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## PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Vijaya was going through an editorial in a newspaper and exclaimed, "I am delighted to live in a successful democracy like India". Rampal, her father says, "I may not be very educated, but I am wondering, whether we really are a successful democracy, I see many people who are still begging on the streets or are malnourished." Vijaya responds by saying, "That's true, but atleast we can vote to bring another government. While many countries are still struggling to have regular popular governments, democracy in India has taken firm roots."

Indians have been participating in elections regularly for over six decades. People have been electing their representatives for running governments at national and state levels and also for local governments. Voting in elections is a formal and simple form of political participation. People's participation becomes effective only when there is a respect for public opinion. Within a country there are people and groups having different points of view, some people have disagreements with certain policies or programmes of the government. A process of debate and discussion is important for a healthy democracy. The essence of democracy is the freedom to voice one's opinion even if it is critical of the government. In fact, democracy is enriched when different voices and constructive opinions influence the policies of the government. Democratic government is a government that sustains itself through public opinion which is expressed through the medium of elections. In this lesson, you will learn about elections, the electoral system, the electoral process, universal adult franchise, in addition to the importance of public opinion in a democracy.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- understand people's participation in democratic processes;
- explain the meaning and importance of public opinion;

- list the agencies which help formulate public opinion;
- describe the electoral system that operates in India;
- discuss the meaning of elections and their types;
- assess election malpractices and measures to check them;
- identify various electoral reforms; and
- explain the meaning of universal adult franchise and its importance.



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## 22.1 PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

You must have observed people voting in elections. Have you voted in any election? We vote to elect our representatives who form and run the government. These representatives implement the government's policies and programmes. People's participation in the election is what makes our democracy a representative and participatory democracy. But the meaning of people's participation does not begin and end with their voting in elections. People's participation is also expressed through public debates, newspaper editorials, protest demonstrations and their active involvement in governmental programmes. Even in respect of election process, it includes participation in campaign, political discussion, working for political parties and standing as candidates.



**Figure 22.1** *People's Participation in an election rally*

People's participation may be defined as, "behaviour through which people directly express their political opinions". This conceptualization is broad enough to cover the electoral and non-electoral forms of political participation. In fact, participation comprises all those actions of citizens by which they seek to influence, support or criticize the government and its policies. They do so to ensure that their representatives respond to their needs and aspirations.



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**ACTIVITY 22.1**

Ask the following questions to three people who are 18-years old or above and write their answers in the table given below.

	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3
Did you vote in last election, why or why not?			
Did you participate in the election process by campaigning for a party/ candidate?			
If the elected person did not fulfill his/her promise, did you make in any public response eg. write to a newspaper, or participate in a protest rally .			

**22.2 PUBLIC OPINION: MEANING, IMPORTANCE AND ITS AGENCIES**

The discussion on people’s participation makes it abundantly clear that there are several ways in which citizens participate in the democratic process. Public opinion is one of the most effective ways. You also must have observed that people quite often enter into discussion on political parties, leaders and candidates and express their opinions on various issues. They do so while travelling in a train or a bus, or at other public places. They also discuss policy decisions taken by the government. Many of us write letters to the editor expressing views on different issues or participate in protest rallies and discussions on radio or television . All such views take the form of public opinion and influence various aspects of democratic process, such as voting behaviour, functioning of a government and the working of administration.

**22.2.1 Public Opinion: Meaning**

But do the terms, ‘voice of the people’ and ‘public opinion’ mean the same? When you study these terms further, you will be able to appreciate that it is not so. In fact, the concept of public opinion has been defined in a variety of ways and definitions appear to be complex. At this stage, let us try to understand the meaning of public opinion in a simple manner. Public opinion is not the unanimous opinion of the people, nor it is the opinion of the majority. Public opinion is an organized and considered opinion of the people on any issues of public concern. Public opinion can also be defined as the complex collection of opinions of different people and the sum of all



**Notes**

their views. To a great extent, various definitions on public opinion include the following characteristics:

- (a) Public opinion is an aggregate of views;
- (b) views are based on reasons;
- (c) these views aim at ensuring the welfare of the whole community; and
- (d) public opinion influences the decisions of governments, functioning of political parties and running of administration.

***Do you know?***

Public opinion as a concept dates back to the eighteenth century. This concept came about through the process of urbanisation and other political and social forces. For the first time, it was Jeremy Bentham, the British Philosopher, who developed theories of public opinion. He said that public opinion had the power to ensure that rulers would rule for the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

**22.2.2 Public Opinion: Its Importance in a Democracy**

The role of public opinion, in a democracy, can hardly be ignored. You already know that democratic government draws its authority from the people and claims its legitimacy from the consent of the governed. No government can function without the support of the people. The process of development of public opinion generates thinking, promotes awareness and invites people's views on issues of public concern. Do you realize how a democratic government is formed, sustained and controlled by public opinion? The following roles of public opinion are especially important:

1. An alert and free public opinion is a check on absolute power;
2. it ensures a system in which no organ of the government overrules others;
3. it promotes a process to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people;
4. it influences government in making laws in the interest of the people;
5. it strengthens democratic values and norms; and
6. it protects rights, freedoms and liberty: 'eternal vigilance' is rightly called the price of liberty, i.e. every citizen needs to be vigilant in order to protect democratic values.

**22.2.3 Public Opinion: Agencies for its Formulation**

As we have seen above, public opinion is not the simple aggregation of views or opinions expressed by individuals or groups. In fact, public opinion is formed on the basis of such views and opinions, but as you find in the illustration, there are number of agencies that contribute to its formulation. The following are some of the important agencies which help to formulate public opinion:



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Figure 22.2 Sources of Public Opinion

1. **Print Media:** Newspapers, periodicals, magazines and other print materials have been contributing to the formulation of public opinion since a long time. As you are very well aware, the news items, articles, news stories, letters to editors and several other published items on almost all the critical public issues update the individual views and opinions. These also assimilate and concretise varied views and opinions and help them evolve as public opinion. These media instruments also facilitate communication of public opinion to all concerned.
2. **Electronic Media:** Cinema, radio, T.V. channels and now cell phones have emerged as perhaps the most effective tools that contribute to the formulation of public opinion. Their audio-visual mode helps a great deal in assimilating views and opinions expressed even in the remotest part of the country. They help in converting views into the most representative public opinion and also in communicating it to all concerned.
3. **Political Parties** constitute an important agency for opinion formation. As you also may be experiencing, almost everyday, the political parties and their leaders feed the people with facts and ideas. We hear and see the leaders of political parties undertaking *padyatras*, *rathyatras* and workers of political parties conducting mass awareness activities about their programmes and policies. These contribute a great deal in the formulation of public opinion.
4. **Legislatures:** Legislatures, Parliament and State Legislatures in our country are the most effective institutions that make substantive contribution to the formation of public opinion. The impact of their contribution has increased manifold since the beginning of the live telecast of legislative debates. These are places where most of the discussions and debates on all the critical issues of public policy and



Notes

public welfare take place. These are watched and heard by the vast majority of population. Legislature's platform provides authentic information and ideas on which public opinion is effectively formulated.

- 5. Educational Institutions:** Different educational institutions also help create public opinion. Our schools, colleges, universities and professional institutes leave on our minds permanent impact. These formal educational institutions impart political education and contribute to the formation of public opinion as well.



### ACTIVITY 22.2

You may have watched the film, *Rang De Basanti*. Its story is about 5 young men whose friend gets killed in a fighter aircraft crash. The corruption in government appears to be the root cause of the incident. This event changes them from being carefree to passion-driven individuals who are determined to avenge their friend's death by using violent means.

In another film, *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, a Mumbai (Bombay) underworld don begins to see the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi. Through his interactions with the image of Gandhi, Munna Bhai begins to practice what he calls Gandhigiri (focused on satyagraha, non-violence and truth) to help ordinary people solve their problems. In both the films the lead actors were working towards a cause using different methods. Which method do you like more? Give your reasons.

Note: This question can be answered even if students have not seen the film.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.1

1. What do you mean by people's participation in the democratic process?
2. Are 'public opinion' and 'voice of the people' synonyms? Give reasons to your answer.
3. Explain the importance of Public Opinion in a democracy.
4. List any two agencies which help in the formation of public opinion? Which agency according to you has the most powerful impact on public opinion?

### 22.3 ELECTIONS IN INDIA

You may have seen a polling booth as shown in the illustration where citizens are lined up to cast their votes. In our country, elections take place for electing Members of the Lok Sabha or the Vidhan Sabha or the representatives of Gram Panchayat



**Notes**

or Municipal Bodies. You may have even participated in such election. Can you define elections? Well, election is a contest among candidates in order to seek the membership of a legislative body or a representative institution to attain a public position. Elections, to the legislatures and local government bodies are held periodically, usually after a particular period. The whole country or the entire State or the area of the concerned local body is divided into a number of constituencies. Each constituency returns one representative from a number of candidates who contest elections. The candidate who gets the largest number of votes as against the other candidates in the constituency is declared elected.



**Figure 22.3** A polling booth with voters in a queue

**?** Do you know

**A Constituency** is a territorial area delimited separately for the Parliament, the State Legislature and the local bodies in India. Each constituency returns a single representative.

**A Candidate** is a prospective person seeking some position through election. He/She is either the incumbent seeking re-election or is a challenger seeking to unseat the incumbent or is simply an aspirant for an open seat.

**A Manifesto** is a document which outlines the proposed programmes and policies of the political parties.

**22.3.1 Importance of Elections**

You also may have experienced that elections provide opportunities to the people to participate actively in the functioning of the democratic government. These are the most important expressions of public opinion, as these enable the people to express their will. In fact, elections widen the scope of political awakening among the masses and educate them by familiarising them with issues of public concern. Elections facilitate peaceful transfer of power from one political party or one group of political parties to another and legitimise the working of the government by justifying the authority of representatives to lead people.



**ACTIVITY 22.3**

Mukund Das, a politician is a two time MLA from Pratappur. He is associated with one of the prominent regional parties of Uttar Pradesh. He has 100% attendance in the Legislative Assembly. However, in terms of his active participation in the Assembly, he has never raised any question in the Assembly nor participated in debate on any issue. Out of Rs. 6 crore that he had in his MLA Development Fund, he has been able to spend only a small amount on development of roads and sewers in his locality.

Devika Sen became an MLA from Durgapur , West Bengal. She is an independent MLA not belonging to any political party. Her family owns a cloth mill in the area. She has 100% attendance in the Assembly. She has often raised questions in the Assembly relating to rights of women and on policies related to trade unions. Out of the Rs. 6 crore from her MLA Development Fund, an amount of Rs. 4 crores was spent on improving the schools in the area and another two crores on developing infrastructure like roads, community centers etc. around the cloth mills.

1. Based on the above information, write in the table below, whom would you vote for. Give reasons for your choice and suggest two ways in which the two candidates can improve their performance.

Candidate	My Vote and reasons	Suggestions for improvement
Mukund Das		1. 2.
Devika		1. 2.
Neither		—

**22.3.2 Types of Elections**

We all observe that elections do take place in our country quite often. But all the elections are not of the same kind. The kinds of elections that take place in India may be understood in two ways. Firstly, we have direct and indirect elections. In direct elections, people vote directly through their ballot to elect their representatives to legislative bodies (Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies) and local government institutions. We have also indirect elections, in which the elected representatives of the people vote for electing persons to occupy certain positions. The President and the Vice-President of India are indirectly elected. The members of the Rajya Sabha also are elected indirectly. Moreover, certain percentage of



**Notes**



**Notes**

members of the Legislative Councils (that are present in some of the States) are indirectly elected by the members of the concerned Legislative Assemblies.

Observed in a different way we find another three categories of elections. These are: (a) General Elections, (b) Mid-term Elections, (c) Bye-elections. The General Elections are held all over the country, for the Lok Sabha and/or for the State Legislative Assemblies. Such elections are held after the expiry of the full term of the legislature. The Lok Sabha Elections held in 2009, for example, may be described as General Elections. If the elections are held before the completion of the normal term of the legislature owing to the dissolution of legislative bodies, these are called Mid-term Elections. The Lok Sabha elections that took place in 1991, for example, were mid-term elections. Bye-elections are held in a particular constituency owing to a vacancy caused by resignation or death of the elected member, or when the election of a particular member is set aside by the judiciary. In such elections, the member is elected for the remaining period of term of the legislature. P.V. Narsimha Rao was elected to the Lok Sabha from Andhra Pradesh in a bye-election held in November 1991.

**? Do you know**

1. The first general elections (Parliamentary Elections) were held in our country in the year 1952. Since then there have been 15 General Elections (Lok Sabha elections) up to 2009.
2. The Lok Sabha elections of 1980, 1991, 1998 and 1999 were Mid-term Elections, held before the schedule.
3. In the history of Indian Elections, only the 1977 Lok Sabha elections were deferred for about two years on account of the proclamation of National Emergency in the country.



**INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.2**

1. Examine the importance of elections in India.
2. What do you mean by direct and indirect elections?
3. Fill in the blanks
  1. Elections held after the expiry of the full term of the legislatures are known as .....
  2. If the elections are held before the completion of the normal term of the legislature owing to the dissolution of legislative bodies, these are called .....
  3. An election held in a particular constituency owing to a vacancy caused by resignation or death of the elected member, or when the election of a particular member is set aside by the judiciary is known as .....

## 22.4 ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN INDIA

India has earned accolades for successfully conducting so many elections. But how do all these happen? Have you ever given thought to certain questions like how are elections conducted in a vast country like India? Who supervises the process of elections? Who delimits the constituencies? Who declares the schedule of elections right from nominations to declaration of results? Who are these officials, called the returning officers, presiding officers, and polling officers? In fact, there is a huge electoral system that has been engaged in managing elections in India. Let us discuss its details.

### 22.4.1 Election Commission of India

The task of conducting free, fair and impartial elections is entrusted to an impartial constitutional authority which is known as the Election Commission. The Election Commission is not a legal but is a constitutional body. A legal body is one which is created by the law of Parliament or State Legislature, while a constitutional body is one which is provided in the Constitution itself. Our Constitution provides for the Election Commission of India. The Election Commission consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and the number of Election Commissioners as the President may fix in accordance with the law. At present, the Election Commission of India consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.



**Figure 22.4** *Election Commission of India*

The Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners are appointed by the President of India. They have tenure of six years or up to the age of 65, whichever is earlier. They enjoy the same status and service conditions as are enjoyed by the Judges of the Supreme Court of India. The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only by impeachment, through a procedure as applicable in the case of a Judge of the Supreme Court. The Election Commissioners can be removed by the President on the recommendations of the Chief Election Commissioner.



Notes

**Notes**

The main functions of the Election Commission of India are as follows:

1. Ensure free and fair elections in the country;
2. supervise, direct and control the entire election machinery; preparation of electoral roll;
3. provide recognition to political parties and register them as national and state parties;
4. allotment of symbols to political parties and the numerous independent candidates contesting the elections;
5. issuing guidelines and code of conduct for the election officials, candidates, and for the political parties during the elections;
6. redressal of election complaints received from the voters, the candidates and the political parties;
7. appointment of electoral officials; and
8. advising the President on matters relating to elections.

The Election Commission performs its role with the help of a group of officials and by observing an election procedure as discussed below:

**1. Election Officials**

For the conduct of elections, the Election Commission is assisted by a number of officials. At the state level, the election work is supervised, subject to overall superintendence, direction and control of the Commission, by the Chief Electoral Officer of the State. The Chief Electoral Officer of the State is appointed by the Election Commission from amongst senior civil servants proposed by the concerned State government. He/She is, in most of the States, a full time officer and has a team of supporting staff. The Election Commission utilises the State government officers for election work, by designating them as District Election Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, Assistant Electoral Registration Officers, and Assistant Returning Officers. They all perform their functions relating to elections in addition to their own routine responsibilities. During election time, they are available to the Commission, more or less, on a full time basis. Out of these, there are three main officials who play very important roles in the conduct of free and fair elections. They are the Returning Officer, Presiding Officer and Polling Officer.

**Returning Officer:** In every constituency, one Officer is designated as Returning Officer by the Commission in consultation with the concerned State government. However, an Officer can be nominated as Returning Officer for more than one constituency. He/She is the official who (a) receives and scrutinises the nomination papers of the candidates contesting elections, (b) allots election symbols on behalf of the Election Commission, (c) conducts smooth elections in the constituency(ies), (d) ensures counting of votes, and (e) declares the election results.

**Presiding Officers:** Every constituency has a large number of polling booths. Every booth, for 800-1000 voters, remains under the charge of an Officer who is known as Presiding Officer. He/She supervises the entire process in the polling booth and ensures that every voter gets an opportunity to cast vote freely and that there is no impersonation. After the polling is over, he/she seals all the ballot boxes and delivers them to the Returning Officer.

**Polling Officer:** Every Presiding Officer is assisted by three or four officials who are called the Polling Officers. These officials ensure that the elections take place smoothly at the polling booth. They check the names of the voters in the electoral roll, put indelible ink on the finger of the voter, issue ballot papers and ensure that votes are secretly cast by each voter.



### Do you know

1. **Impersonation:** It is 'bogus' voting. When somebody takes on a false identity and votes instead of the real person during elections, such an illegal act is called impersonation. It can be curtailed by compulsory identification through use of voters' cards.
2. **Indelible ink:** This ink cannot be removed easily. It is put on the index finger of the right hand of the voter, so that a person does not come again to cast vote for the second time. This is done to avoid impersonation.

## 2. The Electoral Process in India

The election process is a considerably long process having numerous stages. It is important for you to recognize various stages of the electoral process, which are as follows:

1. Delimitation of constituencies is the first step which is undertaken by the Delimitation Commission.
2. Preparation and revision of the electoral roll constitute the next step done under the supervision of the Election Commission periodically.
3. Consequent upon the President's and Governor's notifications, the Election Commission undertakes the task of conducting elections in the country.
4. The election schedule is announced indicating the dates for filling the nomination papers, their scrutiny, withdrawals, polling, counting of the votes, and declaration of the election results.
5. Allotment of election symbols to the candidates, and the political parties is done by the Election Commission.
6. The candidates and the political parties are given time for election campaigns by the Election Commission.



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**Notes**

7. Re-poll, if necessary, in a constituency or in a part of the constituency, is done only on the orders of the Election Commission.
8. Countermanding of election is done when a duly nominated candidate belonging to a recognized political party dies any time after the last date of withdrawals of the nomination papers and the commencement of the polling. The countermanding orders are issued by the Election Commission.
9. The election disputes such as improper rejection of nomination papers of the candidate(s), use of unfair or corrupt means during the elections, bribing and intimidating of voters, or the use of official machinery are probed by the judiciary, i.e. the High Court, and through appeals by the Supreme Court.

**22.4.2 Polling and After**

You must have noticed that the polling day, at every polling booth is a day full of activities. On the day of the polling, the voters go to their respective polling booths, and wait in a queue, for their turn. On entering the polling room, the voter discloses his/her identity to the first polling officer, and then to the second one. After that, another polling officer puts indelible ink on the first finger of left hand in the case of a male voter, and on the right hand in case of the female voter. This is done to avoid bogus or false voting or impersonation. Impersonation, you must be aware is an offence, punishable by law. After the identification of the voter is done by the officials, the voter is given a ballot paper or is shown the electronic voting machine (EVM) containing the names of the candidates along with their respective election symbols. Does not the EVM look like the one shown in the illustration?



**Figure 22.5** *Voting in a Polling Booth*



**Figure 22.6** *Electronic Voting Machine*

If a ballot paper is given, the elector casts his/her vote by marking the ballot paper with a rubber stamp on or near the symbol of the candidate of his/her choice, inside a screened compartment in the polling station. The voter then folds the ballot paper and inserts it in a common ballot box which is kept in full view of the Presiding Officer and polling agents of the candidates.

But if the electronic voting machine is used, the voter uses the machine to indicate his/her choice of candidate. Secrecy is maintained so that nobody gets to know for whom the voter has voted. After the polling, boxes or EVMs are sealed and sent to the counting centres. The votes are counted and the candidate who obtains the largest number of votes is declared elected. The candidate who fails to poll even one-sixth of the total votes cast in the constituency, forfeits his/her security deposits. If any candidate suspects corrupt practices used by the other candidates, he/she can file an election petition in the High Court. If the court is satisfied that corrupt means were used, the election is set aside. An appeal can be made in the Supreme Court against the decision of the High Court.



Notes



Do you know

**Ballot paper** is a piece of paper which indicates the names of the candidates together with their election symbols. It is used to record the choices made by voters.

The **Secret Ballot** is a voting method in which the voters' choices are made confidential, in an election or in a referendum. The method is a means of achieving the objective of secrecy.

**Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)** is a simple electronic device used in place of ballot papers and boxes which were used earlier in conventional voting system. It was first used in 1982 in the bye-election to Parur Assembly Constituency of Kerala for a limited number of polling stations (50 polling stations). During the General Elections of 2004 in India, elections were conducted using a total of 10.75 lacs EVMs



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.3

1. How is the Election Commission constituted?
2. What according to you are the two most critical functions of the Election Commission?
3. Who are the main election officials from state level to the level of polling booth?



4. If you are assigned the task of acting as a Returning Officer, what main functions will you perform and how will you ensure free, fair and peaceful poll in the constituency?
5. What are the five major stages of electoral process in India?

## 22.5 PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REFORMS

The discussion so far has enabled us to appreciate the significance of elections ensuring people's participation in the democratic process. But over the years, it has been found that the election system in India needs improvement to make India a truly participatory democracy. We shall now discuss the most notable factor that has contributed to ensure people's participation in elections. The discussion will also focus on those issues that are considered concerns of Indian elections as well as on suggested electoral reforms.

### 22.5.1 Universal Adult Franchise

Elections play an important role primarily because of the system of universal adult franchise adopted in India just after its independence. It is interesting to observe that in Great Britain, the universal adult franchise was granted in 1928, nearly 300 years after the process of democratization began. In Switzerland, the Home of Democracy, it was also granted as late as in 1972. In India, however, universal adult franchise became a part of the electoral process right from the beginning of our establishment as a democracy, that is, after Independence. What does Universal Adult Franchise mean?

Let us begin with the literal meaning of the concept of universal adult franchise in this context. 'Universal' means commonly applicable to all persons, without any discrimination; 'adult' means a person who is a major and not a minor; 'franchise' means individual's right to cast his/her vote. Universal adult franchise thus means, a system in which all adults, men and women, without any discrimination, have a right to vote in the elections. But all adults do not include those who are legally barred from voting.

#### ? Do you know

1. New Zealand was the first country to grant universal franchise in 1893, and Finland was the first European Country to do so, in 1906.
2. Universal Adult Franchise was introduced in Germany in 1919, Sweden in 1920, and France in 1945.

The concept of universal adult franchise is based on the principle of political equality: one person, one vote; none has more than one vote. It helps ensure liberty of the people and helps secure protection of rights. It is educative in so far as it widens the scope of people's participation.



**Notes**

The right to vote is linked with age of the person. The minimum age required for voting differs from country to country. In most countries of our times, the voting age is 18 years, as in India, China, United States of America, Great Britain and Russia. In countries like Iran, the minimum age for a voter is 15, while in Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua, it is 16 years, and in Indonesia, North Korea and Sudan, it is 17 years. In Japan and Tunisia, it is 20 years, while in South Korea, it is 19 years. In countries such as Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Singapore, the voting age is 21 years, but in Uzbekistan, a voter has to have a minimum age of 25 years.

### 22.5.2 Electoral Reforms

As we have seen, the electoral system in India based on universal adult franchise has helped our voters not only in choosing their representatives, but also in facilitating smooth and peaceful change of governments, replacing one political party or a set of political parties by another. We have also observed that our elections, held so far, have largely been free and fair. People have participated in the election processes actively. Accordingly, elections have become an important part of our democratic life. And yet, there are certain critical problems that have been adversely affecting not only the quality of electoral process but also the functioning of democratic system. These definitely call for electoral reforms.

In fact, the electoral reforms have been engaging the attention of the Parliament, the Government, the Election Commission, the Press and the people for a long time. Some measures were implemented in the past to remove glaring lacunae in the law. Based on the experiences in the recent past, the need has been felt for some steps to be taken quickly for amendment of certain provisions of law. There are issues like (a) rigging of the elections - fake and bogus voting, impersonation, (b) violence during elections, (c) adverse role of money and muscle power, (d) intimidation of voters especially the people of weaker sections, (e) misuse of governmental machinery, (f) booth capturing and criminalization in both elections and politics, that demand immediate attention



**Figure 22.7** Free and Fair Election



## Notes

These negative developments have been discussed at different levels and actions are on for electoral reforms. Indeed, a lot of electoral reforms have already been introduced. But no system of election can ever be perfect. In actual practice, there always come up flaws and limitations in the electoral practices. We have to keep searching some mechanism to make elections truly free, fair and impartial. Numerous suggestions for electoral reforms have come from scholars, political parties, government sponsored committees, and various independent sources.

A tentative list of **suggested electoral reforms** is as follows:

1. Democratization of electoral system be made from time to time so as to keep the electoral system in pace with changing times;
2. change from the on-going system (*plurality system*) to some form of proportional representation system to be introduced to reduce the votes-seats imbalance (see box below);
3. the functioning of political parties to be regulated in order to ensure that they function in a transparent and democratic manner. There is a need to audit their expenditure incurred during the elections;
4. electoral laws to be made more stringent and there must be provisions for harsher punishment;
5. state funding of elections to be introduced so as to reduce and curb election expenses;
6. special provision to be made to ensure at least one third representation of women in Parliament and State legislatures;
7. the role of money and muscle power to be curbed during the elections;
8. criminalization of politics to be stopped in the elections;
9. candidates with any criminal record to be barred from contesting elections; and
10. complete ban to be imposed on the use of caste and religious appeal in election campaigns.



### Do you know

1. The **Plurality System** refers to an election won by the candidate having maximum votes. This voting system is used at present to elect members of the legislative assembly in single-member and multi-member constituencies.
2. The **Proportional Representation** is an electoral device to ensure representation of all sections of the people more or less in proportion to their voting strength. Under this system any group, whether it is a political party or interest group will secure representation in proportion to the popular votes it obtains.



Notes

The Election Commission has taken several new initiatives in the recent past, a reference to some of which has already been made above. Notable among these are: (i) a scheme for use of State owned Electronic Media for broadcast/telecast by political parties, (ii) restrictions on Opinion and Exit Polls (because these polls might influence voters), (iii) checking criminalisation of politics, (iv) computerisation of electoral rolls, (v) providing electors with Identity Cards, (vi) simplifying the procedure for maintenance of accounts and filing of the same by candidates and (vii) a variety of measures for strict compliance of Model Code of Conduct for providing a level playing field to contestants during the elections. As our electoral system has worked well even under certain adverse conditions, hopes are ripe that democracy in our country is going to stay and continue to be better. Our people are committed to democratic values and there are chances that the governments would come up to people's expectations.



### ACTIVITY 22.4

Given below is a short interview sheet. Conduct this interview with the adults in your family or neighborhood to find out what they feel about voting.

1. Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Age : \_\_\_\_\_
2. When did you vote for the first time?
3. How did you decide on the candidate you voted for?
4. Have you ever seen the manifesto of a political party? Did it help you to take your decision?



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.4

1. Universal adult franchise ensures that the vote of every Indian citizen is equally valuable. Do you think that this has been able to reduce inequalities related to class, caste, gender and religion . Justify your view point.
2. Mention any three problems that are confronted by the electoral system in India.
3. Mention any two electoral reforms you think are important to improve our electoral system.



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT?

- In a large country like ours, representative democracy is desirable. Representative government works through representation and representation through elections. Elections, therefore, are the basis of democracy.

**Notes**

- Elections require electorate and electoral processes. Electorate means citizens exercising franchise. In modern democracy, universal adult franchise (all adult citizens without any discrimination, have the right to vote) is essential.
- Single member constituency system is more common than multi-member constituency. Voting is through secret ballot.
- Usually the elections are direct for popular legislative assemblies, though indirect election system is used for certain offices such as the President and the Vice-President of India.
- The electoral process moves through various stages: filling up the nomination papers for election by the candidates, scrutiny of the nomination papers, withdrawals from elections, election campaign, results, etc.
- In India, there is a provision for independent and impartial Election Commission to conduct and supervise elections.
- In the context of a number of lacunae in the on-going electoral process, there is a need for electoral reforms.

**TERMINAL EXERCISES**

1. What do you mean by people's participation in the democratic process? Do you think, casting votes in elections is the be-all and end-all of people's participation? Give reasons.
2. Define Public Opinion and discuss its importance in a democracy.
3. Give any four agencies which help to formulate public opinion. Which agency according to you has the most powerful impact on public opinion?
4. Examine the role of elections in Indian democratic system. Discuss the types of elections that are held in the country.
5. What are the major functions of the Election Commission of India? What are the major stages of election process?
6. What is meant by Universal Adult Franchise? Explain its significance.
7. In India where we see many inequalities related to class, caste, gender, religion, how successful do you think is universal adult franchise?
8. Discuss any four major problems confronted by the electoral system in India.
9. Do you think there is an urgent need to effect electoral reforms in India? What are the major recommendations for bringing about election reforms?
10. Make an Action Plan for the Election Commission, for bringing about reforms in the process of electoral campaigning. The Plan should help promote effective dissemination of information among the general public, about political parties and candidates.



## ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS



## Notes

## 22.1

1. People's participation includes voting in elections, it is also expressed through public debates, newspaper editorials, protest demonstrations and their active involvement in governmental programmes. Even in respect of election process, it includes participation in campaign, political discussion, working for political parties and standing as candidates.
2. 'Voice of the people' and 'public opinion' do not mean the same. Public opinion is not the unanimous opinion of the people, nor is it the opinion of the majority. Public opinion is an organized and considered opinion of the people on any issue of public concern. Public opinion can also be defined as the complex collection of opinions of many different people and the sum of all their views.
3. Public opinion plays an important role in a democracy. A democratic government draws its authority from the people and claims its legitimacy from the consent of the governed. No government can function without the support of the people. The process of development of public opinion generates thinking, promotes awareness and invites people's views on issues of public concern. An alert and free public opinion is a check on absolute power and it promotes a process to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. It also influences government in making laws in the interest of the people.
4. Two agencies which help in the formation of public opinion are Print media and electronic media.

Write the answer to the second part based on your understanding and experience.

## 22.2

1. Elections provide opportunities to the people to participate actively in the functioning of the democratic government. These are the most important expression of public opinion, as these enable the people to express their will. Elections also widen the scope of political awakening among the masses and educate them by familiarizing them with issues of public concern. They facilitate peaceful transfer of power from one political party or one group of political parties to another and legitimise the working of the government by justifying the authority of representatives lead people.
2. In direct elections, people vote directly through their ballot to elect their representatives to legislative bodies (Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies) and local government institutions. In indirect elections, the elected representatives of the people vote for electing persons to occupy certain positions. The President

**Notes**

and the Vice-President of India are indirectly elected. The members of the Rajya Sabha also are elected indirectly.

3. (a) General Elections, (b) Mid-term Elections, (c) Bye Election

**22.3**

1. The Election Commission consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and such number of Election Commissioners as the President may fix in accordance with the law. At present, the Election Commission of India consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.
2. The two important functions of the election commission are
  - (i) Ensuring free and fair elections in the country;
  - (ii) supervision, direction and control of the entire election machinery.
3. For the conduct of elections, the Election Commission is assisted by a number of officials. The main election officers are the Chief Electoral Officer of the State, District Election Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, Assistant Electoral Registration Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, and Polling officers.
4. The following are the main functions performed by a returning officer:
  - (a) receives and scrutinizes the nomination papers of the candidates contesting elections, (b) allots election symbols on behalf of the Election Commission, (c) conducts smooth elections in the constituency(ies), (d) ensures counting of votes, and (e) declares the election results.
5. The five major stages of electoral process in India are:
  - (i) Delimitation of constituencies is the first step which is undertaken by the Delimitation Commission;
  - (ii) preparation and revision of the electoral roll constitute the next step done under the supervision of the Election Commission periodically;
  - (iii) consequent upon the President's and Governor's notifications, the Election Commission undertakes the task of conducting elections in the country;
  - (iv) the election schedule is announced indicating the dates for filling the nomination papers, their scrutiny, withdrawals, polling, counting of the votes, and declaration of the election results;
  - (v) allotment of election symbols to the candidates and the political parties is done by the Election Commission.

**22.4**

1. Universal adult franchise means a system in which all adults, men and women, without any discrimination, have a right to vote in the elections. In many ways



**Notes**

Universal Adult Franchise has provided opportunities to people to participate in election processes despite differences of class, caste, gender and religion. It has enriched our democracy by giving equal opportunity to all persons. Today, people of all castes and classes have an opportunity to vote. However, we cannot say that the inequalities in our society have completely gone, persons belonging to different castes, classes and gender is still discriminated. Real equality can only be brought in once there is a change in the attitude and behavior of ordinary citizens and they stop discrimination at all levels in their personal lives as well at the societal level.

2. Three problems confronting the electoral system in India are:
  - (a) rigging of the elections - fake and bogus voting, impersonation;
  - (b) violence during elections;and
  - (c) adverse role of money and muscle power.
3.
  - (i) The functioning of political parties to be regulated in order to ensure that they function in a transparent and democratic manner. There is a need to audit their expenditure incurred during the elections;
  - (ii) electoral laws to be made more stringent and there must be provisions for harsher punishment.

**MODULE-4**  
**CONTEMPORARY INDIA: ISSUES**  
**AND GOALS**

23. Challenges to Indian Democracy
24. National Integration and Secularism
25. Socio-economic Development and Empowerment of Disadvantaged groups
26. Environmental Degradation and Disaster Management
27. Peace and Security