracy? These are the questions may be asked in Mains. Try to answer this and make notes from the compilations.