

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

L.No	Title of Lesson	SKILLS	Activity
22	People's Participation in the Democratic Process	Self Awareness, Participation, Decision Making, Problem Solving	Understanding Democratic Process

Meaning

In a Democracy people's participation is very important. People, participate to elect their representatives by voting in elections. Discussing the working of the government, public debates, newspaper's editorials, protest demonstrations, public meetings working for a political party and standing as a candidate are all examples of people's participation.

The Meaning of 'Public Opinion'

It is not the unanimous opinion of the people nor it is the opinion of majority. It is an organised and well-considered opinion of the people on any issue of public interest. Public opinion has following characteristics

- It is an aggregate of views
- It is based on reason
- It aims at the welfare of the whole community
- It influences the decisions of the government, functioning of political parties and running of administration.

Importance of public opinion

Public opinion plays a very important role in a democratic system as explained below

- An alert and free 'public opinion' is a check on absolute power of the government
- It motivates the government to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people.
- Public opinion influences the government to make laws in the interest of the people
- It strengthens democratic values and norms
- It protects rights, freedom and liberty.

Various agencies to form and express the opinion

- Print Media
- Electronic Media
- Political Parties
- Legislatures
- Educational Institutions
- Elections

Importance of Elections

Elections facilitate peaceful transfer of power from one political party or one group of political parties to another.

Type of Elections

In India, we have direct and indirect elections.

- **Direct elections:** People poll directly through their ballot to elect their representatives to various legislative bodies. Such elections are for Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and Local Government bodies.
- **Indirect elections:** Elected representatives of the people vote to elect persons for certain positions.
- The President of India, the Vice President of India and members of Rajya Sabha are elected through this method. Elections in India are divided in three categories:
 - (i) General Election
 - (ii) Mid-term Election
 - (iii) Bye Election

Election Commission of India

In India, the task of conducting elections has been entrusted to an impartial constitutional authority known as the Election Commission of India. It is a constitutional body. At present Election Commission has one Chief Election Commissioner and two other Election Commissioners, who are appointed by the President of India.

Functions of the Election Commission

- Ensures free and fair elections,
- Prepares the electoral rolls,
- Provides recognition to political parties,
- Allots symbols to different political parties,
- Issues guidelines and code of conduct for the election officials,
- Redressal of election complaints,
- Conducting election, appointing the electoral officials, counting of votes and announcing the results.

Important Election Officials

- **Returning officer:** In every constituency, one officer is designated as returning officer. He/she receives the nomination papers of candidates and scrutinises them, allots election symbols to the candidates, conducts the election in the constituency, ensures counting of votes, declares the results of the election.
- **Presiding officer:** He/she is the incharge of one polling booth. He/she ensures that every voter registered at that booth must get a chance to vote, no impersonation should be there and delivers the ballot boxes and EVMs to the returning officer.
- **Polling officer:** Every presiding officer is assisted by three or four officials who are called polling officer. Different duties are assigned to them just as one may check the identity of the voter, the second may put the ink on the finger and third may issue the ballot paper and get the signature.

Electoral Process in India

It is a long process and passes through various stages as given below -

Delimitation of constituencies, preparation of electoral rolls, notification of the election, election schedule, allotment of election symbols, repoll or if necessary, countermanding of election, counting of votes and announcement of the result are some of the major functions of the Election Commission.

Participation through elections depend on the right to vote. Who is eligible to vote in India? The Constitution of India has granted Universal Adult Franchise which means that all adults who have attained the age of 18 year have a right to vote without any discrimination.

Election Reforms

Many a times it is heard that election was not fair. As such there is always a scope for improvement. Hence, reforms are made to improve the electoral process from time to time.

Issues of complaint related to elections

- Fake and bogus voting called rigging of elections.
- Use of muscle power or violence to terrorise the voters.
- Use of money to purchase votes.
- Misuse of governmental machinery.
- Booth capturing and criminalization of elections and politics.

Suggested Electoral Reforms

- The present 'first past the post system' or 'plurality system' may be changed to some form of proportional representation
- Expenditure made by candidates or parties should be audited.
- Harsh punishment should be given for booth capturing or fake voting
- A system for state funding should be introduced
- Complete ban should be imposed on the use of caste and religious appeals in campaigns.
- Criminals should be stopped to contest elections

Evaluate Yourself

- Q. How do people make their participation in a democratic system? Explain.
 - Q. Highlight the agencies which help in formation of 'public opinion'.
 - Q. List the complaints which you may have ever heard about electoral system in India. Suggest some measures to reform the present electoral system of India.
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