UNIT 10: POLITY IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand how the Indian political structure evolved over the years.
- explain about Panchayat Raj system under decentralization of power.
- discuss evolution of Indian Electoral system.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In the conventional narrative, Indian history begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization in sites such as Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, and Lothal, followed by the coming of the Aryans. These two phases are usually described as the pre-Vedic and Vedic periods. In the fourth century BC, large parts of India were united under the emperor Ashoka. It is during the

time of the Maurya's that Hinduism first began to take the shape that fundamentally formed the present day religion. Islam first came to India in the eighth century, and by the eleventh century had firmly established itself in India as a political force. Finally under Mughal Empire India achieved a large measure of political unity.

The European presence in India dates back to the sixteenth century. In the very early part of the eighteenth century the Mughal empire began to disintegrate and paved way for regional states. In the contest for supremacy, the English fought the battles of Plassey and Buxar and emerged victors and ruled the country for over two centuries. By the early part of the twentieth century, a nationalist movement had emerged; and by 1919-20, Mohandas Karamchand ('Mahatma') Gandhi had emerged. Successive campaigns had the effect of driving the British out of India in 1947, but not before they had partitioned it, and carved out the Muslim-majority state of Pakistan — later dismembered into Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the previous unit we have tried to understand the nature of economy of India and how it has evolved over the years. In this unit we shall discuss the nature of Indian Polity, evolution of Indian Political Structure, and some other important aspects of Indian Polity such as - Decentralization of power, Political Elites, Political Parties, emagence of electoral system so on and so forth.

10.3 EVOLUTION OF INDIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE

In the beginning of the Vedic age, people were nomads but with development in agriculture people started to settle down in groups. The organization was mainly tribal and the head of the tribe was supposed to be the chieftain, though the concept of King had yet not developed. With the passage of time large kingdoms started to grow and by the 6th century BC there were 16 Mahajanapadas (Kingdoms) in the region.

There were many small republics also in ancient India. These republics had some elements of democracy in their administration. The king (raja) was the supreme head of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches. He was assisted in administration by a number of officials. The members of the council of minister could give advice to the king, but final

decisions were left to the king. The ministers and other officials were directly appointed by the king.

Asministrative structure during the Gupta period was exceptionally good in spite of large empire. During the Gupta period also the administrations was more or less like the Mauryas. The most important difference between the Gupta and Mauryan administrations was centralization and decentralization of administration. In the Gupta administration, the governors of the provinces were more independent as compared to the Mauryans, where the administration was highly centralized.

10.4 INDIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE POST INDEPENDENCE

Independent India came into being in 1947 from the British rule after a long struggle for Independence. After independence like many other new born states India also began with a parliamentary democracy. The well developed and fully evolved form of democracy that we witness today in India has taken a long span of time to mature. Here we are going to find out those factors which contributed a lot for the success of India s democracy. These factors are described below :

10.4.1 Colonialism

The British ruled India undemocratically long after they had deepened and broadened the institutions of democracy at home (England); but consciously or unconsciously the British trained thousands of Indians in the art of government and administration. The British rule taught the Indians about political party, legislature, legislative acts (1773 acts to 1947 acts), election, civil service and so forth which increased political awareness and knowledge of the people of India. These things assisted the leaders of new India to run their state after getting independence from the British rule.

The British government introduced electoral practice in India in 1882 by passing a resolution on Local Self – Government and 1892 Indian Councils Acts. According to the Indian Council Acts 1892, “the government agreed to allow elections to be held in India under

the rule, though the members so elected could take their seats only after being nominated by the Government." This practice of election facilitated the Indians to adopt them with basic principles of democracy afterward. In various times the British rule had enacted various acts to govern the Indians which later assisted the Indian independent government to form their constitution of 1950 within a short period and understand the procedures of legislature.

In the early period of the British rule there was no organization to speak for the mass of India. Thus, the British rule encouraged the Indian to form a formal organization to promote the voice of the rank and file of India. As a result, the Indian National Congress (INC) was set up in 1885 by Sir Alan Octavian Hume, a retired British Civil Servant, with a view to present the interests to the British regime in an organized manner.

10.4.2 Tradition of Panchayat

The Panchayat system of ancient India helped the people of India to cope with the culture of democracy. "The word panchayat describes– a technique of seeking agreement through consultation, hallowed, according to tradition by divine sanction: panch-men-parameswar. This technique was mainly employed in social or economic organisms." It was also extensively used for the arbitration of both caste and village disputes. "Panchayat means a council of five and it usually refers to a village council – which may or may not have five members – which has a great deal to say about the life of the people of the village, in social and religious as well as in economic and political matters. Officially speaking, the panchayat is today the most basic – unit of self-government in India".

10.4.3 Electoral Practice

According to Sir Stafford Cripps, in democracy the people must have a free and unfettered choice of their representatives with a right of recall at stated period. In the same way, Mr. E. F. M. Durbin points out that for the successful working of democracy the first

essential is the ability of the people to choose a government. Therefore, India ensured the voting right of people of India by the Constitution of India which is supreme law of the country. In this approach people always get chance to exercise their power or to choose their favorite candidate. The Indian government or leaders also always showed due respect toward the verdict of the election. This increases the political awareness of the people and they realize that they have an important role to play in the politics. So, it helps to boost the political participation of the people of India. Thus, since independence, the participation of the people is always growing.

10.4.4 Written Constitution

The leaders of the Congress Party chose the written constitution as the organic law of the Indian republic which went into effect on January 26, 1950. This constitution clearly describes about the nature of the Republic, the organization and powers and mutual relations of the Centre and the States, the Fundamental rights of the citizens (Articles: 13 to 35), the directive principles of State policy (Articles: 36 to 51), and so on. This constitution spells out almost all pros and cons of functions of the country. It is in-fact, the longest constitution of the world. This written constitution assists in maintaining the relation between the centre and the states and the stability of the country. It clearly discusses the functions of the centre and the states which helps the growth of democracy in India. In this mode, the written constitution plays a great role in the success of democracy in India.

10.4.5 Independence of the Supreme Court

At present, the independence of Judiciary is considered to be a crucial feature of the democratic country. That is why in democratic countries, the Judiciary is considered the guardian of the constitution and the country. Bryce has rightly said, “There are no better test of excellence of a Government than the efficiency of its judicial system, for nothing more nearly touches the welfare and

security of the average citizen than his knowledge that he can rely on the certain and prompt administration of justice". Garner also observes, "A society without legislative organs is conceivable and indeed, fully developed legislative organs did not make their appearance in the life of the state until modern times, but a civilized state without judicial organs is hardly conceivable". The Supreme Court of India has gained a respectable position in the Indian political system. Many of its decisions and interpretation have been played a great role in maintaining the stability of democracy in India.

10.5 DECENTRALISATION OF POWER

Decentralisation is the process of redistribution of powers, functions, and administrative responsibilities from a central authority to the lowest level of the organization. In the context of India, we can say that power was transferred from the Union Government (Central) and the State Governments to the village level units or Panchayats.

According to Louis A. Allen, "Decentralisation refers to tire systematic effort to delegate to the lowest levels all except that which can only be exercised at central points."

During India's struggle for Independence, Mahatma Gandhi advocated and supported self-governing village communities and believed India's real development can only take place through Gram Swaraj. Immediately after independence government launched development projects focusing on Community Development and various committees were set up to study how government powers could be decentralized to village level units. This led to the 73rd amendment of the Constitution, 1992. The 73rd amendment declared the Panchayats as units of self government. The whole of Panchayati Raj system is divided into three-tier levels, namely i) Village Panchayat or Gram Panchayat (village level) ii) Panchayat Samiti (block level) and iii) Zilla Parishad (district level). The Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 came into force on 24th April 1993.

Let's now discuss in details the Three-tier System of Panchayati Raj in India.

- **Village Panchayat:** The Village Panchayat is the lowest unit. The Panchayat chiefly consists of elected representatives elected by the people of the village. Registered voters (above 18 years) who do not hold any office of profit under the government are eligible for election to the Panchayat. The Panchayat as a body is accountable to the general body of the village known as Gram Sabha which meets at least twice a year. The Village Panchayat must present its budget, accounts and annual administrative report before the Gram Sabha. The Panchayat requires the approval of the Gram Sabha regarding village plan, proposals for taxation and development programmes before they are enforced by the Panchayat.

  Each Panchayat elects a President or Sarpanch and Vice-President or Upsarpanch. The Sarpanch is the executive head of the Village Panchayat and coordinates its activities and looks after local institutions like cooperatives.

  The principal functions performed by the Village Panchayat includes maintenance of roads, wells, schools, burning and burial grounds, sanitation, public health, libraries, reading rooms, community centre etc. The Panchayat keeps birth and death records at village level and also acts as the agent of the Panchayat Samiti in executing schemes development at the village level.

- **Panchayat Samiti:** The Panchayat Samiti is the second tier of the Panchayat Raj. The Panchayat Samiti consists of 20 to 60 villages depending on area and population. The president of the Panchayat Samiti is the Pradhan, who is elected by an electoral committee consisting of all members of the Panchayat Samiti and all the Sarpanch of Village Panchayat falling within the areas. The Pradhan convenes and presides over the Panchayat Samiti meetings. He ensures the implementation of the decisions and resolutions of the Samiti and its Standing Committees. He exercises administrative control over the Block Development Officer and his/her staff. By the virtue of the office, the Pradhan is the member of the Zilla Parishad. With the Pradhan and Up-Pradhan, 20 other members are elected from all the Panchayats falling in the block area.

The principal function of the Panchayat Samiti is to coordinate the activities of the various Panchayats within its jurisdiction. The Panchayat Samiti supervises the work of the Panchayats and scrutinizes their budgets. The Samiti carries out the directives of the State Government pertaining to specific projects.

- **Zilla Parishad:** The Zilla Parishad stands at the apex of the three-tier structure of the Panchayati Raj system. Zilla Parishad consists of all the representatives of the Panchayat Samiti, all the members of the state Legislature and the Parliament representing the district and all the district level officers of the Medical, Public Health, Public Works, Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary, Education and other development departments. There is provision for special representatives of women, members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes provided they are not adequately represented in the Zilla Parishad. The Deputy Commissioner or District Collector is also a member of the Zilla Parishad. The Chairman of the Zilla Parishad is elected among its members.

  Its primary responsibility is to maintain the primary and secondary schools, hospitals, dispensaries, minor irrigation works. The Zilla Parishad renders necessary advice to the government with regards to implementation of the various development schemes.

10.6 POLITICAL ELITE

This group of people belongs to the most influential and prestigious stratum in a society who have major influence in shaping the values and attitudes of the majority of the people. Wright Mills (1956) described them as, “those who make decisions having major consequences, who are able to realize their will even if others resist, and who have the most of what there is to have- money, power and prestige.” And Marx referred them as ‘ruling class’.

Generally speaking, ‘Political Elite’ maybe be defined as a group of high stratum decision-makers in political culture or political structure which

monopolizes political power, influences major political policies and occupies all important post of political command. One of the most famous examples of Political elite is Jawaharlal Nehru. After Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi joined politics and the legacy still continues where her Daughter in law and Grandson are active president and member of Indian National Congress. The elite's are those who have a stable economic background (through Royal or ancestral lineage), highly educated, mostly belonging to the upper castes/class and committed to societal interests. Their socio-political ideology based on nationalism, liberalism and religious-cultural reforms and at times family allegiance and commitment to certain political ideology.

10.7 POLITICAL PARTIES

A political party is defined as an organized group of people with similar political aims and objectives, that seeks to influence public policy by getting elected through General or State Legislative Election to public office. In true sense, Political parties are indispensible to any democratic system. They act as the best link between the government and the common men. Political parties generally operate based on defined objectives, activities on public issues but the ultimate objective of any political party is to attain government power.

Based on the characteristics of a nation, political parties exist within single party system, bi-party system or multi-party system. And based on their area of activity, objectives and interest political parties are divided into National and State party. The political parties in India have been greatly influenced by cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism.

In India even though we have a multi party system, at national level various political parties join hands together under two major coalition. At present we have National Democratic Alliance (NDA) spearheaded by Bharatiya Janata Party that runs the government and United Progressive Alliance (UPA) headed by Indian National Congress who sits in the opposition.

10.8 EMERGENCE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN INDIA

After India attained Independence on 15th of August 1947 there was a need to elect a truly representative government on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The Election Commission was set up as Independent constitutional authority and was brought to force from 26th of November, 1949. The Election Commission was formally constituted on January 25th, 1950 the day before India became Sovereign Democratic Republic. The first Chief Election Commissioner was Sukumar Sen.

The Commission initially functioned as single member body. However since 1993 the Election Commission is regularly functioning as a three member body. It constitutes a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners. The term of office is six years or till the age of 65 years whichever is earlier. All the three members have equal power in decision making. If in any case there is difference of opinion on any issue then the commission goes by the decision taken by the majority.

After the constitution of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha of the Parliament and the State Legislative assemblies, the first General Election was conducted in 1951-52. The Election Commission recognized 14 political parties at national level and 39 parties at state level.

The Election Commission adopted the '**Balloting System**' of voting for the years 1951-52 and 1957. Under Balloting system, each candidate was allotted a separate ballot box and voters were just required to drop their ballot paper into the ballot box of the candidate of their choice. From the 3rd General Election in 1962, Election Commission switched to '**marking system**' of voting. In marking system there is one ballot list where the names of all the candidates are listed and voters mark the candidate of his/her choice with a marked rubber stamp and all the ballot papers are put in a single ballot box.

For the first time in Indian Election history the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used on experimental basis in parts of Parur Assembly in Kerala in 1982. From 1998 onwards EVMs were extensively used and in 14th General Elections 2004 each and every polling station used EVMs across the country.

Along with EVMs, the Election Commission of India introduced Voter ID Card for the first time in 1993. The main objective of introducing photo Identity Voter Card is to remove dummy voters from the system and improve the electoral rolls and prevent electoral fraud.

The biggest revolution in the Indian Electoral system was the introduction of 'NOTA' or 'None of the above' option. In 2009 the Election Commission asked the Supreme Court to offer NOTA option to voters the freedom of not selecting an undeserving candidate. Supreme Court of India finally ordered on 27th September 2013 the Election Commission to provide all voting machines with a NOTA button to give voters the option to choose 'none of the above'.



CHECK YOU PROGRESS

Q1: What was the most important difference between Gupta and Mauryan dynasty's administrations?

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Q2: What does the word 'Panchayat' mean?

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Q3: What does the constitution of the India specify?

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Q4: Who supported 'decentralization of Power?

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Q5: What did Karl Marx refer to 'political Elite' as?

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Q6: What do Political parties do?

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Q7: Why Voter ID cards were introduced?

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10.9 LET US SUM UP

- When small republics were formed in ancient India the King (raja) was the supreme head of legislative, executive and judiciary branches.
- After Independence India followed Parliamentary form of government.
- Indian Councils Act 1892, "the government agreed to allow elections to be held in India under the rule, though the members so elected could take their seats only after being nominated by the Government."
- The panchayat is today the most basic – unit of self-government in India
- In democracy the people must have a free and unfettered choice of their representatives with a right of recall at stated period.
- The constitution of India plays a great role in the success of democracy in India.
- In India transfer of powers happens from Union Government to State Government to the village level units or Panchayats.
- The whole of Panchayati Raj system is divided into three-tier, namely i) Village Panchayat or Gram Panchayat (village level) ii) Panchayat Samiti (block level) and iii) Zilla Parishad (district level).
- The Panchayat keeps birth and death records at village level and also acts as the agent of the Panchayat Samiti in executing schemes of development at the village level.
- The principal function of the Panchayat Samiti is to coordinate the activities of the various Panchayats within its jurisdiction.
- Zilla Parishad is the top most tire of the Panchayat Raj System and here both public and government officials from various departments are part of it. The Zilla Parishad renders necessary advice to the

government with regards to implementation of the various development schemes.

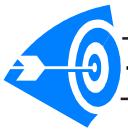
- 'Political Elite' maybe be defined as a group of high stratum decision-makers in political culture or political structure which monopolizes political power, influences major political policies and occupies all important posts of political command.
- Political parties act as a link between government and common men.
- The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used on experimental basis in parts of Parur Assembly in Kerala in 1982.
- NOTA stands for 'None of the above' option.



10.10 FURTHER READING

1) Laxmikanth. M, (2013) "Indian Polity"; McGraw Hill Education, New Delhi.

2) Rao, C. N. Shankar, (2008) " Sociology, Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought"; S. Chand & Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.



10.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No.1: The Gupta administration followed decentralized administration and Maurya's followed centralized administration.

Ans to Q No.2: Panchayat means a council of five and it usually refers to a village council.

Ans to Q No.3: This constitution clearly describes about the nature of the Republic, the organization and powers and mutual relations of the Centre and the States, the Fundamental rights of the citizens (Articles: 13 to 35), the directive principles of State policy (Articles: 36 to 51).

Ans to Q No.4: Mahatma Gandhi advocated and supported Decentralization of Power.

Ans to Q No.5: Marx referred to 'Political Elite' group as 'Ruling Class'.