

Democratic Government



Look at the following headlines from newspapers. You will find reports of governments doing different things. Most of these relate to managing public affairs of the country.

Government sought to protect rights of unorganised workers

Detailed plan to tackle floods soon, says Government

Govt. fixes price of onions. Says no shortage in market

Supreme Court can have five more judges: Govt

Govt. for revamping coal and power sector

Over 15,000 villages declared scarcity-hit by Government

What does a Government do?

In our times, every country needs a government to make decisions and get things done. These decisions can be about where to build roads and schools, or how to reduce the price of onions when they get too expensive or ways to increase the supply of electricity. The government also takes action on many social issues. For example, it has several programmes to help the poor. It does other important things such as running postal and railway services.

The government also has the job of protecting the boundaries of the country and maintaining good relations with other countries. It is responsible for ensuring that all its citizens have enough to eat and have good health facilities. When there are natural disasters like a cyclone or an earthquake, it is the government that mainly organises aid and assistance for the people. If there is a dispute or if someone has committed a crime, people go to a court. Courts are also a part of the government. Perhaps you are wondering

how governments manage to do all this and why it is necessary for them to do so. When human beings live and work together, they need an organisation to take decisions for their common good. Some rules have to be made that apply to everyone. For example, there is a need to control resources and protect the territory of a country, so that people can feel secure. Governments do this on behalf of their people by exercising leadership, taking decisions and implementing them among all the people living in their territory.

- ◆ Who runs your school?
- ◆ List a few activities of the government that you know.

Types of Government

In Chapter 9, we learnt about how the people of a tribal society govern themselves – how male members of different families of the tribe gather to discuss and decide and how the headman implements those decisions etc. This system works well in situations where the number of people is less. But do you think it will work if the society had thousands or lakhs of families?



Fig. 12.1: Railway station Kachiguda



Fig. 12.2: Post Office



Fig. 12.3: Supreme Court

Some examples of institutions that are a part of the Government.

What kind of problems will they face? Similarly, this kind of arrangement worked if all members of the society had the same cultural background (religion, caste, language etc.) as the rules of behaviour would be agreeable to all.

However, if a society has people of different cultures, will it work? Moreover, the tribal arrangement worked where the interests, ambitions and life styles of the people were similar. There were no classes like the rich and the poor. But in societies with varying interests and various classes like farmers, traders, moneylenders, industrialists, workers without land or other

resources, etc, there would be so many differences that they would not be able to arrive at a common solution to a problem.



Fig. 12.4: Modern statue of Shalivahana king

In historic times, kings, queens and emperors made the laws and implemented them with the help of armies and officials. They also decided where to build roads, how much tax was to be collected etc. If people did not agree with them or did not follow their orders, they punished them. No one could question their authority and disobey their orders. Many kings were not satisfied with ruling their own kingdom and constantly waged wars to expand their kingdoms. This form of government is called monarchy. The monarch (king or queen) has the power to make decisions and run the government. The monarchs also act as the supreme judges in all important cases of dispute. The monarch may have a small group of people to discuss matters with but the final decision-making power remains with the monarch. Monarchs do



Fig. 12.5: Assembly

not have to explain their actions or defend the decisions they take.

- ♦ Compare tribal democracy with monarchy on the following aspects.
 - i. Which of the two systems do you think respects the opinion of the people more?
 - ii. Which of them do you think can work in a large society or a society of people with different interests and customs.?
 - iii. Which of them has the danger of the rulers becoming oppressive and unjust?
- ♦ Can you think of a system of government which can handle the needs of a large and complex society and yet not become unjust or oppressive?
- ♦ In which system were there more wars, monarchy or tribal democracy? Give reasons.

Democratic Governments

One of the ways to accommodate the views of all kinds of people living in the society and prevent oppressive and unjust forces from controlling the government is the democratic government. It was made possible because of the struggles of people all over the world against monarchies and their firm resolve to develop a form of government which will be in harmony with people's wishes.

Today, India is a democratic country. How do we ensure that our government functions according to the wishes of the people who have such divergent cultures and interests?

There are millions of people living in our country. The participation by all citizens in taking decisions may lead to countless number of opinions. These processes may consume more time without arriving at any consensus. Moreover, not all citizens are in a position to spend time, money, and energy for participating in public affairs. How can we solve this problem?

Abraham Lincoln defined 'democracy' as "a government of the people, by the people and for the people." Think over these words and see if you agree with him.

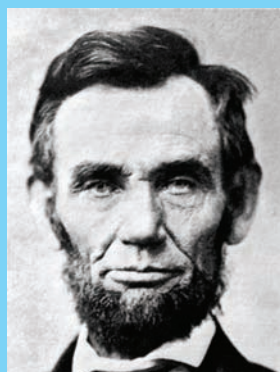


Fig. 12.6:
Abraham
Lincoln

We do this with the help of two principles – 'representative democracy' and 'rule of the majority'. Let us understand these two ideas better.

Democratic governments in our times are usually referred to as representative democracies. In representative Democracies, people choose their representatives through an election process. A village, for example, will have about two to five thousand people. It is divided into different wards consisting of about a hundred or two hundred persons. Each ward will elect one person to represent them. All adults over 18 years of age, whether men or women, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, irrespective of their religion or language, vote in these elections. The person who gets the largest number of votes becomes the representative of the entire group. These elected representatives meet and make decisions on behalf of the entire population.



Fig. 12.7: Voting in Rural Area: A mark is put on the finger to make sure that a person casts only one vote

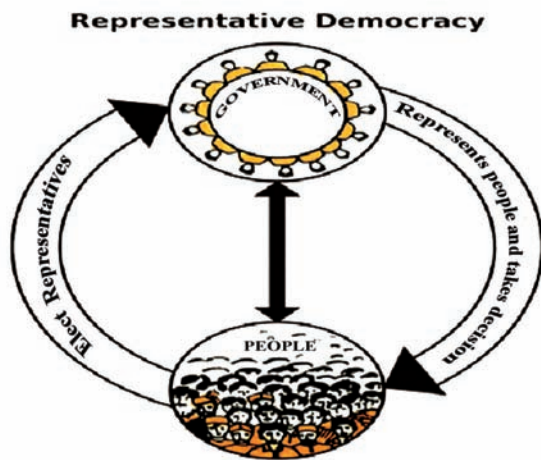


Fig. 12.8: Representative Democracy

Thus, a free and fair election of representatives is the basis of our democratic system. Prior to the elections, people are expected to think and discuss the issues on which a government has to act. Different persons or parties advocating different points of view openly discuss their views. This will enable the voters to decide on the candidate they would like to represent them. The representatives are expected to stick to the viewpoints expressed by them and keep the promises made by them. They are also expected to consult the people from time to time to know about their view points and problems. The representatives are elected for a fixed period, usually for five years. After that, fresh elections are conducted and people elect their representatives once again.

- ♦ Why do you think is it important for people to know the views of the different candidates in elections?

- ♦ What will happen if the representatives are elected forever?
- ♦ Do you think it is possible for the representatives to go against the wishes and interests of the people who elected them?

As you may have noted, the election of the representatives is done by a simple majority.

This means, the one who gets more votes, even if it is a difference of one vote, will get elected. Those who voted for the other candidates will have to accept this and abide by the decision of the majority.

Similarly, most decisions of the elected representatives are validated based on the same principle of majority. If a decision is supported by more than half of the members, it will be implemented.

Example: If there are twenty members in a village panchayat and a proposal is supported by just eleven persons, it will be passed and implemented even if nine members opposed it. Thus, modern



Fig. 12.9: Mass demonstration against price rise

democracies do not try to get a complete agreement of everyone on any issue but go by the decision of the majority.

Many people believe that by this system of ignoring the views of the minority (those who are less in number), our democratic system can become oppressive for them.

- ♦ Do you think the above mentioned statement is correct? Discuss with the help of some examples.
- ♦ Form a Students' Council (Bal Parishad) in the class and form rules of behaviour in the class. Try both a system in which all students participate in decision making and a system in which students elect representatives to the Council. Let all the children prepare their own reports of this experience.

Checks on elected representatives

How do we ensure that the elected representatives do not become oppressive or ignore the interests of the minority who do not agree with them?

In a democracy, the authority of the people who get elected is also regulated by certain principles which are stated in the constitution of the country. If they go against these principles or procedures, the courts can disallow their decisions. Those who disagree with the elected representatives can freely express their views and criticise their actions. This can be done through meetings, TV, newspapers, etc.

Equality and democracy

Democracy requires that all people – men and women, literate and illiterate, rich and poor, beggars and officers, spare some time to understand public matters. It also requires that they have access to all the required information about the activities of the government so that they can take proper decisions. It further requires them to exercise their vote with freedom and without any interference. Unfortunately, this is not always completely possible in most of the countries. For example, many people do not have even the minimum education needed to read newspapers. Most of the people are not using the Right to Information Act effectively to check the functioning of different systems. Its effective use ensures proper functioning of the machinery. Many people, especially women and the poor, just do not have the time or facility to take part in these public matters – they are either too busy earning their livelihoods or working for their families. In many cases, the powerful or the rich try to influence the voting by forcing the people or by giving them small gifts before the elections. Sometimes, people are persuaded not to decide for themselves but vote according to their caste or religion. All these factors prevent people from using their democratic right of voting after giving due consideration to the issues and candidates.

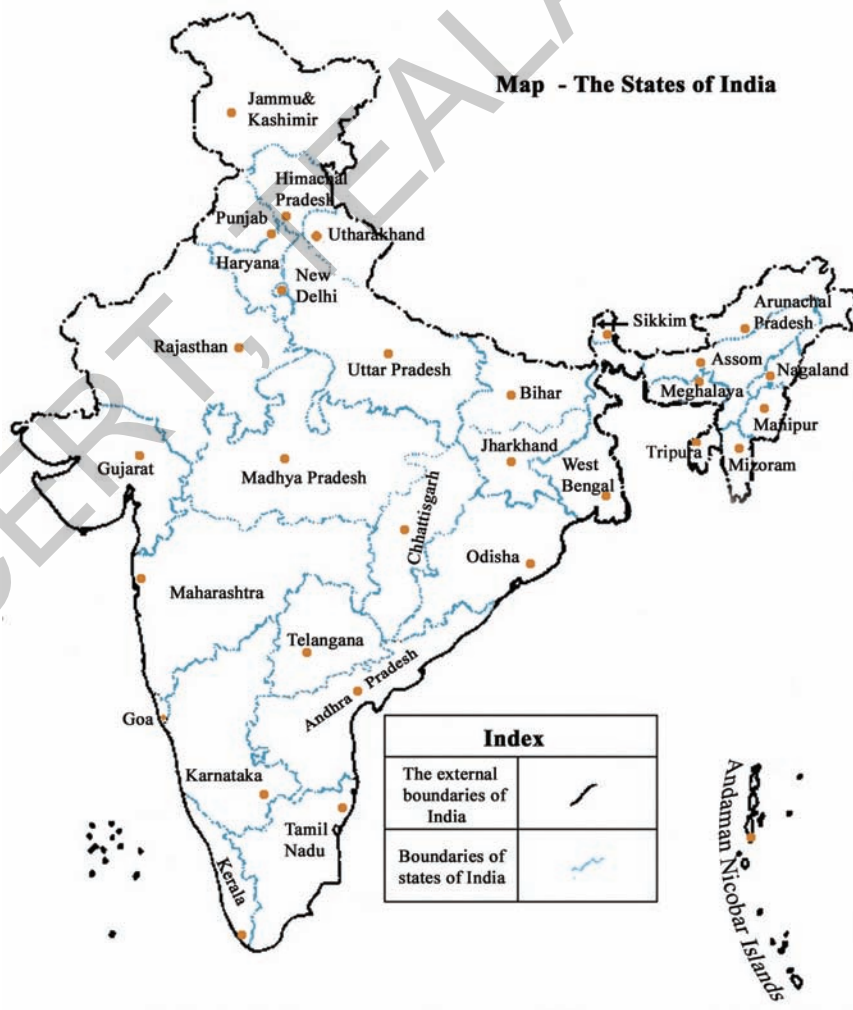
- ♦ Find out from your parents about the problems they see in the electoral system and prepare a report for your class. Discuss in

Map - Showing National Capital

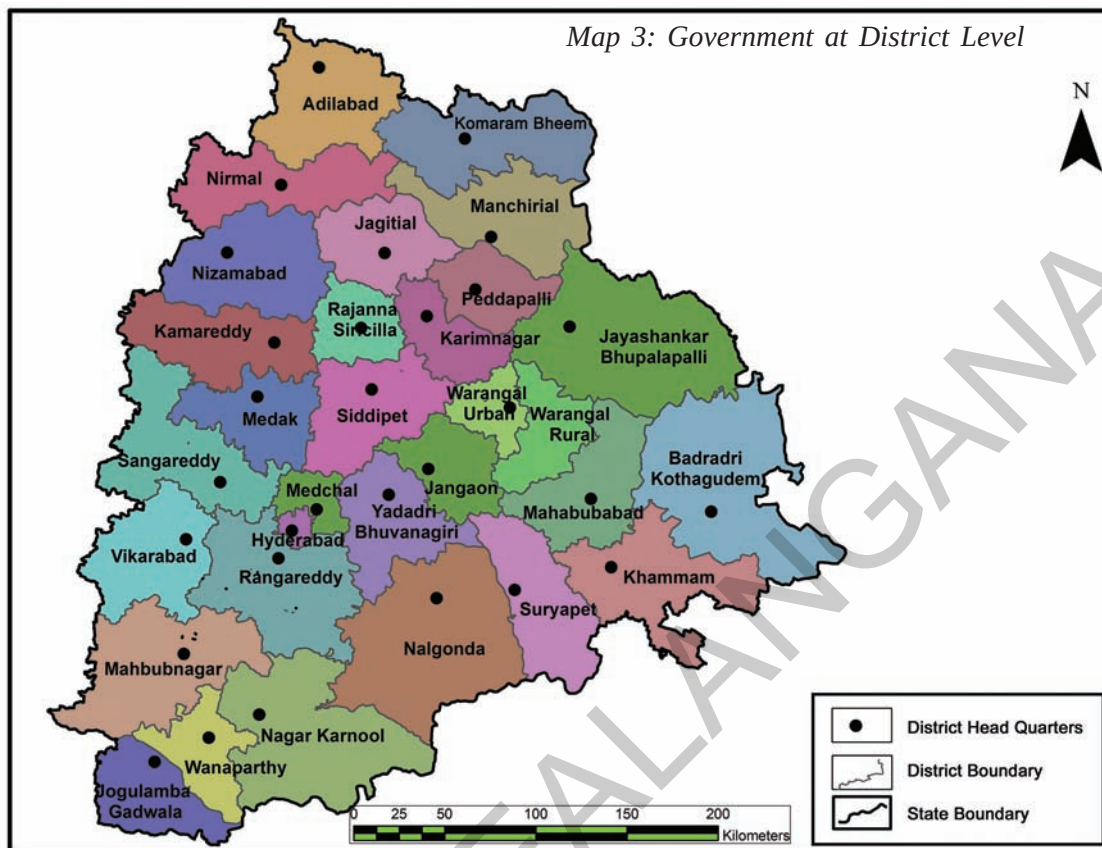


● *Map 1: Government at National Level*

Map - The States of India



● *Map 2: Governments at State Level*



your class and find solutions for these problems. What do you understand by ‘inequality’? Illustrate with examples.

- ♦ What do you think are the main interferences faced by people in choosing the right candidate?

Government at different levels

The government works at different levels: at the local level, at the level of the state and at the national level. The local level means the government in your village, town or locality; the state level government works for an entire state like Telangana or Assam; and the government at the national level represents and works for the entire country. Later in this book, you will read about how local level government functions and when you go to the next classes you will learn about how governments function at the state and central levels.

Organise three or four teams of students and give each of them one of the following themes to perform a role play or a skit:

- ♦ *An election meeting and discussions with the candidates.*
- ♦ *How people who may not have proper information take their decisions regarding voting.*
- ♦ *Difference between democratic and monarchic government.*
- ♦ *How rich and powerful people in the villages try to influence the voters.*

Keywords

Democracy

Monarchy

Constitution

Elections

Decision making

Representative

Improve your learning

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between the governments in a Gond tribe and a modern democracy.
2. Is it possible to include the opinions of the minority in taking a decision? Discuss with some examples.
3. Imagine how your school would be if it was run by all the students and teachers together? Would you want everyone to participate in taking decisions or would you like to elect representatives? Give reasons.
4. Do you think the decision making in your house is democratic? Does everyone have a say in it?
5. Gopal's father consulted all the members of the family on setting up a shop but everyone had a different opinion. Finally, he decided to set up the shop. Do you think he was democratic?
6. Mary's mother asked her children where they wanted to go on Sunday. Two children wanted to watch a film and three wanted to go to the park. If you were in Mary's mother's place, what decision would you take? Give reasons.
7. Classify the following as per the levels of government (Central, State, Local): MP, MLA, Sarpanch, Mayor, CM and PM.
8. Collect news regarding activities of your local M.P, M.L.A and Ministers from newspapers.
9. Draw the outline map of India, observing the map given in this chapter.



Project:

1. Look at the newspapers of the last seven days and collect news about the activities of the government. Stick them on a large sheet or notebook. Make a list of activities of the government you find in these clippings. Discuss this list in the class to get an idea of all the things done by the government.
2. Consult any 10 people of your village who have right to vote and collect the information of the particulars they consider while electing a candidate in Elections. Write a report and discuss on it in the class room.