



5. Concept of Representation

We use the term ‘representatives’ to describe our Members of Parliament or the Members of the State Assembly. We also use the term to describe our Municipal Corporators or Panchayat Members. The concept of representation is important in a democracy. What do we mean by ‘representatives’? Who are they? How do they become representatives? In this chapter, we will study the concept of representation in democratic countries.

What is Representation?

Today in democracies, people elect individuals from amongst themselves to govern themselves. They are called representatives. Political systems where this happens are known by the term ‘indirect democracies’. This is so because people do not conduct their own affairs but rather entrust this task to some others who are known as ‘representatives’. But there was a time when people governed themselves. Political systems where such an arrangement prevailed are described today as ‘direct democracies’. City states in ancient Greece, Athens, for instance, were direct democracies. There is evidence of similar arrangements prevailing in ancient India, but not many details are available as yet. It must be noted that such systems did not give the right to govern to all individuals. Women and the poor were generally excluded.

Direct democracy prevailed in political units which had a limited geographical area and a small population. This made it feasible for all those individuals who had the right to conduct the affairs of such units to do so. But in modern times, the area and the population of political

units has increased. It is not possible for the people to govern themselves. This led to the birth of ‘indirect democracies’. They are also known as ‘representative democracies’ because people govern themselves through their representatives. Their form of government is referred to as ‘Responsible Government’ since the representatives are ultimately responsible and accountable to the people.

Divine Right of Kings

Representative democracies have their origins in medieval Europe. Scholars have noted that similar systems did exist in ancient India. Till the medieval period, Monarchies existed almost everywhere in the world. Monarchs had absolute power over whom they ruled. In some cases, they were regarded as representatives of God on the Earth. These Monarchs claimed they or their ancestors had been given the right to rule by God, a doctrine known as the Divine Right of Kings.

However, as time went by, these Monarchs realised that ruling their respective countries was becoming more expensive, and hence desired to raise more money from their subjects in the form of taxes. The payment of taxes would have become easier if the people agreed to do so. It was of course, not possible to gather all the people together to seek their approval as well as the holding of separate meetings in different parts of the country. Hence, many monarchs decided to convene meetings or gatherings at their capital cities of individuals who were to be separately elected by the people from various parts of their respective countries. The proposals

Major Acts pertaining to representative assemblies in India

1861: Indian Councils Act, 1861: Establishment of legislatures in India and the appointment of Indian members to them.

1892: Indian Councils Act, 1892: Expansion of and introduction of the elected members in these legislatures

1908-09: Morley-Minto reforms and the Indian Councils Act, 1909: Further expansion of these legislatures and an increase in the proportion of elected members.

1918-1919: Montague-Chelmsford reforms and the Government of India Act, 1919: Further expansion of these legislatures with the elected members constituting a majority in them.

1935: Government of India Act, 1935: Provincial legislatures become predominantly elected.

Methods of Representation

In every democratic country, some method is required by which individuals shall govern the people of that country. These methods are known as the 'methods of representation'. These methods are as follows :

(i) **Electoral:** The people have the right to decide who shall govern them. This method primarily is used to decide who shall become the representatives or the members of the representative assemblies. This is so because these assemblies are where the ultimate decision making powers are located. But there is no single electoral method, and indeed there is a variety of them.

(ii) **Non-electoral:** The individuals occupy

various positions through appointment or selection. This second method is used in deciding which individuals shall be appointed as government officials or as members of other government bodies.

(iii) **Non-Official:** This refers to the role that the civil society plays in trying to represent the people. This is done through interest and pressure groups.

In most countries, elections to the representative assemblies take place on a geographical basis, that is to say, the country is divided into distinct areas or constituencies. The people living in these constituencies have the right to elect individuals from their respective constituencies to be their representatives. They, thus, have the right to vote or possess the franchise. Those individuals contesting the elections are known as candidates. The number of individuals to be elected from each constituency varies from country to country.

Electoral systems are classified in two ways:

(i) Number of members that are elected from one constituency: In this system there are two types of election methods: (a) Single-Member: Only one member is elected from one constituency. (b) Multi-Member: Several members can be elected from one constituency.

(ii) How many votes are required to get elected from any one constituency: In this system there are three types of election methods: (a) Plurality, (b) Majority and (c) Proportional.

Generally, the Plural and Majority methods are used for Single-Member constituencies.

In the Plurality system, the candidate who receives the maximum number of votes is elected. In this system, it is not necessary for a candidate to secure a majority of the votes to be elected. This system can be compared to a running race. The runner who reaches the finish line first is the winner. How much time the winner takes to reach the finish line is irrelevant. This is why this system is also known as the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. This system is used for elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies in India.

In the Majority system, it is necessary to secure a majority of the votes, i.e. more than 50%, to get elected. This system is used for the election of the President of India as well as the Vice-President of India.

Proportional systems are generally used in Multi-Member constituencies. In this system, the number of candidates of a given political party to be elected depends upon the proportion of votes that it receives. For instance, if a political party receives 40 % of the votes in a five member constituency, then two of its candidates will be elected from that constituency. This system is not used in India. There is a sub-type of the Proportional system which is known as the Single-Transferable Vote (STV) system. Here the voters have to rank the candidates in the order of preference. This system is used in the elections to the Rajya Sabha and to the State Legislative Councils in India.

Right to vote

A mention has been made of the right to vote. Today, adult franchise exists in all democracies. This means that all adult citizens of the country, irrespective of

gender, race, economic and social status, have the right to vote in elections and thus have a say in deciding in who their representatives would be. However, the age at which an individual becomes entitled to vote varies from country to country. In India, a citizen can become a voter on becoming 18 years of age.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, initially the women and the poor did not have the right to vote. But with the spread of the idea of democracy, it became difficult to justify the exclusion of a majority of the population from the right to vote. Soon all men received the right to vote. However, the struggle to secure the right to vote to women was even more difficult. By the mid-20th century, most democratic countries granted women the right to vote. It must be noted that India granted all its adult citizens, both male and female, the right to vote in 1950 itself when the Constitution was adopted.



Women Voters in India



Postage Stamp of the Election Commission of India



Do you know ?

When did women get the right to vote?

Chronology of women's right to vote

United States	: 1920
United Kingdom	: 1928
France	: 1945
Japan	: 1945
Israel	: 1948
India	: 1950
Switzerland	: 1971

Find out!

Names of Member of Parliament and Member of Legislative Assembly from your constituency. Which political party do they belong to?

Channels and Levels of Representation

Political parties are the most important channels for political representation. They serve as the primary channels of political representation. But what are political parties? They can be defined as organised groups formed by individuals holding similar views on a wide variety of issues. They seek to obtain political power in order to implement policies based on these views.

In democracies, parties seek to obtain power through elections. Individuals who are members of various parties contest elections as candidates of their respective parties. Moreover, the views of a party taken together are described as that party's ideology. During elections, the parties present before the voters a programme based on their ideology and promise them that this programme would be implemented if elected to power. The voters who approve of a given party's programme

because they feel that it will benefit them vote for that party's candidates. Thus, the aspirations and wishes of the voters are represented in the decision-making process through the channel or the medium of a given political party.

However, it must be noted that decision-making occurs at different levels. In a federal system like India, it occurs at both the national as well as at the state level. India also has granted constitutional status to the local self-government institutions like the Gram Panchayats and the Municipal Councils and Corporations. They have been entrusted with certain powers and responsibilities which have been enumerated in the Constitution of India. This means that decision-making also takes place at the local level. Elections are held for representative assemblies at all these three levels, and political parties contest them. Thus, parties serve as channels of representation at all these three levels.

Classification of Political Parties

In India, political parties are classified as 'National' or 'State' parties. The Election Commission of India has certain criterion to classify a party as 'National' or 'State'.

The Election Commission has decided that a political party shall be eligible to be recognised as a **National** party if :-

- (i) it secures at least **six percent** (6%) of the valid votes polled in any **four** or more states, at a general election to the House of the People or, to the State Legislative Assembly; and
- (ii) in addition, it wins at least four seats in the House of the People from any State or States.

OR

it wins at least two percent (2%) seats in the House of the People (i.e., 11 seats in the existing House having 543 members), and these members are elected from at least three different States.

List of National Parties in India

- Indian National Congress
- Communist Party of India
- Bharatiya Janata Party
- Communist Party of India (Marxist)
- Bahujan Samaj Party
- Nationalist Congress Party
- All India Trinamool Congress

(Election Commission Of India, No.56/2018/PPS-III Dated : 13th April, 2018)



Find out!

Give names of four State parties from Maharashtra and six from other States.

Origin of Political Parties

It would be interesting to find out the process by which parties came into existence. They emerged a little later than the representative assemblies mentioned in the earlier sections. As these assemblies came to have more of a say in a country's decision-making process, members of these assemblies who held similar views began gathering together to influence the policies of the government in a direction that they desired. Such groups soon came to be described as political parties.

Once power passed into the hands of

these assemblies and it became established that whosoever commanded a majority in these assemblies would head the Executive. The need for organised groups became increasingly felt since such groups would ensure that the majority would last for a reasonable amount of time and thus ensure political stability. This process can be seen in the 18th century in the United Kingdom. A similar process occurred in many other countries as well. As more and more people secured the right to vote, these parties expanded their membership among the voters and became well-knit organisations.

In India, political parties arose as a result of the fight against British rule. The Indian National Congress was the first organisation to be formed in India which can be described as a political party. This happened in 1885. As the freedom movement picked pace, various other parties like the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, Unionist Party, the Communist Party of India, the Independent Labour Party, among others were formed. After independence, many more parties like the Peasants and Workers Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Jana Sangh, Socialist Party, Republican Party of India, Shiv Sena, among others were established. Generally speaking, newer parties are formed when some sections of society believe that the existing political parties are not or cannot fulfil their aspirations. This has happened all over the world and this has also been a major reason for the formation of new parties in India.

Interest and Pressure Groups

Interest and Pressure groups are informal channels that seek to represent the people. A Pressure Group is an interest group that is organised to influence public and especially government policy. This

group does not participate in elections to become a part of government or the opposition. It seeks to influence policy from outside by putting pressure on the government. Sometimes the word 'Lobby groups' is used to describe these interest groups. Trade Unions, Agricultural interest groups, student organisations are some examples of pressure groups.

Pressure groups are different from political parties.

(i) The political parties are part of the governmental system. They seek to

In India we can identify some interest/pressure groups like:

- (i) In the area of business: Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), etc.
- (ii) Trade Unions: The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), The Hind Mazdoor Sangh (HMS), etc.
- (iii) Agricultural Unions: All India Kisan Sabha, Bharatiya Kisan Union, Shetkari Sanghatana, etc.
- (iv) Student Unions: National Students Union of India (NSUI), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), All India Students Federation (AISF), Student Federation of India (SFI), etc..

Some Pressure Groups in United States

- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- American Civil Liberties Union
- The National Organisation for Women
- American Medical Association
- American Federation of Labour and Congress of International Organisations AFL-CIO
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

influence government policy from the inside. A pressure group tries to influence the government from the outside. They do not stand for elections and become members of the legislature.

(ii) Political parties have a broad agenda. They seek to represent the people for political, social, economic, cultural, and other concerns. Pressure groups usually have a narrow focus. They focus on specific issues or fight for a specific cause.

Pressure groups are also different from social movements. The pressure groups usually have a more formalised structure. Social movements usually do not have a formal structure or organisation. They take up a cause and pursue it. (Example: Chipko Movement) This is why sometimes interest groups are described as representing 'organised interests'.

Non governmental Organisations

Non governmental Organisations (NGOs) are another mechanism for representation. This is usually a private, non-commercial group that wants to achieve its aims through a nonviolent struggle. They usually promote or defend a cause. They have people with specialised knowledge associated with them.

All of the above are channels of representation. They seek to represent the people's aspirations and concerns.

In this chapter, we have seen how people seek to represent themselves through various channels. Representative government is an important aspect of a successful democracy. Let us now turn to another aspect of government that is equally important. We will see the role of the Judiciary in the next chapter.

Find out!

Identify some NGOs working in your area for child development, environmental issues, community development, women area for etc. and find out about their work.

Please see the following website for further information:

Representation

Edmund Burke, Speech to the Electors of Bristol

Representation Vol. 1, Page 391, 3 Nov. 1774 Works 1:446--48

http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/print_documents/v1ch13s7.html



Exercise

1. (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the following statements.

1. Ancient Greece had
(dictatorship, direct democracy, indirect democracy, monarchy)
2. The oldest representative assembly in the world is
(House of Commons, House of Lords, Senate, House of Representatives)

(B) State the appropriate concept for the given statement.

The political system where people elect representatives to govern themselves.

(C) Find the odd word in the given set.

The Indian National Trade Union Congress, All India Kisan Sabha, National Students Union of India, Indian National Congress

3. Explain the co-relation between the following.

Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations.

4. Express your opinion of the following.

Pressure groups are different from political parties.

5. Answer the following in detail with reference to the given points.

What is meant by representation? Explain the various methods of the representation?

- (a) meaning
- (b) electoral
- (c) non-electoral
- (d) non-official

6. Suggest ways by which you can encourage people to vote in election.

Activity :

Write the history of any one national political party in India.

2. Complete the concept map.

