

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE POLITY

STUDY-NOTES

- **Democracies** fall into two basic categories, direct and representative.
- In a **direct democracy**, all citizens, without the intermediary of elected or appointed officials, can participate in making public decisions.
- Such a system is clearly only practical with relatively small numbers of people – in a community organisation or tribal council, where members can meet in a single room to discuss issues and arrive at decisions by consensus or majority vote.
- Modern society, with its size and complexity, offers few opportunities for direct democracy. Today, the most common form of democracy is **representative democracy**, in which citizens elect officials to make political decisions, formulate laws, and administer programmes for the public good.
- Ours is a representative democracy. Every citizen has the important right to vote her/his representative.
- People elect their representatives to all levels from Panchayats, Municipal Boards, State Assemblies and Parliament.
- There has increasingly been a feeling that democracy ought to involve people more regularly and should not just mean casting a vote every five years.
- **Participatory democracy** is a system of democracy in which the members of a group or community participate collectively in the taking of major decisions.
- Both the procedures as well as the values that form Indian democracy have developed over the long years of India's anti-colonial struggle.
- In the last 70 years, since Independence, the success of Indian democracy has been seen as a remarkable feat for a country with such great diversity as well as inequality.
- Like so many other features of modern India we need to begin the story about modern Indian democracy from the colonial period.
- Many structural and cultural changes that British colonialism brought about deliberately. Some of the changes that came about happened in an unintended fashion.
- The British did not intend to introduce them. For instance, they sought to introduce western education to create a western educated Indian middle class that would help the colonial rulers to continue their rule.
- A western educated section of Indians did emerge. But, instead of aiding British rule, they used western liberal ideas of democracy, social justice and nationalism to challenge colonial rule.
- This should not, however, suggest that democratic values and democratic institutions are purely western.
- Our **ancient epics**, our diverse folk tales from one corner of the country to another are full of dialogues, discussions and contrasting positions. For example, the dialogue between Bhriгу and Bharadvaja on caste differences in the epic Mahabharata.
- **Social change in modern India** is not just about Indian or western ideas. It is a combination as well as reinterpretation of western and Indian ideas. There was an exposure to different ideas and there was a deeper questioning of the meaning of democracy.
- Is democracy just about political freedom? Or is it also about economic freedom and social justice? Is it also about equal rights to all irrespective of caste, creed, race and gender? And if that is so how can such equality be realised in an unequal society?

- Many of these issues were thought of much before India became free. Even as India fought for its independence from **British colonialism** a vision of what Indian democracy ought to look like emerged.
- As far back as in 1928, Motilal Nehru and eight other Congress leaders drafted a Constitution for India.
- In 1931, the resolution at the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress dwelt on how independent India's constitution should look like.
- The **Karachi Resolution** reflected a vision of democracy that meant not just formal holding of elections but a substantive reworking of the Indian social structure to have a genuine democratic society.
- The Karachi Resolution clearly spelt out the vision of democracy that the nationalist movement in India had. It articulated the values that were further given full expression in the Indian Constitution.
- The **Preamble** of the Indian Constitution seeks to ensure not just political justice but also social and economic justice.
- Significantly, the Constitution emerged from intense and open discussions within the Constituent Assembly. Thus, its vision or ideological content as well as the process or procedure by which it was formed was democratic.
- The popular demand in 1939 for a Constituent Assembly was, after several ups and downs conceded by Imperialist Britain in 1945. In July 1946, the elections were held.
- In August 1946, the **Indian National Congress' Expert Committee** moved a resolution in the Constituent Assembly. This contained the declaration that India shall be a Republic where the declared social, economic and political justice will be guaranteed to all the people of India.
- On matters of **social justice**, there were lively debates on whether government functions should be prescribed and the state should be bound down to them. Issues debated ranged from right to employment, to social security, land reforms to property rights, to the organisation of panchayats.
- Due to the vast diversity and inequality in our country, many divides classify our people. The impact that culture, religion, and caste have on the urban-rural divide, rich-poor divide and the literate-illiterate divide is varied.
- **Competing interests** operate on the Indian social scene and clamour for control of the State's resources.
- There are some basic objectives laid down in the Constitution and which are generally agreed in the Indian political world as being obviously just.
- These would be **empowerment** of the poor and marginalised, poverty alleviation, ending of caste and positive steps to treat all groups equally.
- Competing interests do not always reflect a clear class divide. For example, the closing down of a factory because it emits toxic waste and affects the health of those around. This is a matter of life, which the Constitution protects.
- The flipside is that the closure will render people jobless. Livelihood again, is a matter of life that the Constitution protects.
- There is a difference between law and justice. The essence of **law** is its force. Law is law because it carries the means to coerce or force obedience. The power of the state is behind it.
- The essence of **justice** is fairness. Any system of laws functions through a hierarchy of authorities. The basic norm from which all other rules and authorities flow is called the Constitution. It is the document that constitutes a nation's tenets.
- The **Indian Constitution** is India's basic norm. All other laws are made as per the procedures the Constitution prescribes. These laws are made and implemented by the authorities specified by the Constitution.
- A hierarchy of courts (which too are authorities created by the Constitution) interpret the laws when there is a dispute. The Supreme Court is the highest court and the ultimate interpreter of the Constitution.
- The **Supreme Court** has enhanced the substance of Fundamental Rights in the Constitution in many important ways. For example, reading Directive Principles into the content of Fundamental Rights.
- The Supreme Court read the Directive Principle of "equal pay for equal work" into the Fundamental Right to Equality under Article 14 and has provided relief to many plantation and agricultural labourers and to others.
- The Constitution is not just a ready referencer of do's and don'ts for social justice. It has the potential for the meaning of social justice to be extended.

- **Social movements** have also aided the Courts and authorities to interpret the contents of rights and principles in keeping with the contemporary understanding on social justice. Law and Courts are sites where competing views are debated.
- The Constitution remains a means to channelise and civilise political power towards social welfare.
- The Constitution has the capacity to help people because it is based on basic norms of social justice.
- For instance, the **Directive Principle** on village panchayats was moved as an amendment in the Constituent Assembly by K. Santhanam. After forty odd years it became a Constitutional imperative after the 73rd Amendment in 1992.
- **Panchayati Raj** translates literally to ‘Governance by five individuals’. The idea is to ensure at the village or grass root level a functioning and vibrant democracy.
- Traditionally there have been caste panchayats in villages. But they have usually represented dominant groups. Furthermore, they often held conservative views and often have, and continue to take decisions that go against both democratic norms and procedures.
- When the constitution was being drafted panchayats did not find a mention in it leading to expression of anger and disappointment among some members.
- Drawing on his own rural experience Dr. Ambedkar argued that local elites and upper castes were so well entrenched in society that local self-government only meant a continuing exploitation of the downtrodden masses of Indian society. The upper castes would no doubt silence this segment of the population further.
- The concept of **local government** was dear to Gandhiji. He envisaged each village as a self-sufficient unit conducting its own affairs and saw gram-swarajya to be an ideal model to be continued after independence.
- It was, however, only in 1992 that grassroot democracy or decentralised governance was ushered in by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This Act provided constitutional status to the **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**.
- It is compulsory now for local self-government bodies in rural and municipal areas to be elected every five years. More importantly, control of local resources is given to the elected local bodies.
- The **73rd and 74th amendments** to the Constitution ensured the reservation of one third of the total seats for women in all elected offices of local bodies in both the rural and urban areas.
- Out of this, 17 per cent seats are reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes. This amendment is significant as for the first time it brought women into elected bodies which also bestowed on them decision making powers. That was a big step indeed in enfranchising women.
- The 73rd Amendment provided a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all states having a population of over twenty lakhs.
- The structure of the Panchayati Raj system is like a pyramid. At the base of the structure stands the unit of democracy or Gram Sabha. This consists of the entire body of citizens in a village or grama. It is this general body that elects the local government and charges it with specific responsibilities.
- The **Gram Sabhas** ideally ought to provide an open forum for discussions and village-level development activities and play a crucial role in ensuring inclusion of the weaker sections in the decision-making processes.
- The **panchayats** have been given many powers and responsibilities. These include to prepare plans and schemes for economic development, to promote schemes that will enhance social justice, to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees, help in the devolution of governmental responsibilities, especially that of finances to local authorities.
- Social welfare responsibilities of the Panchayats include the maintenance of burning and burial grounds, recording statistics of births and deaths, establishment of child welfare and maternity centres, control of cattle pounds, propagation of family planning and promotion of agricultural activities.
- The development activities include the construction of roads, public buildings, wells, tanks and schools. They also promote small cottage industries and take care of minor irrigation works.
- Many government schemes like the **Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)** and **Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)** are monitored by members of the panchayat.
- The main income of the Panchayats is from tax levied on property, profession, animals, vehicles, cess on land revenue and rentals. The resources are further increased by the grants received through the **Zilla Panchayat**.

- It is also considered compulsory for Panchayat offices to put up boards outside their offices, listing the break up of funds received, and utilisation of the financial aid received.
- **Nyaya Panchayats** have been constituted in some states. They possess the authority to hear some petty, civil and criminal cases. They can impose fines but cannot award a sentence.
- These village courts have often been successful in bringing about an agreement amongst contending parties. They have been particularly effective in punishing men who harass women for dowry and perpetrate violence against them.
- **Democratisation** is not easy in a society that has had a long history of inequality based on caste, community and gender.
- Given this unequal and undemocratic social structure, it is not surprising that in many cases, certain members belonging to particular groups, communities, castes of the village are not included or informed about meetings and activities of the village.
- The Gram Sabha members are often controlled by a small coterie of rich landlords usually hailing from the upper castes or landed peasantry. They make decisions on development activities, allocate funds, leaving the silent majority as mere onlookers.
- Another example of grassroot level democracy are *Van Panchayats*. To overcome the problem of deforestation in Uttarakhand, women have set up van-panchayats.
- Members of the van-panchayats develop nurseries and nurture tree saplings for planting on the hill slopes. Members also police nearby forests to keep an eye on illegal felling of trees.
- To reach out to women to train them and create awareness about the Panchayati Raj system, innovative modes of communication are used such as story telling with the help of the cloth 'phad' or scroll.
- Pictorial pictures on the 'phad', accompanied with folk music are useful tools to convey the message for able governance and participation.
- Many tribal areas have had a rich tradition of grassroot democratic functioning. For example, in Meghalaya, all the three major ethnic tribal groups, namely, the *Khasis*, *Jaintias* and the *Garos* have their own traditional political institutions that have existed for hundreds of years.
- These political institutions were fairly well-developed and functioned at various tiers, such as the village level, clan level and state level.
- For instance, in the traditional political system of the *Khasis* each clan had its own council known as the '*Durbar Kur*' which was presided over by the clan headman.
- A large chunk of tribal areas lie outside the provisions of the 73rd Amendment.
- As sociologist Tiplut Nongbri observes, tribal institutions in themselves need not necessarily be democratic in its structure and functioning.
- Notwithstanding the strong egalitarian ethos that characterised tribal societies the element of stratification is not altogether absent.
- Tribal political institutions are not only marked by open intolerance to women but the process of social change has also introduced sharp distortions in the system, making it difficult to identify which is traditional and which is not.
- In the story of Indian democracy, there are contending interests of different groups. Here, the role of **interest groups, pressure groups and political parties** becomes important in a democracy.
- Industrialists form associations such as Federation of Indian Chambers and Commerce (FICCI) and Association of Chambers of Commerce (ASSOCHAM).
- Workers form trade unions such as the Indian Trade Union Congress (INTUC) or the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU).
- Farmers form agricultural unions such as **Shetkari Sangathan**. Agricultural labourers have their own unions.
- In a democratic form of government political parties are key actors. A **political party** may be defined as an organisation oriented towards achieving legitimate control of government through an electoral process.

- Political Party is an organisation established with the aim of achieving governmental power and using that power to pursue a specific programme. An important definition of political parties has been given by noted sociologist **Max Weber**.
- Political parties are based on certain understanding of society and how it ought to be. In a democratic system the interests of different groups are also represented by political parties, who take up their case.
- Different interest groups will work towards influencing political parties. When certain groups feel that their interests are not being taken up, they may move to form an alternative party.
- Or they form pressure groups who lobby with the government. Interest Groups are organised to pursue specific interests in the political arena, operating primarily by lobbying the members of legislative bodies.
- In some situations, there may be political organisations which seek to achieve power but are denied the opportunity to do so through standard means. These organisations are best regarded as movements until they achieve recognition.
- It is obvious that all groups will not have the same access or the same ability to pressurise the government. However, this does not negate the fact that social movements and pressure groups also continue to play a very important role in a democracy.
- An example of how contending interests function in society is through the concrete example of developments in the city of Mumbai where the rich and the poor see the city and the use of its spaces differently.

QUESTION BANK

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- When all the members of a community organisation or tribal council can participate in making public decisions it is called _____ form of democracy.
 (a) Representative (b) Direct (c) Competing (d) None of these
- Grants received through the Zilla Parishad, and variety of taxes levied on property, profession, animals etc. are sources of _____ for the Panchayat.
 (a) Income (b) Status (c) Conflict (d) None of these
- Organizations oriented towards achieving legitimate control of government through an electoral process is known as
 (a) Associations (b) Political parties (c) Interest groups (d) Pressure groups
- Farmers form agricultural unions like the _____.
 (a) Kisan Sangathan (b) Kisan Sabha (c) Shetkari Sangathan (d) None of these
- Values like liberty and fraternity are derived from _____ revolution.
 (a) French (b) British (c) Russian (d) None of these
- A system of democracy in which the members of a group or community participate collectively in the taking of major decisions. This is called:
 (a) Dictatorship (b) Monarchy
 (c) Representative democracy (d) Participatory democracy
- The full form of FICCI, an association supporting industrialists is:
 (a) Federation of Indian Chambers and Commerce (b) Federation of Industry Commerce and Capital
 (c) Federal Industry Chambers and Commerce (d) Federal Indian Commerce and Chambers
- The Panchayati Raj is an example of a major initiative towards _____ democracy.
 (a) Centralised (b) Grassroot (c) Decentralised (d) Both (b) and (c)
- The full form of ASSOCHAM, an association supporting industrialists, is :
 (a) Association of Indian Chambers and Commerce (b) Association of Industry Commerce and Markets
 (c) Association of Chambers of Commerce (d) Association of Indian Commerce and Chambers

10. As far back as in _____, Motilal Nehru and eight other Congress leaders drafted a constitution for India.
 (a) 1928 (b) 1931 (c) 1938 (d) 1935
11. The _____ is the ultimate interpreter of the Constitution.
 (a) Law (b) State (c) Justice (d) Supreme Court
12. In the traditional political system of the _____ each clan had its own council known as the 'Durbar Kur' which was presided over by the clan headman.
 (a) Mundas (b) Bhutia (c) Khasis (d) Bodo
13. Crimes like harassment of women for dowry are resolved by _____ Panchayats in rural areas.
 (a) Nyaya (b) Zilla (c) Panchayat Samiti (d) None of these
14. In 1931, the resolution at the _____ session of the Indian National Congress dwelt on how independent India's constitution should look like.
 (a) Lahore (b) Calcutta (c) Karachi (d) Madras
15. In August 1946, The Indian National Congress' Expert Committee moved a resolution in the Constituent Assembly. This contained the declaration that India shall be a _____ where the declared social, economic and political justice will be guaranteed to all the people of India.
 (a) Sovereign (b) Republic (c) Secular (d) Democratic
16. "Ban on child labour welcome but these kids have a question." This is an example of:
 (a) Social Justice (b) Constitutional norms (c) Law (d) Competing interests
17. The Directive Principle on village panchayats was moved as an amendment in the Constituent Assembly by.
 (a) K. Santhanam (b) K.T. Shah (c) Jawahar Lal Nehru (d) B.R. Ambedkar
18. Innovative modes of communicating the strength of the Panchayati Raj system (able governance and participation) include the use of which mediums in villages?
 (a) Judgements by Nyaya Panchayats (b) Phad or scroll
 (c) Van Panchayat (d) Right to Information
19. Examples of government schemes that are monitored by members of the Panchayat include:
 (a) Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) (b) Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
 (c) Both (a) and (b) (d) Neither (a) nor (b)
20. **Assertion (A):** Sociologist Tiplut Nongbri remarks that tribal institutions in themselves need not necessarily be democratic in its structure and functioning.
Reason (R): Tribal political institutions are marked by tolerance to women.
 (a) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A.
 (b) Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A.
 (c) A is true but R is false.
 (d) A is false but R is true.
21. _____ are organised to pursue specific interests in the political arena, operating primarily by lobbying the members of legislative bodies.
 (a) Political parties (b) Interest groups (c) Panchayats (d) Dominant social groups
22. "Whereas the genuine place of classes is within the economic order, the place of status groups is within the social order...But parties live in a house of power... Party actions are always directed towards a goal which is striven for in a planned manner. The goal may be a 'cause' (the party may aim at realising a program for ideal or material purposes), or the goal may be 'personal' (sinecures, power, and from these, honour for the leader and followers of the party)."
 Who has given this view on Parties?
 (a) Mc Kinsey (b) Marx (c) Max Weber (d) Tiplut Nongbri

23. Which one of them is not the power and responsibility of the Panchayats?
- To make the budget for the country
 - To promote schemes that will enhance social justice
 - To prepare plans and schemes for economic development
 - To levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees
24. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution ensured the reservation of one third of the total seats for women in all elected offices of local bodies in both the rural and urban areas. Out of this, _____ per cent seats are reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes.
- 15
 - 16
 - 17
 - 18
25. The concept of local government was dear to Gandhiji too. He envisaged each village as a self-sufficient unit conducting its own affairs and saw _____ to be an ideal model to be continued after independence.
- Gram Swarajya
 - Gram Panchayat
 - Charkha
 - Satyagraha
26. A Fundamental Right includes all that is incidental to it. The terse words of _____ recognising the right to life and liberty have been interpreted as including all that goes into a life of quality, including livelihood, health, shelter, education and dignity.
- Article 25
 - Article 29
 - Article 30
 - Article 21
27. We should not assume that democratic values and democratic institutions are purely western. Our ancient epics, our diverse folk tales from one corner of the country to another are full of dialogues, discussions and contrasting positions. One example can be seen in the epic _____ where Bhrgu and Bharadvaja have a dialogue on caste differences.
- Ramayana
 - Mahabharata
 - Puranas
 - Vedas
28. The Constitution emerged from intense and open discussions within the Constituent Assembly. Thus, its vision or ideological content as well as the process or procedure by which it was formed was _____.
- Democratic
 - Liberal
 - Just
 - Equal
29. In 1939, Gandhiji wrote an article in the _____ called 'The Only Way' in which he said "... the Constituent Assembly alone can produce a constitution indigenous to the country and truly and fully representing the will of the people" one based on "unadulterated adult franchise for both men and women".
- The Buddha and his Dharma
 - Young India
 - Harijan
 - Indian Opinion
30. "This consists of the entire body of citizens in a village or grama. It is this general body that elects the local government and charges it with specific responsibilities." Identify which is this body.
- Gram Panchayat
 - Gram Sabha
 - Van Panchayat
 - Panchayati Raj
31. Of these, which is an example of decentralised governance?
- State Assemblies
 - Parliament
 - Panchayats
 - Supreme Court
32. The essence of justice is _____.
- Truth
 - Freedom
 - Law
 - Fairness
33. The Directive Principle on village panchayats was moved as an amendment in the Constituent Assembly by K. Santhanam. After forty odd years it became a Constitutional imperative after _____ in 1992.
- 75th Amendment
 - 73rd Amendment
 - 71st Amendment
 - 76th Amendment
34. Caste panchayats in villages usually represent
- the dominant groups
 - the poorest section
 - the Dalits
 - both (a) and (b)
35. The 73rd Amendment provided a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all states having a population of over _____ lakhs.
- Fifteen
 - Sixteen
 - Twenty
 - Eighteen
36. Every year in _____ the Finance Minister of the Government of India presents the Budget to the Parliament.
- January
 - March
 - April
 - February

Input-Text Based MCQs

Study the passage and answer the questions that follow (37 to 40):

Many tribal areas have had a rich tradition of grassroot democratic functioning. We give an illustrative example from Meghalaya. All the three major ethnic tribal groups, namely, the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos have their own traditional political institutions that have existed for hundreds of years. These political institutions were fairly well-developed and functioned at various tiers, such as the village level, clan level and state level.

37. In the traditional political system of the Khasis each clan had its own _____ known as the 'Durbar Kur' which was presided over by the clan headman
(a) Government (b) State (c) Council (d) Unit
38. What could be a possible reason for a large chunk of tribal areas lying outside the provisions of the 73rd Amendment?
(a) The concerned policy makers did not wish to interfere with the traditional tribal institutions
(b) The policy makers did not understand the customs of the tribals
(c) The tribals don't want to be under its provisions
(d) None of the above
39. Which of these is not a tribe from Meghalaya?
(a) Garos (b) Khasis (c) Banjaras (d) Jaintias
40. Which sociologist has observed that tribal institutions in themselves need not necessarily be democratic in its structure and functioning?
(a) Ramachandra Guha (b) Tiplut Nongbri (c) Babasaheb Ambedkar (d) Amartya Sen

ANSWERS

Multiple Choice Questions

1. (b) 2. (a) 3. (b) 4. (c) 5. (a) 6. (d) 7. (a) 8. (d) 9. (c) 10. (a)
11. (d) 12. (c) 13. (a) 14. (c) 15. (b) 16. (d) 17. (a) 18. (b) 19. (c) 20. (c)
21. (b) 22. (c) 23. (a) 24. (c) 25. (a) 26. (d) 27. (b) 28. (a) 29. (c) 30. (b)
31. (c) 32. (d) 33. (b) 34. (a) 35. (c) 36. (d)

Input-Text Based MCQs

37. (c) 38. (a) 39. (c) 40. (b)