

ISSUES IN INDIAN POLITICS

COURSE CODE: M23PS05DC

Postgraduate Programme in Political Science
Discipline Core Course
Self Learning Material



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Issues in Indian Politics

Course Code: M23PS05DC

Semester - II

Discipline Core Course
Postgraduate Programme in Political Science
Self Learning Material
(With Model Question Paper Sets)



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Semester- II

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Postgraduate Programme in Political Science

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Edition
January 2025

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ISBN 978-81-986024-5-9



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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The MA programme in Political Science offers an advanced study of governmental structures and processes. It combines theoretical frameworks with practical applications, emphasising policy analysis and implementation. The curriculum covers organizational theory, public policy, administrative law, governance ethics, etc. Through the courses, learners gain expertise in public sector management. This programme prepares graduates for leadership roles in government agencies, non-profits, and international organizations, as well as for further academic pursuits. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.

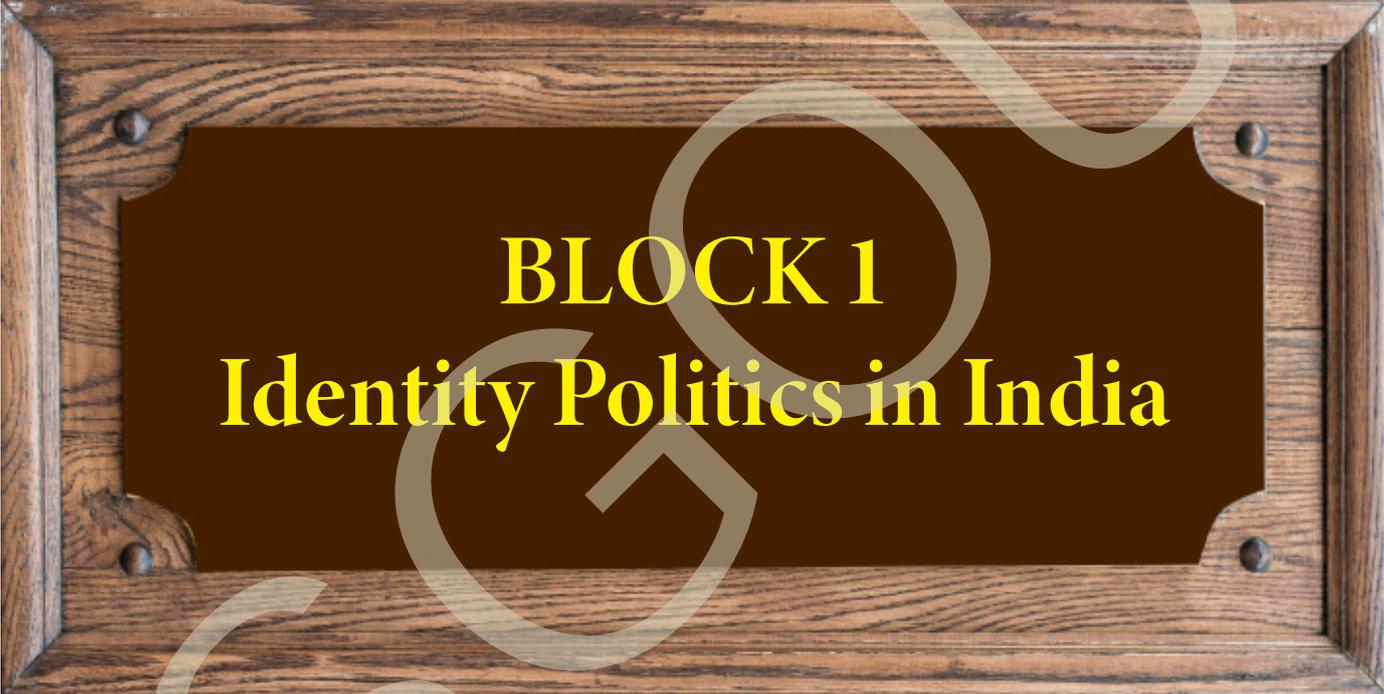


Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-01-2025

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A wooden frame with a dark brown interior and a lighter brown exterior. The frame is made of wood with visible grain and has four small metal fasteners at the corners. Inside the frame, the text "BLOCK 1" is written in a bold, yellow, serif font, and "Identity Politics in India" is written below it in a larger, bold, yellow, serif font. A large, light-colored watermark "SGOU" is overlaid on the image.

BLOCK 1
Identity Politics in India

UNIT 1

Politics of Caste

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of the course, the learners will be able to

- explain the relationship between caste and politics in India.
- analyze the role of caste in shaping electoral politics.
- define caste and its sociopolitical significance in the Indian context.
- examine the provisions of the Indian Constitution related to caste and equality.
- discuss contemporary caste dynamics, including Sanskritisation and the status of caste-based discrimination.

Background

Caste has been a foundational element of Indian society for centuries. Originally, it functioned as a hierarchical system based on occupation and social status, but over time, it has become a multifaceted structure that permeates nearly every aspect of life, including the political sphere. The relationship between caste and politics is of particular significance as it influences power dynamics, representation, and policymaking in India's democratic framework.

In the context of electoral politics, caste plays a central role. It is frequently utilized as a tool for voter mobilization and has a significant impact on voting behavior. Political parties often cater to caste-based identities to consolidate support and determine candidate selection. At the same time, caste has served as a mechanism for marginalized groups to gain political empowerment, allowing them to assert their rights and demand justice within the democratic process.

The Indian Constitution, which was framed to combat caste-based discrimination, guarantees equality for all citizens and prohibits untouchability. It also includes affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education, employment, and political representation,

to uplift Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. However, despite these constitutional safeguards, caste-based violence and discrimination remain persistent challenges, highlighting the complexities involved in achieving social justice.

A comprehensive understanding of caste politics is crucial for grasping the broader socio-political landscape of India. This unit delves into the historical roots, contemporary developments, and constitutional provisions related to caste politics, offering critical insights into one of the most enduring and impactful features of Indian democracy.

Keywords

Caste, Reservation, Sanskritisation, Caste-based Violence, Indian Constitution, Electoral Politics, Caste Discrimination

Discussion

1.1.1 Concept of Caste: Definition and Meaning

Jayaprakash Narayan once observed that caste has emerged as “the most major political party in India.” It has been a key determinant of political participation, the electoral process, voting behaviour, and almost all other aspects of Indian politics.

E. A. H. Blunt described caste as an endogamous group or a collection of endogamous groups bearing a common name, with hereditary membership. It imposes certain restrictions on its members in matters of social interaction, follows a common traditional occupation or claims a common origin, and is generally regarded as forming a homogeneous community.

- Endogamous groups

- A form of social stratification

The caste system represents a form of social stratification where one’s lifestyle, occupation, and social status are inherited by birth. This structure is predominantly found in South Asia, especially India, and has historically influenced the region’s socio-economic framework.

In 1932, sociologist G. S. Ghurye outlined six defining features of the caste system:

- ◇ **Segmental Division of Society:** Society is divided



into distinct groups, with membership determined by birth.

- ◇ **Hierarchy:** A ranked order exists among castes, typically placing Brahmins at the top, though variations occur across regions.
- ◇ **Restrictions on Feeding and Social Intercourse:** There are specific rules governing the types of food and drink that members of higher castes can accept from those of lower castes.
- ◇ **Civil and Religious Disabilities:** Certain castes face limitations in accessing public facilities and participating in religious practices.
- ◇ **Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation:** Occupations are often inherited, with individuals discouraged or prohibited from pursuing professions outside their caste's traditional roles.
- ◇ **Restriction on Marriage:** Marriages are typically confined within the same caste, a practice known as endogamy.

Social reformer Periyar E.V. Ramasamy criticized the caste system, asserting that “a small number of cunning people created caste distinctions in order to dominate over society.” He advocated for self-respect and rational thinking as means to eliminate caste-based discrimination, arguing that religious doctrines perpetuated social divisions.

- Perpetuated social divisions

Understanding the Caste System

The Indian caste system is a complex social hierarchy that has developed over thousands of years. Its origins are often traced to the ancient Vedic classification called ‘Varna,’ which divided society into four main categories based on occupation and duty:

- Concept of Varna

- ◇ **Brahmins:** Priests and scholars.
- ◇ **Kshatriyas:** Warriors and rulers.
- ◇ **Vaishyas:** Merchants and artisans.
- ◇ **Shudras:** Laborers and service providers.

Over time, this theoretical framework merged with ‘Jāti,’ the practical manifestation of caste, resulting in a rigid and

hereditary system.

In this system, an individual's caste dictates their social standing, profession, and potential marriage partners. For example, someone born into a Brahmin family is traditionally expected to pursue scholarly or priestly duties, while an individual from a Shudra caste might engage in manual labor or service-oriented roles.

A key aspect of the caste system is endogamy, where marriage is restricted within one's own caste. This practice maintains caste boundaries and ensures the continuation of traditional roles across generations. Additionally, concepts of purity and pollution play a significant role, with certain castes considered more 'pure' and others viewed as 'polluted,' leading to social exclusion and discrimination.

- Concepts of purity and pollution

1.1.1.1 Features of Caste System

Most Important Features of Caste system are as follows

- ◇ **Occupational Association:** Historically, specific castes were linked to particular professions. For instance, the 'Chamar' caste was traditionally associated with leatherwork, while the 'Dhobi' caste specialized in washing clothes. These associations often restricted individuals from pursuing occupations outside their caste-designated roles.
- ◇ **Social Exclusion:** The practice of untouchability exemplifies the extreme social exclusion inherent in the caste system. Individuals from certain castes were prohibited from entering temples, using common wells, or even walking on the same paths as those from higher castes. This systemic discrimination led to significant socio-economic disadvantages for the affected groups.
- ◇ **Modern Implications:** Despite legal prohibitions, caste-based discrimination persists in various forms. For example, in corporate India, diversity initiatives often overlook caste, focusing instead on gender or race. This omission highlights the deep-rooted nature of caste in Indian society and the challenges in addressing it.

- Linked to particular professions

- Systemic discrimination

- Persists in various forms

The caste system is a deeply entrenched social structure



that has shaped the socio-economic and cultural landscape of South Asia, particularly India. Understanding its definitions, key concepts, and real-world implications is crucial for comprehending the complexities of social stratification and the ongoing challenges in achieving social equity in the region.

1.1.2 Caste and the Indian Constitution

- Foster equality and social justice

The Indian Constitution plays a crucial role in addressing the deeply rooted inequalities created by the caste system. Its provisions aim to rectify the historical injustices faced by marginalized communities, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Through various measures, the Constitution strives to foster equality and social justice, reflecting its commitment to building a more inclusive and equitable society.

Prohibition of Caste-Based Discrimination

The Constitution explicitly prohibits caste-based discrimination to ensure that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities.

- Equal rights and opportunities

- ◇ **Article 15:** This article guarantees that no individual shall face discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. It also ensures that all citizens have equal access to public spaces such as shops, restaurants, hotels, entertainment venues, and public utilities like wells, tanks, and roads maintained by public funds.
- ◇ **Article 16:** This article extends the principle of non-discrimination to public employment, ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens and prohibiting caste-based discrimination. It also allows the State to reserve posts for SCs and STs in public services, acknowledging their historical underrepresentation in these areas.
- ◇ **Article 17** of the Constitution of India seeks to abolish untouchability. Untouchability refers not just to the avoidance or prohibition of physical contact but to a much broader set of social sanctions.
- ◇ **Article 46** of the Constitution of India promotes the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other weaker sections

of society. It also seeks to protect them from social injustice and exploitation.

- ◇ **Article 338** of the Constitution of India provides for the establishment of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes.
- ◇ **Article 338A** of the Constitution of India provides for the establishment of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

These provisions are designed to eliminate systemic barriers and encourage the equal participation of all citizens in public life.

Special Provisions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

- Affirmative action measures

The Constitution includes affirmative action measures to address the socio-economic disadvantages faced by SCs and STs, aiming to uplift these communities and integrate them into the mainstream society.

- ◇ **Reservation in Education and Employment:** Articles 15(4) and 16(4) grant the State the power to reserve seats in educational institutions and positions in public employment for SCs and STs. These provisions are intended to provide opportunities for advancement and bridge the gaps created by centuries of exclusion.
- ◇ **Political Representation:** Articles 330 and 332 provide for the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. This ensures that these communities are politically represented and can voice their concerns in the legislative processes.
- ◇ **Special Administration:** Article 244, through the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, provides for the administration of Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas. These provisions aim to protect the rights and autonomy of tribal communities while promoting their socio-economic development.

To prevent atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), Parliament enacted the *Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955*, which was later renamed the *Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976*. In 1989, the *Scheduled Castes and*



- Acts to prevent discrimination

Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was passed. This special law specifically addresses offenses committed against members of the SC-ST communities in India. It extends to the whole country and provides stringent punishments for acts of discrimination, violence, and atrocities against these communities.

- Introduced stricter provisions

SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act (Amendments)

The *Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015*, introduced stricter provisions and expanded the list of punishable offenses.

The *Prevention of Atrocities (Amendment) Bill, 2018*, was passed by Parliament in August 2018. This amendment nullified the Supreme Court's ruling that had diluted the provisions of the Act by mandating prior approval before the arrest of accused persons. The amendment restored the original provisions to ensure better protection for SC/ST communities.

- Ensuring representation

Reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

The policy of reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India began in 1950 with the *Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950*, and the *Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950*. These orders laid the foundation for affirmative action, ensuring representation for SCs and STs in education, employment, and legislatures.

- Reduce the inequalities

1.1.2.1 Addressing Social Inequalities

The provisions for SCs and STs in the Constitution are based on the recognition of their historical oppression and exclusion. By granting reservations in education, employment, and political representation, the Constitution seeks to empower these communities and reduce the inequalities perpetuated by the caste system. Additionally, laws such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955) and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989) further strengthen protections against caste-based discrimination and violence.

The Indian Constitution provides a comprehensive framework for addressing caste-based inequalities. Through its emphasis on equality, affirmative action, and protective

- Comprehensive frame-work

measures, it aims to dismantle the barriers created by the caste system and promote social justice. While significant progress has been made, the effective implementation of these provisions remains essential to achieving the vision of an inclusive and equitable society.

- Shape India's democracy

1.1.3 Caste and Politics

Caste has always been an important part of Indian society and its political system. It acts as both a social structure and a major influence on political actions. The relationship between caste and politics has helped shape India's democracy, influencing governance, representation, and policy decisions. This connection has brought both progress and challenges, showing the complex nature of India's socio-political system.

- Impact of caste

1.1.3.1 Role of Caste in Electoral Politics

Caste plays a crucial role in influencing elections in India. It affects how people vote, how candidates are chosen, and how political alliances are formed. Studying the impact of caste on elections helps us understand its importance in the democratic process.

- Influences how people vote

Influence on Voting Patterns: In India, caste often influences how people vote. Political parties and candidates design their campaigns to appeal to specific caste groups, using shared identities and social networks. They study the caste composition of constituencies and often select candidates from dominant or influential castes to secure votes. This practice strengthens caste-based identities and creates solid voting groups.

- Political parties form alliances

Caste-Based Alliances: In Indian elections, political parties often form alliances with caste groups to broaden their support base. These alliances combine dominant and marginalized castes to gain political power. For example, regional parties in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have historically relied on such coalitions. These partnerships highlight the strategic role caste plays in politics.

- Impacted elections

Reservation and Electoral Representation: The reservation system, created to address historical injustices against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), has greatly impacted elections. Reserved constituencies ensure representation for these communities in legislative bodies. However, this system has also sparked debates about its

effectiveness and whether it perpetuates caste divisions.

- Negotiate political demands

Role of Caste Organizations: Organizations based on caste actively shape election outcomes. They support candidates who represent their community's interests and act as a link between political parties and voters. These groups also negotiate political demands, influencing the broader political environment.

In summary, caste is a key factor in Indian elections, shaping voting behavior, alliances, and representation. While it has empowered marginalized communities, it has also deepened divisions, making it a complex issue in India's democratic framework.

1.1.3.2 Impact of Caste in Indian Politics

- Maintain societal divisions

The influence of caste on Indian politics goes beyond elections, affecting governance, policymaking, and social movements. Understanding its broader impact highlights how caste can empower marginalized groups while also maintaining societal divisions.

- Means to gather political support

Caste as a Tool for Political Mobilization: Caste is often used as a means to gather political support in India. Leaders use caste identities to build voter bases and rally communities. This strategy has helped marginalized groups become more active in politics. For example, movements led by B.R. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram have used caste identities to challenge social inequalities and demand justice.

- Created obstacles to national unity

Challenges to National Integration: Although caste-based politics has increased representation for disadvantaged groups, it has also created obstacles to national unity. Focusing on caste identities can sometimes harm broader national interests, leading to divisions and conflicts. Issues like communal violence and caste-based rivalries are often worsened by the political use of caste.

- Impact on policymaking

Policies and Legislation: Caste has had a strong impact on policymaking in India. Affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education, jobs, and politics, aim to uplift disadvantaged groups. However, these policies have sparked debates about fairness, reverse discrimination, and the need to update reservation criteria. Political parties often exploit these

debates to secure votes, further embedding caste identities in politics.

- Transformed the political landscape

Emergence of Dalit Politics: The rise of Dalit politics has been a significant development in Indian democracy. Dalit leaders and parties, such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), have successfully challenged upper-caste dominance. This shift has transformed the political landscape, ensuring better representation for marginalized groups and promoting social justice.

- Reflect the caste dynamics

Role in Grassroots Politics: At the local level, caste plays a significant role in political participation and governance. Panchayati Raj institutions, which aim to decentralize power, often reflect the caste dynamics of their regions. Although reservations for SCs, STs, and women have improved representation, caste hierarchies still affect decision-making and resource distribution.

- Deepened divisions

Caste and politics in India are closely connected, shaping the country's democracy and social structure. While caste-based politics has increased representation and empowerment for disadvantaged groups, it has also deepened divisions and created conflicts. Balancing the goals of social justice and national unity remains a key challenge for Indian democracy. A better understanding of caste and its political role is essential for building a more inclusive and fair society.

1.1.4 Caste Politics: Emergence of Caste-Based Parties

- Altered India's democratic framework

The emergence of caste-based political parties has significantly altered India's democratic framework. These parties have not only redefined electoral strategies but also ensured better representation for marginalized groups. This trend gained prominence during the 1980s when caste identities became central to political mobilization and governance.

Caste-Based Political Parties: Shaping the Electoral Landscape Since the 1980s

- Formed around caste identities

Since the 1980s, Indian politics has seen a notable rise in political parties explicitly formed around caste identities. This shift stemmed from the historical exclusion of lower castes and their growing demand for political inclusion. Parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh and the Rashtriya



Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar emerged as platforms for caste assertion, particularly for Dalits, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and other underrepresented communities.

In earlier elections, caste affiliations often determined electoral outcomes. Political parties and candidates used caste networks to secure votes, appealing to shared identities and promises of community welfare. The success of these approaches underscored caste's importance as a political tool, leading to the rapid growth of caste-focused parties nationwide.

Complex Caste Calculations in Indian Politics

As caste-based politics expanded, the political arena became increasingly competitive. Major parties began employing similar caste-driven strategies to appeal to a broad spectrum of communities. This led to alliances that often brought together dominant and marginalized castes, creating complex political dynamics.

- Caste-driven strategies

These intricate calculations are particularly visible in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where multiple parties compete for the same caste groups. For example, the rivalry between the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh illustrates how caste identities can serve both as a unifying factor and a source of division in electoral politics.

- Source of division

Social Justice and Caste-Based Parties

Caste-based political parties have been instrumental in promoting social justice in India. By advocating for the rights of marginalized communities, these parties have highlighted issues such as land reforms, reservation policies, and measures to combat discrimination. Leaders like Kanshi Ram and Lalu Prasad Yadav played key roles in mobilizing caste identities to demand equality and challenge social hierarchies.

- Promoting social justice

However, the emphasis on caste identities has faced criticism for fostering divisions and detracting from broader national priorities. Critics argue that an excessive focus on caste-based politics can overshadow essential issues like economic development and governance.

- Overshadow essential issues

Regional Variations and the Role of Identity

The influence of caste-based political parties varies across India. In northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, caste

- Challenge caste hierarchies

politics is deeply ingrained, with parties explicitly aligning themselves with particular communities. Conversely, southern states such as Tamil Nadu have seen the rise of Dravidian parties, which challenge caste hierarchies while promoting regional and linguistic identities.

- Amplify the voices of marginalized groups

The rise of caste-based political parties has had a profound impact on India's democracy. By amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, these parties have made the political system more inclusive. However, their reliance on caste identities has also introduced challenges, such as reinforcing divisions and complicating national integration. Balancing representation with unity remains a key challenge for Indian democracy. A thorough understanding of caste-based politics is essential to appreciate its role in shaping the country's socio-political landscape.

1.1.5 Politics of Caste-Based Reservation in India

- Equal opportunities

Caste-based reservation in India has been a central issue in the country's socio-political landscape since the adoption of the Constitution in 1950. The reservation system was introduced to address the historical injustices and discrimination faced by marginalized communities, especially the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The system aims to ensure these communities have equal opportunities in education, employment, and political representation. However, caste-based reservation has also been a source of significant political debate, with various arguments surrounding its fairness, efficacy, and long-term implications. In recent years, the introduction of the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation has added a new dimension to the debate.

1.1.5.1 Features of Caste-Based Reservation

Caste-based reservation in India has several key features that are designed to provide affirmative action to historically marginalized communities. These features aim to promote social justice, equality, and inclusivity in Indian society.

- ◇ **Affirmative Action for SCs, STs, and OBCs:** The reservation system primarily benefits the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other



Backward Classes (OBCs). These groups were historically discriminated against and denied access to education, employment, and social opportunities. The reservation system ensures that a certain percentage of seats in educational institutions, government jobs, and legislative bodies are reserved for these communities.

• Equal access to education

• Have access to employment opportunities

• Participation in the legislative process

• Voice at the grassroots level

◇ **Reservation in Education:** A certain percentage of seats in public educational institutions, including universities and colleges, are reserved for SCs, STs, and OBCs. This aims to provide equal access to education and reduce the educational gap between these communities and the general population.

◇ **Reservation in Employment:** The reservation system extends to government jobs, where a certain percentage of positions are set aside for SCs, STs, and OBCs. This ensures that these communities are represented in the public sector and have access to employment opportunities that were previously denied to them.

◇ **Political Representation:** The Indian Constitution also reserves seats for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and State Legislative Assemblies. This guarantees political representation for these communities and ensures their participation in the legislative process.

◇ **Reservation in Local Governance:** In addition to national and state-level reservations, provisions exist for reserving seats for SCs, STs, and OBCs in local governance bodies such as Panchayats and Municipalities. This helps ensure that these communities have a voice at the grassroots level.

1.1.5.2 Debates Related to Caste-Based Reservation

The politics of caste-based reservation has been a subject of intense debate in India, with supporters and critics presenting opposing views on its effectiveness and impact on society.

Arguments in Support of Caste-Based Reservation

◇ **Addressing Historical Injustice:** Supporters of caste-based reservation argue that it is a necessary measure

- Providing these communities with the opportunities

- Equal access

- Voice in legislative bodies

- Fostering social mobility

- Reinforces the idea of caste

- Denied opportunities

to rectify the historical injustices faced by SCs, STs, and OBCs. These communities were systematically excluded from education, employment, and social mobility for centuries due to the caste system. Reservation is seen as a means of providing these communities with the opportunities they were denied in the past.

- ◇ **Promoting Social Justice:** The reservation system is viewed as a tool for promoting social justice by ensuring that marginalized communities have equal access to opportunities in education, employment, and political representation. It is seen as a means of leveling the playing field and reducing social inequalities.
- ◇ **Ensuring Representation in Governance:** Reservation in political representation ensures that SCs and STs have a voice in legislative bodies, allowing them to participate in decision-making processes. This is crucial for ensuring that their concerns and needs are addressed in policy-making.
- ◇ **Empowerment of Marginalized Communities:** By providing opportunities in education, employment, and politics, caste-based reservation empowers marginalized communities, helping them break the cycle of poverty and discrimination. It is seen as a means of fostering social mobility and improving the socio-economic status of these communities.

Arguments Against Caste-Based Reservation

- ◇ **Perpetuation of Caste Identities:** Critics of caste-based reservation argue that it perpetuates caste identities and divisions in society. They believe that the reservation system reinforces the idea of caste as a basis for social differentiation, which could hinder the process of caste abolition and social integration.
- ◇ **Reverse Discrimination:** Some argue that caste-based reservation leads to reverse discrimination, where individuals from the general category are denied opportunities in favor of those from reserved categories, even if they are not economically or socially disadvantaged. This is seen as unfair by those who believe that merit should be the primary



criterion for selection.

- Undermines meritocracy

◇ **Impact on Merit:** One of the most common criticisms of caste-based reservation is that it undermines meritocracy. Critics argue that reservation leads to the selection of candidates based on caste rather than merit, which could result in the appointment of less qualified individuals to key positions in education, employment, and governance.

- Decline in the quality

◇ **Dilution of Quality:** Some opponents claim that the reservation system has led to a decline in the quality of education and public services, as candidates from reserved categories may not meet the academic or professional standards required for certain positions. This, they argue, could result in inefficiency and a reduction in the overall quality of public institutions.

The New Policy of EWS (Economically Weaker Sections)

- 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2019

The policy of reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) was implemented through the *103rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2019*. This amendment enabled the government to provide a 10% reservation in education and government jobs for EWS candidates who do not fall under the existing SC, ST, or OBC reservation categories.

- 10% reservation

In 2019, the Indian government introduced a new policy that provides 10% reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in educational institutions and government jobs. This policy was aimed at addressing the exclusion of economically disadvantaged individuals from the general category, who did not benefit from caste-based reservations but still faced financial challenges. The EWS reservation applies to individuals from economically disadvantaged families, irrespective of their caste background.

- Regardless of caste

Supporters of the EWS reservation argue that it is a positive step toward ensuring that economically disadvantaged individuals, regardless of caste, have access to opportunities in education and employment. This policy is seen as a way to broaden the scope of affirmative action, ensuring that the benefits of reservation are extended to all economically vulnerable sections of society. Proponents also view the EWS reservation as a way to address the growing concerns of the middle class, who often face economic hardships but do not

benefit from caste-based reservations.

- Focusing on economic status

Critics of the EWS reservation contend that it dilutes the original intent of caste-based reservations, which were designed to address the historical disadvantages faced by specific communities. They argue that by focusing on economic status rather than caste, the EWS reservation may undermine the social justice objectives of the reservation system. Some also express concerns that the criteria for identifying economically weaker sections are not clearly defined, which could lead to the inclusion of individuals who are not genuinely economically disadvantaged, thus reducing the effectiveness of the policy.

- Historical injustices and contemporary realities

The politics of caste-based reservation in India remains a complex and evolving issue. While the reservation system has played a significant role in promoting social justice and empowering marginalized communities, it has also generated considerable debate regarding its fairness, effectiveness, and long-term impact. The introduction of the EWS reservation policy has added a new dimension to this debate, raising questions about whether economic criteria should replace or complement caste-based reservations. As India continues to grapple with issues of social inequality and economic disparity, the future of caste-based reservation will remain a critical issue in the country's political discourse, requiring careful consideration of both historical injustices and contemporary realities.

1.1.6 Caste Politics in India: Sanskritisation and the Emergence of Dominant Castes

- Sanskritisation

Caste politics in India has played a significant role in shaping the country's social, political, and economic structures. Over time, caste-based mobilizations and identity politics have influenced political dynamics, with processes such as Sanskritisation and the rise of dominant castes being central to the changing landscape of caste in India. These processes have had profound effects on caste relations and political power structures in the country.

Understanding Sanskritisation

Sanskritisation, a term coined by sociologist M.N. Srinivas, refers to the process through which lower-caste communities attempt to raise their social status by adopting the customs, rituals, and practices of higher castes, particularly Brahmins.



- Imitating the religious rituals

This includes imitating the religious rituals, lifestyle, and cultural norms of upper castes, such as performing elaborate pujas, adopting vegetarianism, and using Sanskritized names. The primary aim of Sanskritisation is to gain social recognition and upward mobility within the caste hierarchy.

- Reinforces existing caste hierarchies

While Sanskritisation has enabled certain lower-caste groups to improve their social standing, it does not dismantle the core inequalities of the caste system. Instead, it reinforces existing caste hierarchies, as the process of imitation does not challenge the fundamental structure of caste-based discrimination.

- Caste-based identity politics

Sanskritisation and the Rise of Dominant Castes

The process of Sanskritisation has been crucial in the rise of dominant castes in India. Dominant castes are those groups that hold significant social, political, and economic power in specific regions. The emergence of these castes has been shaped by a combination of traditional power structures and the changing dynamics of caste-based identity politics.

Several factors contribute to the rise of dominant castes:

- Land, resources, and economic capital

◇ **Economic Power:** Caste groups that control land, resources, and economic capital often become dominant in their regions. For example, groups like the Jats in North India, the Patels in Gujarat, and the Vokkaligas in Karnataka have used their economic resources to gain political influence.

- The rise of Other Backward Classes

◇ **Political Mobilization:** Through political parties and social movements, certain castes have mobilized to assert their political power. In particular, the rise of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the post-Independence period has been facilitated by the state's affirmative action policies, which have enabled them to gain political power and social recognition.

- Aligning with dominant castes

◇ **Sanskritisation and Political Power:** As lower castes engage in Sanskritisation, they often seek to consolidate their position by aligning with dominant castes or leveraging their newfound social capital to negotiate with political elites. This has contributed to the emergence of new dominant castes, particularly among OBCs, who have become politically assertive and influential in regional politics.

Impact of Sanskritisation on Caste Politics

Sanskritisation has had a significant impact on caste politics in India, shaping both the rise of new political forces and the deepening of caste-based divisions in society. The process has facilitated the emergence of caste-based political parties and movements, which aim to assert the rights of marginalized groups.

- Rise of new political forces

Key impacts of Sanskritisation on caste politics include:

- ◇ **Caste-based Political Mobilization:** The rise of dominant castes has led to the formation of caste-based political parties that seek to represent the interests of specific caste groups. These parties often use the rhetoric of social justice and empowerment to mobilize their base. For example, parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar and the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh have been instrumental in mobilizing OBCs and other backward castes by promoting the idea of social justice and reservation policies.
- ◇ **Increased Political Competition:** As lower castes, particularly OBCs, have gained social mobility through Sanskritisation, they have become politically competitive, challenging the dominance of traditional upper-caste elites. This has led to a shift in power dynamics, especially in regions where OBCs constitute a significant portion of the population.
- ◇ **Caste-based Vote Banks:** The process of Sanskritisation has contributed to the creation of caste-based vote banks, where political parties cater to specific caste groups by offering political and economic benefits. This has resulted in the increasing importance of caste in electoral politics, with parties often focusing on caste identity to win elections.

- Formation of caste-based political parties

- Become politically competitive

- Offering political and economic benefits

- Emergence of new dominant castes

Sanskritisation has played a pivotal role in reshaping caste politics in India, enabling lower-caste communities, particularly OBCs, to rise in social and political prominence. This process has facilitated the emergence of new dominant castes, contributing to the evolution of caste-based political parties and movements. However, Sanskritisation has not been without its challenges. It often reinforces caste hierarchies and does not fully address the inequalities faced by Dalits and



Adivasis. The continuing prominence of caste in Indian politics highlights the need for deeper social reforms that go beyond political mobilization and tackle the root causes of caste-based discrimination and exclusion.

1.1.7 Status of Caste-based Discrimination in Contemporary India

Despite significant legal and constitutional measures aimed at abolishing caste-based discrimination, the practice remains deeply ingrained in contemporary Indian society. While the caste system was officially outlawed by the Constitution, discrimination based on caste continues to manifest in various forms, particularly in rural areas, but also in urban spaces. This section explores the ongoing prevalence of caste-based discrimination in India, focusing on data from crime reports, social exclusion, and the debates surrounding the issue.

- Discrimination based on caste continues

Caste-based Violence and Atrocities: Caste-based violence remains a severe problem in India, with marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and Adivasis, being the primary victims. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) consistently reports on crimes targeting these groups, highlighting the persistence of caste-based violence.

According to the NCRB's 2020 Crime in India report, the number of crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs) reached 50,291 in 2020, showing a notable increase from 47,338 in 2019. Similarly, crimes against Scheduled Tribes (STs) rose from 7,486 in 2019 to 8,112 in 2020. These statistics indicate an alarming upward trend in caste-based violence, despite the presence of legal safeguards.

- Alarming upward trend in caste-based violence

The report also sheds light on the nature of these crimes, with rape, assault, and murder being the most common forms of violence. The number of rape cases involving Dalit women saw an increase of 30% in 2020, underscoring the heightened vulnerability of Dalit women to caste-based sexual violence.

- Rape, assault, and murder

Discrimination in Housing and Public Services: Caste-based discrimination also extends to public services and housing, where marginalized communities continue to face exclusion. Studies and surveys highlight the widespread nature of this issue, particularly in urban areas, where caste-based discrimination is often less visible but still pervasive.

- Extends to public services

- Caste-based exclusion in housing

A 2018 survey by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies revealed that 85% of landlords in Delhi were unwilling to rent properties to Dalits and Adivasis. Similarly, a 2020 survey by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) found that 70% of Dalit families in urban areas reported facing some form of discrimination when trying to secure housing. These findings indicate that caste-based exclusion in housing is not confined to rural areas but is also a significant issue in cities, where it continues to marginalize Dalit and Adivasi communities.

- Discrimination in the workplace

Caste-based Discrimination in Employment: Discrimination in the workplace remains a major issue, particularly in sectors outside government employment. Although affirmative action policies mandate reservations for Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs in government jobs, the private sector remains largely unaffected by these policies. As a result, caste-based biases in hiring, promotions, and job assignments continue to limit opportunities for marginalized groups.

- Exclusion from decision-making processes

A 2019 study by Azim Premji University found that 41% of Dalit employees reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace. This included verbal abuse, denial of promotions, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Additionally, 30% of Dalit employees felt they were paid less than their upper-caste counterparts for the same work, illustrating the continuing economic disparities driven by caste.

- Barrier to educational success

Discrimination in Education: While affirmative action policies have improved access to education for Dalits and Adivasis, caste-based discrimination remains a significant barrier to educational success. The reservation system has facilitated higher enrollment rates for marginalized communities in universities, but discrimination continues to affect their academic experiences.

- Subjected to verbal abuse by their peers

A 2020 report by the University Grants Commission (UGC) found that Dalit and Adivasi students often face caste-based harassment in educational institutions. Many Dalit students, particularly in prestigious universities such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), report feeling marginalized, isolated, and subjected to verbal abuse by their peers. Moreover, a 2021 study by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) found that 28% of Dalit students in secondary schools reported experiencing caste-based



discrimination from teachers, which negatively impacted their academic performance and well-being.

- Need for stronger enforcement of laws

Caste-based discrimination remains a persistent issue in contemporary India, with continuing challenges in areas such as violence, housing, employment, education, and politics. While legal measures, affirmative action policies, and social movements have led to some progress, caste-based inequalities remain deeply embedded in Indian society. Data from crime reports, surveys, and studies consistently highlight the need for stronger enforcement of laws, greater social awareness, and continued policy reforms to address caste-based discrimination effectively. Achieving a caste-free society requires not only legal action but also a transformation in societal attitudes toward greater equality and inclusion.

- Impact electoral politics

Caste remains a significant and influential factor in shaping the social and political dynamics of India. It continues to impact electoral politics by affecting voting behaviors, party tactics, and political coalitions. The social and political importance of caste is evident in its influence on various facets of Indian life, including education, employment, and access to resources. The Indian Constitution has played a crucial role in tackling caste-based discrimination, particularly through reservation policies aimed at fostering equality and social justice. Nevertheless, issues like caste-based violence, discrimination, and the challenges related to reservation policies persist. The rise of caste-based political parties and the process of Sanskritisation further demonstrate the changing role of caste in modern India. Despite advancements, caste continues to be a powerful force in defining social identities and influencing political outcomes, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to reduce caste-based inequalities and build a more inclusive society.

Summarized Overview

Caste in India is a deeply rooted social institution that shapes individual identity and societal roles, with complex meanings and evolving definitions. The caste system is marked by hierarchical divisions, endogamy, and occupational specialization. The Indian Constitution has taken a reformist stance, providing safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Tribes to address historical injustices. Despite legal provisions, caste-based inequalities persist, influencing access to resources and opportunities. Caste continues to play a decisive role in Indian politics, evident in voting patterns and the rise of caste-based

political parties. Reservation policies for backward classes and recent inclusion of EWS reflect the state's effort to ensure social justice, although these remain contested. Concepts like Sanskritisation and the rise of dominant castes reveal changing caste dynamics in modern India. Yet, caste-based discrimination remains a pressing issue, requiring continued attention and policy innovation.

Assignments

1. Analyze the role of caste in shaping electoral politics in contemporary India.
2. Discuss the provisions of the Indian Constitution aimed at addressing caste-based discrimination and inequality.
3. Evaluate the concept of Sanskritisation and its implications for caste mobility in India.
4. Assess the emergence and impact of caste-based political parties on Indian democracy.
5. How does the Indian caste system intersect with issues of economic and political inequality?
6. Compare and contrast the concepts of caste and class in the context of Indian politics.
7. Investigate the role of caste organizations in influencing electoral outcomes in India.
8. Examine the persistence of caste-based discrimination in modern Indian society and propose solutions to address it.

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Suggested Reading

1. Bayly, S. (2001). *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*.
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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UNIT 2

Politics of Class

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- define and explain the concept and characteristics of the class system.
- analyze the theoretical perspectives of Max Weber and Karl Marx on class.
- distinguish between the concepts of class and caste in the Indian context.
- examine the role of various classes in shaping Indian politics.

Background

The concept of class has been a central theme in sociopolitical analysis, shaping the discourse on inequality, power, and social organization. Classical theorists such as Karl Marx and Max Weber have provided foundational frameworks to understand class dynamics. Marx emphasized the economic basis of class and its role in historical materialism, while Weber offered a multidimensional view, incorporating economic, social, and political aspects.

In the Indian context, the interplay between class and caste has added complexity to the analysis of social structures. While caste has traditionally dominated the sociopolitical landscape, class distinctions have gained prominence, especially with the rise of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. The middle class, often seen as a bridge between the elite and the working class, has undergone significant transformations, particularly with the emergence of a “new middle class” shaped by neoliberal policies.

The role of different classes in Indian politics highlights the dynamic nature of social stratification. Political mobilization, economic policies, and social movements often reflect the interests and aspirations of various classes. However, the coexistence and interaction of caste and class continue to generate debates on whether caste-based politics will eventually give way to class-based politics. In the age of globalization, the

concept of class is further redefined, influenced by transnational flows of capital, labor, and culture, adding new dimensions to the study of class in India.

Keywords

Class, Class System, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Caste, Class and Caste, Middle Class, New Middle Class, Class Politics, Globalization

Discussion

1.2.1 Definition and Meaning of the Concept of Class

The term “class” is a foundational concept in the study of society and politics, frequently examined for its relevance in understanding social structures. It pertains to the categorization of individuals into groups based on their economic conditions, roles within society, and access to essential resources. Class functions as a lens through which the disparities and inequalities within societies can be comprehended, along with their influence on political, social, and economic interactions.

- Categorization of individuals

Over time, the understanding of class has undergone significant evolution, with various scholars offering diverse interpretations. It extends beyond mere economic factors such as wealth or income to include aspects like social status, cultural attributes, and power dynamics. Class divisions often serve as the framework for social hierarchies, where individuals and groups are positioned differently in terms of privilege, opportunities, and influence.

- Framework for social hierarchies

Studying class is critical for analyzing how societies operate, how resources are allocated, and how power is distributed. It also provides insights into the roots of social conflicts and the processes of societal transformation, especially in the contexts of industrialization, globalization, and modernization.

- Processes of societal transformation

1.2.1.1 Characteristics of Class

The concept of class is not just a theoretical construct but a practical tool for understanding societal organization. Its characteristics provide insights into how social groups emerge,



how resources are shared, and how power relationships evolve. These attributes highlight the intricate nature of social hierarchies and their impact on individuals and communities.

- Central to Marxist theory

- Hierarchical structure

- Foster a sense of unity

- Lead to conflicts

- Shape political systems

- Open systems provide opportunities

- Significance of cultural capital

- ◇ **Economic Basis:** At its core, class is deeply tied to economic conditions, particularly an individual's relationship to resources and production. Those who control or own production assets, such as factories or capital, often form the upper classes, while those who rely on selling their labor constitute the lower classes. This aspect is central to Marxist theory.
- ◇ **Social Stratification:** Class operates as a hierarchical structure in which individuals and groups are ranked based on their access to wealth, privileges, and opportunities. Higher classes typically enjoy better education, healthcare, and living conditions than lower classes.
- ◇ **Common Interests and Identity:** People within the same class often share similar economic goals, cultural norms, and life experiences. This commonality can foster a sense of unity, leading to collective actions like labor strikes or political movements to protect or advance their interests.
- ◇ **Conflict and Struggle for Power:** Class divisions frequently lead to conflicts, especially between those who hold resources and those who work under them. Marx identified this conflict as the driving force behind historical and societal changes.
- ◇ **Political Influence:** Classes significantly shape political systems and ideologies. Political parties and movements often reflect the interests of particular classes, such as advocating for workers' rights or supporting business-friendly policies.
- ◇ **Mobility Across Classes:** Social mobility, or the ability to move between classes, varies across societies. Open systems provide opportunities for upward mobility through education or entrepreneurship, while closed systems restrict such transitions.
- ◇ **Cultural Dimensions:** Class distinctions are not solely economic but also cultural. Education, language, and social connections play a crucial role in maintaining class differences. Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the

- Transformed class dynamics

significance of cultural capital in reinforcing class hierarchies.

- ◇ **Impact of Globalization:** The globalized economy has transformed class dynamics, creating new elites and intensifying inequalities. The interconnected nature of class today underscores the complexities of modern social structures.

The characteristics of class highlight its multifaceted nature, encompassing economic, social, and cultural dimensions. These features not only define the structure of classes but also reveal their role in shaping societal dynamics and power relations. A comprehensive understanding of these characteristics is essential for addressing the challenges posed by inequality and fostering a more equitable society.

1.2.1.2 Definitions of Class

- Economic division

- ◇ **Karl Marx:** *"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."*

- ◇ Marx viewed class as an economic division rooted in an individual's relationship to the means of production. He argued that societal progress is driven by the conflict between the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor.

- ◇ **Max Weber:** *"A class is a group of people who have in common a specific causal component of their life chances."*

Weber expanded the concept of class beyond economics, emphasizing its connection to social status and political power. His perspective includes market position and access to opportunities, making it broader than Marx's view.

- Social status and political power

- ◇ **Pierre Bourdieu:** *"Class is maintained and reproduced through the possession and transmission of cultural capital."*

Bourdieu emphasized the role of cultural elements such as education, knowledge, and social networks in sustaining class distinctions. He argued that cultural capital reinforces inequalities over generations.



- ◇ **Ralph Dahrendorf:** *“Class conflict arises not merely from economic inequality but from disparities in authority and power within organizations and institutions.”*

- Focusing on authority and power relations

Dahrendorf redefined class theory by focusing on authority and power relations rather than purely economic factors, emphasizing the role of institutional power in class struggles.

These definitions collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of class, illustrating its economic, social, and cultural dimensions. By exploring these perspectives, learners can better grasp the complexity of societal structures and the relevance of class in shaping social and political dynamics.

1.2.2 Max Weber’s Concept of Class

Max Weber, a prominent sociologist and political economist, developed a nuanced understanding of class as part of his broader analysis of social stratification. His concept of class differs from the purely economic perspective of Karl Marx, incorporating a multidimensional approach that includes economic, social, and cultural factors. Weber’s ideas on class are integral to understanding the complexities of social inequality and power structures.

- Nuanced understanding of class

Weber defines class as a group of individuals who share a similar position in the economic order. According to him, class is determined by the possession of goods, opportunities for income, and the conditions of the market. He emphasizes that class is not solely based on ownership of property but also on the ability to access resources and opportunities in the market. This broader definition allows for a more nuanced understanding of social stratification, encompassing a range of economic positions and experiences.

- Ability to access resources

1.2.2.1 Components of Class

Weber identifies three key components of class that interact to shape an individual’s position in society:

- ◇ **Property Ownership:** Ownership of property, such as land, factories, or other means of production, is a crucial determinant of class. Those who own significant property often have greater economic power and influence, while those without property are

- Land, factories, or other means of production

more likely to depend on selling their labor.

- ◇ **Market Position:** The position an individual holds in the labor or goods market is another defining feature of class. For example, skilled professionals, such as doctors and engineers, have a higher market position compared to unskilled laborers. This concept highlights the role of education, skills, and credentials in determining economic opportunities.
- ◇ **Economic Interests:** Members of a class share common economic interests, such as access to wealth, income, and resources. These shared interests influence their life chances, including opportunities for education, healthcare, and upward mobility.

Class, Status, and Party

Weber's analysis of class is part of a broader framework that includes two other dimensions: status and party. Each dimension contributes to the structure of social stratification and highlights different aspects of societal power and hierarchy:

• Economic position of individuals or groups

• Lifestyle, education

- ◇ **Class (Economic Order):** Class refers to the economic position of individuals or groups, primarily determined by their market situation and property ownership. For Weber, class is an economic category, and individuals within a class share similar life chances based on their access to resources and opportunities in the market. For instance, the distinction between capitalists, professionals, and laborers reflects their varying economic positions.
- ◇ **Status (Social Order):** Status pertains to the social honor, prestige, or respect accorded to individuals or groups. Unlike class, status is rooted in social and cultural factors, such as lifestyle, education, or lineage. A person's status can be independent of their economic position. For example, a scholar may hold high status due to intellectual achievements but may not belong to the upper economic class. Status groups often exhibit exclusivity and distinctiveness, marked by shared norms and practices.
- ◇ **Party (Political Order):** Party refers to organized groups or associations that aim to influence power and decision-making processes. Parties are primarily political entities that seek to achieve specific goals,



- Political entities

often through collective action. They may represent diverse interests, including economic classes or status groups, but their primary focus is on wielding power. For example, political parties, trade unions, and advocacy groups operate within the domain of party.

Weber's framework illustrates how these three dimensions intersect and interact to shape individual and group positions within society. A wealthy entrepreneur (class) might lack cultural refinement and therefore have low social prestige (status), or a politically influential leader (party) might not belong to the upper economic class. This multidimensional perspective allows for a more comprehensive analysis of social stratification and power dynamics.

1.2.2.2 Significance of Weber's Concept of Class

Weber's concept of class has significant implications for the study of social stratification and inequality:

- Beyond the economic determinism

- Diversity of class positions

- Examination of social mobility

- Occupational stratification

- ◇ **Multidimensional Approach:** Weber's inclusion of economic, social, and political dimensions provides a comprehensive framework for understanding social inequality. This approach moves beyond the economic determinism of Marxist theory.
- ◇ **Recognition of Diversity:** By acknowledging the diversity of class positions and the role of market dynamics, Weber's theory is adaptable to various social contexts, including modern capitalist societies.
- ◇ **Analysis of Social Mobility:** Weber's focus on life chances and market opportunities allows for the examination of social mobility, highlighting how individuals can move between classes based on education, skills, and economic opportunities.
- ◇ **Foundation for Modern Sociology:** Weber's ideas have influenced contemporary sociological theories, particularly in understanding occupational stratification, consumer behavior, and the role of cultural capital.

1.2.2.3 Criticism of Weber's Concept of Class

Despite its contributions, Weber's concept of class has faced several criticisms:

- Focus on market position

- Limits the applicability

- Multidimensional nature

- Foundational in the study of social stratification

- Theory of historical materialism

- ◇ **Ambiguity in Definition:** Critics argue that Weber's definition of class is too broad and lacks the precision necessary for empirical analysis. The inclusion of multiple factors makes it challenging to delineate clear class boundaries.
- ◇ **Overemphasis on Market Position:** Some scholars contend that Weber's focus on market position and life chances downplays the significance of production relations and exploitation, which are central to Marxist theory.
- ◇ **Neglect of Class Solidarity:** Unlike Marx, Weber does not adequately address the potential for collective action and solidarity among members of a class. This omission limits the applicability of his theory to movements aimed at social change.
- ◇ **Complexity and Application:** The multidimensional nature of Weber's framework can make it difficult to apply in practical research. Critics argue that the interplay between class, status, and party often complicates the analysis of specific social phenomena.

Max Weber's concept of class offers a sophisticated and multidimensional perspective on social stratification. By integrating economic, social, and political dimensions, Weber provides valuable insights into the complexities of social inequality. However, his framework is not without its limitations, particularly in terms of its empirical application and emphasis on market dynamics. Despite these criticisms, Weber's ideas remain foundational in the study of social stratification and continue to inform contemporary sociological research.

1.2.3 Karl Marx on Class

Karl Marx's concept of class is one of the most significant contributions to the study of society and social structures. It forms the foundation of his broader theory of historical materialism and provides a lens to understand societal change and conflict. Marx's analysis of class is deeply rooted in the economic relationships that define different stages of human history, particularly in the context of capitalism. This essay explores Marx's concept of class, its criticisms, and its relevance in contemporary society.



Marx viewed class as a social relationship based on the ownership and control of the means of production. For him, classes are not defined merely by income levels or social status but by their roles in the economic system. In a capitalist society, he identified two primary classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

- *The Communist Manifesto*

The bourgeoisie comprises those who own the means of production, such as factories, land, and capital. This class controls economic resources and profits from the labor of others. On the other hand, the proletariat consists of workers who do not own the means of production and are compelled to sell their labor power to survive. The relationship between these two classes is inherently antagonistic, as the interests of the bourgeoisie in maximizing profits conflict with the interests of the proletariat in securing better wages and working conditions. As Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

- Surplus value.

Central to Marx’s theory is the concept of surplus value. This refers to the value produced by labor that exceeds the wages paid to workers. The surplus value is appropriated by the bourgeoisie as profit, which Marx considered the essence of exploitation in capitalism. He argued that this exploitation creates a deep division between the classes and leads to systemic inequalities. In his work *Capital*, Marx explained, “Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor.”

- Concept of class

Another key element of Marx’s concept of class is class consciousness. He believed that the proletariat would eventually become aware of their shared interests and the exploitative nature of capitalism. This awareness, or class consciousness, would lead to collective action aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system. Marx envisioned that this revolution would result in the establishment of a classless society, where the means of production would be communally owned, and exploitation would be eliminated. He famously stated, “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”

1.2.3.1 Criticisms of Marx’s Concept of Class

While Marx’s analysis of class has been highly influential, it has also faced significant criticisms. One of the pri-

- Economic determinism

mary critiques is the charge of economic determinism. Critics argue that Marx's theory places undue emphasis on economic factors as the sole determinants of social structure and change, neglecting the roles of culture, ideology, and other social dimensions.

- Binary nature

Another criticism is the binary nature of Marx's class analysis. By focusing on the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Marx's framework is seen as overly simplistic and unable to account for the complexities of modern class structures. For instance, the emergence of a middle class, comprising professionals, managers, and small business owners, challenges the rigid dichotomy of Marx's model.

- Neglect of individual agency

Some scholars also critique Marx's neglect of individual agency. His theory emphasizes structural forces and class dynamics, often downplaying the role of individual choices and actions in shaping societal outcomes. This has led to debates about the balance between structure and agency in understanding social phenomena.

- Revolution has not occurred

Empirical challenges to Marx's predictions have also been raised. For example, Marx anticipated the eventual collapse of capitalism and the rise of a proletarian revolution. However, capitalism has shown remarkable adaptability, and such a revolution has not occurred in the manner Marx envisioned. Instead, reforms within capitalist systems, such as labor rights, welfare programs, and regulatory mechanisms, have addressed some of the inequalities that Marx highlighted.

1.2.3.2 Relevance of Marx's Concept of Class Today

- Understanding issues

Despite these criticisms, Marx's concept of class remains relevant in understanding contemporary social and economic issues. The growing concentration of wealth and income inequality in many parts of the world underscores the enduring significance of his analysis.

- Critique of global capitalism

One area where Marx's ideas are particularly pertinent is the critique of global capitalism. In the modern era, multinational corporations dominate global markets, often exploiting cheap labor in developing countries to maximize profits. This dynamic reflects the principles of surplus value and exploitation that Marx described, albeit on a global scale. The disparities between wealthy nations and impoverished regions mirror the



class divisions Marx identified within capitalist societies.

- The wealth gap

Marx's concept of class also provides valuable insights into the persistence of economic inequality. The wealth gap between the richest and poorest segments of society has widened in recent decades, with a small elite controlling a disproportionate share of resources. This concentration of wealth and power resonates with Marx's critique of the bourgeoisie's dominance over the means of production. As he noted in *Capital*, "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutalization, and moral degradation at the opposite pole."

- Emphasis on collective action

Social movements advocating for economic justice and workers' rights continue to draw inspiration from Marx's ideas. Issues such as wage stagnation, precarious employment, and the decline of organized labor highlight the relevance of class analysis in addressing the challenges faced by workers in the 21st century. Moreover, Marx's emphasis on collective action and solidarity remains a powerful tool for mobilizing marginalized groups to demand systemic change.

- Inspire movements

Karl Marx's concept of class offers a profound analysis of the economic relationships that shape society and drive historical change. While his theory has faced criticisms for its economic determinism, binary classification, and empirical shortcomings, it continues to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of power, inequality, and exploitation. In an era marked by growing economic disparities and the challenges of global capitalism, Marx's ideas remain a vital framework for understanding and addressing the complexities of contemporary society. His vision of a classless society, though unrealized, continues to inspire movements for social justice and equality, underscoring the enduring relevance of his work.

- Influence each other

1.2.4.1 Relationship Between Caste and Class

While caste and class are distinct, they often intersect and influence each other. In India, caste has historically determined access to economic resources, education, and political power, creating a rigid hierarchy that parallels class divisions. For instance, upper-caste groups have traditionally enjoyed greater economic and social privileges, while lower-caste groups have faced systemic marginalization and poverty. Andre Béteille, a prominent sociologist, observed in his book *Caste, Class and Power* that economic changes such as

industrialization and urbanization have led to shifts in traditional caste roles, creating new class dynamics. However, caste continues to influence access to opportunities and social mobility, demonstrating its enduring relevance.

1.2.4.2 Interrelation of Caste and Class in Contemporary India

In contemporary India, the interplay between caste and class is evident in various socio-political and economic contexts. Caste mobilization has emerged as a significant factor in shaping Indian politics, particularly since the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations on reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in 1989. This development has profoundly influenced national politics and brought caste-based issues to the forefront. From a Marxist perspective, it is essential to understand how caste assertion impacts the unity of the working class. The inherited caste structure continues to shape class formation under modern capitalism. As capitalism develops within this stratification, the most exploited classes often belong to the most socially oppressed castes. Thus, the struggle against class exploitation and social oppression is inherently interconnected. This dual oppression necessitates an integrated approach to address both economic and social inequalities. As noted by thinkers and activists, the challenge lies in forging a unity among toiling masses that transcends caste divisions. The Communist movement in India has emphasized the need to integrate the fight against class exploitation with the struggle against caste-based oppression. This approach aims to strengthen the solidarity of marginalized groups and advance the cause of people's democracy.

- Advance the cause of people's democracy

1.2.4.3 Differences Between Caste and Class

While caste and class intersect in significant ways, they differ fundamentally in terms of their basis of stratification, mobility, and the factors that sustain them. These differences are crucial to understanding how each system functions in society.

- ◇ **Basis of Stratification:** Caste is primarily based on hereditary status, with individuals being born into a particular caste group that determines their social identity, occupation, and relationships. The caste system is rigid, with little scope for individuals to change their caste, regardless of their economic or



- Hereditary status

- Degree of social mobility

- Economic position and access to resources.

social achievements. In contrast, class is determined by an individual's position within the economic structure of society, particularly in relation to ownership of resources and the means of production. Class can be influenced by factors such as income, education, and occupation, and individuals can move between classes depending on their economic circumstances, abilities, and opportunities.

- ◇ **Rigidity vs. Fluidity:** One of the most significant differences between caste and class is the degree of social mobility. Caste is an inherently rigid system, often referred to as a closed stratification system. The caste into which one is born dictates their social role, occupation, and access to resources. The traditional structure of caste has historically prevented mobility, especially for those in lower castes or Dalits. On the other hand, class is more fluid, allowing for movement up or down the social ladder based on an individual's economic success or failure. Economic changes, such as increased access to education, wealth, or professional success, can facilitate upward mobility in a class-based system, though barriers still exist in terms of access to resources.
- ◇ **Cultural vs. Economic Foundations:** Caste is deeply embedded in cultural and religious traditions, particularly within Hinduism, although it also influences other religions and communities in India. It is tied to the idea of purity and pollution, and individuals are expected to adhere to specific roles based on their caste. Cultural practices, religious rituals, and social norms often reinforce caste-based distinctions. In contrast, class is primarily an economic construct, grounded in the distribution of wealth, income, and power. Class distinctions arise from the economic relations between different groups, such as those who own the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who sell their labor (the proletariat). While culture and education can influence class, the primary determinant is economic position and access to resources.
- ◇ **Local vs. Global:** Caste is a system that is largely confined to the Indian subcontinent, although it has historical roots in other parts of South Asia

- Class is a universal phenomenon

and Southeast Asia. It is deeply tied to the social and religious fabric of India, where caste-based discrimination has been institutionalized over centuries. While caste may have some parallels in other societies (e.g., racial or ethnic hierarchies), it is a unique feature of South Asian societies. In contrast, class is a universal phenomenon that exists in every society, albeit in different forms. Class distinctions are found in capitalist, socialist, and even pre-capitalist societies, although the ways in which class operates may vary. While caste operates within a specific cultural and religious context, class is a more globally applicable concept that transcends national borders.

- Class serves economic function

- ◇ **Social and Economic Functions:** Caste serves to organize society along lines of occupation, social status, and hierarchy. The caste system historically determined an individual's occupation and social duties, ensuring the division of labor within society. This division was often rigid, with certain tasks reserved for specific castes. In contrast, class serves a broader economic function, shaping the relations of production and the distribution of resources. Class divisions are linked to wealth, power, and access to opportunities, with economic exploitation often at the heart of class relations. While caste may influence economic outcomes, class is the primary driver of economic stratification and inequality in modern capitalist societies.

In summary, caste and class represent two distinct forms of social stratification. Caste is based on hereditary, cultural, and religious factors, while class is rooted in economic relationships and power structures. The caste system is rigid and localized, while class distinctions are more fluid and global in scope. Understanding these differences is essential for analyzing social inequality, particularly in the Indian context, where both caste and class continue to shape the lives of individuals and communities.

1.2.5 Role of Different Classes in Politics in India

The political landscape in India is profoundly influenced by the social stratification of its population. Various social classes, including the upper, middle, and lower, have a signifi-



- Impact on political dynamics

cant impact on political dynamics, shaping the discourse, electoral results, policy decisions, and social movements. The political involvement of these classes is not solely based on their material needs but also involves ideological concerns, social justice, and identity. Understanding the political role of these classes requires an examination of their relationship with the state, political parties, and social movements, and how they influence the political agenda.

Upper Classes and Elite Politics

In India, the upper classes -, comprising industrialists, large landowners, corporate elites, and upper-caste groups - have historically held significant sway in shaping the country's political direction. Their influence is especially evident in economic policy formulation, where they tend to benefit from market liberalization, privatization, and foreign investment policies. These groups have long supported mainstream political parties, such as the Indian National Congress (INC) and more recently the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which have catered to their interests through pro-business policies. The upper classes also exert considerable control over media, educational institutions, and cultural bodies, which helps them shape public opinion and influence government policy in a way that preserves their economic and social power. Their ideological influence is seen in the promotion of a neoliberal economic model and a vision of India as a global economic powerhouse, aligning with their material interests.

- Considerable control over media

Middle Classes and Political Mobilization

The middle class in India, consisting of professionals, salaried workers, and small business owners, has seen rapid growth in recent years, particularly in urban areas. This class has become an increasingly important political force, with its growing economic power making it a key electoral constituency. Middle-class voters are often considered decisive in elections, with political parties focusing on issues such as employment, urban development, education, healthcare, and infrastructure to attract their support. The middle class has also been a major beneficiary of economic reforms, especially in the fields of education, technology, and services. As a result, this group generally supports policies that promote economic growth, market liberalization, and globalization. This has led to a shift in political alignments, with parties like the BJP promoting pro-business policies to cater to middle-class

- Decisive in elections

aspirations. Additionally, the middle class has become more involved in social movements, particularly those concerned with governance, transparency, and civil rights. Movements like India Against Corruption have garnered significant middle-class backing, reflecting the class's desire for better governance and accountability.

Lower Classes and Political Mobilization for Social Justice

The lower classes in India, which include the rural poor, landless laborers, Dalits, tribals, and urban poor, have historically faced marginalization in the political system. However, in recent decades, these groups have become increasingly active, especially through movements advocating for social justice, economic equality, and greater political representation. The lower classes constitute a large portion of the electorate, particularly in rural areas, and political parties often appeal to them with promises of welfare programs, land reforms, and affirmative action policies. The rise of regional political parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Samajwadi Party (SP), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) has been driven by the political mobilization of Dalits, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and other marginalized communities. These parties focus on addressing caste-based discrimination and promoting economic justice. The political assertion of these communities has reshaped the national discourse, with issues such as reservations in education, employment, and politics becoming central to the political agenda. Social movements led by the lower classes, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) and various farmers' protests, have highlighted the struggles of rural and working-class communities against land acquisition, displacement, and economic exploitation.

- Movements advocating for social justice

Caste and Class in Political Mobilization

Caste plays a central role in the political mobilization of the lower classes, particularly among Dalits, backward castes, and tribals. The demand for affirmative action and reservations in education, employment, and political representation has been a significant part of the political agenda for these communities. Leaders such as B.R. Ambedkar and Mayawati have been at the forefront of advocating for Dalit empowerment, while the political mobilization of OBCs, particularly following the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, has brought caste-based politics into the mainstream. Caste-based parties have emerged as powerful political forces, influencing both

- Powerful political forces

policy and political alliances. These movements challenge existing power structures and demand greater representation and opportunities for marginalized communities. The intersection of caste and class is crucial in understanding the political dynamics of these groups, as they face both social and economic exclusion.

Urban Poor and Informal Sector Workers

The urban poor, including migrant workers, slum dwellers, and informal sector workers, represent another key constituency in Indian politics. Although often marginalized in mainstream political discourse, their struggles for basic rights, housing, and access to resources have gained increasing attention in recent years. The urban poor are primarily concerned with issues such as affordable housing, sanitation, healthcare, and employment. Political parties often address these concerns through promises of urban development, housing schemes, and job creation. The rise of informal sector labor and the precarious nature of urban employment have made the urban poor an important group for political parties focused on urbanization challenges. These groups are also involved in various social movements that advocate for housing rights and better living conditions. These movements are often led by grassroots organizations, and their demands for inclusion and recognition in the political process have added a new dimension to urban politics, highlighting issues of inequality, poverty, and social justice in rapidly growing cities.

- Demands for inclusion

- Influence policymaking and governance

The political roles of different classes in India are shaped by a combination of economic interests, social identities, and historical experiences. The upper classes, with their economic and political power, significantly influence policymaking and governance, while the middle class plays an important role in electoral outcomes and supports economic liberalization. The lower classes, particularly Dalits, tribals, and the rural poor, have become increasingly active in the political process, demanding social justice and political representation. Their struggles for equality and dignity have reshaped India's political landscape. The political engagement of these classes offers valuable insights into the complexities of India's democracy and the ongoing challenges of addressing social and economic inequalities, political exclusion, and caste-based discrimination.

1.2.6 The Concept of the New Middle Class in Indian Politics

The “New Middle Class” in India refers to a socio-economic group that has gained prominence in the wake of India’s economic liberalization in 1991. This class is distinct from the traditional middle class due to its rapid rise in the post-liberalization era, marked by higher income levels, increased consumerism, and greater access to education and global culture. The New Middle Class is often associated with urban, educated professionals engaged in sectors like information technology, services, business, and management. This socio-economic group is characterized by a growing aspiration for upward mobility, a strong embrace of market-driven ideologies, and a shift towards individual success rather than collective social welfare. The rise of this class has had significant implications for Indian politics, influencing voting patterns, political ideologies, and policy decisions.

- Influencing voting patterns

Emergence of the New Middle Class

The New Middle Class emerged as a direct consequence of India’s economic reforms in 1991, which included liberalization, privatization, and market deregulation. These reforms opened up the Indian economy to global markets, leading to an expansion of industries such as technology, telecommunications, finance, and services. The New Middle Class consists largely of urban professionals, such as IT workers, engineers, doctors, managers, and entrepreneurs, who have benefitted from these economic changes.

- Economic reforms in 1991

Scholars like **M. S. A. Rao**, in his work “**The New Middle Class in India**”, have explored how this class emerged due to both economic liberalization and changing cultural values. Rao suggests that the New Middle Class is not only a product of economic transformation but also a result of cultural shifts that align with globalized, market-driven ideologies.

Characteristics of the New Middle Class

The New Middle Class is distinguished from the older, traditional middle class in several key ways. First, it is an aspirational group, motivated by the desire for upward social mobility and material success. Unlike the older middle class, which was often more conservative and focused on stability,

- More dynamic



the New Middle Class is more dynamic and open to change. This class is typically supportive of policies that encourage free markets, entrepreneurship, and globalization.

- Highly educated

Second, the New Middle Class is highly educated, with a significant portion holding degrees in fields such as engineering, medicine, and management. This education provides the necessary skills for participation in the rapidly expanding knowledge economy, allowing them to take advantage of the opportunities created by liberalization.

- Predominantly urban

Third, this class is predominantly urban, with a strong presence in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, where sectors like IT, services, and finance are booming. Their lifestyle is characterized by increased consumption, access to modern amenities, and a growing influence of Western culture, particularly in areas like entertainment, fashion, and technology.

Political Impact of the New Middle Class

- Shift in voting behavior

The political influence of the New Middle Class in India has been significant. One of the most notable impacts is the shift in voting behavior. Members of this class are generally more politically engaged and tend to support political parties that advocate for economic liberalization, market-friendly policies, and pro-business agendas. Parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have successfully connected with this group, offering promises of national development, technological advancement, and economic growth.

- Free markets and technological progress

In her analysis, **Beverley A. Silver** in “**India’s New Middle Class: The Social and Political Impact of Economic Liberalization**”, explores how this class has shaped Indian politics by backing policies that align with neoliberal economic principles. Silver argues that the New Middle Class has been a key player in pushing the political agenda towards economic growth and development, often supporting political platforms that prioritize free markets and technological progress.

- Demanded greater transparency

Additionally, the New Middle Class is often seen as less influenced by traditional caste-based politics, which has historically been a dominant force in Indian elections. This shift has led to the rise of political issues such as governance, corruption, and economic development, rather than focusing solely on caste-based mobilization. The New Middle Class has

also been active in movements like India Against Corruption, where its members have demanded greater transparency and efficiency in governance.

- Complex role

The New Middle Class in India has become a crucial force in the political and social landscape, particularly after the economic reforms of 1991. Defined by its education, urban orientation, and aspirational values, this class has significantly influenced political discourse, advocating for market-oriented policies and economic development. However, its rise has also been met with criticism for its perceived detachment from the struggles of the poor and marginalized. Understanding the New Middle Class is essential for comprehending the changing dynamics of Indian politics, as it continues to shape the nation's political landscape. The works of scholars such as M. S. A. Rao, Beverley A. Silver, and D.R. Nagaraj provide valuable perspectives on the complex role this emerging class plays in Indian polity.

1.2.7 Globalization and the Changing Role of Class in India: A Political Analysis

- Shifts in India's class structure

Globalization has significantly impacted economies, societies, and political structures globally, and India is no exception. Following the economic liberalization in 1991, globalization has brought about substantial shifts in India's class structure, transforming political power, social mobility, and governance. This analysis delves into how globalization has reshaped class roles in India, focusing on the political ramifications, the changing social dynamics, and the implications for governance.

The Transformation of Class Structures

- More open economy

The process of globalization in India began with the economic reforms of 1991, which introduced liberalization, privatization, and market deregulation. These reforms paved the way for a more open economy, resulting in the growth of industries like technology, telecommunications, and services. The social class structure, which was once predominantly determined by occupation and caste, began to evolve as new economic opportunities emerged.

The New Middle Class became one of the defining features of this transformation. This group, primarily composed of urban professionals, such as those in IT, finance, and management,

- Significant political force

benefitted from economic liberalization. Scholars like M. S. A. Rao have noted that this class is not only a result of economic changes but also reflects a shift in cultural values, with a growing emphasis on individual success and market-driven ideologies. As a result, the New Middle Class became a significant political force, advocating for policies that promote economic growth and global integration.

- Between the wealthy and the poor

While this class has flourished, globalization has also deepened the divide between the wealthy and the poor. The rural population, especially those from marginalized communities, has not shared equally in the benefits of globalization. This has led to a widening gap between urban and rural India, with rural areas continuing to face challenges in terms of education, employment, and access to resources.

- Pro-market policies

Political Consequences of Changing Class Dynamics

The rise of the New Middle Class has had a profound impact on India's political landscape. This group, characterized by its urban, educated, and economically successful members, has become a key political constituency. They tend to support political parties that advocate for pro-market policies, economic reforms, and global integration. Parties like the BJP and Congress have sought to appeal to this demographic by promising economic growth, technological advancement, and national development.

- Shift in political priorities

The political engagement of the New Middle Class has also shifted the focus away from traditional caste-based politics. In the past, caste identity played a central role in shaping political allegiances. However, with the rise of the New Middle Class, political issues have increasingly revolved around governance, economic growth, and national development rather than caste-based mobilization. Scholars like Beverley A. Silver argue that the New Middle Class has contributed to a shift in political priorities, where issues like governance, corruption, and economic reforms have taken center stage.

- Address the inequalities

Nevertheless, the political implications of globalization are not entirely positive. While the New Middle Class has gained political influence, the rural poor and marginalized communities, particularly those from lower castes, have not benefited as much. This has given rise to new political movements advocating for social justice, affirmative action, and greater access to resources. These movements challenge

the dominance of the New Middle Class and seek to address the inequalities exacerbated by globalization.

Globalization and Social Mobility

One of the most significant effects of globalization on class in India is its impact on social mobility. The liberalization of the economy created new job opportunities, particularly in the service and technology sectors, which has enabled many urban professionals to achieve upward social mobility. This has led to a more fluid class structure, where individuals' social and economic positions are increasingly determined by their education, skills, and professional achievements.

- Impact on social mobility

However, the benefits of globalization have not been equally distributed. While those in urban areas, particularly from educated backgrounds, have enjoyed increased opportunities, the rural poor have largely been left behind. The lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities in rural areas has hindered the upward mobility of the rural population. As a result, while globalization has created new avenues for social mobility for some, it has also reinforced existing inequalities for others.

- Created new avenues for social mobility

The Role of Caste in the Era of Globalization

Although globalization has altered class dynamics, caste remains a significant factor in Indian politics. The traditional caste-based system of social stratification has not disappeared but has adapted to the new economic and political realities. The rise of the New Middle Class has led to a shift in political alignments, where caste-based politics are less prominent, and class-based interests have taken precedence.

- Rise of the New Middle Class

However, caste-based movements, particularly those advocating for the rights of Dalits and backward castes, continue to play a crucial role in Indian politics. These movements challenge the dominance of the upper castes and demand greater access to resources, education, and political representation. The intersection of caste and class has led to new forms of political identity, where caste-based groups often align with class interests to advance their political agendas.

- Intersection of caste and class

Globalization, Inequality, and Political Polarization

Globalization has led to significant economic growth in India, but it has also exacerbated inequalities. The benefits



- Exacerbated inequalities

of globalization have been disproportionately enjoyed by the urban elite and the New Middle Class, while the rural poor and marginalized communities have been left behind. This growing inequality has contributed to political polarization, as different classes and caste groups vie for political power and resources.

- Fragmented political landscape

The political parties representing the interests of the New Middle Class, such as the BJP, focus on issues like economic growth, governance, and national development. On the other hand, parties representing marginalized communities, such as the Indian National Congress and regional parties, continue to advocate for social justice, affirmative action, and the redistribution of resources. This division has led to a more fragmented political landscape, with various political parties and movements representing the interests of different social groups.

- Altered the role of class

Globalization has significantly altered the role of class in Indian politics, creating new opportunities for some while deepening inequalities for others. The rise of the New Middle Class has shifted political priorities towards economic growth, governance, and market-oriented policies, while also reducing the prominence of caste-based politics. However, the benefits of globalization have not been equally distributed, leading to the marginalization of the rural poor and other disadvantaged groups. Political polarization and new forms of social mobilization have emerged as different groups seek to address their interests. Understanding the changing role of class in the context of globalization is crucial for analyzing the future trajectory of Indian politics and the challenges it faces in promoting inclusive development and reducing inequality.

Summarized Overview

The concept of class refers to a form of social stratification based on economic status, occupation, and lifestyle, distinguished from caste by its relative fluidity. It encompasses characteristics such as inequality, mobility, and group identity, as explained by thinkers like Weber and Marx. Max Weber viewed class as one part of a broader framework including status and party, emphasizing life chances and market position. Karl Marx saw class as rooted in ownership of the means of production, highlighting class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. While both perspectives offer valuable insights, they have also faced criticisms, especially regarding their applicability to modern, complex societies. In India, caste and class often intersect, though they differ

in rigidity and origins; their relationship continues to shape social and political life. The emergence of a new middle class and the impact of globalization have reshaped class roles, especially in electoral politics and policy demands. Understanding class dynamics is essential to analyze contemporary political developments and socio-economic changes in India.

Assignments

1. Define the concept of class and explain its characteristics with examples relevant to Indian politics.
2. Compare and contrast the theoretical perspectives of Karl Marx and Max Weber on class.
3. Analyze the role of the “new middle class” in shaping the political landscape of contemporary India.
4. How do globalization and neoliberal economic policies influence class dynamics in India?
5. Discuss the intersection of class and caste in the Indian context, with references to thinkers like B.R. Ambedkar and Andre Béteille.
6. Examine the role of the working class in Indian social and political movements.
7. How has the emergence of the “upper classes” influenced economic policymaking in India?
8. Assess the challenges faced by the lower classes in achieving political representation and economic mobility in India.
9. Explore the significance of social mobility in reducing class disparities, with examples from Indian society.
10. Discuss the relationship between class politics and social justice in the context of contemporary Indian democracy.

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Suggested Reading

1. Marx, K. (1867). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* – An essential work exploring the economic foundation of class structures.
2. Weber, M. (1922). *Economy and Society* – A comprehensive analysis of class, status, and power in social stratification.
3. Dahrendorf, R. (1959). *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* – An exploration of authority and power as components of class relations.
4. Wright, E. O. (1985). *Classes* – A detailed analysis of class structures and dynamics in modern societies.
5. Béteille, A. (2003). *Equality and Inequality: Theory and Practice* – Examines the relationship between class, caste, and inequality in Indian society.
6. Chibber, V. (2014). *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* – Challenges the intersection of postcolonial theory and class dynamics in the Global South.
7. Frank, A. G. (1967). *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* – Pro-

vides insights into class under global capitalism, applicable to similar dynamics in India.

8. Deshpande, S. (2003). *Contemporary India: A Sociological View* – Discusses class and stratification in the context of modern India.
9. Harriss, J. (2005). *Middle-Class Activism and the Politics of the Informal Working Class* – Examines middle-class mobilization in India and its implications for class politics.
10. Bardhan, P. (1984). *The Political Economy of Development in India* – Analyzes class dynamics in shaping India's economic and political development.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

UNIT 3

Politics of Gender

Learning Outcomes

With the completion of the Unit, the learners will be able to:

- Assess the concept of gender equality and its political implications.
- Analyse the relation between Gender and Power
- Assess the role of the Constitution in promoting gender equality.
- Explore the changing dynamics of gender with a focus on LGBTQ+ issues.
- Examine the intersection of public policy and gender concerns with examples from Kerala.
- Critically evaluate the effectiveness of gender-related policies and movements in promoting equality.

Background

The politics of gender refers to the ways in which gender identities and relations are shaped, regulated, and contested within the political arena. It involves examining how power dynamics, social norms, and political structures impact gender roles, and how gender itself becomes a site of political struggle. In India, the politics of gender has been central to movements advocating for women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and broader social reforms. Gender-based political struggles in India have been intertwined with the fight for justice, equality, and recognition in various spheres, such as employment, education, and political representation. The Women Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve a specific percentage of seats for women in legislative bodies, is a key issue in the political discourse on gender. Despite the constitutional provisions for gender equality, the implementation of these rights remains a contentious issue. The politics of gender also addresses the evolving dynamics of gender identities, with LGBTQ+ rights becoming an increasingly prominent area of focus. Public policy in states like Kerala has been seen as progressive, with gender-sensitive policies aimed at empowering women and addressing

gender-based concerns. Overall, the politics of gender is an ongoing struggle to redefine and challenge the existing norms and structures that limit the potential of individuals based on their gender.

Keywords

Gender Equality, Gender Movements, Women Reservation Bill, Political Representation, Constitution and Gender, LGBTQ+ Rights, Public Policy, Gender Concerns

Discussion

1.3.1 Gender and Power

The concept of **Gender and Power** is central to political science, as it examines the intersection of gender identities and the distribution of power in society. Gender, understood as a set of social roles, behaviors, and expectations, plays a significant role in shaping power relations. Power, in this context, refers to the capacity to influence, control, or direct decisions, resources, and policies. The interaction between gender and power is intricate, with both elements influencing and reinforcing each other. This relationship is crucial to understanding how gender-based power structures affect individuals' experiences in areas such as political participation, access to resources, and social rights. Exploring this theme provides insights into how gendered power dynamics operate within political and social systems.

- Role in shaping power relations

Gender and Power: Relationship and Interconnection

The connection between gender and power is essential for understanding political systems and societal structures. Power is often distributed unevenly based on gender, with men historically occupying dominant roles. However, these gendered power dynamics are not fixed; they are continuously contested and transformed through social movements, legal changes, and shifts in cultural perspectives.

- Gendered power dynamics are not fixed

- Social construct

- ◇ **Social Construction of Gender:** Gender is not determined by biology but is a social construct that defines the roles, behaviors, and attributes associated with

being male, female, or other gender identities. These gender norms are shaped by cultural, economic, and political forces and play a key role in the distribution of power in society. In many cultures, these norms place men in dominant positions, while women and gender minorities are often subordinated, creating a gendered hierarchy that limits opportunities for those who do not conform to traditional gender expectations.

- Representation in decision-making

◇ **Power and Political Representation:** Gender influences political power dynamics, particularly in the representation and participation of different genders in decision-making. Despite legal frameworks that advocate for equality, women and gender minorities are frequently underrepresented in political offices and leadership roles. This reflects the broader gendered nature of power, where men tend to hold positions of authority. Initiatives like the Women Reservation Bill in India, which seeks to allocate seats for women in legislative bodies, highlight the ongoing struggle to challenge gendered power structures in politics.

- Dismantling patriarchal structures

◇ **Feminist Theory and Gendered Power:** Feminist political theory critically analyzes the gendered distribution of power, focusing on dismantling patriarchal structures that perpetuate male dominance. Feminists argue that power is often structured in ways that sustain gender inequalities, advocating for the redistribution of power to achieve gender equality. Feminist movements have been instrumental in challenging these power structures and promoting policies that support the rights of women and gender minorities.

- Evolves through social movements

◇ **Changing Power Dynamics:** The relationship between gender and power is not static; it evolves through social movements, legal reforms, and shifts in cultural attitudes. Feminist movements, LGBTQ+ rights campaigns, and other gender justice initiatives have worked to shift the balance of power by challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for equality. These movements aim to transform power structures that marginalize women and gender minorities, fostering more inclusive and equitable political and social environments.

- Barriers to gender equality

By examining how gender and power influence each other, we can gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to gender equality and work toward creating more inclusive and equitable societies. This understanding is critical for analyzing political systems, advocating for gender justice, and ensuring better representation and participation of all genders in the political process.

1.3.2 Politics of Gender Equality

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right; it is a cornerstone for building vibrant, thriving societies. In political science, gender equality goes beyond the idea of fairness - it is a key driver of economic growth, social justice, and political stability. When gender equality is realized, societies unlock the full potential of all their citizens, creating environments where everyone, regardless of gender, can contribute to and benefit from progress. The importance of gender equality is reflected in its ability to transform systems of power, improve governance, and address the inequalities that persist in various aspects of life. Understanding why gender equality matters is crucial for political science students, as it helps to uncover the dynamics of political systems, policies, and movements aimed at achieving a more just and equitable world.

- Goes beyond the idea of fairness

Political Empowerment of Women

Women's political empowerment is crucial to ensuring that decisions are credible and legitimate. When women and men share power in decision-making, policies become more inclusive and beneficial to the entire community. Gender-balanced leadership leads to more representative governance, where diverse perspectives contribute to effective policymaking.

- Policies become more inclusive

Equal participation of men and women in decision-making enhances the effectiveness of parliaments and local councils. It fosters transparency, strengthens democratic institutions, and improves public trust in governance. Studies show that when women hold political office, they prioritize issues such as education, healthcare, social welfare, and gender equality, which contribute to sustainable development.

- Fosters transparency

- Underrepresented in political institutions

Despite progress, women continue to be underrepresented in political institutions worldwide. Societal norms, economic disparities, and structural barriers often hinder their full participation. To address this, various measures such as gender

quotas, capacity-building programs, and legal reforms have been implemented in different countries. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 also emphasizes the need for gender equality in political and public life.

Promotes Social Justice and Human Rights

At its core, gender equality is about ensuring that every individual, irrespective of gender, enjoys the same rights and opportunities. It is a fundamental human right enshrined in international agreements like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Gender equality ensures that no one is discriminated against based on their gender, fostering a more just and equitable society. When people are treated equally, regardless of their gender, it strengthens the foundation of social justice.

- Same rights and opportunities

Enhances Economic Growth and Development

Gender equality is closely linked to economic progress. Research has shown that when women and gender minorities have equal access to education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities, economies grow more rapidly and sustainably. By ensuring that all individuals can contribute fully to the economy, societies can tap into the potential of all their citizens. Equal participation in the workforce and access to leadership positions lead to greater innovation, improved productivity, and diverse perspectives, all of which enhance economic performance at both the national and global levels.

- Linked to economic progress

Strengthens Political Participation and Democracy

Gender equality is crucial for the functioning of a healthy democracy. When all genders have equal access to political participation, including voting, representation, and leadership roles, democracy becomes more inclusive and reflective of society's diverse needs. Gender-balanced representation ensures that policies and decisions address the concerns of all citizens. Moreover, the active participation of women and gender minorities in politics can bring fresh perspectives to critical issues such as healthcare, education, and social welfare, which often have significant gendered dimensions.

- Gender-balanced representation

Reduces Poverty and Inequality

Gender inequality is a major contributor to poverty and social



- Proportionately affected by poverty

exclusion. Women and gender minorities are disproportionately affected by poverty due to limited access to education, healthcare, and economic resources. Ensuring gender equality can break the cycle of poverty by providing equal opportunities for all. Gender equality in education, for example, has been shown to significantly improve economic and social outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Empowering women and marginalized genders enables them to contribute to the development of their families and communities, thereby reducing poverty.

- Limit access to healthcare

Improves Health and Well-being

Gender equality is essential for improving health outcomes across societies. Gendered power imbalances often limit access to healthcare, particularly for women and gender minorities. Promoting gender equality in healthcare access, education, and decision-making can improve overall health and well-being. For instance, ensuring equal access to reproductive health services for women and gender minorities can reduce maternal mortality rates and enhance their quality of life. Furthermore, gender equality also promotes mental health by challenging harmful gender norms and reducing the stigma associated with gender-based violence.

- Sustainable Development Goals

Global Commitment to Sustainable Development

Gender equality is integral to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is not only a goal in itself but also a catalyst for achieving other SDGs, such as poverty reduction, quality education, clean water, and economic growth. By addressing gender disparities, societies can make progress on a range of social, economic, and environmental issues that are critical for sustainable development.

- Came into effect in 1950

1.3.3 Indian Constitution and Gender Equality

The Indian Constitution, which came into effect in 1950, is a landmark document that enshrines the core principles of equality, justice, and freedom for all citizens, including women and gender minorities. It provides a comprehensive framework aimed at fostering gender equality in India, reflecting the nation's dedication to dismantling the deeply rooted patriarchal

structures that have historically marginalized women. Beyond guaranteeing equal rights, the Constitution outlines preventive measures to address and eradicate gender-based discrimination. The debates in the Constituent Assembly, along with the provisions enshrined in the Constitution, clearly reflect a commitment to gender equality, though challenges persist in fully realizing these ideals.

Constitutional Provisions for Gender Equality

The Indian Constitution includes several provisions that directly address gender equality, ensuring that women and gender minorities are granted equal rights and opportunities. Key provisions such as Articles 14, 15, and 16 ensure equality before the law, protection from discrimination, and equal access to public employment, while Articles 39(a) and 39(d) focus on social and economic justice for women.

- Equal rights and opportunities

Article 14 - Right to Equality guarantees that no person shall be denied equality before the law or equal protection of the laws, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, are treated equally under the law. This provision forms the cornerstone of gender equality in India and prohibits gender-based discrimination by the state.

- Equality before the law

Article 15 - Prohibition of Discrimination prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Clause (3) of this article allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, recognizing the need for affirmative action to address the historical disadvantages faced by women.

- Affirmative action

Article 16 - Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment ensures that no citizen shall be discriminated against in matters related to employment or appointment to any office under the State based on sex. This provision has been crucial in enabling women to access public sector jobs and participate in the workforce.

- Employment or appointment

Article 39A of the Constitution of India guarantees equal justice and free legal aid to all citizens as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). It was added through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1976 to ensure that justice is not denied due to economic or other disabilities.

- Equal justice

Article 39D of the Constitution of India states that men



- Equal pay for equal work

and women should receive equal pay for equal work. This provision reinforces the principle of gender equality in wages and is also part of the Directive Principles of State Policy. It aims to eliminate wage discrimination and promote economic justice.

- Humane working conditions

Article 42 - Provision for Just and Humane Conditions of Work directs the state to ensure just and humane working conditions, including maternity relief, which is vital for women, ensuring that they are protected in the workplace and can balance family responsibilities with employment.

1.3.3.1 Constituent Assembly Debates and the Idea of Gender Equality

- Equal rights for women

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution through its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties, and directive principles of state policy. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments that commit to ensuring equal rights for women.

- CEDAW

A key milestone in this commitment was India's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. This convention serves as an international bill of rights for women, obligating member states to take appropriate measures to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote women's empowerment.

- Dynamic exchange of views

The debates in the Constituent Assembly regarding gender equality were characterized by a dynamic exchange of views, highlighting the complexities of addressing gender issues in post-colonial India. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who played a central role in drafting the Constitution, was a strong advocate for women's rights and gender equality. He argued that the Constitution should not merely guarantee formal equality but also actively address the socio-cultural disadvantages that women faced. Ambedkar believed that legal provisions for equality should be accompanied by social reforms to dismantle the entrenched patriarchy and caste-based discrimination. His approach was based on the belief that gender equality was essential not only for justice but also for the nation's overall progress. He stressed the importance of recognizing women's rights in both public and private spheres, advocating for their

empowerment through legal protection and social reforms.

However, the debates also revealed a tension between progressive ideals and the conservative social realities of India at the time. Some members, especially those from rural or traditional backgrounds, raised concerns about the practical implications of implementing gender equality. They argued that Indian society, deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions, was not yet ready for full gender equality. Some feared that such changes could disrupt social norms and destabilize family structures. As a result, there was support for gradual reforms that would allow for a more measured transition towards gender equality. This led to the inclusion of provisions like Article 15(3), which allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, seen as a way to address the immediate needs of women, particularly in education, employment, and health, while acknowledging the slow pace of social change.

- Destabilize family structures

Article 51A(e) – It is a fundamental duty of every citizen to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all people of India, transcending religious, linguistic, regional, or sectional diversities. It also includes the duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

- Promote harmony

Article 243D(3) – Not less than one-third of the total seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women. This includes the reservation of seats for women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). These reserved seats are to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

- Seats reserved for women

Despite these differences, the Constituent Assembly was united in its commitment to gender equality. The debates resulted in a Constitution that enshrined the principle of equality for all citizens, with specific provisions aimed at promoting the welfare and rights of women. The discussions also highlighted the understanding that gender equality could not be achieved in isolation but required a holistic approach that included legal, social, and economic reforms. The final Constitution sought to balance the ideals of gender equality with the realities of Indian society, laying the groundwork for future policies and laws aimed at empowering women and ensuring their rights. Though the debates reflected varying views, the outcome was a Constitution that embodied a shared vision of a more just and equal society, where women could fully participate in the political, social, and economic life of the nation.

- Welfare and rights of women



1.3.3.2 Preventive Measures and Legal Provisions

- Several laws and policies

The preventive measures outlined in the Constitution go beyond the promise of equality and aim to tackle the specific challenges faced by women in Indian society. Several laws and policies have been enacted to implement these provisions and promote gender equality.

- Addressing gender-based violence

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) provides a legal framework to protect women from domestic violence, covering physical, emotional, and economic abuse. This law represents a significant step in addressing gender-based violence, which has been a persistent issue in India.

- Ensures maternity leave

The Maternity Benefit Act (1961) ensures maternity leave and benefits for women in both the organized and unorganized sectors, allowing women to balance work and family responsibilities without fear of losing their livelihood.

- Equal pay for equal work

The Equal Remuneration Act (1976) mandates equal pay for equal work, ensuring that women receive the same wages as men for performing the same tasks in both public and private sectors.

- Prevent child marriages

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) aims to prevent child marriages, which disproportionately affect young girls, depriving them of education and economic opportunities. The law sets the legal age for marriage at 18 for women and 21 for men.

- Reservations in local governance

Reservations for Women: The Constitution allows for reservations in local governance (Panchayats and Municipalities), and there have been ongoing debates about the reservation of seats for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. The **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)** mandated 33% reservation for women in local bodies, which has resulted in greater political participation of women at the grassroots level.

- Reflect a shared commitment

The Indian Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality through various provisions, ensuring that women and gender minorities are granted equal rights and opportunities. The debates in the Constituent Assembly reflect a shared commitment to addressing the historical and social challenges faced by women while recognizing the need for gradual reforms. Despite these constitutional guarantees, the full realization

of gender equality in India remains a work in progress, as societal norms and systemic barriers continue to impede women's empowerment. However, the Constitution provides a robust legal framework that, if fully implemented, can lead to a more equitable society. The preventive measures described in the Constitution, along with subsequent legal provisions, have played a crucial role in advancing gender equality, but ongoing efforts are required to overcome entrenched gender biases and ensure that women can fully enjoy their rights and opportunities.

1.3.4 Issues of Political Representation of Women and the Women's Reservation Bill

The political representation of women in India has been a topic of ongoing discussion and concern since the nation's independence. While the Indian Constitution guarantees equality and the right to engage in political life, women's representation in the political sphere remains disproportionately low. Despite some advancements, women continue to face numerous challenges in participating in political decision-making, stemming from cultural, social, and institutional obstacles. The Women's Reservation Bill, aimed at addressing these issues, has become a focal point in the debate surrounding women's political representation.

- Face numerous challenges

Barriers to Political Representation

The underrepresentation of women in Indian politics is influenced by several key factors. One of the primary reasons is the deeply ingrained patriarchal social norms, which often restrict women's roles to the domestic sphere. This societal mindset results in limited support for women pursuing political careers, both from their families and society at large. As a result, women frequently encounter significant opposition when attempting to engage in politics, as traditional gender roles discourage their involvement in public life.

- Encounter significant opposition

Furthermore, the political landscape in India has historically been dominated by male politicians, making it difficult for women to break into political spaces. Women also face challenges related to the lack of financial resources, political connections, and access to influential networks, all of which are crucial for securing political positions. Additionally, violence and intimidation, particularly in rural areas, serve as further deterrents for women considering political participation. These

- Dominated by male politicians



obstacles have contributed to the continued underrepresentation of women in legislative bodies, despite the fact that women constitute half of the population.

1.3.4.1 The Women's Reservation Bill

The Women's Reservation Bill, formally known as the **Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill**, seeks to reserve 33% of the seats in the Indian Parliament and State Legislatures for women. Initially introduced in 1996, the Bill has been the subject of ongoing debate and discussion. Its primary goal is to enhance the representation of women in political decision-making bodies and to promote gender equality in political participation.

- Initially introduced in 1996

The Women's Reservation Bill proposes to reserve one-third of the total seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament) and State Assemblies for women. This reservation would apply to both general and reserved constituencies, ensuring that women have a substantial presence in legislative bodies. By increasing women's political participation, the Bill aims to introduce gender-sensitive perspectives into the legislative process and foster policies that address the unique needs and concerns of women.

- Gender-sensitive perspectives

Political and Social Discourse

The Women's Reservation Bill has generated a wide range of responses from political parties, social groups, and gender activists. Proponents of the Bill argue that it is crucial for achieving gender equality within India's political system. They assert that without significant female representation in legislative bodies, issues affecting women - such as violence, education, healthcare, and employment - are unlikely to receive the attention they deserve. Advocates also believe that women's participation in politics will empower them socially and economically, challenging the patriarchal structures that dominate the political arena.

- Women's Reservation

However, the Bill has faced opposition from several political factions. Some parties, particularly those with significant representation of women from lower social classes, have raised concerns about the potential shortcomings of the reservation system. They argue that it may not benefit women from marginalized communities and could lead to the dominance

- Empowering women

of women from elite or upper-caste backgrounds in the reserved seats, perpetuating existing inequalities. Additionally, concerns have been raised about political dynasties using the reservation system to field women candidates as proxies, thereby undermining the Bill's intent of empowering women in politics.

1.3.5 LGBTQ+ and the Changing Landscape of Gender Rights

The LGBTQ+ community includes a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender minorities. In recent decades, there has been notable progress in the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights, reflecting a shift towards a broader understanding of gender and sexuality. This evolving view challenges traditional definitions of gender, which have historically been limited to binary categories of male and female. As societal attitudes evolve, there is increasing recognition of the fluid and spectrum-based nature of gender identities, expanding the conversation around gender rights beyond conventional boundaries.

- Recognition of LGBTQ+ rights

The Historical Struggle for LGBTQ+ Rights

For much of history, LGBTQ+ individuals have faced societal exclusion, discrimination, and legal penalties. In India, one of the most significant milestones in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights occurred in 2018 when the Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality by striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This ruling marked a major victory for the LGBTQ+ community, signaling a shift in legal perspectives and opening doors for further recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. However, this legal progress is only one part of the broader struggle for full acceptance and equality, as LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face discrimination in various aspects of life, such as employment, healthcare, and education.

- Societal exclusion

The movement for LGBTQ+ rights is not just about ending criminalization but also ensuring equal opportunities for social, economic, and political participation. This includes combating discrimination, advocating for equal access to services, and addressing violence and hate crimes targeting LGBTQ+ individuals. Additionally, recognizing and respecting gender diversity, including non-binary and transgender identities, is

- Combating discrimination



critical to advancing gender rights in a more inclusive manner.

Non-Binary Identities and Gender Fluidity

A crucial development in the understanding of gender rights has been the recognition of non-binary and gender-fluid identities. Traditional notions of gender, which have been based on a binary framework of male and female, are increasingly being challenged. Today, gender is understood as a spectrum, with individuals identifying as male, female, both, neither, or a combination of these categories. This shift is reflected in the growing acceptance of transgender and non-binary individuals, whose gender identities do not conform to the gender norms typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.

- Gender-fluid identities

Transgender Rights and Legal Acknowledgment

Transgender individuals, whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, have been at the forefront of advocating for gender rights. Legal recognition of transgender people and their right to self-identify is an essential part of the evolving concept of gender rights. In India, the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** was a significant step toward recognizing the rights of transgender individuals. The law ensures the right to self-identify gender, prohibits discrimination in areas like employment and healthcare, and guarantees access to social welfare programs.

- Gender rights

Despite these legal advancements, transgender individuals still face significant challenges, including social stigma, violence, and discrimination. Many transgender people encounter difficulties in accessing education, healthcare, and employment, and are often subjected to physical and emotional abuse. The fight for transgender rights is ongoing, with activists calling for further reforms to ensure that transgender individuals are fully integrated into society and afforded the same rights and protections as others.

- Social stigma

Intersectionality and Gender Rights

Understanding gender rights through the lens of intersectionality is crucial to grasping the complexities of the issue. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals experience discrimination and oppression based on multiple, interconnected identities, such as gender, sexuality, race, caste, class, and disability. For LGBTQ+ individuals, gender rights are not just

- Social inequality

about gender identity or sexual orientation, but also about how these identities intersect with other forms of social inequality.

- Social factors

For instance, LGBTQ+ individuals from marginalized communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, and people with disabilities, often face compounded discrimination that limits their access to resources and opportunities. As a result, the struggle for gender rights must also address the intersections of gender with other social factors to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ+ community are not overlooked.

- Diversity of gender identities

The evolving understanding of gender rights is central to the ongoing movement for LGBTQ+ rights. As societies become more open to recognizing the fluidity and diversity of gender identities, the fight for gender equality extends to include the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. Legal recognition, social acceptance, and the dismantling of discriminatory practices are all essential steps in achieving true gender equality. While significant progress has been made, challenges persist, and the journey toward full recognition and protection of LGBTQ+ rights continues. The evolving concept of gender rights advocates for a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable society, where all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, can live freely and with dignity.

- Inclusivity and social justice

LGBTQ+ Rights in Kerala

Kerala has been at the forefront of LGBTQ+ rights in India, making significant strides toward inclusivity and social justice. After Tamil Nadu, Kerala became one of the first states in the country to introduce a comprehensive transgender welfare policy in 2016. This policy aimed to promote the social, economic, and educational empowerment of transgender individuals and ensure their full participation in society.

- Free gender-affirmative surgery

As part of this initiative, the Kerala government proposed free gender-affirmative surgery in government hospitals, recognizing the medical needs of transgender individuals. The state also introduced scholarships for transgender students, skill development programs, and employment opportunities to improve their socio-economic conditions.

In addition, Kerala was the first state to open India's first transgender school, Sahaj International, providing a safe learning environment for transgender students who faced



- First transgender school

discrimination in conventional schools. The government has also worked on housing projects and self-employment schemes to support LGBTQ+ individuals in achieving financial independence.

- Sensitize society

Kerala has also taken steps to sensitize society and law enforcement agencies about LGBTQ+ issues. Awareness campaigns, gender-neutral policies, and inclusive healthcare initiatives have contributed to making the state more LGBTQ+ friendly. The state's progressive stance has encouraged other regions in India to implement similar measures, marking a significant step toward equality and dignity for the LGBTQ+ community.

1.3.6 Public Policy and Gender Concerns: Insights from Kerala

- Various initiatives

Kerala, a state located in the southern part of India, is often recognized as a pioneer in implementing progressive social policies and advancing gender equality. The state's remarkable achievements in literacy, healthcare, and gender development are a result of its commitment to inclusive public policies. The government of Kerala has played a crucial role in addressing gender concerns through various initiatives aimed at empowering women, improving their access to essential resources, and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes. These public policies have contributed significantly to challenging traditional gender roles, creating an environment that allows women to flourish in multiple sectors of society.

1.3.6.1 Kudumbashree: A Comprehensive Approach to Women's Empowerment

- Launched in 1998

One of the most notable public policy initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in Kerala is **Kudumbashree**, a state-run program that was launched in 1998. The name "Kudumbashree" translates to "prosperity of the family" in Malayalam, and it is a holistic community-driven initiative designed to foster the economic, social, and political empowerment of women, particularly in rural areas. The program focuses on uplifting women by providing them with access to microcredit, skill development opportunities, and support for entrepreneurial ventures.

Kudumbashree operates through a network of neighborhood

- Neighborhood groups

groups (NHGs), which are established at the grassroots level. These groups serve as the foundation of the program, offering a platform for women to unite, pool resources, and collaborate to improve their economic and social conditions. By encouraging women to work collectively, Kudumbashree has helped many rural women engage in income-generating activities, attain financial independence, and assert their rights within their families and communities.

- Maternal and child health

1.3.6.2 Other Gender-Focused Public Policies in Kerala

Apart from Kudumbashree, Kerala has implemented several other policies aimed at advancing gender equality. These policies span various sectors, including education, healthcare, and political participation. Kerala has made significant progress in providing equal educational opportunities for girls, with the state achieving near gender parity in literacy rates. Additionally, the government has introduced numerous health initiatives that focus on improving maternal and child health, which have contributed to the state's impressive life expectancy and low maternal mortality rates.

- Domestic violence

1.3.6.3 Challenges and the Path Ahead

Despite the successes of Kerala's public policies in advancing gender equality, challenges persist. Women, especially in rural areas, continue to face issues such as domestic violence, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and underrepresentation in higher levels of political decision-making. While Kudumbashree has empowered many women economically, some barriers to achieving full financial independence remain, particularly for women from marginalized communities.

- Public policy

The experience of Kerala in addressing gender concerns through public policy offers valuable lessons for other states and countries striving to achieve gender equality and empower women. Through initiatives like Kudumbashree, Kerala has made significant strides in improving the socio-economic conditions of women, particularly in rural areas. While challenges remain, Kerala's approach to gender-focused public policy presents a model for creating an inclusive society where women can thrive economically, socially, and politically. The state's efforts highlight the importance of government intervention in empowering women and ensuring their rights are protected.



Summarized Overview

Gender is a social construct that influences power relations and access to opportunities across societies, often privileging one group over another. The interconnection between gender and power is central to understanding inequality and the need for inclusive governance. The Indian Constitution upholds gender equality, supported by debates in the Constituent Assembly and strengthened by legal safeguards. Despite this, women face underrepresentation in politics, leading to demands like the Women's Reservation Bill. Gender justice now includes the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, who continue to struggle for social and legal recognition. Kerala has been a progressive space, particularly in advancing LGBTQ+ rights and addressing gender concerns through public policy. However, gaps remain in implementation and societal attitudes, posing challenges to equality. A gender-just democracy demands continued political will, inclusive laws, and social transformation.

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of gender and its sociopolitical implications in Indian politics.
2. Discuss the significance of gender representation in Indian political institutions.
3. Evaluate the impact of patriarchy on women's political participation in India.
4. How does the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender influence women's empowerment in India?
5. Examine the key provisions of Indian laws and policies aimed at addressing gender inequality.
6. Investigate the role of women in grassroots politics and local governance in India.
7. Assess the challenges faced by women in entering and sustaining roles in Indian politics.
8. Discuss the role of media in shaping perceptions of gender and politics in Indian society.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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BLOCK 2

Marginalization in India

UNIT 1

Marginalization of Dalits and Adivasis

Learning Outcomes

With the completion of the unit the learners will be able to:

- understand the concept and dimensions of marginalization in the Indian context.
- analyze the nature and types of marginalization experienced by Dalits and Adivasis.
- assess the historical and socio-political status of Dalits and Adivasis in India.
- identify key issues faced by Dalits, including caste discrimination and social exclusion.
- explore the challenges faced by Adivasis, including land alienation and cultural erosion.
- examine the provisions of the Indian Constitution for safeguarding marginalized sections.
- evaluate efforts to prevent social exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis.
- analyze the impact of globalization on the marginalization of Dalits and Adivasis and their movements for social justice.

Background

The caste system in India has historically marginalised Dalits and Adivasis, denying them equal access to resources, rights, and dignity. Despite constitutional safeguards, caste-based discrimination remains a significant social and political challenge. Electoral politics in India is deeply influenced by caste identities, shaping party strategies and voter behavior. The rise of caste-based political parties reflects efforts toward greater representation, yet also reinforces caste divisions. Reservations have enabled social mobility but continue to provoke debates and tensions. Caste-based violence and exclusion still affect many communities, highlighting gaps in justice and equality. Contemporary developments like Sanskritisation show how caste identities evolve in response to social change. This unit explores these dynamics to understand the continuing impact of caste on Indian democracy.



Keywords

Marginalization, Social Exclusion, Dalits, Adivasis, Caste Discrimination, Land Alienation, Social Justice, Globalization, Indian Constitution, Cultural Erosion

Discussion

Marginalization is a multifaceted and systemic process by which certain groups are excluded from full participation in social, economic, and political life. In the Indian context, Dalits and Adivasis have been historically marginalized through deeply entrenched caste hierarchies and socio-political structures. This marginalization has manifested in restricted access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion. Dalits, often victims of caste-based discrimination, have been subjected to practices like untouchability and violence, while Adivasis face challenges related to land alienation, cultural displacement, and exploitation of natural resources.

The Indian Constitution has laid a strong foundation to protect the rights of these marginalized groups through provisions such as reservations in education and employment, as well as safeguards against discrimination. However, these measures have met with varying degrees of success due to societal resistance, lack of proper implementation, and evolving challenges in a globalized world. This chapter seeks to explore the complexities of marginalization, the socio-economic status of Dalits and Adivasis, and the role of movements aimed at achieving social justice and equity. By understanding these dimensions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the ongoing struggles and efforts for inclusion in Indian society.

- Social justice and equity

2.1.1 Understanding Marginalisation

Marginalisation is the process by which certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded from mainstream social, economic, and political activities, pushing them to the fringes of society. This exclusion denies them access to resources, opportunities, and meaningful participation in societal development. Marginalisation is a global issue that varies across historical, cultural, and political contexts, often perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

- Excluded from mainstream social

Peter Leonard explained marginality as a state of being excluded from the mainstream of productive or social reproductive activities. The Encyclopedia of Public Health defines marginalisation as the act of placing individuals or groups in the margins, thereby excluding them from privileges and power central to societal functioning. According to Laitin, marginalisation is a degrading condition that undermines economic well-being, human dignity, and physical security. Ghana S. Gurung and Michael Kollmair highlighted that marginalisation represents struggles for access to resources and full participation in social life. These definitions underscore that marginalisation is not merely exclusion but also a dynamic process influenced by societal norms and power structures.

- Privileges and power

In India, marginalisation manifests in multiple ways. Dalits, for instance, have historically been subjected to caste-based exclusion, restricting their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Tribal communities, often displaced due to development projects, face marginalisation through the loss of traditional livelihoods and insufficient integration into mainstream society. Women encounter systemic barriers rooted in patriarchal norms, limiting their roles in political, economic, and social spheres. These examples illustrate how marginalisation operates as a multidimensional and deeply entrenched phenomenon.

- Caste-based exclusion

2.1.1.1 Nature of Marginalisation

Marginalisation is a complex, multifaceted process shaped by historical, cultural, social, and political factors. Its nature can be understood through several dimensions:

Marginalisation is inherently multidimensional, affecting social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of life. For example, caste-based discrimination in India excludes Dalits from education, employment, and social interactions, highlighting the interconnected nature of these dimensions. This exclusion is not static but evolves over time and varies by context.

- Education, employment

The process is often intergenerational, where disadvantages faced by one generation are passed on to the next. Children in marginalised communities, such as Scheduled Tribes, frequently inherit systemic barriers faced by their parents, perpetuating poverty and exclusion. Marginalisation is also intersectional, where overlapping identities amplify exclusion.



- Affirmative action

Political systems play a critical role in influencing marginalisation. In democracies like India, policies such as affirmative action aim to address systemic exclusion. However, the effectiveness of these measures is uneven, as seen in the limited political representation of women and minorities. Additionally, marginalisation often intensifies at different stages of life. Elderly individuals, for example, face increasing exclusion due to declining economic independence and societal neglect.

- Interconnected forms

2.1.1.2 Types of Marginalisation

Marginalisation manifests in interconnected forms, which often overlap and reinforce each other. While it can be broadly categorised, the boundaries between these types remain fluid, reflecting its multifaceted nature.

- Societal networks

Social marginalisation refers to exclusion from societal networks, opportunities, and interactions. In rural India, Dalits are often ostracised from community events and denied access to public spaces. This form of exclusion leads to stigma, low self-esteem, and limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Similarly, tribal communities face social exclusion due to their unique cultural practices, which are undervalued by mainstream society.

- Economic resources

Economic marginalisation occurs when individuals or groups are denied access to economic resources and opportunities. Landless agricultural labourers and informal urban workers in India exemplify this exclusion. Women, too, face economic marginalisation, earning significantly less than men for similar work and being underrepresented in high-paying jobs. This exacerbates poverty and limits upward mobility, creating cycles of deprivation.

- Decision-making processes

Political marginalisation involves exclusion from decision-making processes and political representation. In India, women's participation in politics remains disproportionately low, with underrepresentation in legislative bodies and leadership roles. Ethnic minorities and migrant workers also face barriers to political participation, marginalising them further from policies affecting their lives. This exclusion denies individuals and groups the ability to influence governance and access social and economic benefits.

Cultural marginalisation involves the devaluation or suppression of a group's cultural identity and practices. Tribal

- Cultural identity

languages and traditions in India are often overshadowed by dominant cultural narratives, leading to a loss of heritage and identity. Religious minorities face challenges in practicing their beliefs freely, particularly in regions where the majority religion dominates public life. This erosion of cultural diversity often results in further social and economic exclusion.

- Historically disadvantaged

2.1.2 Status of Dalits and Adivasis in India

Dalits and Adivasis, categorized constitutionally as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), are among the most historically disadvantaged groups in India. Their marginalization stems from deeply rooted social hierarchies, systemic exclusion, and political underrepresentation. Despite constitutional protections and targeted interventions, these communities face significant barriers to achieving social equity and inclusion. This section explores their historical context, constitutional safeguards, demographics, socio-economic conditions, and challenges in education, employment, and political representation.

- Political underrepresentation

Dalits and Adivasis, categorized constitutionally as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), are among the most historically disadvantaged groups in India. Their marginalization stems from deeply rooted social hierarchies, systemic exclusion, and political underrepresentation. Despite constitutional protections and targeted interventions, these communities face significant barriers to achieving social equity and inclusion. This section explores their historical context, constitutional safeguards, demographics, and current socio-economic conditions.

- Caste-based oppression

2.1.2.1 Historical Context

The caste system, entrenched over centuries, relegated Dalits to the lowest social strata. This system enforced untouchability, excluded them from shared spaces, and restricted them to menial labor such as waste disposal and sanitation. The term “Dalit,” meaning oppressed, symbolizes resistance to caste-based oppression. Adivasis, considered India’s indigenous people, traditionally lived independently, coexisting with nature. However, colonial and post-colonial policies disrupted their way of life through forced land acquisition, exploitation of resources, and developmental displacement.

Constitutional Provisions and Safeguards

India’s Constitution, enacted in 1950, offers comprehensive



- Comprehensive safeguards

safeguards for Dalits and Adivasis. Article 17 explicitly abolishes untouchability, while Articles 15(4) and 16(4) enable affirmative action in education and employment. Article 46 directs the state to prioritize the educational and economic advancement of SCs and STs. Additionally, Articles 330 and 332 ensure reserved seats for these groups in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

- Fifth and Sixth Schedules

For Adivasis, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution outline special governance structures for tribal areas, providing autonomy and protecting their cultural and economic interests. The Forest Rights Act, 2006, further aims to restore the rights of tribal communities over their traditional forest lands.

- Socio-economic deprivation

Demographics and Socio-Economic Status

As per the 2011 Census, Dalits constitute 16.6% of India's population, approximately 166 million individuals, while Adivasis make up 8.6%, or roughly 104 million people. Predominantly residing in rural areas, Adivasis are concentrated in forested and hilly regions of states like Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Jharkhand. Despite their significant numbers, both groups face severe socio-economic deprivation.

- Displacement

Dalits have historically faced systemic exclusion from land ownership, leaving them economically dependent on low-paying labor and manual jobs. Adivasis, while traditionally land-dependent, have been forcibly displaced due to industrial projects and large-scale development initiatives. This displacement has led to a significant loss of cultural and social identity. Both groups report low asset ownership, perpetuating cycles of poverty.

- Inadequate infrastructure

Educational attainment remains a critical issue, with Dalits showing a literacy rate of 66.1% in 2011, compared to the national average of 74%. Adivasis fare worse, with a literacy rate of just 58.9%. Additionally, barriers in access to quality education include inadequate infrastructure, discrimination in schools, and irrelevance of curricula to tribal and Dalit contexts. Employment opportunities are also limited, with these communities often relegated to unorganized and exploitative sectors. In political representation, although reserved seats exist for SCs and STs, meaningful participation and decision-making power remain restricted due to systemic inequities.

- Lowest asset ownership

In education, SC and ST communities lag behind national averages. The literacy rate for Dalits was 66.1% in 2011, compared to the national average of 74%. Adivasis fared worse, with a literacy rate of 58.9%. Economically, Dalits possess the lowest asset ownership, and Adivasis endure chronic poverty due to displacement from their ancestral lands.

- Manual scavenging

Persisting Discrimination and Violence

Discrimination against Dalits and Adivasis remains pervasive despite constitutional protections. In rural India, Dalits are often excluded from shared resources such as wells, places of worship, and cremation grounds, while Adivasis face eviction from their ancestral lands in the name of development projects. Practices like manual scavenging persist among Dalits, reflecting the enduring stigmatization linked to caste.

- Atrocities against SCs and STs

Violence against these communities is alarmingly common. Over 40,000 cases of atrocities against SCs and STs were reported in 2016, by the National Crimes Records Bureau including physical assaults, land-grabbing incidents, and systemic exploitation. Women from these communities bear the brunt of such violence, with high rates of sexual assault and limited access to justice due to systemic biases in law enforcement and judiciary. Furthermore, developmental displacement often leads to heightened vulnerabilities, including trafficking and exploitation, particularly among Adivasi women and children.

- Caste-based discrimination

Dalits continue to face caste-based discrimination, especially in rural areas, where practices such as segregated water sources, exclusion from temples, and manual scavenging persist. Adivasis, too, are marginalized through land alienation caused by mining, deforestation, and large-scale development projects.

2.1.3 Issues Faced by Dalits

Dalits confront entrenched barriers to social, economic, and political empowerment, rooted in the caste system and sustained by structural inequalities.

- Untouchability

Social Discrimination and Untouchability

Despite legal prohibitions, untouchability remains widespread. In rural areas, Dalits are barred from using common resources like wells and temples, while schools often segregate



Dalit children or deny them mid-day meals served by upper-caste staff. In urban settings, they face subtle discrimination in housing and employment, with caste identity often determining access to opportunities.

Violence and Atrocities

Violence against Dalits is pervasive, including crimes such as lynching, sexual assault, and land usurpation. Many cases remain unreported due to fear of retaliation. Weak law enforcement and caste biases in the judiciary exacerbate their vulnerability. Dalit women are particularly at risk, frequently subjected to gender-based violence and systemic exploitation.

- Sexual assault

Economic Exploitation

Most Dalits remain confined to low-paying, menial jobs, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Land ownership among Dalits is minimal, leaving many as bonded laborers or dependent on exploitative work arrangements. Economic advancement is further hindered by limited access to financial credit and resources.

- Menial jobs

Educational Challenges

While reservations have improved enrolment rates, Dalit students continue to face challenges in accessing quality education. Discrimination by teachers and peers, coupled with poor infrastructure in Dalit-majority schools, leads to high dropout rates.

- Discrimination by teachers

Political Marginalization

Although political reservations guarantee representation, Dalit leaders often lack decision-making power, serving as nominal representatives under the control of dominant political entities. This restricts their ability to advocate for genuine community interests.

- Lack decision-making power,

2.1.4 Issues Faced by Adivasis

Adivasis encounter distinct challenges tied to their socio-cultural identity, geographical isolation, and systemic marginalization. These are further exacerbated by developmental policies that neglect their rights.

Alienation from Land and Resources

The forced displacement of Adivasis due to industrial

- Forced displacement

projects, mining operations, and infrastructure development is a critical issue. Compensation for such land acquisitions is often inadequate, failing to account for the cultural and social losses incurred. Many Adivasis are pushed into urban slums or precarious labor, disrupting their traditional lifestyles. Similarly, Dalits face systemic exclusion from land ownership, with disputes often escalating into violent conflicts.

- Cultural marginalization

Cultural Erosion

Mainstream cultural dominance has eroded Adivasi traditions, languages, and practices. Indigenous knowledge systems, essential for sustainable living, are disregarded as outdated. This cultural marginalization profoundly affects their social identity and cohesion.

- Poor health outcomes

Health and Nutrition

Adivasis endure poor health outcomes due to inadequate healthcare access, malnutrition, and unsanitary living conditions. Diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis are prevalent in tribal areas. Restrictions on forest access also limit the use of traditional medicines, worsening health crises.

- Discriminatory attitudes

Educational Barriers

Educational attainment among Adivasis remains alarmingly low. Curricula often fail to address their cultural contexts, alienating tribal children from their heritage. Language barriers and discriminatory attitudes in schools further discourage enrolment, particularly among girls, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

- Exploitative labor

Exploitation and Violence

Adivasis frequently face exploitation by contractors, landlords, and bureaucrats. They are coerced into exploitative labor or trafficked to urban centers. Acts of violence, including sexual assault and intimidation during protests, are widespread, particularly against women.

- Stronger legal enforcement

Despite decades of constitutional protections and affirmative action, Dalits and Adivasis remain among India's most marginalized communities. Addressing their challenges necessitates a multidimensional approach involving stronger legal enforcement, community empowerment, and inclusive development strategies. Only by dismantling systemic inequali-



ties and fostering equity can India achieve its vision of a just and egalitarian society.

2.1.5 Safeguarding Dalits and Adivasis from Social Exclusion

- Social exclusion

Dalits and Adivasis in India have historically faced systemic marginalization, rooted in caste and tribal hierarchies. Social exclusion has denied them equitable access to resources, education, and opportunities, while subjecting them to violence and exploitation. Addressing these injustices requires comprehensive legal frameworks, policy interventions, and sustained efforts to ensure equality and dignity. Over the years, the Indian government has introduced a series of constitutional safeguards, legislative measures, and policies to combat these systemic issues.

Constitutional Provisions

The Indian Constitution provides the foundation for safeguarding the rights of Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes). These provisions emphasize equality and seek to dismantle the barriers that perpetuate social exclusion.

Safeguarding the Rights of Dalits and Adivasis

The Indian Constitution provides various safeguards to protect the rights and dignity of Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes).

- Rights of Dalits

- ◇ **Article 17:** Abolishes the practice of untouchability and prohibits its practice in any form.
- ◇ **Article 335:** Provides for reservations in public services and educational institutions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to ensure their adequate representation.
- ◇ **Article 275:** Empowers the Union government to provide special financial assistance to state governments for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes.
- ◇ **Article 338:** Authorizes the central government to appoint a National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to monitor and safeguard their rights.

These constitutional provisions play a crucial role in addressing historical injustices and promoting the socio-

economic development of Dalits and Adivasis.

- Cultural identity and autonomy

Additionally, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules address the unique challenges faced by tribal populations. While the Fifth Schedule ensures the protection of tribal land and resources in non-Northeastern states, the Sixth Schedule provides for self-governance through autonomous councils in tribal areas of the Northeast. These provisions aim to empower Adivasis while preserving their cultural identity and autonomy.

2.1.5.1 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

- Tribe-based atrocities

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, is a significant legislative effort to combat the violence and systemic oppression faced by Dalits and Adivasis. This Act was introduced to address the inadequacy of existing laws in preventing caste- and tribe-based atrocities.

- Rehabilitation of victims

The Act criminalizes a wide range of offenses, including physical violence, forced labor, public humiliation, and the wrongful dispossession of land. It also provides for the establishment of special courts to ensure the swift trial of cases and the rehabilitation of victims. Particularly notable are its provisions addressing crimes against women, recognizing their vulnerability to caste- and gender-based violence.

- Dual purpose

This Act serves a dual purpose. While it aims to punish offenders and deter future crimes, it also seeks to foster awareness about caste- and tribe-based discrimination. However, the Act's implementation has faced challenges, including delays in the judicial process, underreporting of crimes, and societal resistance. Strengthening its enforcement remains a critical priority.

- Most effective tools

2.1.6 Reservation Policies

Reservation policies are among the most effective tools for addressing the socio-economic exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis. Enshrined in Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution, these policies provide for reserved seats in educational institutions and public services.

The rationale behind reservation is to level the playing field for marginalized communities by ensuring their representation



- Ensuring representation

in areas where they have historically been excluded. For example, reserved constituencies in legislatures (Articles 330 and 332) enable Dalits and Adivasis to participate in policymaking processes and advocate for their rights.

- Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)

Over time, reservation policies have expanded to include Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and, more recently, Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of society. Despite criticisms of reverse discrimination and inefficiency, these policies remain crucial for empowering marginalized communities and fostering social equity. Effective implementation and periodic review are essential to ensure that reservations achieve their intended objectives.

National Commissions for SCs and STs

The Constitution mandates the establishment of commissions to monitor and promote the welfare of Dalits and Adivasis.

- Article 338

The **National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)**, constituted under Article 338, is tasked with investigating and addressing issues related to the rights and welfare of Dalits. It advises the government on policy formulation and ensures the implementation of constitutional safeguards.

- Article 338A

Similarly, the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)**, established under Article 338A, focuses on tribal welfare. It addresses issues such as displacement, land alienation, and access to resources, ensuring that the rights of Adivasis are upheld.

Both commissions play a critical role in bridging the gap between policy and implementation, though their effectiveness often depends on political will and administrative support.

Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

- Rectify historical injustices

The Forest Rights Act, of 2006, was passed in India on 18 December 2006. This act was enacted to rectify historical injustices faced by forest-dwelling communities, particularly Adivasis. For centuries, these communities were denied legal recognition of their traditional rights over forest lands and resources. It has also been called the Forest Rights Act, The Tribal Rights Act, the Tribal bill and the Tribal Land Act.

- Community rights

The Act grants individual and community rights to homesteads, agricultural lands, grazing areas, and non-timber forest produce. It also empowers communities to conserve and manage forests sustainably, aligning their cultural practices with environmental goals.

2.1.7 Globalization and the Evolving Nature of Marginalization

- Multifaceted effects

Globalization has brought profound transformations to global economies, cultures, and societies, offering opportunities for progress and integration. However, for marginalized groups such as Dalits and Adivasis in India, its effects are layered and multifaceted. While globalization has created new spaces for these communities to assert their rights and engage with broader networks, it has also increased their vulnerabilities and, in many ways, deepened the marginalization they have long endured.

Economic Implications of Marginalization

- Market-oriented growth

Economic liberalization, a central aspect of globalization, has driven policies that emphasize industrialization, privatization, and market-oriented growth. These shifts have often come at a significant cost to marginalized groups. Adivasis, whose livelihoods are closely tied to land and forests, have been disproportionately affected by large-scale displacement caused by infrastructure development, mining, and urban expansion. The acquisition of their lands frequently occurs without adequate consultation, fair compensation, or proper rehabilitation, undermining constitutional protections intended to safeguard tribal rights.

Dalits, who predominantly work in the informal sector, have also faced significant challenges. Increased global competition has reduced demand for traditional artisanal and agricultural labor, pushing many Dalit workers into greater economic insecurity.

Cultural and Social Dimensions

The cultural identities of marginalized groups have also been significantly impacted by globalization. For Adivasis, traditional knowledge systems and practices, which are integral to their identity, are often sidelined or appropriated for commercial purposes. Their art, rituals, and music are



- Cultural identities

commodified in ways that rarely benefit the communities that produce them. Similarly, Dalits continue to face cultural subjugation perpetuated by dominant caste narratives, further entrenching social exclusion.

- Global human rights forums

However, globalization has also provided these communities with tools to resist marginalization. Digital platforms and global human rights forums have empowered Dalits and Adivasis to amplify their struggles and connect with broader advocacy networks. These platforms have drawn international attention to caste-based discrimination and the displacement of tribal populations, holding governments and corporations accountable for their actions.

- Exacerbated existing inequalities

Enduring Inequalities

Despite its transformative potential, globalization has often exacerbated existing inequalities for Dalits and Adivasis. Issues such as landlessness, economic deprivation, and cultural alienation have persisted or worsened. Structural barriers continue to prevent these groups from participating in or benefiting from globalized economic systems. Consequently, globalization has functioned as a double-edged sword - providing opportunities for visibility and advocacy while failing to address the root causes of exclusion.

- Reordering of social structures

2.1.8 Dalit and Adivasi Movements for Social Justice

The movements led by Dalits and Adivasis in India reflect a long-standing struggle for justice, equality, and identity. Over the years, these movements have evolved, adapting to new socio-political and economic realities while maintaining their core focus on dismantling systemic discrimination.

Dalit Movements: From Protest to Assertion

The Dalit movement finds its ideological foundation in the vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who championed the cause of equality and social justice. Recognizing that caste-based discrimination was entrenched in Indian society, Ambedkar advocated for a radical reordering of social structures. His emphasis on education, economic independence, and political representation laid the groundwork for Dalit activism.

Post-independence, Dalit movements addressed issues

- Land reforms

such as access to education, land reforms, and atrocities committed against Dalits. In the 1970s, organizations like the Dalit Panthers adopted a militant approach, inspired by the Black Panther movement in the United States. These groups sought justice for caste-based violence and emphasized the need for systemic reforms to dismantle caste hierarchies.

- Dalit activism

In recent decades, digital tools have played a pivotal role in Dalit activism. Social media has become a powerful medium for highlighting issues such as manual scavenging, untouchability, and workplace discrimination. Dalit activists have also used global platforms to connect their struggles with international movements against racism and oppression. Efforts to reclaim cultural identity, such as embracing Buddhism as a form of resistance to caste oppression, continue to hold significant importance in the movement.

Tribal Movements

Tribal movements in India have emerged in response to issues such as land rights, cultural identity, autonomy, freedom, and social justice. These movements have been driven by concerns over displacement, exploitation, and loss of traditional livelihoods. Tribals have consistently resisted policies and practices that threaten their rights, making their struggle an important part of India's socio-political landscape.

- Land rights

Adivasi Movements: Defending Land and Identity

Adivasi movements have predominantly focused on issues such as land rights, cultural preservation, and resistance to displacement caused by development projects. The loss of ancestral lands and resources has not only disrupted Adivasi livelihoods but also eroded their cultural and social systems.

- Adivasi movements

Movements like the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which opposed the construction of large dams on the Narmada River, have highlighted the displacement of tribal populations and the violation of their rights. Led by Medha Patkar, this movement emphasized the need for sustainable development and fair rehabilitation for those affected. Similarly, the creation of states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh reflected Adivasi demands for greater autonomy and control over their natural resources.

- Narmada Bachao Andolan

Intersectionality in Movements

Dalit and Adivasi movements for social justice have



- Structural inequalities

responded to these dynamics by addressing issues such as land rights, political representation, education, and cultural preservation. These movements continue to emphasize the need for systemic reforms and sustainable solutions to dismantle structural inequalities. As India navigates the complexities of globalization, the experiences of Dalits and Adivasis remain crucial to the pursuit of an inclusive and equitable society. Their resilience and advocacy underscore the importance of balancing economic development with social justice to ensure that progress benefits all sections of society.

Summarized Overview

Marginalization refers to the process by which certain groups are pushed to the edges of society, limiting their access to resources, rights, and representation. Dalits and Adivasis in India have historically faced severe social, economic, and cultural exclusion due to caste and tribal identities. The legacy of untouchability and dispossession continues to shape the challenges faced by these communities. While legal safeguards like the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and reservation policies aim to ensure justice and inclusion, gaps in implementation persist. Institutions like National Commissions for SCs and STs work to monitor and protect their rights. Globalization has brought new economic challenges, often worsening the displacement and livelihood issues faced by Adivasis. Cultural alienation and social discrimination further deepen marginalization. In response, Dalit and Adivasi movements have emerged, demanding dignity, equality, and genuine social justice.

Assignments

1. What is the concept of marginalisation, and how does it manifest in Indian society?
2. Explain the different types of marginalisation and their impact on social, economic, and political life.
3. How do caste and tribal identity contribute to the marginalisation of Dalits and Adivasis in India?
4. Discuss the constitutional provisions and safeguards provided to Dalits and Adivasis in India.
5. Examine the socio-economic status and demographics of Dalits and Adivasis in contemporary India.
6. Analyze the persistency of discrimination and violence against Dalits and Adivasis, despite legal safeguards.

7. What are the key issues faced by Dalits and Adivasis in terms of access to education, healthcare, and employment?
8. How does the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 aim to address the violence faced by these groups?
9. Evaluate the role of reservation policies in empowering Dalits and Adivasis. Are they adequate in addressing systemic discrimination?
10. How have Dalit and Adivasi movements for social justice evolved in response to the changing socio-political landscape of India?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



UNIT 2

Marginalization of Women, Sexual Minorities, Disabled and Children

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to:

- analyze the status of women in India and understand the socio-economic challenges they face.
- identify the issues faced by women and gender minorities in various social contexts.
- evaluate the constitutional and legal safeguards in place for women's empowerment.
- critically examine the marginalization of sexual minorities in India.
- discuss the legal protections and safeguards available for sexual minorities in India.
- analyze the marginalization of disabled individuals and the challenges they face in society.
- explore the existing safeguards for the disabled population and evaluate their effectiveness.
- assess the marginalization of children, with a focus on social, economic, and political issues.
- understand the various legal frameworks that ensure the protection and rights of children.
- develop strategies to promote the inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups in society.

Background

Marginalisation is a process through which certain groups are systematically excluded from full participation in society. In India, women, sexual minorities, persons with disabilities, and children often face layered forms of discrimination rooted in historical and cultural hierarchies. These groups encounter barriers in accessing education, employment, healthcare, and justice. Gender roles, stigma, social prejudices, and lack of institutional support further deepen their exclusion. Legal and constitutional provisions exist to protect their rights, yet implementation often falls short. The marginalization of these communities is not only a social concern but a violation of human dignity and equality. Understanding their challenges helps in shaping inclusive policies and social awareness. This unit aims to explore these issues critically and promote informed engagement with questions of justice and empowerment.

Keywords

Women Empowerment, Gender Minorities, Sexual Minorities, Disability Rights, Children's Rights, Marginalization, Legal Safeguards, Social Justice

Discussion

- Women, sexual minorities, disabled individuals,

Marginalization in India affects several groups, with women, sexual minorities, disabled individuals, and children facing systemic exclusion and unequal treatment. The status of women in India remains impacted by entrenched patriarchal norms, cultural practices, and limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities despite legal progress. Women and gender minorities continue to face significant issues, including violence, discrimination, and social stigma. Gender minorities, particularly transgender individuals, endure heightened marginalization, often being denied basic rights. Constitutionally, India guarantees equality and protection against discrimination, but challenges in implementation persist, with laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act attempting to address women's empowerment. Sexual minorities face legal and social marginalization, though landmark legal protections, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality and the right to self-identify gender, have provided some relief. Similarly, disabled individuals experience marginalization through inaccessible environments and limited opportunities, but legal frameworks like the Rights of Persons



with Disabilities Act aim to address these issues. Children, particularly from marginalized communities, face risks such as labor, trafficking, and inadequate education, with legal safeguards such as the Right to Education Act and the Juvenile Justice Act focusing on their protection and rights. This unit examines the causes and effects of such marginalization and explores how legal and social interventions work toward creating an inclusive society for these vulnerable groups.

2.2.1 Status of Women in India

The status of women in India has undergone significant transformations over the centuries, shaped by a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and political forces. Historically, Indian society was deeply patriarchal, with women relegated to domestic roles and their access to education, work, and social participation severely limited. Traditional customs, religious practices, and social norms often placed women in subordinate positions, where their primary responsibilities were seen as managing the household and raising children. In many parts of the country, the influence of rigid caste and class structures further constrained women's roles, limiting their ability to engage in public or economic life.

- Subordinate positions

In ancient India, however, women held more prominent positions in society. Ancient texts such as the Vedas and the Upanishads mention women scholars, saints, and philosophers, though their roles gradually diminished with the advent of certain social and religious practices. The medieval period saw the rise of rigid gender roles, with practices like Sati (the burning of widows) and child marriage becoming widespread. During the colonial era, British policies, combined with traditional Indian customs, further restricted women's freedom, though this period also saw the emergence of social reform movements that sought to improve women's status.

- Rigid gender roles

History of Marginalized Women

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was one of the earliest social reformers to protest against the subjugation and suffering of women in India. He opposed inhumane practices such as sati and polygamy while advocating for widow remarriage. Later, social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and others carried forward the struggle for women's emancipation in the 19th and 20th centuries.

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy

- Lord William Bentinck

The British government enacted several laws to improve the status of women. The practice of sati was abolished in 1829 under the Bengal Sati Regulation, spearheaded by Lord William Bentinck. Other significant reforms included the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act (1856), Indian Penal Code (1861), Age of Consent Act (1891), and Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), which sought to protect women's rights and improve their social position.

- India's Constitution

The post-independence period in India marked a turning point for women's rights. India's Constitution, adopted in 1950, laid the foundation for gender equality by providing women with the same legal rights as men. Over the decades, various socio-political movements and legal reforms have contributed to improving the status of women, particularly in urban areas. Women's participation in education, the workforce, and politics has increased, albeit unevenly.

- Rise in literary rate

For instance, the literacy rate among women has steadily increased from 9.2% in 1951 to 70.3% in 2021, according to the Census of India. More women are now pursuing higher education, and the number of women in professional careers has risen. The rise of women in political leadership is another significant indicator of progress. Leaders like Indira Gandhi, who served as the Prime Minister of India for 15 years, and current political figures such as Mamata Banerjee and Sonia Gandhi, have paved the way for more women to participate in politics.

- Rural women

However, despite these advancements, the status of women in India remains uneven, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities. Women in rural India continue to face significant barriers to education, healthcare, and economic independence. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reports that women in rural areas have lower access to education and healthcare compared to their urban counterparts. Furthermore, women from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) face compounded challenges, including discrimination and exclusion from mainstream opportunities.

Moreover, socio-cultural practices such as child marriage, dowry, and gender-based violence continue to persist, hindering the progress of women. For instance, despite legal prohibitions, child marriage remains prevalent in rural and impoverished



- Violence against women

areas, with approximately 27% of girls in India married before the age of 18, as per UNICEF. Similarly, violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking, continues to be widespread. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), crimes against women increased by 7.3% in 2020, with the highest number of reported cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment.

- Ingrained cultural attitudes

The status of women in India, therefore, presents a complex and multifaceted picture. While progress has been made, particularly in urban and educated sectors, women, especially in rural and marginalized communities, continue to face significant challenges. Achieving true gender equality requires addressing not only legal and institutional barriers but also deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and social norms that perpetuate gender discrimination.

2.2.1.1 Issues Faced by Women in India

Women in India face a wide array of issues, many of which are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of the country. These issues range from gender-based violence to economic inequality, from limited access to education to workplace discrimination. Below are some of the most pressing issues faced by women in India:

- Domestic violence

Gender-Based Violence: Gender-based violence remains one of the most pervasive and urgent issues faced by women in India. This violence takes many forms, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, dowry-related violence, and female infanticide. A case that brought national and international attention to this issue was the 2012 Delhi gang rape, where a 23-year-old woman was brutally assaulted and murdered, sparking widespread protests and calls for stronger legal protections for women. In response, the Indian government passed the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in 2013, which increased penalties for sexual violence and introduced new provisions to protect women from acid attacks and stalking.

- Violence in silence

Despite these legal reforms, many women continue to face violence in silence. A 2018 report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) indicated that crimes against women, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, remain widespread. According to the report, every 20 minutes a woman is raped in India, and every 10 minutes, a woman faces

domestic violence. The reasons for this persistent violence are multifaceted, including patriarchal attitudes, inadequate law enforcement, and a lack of awareness about legal rights.

- Gender biases

Gender Discrimination: Gender discrimination manifests in multiple ways across Indian society. It is evident in the preference for male children, which has led to skewed sex ratios in some regions. According to the 2011 Census, India's sex ratio stood at 940 females for every 1,000 males, a reflection of gender biases that favor male children. This preference often results in the neglect of girls, who are denied access to education, healthcare, and nutrition.

- Global Gender Gap Report 2020

In the workplace, gender discrimination is prevalent, with women earning less than men for the same work. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 112th in terms of gender parity in the workplace. Women are also underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in sectors like politics, business, and academia. For example, a report by Catalyst in 2020 showed that only 10% of Indian companies have women in top executive roles. This underrepresentation is compounded by cultural norms that view women as less capable of leadership and decision-making.

- UNICEF

Child Marriage: Despite being illegal, child marriage remains prevalent in certain parts of India, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions. According to UNICEF, approximately 27% of girls in India are married before the age of 18, with the highest rates found in states like Rajasthan, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. Child marriage often results in early pregnancies, interrupted education, and lifelong economic dependence. It also exposes young girls to higher risks of maternal mortality and health complications. For instance, a report by the Population Foundation of India (PFI) revealed that child brides are more likely to experience complications during childbirth, leading to higher maternal mortality rates.

Access to Education: While female literacy rates in India have improved significantly, access to quality education remains a challenge for many girls, especially in rural and marginalized communities. According to the Ministry of Education's 2020 report, the literacy rate for women in rural areas is significantly lower than that of urban women. A significant barrier to

- Lack of infrastructure

education is the lack of infrastructure, including inadequate sanitation facilities in schools, which disproportionately affects girls, especially during menstruation. A report by the World Bank in 2018 highlighted that one in five girls in India drops out of school due to a lack of proper sanitation facilities.

- Low-wage

Economic Inequality: Women in India face substantial economic inequality. Despite making up a large part of the labor force, women are often employed in low-wage, informal sectors and excluded from high-paying, formal jobs. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the female labor force participation rate in India is among the lowest in the world, at just 23.6%. Women are also underrepresented in entrepreneurship and leadership roles. A 2019 study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that advancing women's equality in India could add \$770 billion to the country's GDP by 2025. However, women continue to face barriers such as limited access to credit, lack of skill development opportunities, and societal norms that restrict their economic independence.

- Global maternal deaths

Health and Reproductive Rights: Women's health, particularly reproductive health, is another critical issue. While maternal mortality rates have decreased in recent years, they remain high, especially in rural areas. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), India accounts for 17% of global maternal deaths. Women often face inadequate access to healthcare services, particularly in remote regions, where medical facilities are scarce, and healthcare workers are often overburdened. Additionally, social taboos surrounding menstruation and reproductive health issues further marginalize women's health concerns, making it difficult for them to seek necessary medical care.

- Equal opportunities

2.2.1.2 Constitutional and Legal Safeguards for Women Empowerment

India's Constitution and legal system provide a strong foundation for the protection and promotion of women's rights. These legal safeguards are vital in addressing the challenges women face and ensuring that they have equal opportunities in education, employment, and public life. Some of the key constitutional and legal safeguards include:

Constitutional Provisions: The Indian Constitution contains several provisions that promote gender equality and the protection of women's rights. Article 14 guarantees equality

- Promote gender equality

before the law, while Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. Article 39(a) directs the state to ensure equal rights to adequate means of livelihood for women, and Article 42 mandates the state to provide just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. These provisions provide a strong legal framework for gender equality and women's empowerment.

- Equal wages for equal work

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976: This Act mandates that men and women be paid equal wages for equal work. While its implementation has faced challenges, particularly in the informal sector, it remains an important tool for addressing the gender wage gap.

- Domestic violence

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: This law offers legal protection for women facing domestic violence. It allows women to seek protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief from the courts. The law also defines domestic violence broadly, covering physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Despite this, implementation has been slow, with many women unaware of their rights or unable to access legal resources.

- Sexual harassment

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013: This law aims to protect women from sexual harassment at the workplace. It mandates that employers establish a mechanism for redressal and create awareness about sexual harassment. However, the effectiveness of the law is often limited by a lack of awareness and reluctance to report incidents of harassment.

- Abuse of women

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: This Act criminalizes the giving or receiving of dowry, a practice that has historically been used as a means of exploitation and abuse of women. While dowry-related violence continues to be a problem, particularly in rural areas, the law serves as a deterrent and provides a legal mechanism for women to seek justice.

- Paid maternity leave

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961: This law ensures that women receive paid maternity leave and other benefits such as nursing breaks. It aims to provide economic security during maternity and protect women's rights as workers. However, the law's implementation is often uneven, with many women in the informal sector lacking access to maternity benefits.



The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, increased paid maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks for women with one or two children. For those with more than two children, the entitlement remains 12 weeks. It mandates crèche facilities for establishments with 50 or more employees and allows work-from-home options in certain cases. Employers must inform women about their maternity benefits at the time of joining. The Act aims to support working mothers and promote workplace gender equality.

- Increased paid maternity leave

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006: This Act prohibits the marriage of girls under the age of 18 and boys under the age of 21. It aims to eliminate child marriage, which has long-term negative consequences for women's health, education, and economic well-being. Despite the legal prohibition, child marriage remains prevalent, especially in rural areas, and its enforcement remains a challenge.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001: This policy outlines the government's commitment to women's empowerment through various initiatives, including improving women's access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, and addressing violence against women.

- Addressing violence

Despite these constitutional and legal safeguards, the enforcement of these laws remains a challenge. Women often face societal pressures, lack of awareness, and limited access to legal resources, which hinder their ability to seek justice. For instance, in rural areas, women may not have the resources to file complaints or may be discouraged from doing so due to fear of social backlash.

- Face societal pressures

While India has made significant progress in advancing women's rights, challenges remain. Addressing these issues requires a multi-dimensional approach, combining legal reforms, societal change, and greater awareness about gender equality. Only through collective efforts can India ensure that women are empowered to lead fulfilling lives and contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

- Legal reforms

2.2.2 Marginalisation and Sexual Minorities

- Stigma and discrimination

In India, sexual minorities, including LGBTQ+ individuals, continue to confront significant hurdles despite legal advancements and growing visibility. Their marginalization is deeply rooted in historical, social, and cultural factors that perpetuate stigma and discrimination.

2.2.2.1 Historical Background and Social Challenges Faced by Sexual Minorities in India

- Section 377

Sexual minorities, including those with non-heteronormative identities, have long existed in India, with historical evidence found in ancient texts like the Kama Sutra, which mentions same-sex relationships. The hijra community, recognized for its cultural and religious significance, has also been a part of India's social fabric for centuries. However, during the colonial period, laws such as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) criminalized same-sex relations, perpetuating a cycle of legal and social marginalization that continues to affect sexual minorities today.

- Harassment, and violence

After India gained independence, conservative societal norms remained entrenched, often labeling sexual minorities as immoral or deviant. These views were further reinforced by traditional expectations of heterosexual marriages and rigid gender roles, creating an environment in which individuals who did not conform to these norms were marginalized. Public spaces, workplaces, and educational institutions have frequently been unwelcoming, contributing to exclusion, harassment, and violence against sexual minorities.

- Inclusion of sexual minorities

Moreover, the medical community once classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, a view that persisted until the late 20th century when global organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) revised their stance. Despite these international shifts, societal attitudes in India continue to uphold heteronormative standards, limiting the acceptance and inclusion of sexual minorities in various aspects of life.

2.2.2.2 Judicial and Legislative Developments in the Rights of Sexual Minorities

The Indian judiciary has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of sexual minorities, often stepping in where



- Rights of sexual minorities

legislative measures have lagged. One of the first significant judicial interventions occurred in 2009, when the Delhi High Court, in the case of Naz Foundation vs. Government of NCT of Delhi, ruled that Section 377 of the IPC was unconstitutional. Although this decision was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2013, it sparked critical public discourse and advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights.

- Affirmative action

A major turning point came in 2014 with the case of National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India, in which the Supreme Court recognized transgender individuals as a third gender. This ruling affirmed their rights under the Indian Constitution and called for affirmative action, including reservations in education and employment, as well as the implementation of welfare schemes for transgender people.

- Section 377 unconstitutional

The landmark 2018 judgment in Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India further advanced LGBTQ+ rights by decriminalizing consensual same-sex relationships. The Supreme Court declared Section 377 unconstitutional as it pertained to adults, reinforcing the constitutional values of dignity, equality, and autonomy. While this ruling was a significant step forward, it also underscored the need for continued societal acceptance and further legislative action to ensure full equality for sexual minorities.

The Path toward Equality and Justice for Sexual Minorities in India

- Legislative reforms

India has made significant progress in recognizing and protecting the rights of sexual minorities, particularly through judicial rulings and legislative reforms. However, true equality can only be achieved through continued societal transformation. Legislative changes, such as amending constitutional provisions to include sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds for non-discrimination, are necessary to strengthen protections. Achieving an inclusive society requires concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and individuals, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, enjoy the dignity and equality guaranteed by the Constitution.

2.2.3 Marginalisation of Disabled

Disability, in its many forms, affects a significant portion of the population in India, yet the lived experiences of disabled individuals are often marked by exclusion, discrimi-

- Social attitudes

nation, and inequality. While legal protections and frameworks exist, the journey toward full inclusion for disabled people remains challenging. The barriers they face are not just physical, but also deeply rooted in social attitudes and systemic structures. This document seeks to explore the ways in which disabled individuals are marginalized in Indian society, the legislative and judicial steps that have been taken to safeguard their rights, and the ongoing efforts needed to ensure their full participation in all aspects of life.

- Cultural perceptions

2.2.3.1 Historical and Social Challenges Faced by Disabled Individuals in India

The history of how disability has been viewed in India is shaped by centuries of cultural, religious, and social beliefs. In ancient times, disability was often seen as a result of divine punishment or a curse, leading to the social isolation of those affected. These cultural perceptions meant that people with disabilities were frequently excluded from mainstream society, often relegated to a life of dependency and isolation. During the colonial era, although some reforms were introduced, the societal attitudes toward disability remained largely negative, and disabled individuals continued to face neglect and exclusion.

- Legal protections

After India gained independence, the situation for disabled people saw some improvement, particularly in terms of legal protections. However, the societal mindset remained entrenched in outdated views, and disabled individuals continued to struggle with limited opportunities in education, employment, and social participation. Public infrastructure, educational institutions, and workplaces were not designed with accessibility in mind, and disabled individuals often had to rely on charity or live in institutions, unable to fully integrate into society. These historical attitudes and practices still influence the experiences of disabled people today, despite legal progress.

2.2.3.2 Legal and Judicial Efforts to Secure Rights for Disabled Individuals

India has made significant strides in recognizing the rights of disabled individuals, particularly through the passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act in 2016. This landmark legislation expanded the definition of disability, now covering a wide range of physical, mental, and sensory impair-

- Rights of Persons with Disabilities

ments. The Act also introduced provisions to ensure that disabled individuals have equal access to education, employment, and public services. One of the key provisions is the concept of “reasonable accommodation,” which requires employers and institutions to make adjustments to ensure that disabled individuals can fully participate in society.

- Indian judiciary

The Indian judiciary has also played a crucial role in advancing the rights of disabled individuals. The Supreme Court has delivered several important rulings that have reinforced the need for accessible public infrastructure, transportation, and government services. These rulings have emphasized the state’s responsibility to ensure that disabled people can enjoy their rights without discrimination. However, despite these legal frameworks, the implementation of disability rights has been inconsistent, and many provisions of the law are not fully enforced at the ground level.

2.2.3.3 Barriers to Full Implementation of Disability Rights

- Accessible infrastructure

Although India has made notable progress in creating a legal framework to protect the rights of disabled individuals, the practical implementation of these laws remains a major challenge. One of the most significant barriers is the lack of accessible infrastructure. Public buildings, transportation systems, and educational institutions are often not designed to accommodate the needs of disabled individuals. Despite the legal mandate for accessibility, many areas remain inaccessible, making it difficult for disabled individuals to fully engage in public life.

- Social discrimination

In addition to physical barriers, disabled individuals also face social discrimination, which limits their opportunities for education, employment, and participation in social activities. In educational settings, disabled students often struggle with inadequate resources, and many schools lack the necessary infrastructure to support their needs. Similarly, in the workplace, disabled individuals frequently encounter prejudice and exclusion, making it harder for them to find and retain employment. Employers may be unwilling to provide the necessary accommodations or may hold stereotypes about the abilities of disabled individuals, further exacerbating their marginalization.

2.2.4 Marginalisation and Children

Children represent the future of any society, and as such, they deserve not only protection but also opportunities to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. However, in India, millions of children continue to face marginalization due to a complex web of socio-economic, cultural, and political factors. This marginalization is not just a theoretical issue; it manifests in tangible ways - through child labor, lack of access to education, physical and emotional abuse, and neglect. Even though India has made significant strides in creating legal frameworks to protect children's rights, the gap between policy and practice remains painfully wide. This document seeks to explore the different forms of child marginalization in India, examine the safeguards that exist, and highlight the challenges that still persist. Ultimately, it will discuss the necessary steps to ensure that every child is empowered and protected.

- Different forms

2.2.4.1 Social Dynamics of Child Marginalization in India

The marginalization of children in India has deep historical roots, shaped by centuries of socio-economic inequality, cultural norms, and the enduring legacy of colonialism. For generations, children from marginalized communities - whether from lower castes, tribal groups, or economically disadvantaged backgrounds - have faced systemic exclusion. These children have often been denied basic rights, such as education, healthcare, and even access to proper nutrition.

- Legacy of colonialism

During the colonial era, exploitative economic policies further entrenched these disparities. The British colonial government's focus on resource extraction and economic control left many Indian children in rural areas with limited opportunities for education and growth. In the post-independence era, despite constitutional guarantees and legislative reforms, India's social fabric remained steeped in inequality. Attitudes towards children, especially those from marginalized communities, were often shaped by a belief in their lesser status. This mindset contributed to the persistence of practices such as child labor, child marriage, and exclusion from educational and healthcare systems. These societal dynamics continue to influence the marginalization of children, limiting their opportunities for development and future success.

- Limited opportunities



2.2.4.2 Legal Frameworks and Judicial Measures for Child Protection

India has enacted several laws to protect children from exploitation, abuse, and neglect. The Constitution of India provides a robust foundation for child protection. Articles 15 and 21, for instance, prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste, sex, and place of birth, while also guaranteeing the right to life and personal liberty, which includes protection from abuse. Article 24 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, mines, and other hazardous occupations. It is a fundamental right aimed at protecting children from exploitation and ensuring their well-being. This provision is reinforced by various child labor laws, including the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and the Right to Education Act, 2009, which emphasize the importance of education and a safe childhood.

The Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009, stands as a landmark piece of legislation, mandating free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. This law is a critical step in addressing educational disparities and ensuring that children from marginalized backgrounds have access to quality education. Similarly, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, offers a comprehensive legal framework for protecting children in need of care and protection, including those who are orphaned, abandoned, or involved in criminal activities.

- The Right to Education Act

Other key legal safeguards include the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. These laws aim to protect children from exploitation and early marriage. However, challenges remain in their enforcement, with child labor and early marriage continuing to be widespread issues in many parts of the country. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1987, prohibits child labor pledging and human trafficking, aiming to combat exploitation. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, specifically addresses sexual crimes against children, ensuring strict punishment for offenders. Both laws play a crucial role in safeguarding children's rights and dignity in India.

- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act

Judicial activism has also played a pivotal role in advancing child rights. The Supreme Court of India has delivered several significant judgments, such as the 1993 Unnikrishnan

- Judicial activism

case, which emphasized the state's duty to provide free and compulsory education. The court has also intervened in cases of child labor, abuse, and neglect, urging the government to take concrete steps to safeguard children's rights.

2.2.4.3 Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to the Marginalization of Children

In India, socio-economic conditions play a major role in perpetuating the marginalization of children. Poverty, in particular, is a critical factor, with millions of children living in extreme deprivation. For many of these children, survival means working in hazardous conditions, often in agriculture, domestic work, or informal sectors, instead of attending school or enjoying their childhood. This exploitation of cheap child labor robs them of the opportunity to grow, learn, and build a better future.

- Socio-economic conditions

Child marriage, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, is another significant issue that exacerbates the marginalization of girls. Early marriage often leads to early pregnancies, discontinuation of education, and limited economic opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

- Child marriage

Children from marginalized communities - such as Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims - face even greater challenges. These children experience multiple layers of discrimination, not only in terms of access to resources but also in societal attitudes. Discrimination in schools, healthcare, and public spaces further limits their opportunities for social mobility and integration, reinforcing the barriers to equality.

- Multiple layers of discrimination

Crimes Against Children in India

Crimes against children in India pose a serious threat to their safety, dignity, and overall well-being. These crimes stem from deep-rooted social, economic, and cultural factors that make children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. There are seven major types of crimes against children in India:

- Exploitation and abuse

- ◇ **Child Labour** – Forced employment of children in hazardous or exploitative conditions, depriving them of education and a normal childhood.
- ◇ **Child Trafficking** – Illegal trade of children for

forced labor, sexual exploitation, or other forms of abuse.

- ◇ **Child Marriage** – Early and forced marriages that violate children’s rights, impacting their health and future opportunities.
- ◇ **Child Sexual Abuse** – Physical and psychological exploitation of children, including sexual harassment, assault, and online abuse.
- ◇ **Child Abandonment** – Desertion of children by parents or guardians, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.
- ◇ **Cyberbullying of Children** – Online harassment and exploitation through social media and digital platforms, affecting children’s mental health.
- ◇ **Child Begging** – Forced begging where children are exploited by organized groups, often leading to physical and emotional harm.

Solutions to Combat Crimes

To effectively combat these crimes, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. Strengthening laws and ensuring their strict enforcement is crucial to deter perpetrators. Conducting awareness campaigns can help educate communities about child rights and the consequences of these crimes. Empowering children through education is essential in breaking the cycle of exploitation. Additionally, community participation is vital in creating a safe environment where children’s rights are protected and upheld.

• Empowering children

2.2.4.4 Initiatives for Enhancing Child Protection and Empowerment

Addressing the marginalization of children in India requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach. First, the enforcement of existing laws needs to be strengthened. This includes improving the capacity of law enforcement agencies, fostering better coordination between government departments, and increasing public awareness about children’s rights. Sensitization programs for parents, teachers, and community leaders can help cultivate a culture of child protection.

• Multi-faceted approach

Improving access to quality education is another critical strategy. The Right to Education Act must be fully implemented, with a focus on ensuring that children from marginalized

- The Right to Education Act

communities have equal access to education. Schools should be equipped with the infrastructure necessary to support children with disabilities and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Scholarships, midday meal programs, and other incentives can help reduce dropout rates and ensure that children stay in school.

- Demands immediate attention

Efforts to eliminate child labor and child marriage must be prioritized. This requires not only stricter enforcement of laws but also addressing the root causes of these issues, such as poverty, illiteracy, and gender inequality. Vocational training programs for children, as well as economic support for families, can help break the cycle of exploitation.

- Civil society organizations

The involvement of civil society organizations and NGOs is crucial in child protection efforts. These organizations can provide legal aid, advocacy, and support services for children in need, and play a key role in holding the government accountable for its commitments to child welfare. Collaborative efforts between the government, NGOs, and international organizations can help create a more effective and inclusive child protection framework.

The marginalization of children in India is a serious issue that demands immediate attention. While legal frameworks exist to protect children, significant gaps remain in their implementation. Socio-economic conditions, cultural attitudes, and systemic barriers contribute to the continued exclusion of many children. Addressing these issues requires a combination of legal reform, policy implementation, and social change. By ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have access to education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation, India can truly fulfill its commitment to the well-being and future of its youngest citizens.

Summarized Overview

Marginalization affects various social groups, including women, sexual minorities, the disabled, and children, by restricting their rights and access to opportunities. Women in India have historically faced patriarchy, violence, limited mobility, and under-representation in decision-making spaces. Although constitutional rights and legal measures like the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 aim at empowerment, gender inequality persists. Sexual minorities have also endured social stigma, criminalization,



and discrimination, but judicial rulings such as the decriminalization of Section 377 have advanced their rights. Legislative reforms and inclusive policies are crucial to secure dignity and equality for LGBTQ+ individuals. Disability and childhood marginalization are equally pressing, involving denial of education, healthcare, and protection. A just society must address the specific needs of these groups through rights-based and inclusive approaches. Promoting awareness, strong legal frameworks, and social acceptance is essential to build an equitable and compassionate India.

Assignments

1. Critically analyze the socio-economic status of women in India and discuss the historical factors contributing to their marginalization.
2. Explain the challenges faced by sexual minorities in India, highlighting both social stigma and systemic barriers.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, in addressing gender-based violence in India.
4. Discuss the intersectionality of caste and gender in shaping the experiences of Dalit women.
5. Assess the impact of legal reforms, such as the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, on the rights of sexual minorities.
6. Examine the barriers to education for children with disabilities in India and propose strategies for inclusive education.
7. Analyze the socio-economic challenges faced by disabled individuals in India and assess the implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
8. Investigate the prevalence of child labor in India, focusing on its root causes and the effectiveness of legal interventions.
9. Discuss the role of civil society organizations in addressing the marginalization of children in India.
10. Critique the existing policy framework for the empowerment of marginalized groups in India, suggesting reforms for better implementation.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



UNIT 3

Politics of Affirmative Action

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, learners will be able to:

- define and contextualize affirmative action and its relevance in ensuring social justice and equity.
- evaluate the importance and purpose of affirmative action as a tool for addressing historical discrimination and promoting inclusivity.
- analyze the debates surrounding reservations for SC, ST, OBC, and women within the Indian political framework.
- trace the historical evolution of affirmative action in India, highlighting significant milestones and legal provisions.
- discuss the role of inclusive politics in shaping affirmative action policies and fostering social cohesion.
- critically analyze the criticisms against affirmative action, considering arguments related to meritocracy, reverse discrimination, and socio-political implications.

Background

Affirmative action encompasses a range of policy instruments aimed at rectifying structural inequalities and ensuring equitable access to opportunities for historically marginalised communities. In the Indian context, it has primarily taken the form of constitutionally mandated reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and women in spheres such as education, public employment, and political representation. These measures are grounded in the broader objective of advancing social justice and fostering inclusive governance. The trajectory of affirmative action in India reflects a complex interplay of legal provisions, judicial interpretations, and socio-po-

litical movements. While the policy has facilitated upward mobility for many, it has also generated ongoing debates regarding meritocracy, efficiency, and claims of reverse discrimination. Critics often argue that such measures challenge the principle of equal opportunity, while proponents view them as essential correctives to entrenched social hierarchies. The role of inclusive politics remains central in shaping and sustaining these interventions. This unit critically examines the evolution, implementation, and contested nature of affirmative action within India's democratic framework.

Keywords

Affirmative Action, Social Justice, Reservation Policy, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Marginalization, Inclusive Politics

Discussion

- Constitutional mandate

The concept of affirmative action embodies the principles of equity and social justice, focusing on rectifying historical injustices and inequalities faced by marginalized groups. It encompasses a range of policy measures designed to ensure representation, opportunities, and empowerment for those systematically excluded from socio-economic and political processes. Affirmative action is not only a moral imperative but also a constitutional mandate in many nations, including India, where it seeks to address the entrenched caste, gender, and socio-economic disparities.

- Articles 15, 16, 17, and 46

India's unique socio-cultural landscape, shaped by a hierarchical caste system, patriarchy, and colonial history, necessitated proactive measures to uplift disadvantaged communities. The Indian Constitution, through Articles 15, 16, 17, and 46, lays the foundation for affirmative action by prohibiting discrimination and promoting the welfare of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Furthermore, provisions for women in political representation and workforce participation demonstrate the comprehensive scope of these measures.

Historically, affirmative action in India was envisioned as a means to foster social cohesion and create a level playing field for marginalized groups. The reservation system - covering education, employment, and political representation - became the cornerstone of affirmative action policies. However,



- Foster social cohesion

the implementation and outcomes of these measures have sparked intense debates. Supporters argue that reservations are indispensable for addressing systemic oppression and ensuring representation, while critics highlight concerns over meritocracy, efficiency, and the perpetuation of caste identities.

- Affirmative action

This unit examines affirmative action from multiple perspectives, analyzing its significance, historical development, and impact while addressing the controversies and criticisms surrounding its implementation. Through this exploration, students will gain a nuanced understanding of the politics of affirmative action and its relevance in achieving an equitable and just society.

- Affirmative action

2.3.1 Meaning of the Concept of Affirmative Action

Affirmative action is a policy tool designed to address systemic inequities by providing marginalized and underrepresented groups with enhanced opportunities in various sectors, including education, employment, and political participation. Historically, these groups have faced significant barriers due to discrimination based on factors such as caste, race, ethnicity, gender, and disability. Affirmative action seeks to break down these barriers, offering targeted support to create a level playing field where all individuals, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to succeed.

- Treating everyone the same

2.3.1.1 Key Features of Affirmative Action

Proactive Approach to Equity

Unlike traditional measures aimed at simply preventing discrimination, affirmative action is proactive. It acknowledges that systemic inequities cannot be solved by treating everyone the same, as doing so would not account for historical disadvantages. By implementing measures such as quotas, reserved seats, or outreach programs, affirmative action actively seeks to create opportunities for marginalized groups to overcome the historical and structural barriers they face.

Recognition of Structural Inequalities

Affirmative action is built on the recognition that inequality often arises from long-standing structural factors. These factors are the result of historical wrongs such as slavery, colonialism, or caste-based discrimination, and they are reinforced by

- Caste-based discrimination

societal and economic systems that benefit dominant groups. Affirmative action seeks to dismantle these structures and reduce the effects of this unequal foundation by offering targeted support to disadvantaged groups.

- Equity

Equity over Equality

One of the core principles of affirmative action is equity, not simply equality. While equality assumes that everyone starts at the same place and requires the same treatment, equity acknowledges that some individuals or groups begin at a disadvantage. By providing additional resources, such as scholarships or mentoring, affirmative action ensures that marginalized groups have the support they need to compete on equal terms with their more privileged peers.

- Individuals with disabilities

Focus on Historically Marginalized Groups

Affirmative action is intended to benefit groups that have been excluded or oppressed throughout history. These groups can vary depending on the context, but they commonly include racial and ethnic minorities, women in male-dominated fields, and individuals with disabilities. By focusing on these groups, affirmative action works to integrate them into mainstream society and ensure they are not left behind in key sectors such as education, employment, and politics.

- Not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Diverse Implementation Mechanisms

Affirmative action is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It uses a variety of methods to achieve its objectives, depending on the needs of the marginalized group in question. Common mechanisms include:

- ◇ **Quotas and Reservations:** Allocating a percentage of opportunities (e.g., seats in educational institutions or jobs) to underrepresented groups.
- ◇ **Financial Assistance:** Providing scholarships, grants, or loans to help marginalized individuals access education or training.
- ◇ **Outreach Programs:** Actively recruiting and engaging underrepresented groups.
- ◇ **Mentorship and Training:** Offering guidance and skill-building programs to prepare individuals for success in competitive environments.

• Greater equality

• Diversity of the society

• Implicit biases

• Addressing historical wrongs

- ◇ **Temporariness and Dynamic Adaptability** Many affirmative action policies are intended to be temporary, implemented until significant progress has been made toward greater equality. As society evolves and barriers are reduced, these policies can be adjusted to meet the changing needs and conditions. However, it is often recognized that such progress takes time, and in practice, affirmative action may need to be extended beyond initial timelines.
- ◇ **Emphasis on Diversity and Representation** Affirmative action helps ensure that institutions reflect the diversity of the society they serve. By fostering diversity in educational institutions, workplaces, and governments, affirmative action creates environments that promote innovation, creativity, and better decision-making. The goal is not only to address past wrongs but also to enrich the social, cultural, and intellectual fabric of society.
- ◇ **Addressing Implicit Bias** Implicit biases - unconscious stereotypes and attitudes-can influence decision-making, often leading to the exclusion of marginalized groups. Affirmative action seeks to counteract these biases by implementing objective criteria that promote fair representation of all groups, helping to reduce the negative impact of unconscious prejudices in hiring, admissions, and policy decisions.

The features of affirmative action emphasize its commitment to addressing historical wrongs and providing marginalized communities with the support they need to succeed in today's society. By proactively creating opportunities, recognizing structural inequalities, and focusing on equity, affirmative action works to reduce disparities and foster a more inclusive and diverse society. Its dynamic, adaptable nature ensures that affirmative action remains effective in addressing the evolving needs of marginalized groups, ultimately promoting a more just and equitable world.

2.3.1.2 Importance of Affirmative Action

- ◇ Affirmative action is vital in creating a society that values equality and inclusivity, particularly in the face of historical and ongoing systemic inequalities. By providing opportunities to historically marginalized groups, affirmative action helps break cycles of

- Equality and inclusivity

- Racial minorities

- Social inequality

- Cultural understanding

- Fair representation

disadvantage and ensures that all individuals have access to the same opportunities, regardless of their background. Its importance lies in its capacity to foster social cohesion, reduce disparities, and empower individuals from all walks of life.

- ◇ **Addressing Historical Injustice** Affirmative action is a direct response to centuries of systemic discrimination. Many marginalized groups, such as racial minorities or women, have faced exclusion from critical areas like education, employment, and political representation. Affirmative action policies aim to correct these injustices by providing historically excluded communities with the support they need to overcome these barriers and succeed on an equal footing.
- ◇ **Reducing Socio-Economic Inequalities** Economic disparity is often deeply intertwined with social inequality. Affirmative action helps bridge the gap between different socio-economic groups by ensuring that marginalized communities have access to resources that were once denied to them. Policies such as scholarships for disadvantaged students or reserved job quotas for underrepresented groups provide a vital pathway to socio-economic mobility, contributing to the upliftment of entire communities.
- ◇ **Fostering Diversity and Inclusion** The value of diversity in any institution cannot be overstated. Diverse environments foster creativity, enhance problem-solving, and promote cultural understanding. Affirmative action policies ensure that marginalized groups are represented in schools, workplaces, and government, promoting diverse perspectives that contribute to the collective progress of society. Diversity leads to better decision-making and social innovation, enriching the entire community.
- ◇ **Promoting Social Cohesion** In deeply divided societies, unequal access to resources and opportunities often creates resentment and division. Affirmative action plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion by ensuring fair representation and equal participation in societal processes. By reducing social inequality, affirmative action fosters a sense of unity and belonging, which in turn strengthens national



identity and societal harmony.

• Psychological impact

- ◇ **Empowering Marginalized Communities** The psychological impact of affirmative action is profound. By seeing members of their community represented in influential spaces, marginalized individuals are encouraged to pursue their aspirations and believe in their potential. Affirmative action serves as a powerful tool for empowerment, enabling people from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome self-doubt and reach their full potential.

• Historical disadvantages

- ◇ **Balancing Systemic Inequities** Inequality is often a generational issue, perpetuated by historical disadvantages. Affirmative action helps break these cycles by offering marginalized groups opportunities to access quality education, stable employment, and decision-making roles. Through policies such as preferential hiring or university admissions, affirmative action levels the playing field and ensures that everyone has a chance to compete based on merit, not historical disadvantage.

• Inclusive and equitable future

The importance of affirmative action lies in its transformative power to address historical injustices and systemic inequalities. It empowers marginalized communities, enhances diversity, and fosters social harmony by ensuring that all individuals have access to the same opportunities. Affirmative action is essential not only for correcting past wrongs but also for building a more inclusive and equitable future, where everyone, regardless of their background, can succeed and contribute to the development of society.

2.3.2 Reservation as a Key Tool for Promoting Equality

• Addressing historical inequalities

In India, reservation is a policy mechanism aimed at addressing historical inequalities faced by marginalized groups. The system is designed to ensure that communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and women receive special consideration in educational institutions, public employment, and political representation. Reservation, therefore, plays a central role in promoting social equality and helping disadvantaged groups overcome systemic barriers.

2.3.2.1 The Role of Reservation in Education

Education is a powerful tool for social mobility, and for many years, marginalized communities in India have faced significant barriers in accessing quality education. Reservation in educational institutions ensures that students from these communities have opportunities to pursue higher education, which can, in turn, lead to better employment prospects and a brighter future. This subheading delves into the importance of reservation in education, its impact, and the challenges it faces.

- Social mobility

Reservation in educational institutions provides seats for SCs, STs, OBCs, and women, ensuring that these groups are not excluded from higher learning opportunities. By granting them access to education, reservation policies aim to break the cycle of poverty and social marginalization. The policy helps level the playing field, offering students from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance to compete with their more privileged peers.

- Learning opportunities

Top institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) have seen increasing participation from marginalized groups due to reservation. This representation fosters a more inclusive academic environment, providing opportunities for students who would otherwise be excluded. The diverse student body created through reservation policies enriches the learning experience for everyone involved.

- Increasing participation

Despite its positive impact, reservation in education often faces criticism for allegedly compromising merit. Some argue that students from reserved categories might not meet the same academic standards as others. However, supporters argue that the reservation system is a necessary measure to ensure equal opportunities for students who face numerous socio-economic challenges, such as poor schooling and lack of resources.

- Compromising merit

Reservation in education has undeniably improved access for marginalized groups, ensuring that students from disadvantaged communities are able to pursue higher education. While there are valid criticisms, these concerns must be addressed through additional support systems, such as remedial classes, rather than abandoning the reservation system altogether.

- Remedial classes



2.3.2.2 Reservation in Employment and Public Service

Employment in the public sector is another critical area where reservation has played an essential role in promoting equality. Reservation policies in government jobs ensure that SCs, STs, OBCs, and women have a fair chance of employment in public administration and other sectors. This section examines the importance of reservation in employment, its role in creating a diverse workforce, and the challenges it faces.

- Role in promoting equality

Representation in Public Sector Jobs

The reservation system guarantees a certain percentage of jobs for marginalized communities in public sector organizations, including government services and public enterprises. This helps address the historical underrepresentation of these communities in these sectors and provides them with a chance to contribute to the functioning of the state. Representation in government employment also ensures that these groups are included in decision-making processes.

- Representation in government employment

Promoting Workforce Diversity

By fostering a diverse workforce, reservation contributes to an inclusive environment in public services. It ensures that people from all sections of society are represented in government institutions, which is vital for creating policies that cater to the needs of all citizens. Additionally, it provides role models from marginalized communities who inspire future generations to aim for public service roles.

- Inclusive environment in public services

Addressing Employment Reservation Concerns

Critics of reservation in employment often argue that it leads to reverse discrimination, where more qualified candidates from the general category may lose out due to quotas. However, supporters believe that reservation is a necessary corrective measure, as it allows marginalized groups to overcome disadvantages like poor access to education, lack of social capital, and economic constraints. Moreover, it is important to consider that public service roles require more than just academic qualifications; they also require a deep understanding of the diverse needs of India's population.

- Reverse discrimination

Reservation in employment has been instrumental in fostering inclusivity within the Indian public sector. While

- Fostering inclusivity

challenges exist, such as concerns over merit, reservation ensures that marginalized groups are represented in public services. These policies help maintain a diverse and equitable workforce that can serve the needs of all citizens.

- Political representation

2.3.2.3 Reservation in Political Representation

Political reservation is crucial for ensuring that marginalized groups have a voice in India's democratic processes. Without reservation, communities such as SCs, STs, OBCs, and women would struggle to secure political representation, thus limiting their influence in policymaking. This section explores the significance of reservation in politics, its impact on governance, and the challenges associated with it.

Political reservation in legislative bodies such as Parliament and state assemblies guarantees that SCs, STs, OBCs, and women are represented in the policymaking process. This inclusion is vital for ensuring that their unique concerns - such as poverty, education, health, and gender equality - are addressed by lawmakers. Reservation provides a platform for these groups to contribute to the nation's development and promotes a more inclusive democracy.

- The Women's Reservation Bill

The Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes reserving one-third of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women, highlights the importance of gender equality in politics. Political reservation for women not only increases female representation but also helps address issues like gender-based violence, reproductive health, and access to education. While the bill has faced obstacles, it remains a crucial step toward achieving gender parity in political representation.

- Challenging patriarchal norms

Despite its potential, political reservation faces challenges, especially concerning tokenism. Critics argue that reserved constituencies could lead to male family members contesting elections on behalf of women, thus limiting the empowerment of women. However, proponents argue that political reservation is necessary for challenging patriarchal norms and ensuring that women have a genuine role in shaping the political landscape.

- Say in the governance of India

Political reservation has proven to be an essential tool for ensuring that marginalized groups, including women, have a say in the governance of India. While challenges exist, particularly around token representation, the policy is vital for creating a more inclusive and representative political system.



- Promoting equality in education

Reservation remains a cornerstone of India's efforts to achieve social justice by promoting equality in education, employment, and politics. While the policy is not without its critics, its role in addressing historical inequalities and providing marginalized groups with opportunities to succeed cannot be overstated. Reservation helps ensure that these communities can participate in the country's social, economic, and political life, paving the way for a more inclusive and just society. Despite the challenges and ongoing debates, reservation continues to be an essential tool for fostering fairness and equality in India.

2.3.3.1 Reservation for SC, ST, OBC, and Women: A Comprehensive Overview

In India, the reservation system serves as a pivotal tool in addressing the long-standing socio-economic disparities faced by historically marginalized groups. The policy is aimed at fostering equality and ensuring that those who have been historically excluded or disadvantaged are given opportunities for social and economic advancement. The reservation framework covers a range of groups including the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and women. These groups, due to a variety of social, economic, and historical factors, have faced significant challenges in accessing education, employment, and political representation. To counter these systemic inequalities, the reservation system was introduced as a means to promote inclusivity and equitable growth. An understanding of the constitutional basis for these provisions, the extent of their implementation, and the impact on society is essential to analyzing their role in promoting social justice in India.

- Fostering equality

2.3.3.2 Reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)

The experience of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India has been shaped by deep-rooted social exclusion. These communities have faced systemic discrimination for centuries, with the caste system positioning SCs at the bottom of the social hierarchy and STs being isolated due to their geographical locations and distinct cultures. This historical marginalization has significantly hindered their access to education, employment, and social opportunities. The Indian government recognized the need to provide special provisions for these communities as a means to rectify past wrongs and promote equality.

- Deep-rooted social exclusion

- Articles 15(4) and 16(4)

The Indian Constitution specifically addresses these disparities by providing for affirmative action measures, including reservations, to improve the socio-economic standing of SCs and STs. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) grant the state the authority to reserve seats for these communities in educational institutions and government employment. These constitutional provisions highlight the belief that mere legal equality cannot address the deep-seated disadvantages faced by these groups, and active measures are necessary to level the playing field.

The implementation of reservations in education ensures that SCs and STs have access to seats in schools and higher education institutions. This policy provides them with the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications that enhance their social and economic mobility. Additionally, reserved positions in government jobs ensure that these communities are represented in the public sector, contributing to governance and policy-making. The intent of these measures is to create a more balanced and inclusive society where SCs and STs can actively participate in the nation's development.

Despite the positive impacts of the reservation system, it remains a subject of significant debate. Critics argue that reservation undermines the principle of merit-based selection, often resulting in reverse discrimination. They contend that deserving candidates from non-reserved categories may be denied opportunities due to the preferential treatment given to SCs and STs. On the other hand, proponents argue that merit should not be assessed in a vacuum and that true meritocracy requires acknowledging the unequal starting points of individuals from marginalized communities. Thus, the reservation system is considered by many as an essential tool to correct systemic injustices and foster a more inclusive society.

- Subject of significant debate

2.3.3.3 Reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC)

The reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) has evolved in response to the recognition that a significant portion of Indian society, while not as severely marginalized as SCs and STs, still faces considerable socio-economic disadvantages. The Mandal Commission, formed in 1980, highlighted that many communities were economically backward and had limited access to education and government services. The Commission's recommendations led to the introduction of

- Mandal Commission



reservations for OBCs, which aimed to ensure that these communities had a fair opportunity to access the benefits of India's growth and development.

- Educational institutions and government employment

Following the Mandal Commission's report, the government implemented reservations for OBCs under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution, reserving seats in educational institutions and government employment for these communities. The aim was to provide these groups with an opportunity to overcome their historical and socio-economic disadvantages and participate more fully in the nation's development process.

- Representation in the public sector

The reservation system has significantly improved access to education and employment opportunities for OBCs. In educational institutions, a fixed percentage of seats in general and professional courses are allocated to OBC candidates, ensuring that they are not excluded from opportunities that can enhance their socio-economic status. In government employment, reserved job opportunities for OBCs have helped increase their representation in the public sector. This has contributed to the reduction of inequalities and provided a pathway for OBCs to attain economic stability and upward mobility.

However, the reservation for OBCs has faced criticism and challenges in its execution. One of the primary concerns is the process of identifying which communities qualify as OBCs. The criteria for inclusion have often been viewed as arbitrary, leading to the inclusion of communities that may not necessarily be in need of special provisions. Additionally, there are concerns that the benefits of reservation may not always reach the most economically disadvantaged members within the OBC category, undermining the policy's effectiveness in addressing the needs of those who are truly marginalized.

2.3.3.4 Reservation for Women

- Traditional gender roles

Gender inequality remains a persistent issue in India, with women often subjected to various forms of social, economic, and political exclusion. Traditional gender roles, patriarchal societal structures, and cultural norms have placed women at a disadvantage in key areas such as education, employment, and political participation. Although there have been strides in advancing women's rights, particularly through legal frameworks, the social and economic gap between men and women remains significant, especially in rural areas and under-represented fields.

- Articles 15(3) and 16(2)

The Indian Constitution acknowledges the need for affirmative action to promote gender equality through special provisions for women. Articles 15(3) and 16(2) empower the state to enact policies aimed at advancing the welfare of women, particularly in areas where they have been historically disadvantaged. This constitutional framework has laid the foundation for the introduction of reservations in education, employment, and politics as a means to address gender-based inequalities.

In education, reserved seats for women ensure that they have equal access to opportunities in institutions of higher learning, particularly in fields such as engineering, medicine, and law, where gender disparity is significant. The reservation system also provides opportunities for women in the workforce, particularly in government jobs, by reserving a percentage of positions. This enables women to achieve financial independence and contribute to national development.

- Women's Reservation Bill

In the political arena, the Women's Reservation Bill proposes to reserve one-third of seats in the national and state legislatures for women, thus addressing the gender imbalance in political representation. This initiative is vital for empowering women and ensuring that their voices are heard in the legislative process, which has direct implications for the development of policies affecting women and society as a whole. Despite delays in the passage of the bill, the reservation of political seats for women continues to be a focal point of gender equity efforts in India.

- Critics of women's reservation

Critics of women's reservation argue that it could lead to tokenism, where women may occupy positions not based on their merit or abilities but solely to fulfill the quota. In politics, there is also the concern that male relatives may be elected to represent women in reserved constituencies, which could limit the intended empowerment of women. Despite these criticisms, many believe that reservation remains a necessary step in addressing the entrenched patriarchal structures and ensuring genuine gender equality in all spheres of life.

2.3.3.5 The Broader Impact of Reservation Policies

The reservation system, with its focus on providing targeted opportunities to marginalized communities, has played

- Achieve social justice

a significant role in addressing systemic inequities that have hindered the progress of these groups. By providing reserved opportunities in education, employment, and politics, the state ensures that these communities are not excluded from the benefits of India's growth. Reservation policies are thus seen as a mechanism to achieve social justice by correcting historical wrongs and promoting inclusivity in all sectors of society.

- Marginalized communities

Beyond providing immediate opportunities, reservation policies have contributed to the long-term empowerment of marginalized communities. Increased access to quality education and stable employment has led to greater economic independence, improved social mobility, and the reduction of poverty. Over time, these outcomes have played a role in dismantling entrenched social hierarchies and creating a more equitable society where individuals from historically marginalized communities can fully participate in national development.

- Ongoing debate

As India continues to evolve, the future of reservation policies remains a topic of ongoing debate. While some argue that merit-based systems should replace reservations, others assert that affirmative action remains essential in addressing enduring social, economic, and political disparities. The challenge moving forward is to ensure that the reservation system adapts to the changing needs of Indian society and remains a tool for achieving genuine equality and social justice.

2.3.6 Economic Weaker Sections (EWS) Reservation

- Economically weaker sections

The introduction of the Economic Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation in India was designed to address the socio-economic disparities faced by individuals who belong to economically disadvantaged backgrounds, regardless of their caste, religion, or social standing. This initiative marks a significant shift in the country's reservation policy, which had previously focused on addressing caste-based inequalities, now extending its reach to include economically marginalized groups. By offering EWS reservations, the government aims to ensure that individuals from economically weaker sections gain better access to opportunities in education, government employment, and other public services.

Understanding the EWS Reservation

The concept of EWS reservation was officially established through the 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2019. This constitutional amendment introduced Articles 15(6) and 16(6), which grant a 10% reservation to individuals who are economically disadvantaged but do not belong to the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), or Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The eligibility for this reservation is determined based on an individual or family's annual income, which must be below Rs. 8 lakh, or their ownership of property above a certain limit.

- 103rd Constitutional Amendment

The EWS reservation entitles beneficiaries to a 10% quota in public and private educational institutions and government employment, aiming to provide economically disadvantaged individuals the chance to improve their socio-economic conditions. The policy assumes that economic vulnerability, irrespective of caste or religion, creates significant barriers in accessing education and employment opportunities, which in turn limits social mobility.

- 10% quota

Critiques of EWS Reservation

While the EWS reservation aims to alleviate the challenges faced by economically weaker sections, it has generated substantial criticism across various sectors. Some of the most notable concerns include:

- Challenges faced

◇ **Dilution of Caste-Based Reservations:** One of the primary critiques of the EWS reservation is that it could potentially weaken the caste-based reservation system, which was specifically designed to address the historical and systemic social discrimination faced by SCs, STs, and OBCs. Critics argue that by implementing class-based reservations, the government is deflecting attention from these deeper social inequalities and redistributing benefits to a broader, more diverse group that may not have experienced the same degree of marginalization.

- Class-based reservations

◇ **Limited Applicability of the Criteria:** The income threshold set for EWS eligibility (Rs. 8 lakh per year) may not effectively capture the extent of economic hardship faced by all families. Many families just above this threshold may still be living



- EWS

in poverty or facing significant economic challenges, while others who meet the criteria may not be facing as severe difficulties. This inconsistency in applying the criteria limits the reach and effectiveness of the policy, leaving many individuals without access to the intended benefits.

- ◇ **Challenges in Implementation:** The implementation of EWS reservation has raised questions about how effectively the criteria for identifying economically weaker sections will be applied. Determining income and property ownership accurately is complex and may lead to inconsistencies and unfairness. Without clear and transparent processes, there is a risk that the system could be misused or that benefits may not reach the most deserving individuals.

2.3.7 Criticism Against Affirmative Action

Affirmative action in India, aimed at addressing historical social and economic inequalities, has been both lauded and criticized since its inception. While the policy is designed to uplift marginalized communities, especially Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), it has faced significant scrutiny, particularly from political thinkers, social theorists, and commissions tasked with evaluating its impact. Critics argue that affirmative action may have unintended consequences and fails to achieve the broader goals of equality and social justice. This section seeks to engage with various criticisms of affirmative action, drawing on scholarly perspectives and key commissions that have shaped the discourse around the policy.

- Economic inequalities

Perpetuation of Division and Social Tensions

One of the most prominent critiques of affirmative action comes from scholars who argue that it may inadvertently entrench social divisions rather than dismantle them. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the architects of India's affirmative action framework, envisioned reservations as a tool to address caste-based discrimination and promote social integration. However, many critics, such as political thinker Rajeev Bhargava, contend that by continuing to prioritize caste in the public sphere, affirmative action perpetuates caste-based identities, which could hinder the process of nation-building and social cohesion. According to Bhargava, the reservation system "reinforces the

- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

very divisions it seeks to mitigate,” thereby entrenching social and cultural distinctions rather than bridging them.

Erosion of Meritocracy

Another pervasive criticism is the perception that affirmative action undermines meritocracy, particularly in the fields of education and employment. Critics argue that reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs can result in individuals who are less qualified or underprepared occupying positions that could otherwise go to more deserving candidates. This critique has often been voiced by proponents of a “merit-based” approach to policy, such as **Subramanian Swamy**, a prominent economist and politician. Swamy argues that affirmative action in higher education and government employment weakens the efficiency and performance of institutions by prioritizing quotas over competence.

- Undermines meritocracy

Reinforcing Dependency and Entitlement

Critics argue that affirmative action may promote a culture of dependency among marginalized communities, rather than empowering them to overcome their socio-economic challenges. While the intention is to provide an initial push, some scholars, including **Dr. Vivek Kumar**, suggest that overreliance on affirmative action may result in individuals failing to develop the necessary self-sufficiency to thrive without state intervention. This argument hinges on the concern that when a group is continuously treated as disadvantaged and dependent, it might not be motivated to improve its conditions independently. As Dr. Kumar posits, affirmative action risks creating an “entitlement culture,” where individuals view state-sponsored support as a permanent crutch rather than a temporary intervention.

- Entitlement culture

Additionally, some beneficiaries themselves may feel the need to constantly prove their worth, as their position in society is often seen as contingent on their reserved status rather than their merit or abilities. This perpetuates a cycle of insecurity and contributes to the undermining of their contributions in the long run.

Socio-Economic Inequalities Overlooked by Identity-Based Reservations

Another significant critique is that affirmative action, by focusing on caste, does not sufficiently address the broader socio-



- Srinivasan Committee Report (2007)

economic inequalities that exist within all groups, including those not classified as OBCs, SCs, or STs. The **Srinivasan Committee Report** (2007) highlighted the need for a more inclusive approach that addresses economic hardship across all sections of society, rather than solely focusing on caste-based categories. Critics argue that poverty, lack of access to quality education, and regional disparities affect individuals from all communities, and that the state should focus on addressing these issues through economic, rather than caste-based, criteria.

Short-Term Remedy, Long-Term Challenges

- Amartya Sen

While affirmative action may offer immediate relief to disadvantaged groups, it is criticized for failing to address the long-term systemic causes of inequality. **Amartya Sen**, a Nobel laureate in economics, has pointed out that while reservations provide short-term benefits, they do not tackle the root causes of poverty, lack of access to education, and entrenched social biases. Sen argues that structural reforms in education, health, and employment should be prioritized, as these would lead to broader social mobility and address the deeper inequities that affirmative action alone cannot rectify.

- Structural reforms

The criticisms against affirmative action, as discussed by various thinkers and commissions, point to a need for a more nuanced understanding of its implications. While the policy has undeniably contributed to the upliftment of marginalized communities, its limitations in terms of perpetuating social divisions, undermining meritocracy, and creating dependency cannot be overlooked. As the debate continues, it is essential to consider not only the long-term effects of affirmative action but also the need for broader, structural reforms that address both socio-economic and social inequities in a holistic manner. Only through this balanced approach can India hope to achieve a truly equitable and just society.

Summarized Overview

Affirmative action refers to policy measures aimed at correcting historical injustices and ensuring equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups. It includes proactive steps like reservation in education, employment, and politics to promote social justice. These measures are especially important in a stratified society like India, where caste, gender, and economic status create deep inequalities. Reservations for SCs, STs, OBCs, and women have played a significant role in enhancing representation and access to public resources. The introduction of EWS reservation extends these benefits to economically backward individuals from unreserved categories. While affirmative action has uplifted many marginalized sections, it has also sparked debates about merit, fairness, and the need for periodic revision. Critics argue that it may reinforce identity politics or benefit only a few within disadvantaged groups. However, affirmative action remains a vital tool for building a more inclusive and equitable democracy.

Assignments

1. Define affirmative action and explain its significance in addressing historical inequalities.
2. Discuss the key features of affirmative action policies and their relevance in contemporary society.
3. Analyze the importance of affirmative action in promoting social justice and equality.
4. Explain how reservation serves as a key tool for promoting equality in India.
5. Evaluate the role of reservation policies in improving access to education for marginalized communities.
6. Discuss the impact of reservation policies on employment and public service sectors in India.
7. Examine the importance of political representation through reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).
8. Provide a comprehensive overview of reservation policies for SC, ST, OBC, and women in India.
9. Critically analyze the reservation policy for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in India.
10. Discuss the criticisms against affirmative action and suggest possible reforms to address these concerns.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

A rectangular wooden frame with a dark brown interior. The frame is made of light-colored wood with visible grain and four dark metal fasteners at the corners. The text is centered within the frame.

BLOCK 3
Parties and the Party
System in India

UNIT 1

Social and Ideological Base of the Political Parties

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of the unit, learners will be able to:

- identify and describe the major political parties in India and their ideological foundations.
- analyze the social base of the Indian National Congress and its historical evolution.
- examine the ideological and social base of the Bharatiya Janata Party and recent trends in its political positioning.
- discuss the social and ideological base of Communist parties in India and their impact on Indian politics.
- evaluate the role of the Bahujan Samaj Party and Aam Aadmi Party in representing specific social groups.
- assess the influence of regional parties in Indian politics and their role in coalition governments.

Background

India's political landscape is characterized by a multiplicity of parties rooted in distinct ideological frameworks and supported by diverse social constituencies. The Indian National Congress, once a dominant force with a pan-Indian appeal, has experienced a gradual transformation in its sociopolitical base. The Bharatiya Janata Party, underpinned by the ideology of cultural nationalism, has broadened its support across various caste and regional segments. Left-oriented parties, particularly the Communists, have traditionally mobilized laboring classes through class-based ideology, though their influence remains regionally concentrated. The Bahujan Samaj Party has emerged as a significant platform for Dalits and other marginalised communities, while the Aam Aadmi Party reflects the aspirations of the urban middle class and governance reform agendas. Regional parties,

drawing upon linguistic, ethnic, and sub-national identities, have asserted substantial influence in state-level politics. Their participation has been pivotal in shaping coalition governments and national political discourse. This unit seeks to critically examine the ideological and social foundations that structure India's diverse party system.

Keywords

Political Parties, Ideology, Social Base, Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Communist Parties, Regional Parties, Electoral Performance.

Discussion

Political parties in India are shaped by their ideological commitments and social support bases. Understanding these aspects is essential for comprehending the country's party system's functioning. The unit explores how different parties align themselves with specific social groups and ideological frameworks, influencing their electoral strategies and governance approaches. By analyzing these dynamics, learners will gain insights into the evolution and transformation of political parties in India. The interplay between caste, religion, and regional identities has played a significant role in shaping party politics. Additionally, new political movements have led to shifts in traditional voting patterns. Economic policies and developmental agendas also influence party ideologies and their appeal to different social groups. The study of these factors helps in understanding the broader political landscape of India.

- Ideological commitments

3.1.1 Political Parties in India: An Introduction

Political parties serve as a crucial link between different social groups and the electorate, facilitating organized political action. They conduct election campaigns, mobilize support, and, upon winning elections, take on the responsibility of governing the country. The ruling party functions as a temporary custodian of national interests, accountable not only to its core supporters but to the entire nation. It is responsible for planning and implementing public policies that serve the broader public good.

- Conduct election campaigns

Edmund Burke, an English statesman, viewed a political



party as a group united by a common principle aimed at promoting national interests. Political parties can also be seen as social coalitions representing specific segments of society, advocating for their concerns within the political system. Political parties are crucial components of a democratic political system, as they help organize the political process, represent diverse interests, and ensure the effective functioning of the government. In the context of India, political parties have played a central role in the country's evolution as a democracy since its independence in 1947.

- Multi-party

In India, the party system is multi-party, which means that multiple parties compete for power at the national and state levels. This system is a product of the country's complex social, cultural, and religious diversity. Political parties in India are guided by various ideologies, such as nationalism, secularism, socialism, regionalism, and conservatism, reflecting the varied aspirations of different sections of the population.

- National parties, Regional parties, and State parties.

The Constitution of India provides the framework for the operation of political parties, and their role is integral to the structure of the Indian parliamentary system. Elections are conducted at multiple levels - national, state, and local - making political parties a key player in these contests. Over time, some political parties have evolved from being a mere electoral vehicle to becoming institutionalized organizations with deep roots in Indian society. The major political parties in India can be classified into three categories: National parties, Regional parties, and State parties. National parties have a significant presence in multiple states and play a major role in national politics, while regional parties focus on the issues pertinent to specific states or regions.

- National and regional parties

3.1.2 Important Political Parties in India

India's political landscape is shaped by a mix of national and regional parties, each with distinct ideological foundations and electoral strategies. The multi-party system reflects the country's diverse social, linguistic, and regional dynamics, ensuring the representation of different groups. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections witnessed shifts in party performances, reaffirming the importance of alliances in India's federal democracy.

1. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is currently the largest

- Largest political party

political party in India, both in terms of its ideological influence and electoral strength. Founded in 1980, the BJP is the successor to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), which was established in 1951 by Syama Prasad Mookerjee. The party's ideological foundation is rooted in Hindutva, a form of Hindu nationalism promoted by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), with which it shares close ties. The BJP gained national prominence in the 1990s, particularly with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and its push for the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the BJP led a stable coalition government (1998–2004). However, the party's real electoral dominance began with Narendra Modi's leadership, securing a majority government in 2014 and 2019. In the 2024 elections, while the BJP remained the single-largest party, its strength fell to 240 seats, making it dependent on allies within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to form the government. The BJP's political agenda focuses on economic reforms, nationalism, infrastructural development, and centralization of governance, with a strong emphasis on foreign policy and national security. The party remains dominant in North and Western India, while it continues efforts to expand in the South and East.

2. Indian National Congress (INC)

The Indian National Congress (INC) is one of India's oldest and historically most significant political parties, playing a crucial role in the freedom struggle against British rule. Founded in 1885, the Congress was led by iconic figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel. Post-independence, it became the dominant party under Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi, championing socialism, secularism, and economic planning. However, since the 1990s, the party has struggled to maintain its political dominance due to the rise of regional parties and challenges from the BJP. The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) governed India from 2004 to 2014, but corruption scandals and leadership crises led to its decline. In 2024, the Congress made moderate gains, winning 99 seats in the Lok Sabha, improving from its previous 52 seats in 2019. The party remains influential in Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, while struggling in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Congress continues to advocate for social justice, economic equality, and a secular democratic structure, opposing the majoritarian politics of the BJP.

- Founded in 1885



3. Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M)

- Left-wing parties

The Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] are the major left-wing parties in India, advocating Marxist-Leninist principles, economic equality, and labour rights. The CPI, founded in 1925, was historically influential in India's trade unions, peasant movements, and workers' struggles. However, ideological splits led to the formation of the CPI(M) in 1964, which adopted a more radical stance. The Left Front, led by the CPI(M), governed West Bengal (1977–2011) and Tripura (1993–2018), while also maintaining strongholds in Kerala. However, the decline of industrial labour movements, agrarian distress, and the rise of identity-based politics have weakened the left's electoral prospects. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the CPI won 2 seats, and the CPI(M) secured 4 seats, showing a continued decline in national politics. Despite this, left parties remain influential in Kerala, where Pinarayi Vijayan's government continues to implement welfare-based governance models.

4. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

- Founded in 2012

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is a relatively new entrant in Indian politics, founded in 2012 by Arvind Kejriwal after the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare. The party's ideology is centred on transparency, good governance, and public service reforms, particularly in education, healthcare, and water supply. AAP first came to power in Delhi in 2015, winning consecutive assembly elections with massive mandates. The party expanded its reach to Punjab, where it won the 2022 state elections, forming a government. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, AAP secured 3 seats, showing modest national expansion. However, its alliance with Congress under the INDIA bloc and conflicts with central investigative agencies have posed challenges to its future growth.

5. Samajwadi Party (SP)

- Based in Uttar Pradesh (UP)

The Samajwadi Party (SP) is a major regional party primarily based in Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most politically significant state. Founded in 1992 by Mulayam Singh Yadav, the SP emerged as a champion of social justice, OBC empowerment, and secularism, drawing inspiration from Lohiaite socialism. The party's primary support base has historically been the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), particularly the Yadav community,

- Setbacks in the 2017 and 2019 elections

and Muslims, making it a dominant force in UP politics. Under Akhilesh Yadav's leadership, the party has attempted to modernize its appeal while maintaining its core social justice agenda. The SP has governed UP multiple times, most notably between 2012 and 2017, when Akhilesh Yadav served as Chief Minister, focusing on infrastructure, youth welfare, and economic development. However, the party faced setbacks in the 2017 and 2019 elections, losing ground to the BJP's Hindutva-based mobilization and social engineering tactics. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the SP made a strong comeback, securing 37 seats, making it the largest opposition party from UP and posing a significant challenge to the BJP in the state. The party's growing alliance with other opposition parties, particularly under the INDIA bloc, has increased its national significance. The SP's future electoral prospects depend on its ability to consolidate OBC, Dalit, and Muslim votes, counter BJP's outreach to backward communities, and expand beyond its traditional strongholds.

6. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was founded in 1999 by Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma, and Tariq Anwar after splitting from the Indian National Congress (INC) over the issue of foreign-born leadership (opposing Sonia Gandhi's leadership). The party, largely based in Maharashtra, has played a crucial role in coalition politics, aligning with both the Congress and BJP at different times. The NCP has traditionally represented a mix of agrarian interests, Maratha dominance, and centrist secularism, positioning itself as a key regional power. Over the years, it has wielded considerable influence in Maharashtra's sugar cooperatives, rural economy, and banking sector, making it a formidable force in state politics. However, in 2023, the party split into two factions, with Ajit Pawar aligning with the BJP and the original faction remaining with Sharad Pawar. This internal division weakened the party's strength in Maharashtra, significantly affecting its electoral prospects. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP faction won 1 seat, while the Ajit Pawar faction failed to gain substantial ground. The future of the NCP hinges on whether it can reunite its factions, regain its lost voter base, and assert itself in Maharashtra's evolving political landscape, particularly with the rising influence of the BJP and Shiv Sena factions.

- Based in Maharashtra



5. Major Regional Parties

Regional parties play a crucial role in India's federal structure, often influencing coalition politics at the national level. Some of the most influential regional parties include:

1. Trinamool Congress (TMC): Led by Mamata Banerjee, the TMC is dominant in West Bengal, where it has been in power since 2011, successfully countering the BJP's expansion in the state. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, TMC secured 29 seats, retaining its influence.
2. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK): A key player in Tamil Nadu, the DMK, led by M.K. Stalin, continues to champion Dravidian ideology, social justice, and Tamil identity politics. It won 22 seats in 2024, reinforcing its stronghold.
3. Shiv Sena (Thackeray & Shinde factions): The party split in 2022, with Eknath Shinde leading a pro-BJP faction and Uddhav Thackeray aligning with the opposition. Both factions remain significant players in Maharashtra politics.
4. Biju Janata Dal (BJD): A key regional force in Odisha, the BJD, led by Naveen Patnaik, has been in power for over two decades. However, in 2024, it faced major electoral setbacks, losing ground to the BJP.

- Coexistence of national and regional parties

India's political party system is characterized by the coexistence of national and regional parties, reflecting the country's linguistic, caste-based, and ideological diversities. While BJP and Congress remain the principal national parties, regional forces play a crucial role in shaping governance through coalition politics. The decline of left-wing parties, the rise of personality-driven politics, and the fragmentation of opposition alliances continue to influence India's electoral landscape. As Indian democracy evolves, political parties will remain pivotal in policy-making, governance, and representation, ensuring the world's largest democracy remains vibrant and dynamic.

3.1.3 Social and Ideological Foundations of the Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress (INC) has significantly shaped India's political landscape since its inception in 1885. The party has significantly transformed in its social and ideological

- Shifts in voter preferences

underpinnings, shifting from the primary force in the struggle for freedom to governing post-independence India for several decades. The party's ability to maintain a wide coalition of support from many societal segments was a key strength. However, over time, shifts in voter preferences, economic liberalization, and the emergence of significant regional and ideological rivals have significantly altered its status. This section analyzes the evolution of the Indian National Congress's social and ideological foundations, highlighting the impact of political transformations, electoral trends, and intellectual perspectives.

Societal Basis of the Indian National Congress at Its Formation

- Initial scope was limited

During its early years, the INC primarily attracted the English-educated elite, comprising lawyers, journalists, and professionals from major urban centers like Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. The organization was mostly governed by upper-caste Hindus, Parsis, and members of the emerging middle class who had benefited from British education. The party's earliest efforts focused on constitutional revisions, moderate requests, and petitions sent to the British government. However, the initial scope of the INC was limited, as it encountered difficulties in incorporating the rural population, agriculturalists, and lower-caste communities into its structure.

Societal Basis of the Indian National Congress Following Independence

- Post-independence

Post-independence, the INC sustained its considerable popularity across many social strata. The party's commitment to socialism, secularism, and smart economic development under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru bolstered its extensive popularity. The agrarian policies of the 1950s and 1960s, which included land reforms and community development efforts, received significant support from the rural electorate, especially small and marginal farmers.

- Pro-labor policies

The INC attracted support from industrial workers due to its pro-labor policies and the nationalization of key industries. Nevertheless, the emergence of vigorous labor movements in the 1970s, particularly shaped by leftist ideologies, led to a gradual decline in working-class support. The economic liberalization measures enacted after 1991, while promoting economic growth, alienated the party from its socialist



foundations, hence diminishing its traditional support among economically disadvantaged demographics.

- New challenges

The 21st century has witnessed a significant erosion of the INC's social foundation, as caste and regional parties diminish its dominance. The decline in backing among Dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBC), particularly due to the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and regional caste-focused groups, has posed significant challenges for the party.

Ideological Basis of the Indian National Congress

- Liberal constitutionalism

The foundational ideology of the INC was initially rooted in liberal constitutionalism, shaped by British parliamentary democracy and the tenets of justice, equality, and representation. Pioneering figures like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Surendranath Banerjee championed gradual political reforms within the British colonial framework. With the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, the party embraced a broader ideological framework that incorporated nationalism, nonviolent resistance, and social inclusion. Gandhi's teachings instilled a collective identity within the party, converting it into a vehicle for national unity, anti-colonial resistance, and socio-economic development.

Ideological Basis of the Indian National Congress Post-Independence, the INC adopted Nehruvian socialism, emphasizing state-directed economic planning, secularism, and democratic governance. Nehru's vision was profoundly influenced by Fabian socialism, seeking to create a mixed economy where the state controlled vital sectors while allowing a regulated private sector. During Indira Gandhi's tenure, the party embraced a more populist approach, marked by the nationalization of banks, the slogan "Garibi Hatao" (Eradicate Poverty), and a significant emphasis on state control of resources. This era saw the emergence of authoritarian inclinations, particularly during the Emergency (1975-77), which undermined democratic institutions and alienated substantial segments of society.

The economic liberalization of 1991, spearheaded by P. V. Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, signified a significant ideological transformation. The transition to market-oriented policies, deregulation, and globalization led to economic growth while simultaneously intensifying socio-economic inequalities. The party's ideological ambivalence

- Ideological transformation

became evident in the subsequent decades as it endeavored to reconcile liberal economic policies with welfare efforts such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) implemented in 2005.

Current Trends in the Ideological Basis of the Indian National Congress

- Ideological crisis in modern politics.

The Indian National Congress is presently undergoing an ideological crisis in modern politics. The party oscillates between its traditional secular, socialist policies and a more centrist, reformist strategy to include urban and business constituencies. The ascendance of the BJP's vigorous nationalist ideology has necessitated the INC to modify its ideological position. The party's promotion of secularism and pluralism has often been compromised by inconsistent electoral rhetoric, leading to voter ambiguity.

- Protector of constitutional principles

The INC aims to establish itself as a protector of constitutional principles, democratic values, and minority rights. Nevertheless, its efforts to counter right-wing nationalism have not yielded significant political results. The 2014 and 2019 general elections saw a significant decline in the INC's electoral backing, as the party struggled to define a unique ideological identity separate from its competitors. The Indian National Congress, once the dominant political organization in India, has undergone significant social and ideological changes. The party is facing a reduction in its traditional support base and ideological divergences. Despite attempts to adapt to evolving political realities, it has challenges in combating rising political forces and re-establishing its relevance in contemporary Indian politics.

- Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in 1980

3.1.4 Social and Ideological Foundations of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has exerted significant influence in India's political arena, affecting national policies and ideological discourses. Originating from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in 1980, the BJP has expanded its prominence by a combination of Hindutva ideology, economic reforms, and nationalist discourse. Its capacity to unify various social groupings within a shared ideological framework has facilitated its political success. Nonetheless, evolving voter preferences, economic policies, and regional political dynamics have impacted the party's stance throughout time. This study

analyzes the development of the BJP's social and ideological underpinnings, highlighting political changes, election patterns, and intellectual viewpoints.

Social and Ideological base of BJP

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the predecessor of the BJP, was originally motivated by Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's vision and shaped by the wider Hindu nationalist movement. The initial support base was mostly composed of the urban Hindu middle class, professionals, and the small business sector, who resonated with its focus on cultural nationalism and its resistance to the Congress party's secularism. This constrained ideological framework, focused on Hindutva, was based on the conviction that India's identity was intrinsically linked to Hindu culture and religion. The concept of a unified India founded on Hindu principles was expressed by thinkers such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, who promoted the notion of cultural cohesion that surpasses religious pluralism.

- Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's vision

Notwithstanding its ideological foundations, the BJP's initial efforts to achieve national prominence were constrained. The party's promotion on Hindu unification, at the detriment of a wider social coalition, was seen exclusive. Consequently, its support base remained limited, primarily restricted to Hindi-speaking states and regions with a significant Hindu demographic. The transition to a more pragmatic approach, exemplified by the establishment of the BJP in 1980, enabled the party to adjust its strategies and expand its support.

- Support base remained limited

Support and Electoral Constituency of the BJP in Northern and Central India

The BJP's ascendance in North and Central India is mostly due to its resonance with Hindu sentiments and its capacity to mobilize the populace via religious symbols and cultural nationalism. The Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, was a pivotal event for the party. This movement served as a catalyst for rallying a diverse array of people, especially the urban and rural Hindu demographics, by presenting the issue as one of religious pride and historical rectitude. The effective implementation of the Ram Mandir movement by figures such as Lal Krishna Advani transformed the BJP into a significant force in Indian politics.

- Ram Mandir movement

- Reinforcing its influence

In Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar, the BJP leveraged the substantial support of Hindu voters, especially from the higher castes, who perceived Congress's policies of appeasement as alienating. The party allied with social and religious entities like as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), thereby reinforcing its influence among these constituents. The execution of welfare initiatives such as the Ujjwala Yojana, designed to furnish LPG connections to rural women, and the Jan Dhan Yojana, focused on financial inclusion, enabled the BJP to broaden its constituency beyond its conventional upper-caste backing, engaging with Dalit and backward groups.

The BJP's Support and Electoral performance in South India

- Obstacles in South India

The BJP has encountered a distinct array of obstacles in South India. The region's robust regional political parties, such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have traditionally dominated the political arena. The Dravidian movement, emphasizing Tamil identity and anti-Brahmin sentiments, has established a unique socio-political ethos, complicating the BJP's alignment with the region's cultural and political narratives.

- Coalitions with local leaders

The BJP's efforts to penetrate states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been constrained, since the party has faced challenges in overcoming the dominant influence of Dravidian politics and the Left Front, respectively. Karnataka exemplifies a successful narrative in the BJP's southern expansion. The party's policy of forming coalitions with local leaders and prioritizing economic development problems has enabled it to establish a robust support base, especially within the Lingayat community and other upper-caste groups. Moreover, the BJP's resonance with the ambitions of the urban middle class and its focus on local concerns, such as water distribution and regional infrastructure, has strengthened its standing in Karnataka. The BJP in Telangana has progressively concentrated on the intersection of Hindutva politics and regional development matters. This strategy has seen gradual success in engaging people, while the party continues to encounter formidable challenges from the regional Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS).



3.1.5 Social and Ideological Underpinnings of Leftist Parties in Indian Politics

The Left parties in India have profoundly impacted the country's political dialogue, particularly in advocating for social justice, economic equality, and anti-imperialist ideologies. Rooted in Marxist, Leninist, and socialist thought, these parties have traditionally positioned themselves as champions of the working class, agrarians, and marginalized communities. The Left has significantly influenced India's socio-political landscape, particularly in the post-independence period, with its policies affecting labor rights, land reforms, and the welfare state. Additionally, the Left has consistently advocated for secularism and opposed majoritarian politics, playing a crucial role in countering communalism and safeguarding India's pluralistic ethos.

- Rooted in Marxist, Leninist, and socialist thought

The Left parties, notably the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), and various smaller regional Marxist parties, have consistently served as counterweights to the policies of the ruling Congress and later the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Despite their historical influence, the electoral prospects of the Left have declined, particularly since the early 1990s, with the onset of economic liberalization and globalization. The shift in political and economic circumstances has posed significant challenges for Leftist parties, necessitating a reassessment of their ideological stances and strategies to remain relevant in contemporary Indian politics.

- Economic liberalization and globalization

Fundamental Social and Ideological Structure of Leftist Parties

The Left parties in India emerged from a confluence of scholarly traditions, grassroots activism, and labor movements. The Communist Party of India, founded in 1925, significantly contributed to the struggle for independence and subsequently became the primary political force advocating a socialist alternative to the existing Nehruvian welfare state model. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was established in 1964 following ideological differences within the CPI. The CPI(M) adhered to a Marxist-Leninist ideology, advocating for structural changes to address capitalist exploitation and social inequalities.

- The Communist Party of India, founded in 1925

In the early decades post-independence, Leftist parties

- Challenged feudal structures

garnered support from labor unions, rural agrarians, and the urban working class. They actively challenged feudal structures in rural India, working toward land redistribution and social equity. The Left wielded considerable influence in states such as West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura, implementing land reforms, literacy programs, and social welfare initiatives. These measures aimed to uplift the marginalized and promote equitable economic development. The intellectual foundation of the Left was rooted in Marxist theory, emphasizing class struggle, social justice, and the elimination of economic disparities. The parties advocated for nationalizing industries, strengthening labor rights, and wealth redistribution. Additionally, they played a vital role in upholding secularism, resisting religious majoritarianism, and fostering an inclusive political environment.

Support and Electoral Constituency of Leftist Parties in India

- Backing from rural peasants

Historically, Left parties received substantial backing from rural peasants, the working class, and intellectuals dissatisfied with the policies of the Congress-led central government. The CPI(M) attained significant electoral success in states such as West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura, where it governed for several decades, enacting progressive land reforms and social welfare policies.

- Left Democratic Front (LDF)

In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front (LDF), led by the CPI(M), has maintained a strong political presence, consistently securing electoral victories. The Left's emphasis on land redistribution, welfare programs, and social justice resonates with various segments of the population, including workers, Dalits, and women. The LDF has also played a significant role in safeguarding secularism in Kerala, countering Hindutva narratives, and ensuring that communal harmony is preserved. The state's robust welfare model, characterized by high literacy rates, accessible healthcare, and social security programs, is a testament to the Left's governance philosophy. In Tripura, the Left ruled for over two decades, implementing progressive policies before facing electoral setbacks from the BJP. Despite this, the Left's commitment to social equity and its pro-poor stance continue to influence regional politics.

However, the Left's electoral dominance began to decline in the post-liberalization era. Economic reforms introduced in the 1990s posed challenges as neoliberal policies, privatization,

and globalization reshaped India's economic landscape. The Left struggled to adapt to these changes, leading to a gradual erosion of its traditional support base among urban and middle-class voters.

Contemporary Trends in the Left's Social Infrastructure

The Left parties in India have faced a decline in their traditional support among the working class and rural demographics due to rapid economic and social transformations. The expansion of the service sector, the rise of the middle class, and the increasing influence of consumerism have posed challenges for the Left's ideological outreach. However, the Left continues to maintain a significant presence in Kerala, where its policies on social welfare, education, and healthcare continue to resonate with voters. The CPI(M)-led LDF has effectively implemented schemes that ensure economic security, public health, and equitable development.

- Decline in their traditional support

Furthermore, the Left retains influence among urban intellectuals and progressive circles due to its critique of unregulated capitalism, advocacy for social justice, and opposition to divisive politics. The Left has remained steadfast in its opposition to majoritarianism, making concerted efforts to counter Hindutva-driven narratives and defend India's secular and democratic fabric. While the Left's influence in national politics has diminished, its role in upholding secularism, advocating for economic justice, and ensuring a robust welfare state remains crucial.

3.1.6 Aam Aadmi Party

The India Against Corruption movement, led by social activist Anna Hazare, resulted in the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in 2012. The objective of creating an alternative political entity that emphasized accountability, transparency, and the eradication of corruption drove the party's inception. The fundamental principles of the AAP include direct citizen engagement in politics, democratic decentralization, and integrity in governance.

- India Against Corruption movement

The AAP initially focused on Delhi, establishing a government in the National Capital Territory in 2013, emphasizing objectives like free electricity and water, along with improvements in public healthcare and education. Disillusioned youth and urban middle-class people quickly adopted the party. The AAP garnered support in Punjab, Goa, and other states despite

- Free electricity and water

internal discord and criticism of its governance by presenting itself as a party committed to “honest politics.”

- Transparent governance

The party’s commitment to transparent governance, decentralized decision-making, and prioritization of regional issues such as public services and essential amenities enhances its appeal to voters. However, it continues to encounter challenges in extending its concept beyond urban areas and overcoming the influence of formidable political entities at both state and federal levels.

3.1.7 Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

- Self-determination of Dalits

Kanshi Ram founded the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 1984 with the primary aim of advocating for the rights and self-determination of Dalits, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The BSP’s political objective, grounded on the ideals of equality and social justice, focuses on the advancement of marginalized groups whose rights have historically been denied within India’s social framework.

- Coalition of Muslims, Dalits, and OBCs

Mayawati, the party’s most prominent leader, significantly enhanced its power, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, where it has established several governments. The BSP successfully established a coalition of Muslims, Dalits, and OBCs under Mayawati’s leadership, consistently highlighting welfare projects that aided marginalized communities and policies such as affirmative action and land redistribution. The party wields significant influence in Uttar Pradesh politics and beyond due to its extensive support among Dalits and other marginalized groups. Nonetheless, the BJP’s rise and the advent of regional competitors such as the Samajwadi Party have impeded the party’s growth in recent years. Given the evolving political landscape, characterized by the ascendance of Hindutva politics and the intricacies of contemporary social identity politics, the BSP’s enduring focus on caste-based mobilization has under more examination.

- Inclusive governance, social fairness

3.1.8 Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)

Following his departure from the Indian National Congress (INC) for ideological differences, Sharad Pawar established the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 1999. The NCP advocates for inclusive governance, social fairness, regional autonomy, and secularism. The NCP, originating from Maha-



rashtra politics, has played a crucial role in shaping the state's political landscape.

- Maratha population

The party's primary support base consists predominantly of the Maratha population, agriculturalists, rural inhabitants, and the working class. Through the formation of strategic alliances with national and regional parties, influential political leader Sharad Pawar has been instrumental in maintaining the NCP's significance. The NCP has sustained its power in Maharashtra through robust political alliances, governing the state in collaboration with the Congress and Shiv Sena.

- Significant regional power

Although the NCP has largely maintained its influence in Maharashtra, it has encountered numerous challenges, particularly as the BJP has strengthened its position in the state. Notwithstanding this, the party remains a significant regional power, impacting state governance and promoting legislation that upholds farmers' rights and regional autonomy. To maintain its relevance in Maharashtra and beyond, the NCP must effectively manage partnerships and adapt to evolving political dynamics.

- New social coalitions

India's polity is shaped by the trajectory of its ideology of political parties, the nature of its socioeconomy that governs the society and the changing dynamics of electoral politics. National and regional political parties have played a major role in shaping government, policy choices and the underlying democratic framework. Once the leading political party on the subcontinent, the Indian National Congress has adapted slowly to new social coalitions, economic change and regional and ideological rivals. The BJP has emerged as a major force by combining cultural nationalism with governance-centric politics thus expanding its appeal across a variety of social groups. The Left parties, once pivotal in the making of labour and agrarian policies, are facing electoral backlashes but still strive to uphold their political ideology based on labour politics. Regional parties, such as the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Nationalist Congress Party, have played an important role in articulating the interests of certain caste, class and regional identities, and thus have substantial clout in coalition politics. By focusing on governance and transparency, the Aam Aadmi Party has brought a new dimension to electoral politics, challenging traditional political constructs.

Indian General Election 2024: An Overview

The 2024 Indian General Election marked a significant milestone in the country's democratic process, showcasing the dynamic political landscape. With an electorate exceeding 968 million, approximately 642 million voters participated in the election, including a record-breaking 312 million women voters. Spanning 44 days, this election was the largest in India's history, highlighting the nation's deep commitment to democratic values and electoral participation.

- 642 million voters

Several national parties played key roles in the election, shaping its outcome. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, secured 240 seats, a decline from its previous tally of 303 in 2019. The Indian National Congress (INC), as a prominent member of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), improved its performance by winning 99 seats, thereby securing the status of the official opposition for the first time in a decade. Other national parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], and the National People's Party (NPP), continued to play significant roles in different regions of the country.

- Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance

The election results led to the formation of the government by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which secured a total of 293 seats. Despite the BJP falling short of an outright majority, it managed to form the government for a third consecutive term with the support of its allies. The INDIA bloc, consisting of the INC and various regional parties, made notable gains by collectively winning 232 seats, reflecting a shift in the political dynamics of the country. The election saw the participation of 47 recognized state parties, along with 690 registered and unregistered political parties, making it a highly competitive event. According to statistical data provided by the Election Commission, a total of 744 candidates contested the general election, emphasizing the diversity and inclusivity of the Indian electoral process.

- National Democratic Alliance (NDA)

The 2024 General Election reaffirmed India's status as the world's largest democracy, demonstrating both continuity and change in its political landscape. The increased voter engagement, particularly among women, and the participation of numerous political parties underscored the evolving nature of electoral politics in the country. The results set the stage

- Increased voter engagement



for India's governance in the coming years, shaping policies and political strategies in response to the electorate's evolving aspirations.

The broad scope of Indian politics can also be lucrative in the long run, as parties are forced to navigate an increasingly complex socio-political environment shaped by regional aspirations, changing economics and ideological confrontations. The interplay of caste, religion, economic policies and governance methodologies will continue to drive India's political parties in a certain direction. Their ability to recalibrate to fresh challenges without sacrificing ideological coherence or public faith will determine their ultimate role within India's democratic architecture.

- The interplay of caste, religion, economic policies

Summarized Overview

Political parties in India represent diverse ideologies, social bases, and regional interests, reflecting the country's pluralistic society. The Indian National Congress, with roots in the freedom struggle, has traditionally drawn support from multiple social groups and espoused a centrist, secular ideology. The Bharatiya Janata Party is grounded in cultural nationalism and has built a strong base in northern and central India, with growing influence in the south. Leftist parties, including CPI and CPI(M), emphasize class struggle and social justice but have seen declining support in recent years. Regional parties like the Samajwadi Party and BSP focus on caste-based and regional mobilization, often shaping coalition politics. Aam Aadmi Party and NCP represent new and regional aspirations, with AAP gaining prominence through governance reforms. Social foundations and ideological positions of parties evolve with changing political dynamics and electoral demands. The 2024 General Election highlighted shifting voter alignments, ideological contestations, and the increasing role of regional and issue-based politics.

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of political parties in shaping Indian democracy.
2. Analyze the ideological base of the Indian National Congress and its evolution over time.
3. Examine the social base of the Bharatiya Janata Party and how it has influenced its electoral performance.
4. Compare and contrast the ideological foundations of the Communist parties in India.
5. Evaluate the role of the Bahujan Samaj Party in representing marginalized commu-

nities in Indian politics.

6. Assess the impact of regional parties on national politics in India.
7. How has the Aam Aadmi Party positioned itself ideologically and socially in Indian politics?
8. Discuss recent trends in the social and ideological base of major political parties in India.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



UNIT 2

Coalition Politics in India

Learning Outcomes

With the completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- understand the conceptual foundations of coalition politics and its relevance in a multi-party democracy.
- analyze the structural and institutional factors that influence coalition formations and their sustainability.
- evaluate the role of ideology in the formation and breakdown of coalition governments in India.
- examine the power dynamics and decision-making processes in coalition governments.

Background

Coalition politics in India reflects the complexities of governing a diverse, multi-party democracy. The decline of single-party dominance has led to alliances shaped by both political necessity and strategic compromise. Structural factors such as the electoral system and party fragmentation significantly influence coalition formation and stability. While ideology can serve as a binding force, coalitions often prioritize pragmatic interests over ideological coherence. Governance within coalitions requires power-sharing and negotiated decision-making among partners. Regionalism and federal dynamics further shape the nature and outcomes of coalition politics. Despite fostering inclusivity, coalition politics also raises ethical concerns related to opportunism, instability, and policy inconsistency. This unit critically explores these dynamics within India's democratic framework.

Keywords

Coalition, Multi-party democracy, Electoral alliance, Federalism, Power-sharing, Political stability, Ideology, Regionalism, Governance, Decision-making

Discussion

- Coalition politics

Coalition politics has been a defining feature of India's democratic landscape since the decline of one-party dominance in the late 20th century. As a multi-party democracy with diverse regional and ideological interests, India has witnessed various forms of coalition arrangements—ranging from pre-election alliances to post-election government formations. These coalitions have played a critical role in shaping governance, policy-making, and political stability. While coalition governments promote inclusivity and power-sharing, they also bring challenges such as leadership conflicts, ideological compromises, and governance inefficiencies. Understanding coalition politics in India requires an examination of institutional frameworks, electoral strategies, regional influences, and ethical concerns. This unit provides an in-depth analysis of coalition politics and its implications for Indian democracy.

3.2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Coalition Politics with a Focus on the Indian Context

- Coalitio

The word “coalition” originates from the Latin word “coalitio,” which means “growth together” or “union.” It is derived from the verb “coalescere,” where “co-” means “together” and “alescere” means “to grow” or “nourish.” The term evolved in French as “coalition,” meaning an alliance or union, before entering the English language in the early 17th century. Initially used in a biological sense to describe things growing together, it later came to signify political and social alliances formed for a common purpose. Coalition politics refers to a governance model wherein many political parties cooperate to form a government, allocating executive functions and legislative decision-making responsibilities. This political system emerges when no single party secures an absolute majority in the legislature, necessitating coalitions and power-sharing arrangements. Coalition politics is an essential element of modern democratic systems, particularly in multiparty democracies like India.



Features of Coalition Politics

- Collaboration, compromise

Coalition politics emerges in a multi-party system when no single party secures an outright majority, necessitating alliances to form a government. It is particularly prevalent in parliamentary democracies like India, where diverse political ideologies and regional interests shape governance. Coalition governments function through collaboration, compromise, and collective decision-making among various political entities. While coalition politics fosters inclusivity and power-sharing, it also presents challenges such as instability and delays in policy implementation.

- Power-sharing

One of the key features of coalition politics is power-sharing, where governance responsibilities and decision-making authority are distributed among coalition partners. This arrangement prevents any single party from dominating the political landscape. Additionally, decision-making in coalition governments is based on consensus, requiring agreement among coalition members. This ensures stability but often necessitates concessions and compromises. Coalition politics also demands continuous negotiation and adaptability. Parties within the coalition must engage in ongoing discussions and exhibit flexibility to resolve policy differences and maintain unity. This system prevents the concentration of power, as the presence of multiple parties ensures a more balanced and inclusive political structure. However, ideological and policy differences among coalition partners can sometimes lead to instability, resulting in leadership changes or even the collapse of the government.

- Political representation

Another significant aspect of coalition politics is its ability to enhance political representation. It provides smaller and regional parties with an opportunity to participate in governance, ensuring that a wide range of interests are considered in policy decisions. However, reaching consensus among multiple stakeholders can slow down decision-making processes, leading to delays in policy implementation. The efficiency of a coalition government depends largely on strong leadership, skilled negotiation, and the ability to manage ideological differences for the collective good. Coalition politics plays a crucial role in preventing political dominance and promoting democratic representation. While it strengthens political inclusivity, it also brings governance challenges that require effective coordination and leadership. The success and longevity of coalition governments depend on their ability to maintain stability while addressing the diverse interests of their

member parties.

Fundamental Principles of Coalition Politics

Coalition politics is based on various essential concepts and theoretical frameworks:

- Increased voter engagement

Pluralism and Political Diversity: Coalition politics arises in nations marked by diverse political ideologies, regional interests, and social frameworks. It enables the representation of multiple viewpoints within the government.

- Consensus-building

Consensus and Compromise: Coalition governments, comprising many parties, operate through dialogue, consensus-building, and compromise to formulate policies and govern effectively.

- Distribute executive and legislative power

Power Sharing: Coalitions distribute executive and legislative power among participating parties, leading to a more inclusive decision-making process.

Electoral systems, particularly proportional representation and first-past-the-post, influence the dynamics of coalition politics. In India, the first-past-the-post system has consistently resulted in the formation of coalitions due to fragmented electoral mandates.

- Closely linked to federal structures

Federalism: Coalition politics is closely linked to federal structures where regional parties substantially impact governance at both national and state levels.

- Ensuring stability

Institutional Constraints: Parliamentary democracy requires coalition partners to function within constitutional and institutional limits, ensuring stability and adherence to democratic norms.

3.2.2 Evolution of Coalition Politics in India

India's involvement in coalition politics has significantly evolved since independence. The evolution of coalition governance can be divided into many phases, each marked by specific political events and trends.

Pre-1989 Era: Dominance of the Congress Party

From 1947 until the late 1980s, the Indian National Congress (INC) primarily dominated Indian politics. This period was characterized by the predominance of a single political party



- From 1947 until the late 1980s

at the national level, with the Congress securing significant majorities in successive elections. The Congress's dominance arose from its participation in the independence movement, the leadership of prominent figures like Jawaharlal Nehru, and its ability to engage a wide spectrum of voters from different regions and ethnic backgrounds.

- The first occurrence of coalition

Despite this dominance, coalition politics was not entirely absent. At the state level, certain regional parties formed coalitions to challenge Congress's supremacy. The first occurrence of coalition governance occurred in Kerala in 1957 when the Communist Party of India (CPI) formed a government. These cases were anomalies rather than typical occurrences. By the late 1960s, the Congress faced internal factionalism and a decline in dominance, resulting in its first major electoral setback in 1967. Numerous non-Congress coalitions emerged at the state level, demonstrating the feasibility of coalition politics in India. These coalitions were unstable and often short-lived due to ideological differences among the parties.

1989-1999: The Rise of Coalition Politics at the National Level

- 1989 general elections

The 1989 general elections marked the true emergence of coalition politics at the national level. The Congress failed to secure an absolute majority, leading to the formation of the National Front government under V.P.'s leadership. Singh obtained external assistance from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Left Front. The coalition governance experiment was short-lived due to ideological differences and internal strife, leading to political instability.

- Dismantment of single-party dominance

The 1990s saw the continued rise of coalition politics as regional parties gained significant influence. The disbandment of single-party dominance enabled the establishment of coalitions such as the United Front (1996-1998), which brought together several regional and national parties. These ties were precarious, marked by frequent shifts in political loyalty and governmental instability. The 1998 elections resulted in the formation of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), indicating a significant shift in coalition dynamics. For the first time, a non-Congress coalition successfully fulfilled its term under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. This period established coalition politics as an enduring feature of Indian democracy.

1999-Present: Formation of Coalition Politics

- NDA government in 1999

The formation of the NDA government in 1999 signified a more stable period in India's coalition politics. The NDA's effective fulfillment of its complete tenure from 1999 to 2004 demonstrated that coalition governments can function successfully despite ideological disparities. During this period, the Congress conformed to the coalition paradigm by forming the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in 2004, which remained in power until 2014.

- Rise of regional parties

The rise of regional parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and Trinamool Congress underscored the growing importance of regional organizations in national politics. The coalition era also saw increased bargaining power for minor parties, which often significantly impacted government stability. The 2014 elections culminated in the reinstatement of a single-party majority, with the BJP attaining a substantial victory. This indicated a shift away from coalition politics at the national level, as the BJP attained an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. Nonetheless, regional coalitions maintained their supremacy in state politics, highlighting the lasting importance of coalition rule.

- The 2024 elections

The 2019 elections validated the dominance of the BJP-led NDA, as the coalition secured a significant majority. This period saw a more centralized decision-making process relative to prior coalition governments, hence reducing the negotiating power of smaller alliance partners. Coalition politics at the state level remained fluid, with shifting coalitions influencing power in multiple states. The 2024 elections introduced new challenges and concerns regarding coalition politics. Despite the BJP-led NDA retaining power, the reduced majority of the primary party required increased reliance on coalition partners, reviving concerns about administration stability and policy coherence. The findings demonstrated an increased impact of regional parties, implying a potential return to a coalition-based governance model. This has sparked debates over the resilience of coalitions in sustaining stable governance while addressing the many political and geographical needs of the nation.

3.2.3 Structural and Institutional Factors Influencing Coalition Politics

The coalition politics of India is shaped by a combination of structural and institutional factors that make alliances



- Structural and institutional factors

crucial for stable governance. The country's complex political landscape, characterized by a multiparty system, regional dynamics, and socio-economic diversity, often leads to the formation of coalitions at both national and state levels. The legislative framework and the Anti-Defection Law profoundly affect the dynamics of coalition politics in India.

- Structural characteristics

The coalition politics of India is shaped by various structural characteristics that need and complicate alliance formation. The multiparty system presents a substantial challenge, as the presence of various national and regional parties hinders any single party from achieving an outright majority, necessitating coalition governments. The regional political influence strengthens coalition politics, as strong state-based parties are crucial in national governance, often acting as kingmakers in alliance formations. The electoral system, employing the first-past-the-post technique, occasionally results in fragmented mandates, requiring political parties to collaborate post-election to ensure parliamentary stability. India's federal structure fosters coalition politics, as multiple parties govern at the state level, hence influencing national coalitions and policy development. Furthermore, social and ethnic diversity engenders political fragmentation, as caste, linguistic, and religious groups seek representation through regional and identity-based parties, leading to complex coalition arrangements. Economic disparities within regions affect coalition politics, as regional parties often align with national parties based on economic goals and developmental needs, making coalition governance a delicate balance between local ambitions and national initiatives.

- Legislative framework

The structural framework of India's parliamentary system profoundly impacts coalition politics. The legislative framework necessitates majority support in the Lok Sabha, making coalitions essential when no individual party secures a majority. The President plays a pivotal role in coalition formation by inviting the party or alliance most capable of establishing a stable administration. The Anti-Defection Law, instituted in the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, influences coalition stability by discouraging frequent shifts in party allegiance, hence preventing abrupt governmental collapses. The judicial and constitutional framework impacts coalition politics, since the Supreme Court and High Courts adjudicate disputes related to coalition agreements, election malfeasance, and governance issues. The Governor plays a vital role in coalition formation at the state level, especially in hung assemblies, when discretionary powers can influence governmental stability.

Coalition agreements, such as Common Minimum Programmes (CMPs), promote policy consistency among coalition members by creating a consolidated governing agenda. Additionally, the Rajya Sabha fulfills a mediating role, especially when coalition administrations lack a majority in the upper house, necessitating continuous dialogue and consensus-building. These institutional factors collectively affect the functioning, durability, and effectiveness of coalition governments in India.

- Regionalism, electoral fragmentation

In summary, coalition politics in India emerges from the interplay of structural factors such as regionalism, electoral fragmentation, and socio-economic inequalities, alongside institutional frameworks including the parliamentary system and the roles of the President and judiciary. These factors ensure that coalition governments are essential to India's democratic structure, requiring ongoing negotiation, adaptability, and balance among diverse political factions.

3.2.4 The Impact of Ideology on Coalition Formation and Dissolution: The Indian Context

Ideology profoundly impacts the dynamics of coalition politics in India, influencing both the formation and disbandment of alliances. In the Indian context, where coalition governments are common, the presence or lack of ideological congruence has been a critical factor influencing the stability and longevity of these regimes. Understanding the impact of ideology in coalition politics requires an analysis of its role in the strategic formation of coalitions and the elements leading to their final disintegration.

- Formation and disbandment of alliances

Ideology in Coalition Formation

In India, political ideology often influences the formation of coalitions, although pragmatic factors - such as electoral considerations, regional dynamics, and power distribution - also play a considerable role. During the 1990s, the rise of regional parties and their increasing influence led to a shift from purely ideological coalitions to more opportunistic, issue-focused alliances. The ideological orientations of the participating parties frequently operate as a foundation for coalition formation.

- Ideological coalitions to issue-focused alliances

A significant case is the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), created under the leadership of the Indian National



- United Progressive Alliance

Congress (INC) in 2004. The UPA contained parties with varied ideological orientations, ranging from leftist communist factions to regional entities such as the DMK and Trinamool Congress; yet, a cohesive ideological framework of secularism, welfare, and social justice connected these organizations. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), founded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), developed a coalition encompassing center-right, right-wing, and regional parties, united by a dedication to nationalism, economic liberalization, and Hindutva (Hindu nationalism).

- Economic reforms, national security

In these instances, the ideological heterogeneity of the coalition partners did not inherently block collaboration, as coalitions were regularly built on the grounds of reciprocal electoral benefits and political expediency. Nonetheless, ideology continued to affect the underlying framework of policy making and governmental agendas. The UPA's policy concentration on pro-poor welfare projects, rural development, and inclusive growth reflected the left-leaning orientation of the Congress-led alliance. Conversely, the NDA's focus on economic reforms, national security, and Hindu nationalism coincided with the BJP's ideological framework.

Ideology in Coalition Disintegration

- Breakdown of coalitions

While ideology can aid in coalition creation, it often is the divergence of ideological positions that leads to the disintegration of alliances. In India's coalition politics, the breakdown of coalitions sometimes transpires when parties discover their ideological discrepancies are irreconcilable, culminating in conflicts over policy objectives and governance priorities.

- Ideological difference

An excellent occurrence of this was the fall of the UPA administration in 2014, largely attributed to the ideological difference between the INC and its coalition partners, particularly the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Samajwadi Party (SP). The CPI grew increasingly critical of the Congress-led government's pro-market reforms and economic liberalization policy, while the SP expressed mounting worries regarding Congress's perceived disdain for regional interests, notably in Uttar Pradesh. This ideological conflict ultimately caused the decline of the partnership, culminating in the UPA's electoral defeat in the 2014 general elections.

Similarly, the 1996 dissolution of the United Front (UF),

- Dissolution of the United Front (UF)

a coalition of communist parties, was partially driven by ideological discord. The UF government, which ascended to office with the backing of the INC, disintegrated following a succession of policy disputes between Congress and the regional parties, especially concerning matters like economic liberalization and the degree of state involvement in social welfare initiatives. The ideological divide between the socialist and liberal economic policies of the Congress and its allies caused governmental instability, culminating in its final collapse.

- Disintegration of the NDA in 2004

The most significant example of ideological conflict resulting in the dissolution of a coalition was the disintegration of the NDA in 2004. The BJP's alliance with regional parties like the Shiv Sena and the Janata Dal (United) was mainly based on mutual accords over national security and economic reforms. The fundamental ideological disparity between the BJP's right-wing Hindu nationalism and the secular, inclusive stance of certain allies posed issues. The ideological conflict, particularly about the treatment of religious minorities and the influence of religion in politics, ultimately led to the NDA's defeat in the 2004 elections.

- Instability and subsequent disintegration

Ideology is crucial in the establishment and dissolution of coalition administrations in India. Although ideological congruence might promote the formation of durable alliances, it is frequently the variance in ideological stances that results in instability and subsequent disintegration. The Indian experience illustrates that coalition politics arises not solely from electoral calculations and power-sharing agreements, but is also shaped by the fundamental ideological similarities and disparities across parties. The evolving Indian political scene will maintain the significance of ideology in influencing coalition dynamics, balancing strategic pragmatism with entrenched ideological beliefs.

3.2.5 Regionalism, Federalism, and the Influence of Minor Parties in Coalition Politics: The Indian Context

In India, regionalism, federalism, and the influence of minor parties have profoundly influenced the development of coalition politics. The nation's extensive diversity, in both cultural and geographical aspects, has resulted in a multi-party system where no single party can constantly prevail in the political

- Multi-party system

landscape. Consequently, regional parties and minor political groups have emerged as significant actors in coalition governments. The interplay of regionalism, federalism, and minor political parties is essential for comprehending the operation, stability, and disintegration of coalition administrations in India.

Regionalism and Its Impact on Coalition Politics

- Regionalism

Regionalism in India denotes the political mobilization of distinct ethnic, linguistic, cultural, or geographical groups for political representation and autonomy. The political landscape of India is marked by the preeminence of national parties such as the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in conjunction with several regional parties that articulate the distinct needs and ambitions of various states and populations. The emergence of regionalism has transformed the nature of coalition politics, as these regional parties have become crucial for the formation and maintenance of national governments.

- Connecting state and national governance

Historically, regional parties have been essential in connecting state and national governance. The Indian National Congress, once the preeminent political party in India, started to diminish in influence during the 1980s and 1990s as regional parties ascended, indicative of the increasing regional aspirations. Political entities such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) have not only prevailed in state politics but have also exerted significant influence on national policies. The decentralization of power has augmented the significance of regional parties in coalition politics, rendering them essential for both the establishment and stability of central governments.

- Influencing national policy

Regional parties frequently serve as “kingmakers,” influencing national policy direction by maintaining the balance of power within coalition administrations. In the 2004 and 2009 general elections, the Indian National Congress headed the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which relied significantly on the backing of regional parties such as the DMK, TMC, and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) to attain a majority. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has established the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), frequently collaborating with regional parties as the Shiv Sena, Janata Dal (United), and Akali Dal.

- Interplay between regionalism and federalism

These coalitions illustrate the complex interplay between regionalism and federalism in India's political framework. Regional parties leverage their power inside coalitions to get resources, political positions, and advantageous policies for their states, therefore reinforcing the decentralized character of India's federal framework.

- Increasing popularity of regionalism

Federalism and Its Function in Coalition Politics

India's federal governance structure allocates power between the central and state governments. This framework, however, lacks rigorous symmetry. The central government, especially under a predominant party, has traditionally had greater authority over national governance; nevertheless, states have increasingly gained political importance, notably with the emergence of regionalism. The increasing popularity of regional parties has altered power relations, highlighting the significance of coalition politics and decentralization. The Government of India Act of 1935 is considered a significant milestone in the evolution of federalism in India, as it laid the foundation for the federal structure later adopted in the Indian Constitution.

- Government of India Act of 1935

The Government of India Act of 1935 introduced a federal framework by dividing powers between the central government and the provinces. It provided for the establishment of an All-India Federation, which was to consist of British Indian provinces and princely states. Although the federation was never fully implemented due to a lack of support from the princely states, the Act served as an important precedent for India's later constitutional development. In coalition politics, federalism guarantees the representation of state-level issues at the national level. Regional parties frequently leverage their coalition positions to advocate for enhanced autonomy, increased financial resources, and political concessions for their states. These conversations may encompass obtaining financing for infrastructure development, local welfare initiatives, and potential policy modifications concerning area industry. Regional parties are crucial in maintaining the robustness and responsiveness of India's federal system to the different requirements of its states through effective negotiation.

- Difficulties in coalition governance

Nonetheless, federalism poses difficulties in coalition governance. Regional parties frequently advocate for policies tailored to their local constituency, perhaps conflicting with the interests of the central government or other coalition partners. Regional parties in the southern states may emphasize agricultural and



water management issues, whilst parties from northern states may concentrate on urban development and industrialization. Regional inequalities may result in tensions and policy impasses within coalition administrations, so straining national governance.

The Function of Minor Parties in Coalition Governance

Minor parties, albeit less significant in national electoral power, are essential to India's coalition politics. These parties, typically possessing limited geographical or ideological foundations, become pivotal actors when no single party secures an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament). The capacity of minor parties to influence the distribution of power in coalition governments affords them significant leverage in national policy-making, rendering them essential participants in coalition formation and stability.

- The capacity of minor parties

Minor parties frequently function as intermediaries or conciliators within coalitions, acting as links between more powerful, predominant parties. Their influence is especially evident in situations where the big national parties - Congress or BJP - must forge coalitions with regional or ideologically divergent smaller parties to secure the necessary majority. In the 1996 general elections, no party secured an outright majority, resulting in the establishment of the United Front (UF), a coalition of minor parties. Despite its ideological diversity, the UF government maintained power for several years, bolstered by the conditional backing of the Congress party. The impact of minor parties is further exemplified in coalition governments, such as the NDA led by the BJP, where smaller partners like the Janata Dal (United), Shiv Sena, and Akali Dal assumed crucial positions. These minor parties wielded considerable influence in determining the policies and goals of the central government, especially regarding religious identity, agricultural subsidies, and regional development.

- Intermediaries or conciliators within coalitions

3.2.6 Challenges and Dynamics in Coalition Politics with Minor Parties

The function of minor parties in coalition politics is ambivalent. Small parties are crucial for establishing majority alliances; nonetheless, they frequently contribute to instability and complexity. Minor parties may possess limited agendas, potentially causing discord among coalitions if their demands remain unaddressed. As minor parties are generally less accountable to

- Compelling larger parties

the wider national population, their negotiating power can occasionally result in undue influence, compelling larger parties to concede on critical matters.

- Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

During the UPA government's existence, smaller parties like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) were instrumental in maintaining coalition stability through their support. As the demands of these parties escalated, the UPA was compelled to make policy compromises, which occasionally resulted in internal strife and undermined the stability of the coalition. Moreover, minor parties may possess restricted representation at the national level and may emphasize themes that are less pertinent to national administration. This may create discord within coalitions if larger parties view the demands of smaller parties as harmful to overarching national goals or inconsistent with the coalition's overall agenda.

- Decentralization of authority

In summary, regionalism, federalism, and the influence of minor parties are important to the operation of coalition politics in India. Regional parties facilitate the decentralization of authority and elevate regional aspirations within national politics. Their involvement in coalition governments guarantees that India's multifaceted federal system addresses local need while preserving national unity. Simultaneously, minor parties, despite their limited national presence, exert an outsized influence on coalition building, government, and stability. These entities function as essential mediators, negotiators, and influencers in the formulation of national policies. The interplay between regionalism, federalism, and minor parties will be essential for comprehending the intricacies of coalition politics in India as it progresses.

Summarized Overview

Coalition politics in India refers to the practice of multiple political parties coming together to form governments, often due to the absence of a clear majority. It became prominent post-1989, moving India away from the dominance of a single-party rule led by the Congress. Structural and institutional factors like electoral dynamics, party fragmentation, and federalism influence the nature of coalitions. Ideology plays a dual role—guiding alliances but also causing splits when consensus weakens. Regionalism and minor parties significantly shape coalition governments, often serving as kingmakers. Coalition politics has led to more inclusive policy-making but also brings challenges like instability and leadership issues. The rise in political bargaining, ethical concerns, and opportunism has raised questions about governance integrity. Despite challenges, coalition politics is likely to remain relevant in India's multiparty democracy, especially with increasing regional assertions and issue-based mobilization.



Assignments

1. Explain the conceptual foundations of coalition politics and its significance in India's political system.
2. Discuss the impact of coalition politics on governance and policy formulation in India.
3. How do electoral alliances differ from governance coalitions? Provide examples from Indian politics.
4. Examine the role of regional and smaller parties in coalition governments.
5. Analyze the ethical concerns, such as horse-trading and opportunism, in coalition politics.
6. What are the challenges of leadership and stability in coalition governments? Illustrate with historical cases.
7. Assess the role of ideology in coalition formations and breakdowns in Indian democracy.
8. How does coalition politics influence the federal structure of governance in India?
9. Compare the Indian coalition experience with coalition politics in other democratic countries.
10. Predict the future trajectory of coalition politics in India based on historical trends and global experiences.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

UNIT 3

Regional Political Parties

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- understand the role and significance of regional political parties in the Indian political system.
- identify and analyze the major regional political parties in India and their impact on governance.
- discuss the ideological foundations that shape regional parties and their political strategies.
- explain how regional political parties influence the federal structure and national politics.
- analyze the challenges faced by regional parties in a multi-party system.

Background

Regional political parties play a pivotal role in representing sub-national identities and interests within India's federal democratic framework. They often emerge from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural movements, reflecting localized concerns and aspirations. These parties have significantly influenced both state-level governance and national coalition politics. Their ideological orientations are shaped by regional priorities and identity-based mobilization. While they strengthen federalism and political decentralization, they also face constraints related to limited geographic scope and leadership centralization. Regional parties frequently navigate complex challenges in a competitive multi-party system. Their role in identity politics has contributed to both democratic inclusion and political fragmentation. This unit explores their evolving significance and influence in Indian politics.



Keywords

Regional Political Parties, Federalism, Identity Politics, National Integration, Electoral Strategies, Ideology, Caste-based Parties, Regional Movements, Coalition Politics, Political Economy.

Discussion

- Regional political parties

In the diverse political landscape of India, regional political parties have played a significant and ever-increasing role in shaping the course of the nation's political development. While national parties have historically dominated the political arena, the emergence and growth of regional political parties have altered the dynamics of both state and national politics. These parties represent specific regional, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups, and their rise can be traced back to the post-independence period when India's federal structure and diverse society began to demand political representation.

- Localized aspirations

India's federal structure has provided a conducive environment for regional political parties to thrive. They cater to the localized aspirations of their constituencies, focusing on issues such as language, culture, and regional development. Over time, these parties have become central to India's coalition politics, particularly in the context of national elections where no single party can achieve a majority on its own. This chapter explores the emergence of regional parties, their ideological foundations, their impact on national politics, and the challenges they face in India's complex political framework.

- Role of regional political parties

The rise of these parties has had a profound effect on India's political economy, governance structures, and social movements. In an increasingly fragmented political environment, understanding the role of regional political parties is essential to comprehending the changing dynamics of Indian democracy. The chapter will also discuss the future trajectory of these parties and their impact on national integration and unity in a country as diverse as India.

3.3.1 Overview of the Regional Political Parties

Regional political parties operate in Indian politics internally in a particular state or region and aim to represent the in-

- Issues affecting the local people

terests, culture, and the issue of that area. Unlike national parties, these are regional parties and focus aggressively on issues affecting the local people such as state development, language, caste and ethnic identity. National parties have a broad, pan-Indian mandate; regional parties focus on the aspirations and, in any case, sensitiveness of specific populations or geographic areas.

Emergence and Importance

- Emergence of regional political parties

In the aftermath of Independence, the emergence of regional political parties in India stemmed from the impetus of regional autonomy and identity. These parties later sprang up as a counter to the hegemony of national parties like the Indian National Congress (INC), often seen as too centralised. With India's multifaceted social structure and vast geography coming to the fore, regional political parties were beginning to champion localised issues. These parties are derived from regional movements, based on linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or economic issues.

- India's multiparty system

In the context of national politics, regional political parties often hold the power to make or break coalition governments around the country. Regional parties have gained considerable political clout in India's multiparty system, in which no one party can be relied on to win the majority on its own. Since at both national and sub-national level, parties which are regional but national and party based have made regional politics also more important in terms of their impact in national elections.

3.3.1.1 Features of Regional Political Parties

- Issues within their state or region

◇ **Regional Concerns:** Unlike national parties that deal with issues across the nation, regional parties primarily focus on issues within their state or region. These may include regional economic progress and developmental projects, linguistic rights, and the preservation of regional culture.

- Regional or cultural identity

◇ **Identity-Based Politics:** Many of India's regional parties, are built on the idea of regional or cultural identity. This can manifest as linguistic, religious, ethnic or caste-based movements. This identity politics may mobilize voter support, and it certainly provides a platform for voices of those disadvantaged by the larger national political debate.

◇ **Federalism and Autonomy:** State parties have



- greater decentralisation of authority

traditionally fought for greater decentralisation of authority and a more autonomous stance for states in the federal structure of India. Such demands could range – in addition to demands for greater control over resources and a fairer distribution of power – to demands for fiscal autonomy for states.

- ◇ **Political Strategy:** At times of national elections regional parties, if required work in fruitfully with national parties and forms coalitions. And they may form coalition governments at the state level to run state administrations. These alliances and coalitions are often pragmatic, based on mutual geographical or economic self-interest, rather than ideological coherence.

- Shaping the outcome of national elections

Regional parties have a formidable presence in a few specific states enabling them to play a crucial role in affecting national politics with their performance in state elections (Source: The Fleet) Because of its fragmented electoral system, with the first-past-the-post voting model often leading to splintered mandates, regional parties are pivotal in shaping the outcome of national elections in India.

3.3.2 Important Regional Political Parties in India

- Prominent regional political parties

India is home to many of the major regional parties whose effectiveness plays an important factor in state and national politics. Such parties often emerge to promote regional, linguistic or cultural identities, and their influence has entered national politics, especially in coalition governments. India has several prominent regional political parties:

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) – Tamil Nadu

- C. N. Annadurai

The DMK or Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a prominent regional party in Tamil Nadu, was founded by C. N. Annadurai in 1949. It is also based on Dravidian identity, which is a native identity that upholds that Tamil culture and language should prevail and social justice should be given to the downtrodden and disenfranchised in society. The DMK has been a major force in the far-left here in Tamil Nadu politics, often advocating for further state autonomy within the Indian Union, as well as advocating for Tamil nationalism. The party has alternated in power in the state and become a major player in national

coalition politics.

AIADMK - All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), which was founded in 1972 by actor-politician M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) While the AIADMK also derives its spirit from the Dravida panache, as the DMK, it differs in terms of its means and leaders. Under J.'s leadership. She led her party to become one of the most powerful in Tamil Nadu and, emerged as a strong supporter of the policies aimed for poverty and rural-oriented sectors in the state. Trained on new data until October 2023,

- Founded in 1972

Shiv Sena – Maharashtra

Shiv Sena is a right-wing regional party founded in the interests of the Marathi-speaking population of Maharashtra in 1966 by Bal Thackeray. The party espouses the doctrine of Marathi pride, regionalism and preservation of local culture and identity. The Shiv Sena has been a dominant force in Maharashtra, particularly in Mumbai, and has played a significant role in the state's politics. It has been a part of various coalition governments at state and national levels and has often been a close ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

- Right-wing regional party

Trinamool Congress (TMC) – West Bengal

The TMC or Trinamool Congress, formed in 1998 by Mamata Banerjee after breaking away from the Indian National Congress, is the dominant political force in West Bengal. The TMC emphasizes the empowerment of marginalized groups including the poor, farmers, and ethnic minorities. The party has consistently advocated for regional autonomy and development under Mamata Banerjee's leadership. The TMC's mass support among the people of West Bengal has strengthened its position as a formidable regional player in national politics and a challenge to the ruling federal government.

- Mamata Banerjee

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) – Andhra Pradesh

Founded in 1982 by actor-turned-politician Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR), the party was formed to be the voice of Telugu-speaking people of Andhra Pradesh. Augmentation of the progress of the farmers, coolies and the deprived of the State along with development of the State itself is the World View of the TDP. The TDP is significant in Andhra Pradesh

- The voice of Telugu-speaking people



and has played an influential part in national coalition politics, particularly when it partnered the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the late 1990s.

BSP – Uttar Pradesh

Founded by Kanshi Ram, with Mayawati succeeding him, the Bahujan Samaj Party was formed in 1984 in Uttar Pradesh to look out for the interests of Dalits, backward classes, and other oppressed sections. The BSP believes in a social justice ideology and for a long time now, the party has continuously pushed the agenda of affirmative action, focused on seats and reservations for Dalits in school, employment, and politics. The BSP is heavily regional in its make-up but perhaps more than any other regional party it has a significant national presence by way of catching the imagination of underprivileged sections across India.

- Kanshi Ram

Biju Janata Dal (BJD)– Odisha

Naveen Patnaik, son of eminent Odia statesman Biju Patnaik, founded the BJD (Biju Janata Dal) in 1997. The BJD is committed to the development of Odisha and welfare of its people. Regionalism is the urban-rural roots - poverty and agrarian society are the party's ideological roots. The BJD is the leading player in Odisha politics since 2000 and has been handling national level alignments well.

- Naveen Patnaik

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) – Maharashtra

It consists of militias of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which was formed in 1999 when Sharad Pawar split from the Indian National Congress (INC). The NCP, whose principal base is in Maharashtra, advocates for social justice, secularism and regional autonomy. The party is a part of several coalition governments, both in states and nationally, where it has wielded considerable power in influencing the political dynamics in Maharashtra. Known for its pragmatic approach to coalition politics and its ability to strike alliances across the political spectrum, the NCP has been looking for a partner in UP and, in the past two elections, has identified the Congress.

- Formed in 1999

National Conference (NC) – J&K

Founded in 1932 by Sheikh Abdullah, the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (NC) has consistently been the

- Founded in 1932

leading political party in the Jammu and Kashmir region. NC has been at the forefront of protecting the political rights of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. It follows a policy of regionalism, secularism and a special status for the state enshrined in the Constitution of India. Over the years, the politics of Jammu and Kashmir has altered, but the NC is still an important factor in the region.

- Assamese people

Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) – Assam

The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) is a regional political party which was founded in 1985 to address the issues concerning the Assamese people in Assam. The All Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) was formed in response to concerns about the influx of migrants into the state and calls for the protection of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Assamese people. Though the AGP has played an important role in Assam's political scenario, the party's power has dwindled in the recent past.

- Aspirations of their respective regions

Not only do these regional parties represent the unique identities and aspirations of their respective regions but they also play a key role in state and national politics. Their relevance can be observed in coalition politics, where their support is often critical in forming stable governments.

What led to the emergence of Regional Political Parties in India

- Regional consciousness

Creation of states based on linguistic identity strengthened regional consciousness, leading to demands for greater political representation. Many regional parties emerged to advocate for the interests of specific linguistic communities, such as the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu, which gave rise to the DMK and later the AIADMK. The failure of national parties to address regional issues also contributed to the growth of regional political formations. As national parties often focused on broader policies, they sometimes overlooked local concerns such as land reforms, economic development, and cultural preservation. This created a space for regional parties to step in and represent localized grievances more effectively.

- Neglected in terms of resource allocation

Economic disparities and uneven development across different states further fueled regional political movements. Many states felt neglected in terms of resource allocation, industrial development, and infrastructure projects. Regional parties capitalized on these sentiments by advocating for better



economic policies and greater autonomy in decision-making. The decline of single-party dominance, particularly the weakening of the Congress party after the 1967 elections, played a significant role in the emergence of regional parties. With the erosion of Congress's hegemony, several states witnessed the rise of strong regional leaders who formed their own parties to challenge national-level politics. The trend became more pronounced after the 1989 general elections, which marked the beginning of coalition politics in India.

- Regional autonomy movements

Identity politics, including caste-based and ethnic mobilization, has also been a driving force behind regional parties. Many such parties, like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), emerged to represent the interests of specific caste groups and marginalized communities. Similarly, regional autonomy movements, such as the ones in Punjab (Shiromani Akali Dal) and Jammu & Kashmir (Jammu and Kashmir National Conference), have contributed to the rise of regional political entities.

- Decisive role in government formation

The increasing role of coalition politics at the national level has further strengthened regional parties. With no single party securing an outright majority in many elections, regional parties have often played a decisive role in government formation, thereby gaining greater influence in national politics. The rise of regional political parties in India reflects the country's diverse socio-political landscape. These parties have provided a voice to regional aspirations, strengthened federalism, and contributed to the decentralization of power. However, their presence has also led to challenges such as political fragmentation and governance instability. Despite this, regional parties continue to play a significant role in India's democratic framework.

- Ideological spectrum

3.3.3 Ideological foundation of Regional Political Parties

The ideological foundations of regional political parties in India are deeply embedded in the diverse social, cultural, and economic contexts of the country. Unlike such national parties, which tend to adopt a broader ideological spectrum to appeal to a wider range of voters, regional parties focus on issues that are local and relevant to the constituents they represent. Regional parties are ideologically driven by their local constituents' aspirations, often amid complaints or the demands that revolve around identity, ability, and social justice. Here are the

major ideological bases of regional political parties in India:

Regionalism and Autonomy

Regionalism, which is one of the founding principles of various regional parties, emphasizes the distinctiveness of individual states or regions in India. Regional Parties often espouse greater autonomy in their states, which is a greater decentralised federal system. They hope to ensure that local issues - like economic development, cultural preservation and distribution of natural resources - are given more weight nationally. Such demands for autonomy can range from calls for greater authority to states on matters of legislation, taxation, and development to more extreme demands like statehood, or even the formation of separate regions within India altogether. The Shiv Sena and Telugu Desam Party, among others, have emphasized the need for a more federal system that allows states greater control over the resources they own and decisions they make.

- Local issues

The identity of linguistics and culture

Many regional parties are formed on the agenda of protecting and promoting regional cultural and linguistic identity. Such parties claim that the cultural and linguistic uniqueness of their regions needs protection from the perceived homogenization of national politics. All regional parties define their beliefs through language - most call for official language status, protection for local languages in education and administration and support for programs that promote regional arts, literature and customs. The DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) particularly in Tamil Nadu consider the Tamil language a vital part of their ideological framework for loagans (as in the meaning of loagan which is considered as an identity) and a culture that implies that they want to protect their Tamilloagan.

- Promoting regional cultural and linguistic identity

Equity and Assistance for Under-Privileged Communities

Regional parties have often strode to the tunes of social justice and upliftment of the weaker and under-privileged sections of the society. Many political parties have born out of regional movements, be it caste, religion, class, or general reason and/or community. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) dwells mainly in Uttar Pradesh and advocates for the rights of Dalits and other underprivileged classes, while the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has stalwartly up until now represented

- Upliftment of the weaker



the interests of the rural poor in Andhra Pradesh. In a bid to address historical injustices and inequalities, these parties often promote affirmative action laws, including caste-based reservations in education, public employment and political representation.

Secularism and Governance for All

But many regional parties also promote a secular vision of society, hoping to bring together many religious and cultural communities in their coalitions. Yet their version of secularism largely emphasizes toleration in the local context, as opposed to the strict adherence of national political secularism. Political formations like the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in Maharashtra and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar have sought to weave disparate religious and social communities, routinely positioning themselves as champions of minority rights, especially in regions with significant Muslim, Dalit, or tribal populations.

- Secular vision of society

Opposition to National Supremacy and Centralization

Many regional parties emerge in response to the centralized nature of national politics that most often see decision-making as being exercised without due regard for the specificities of the issues facing other regional communities. The parties alleged the central government often formulates policies which do not take into account the specific problems faced by states. Thus, regional parties often emphasize the importance of decentralizing power and demand an increased say for states in national decision-making. In West Bengal, the TMC has been particularly vocal in criticizing the national government and tends to argue regularly for the central government to provide greater autonomy to state administrations.

- Importance of decentralizing power

The regional political parties in India have significantly diverse ideological bases, which also align with the country's complex social fabric. Such parties draw their strength from their commitment to regional self-rule, ethnic identity, economic progress, and social justice. They address specific local needs and aspirations that national parties may overlook, making sure that India's diverse regional interests find expression in both state and national politics. Regional parties continue to play a critical role in shaping India's political narrative, particularly in fostering a more inclusive and federal political structure.

- Diverse ideological bases

3.3.4 The Role of Regional Political Parties in Indian Federalism

India is a union of states; with that union comes a division of powers between the union government and the state governments. The Indian Constitution envisages a strong central government, though the rise of regional political parties (RPPs) has greatly affected Indian federalism dynamics. These parties represent the interests of their own regions, and are often in favour of greater autonomy and decentralisation. One can approach the role of regional parties in Indian federalism by looking at how they have shaped the evolution of federal governance, their influence on state and national politics, and their efforts to defend regional autonomy.

- Division of powers

Enhanced Regional Identity and Autonomy

Regional parties often spearhead efforts towards regional identity and autonomy in the Indian federation. They want to stress that the protection of the diverse cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic characteristics of their regions is important. This need for independence stems from the belief that a forceful centralized body might sometimes overlook or marginalize local matters. Regional parties have consistently lobbied for greater empowerment of states - a call that becomes particularly notable in areas like the management of resources, law-making and economic policy.

- Efforts towards regional identity

Parties like the DMK, and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu have historically pushed for greater recognition of Tamil language and culture, as well as greater autonomy for the state in matters like education and administration. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena has sought to maintain Marathi identity, and is pushing regional governance structures that would give states greater sovereignty over regional issues.

- Greater autonomy for the state

National-Level Power Distribution and Coalition Politics

At the same time, they have been crucial in coalition politics and power-sharing arrangements, which are an essential part of India's multi-party system. As a result of the vast and varied political landscape of India, none of the major political parties managed to retain control at the national level for any prolonged period without coalition-forming with regional parties. Due to their substantial sway in specific states, such parties often serve as kingmakers in the creation of national governments.

- Kingmakers in the creation of national governments



Coalition governments at the centre have emerged with the support of regional parties like TDP, BJD, TMC, DMK, etc. It has used its heft within the union to be offered consideration of regional goals including economic policy and autonomy in exchange for parliamentary backing. This cogovernance will impact the way national policy is formulated, and it guarantees that regional interests are not sidelined.

- Co-governance

Encouraging the Delegation of Authority

Delegation of powers to states is an integral part of Indian federalism, and regional parties have been strong supporters of this agenda. They have always called for reforms allowing state governments to take actions that appropriately affect their constituents. The regional parties argue that government is improved through decentralisation, which quickly and efficiently addresses local problems.

- Delegation of powers

Regional parties like the TMC in West Bengal and NCP in Maharashtra have also called for the devolution of more resources and decision-making authority to state governments, particularly in fields like education, health, and local governance. From as far back as the American Revolution, the idea of federalism, or minimizing the power of a central government, has made an appearance on the political agenda of both these parties; as they seek to navigate the equilibrium between the dirigisme of the central state and the independence of the state legislature.

- Devolution of more resources

Regional Political Parties and Concept of ‘Cooperative Federalism

Regional parties often demand greater autonomy even as they collaborate through cooperative federalism, where states and the Union tackle problems that require joint action. In India, as a federal country, Cooperative Federalism is expected to play the role of a trigger point in developing a better relationship between the Centre and the states for mutual development.

- Greater autonomy

Regional parties, especially ruling parties at the state level, have sought to strengthen cooperation between the Centre and States on disaster relief, infrastructure development, fiscal federalism, etc. Mamata’s TMC did this during the COVID-19 epidemic, getting funds for states to tackle the problem, and even the DMK has collaborated with the central government. In economic matters, they play a crucial role in shaping the

- Strengthen cooperation

direction of policies around resource allocation, subsidies and compensation of revenue deficits to state governments.

3.3.5 The Impact of Regional Parties on National Politics

Many of India's regional political parties (RPPs) impact the national politics, including decisions of national policies, governing coalitions and national discourse. As their role in the political landscape has grown, the balance of power has shifted away from the two main national parties - Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) - resulting in a more divided, multi-party system. This development has provided Indian politics with opportunities, and concomitant difficulties. Here are the major areas where regional parties have influenced national politics significantly:

- More divided, multi-party system

Establishment of Coalition Politics and Government

Regional parties obviously play a role in realignment of national politics through their involvement in coalition politics. At the same time, throughout much of the post independence period, no party has gained an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament), in India's multi-party democracy. As a result, regional parties often balance the power in national elections. Their support is crucial in forming a stable central government (regional parties would subsequently secure meaningful political, economic and regional concessions in return for their support).

- Involvement in coalition politics

In the era of coalition politics, having regional parties was either indispensable to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which was led by the Congress Party, or to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the BJP, to form a government. Regional players such as the DMK and TMC held the key during the two terms of the UPA. Shiv Sena, TDP, BJD were also indispensable in NDA coalitions. But the evolution of regional parties has made coalition politics prevalent and no party can now hope to govern without its smaller and more powerful allies. This has led to a negotiated form of governance, where regional parties negotiate their own priorities in exchange for supporting the administration at the national level.

- Regional players

Formulating National Policy

Regional parties have played an important role in brin-



- ringing regional issues

ging regional issues to national political discourse and thus influencing national policy. These parties often articulate regional issues that have broader national implications. Regional parties have widely advocated policies and programs related to agriculture, regional development, and social justice to make sure that national policy caters to the diverse regional needs.

- TDP and TRS

This served as a launch pad for pro-farmer policies and regional upliftment at the national level which TDP and TRS (Telangana Rashtra Samithi) delivered in full. Similarly, the DMK and other organizations have worked for the promotion of the Tamil language and culture, contributing to language and educational policies at the national level. Regional parties have ensured that national resource bloodletting (water, subsidies and grants) is allocated as per the state-specific needs, often forcing the Centre to follow a more equitable, local-demand-friendly, approach.

- Realignment of national politics

Alignment and Realignment of National Politics

Regional parties have expanded and contributed to the realignment of national politics. The multi-party system with regional parties as key players has been progressively replacing the earlier predominant two-party system. This change has affected how national political parties operate. For example, both the Congress and BJP have been forced to adjust their strategy in line with regional aspirations and demands.

- Neglect towards regional issues

This common neglect towards regional issues by national parties over a long period has brought the rise of regional parties and has made national parties change their program towards gaining regional support. In Maharashtra, the BJP has partnered with its ally the Shiv Sena, in Bihar, with the JD(U), and in Odisha, with BJD, aiming to gather as much support in these states as possible. In regional contexts, Congress has sought alliances with TMC, DMK, and RJD to limit the BJP's reach. This realignment has changed the nature of national elections. Coalitions are often formed before elections, alliances brokered over not just ideological consistency but also viability of regional interests.

Impact on Electoral Results

Regional players are now important in shaping electoral outcomes nationally. If its impact is clear in most Indian states,

- Shaping electoral outcomes nationally

it is more so in states with distinct regional identities like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha. In these states, which are vital in national elections, the effectiveness of regional parties often affects the outcomes.

- Mamata Banerjee's TMC

The rise of regional parties in UP (most important being SP and BSP), have made the state a significant fraction for determining the outcome of general elections. Similarly, Mamata Banerjee's TMC in West Bengal has become a significant force in national politics, often disrupting the Congress versus BJP contest. The rise of regional parties in crucial states has fragmented the electorate and made the politics more competitive.

3.3.6 Regional Political Parties and Identity Politics

India's regional parties have had a considerable impact on identity politics, often framing their political promises to promote and protect specific regional, linguistic, ethnic, or cultural identities. These are parties that give voice to the fears and desires of populations whom various national narratives deem featureless and irrelevant to the national political conversation. Shiv Sena in its home state Maharashtra emphasises Marathi identity but the DMK in Tamil Nadu stands for Tamil identity and its language. Similarly, the BSP is a party of Dalit empowerment, while the TRS is a party for the identity and development of the Telangana region. In emphasizing regional identity and the need to protect cultural neglect, such parties not only challenge the dominance of national parties but also seek to incorporate communities that had been on the political margins. And identity-based politics have thus reshaped the Indian political landscape, regional parties often undertaking the role of protectors of regional autonomy and cultural distinctiveness, having repercussions on political life at both the state and national levels. FILE: An Indian man holds up a scarf displaying the emblem of India's main Hindu nationalist opposition BJP during Holi festival celebrations in Ahmedabad, March, 2015. | AP

- Impact on identity politics

Regional Political Parties: The Challenges Faced

Regional political parties are confronted with many problems that affects their functioning, electoral viability and also national politics. Resource constraints is one of the major

- Electoral viability



hurdles, which regional parties have in abundance owing to smaller organizational structures and limited funding when compared to national parties. Without resources, they struggle to effectively engage voters, run large campaigns and maintain a coherent political spine - leaving them dependent on burst funding and at times vulnerable to outsiders.

- Internal factionalism

The second challenge is internal factionalism - regional parties lose out owing to leadership tussles, infighting, infighting and jargon-filled discourses. This is especially true in personality-driven parties, in which a leader's dominance can overshadow democratic processes, leading to coups and the creation of satellite parties. This division could potentially fracture the party's electoral bedrock and undercut its capacity to offer cohesive governance.

- Centralizing of power

There is considerable political competition that national parties pose to regional parties, who in many cases, have their influence squeezed into regional areas. Overall national parties, most notably the BJP and Congress, have increasingly attempted to forge nursed alliances with or subsume regional forces, considerably sapping their influence and political freedom in the process. The national government's centralizing of power makes it even harder for regional parties to uphold norms of federal governance (which is difficult enough as it is given India's hyper-centralized structure of politics). The increasing dominance of the central government in both economic and administrative decision-making is curbing the autonomy of regional governments, therefore weakening regional parties.

- Nationalised narrative

For regional parties, the challenge is that of remaining relevant in an increasingly nationalised narrative. The BJP and Congress continue to monopolize national elections, and even if regional issues often trump national ones, regional parties could find it difficult to maintain their unique edges. The challenge of reconciling local aspirations with the national imperatives of unity, while acknowledging demands for social justice and inclusive development, remains a significant challenge before these parties. These dynamics require regional parties to implement flexible strategies and navigate through changing political landscapes, making their existence contingent on their ability to respond to changes in public sentiment both at the regional and national levels.

3.3.7 Future of Regional Political Parties

The future of regional political parties in India is impacted by changing political dynamics, electoral trends, and the increasing aspirations of regional communities and the national political landscape. Many key factors are anticipated to affect their growth in the next years.

- Aspirations of regional communities

Amplifying Regional Aspirations: Considering the impact of the regional identities in Indian politics, its quite likely that regional parties will remain or strengthen their grip in those states with a vibrant regional consciousness. Ensuring the enduring stature of regional parties, particularly in states marked by distinct language, culture or historical legacy are issues of economic inequality, outward conservatism, and demands for greater independence. Such political outfits that can skillfully co-opt such regional aspirations will be formidable players for the foreseeable future both in state and national politics.

- Impact of the regional identities

Coalition Politics and National Role: For all these reasons, regional parties are likely to continue their powerful role in coalition politics both at the state and national levels. The multiparty system and the inability of any individual party to consistently secure an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha mean that regional parties will remain key players in the formation of coalition governments. The ability of regional parties to extract largescale policy and political concessions in exchange for support within such coalitions would ensure their continued relevance in national politics. The rising dominance of national parties, especially the BJP, could make it challenging for regional parties to maintain their bargaining strength.

- Key players in the formation of coalition governments

Regional parties are enslaved in regional politics while BJP and Congress growing into both formations. The BJP's aspirations to capture space in states previously ruled by regional parties - such as West Bengal, Odisha, and Kerala - pose a direct threat to the dominance of these local formations. The BJP-led government's tendency to centralization may undermine local parties' autonomy and push them into fiercer competition with national parties and, especially, threaten their status as an alternative to national parties, under the guise of federalism and state rights. The electoral future of regional parties will depend on their ability to maintain strong local support in a context of heightened competition.

- Tendency to centralization



Only their ability to forge strategic ties with other regional parties or national parties will determine the future of regional parties. Though ideological and regional issues may continue to rule the roost, for regional parties to survive, they ought to undertake pragmatic coalition-building. Over time, regional parties might form larger regional coalitions or try to build a bigger national profile, especially if national parties continue to splinter. The coalition of regional parties can emerge as an effective alternative to the hegemony of national parties in certain states or at the national level.

It will influence outreach strategies for regional parties to connect with voters due to the rise of social media and technology. The growing importance of internet media allows regional parties to reach out to younger, tech-savvy voters, who often are more interested in local issues than national narratives.” The ability to effectively use social media to campaign, advocate on issues and mobilize voters will be crucial for regional parties to remain relevant in an increasingly connected world.

- Younger, tech-savvy voters

In brief, regional political parties in India are most likely to witness both continuity and transformation in the coming years. Regional parties will still play a key role in advocating for local issues and coalition politics, but their survival and growth will depend on their ability to adapt to changing politics, handle national issues competently and build broad coalitions. By tackling challenges like competition from nationalized parties, intra-party stability, and voters’ changing demands, regional parties can maintain relevance in India’s complex and fluid polity.

- Advocating for local issues

Summarized Overview

Regional political parties in India have emerged as key players in the democratic process, representing specific linguistic, cultural, and regional aspirations. These parties often focus on state-level issues, promoting localized development and identity-based demands. Their rise can be traced to dissatisfaction with national parties, the assertion of regional identities, and the decentralization of power. The ideological foundations of regional parties vary, ranging from ethnic and linguistic nationalism to regional economic priorities. They play a crucial role in strengthening Indian federalism by voicing state-specific concerns within the national framework. Regional parties significantly influence coalition politics and have shaped national governance through alliances and policy negotiations. Their engagement in identity politics has empowered marginalized communities but also led to fragmentation. The future of regional parties remains strong, driven by the need for regional representation in a diverse and federal political system.

Assignments

1. What are regional political parties, and how have they influenced Indian politics?
2. How do ethnicity, caste, and language shape the ideology of regional political parties?
3. What challenges do regional political parties face in coalition politics?
4. What is the future trajectory of regional political parties in India?
5. How have regional political parties impacted national policies in India?
6. What is the role of regional political parties in identity politics in India?
7. What electoral strategies are used by regional political parties to maintain political relevance?
8. How do regional political parties influence governance at the state level?
9. How do major regional political parties in India differ in their political approach and ideology?

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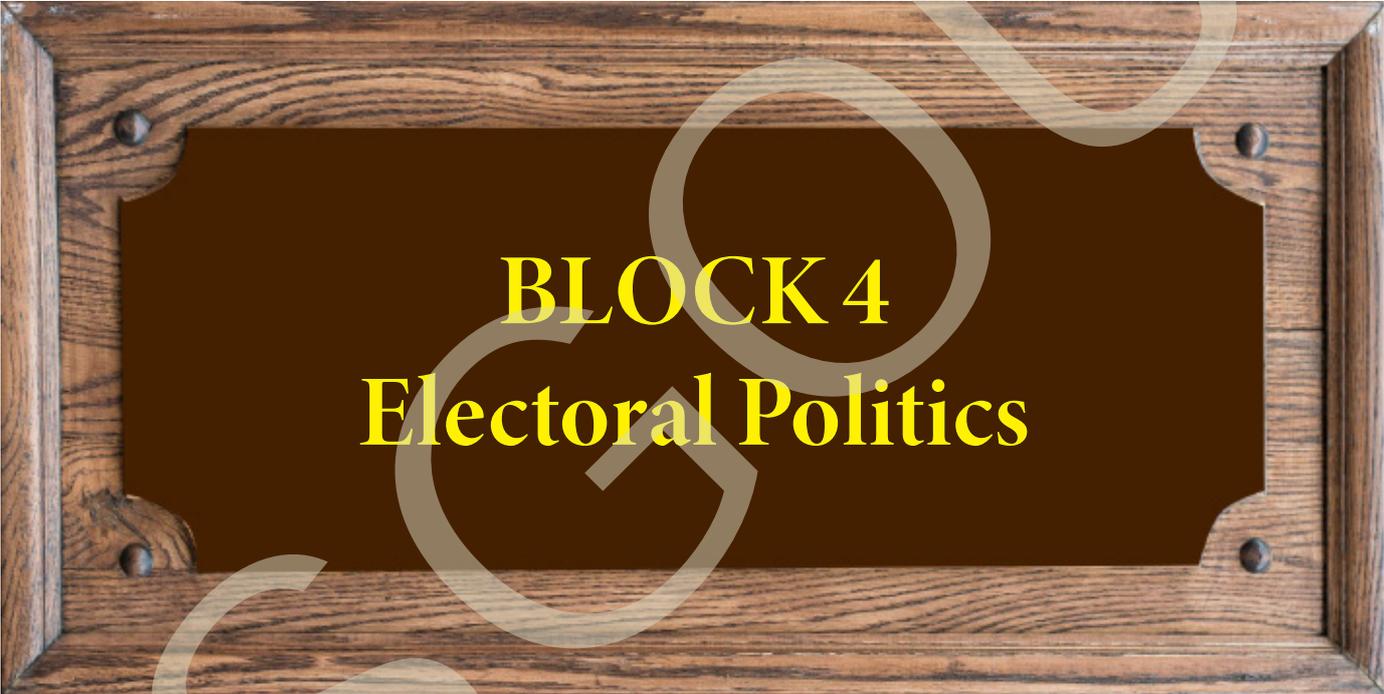
Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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BLOCK 4
Electoral Politics

UNIT 1

Political Participation and Electoral Behaviour

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, learners will be able to:

- define and explain the concept of political participation.
- identify and differentiate between various types of political participation.
- analyze the role of political participation in democratic systems.
- evaluate the determinants of voting behaviour.
- examine the changing trends in voting patterns across different societies.
- assess the impact of social media on voting behaviour and political engagement.
- critically analyze the relationship between political participation and electoral outcomes.

Background

Political participation constitutes a core dimension of democratic functioning, encompassing diverse modes of citizen engagement in political life. These range from institutionalized activities such as voting and party affiliation to non-conventional forms like protests and digital mobilization. The nature and extent of participation offer insights into the inclusiveness and responsiveness of democratic systems. Electoral behaviour, as a subset of participation, is shaped by socio-economic variables, identity markers, political socialization, and media influence. Emerging trends reflect changing patterns driven by generational shifts, urbanization, and technological mediation. The advent of social media has reconfigured political communication, opinion formation, and voter mobilization. The link between participation and electoral outcomes is mediated by complex structural and attitudinal factors. This unit applies theoretical frameworks to critically examine the evolving contours of political engagement in contemporary democracies.

Keywords

Political participation, voting behaviour, electoral systems, social media, political engagement, voter turnout, political mobilisation, democratic governance.

Discussion

- Political participation

Political participation and electoral behaviour are central to the functioning of democratic societies. Political participation refers to the various ways citizens engage in the political process, from voting to activism, while electoral behaviour focuses on how and why individuals vote the way they do. Understanding these concepts is crucial for analyzing the health of democracies, the legitimacy of governments, and the evolving dynamics of political engagement. In recent years, the rise of social media and changing societal norms have significantly influenced voting patterns and political participation. This unit explores the meaning, types, and role of political participation, the determinants of voting behaviour, and the impact of modern technologies on electoral processes. By examining these themes, students will gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of democratic participation and the factors that shape electoral outcomes.

4.1.1 Meaning, Definitions, Forms, and Analysis of Political Participation

- Verba and Nie

Political participation is defined as any action taken by a citizen to influence the political system. Verba and Nie stated, “Where few take part in decisions, there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decision-making, the more democracy there is.”

- Way to voice their political opinions

A key component of democratic government is political participation, which shapes how people interact with political processes to have an impact on decision-making. It gives people and organizations a way to voice their political opinions, hold governments responsible, and participate in the formulation of public policy. Voting, joining a political party, participating in protests, advocacy, and online activism are just a few ways to get involved in politics. Greater political involvement in democracies is a sign of more involved citizens, which promotes inclusive policies and responsive governance. Since gaining

independence in 1947, political engagement has been essential to India's democratic process. India, the largest democracy in the world, has a varied and changing pattern of political participation that is impacted by caste, class, gender, geography, and the introduction of digital technologies. Maintaining democratic values and guaranteeing inclusive decision-making depend on citizens' capacity to engage in governance.

4.1.1.1 Definitions and Significance of Political Participation

- Influence policy and form government

Any activity that involves people or groups getting involved in politics in order to influence policy and form government is considered political engagement. It encompasses both indirect activities like advocacy and activism as well as direct ones like voting and running for office.

- Herbert McClosky

Political participation has been defined by several academics from various angles. It is defined by Sidney Verba and Norman Nie (1972) as actions taken by private individuals to influence public policy. According to Herbert McClosky (1968), participation is voluntary and involves citizens choosing leaders and influencing public policy. According to Samuel P. Huntington and Joan M. Nelson (1976), both individual and group activities have an impact on governmental policy. Similarly, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) define political participation as actions intended to influence the distribution of social goods and values.

- Decision-making

These definitions collectively underline the significance of political participation in shaping governance structures, influencing leadership, and ensuring representation in decision-making. Active political participation is vital in democratic societies as it fosters inclusivity, enhances political accountability, and ensures that diverse voices contribute to policymaking.

4.1.1.2 Characteristics of Political Participation

Political participation exhibits several defining characteristics that help understand its scope and impact.

One of the fundamental characteristics is its voluntary nature, meaning that individuals engage in political activities based on personal interest, motivation, or ideology. Participation is driven by a desire to influence governance, shaping policies and

- Voluntary nature

leadership decisions that impact society. Political participation can be both direct and indirect, where direct participation includes activities like voting and contesting elections, while indirect forms involve advocacy, civic engagement, and digital activism.

- Varied levels of involvement

Another important aspect is the varied levels of involvement, ranging from minimal participation (such as voting in elections) to high engagement (such as activism and grassroots mobilization). Additionally, political participation exists in institutional and non-institutional forms. Institutional participation follows legal frameworks, such as elections and party membership, while non-institutional participation includes protests, civil disobedience, and social movements.

- Caste, religion, and regional diversity

The context-specific nature of political participation means that engagement varies based on the political system, historical developments, and cultural influences of a country. In India, factors like caste, religion, and regional diversity significantly influence participation patterns.

4.1.2 Forms of Political Participation

- Multiple forms

Political participation manifests in multiple forms, broadly categorized into conventional, unconventional, and emerging methods of engagement.

Conventional Political Participation

- Widely accepted activities

Conventional political participation includes legally recognized and widely accepted activities within the democratic framework. The most fundamental form is voting, where citizens elect representatives to govern on their behalf. In India, voting remains a key mode of participation, with the 2019 general elections witnessing a high turnout of 67%.

- Standing for elections

Another significant form is standing for elections, where citizens contest local, state, or national elections to represent their communities in governance. Political engagement is also evident in joining political parties, where individuals contribute to decision-making and policy formation. Major political parties in India, such as the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have large memberships, reflecting strong public involvement.

Citizens also participate by engaging in election campaigns,

- Engaging in election campaigns

mobilizing voters, and contributing to the democratic process. Interacting with elected representatives through petitions, meetings, and public forums allows individuals to voice their concerns and influence governance. Additionally, policy advocacy and lobbying are crucial methods where organizations and civil society groups engage in influencing government policies, particularly in areas like environmental conservation and human rights.

Unconventional Political Participation

- Criticize the political system

Unconventional political participation includes activities that challenge or criticize the political system, often occurring outside formal structures. One prominent method is protests and demonstrations, where citizens gather to express dissent. Historical examples include the 2011 anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare and the 2020–21 farmers' protests.

- Political or social change

Similarly, strikes and civil disobedience are forms of resistance aimed at bringing about political or social change. Movements like Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement and the Chipko Movement highlight the power of such actions in shaping governance.

- Boycotts and sit-ins

Boycotts and sit-ins are also effective means of political expression, where citizens refuse to engage in certain economic or political activities to make a statement. Another growing area is online and digital activism, where individuals use social media campaigns, online petitions, and digital platforms to mobilize political participation. The #MeToo movement, for instance, has played a significant role in influencing policy debates globally.

- Grassroots mobilization

Additionally, social movements and grassroots mobilization serve as powerful tools for political engagement. Movements advocating for environmental protection, gender rights, and workers' rights - such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan and Dalit rights movements - demonstrate the impact of collective participation in shaping policies and demanding justice.

- Modes of political participation

Emerging Forms of Political Participation

With technological advancements, new modes of political participation have emerged, providing alternative ways for citizens to engage in governance. Citizen journalism, where individuals report political events, corruption, and social issues



through digital platforms, has become a crucial method of political engagement.

- Act of political participation

Signing a petition is an act of political participation because it allows citizens to express their opinions, advocate for change, and influence decision-makers. Petitions are often used to demand policy changes, support or oppose legislation, or bring attention to social and political issues.

- Participatory budgeting

Another innovative form is deliberative democracy initiatives, such as participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies, which allow individuals to directly contribute to decision-making processes. Additionally, crowdsourcing for policy ideas has gained prominence, with governments using online platforms to seek public input on policy matters. These emerging forms of participation enhance democratic engagement by providing diverse avenues for citizen involvement.

- Conventional and unconventional forms

Political participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that citizens actively shape governance structures and policies. In India, political engagement has evolved over the years, with both conventional and unconventional forms playing crucial roles in shaping the country's democracy. While significant progress has been made, addressing challenges such as gender disparity, electoral corruption, and political apathy is essential for fostering a more inclusive and participatory democracy. Strengthening institutions, promoting awareness, and encouraging civic responsibility will be key to sustaining democratic participation and ensuring a vibrant political culture.

- Fundamental pillar

4.1.3 Importance of Political Participation

Political participation is a fundamental pillar of democracy, ensuring that citizens actively engage in governance and decision-making. It allows individuals to express their political preferences, hold leaders accountable, and contribute to shaping public policies. A politically active citizenry strengthens democratic institutions, promotes inclusive governance, and enhances the legitimacy of government decisions.

Strengthening Democracy and Representation

Political participation is essential for the proper functioning of democracy. By engaging in political processes, citizens ensure that their voices are heard and their interests represented in policymaking. Voting, joining political parties, and engaging

- Engaging in political processes

in advocacy efforts contribute to a more inclusive and representative governance system. In India, with its diverse population, broad-based political participation ensures that all social groups, including marginalized communities, have a stake in governance.

Ensuring Government Accountability

- Government institutions accountable

One of the key functions of political participation is to hold elected representatives and government institutions accountable. When citizens actively engage in politics through voting, protests, petitions, and civic activism, they pressure governments to fulfil their promises and implement policies that benefit society. Accountability mechanisms such as public debates, questioning elected officials, and media engagement help prevent corruption and misuse of power.

Promoting Social and Political Awareness

- Active political participation

Active political participation fosters civic awareness and political education among citizens. Engaging in political discussions, attending public forums, and participating in social movements educate individuals about their rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of government institutions. Awareness leads to informed decision-making, reducing political apathy and encouraging responsible citizenship. Digital activism and media platforms have further expanded access to political knowledge, empowering citizens to engage in governance more effectively.

Driving Policy Changes and Social Reforms

- Labour unions

Political participation plays a significant role in influencing public policy and advocating for social change. Historically, movements led by civil society, labour unions, and grassroots organizations have resulted in major policy reforms. In India, movements such as the Chipko Movement, the Right to Information (RTI) campaign, and the Nirbhaya movement for women's safety have shaped significant policy decisions. Engaged citizens push for reforms in areas like education, healthcare, and environmental protection, ensuring that government policies align with public needs.

Strengthening Political Stability and National Integration

Widespread political participation contributes to political stability by fostering a sense of inclusion and national unity.



- political stability

When all sections of society feel represented in the political system, social cohesion improves, reducing the likelihood of conflicts and political unrest. Participation also bridges societal divides, bringing together diverse groups to collectively address national issues. In a country as diverse as India, inclusive political participation is essential for national integration and democratic resilience.

Promoting Youth Participation in Governance

Youth participation in politics is crucial for the sustainability of democracy. Young people bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and enthusiasm for political change. Encouraging student activism, youth representation in political parties, and digital engagement ensures that the next generation actively contributes to governance. Initiatives such as youth parliaments and student unions provide platforms for young voices to influence political discourse.

Promoting Gender Equality in Politics

Gender-inclusive political participation strengthens democracy by ensuring that women's voices and concerns are adequately represented. Increased female participation in politics leads to more inclusive policies on education, healthcare, and social welfare. In India, efforts to increase women's representation through reservation in local governance (Panchayati Raj) have empowered women and improved decision-making at the grassroots level.

- Gender-inclusive political participation

4.1.4 Issues and Challenges Related to Political Participation

Political participation is essential for a well-functioning democracy, but several issues and challenges hinder its effectiveness. These challenges arise from structural, social, economic, and technological factors that limit individuals' ability to engage in political processes. Addressing these barriers is crucial to ensuring inclusive, fair, and meaningful participation in governance.

- Fair, and meaningful participation in governance.

Voter Apathy and Low Political Awareness

A significant challenge to political participation is voter apathy, where citizens, especially urban populations, show disinterest in electoral processes. Lack of political awareness, disillusionment with political leaders, and scepticism about the

- Disinterest in electoral processes

effectiveness of voting contribute to low voter turnout. In India, while rural areas often witness higher voter participation, urban centers have recorded lower turnouts due to disengagement and a perception that individual votes do not influence outcomes.

- Economic disparities

Socioeconomic Inequality and Political Exclusion

Economic disparities and social inequalities often limit the political engagement of marginalized communities. The poor, landless laborers and daily wage workers often struggle to participate in politics due to financial constraints and lack of access to information. Political campaigns and elections often favour those with wealth and influence, sidelining economically weaker sections. Additionally, caste and class-based discrimination restrict many from actively engaging in governance.

- Gender-based discrimination

Gender Barriers in Political Participation

Despite progress in women's political participation, gender-based discrimination continues to be a significant challenge. Women often face socio-cultural restrictions, lack of financial independence, and limited access to political networks, which hinder their active involvement in politics. While India has introduced reservations for women in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies, their representation in state legislatures and Parliament remains low. Patriarchal attitudes and political violence further discourage women from contesting elections.

- Booth capturing, voter suppression

Electoral Violence and Intimidation

Electoral violence, including coercion, threats, and vote-buying, undermines free and fair political participation. In several regions, political rivalry leads to violent clashes, discouraging voters from exercising their franchise. Booth capturing, voter suppression, and intimidation of candidates are still prevalent issues in some parts of India. Such activities erode public trust in the electoral process and discourage citizens from engaging in politics.

Influence of Money and Muscle Power

The excessive role of money and muscle power in elections creates an uneven playing field, limiting the participation of honest and capable candidates. Wealthy individuals and corporate-backed politicians often dominate elections, reducing opportunities for grassroots leaders. The increasing



use of money for vote-buying and campaign financing weakens democratic accountability and distorts electoral outcomes. The criminalization of politics, where candidates with criminal backgrounds contest and win elections, further threatens the integrity of political participation.

Youth Disengagement from Politics

While youth represent a significant portion of the population, their political participation remains inconsistent. Many young people feel disconnected from traditional politics and perceive political institutions as unresponsive to their needs. The lack of youth-friendly political platforms and the dominance of older political elite's limit youth involvement in governance. However, social media and student activism have provided alternative avenues for youth engagement, indicating potential for increased participation.

- Disconnected from traditional politics

Young men and women are traditionally active in universities (when allowed), but they often become disillusioned with political leadership and institutions and find themselves excluded from policy development. As a result, youth political activism remains unorganized. Moreover, young people are not adequately represented in formal political institutions and processes such as parliament, political parties, elections, and public administration. This lack of representation limits their ability to influence decision-making and contribute to shaping policies that affect their future. Voter apathy, economic inequality, gender barriers, electoral violence, and the influence of money and muscle power remain significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges requires electoral reforms, political education, inclusive policies, and strengthening democratic institutions. Encouraging digital participation, ensuring fair representation, and promoting civic awareness can help overcome these barriers, leading to a more participatory and inclusive democracy.

- Lack of representation

4.1.5 Voting Behaviour: Definition and Determinants in India

Voting behaviour is a crucial aspect of political participation, reflecting how individuals and groups engage in the electoral process to choose their representatives. It plays a key role in shaping the democratic framework by determining political leadership and influencing governance. The study of voting behaviour helps in understanding voter motivations, electoral trends, and the broader political culture within a society. In In-

- Voting behaviour

dia, voting behaviour is highly dynamic and influenced by a variety of social, economic, political, and psychological factors.

Defining Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour refers to how individuals cast their votes and the factors that shape their electoral choices. It is a complex process that involves personal preferences, ideological leanings, social affiliations, and political influences. Scholars have offered different perspectives on voting behaviour, emphasizing its significance in democratic participation.

- Personal preferences

G. Almond and S. Verba describe voting behaviour as a reflection of the political culture that influences how individuals engage with electoral politics and make their decisions. Robert Dahl considers voting behaviour as an act of expressing a preference for a candidate, party, or policy through an electoral process. Similarly, Herbert Tingsten defines it as an individual's response to the political environment, shaped by psychological, social, and economic influences. These definitions highlight that voting is not merely a routine act but a decision-making process that reflects the aspirations, concerns, and interests of the electorate.

- Reflection of the political culture

4.1.5.1 Determinants of Voting Behaviour

It is shaped by a wide array of factors that influence a voter's decision-making process. These determinants include both personal and societal influences, ranging from socio-economic factors like income, education, and occupation to psychological factors such as party loyalty, political ideology, and individual values. Additionally, external factors like media influence, electoral campaigns, and social networks also play a significant role in shaping voting behaviour.

- Decision-making process

Social and Cultural Factors

Social structures, including caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, and regional identity, play a decisive role in shaping voter preferences. Political parties and groups utilize these factors to gain an advantage in electoral competition and secure victory at the ballot box.

- Shaping voter preferences

The interests of voters and their behavior during elections are also shaped by the nature and purpose of the elections, as well as the extent of suffrage. These elements influence how individuals perceive candidates, policies, and political



- Voting decisions

dynamics, ultimately affecting their voting decisions. In India, caste has historically influenced electoral choices, with political parties forming alliances based on caste dynamics. Communities often align with parties that represent their social and economic interests. Religious identities also shape voter behavior, as political mobilization around religious sentiments often influences electoral outcomes. Gender has emerged as a significant factor, with increasing political participation among women leading to shifts in voting patterns. While traditionally guided by family and community decisions, women voters are now making independent electoral choices, influenced by welfare policies and social empowerment initiatives.

Psychological and Ideological Influences

- Ideological leanings

Voters often develop an attachment to political parties based on ideological leanings and historical loyalties. Party identification plays a crucial role in shaping electoral choices, with many individuals consistently supporting a particular party across elections. The appeal and credibility of political leaders also influence voter behavior. Charismatic leaders with strong public outreach, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Narendra Modi, have been able to shape electoral outcomes through their leadership appeal.

Political Socialization

- Political beliefs, values, and attitudes

Political socialization refers to the lifelong process through which individuals develop their political beliefs, values, and attitudes. It influences how people understand governance, political institutions, and their roles as citizens. This process starts in early childhood and continues throughout life, shaped by various social influences and experiences.

- Political socialization

Several key factors contribute to political socialization, including family, education, peer groups, media, religious institutions, and significant political events. Family plays a fundamental role in shaping political views, as children often adopt the perspectives of their parents. Schools reinforce civic knowledge and a sense of national identity, while peer interactions expose individuals to diverse opinions. The media, including news outlets and social platforms, significantly shape political awareness. Additionally, major political events - such as elections, protests, or policy changes - can leave a lasting impact on one's political outlook.

Economic Considerations and Policy Performance

- Impact voter decisions

Economic factors significantly impact voter decisions, as people often evaluate governments based on their handling of economic issues. Economic performance, including employment rates, inflation control, and development initiatives, influences electoral outcomes. In India, voters have shown support for governments that implement effective welfare schemes and infrastructure projects. Policies such as MGNREGA, which provides rural employment, and the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which provides free cooking gas connections, have played a crucial role in shaping voter preferences, particularly among lower-income groups.

Political Context and Electoral Dynamics

- Governance performance

Governance performance, political stability, and election campaigns play a vital role in shaping voting behavior. Voters assess the effectiveness of ruling governments based on their ability to maintain law and order, reduce corruption, and deliver essential services. Political stability fosters trust in governance, while instances of misgovernance or scandals often lead to voter dissatisfaction and electoral shifts.

- Election campaigns

Election campaigns and political communication strategies have a significant impact on voter choices. Political parties invest in large-scale campaigns to influence public opinion through rallies, advertisements, and media outreach. In recent years, the rise of digital platforms has transformed electioneering, with political parties leveraging social media to connect with voters. Social media campaigns on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have played a crucial role in mobilizing voter support, especially among the youth.

Role of Electoral Systems and Political Alliances

- First-past-the-post (FPTP) system

The design of the electoral system and political alliances further shape voting behavior. India follows the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, where candidates with the highest votes win, making electoral strategy crucial for political parties. Coalition politics and electoral alliances influence voting decisions, as regional parties align with national parties to strengthen their electoral prospects. Voters often consider the feasibility of coalition governments and the impact of alliances on governance when making electoral choices.

Impact of Media and Digital Influence

- Role of media

The role of media in shaping political opinions has grown significantly. Traditional media, including newspapers and television, continues to influence voters by providing political analysis and election coverage. However, digital media has emerged as a powerful tool in electoral politics. Online platforms enable political parties to reach a wider audience, mobilize support, and engage with voters in real-time. The spread of misinformation and fake news, however, remains a challenge, influencing public perception and sometimes leading to electoral manipulation.

Public Image of the Candidate

- Personal connection with the candidate

A candidate's reputation among the people in their constituency, along with their known qualities and contributions in various fields, plays a significant role in shaping voting behavior. Beyond party loyalty or opinions on key issues, voters often consider their personal connection with the candidate and their past involvement in community affairs before making a decision.

Election Campaign

Political parties employ various strategies to influence voters and secure electoral support. These include mass gatherings, street meetings, posters, personal interactions, speeches by celebrities, television and radio broadcasts, newspaper advertisements, processions, and other forms of propaganda. The primary goal of an election campaign is to convince voters that their interests will be best served by the party and its candidates.

4.1.6 Voting Behaviour and Social Media

- Influencing voting behaviour

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool in shaping political opinions and influencing voting behaviour in modern democracies. With the rise of digital communication, political engagement has transcended traditional platforms, making social media a critical space for political discourse, election campaigns, and voter mobilization. In India, where internet penetration has significantly increased, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram play a crucial role in shaping electoral trends. The influence of social media on voting behaviour is evident in recent elections, where digital campaigns, online political discussions, and targeted advertise-

ments have significantly impacted voter decisions.

The Role of Social Media in Political Awareness and Engagement

- Access political information

Social media provides a platform for citizens to access political information, engage in discussions, and express their opinions. Unlike traditional media, which is often one-directional, social media fosters interactive communication, allowing voters to engage directly with political leaders, parties, and fellow citizens. It facilitates political debates, exposes corruption, and raises awareness about government policies and election-related issues.

- To connect with voters

Political parties and candidates use social media to connect with voters, share their manifestos, and counter misinformation. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook allow politicians to communicate their messages in real time, respond to public concerns, and shape political narratives. The live-streaming of political rallies, debates, and interviews has increased voter engagement, making elections more transparent and accessible to the public.

- Digital transformation

Social Media Campaigns and Their Impact on Voting Behaviour

Election campaigns have undergone a digital transformation, with social media becoming a central component of political strategies. Digital marketing techniques such as targeted advertisements, influencer endorsements, and hashtag campaigns have played a significant role in mobilizing voter support. Political parties invest heavily in social media outreach to influence public opinion, especially among young and first-time voters.

- Shape voter preferences

For instance, in the 2014 and 2019 Indian general elections, social media was extensively used by political parties to shape voter preferences. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leveraged digital campaigns, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook advertisements to engage voters and mobilize support. Similarly, opposition parties used social media platforms to challenge narratives, highlight governance issues, and reach undecided voters.

Hashtag movements such as #MainBhiChowkidar, #IndiaAgainstCorruption, and #AbkiBaarModiSarkar illustrate

- Hashtag movements

how social media campaigns have influenced voter sentiments. Political parties use data analytics to identify voter preferences and tailor messages that resonate with specific demographics. This targeted approach helps in addressing regional and community-specific concerns, thereby shaping electoral outcomes.

4.1.7 Changing Trends in Voting Patterns

- Voting patterns reflect the preferences

Voting patterns reflect the preferences and behaviour of voters in an electoral process, shaped by social, economic, political, and technological factors. Over time, these patterns undergo shifts due to demographic changes, political realignments, economic conditions, and technological advancements. In India, voting behavior has evolved significantly since independence, moving from loyalty-based voting to issue-based and identity-driven voting. The increasing role of social media, youth participation, and regional dynamics further contribute to changing electoral trends. Understanding these shifts provides insights into the functioning of democracy and the factors influencing electoral choices.

Transition from Party Loyalty to Issue-Based Voting

- Strong party loyalty

Historically, Indian elections were characterized by strong party loyalty, with voters supporting political parties based on historical affiliations, ideological leanings, or social identities such as caste and religion. However, in recent years, issue-based voting has gained prominence. Voters increasingly prioritize governance performance, economic policies, employment, and welfare schemes over traditional party affiliations.

- The rise of regional parties

For example, the 2014 and 2019 general elections witnessed a shift where national security, economic reforms, and leadership qualities played a decisive role. The rise of regional parties has also contributed to issue-based voting, as voters evaluate state-specific governance and development policies rather than solely relying on national party narratives.

The Role of Identity Politics in Voting Behavior

- Regional identities

Caste, religion, and regional identities have historically played a significant role in shaping Indian voting patterns. While identity-based voting remains relevant, its influence is gradually shifting. Political parties continue to mobilize voters along caste and religious lines, but younger voters are

increasingly prioritizing governance, economic opportunities, and policy reforms.

- Caste-based voting

However, caste-based voting continues to be visible in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where caste equations play a crucial role in electoral strategies. Similarly, religious identity remains a factor, with parties engaging in polarization tactics. Yet, urban voters, particularly the middle class, are showing a tendency to move beyond identity politics and focus on developmental issues.

Youth Participation and Changing Electoral Dynamics

- Increasing participation of youth

The increasing participation of young voters has significantly influenced voting trends. With nearly 66% of India's population below the age of 35, youth voters have emerged as a decisive electoral force. Unlike older generations, young voters are more likely to be influenced by social media, digital campaigns, and issue-based politics rather than traditional political loyalties.

- Emergence of social media

The emergence of social media platforms has transformed political engagement among youth, allowing for real-time interaction with political leaders and access to diverse political perspectives. The rise of student activism and youth-led movements, such as those advocating for employment opportunities and environmental concerns, has further shaped electoral outcomes.

The Future of Indian Voting Behavior

- Changing voting trends

India's changing voting trends show that the country's populace is becoming more knowledgeable and engaged. Traditional elements like caste, religion, and party affiliation are still important, but young people, women, social media, and economic concerns are changing how people vote.

- Voter awareness rises

Elections will probably become more competitive as technology develops and voter awareness rises, with parties emphasising real-time voter involvement and performance-based government. A combination of new digital trends and conventional electoral dynamics will influence voting behaviour in the future, enhancing the vibrancy and participation of Indian democracy.

Voting patterns' shifting tendencies reflect how Indian



- Voting patterns shifting tendencies

democracy is developing due to sociopolitical upheavals, economic changes, and technological breakthroughs. Traditional political narratives are being challenged by voters who are growing more issue-driven, strategic, and knowledgeable. Political parties must adjust to voters' shifting expectations as election dynamics change, making sure that governance, openness, and the efficacy of policies continue to be crucial components of electoral competition. National parties in parliamentary elections, indicating a more strategic and nuanced approach to voting.

Summarized Overview

Political participation refers to the various ways citizens engage in the political process, including voting, campaigning, protests, and public discussions. It is a key element of democracy, reflecting public involvement in shaping governance and policy. Forms of participation range from conventional methods like voting to unconventional actions such as digital activism. Despite its importance, challenges like apathy, inequality, and lack of awareness hinder full participation. Voting behaviour in India is influenced by multiple factors including caste, religion, class, gender, media, and regional issues. The role of social media has grown, enabling wider political awareness, especially among youth and urban voters. Digital platforms now shape opinions, campaign strategies, and voter engagement in significant ways. As technology advances, voting patterns in India are evolving, reflecting a more informed yet complex electorate.

Assignments

1. Define political participation and discuss its significance in democratic systems.
2. Compare and contrast conventional and unconventional forms of political participation.
3. Analyze the role of political participation in shaping public policy.
4. Identify and explain the key determinants of voting behaviour.
5. Discuss the impact of socioeconomic factors on voting patterns.
6. Examine the changing trends in voting behaviour in the 21st century.
7. Evaluate the role of social media in influencing electoral behaviour.
8. Critically assess the challenges to political participation in modern democracies.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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UNIT 2

Issues of Representation

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the meaning and significance of representation in democratic systems.
- compare and contrast the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems.
- analyze the rationale behind the reservation of constituencies in India.
- evaluate the application of the PR system in Rajya Sabha elections.
- examine the reasons for India's adoption of the FPTP system.
- assess the experiences and challenges of the FPTP system in India.
- discuss the provisions and significance of the Representation of People Act.
- explore the role of the Election Commission in ensuring free and fair elections under universal adult franchise.

Background

Representation serves as a foundational principle of democratic systems, enabling the inclusion of diverse social groups in institutional decision-making. Electoral mechanisms such as the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems offer distinct models for translating popular will into legislative presence. India's preference for the FPTP system was rooted in its administrative simplicity and potential to ensure stable governance, while the PR system has been selectively applied, particularly in upper house elections. The reservation of constituencies aims to rectify historical exclusions by ensuring the political participation of marginalized communities. The Representation of People Act establishes the legal parameters for electoral conduct, candidature, and voter eligibility. While the FPTP system has contributed to governability, it has also been critiqued for producing disproportional outcomes and limiting minority

representation. The Election Commission of India plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the principles of electoral fairness under universal adult franchise. This unit offers a critical inquiry into the institutional and normative dimensions of representation in India.

Keywords

Representation, FPTP, Proportional Representation, Reservation of Constituencies, Rajya Sabha, Election Commission, Universal Adult Franchise, Representation of People Act.

Discussion

- Representation

Representation is a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that the voices and interests of citizens are reflected in decision-making processes. This unit delves into the mechanisms of representation, focusing on electoral systems like the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR), which shape the political landscape. It also examines the reservation of constituencies, a tool for ensuring inclusive representation of marginalized groups. The unit further explores the role of the Election Commission in upholding free and fair elections, the significance of the Representation of People Act, and the principle of universal adult franchise, which empowers every citizen to participate in the democratic process. By analyzing India's adoption of the FPTP system and its experiences, this unit provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in achieving effective representation.

4.2.1 Representation: Meaning and Significance

- Political decision-making

Representation is a key concept in political science that ensures the voices, interests, and concerns of individuals or groups are expressed in political decision-making. It acts as a bridge between the people and the government, making governance more inclusive and participatory. Without representation, political systems risk becoming unresponsive to the needs of society.



Meaning of Representation

Representation refers to the process by which individuals or groups are given a voice in governance through elected officials, appointed representatives, or advocacy groups. In democratic systems, citizens cannot directly participate in every political decision, so they elect representatives to act on their behalf. These representatives are expected to reflect the interests, demands, and aspirations of their constituents in policymaking.

• Voice in governance

There are different forms of political representation:

- ◇ **Descriptive Representation** – When representatives share characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or religion with their constituents, creating a sense of shared identity.
- ◇ **Substantive Representation** – When representatives advocate for the interests and concerns of their constituents, irrespective of personal identity.
- ◇ **Symbolic Representation** – When representatives are seen as embodying values, ideals, or aspirations that resonate with the people.
- ◇ **Dyadic Representation** - Dyadic representation refers to the extent to which elected legislators reflect the preferences and interests of the specific geographical constituencies they represent. Legislators often have an incentive to build a personal connection with voters beyond the support they receive from their political party. This may involve direct engagement with constituents, addressing local concerns, and advocating for policies that align with their community's interests.

• Embodying values

• Direct engagement

These forms of representation ensure that diverse groups within society have a voice in political processes, making governance more legitimate and responsive.

4.2.1.1 Significance of Representation

The importance of representation in political systems can be understood from multiple perspectives:

- ◇ **Democratic Legitimacy** – Representation is central to democracy, as it allows citizens to have a say in

• Legitimacy and trust

• Preventing marginalization and exclusion

• Accountable to their constituents

• Conflict or unrest

• Participatory, inclusive, and accountable

• Simplicity and strong governance

governance, either directly or indirectly. A government that represents its people earns legitimacy and trust.

- ◇ **Inclusiveness and Pluralism** – A well-functioning representative system ensures that different social, economic, and cultural groups have a voice, preventing marginalization and exclusion.
- ◇ **Accountability** – Elected representatives are accountable to their constituents, as they are subject to elections and public scrutiny. This ensures they act in the best interests of the people.
- ◇ **Conflict Resolution** – By incorporating diverse perspectives, representation helps address grievances through institutional channels rather than conflict or unrest.
- ◇ **Policy Responsiveness** – When representatives truly reflect the needs of their constituents, policymaking becomes more effective and aligned with public interest.

Representation is a crucial pillar of democratic governance, ensuring that political systems remain participatory, inclusive, and accountable. It provides a means for citizens to express their interests and influence policymaking, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of political institutions. Without effective representation, democracy loses its essence, and political alienation can weaken public trust in governance.

4.2.2 First Past The Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) System: A Comparative Analysis

The electoral system of a country plays a crucial role in shaping its political landscape and governance structure. Among the various electoral systems, the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system and the Proportional Representation (PR) system are the most widely used worldwide. While FPTP is known for its simplicity and strong governance, PR is appreciated for its fairness and inclusivity. This analysis explores the features, advantages, disadvantages, and impact of both systems, providing a comprehensive comparison to understand their implications on democracy.



4.2.2.1 First-past-the-post (FPTP) System

The First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system is one of the most widely used electoral methods, particularly in countries with a British colonial legacy. It is a simple system where the candidate who receives the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner, regardless of whether they secure an absolute majority. This system is predominantly used in single-member constituencies, making it distinct from proportional representation models. FPTP is known for its ability to produce clear electoral outcomes, often favouring a two-party system and promoting political stability. However, it has also been criticized for not always accurately reflecting the overall will of the electorate. Understanding the key features of FPTP is essential to analyzing its impact on governance and democratic representation.

- Most widely used electoral methods

Features of the First-Past-The-Post System

One of the primary characteristics of the FPTP system is its **single-member district structure**, where each electoral constituency elects only one representative to the legislature. This differs from proportional representation systems, where multiple representatives can be elected from a single constituency.

- Single-member district structure

Another defining feature of FPTP is its **plurality voting mechanism**, which means that the candidate with the most votes wins, even if they do not secure an absolute majority (i.e., more than 50% of the votes). This can lead to situations where a candidate is elected despite a majority of voters having preferred other candidates.

- Plurality voting mechanism

The **winner-takes-all nature** of the system means that only the candidate with the highest number of votes gains representation, while all other votes cast for losing candidates are effectively disregarded. This can result in a significant number of wasted votes, as they do not contribute to representation in the legislature.

- Winner-takes-all nature

FPTP generally favours **two-party dominance**, as smaller parties struggle to win seats unless they have concentrated regional support. This is particularly evident in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, where politics is largely shaped by two major political parties.

- Two-party dominance

- Geographic representation

The system is also characterized by **geographic representation**, as it ensures that elected representatives are directly linked to a specific territorial constituency. This strengthens the connection between voters and their representatives, fostering greater accountability and responsiveness to local issues.

- Simplicity and efficiency

One of the practical advantages of FPTP is its **simplicity and efficiency** in vote counting. Since voters only need to select one candidate and the winner is decided by a simple plurality, the results are quick to declare, reducing delays and uncertainties in the electoral process.

- Produce strong and stable governments

Additionally, FPTP is known to **produce strong and stable governments**, as it often results in a single party gaining a parliamentary majority, reducing the need for coalition governments. This stability allows for more decisive governance and policy implementation, though it can also lead to the exclusion of minority political voices.

- Efficiency and stability

While the FPTP system has been historically favoured for its efficiency and stability, its inherent limitations, particularly regarding representation and fairness, have led to debates about electoral reforms in many democracies worldwide.

Advantages of the First-Past-The-Post System

- Simplicity

One of the major strengths of FPTP is its simplicity. The voting process is straightforward, and results are declared quickly since only a simple count is required. This system tends to produce strong, stable governments by favouring majority parties, thereby reducing the chances of coalition governments, which can be unstable. Additionally, FPTP provides a direct link between voters and their elected representatives, ensuring accountability and responsiveness.

- Excessive fragmentation

Another advantage is that it prevents the excessive fragmentation of political parties. By making it difficult for smaller or extremist parties to gain representation, FPTP often results in moderate and centrist governments. Furthermore, the system encourages political stability, as ruling parties typically enjoy clear majorities and can implement policies effectively without excessive compromises.

Disadvantages of the First-Past-The-Post System

Despite its benefits, FPTP has several drawbacks. One

- Proportional representation

- Favours larger, well-established parties

of the major criticisms is that it does not ensure proportional representation. A party can win a majority of seats without winning a majority of the popular vote, leading to distorted electoral outcomes. This can result in “wasted votes,” where votes for losing candidates have no impact on the final result.

Another issue is that smaller parties and independent candidates find it difficult to compete, as the system favours larger, well-established parties. Tactical voting is also common, where voters choose the “lesser evil” rather than their preferred candidate to prevent an undesirable party from winning. Additionally, the system can lead to regional imbalances, where certain regions are overrepresented while others are underrepresented in the government.

4.2.3 Proportional Representation (PR) System

Features of the Proportional Representation System

- Political preferences of the electorate

The Proportional Representation (PR) system is designed to allocate seats in proportion to the votes received by each political party. Unlike FPTP, PR systems use multi-member constituencies, where multiple candidates are elected from a single district. The primary goal of PR is to ensure that the composition of the legislature reflects the political preferences of the electorate as accurately as possible.

There are several variations of PR, including:

- Votes for political parties

◇ **Party-List PR:** Voters cast their votes for political parties rather than individual candidates. Parties are then allocated seats based on their share of the vote.

- Quota system

◇ **Single Transferable Vote (STV):** Voters rank candidates in order of preference, and seats are allocated based on a quota system. For eg. The president of India is elected through the PR system with a single transfareble vote.

- Hybrid system

◇ **Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP):** A hybrid system that combines elements of both FPTP and PR, used in countries like Germany and New Zealand.

PR is widely used in European countries, including Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, as well as in South

Africa and Israel.

Advantages of the Proportional Representation System

One of the biggest strengths of PR is that it ensures fair representation of diverse political views. Since seats are distributed in proportion to votes, smaller parties have a better chance of being represented, leading to a more inclusive democracy. This reduces the number of wasted votes and enhances voter satisfaction.

- Distributed in proportion to votes

Proportional Representation (PR) ensures that every vote contributes to the allocation of seats in parliament, making the electoral process more representative. Smaller parties and minority groups have a better chance of gaining representation under this system, leading to a more diverse range of perspectives and ideas in parliamentary decision-making.

- More representative

PR systems also encourage political participation, as voters feel their voices matter. It promotes multi-party systems, fostering a diversity of political ideas and reducing the dominance of a single party. Additionally, PR systems often lead to consensus-based governance, as coalition governments require negotiation and compromise, preventing authoritarian tendencies.

- Multi-party systems

Disadvantages of the Proportional Representation System

Despite its inclusivity, PR has some drawbacks. One of the key concerns is political instability, as coalition governments are common. These coalitions can be fragile and lead to frequent government collapses or policy deadlocks.

- Political instability

Another issue is the complexity of the electoral process. PR systems often involve mathematical calculations for seat allocation, making the process harder to understand for voters. The system also weakens the direct link between representatives and constituents, as candidates are often selected from party lists rather than specific geographic areas. Additionally, PR may allow extremist parties to gain representation if they secure a small percentage of votes, potentially leading to radical policies or instability.

- Complexity

Difference Between FPTP and PR System

- ◇ **First-Past-The-Post (FPTP):** A voting system in which the candidate with the most votes in a



constituency wins and represents that area in the legislature.

- ◇ **Proportional Representation (PR):** A voting system that allocates seats in the legislature in proportion to the votes received by political parties or candidates.
- ◇ **FPTP** focuses on electing individual candidates who secure the highest number of votes.
- ◇ **PR** distributes seats to political parties based on their proportion of the total vote.
- ◇ **FPTP** often results in a two-party or limited multi-party system, making it difficult for smaller parties to gain representation.
- ◇ **PR** encourages a multi-party system by giving smaller parties better chances of securing seats based on their share of votes.
- ◇ **FPTP** ensures direct accountability, as elected representatives are tied to specific constituencies.
- ◇ **PR** may lead to more indirect accountability since representatives are often chosen from party lists rather than directly elected by a local constituency.
- ◇ **FPTP** typically results in stable governments, often producing single-party majorities.
- ◇ **PR** frequently leads to coalition or minority governments, requiring political parties to form alliances to achieve a legislative majority.
- ◇ **FPTP** is widely used in countries such as the UK, the United States, Canada, and India.
- ◇ **PR** is adopted in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Sweden.

4.2.4 Reasons for Adopting the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) System in India

India, the world's largest democracy, adopted the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system for its parliamentary and state legislative elections. This decision was influenced by multiple factors, including historical precedents, administrative simplicity, and the need for political stability in a newly independent and diverse nation. The adoption of FPTP was a

- Administrative simplicity

strategic choice aimed at ensuring effective governance while accommodating India's complex socio-political landscape.

Colonial Legacy and Familiarity

One of the primary reasons for adopting FPTP was its historical association with British rule. India had already experienced elections under the Government of India Act, of 1935, where FPTP was used in provincial elections. The familiarity with this system among political leaders and administrators made it a natural choice for independent India. Given the urgency of conducting elections in a newly independent country, adopting an already-tested system was seen as a practical decision.

- Government of India Act, of 1935

Simplicity and Practicality

FPTP is one of the simplest electoral systems, both in terms of voting and counting. Voters need to mark their preference for a single candidate, and the candidate with the highest number of votes wins. This ease of understanding was crucial in a country with low literacy rates at the time of independence. The simplicity of FPTP also allowed for quicker election results, reducing administrative burdens and the risk of disputes.

- Ease of understanding

Need for Political Stability

India's leaders, particularly the framers of the Constitution, were concerned about the risks of political instability in a newly independent country. Proportional Representation (PR) systems often lead to fragmented legislatures and coalition governments, which could make governance difficult in a diverse country like India. FPTP, by favouring majority governments, was seen as a way to ensure stability and decisiveness in governance.

- Decisiveness in governance

Direct Representation and Strong Constituency Link

FPTP provides a direct link between elected representatives and their constituents. Each Member of Parliament (MP) or Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) represents a specific geographic area, making them accountable to the voters in that region. This system was considered essential for a large and diverse country like India, where regional representation and local governance play a critical role.

- Accountable to the voters



4.2.5 Experience of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) System in India

India adopted the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system at the time of independence in 1947. This system has been the cornerstone of Indian elections, particularly for the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and state legislative elections. The Indian experience with FPTP has been shaped by the country's vast diversity, regional dynamics, and political evolution over the decades. While FPTP has contributed to political stability and clear outcomes in many instances, it has also presented challenges, especially concerning the representation of regional and smaller parties. This section delves into the Indian experience of FPTP, highlighting its successes and limitations in the Indian context.

- Contributed to political stability

Stability and Single-Party Dominance

The FPTP system, particularly in the early decades post-independence, helped maintain political stability and favoured single-party dominance. The Indian National Congress (INC) consistently secured large majorities in the first few general elections, largely due to the party's broad appeal across diverse regions. The system helped consolidate political power, making governance more decisive and effective. The early years of FPTP in India, from 1951 to the 1960s, witnessed the INC shaping national policies with little opposition. This centralization of power allowed for rapid nation-building, particularly after the challenges of partition and independence.

- Governance more decisive and effective

Emergence of Regional Parties

Over time, as India's political landscape became more diverse, the limitations of FPTP became evident. In the 1970s and 1980s, the system began to favour larger regional parties that had strongholds in specific states. Regional parties like the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the TDP in Andhra Pradesh, and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra began to challenge the dominance of the national parties. FPTP allowed these regional parties to secure a significant number of seats within their respective states, even if they didn't win an overwhelming majority of the vote at the national level.

- Limitations of FPTP became evident

However, this dominance of regional parties also highlighted one of the key criticisms of FPTP – it allowed large parties to monopolize political representation in certain regions, sidelining

- Dominance of regional parties

smaller voices. In states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, regional parties or smaller alliances sometimes had a strong vote share but ended up winning very few seats due to the concentrated nature of vote splitting, further perpetuating the dominance of larger national parties.

- Inability to produce a single-party majority

Coalition Governments and Fragmentation

By the 1990s, the FPTP system's inability to produce a single-party majority in a more fragmented electorate led to the rise of coalition politics. With the INC losing its hold on national politics and regional parties gaining influence, coalition governments became more common. In the 1996 elections, no party secured a clear majority, leading to a series of short-lived coalitions. This period saw the advent of coalition governments, both at the centre and at the state level, where parties with differing ideologies were forced to work together, often leading to inefficiency in governance.

- Greater representation for smaller and regional parties

Despite being seen as a failure in some instances due to instability, coalition governments also provided greater representation for smaller and regional parties, allowing them to influence national policy. However, the coalition arrangement under FPTP often meant that compromises were necessary, leading to policy paralysis and reduced clarity on key issues.

- Wasted votes

Disproportionality Between Votes and Seats

One of the key criticisms of the FPTP system in India has been the significant discrepancy between the share of votes a party receives and the number of seats it secures. There have been several instances where parties won a large percentage of the national vote but failed to convert that into a corresponding number of seats in the legislature. This phenomenon is often referred to as "wasted votes," where votes for losing candidates do not contribute to the final result.

- Representational fairness

For example, in the 2014 general elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received about 31% of the total votes but won 282 seats, a clear majority. On the other hand, smaller parties such as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) received a significant number of votes in urban constituencies but only secured a handful of seats. This disproportionality has led to concerns about the representational fairness of the FPTP system in India, with critics arguing that the system fails to accurately reflect the diverse preferences of the electorate.

4.2.6 Role of Political Parties in Ensuring Representation

Political parties play a pivotal role in ensuring effective representation within a democratic system. In India, they serve as the principal vehicle for political participation, representing the interests of various social groups, regions, and ideologies. The role of political parties in ensuring representation is crucial for the functioning of India's democratic process, as they link the electorate with the government. However, while parties are essential in promoting democratic ideals, their performance in ensuring inclusive representation has often been criticized for neglecting marginalized sections of society.

- Promoting democratic ideals

Party Platforms and Representation

Political parties in India are responsible for creating platforms that reflect the diverse interests of the electorate. Major national parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) tend to focus on national issues, while regional parties address local or state-specific concerns. In a country with over a billion people and significant diversity in terms of caste, religion, language, and region, these parties attempt to forge political agendas that cater to these varied interests.

- State-specific concerns

However, the challenge lies in the extent to which parties genuinely represent the entire spectrum of their constituencies. For instance, while parties may create platforms that promise to protect the interests of various groups, in practice, they often prioritize the needs of dominant social and political factions. Smaller or marginalized communities, such as Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities, sometimes find themselves sidelined in the larger political discourse, despite being critical players in electoral outcomes.

- Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities

Political Parties and Inclusivity

In recent decades, political parties in India have gradually become more attuned to the need for greater inclusivity. This has been most evident in the rise of caste-based and regional parties, which aim to represent specific social groups that were historically excluded from mainstream political conversations. Parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Samajwadi Party (SP) have focused on representing the Dalit and backward classes, while regional parties such as the Dravida Munnetra

- Greater inclusivity

Kazhagam (DMK) and Trinamool Congress (TMC) have focused on the interests of particular ethnic, linguistic, or regional groups.

- Lack of adequate representation

However, despite the increasing focus on inclusivity, the representation of certain groups remains limited. Women, for example, are significantly underrepresented in Indian politics, as are economically disadvantaged and rural populations. This lack of adequate representation in political parties undermines the diversity of viewpoints in the legislative process.

- Challenges remaining

Political parties play an essential role in ensuring representation in India, but they have often fallen short of adequately representing all segments of society. While parties have become more attuned to the interests of marginalized groups in recent years, challenges remain in achieving true inclusivity. To strengthen democratic processes, political parties must continue to evolve and ensure that the voices of all social groups, particularly the marginalized, are included in the political agenda.

4.2.8 Future of Representation: Reforms and Recommendations

- Reforms are essential

The future of representation in India's democratic system depends largely on the evolution of electoral and political processes to ensure greater inclusivity and fairness. As India continues to grow and diversify, the challenges related to political representation, both in terms of the electoral system and the performance of political parties, need to be addressed. Reforms are essential to accommodate new demands for better representation and ensure that democratic processes reflect the aspirations of all sections of society.

Electoral Reforms for Greater Representation

- Mixed electoral system

One of the key reforms needed in India's electoral system is the introduction of a mixed electoral system that combines the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system with Proportional Representation (PR). This would ensure that both regional representation and proportionality are achieved. A combination of FPTP and PR could reduce the disproportionality that often arises in Indian elections, where smaller parties or regional forces are underrepresented in the legislature despite securing a significant vote share.

- Reducing the role of money

Additionally, reforms like reducing the role of money in elections and enhancing transparency in party funding are crucial to ensure that the electoral process remains fair and equitable. Strengthening the representation of marginalized groups, particularly women and economically disadvantaged communities, should also be a priority.

Inclusive Representation Through Party Reforms

- Focusing on gender equality

Political parties need to take proactive steps to ensure that they represent a more diverse range of voices. This includes focusing on gender equality by ensuring better representation of women within party ranks and legislative bodies. Additionally, parties must strive for more equitable representation of rural and underprivileged populations, who are often sidelined in political discourse.

- Internal democracy

Encouraging internal democracy within parties and preventing the concentration of power in the hands of a few leaders would also strengthen representation. This would allow for greater participation by a broader section of society in political decision-making processes.

Legal Reforms for Strengthening Representation

- equal political representation

Strengthening the legal framework governing electoral and party practices is crucial for ensuring fair representation. This includes measures like ensuring equal political representation through reservations or quotas for women, backward classes, and other marginalized groups. Legal safeguards against caste-based discrimination and electoral manipulation would also promote a more inclusive and representative democracy.

- Civic participation

Furthermore, encouraging more civic participation and awareness regarding elections is key to ensuring that citizens are better informed about the electoral process and the candidates they vote for, which would in turn improve the quality of representation.

- Fairness, inclusivity, and transparency

The future of representation in India hinges on reforms that promote fairness, inclusivity, and transparency. While the current system has provided a framework for democracy, changes in electoral processes, party practices, and legal structures are necessary to ensure that the diverse voices of Indian society are adequately represented. With the right reforms, India can move towards a more inclusive, effective, and accountable political system that reflects the true aspirations of its people.

Summarized Overview

Representation is central to democracy, allowing citizens to express their political will through elected officials. It ensures inclusiveness, accountability, and participation in governance. India follows the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system, which is simple and provides stable governments but often lacks proportional fairness. In contrast, the Proportional Representation (PR) system ensures better representation of diverse groups but may lead to fragmented legislatures. India adopted FPTP for its simplicity and suitability for a large and diverse democracy. While FPTP has ensured political stability, it has also raised concerns about under-representation of minorities and smaller parties. Political parties and the judiciary play key roles in maintaining fair representation. Ongoing debates suggest that electoral reforms may improve representational justice and democratic functioning in the future.

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of representation and its significance in a democratic system.
2. Compare the FPTP and PR systems, highlighting their advantages and disadvantages.
3. Discuss the rationale behind the reservation of constituencies in India.
4. Analyze the application of the PR system in Rajya Sabha elections.
5. Why did India adopt the FPTP system, and what are its implications?
6. Evaluate the experiences and challenges of the FPTP system in India.
7. What are the key provisions of the Representation of People Act, 1951?
8. How does the Election Commission ensure free and fair elections in India?

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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UNIT 3

Electoral Reforms

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- analyze the historical evolution of electoral reforms in India and their significance.
- evaluate the major challenges in implementing electoral reforms in the Indian context.
- examine the role of various committees in shaping electoral reforms in India.
- assess the role of the Election Commission of India in driving electoral reforms.
- critically analyze the impact of social media and technology on electoral processes.
- propose future electoral reforms based on current challenges and recommendations.

Background

Electoral reforms in India represent a continual process aimed at enhancing the legitimacy, transparency, and efficiency of democratic governance. These reforms have evolved in response to institutional deficiencies and socio-political transformations. Various expert committees have played a pivotal role in conceptualizing reform agendas to address electoral malpractices and systemic inefficiencies. The Election Commission of India has been central in operationalizing reforms and safeguarding electoral integrity. Judicial interventions have further advanced reform by interpreting constitutional provisions to promote fairness and accountability. Technological advancements and the proliferation of social media have redefined electoral engagement, raising new regulatory and ethical challenges. Persistent issues such as criminalization of politics, unregulated campaign finance, and misinformation continue to undermine electoral credibility. This unit critically examines the historical trajectory, institutional roles, and normative dimensions of electoral reform in the Indian context.

Keywords

Electoral reforms, Election Commission of India, criminalization of politics, electoral funding, EVMs, VVPATs, social media, judiciary, voter awareness, and political transparency

Discussion

- Electoral reforms

Electoral reforms are essential for strengthening democracy by ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections. In India, the electoral system has evolved significantly since independence, with the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs), and measures to curb electoral malpractices. However, challenges such as the criminalization of politics, the influence of money power, and the misuse of technology persist. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has played a pivotal role in driving reforms, but issues like voter apathy, lack of internal democracy in political parties, and the growing influence of social media demand continuous innovation. This chapter explores the need for electoral reforms, the historical evolution of such reforms, the role of various committees and the judiciary, and the impact of technology on elections. It also discusses future directions for reforms to ensure a more inclusive and transparent electoral process.

4.3.1 The Need for Electoral Reforms in India

- Survival and betterment of democracy

Electoral reforms are vital for the survival and betterment of democracy in India. There are many issues, however, that still stand in the way of implementing truly free and fair elections in this well-functioning electoral regime. Issues relating to election rigging, political bribery, the influence of money and crimes in politics, declining voter turnouts, and lack of intra-party democracy highlight the continuing need for reforms. Moreover, new challenges like the misuse of technology, regional disparities in electoral practices, and the under-representation of vulnerable populations call for continued improvements to electoral architecture. Strengthening institutions like the Election Commission, along with progressive reforms, would ensure that the process preserves India's electoral sys-



tem's transparency, and inclusiveness and reflects the mandate of the people.

- Beginning of significant changes

India's electoral system remained largely unchanged until the fourth general election in 1967. However, the demand for reforms emerged prominently in 1971, marking the beginning of significant changes in the electoral process. Since then, various modifications have been introduced to enhance transparency, efficiency, and fairness in elections, ensuring a more robust democratic framework.

Ensuring Free and Fair Electoral Processes

- Election Commission of India (ECI)

Free and fair elections are the backbone of any democracy. The quality of the democratic process is severely compromised in India, notwithstanding the robust framework established by the Election Commission of India (ECI). Numerous instances of electoral malpractices such as booth capturing, voter intimidation and use of state machinery, during elections, highlight the need for comprehensive reforms. Such actions not only subvert the will of the electorate but also undermine public trust in democratic institutions. To address these challenges and ensure that elections reflect the will of the people, electoral reforms are essential.

Reducing the Influence of Money

- Transparency to political funding

Financial strength has a serious effect on Indian elections. Such a situation fosters an inequitable landscape, whereby candidates and parties with greater financial reserves are prioritized over those who operate on tighter budgets. The electoral bonds, which were supposed to add transparency to political funding, have raised concerns over donor secrecy and unwarranted influence. Electoral reforms are, above all, the means to govern campaign financing, guarantee transparency and reduce the influence of money in politics.

Dealing with the Criminalization of Politics

Indian democracy is under imminent threat from the criminalization of politics. A significant share of lawmakers has pending criminal charges, ranging from relatively small infractions to serious crimes. This ultimately delegitimizes legislative institutions and raises doubts about governance quality. Despite legal interventions, such as the Supreme Court's order that criminal records be disclosed, the problem

- Criminalization of politics

persists. Electoral changes are needed to exclude candidates with significant criminal records and to ensure that only people of integrity and public confidence are elected to office.

- Voter apathy

Enhancing Voter Awareness and Participation

Voter apathy, particularly among youth and marginalised communities, is a growing concern in Indian elections. Low voter turnout in certain locations and demographic groups demonstrates a lack of engagement and trust in the democratic process. Instead, reforms should enhance voters' knowledge and motivation through tailored campaigns, education, and technology. Not only does payment reform help establish an incentive for high-need patients to make healthy choices, but it can also make the voting process more inclusive and accessible, thus bridging the gap between citizens and democracy.

- Lack of internal democracy

Strengthening Internal Democracy in Political Parties

The issue of lack of internal democracy in political parties needs to be addressed urgently. Many political parties in India are the bastions of one leader or family which provides little space for internal dissent or democratic deliberation. Power consolidation undermines democratic norms and hinders the emergence of new leaders. Electoral reforms should focus on also enhancing transparency and accountability within political parties, ensuring that they function properly as democratic institutions. It includes things such as regular internal elections and transparency over party financing.

- Representation of marginalized groups

Ensuring Underrepresented Populations are Represented

Despite constitutional provisions regarding the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), representation of marginalized groups in Indian legislatures remains inadequate. Women are significantly underrepresented in the halls of politics. The long-promised Women's Reservation Bill providing one-third reservation for women in legislative seats is still not a reality. Such discrepancies in representation – gaps in perceptions and reality – can only be redressed through electoral reforms, ensuring that all strata/sectors of society are afforded a fair/rational judgement on decisions that impact them.

Strengthening the Role of the Election Commission

It is the Election Commission of India (ECI) which plays



- Legal and institutional constraints

a key role in ensuring free and fair elections. However, its effectiveness is often hampered by legal and institutional constraints. Reforms need to focus on strengthening the independence and powers of the ECI so that it can adopt an affirmative agenda against electoral malpractice. That includes giving the ECI greater power to implement the Model Code of Conduct, regulate campaign finance and address violations of election laws.

- Voter participation

Addressing Regional Disparities in Electoral Practices

India's federal system leads to wide differences in electoral practices and issues across states. In some states, we see high voter participation and robust electoral systems, and in some; we have reported voter intimidation or violence or election malpractices. This requires a regional approach in electoral reforms addressing the particular challenges faced by regions. It entails would also improve the powers of state election commissioners and ensure uniform enforcement of the announced law.

- Integrity of the electoral process

4.3.2 Historical Evolution of Electoral Reforms in India

Elections are the backbone of any democracy, ensuring that power remains in the hands of the people through their chosen representatives. Since gaining independence, India's electoral system has undergone significant changes, adapting to emerging challenges and evolving political landscapes. Despite these advancements, issues such as corruption, the criminalization of politics, the unchecked influence of money, and declining voter participation have raised concerns about the integrity of the electoral process. To address these concerns, successive governments and expert committees have proposed various electoral reforms aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and efficiency. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has played a crucial role in implementing reforms that have strengthened the country's democratic framework.

The First-Past-the-Post System and Its Challenges

India adopted the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system, inspired by the British electoral model. However, flaws in this system became evident soon after independence, as election malpractices such as booth capturing, voter impersonation and electoral violence began to surface. The Representation

- Inspired by the British electoral model

of the People Act, of 1951, laid the foundation for electoral regulations, defining the qualifications and disqualifications for candidates and establishing rules for conducting elections. Over time, the Election Commission introduced measures such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) to curb fraud and the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) to regulate political behaviour during elections. Despite these initiatives, deeper structural reforms were needed to tackle persistent electoral challenges.

The Tarkunde Committee and the Push for Transparency

One of the earliest efforts to reform India's electoral system came in 1974 when the Citizens for Democracy, led by Jayaprakash Narayan, formed the Tarkunde Committee. Although not a government-appointed body, the committee made several forward-thinking recommendations, such as state funding of elections to reduce candidates' dependence on private donations and corporate sponsorships. It also proposed an independent election tribunal to resolve electoral disputes and called for strict regulations to prevent the misuse of government resources during election campaigns. While its suggestions were not immediately implemented, they played a crucial role in shaping future electoral debates and reforms.

- Citizens for Democracy, led by Jayaprakash Narayan

The Dinesh Goswami Committee and the Fight Against Money Power

In 1990, the Dinesh Goswami Committee was established to address growing concerns about the excessive influence of money and muscle power in elections. The committee advocated for partial state funding of elections to create a level playing field, particularly for candidates from economically weaker sections. It also recommended imposing stricter regulations on corporate donations and disqualifying candidates with criminal backgrounds. Additionally, the committee stressed the need for voter awareness programs to enhance electoral participation. Some of its key recommendations, such as the introduction of electronic voting and stricter enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, were later implemented, leaving a lasting impact on India's electoral landscape.

- Excessive influence of money and muscle power

The Indrajit Gupta Committee and the Debate on State Funding

The Indrajit Gupta Committee, formed in 1998, focused specifically on the issue of state funding for elections. It strongly



- Formed in 1998

supported public financing of elections, arguing that it would reduce the dependence of political parties on corporate and illicit funding. The committee believed that state support would help curb corruption and create a more equitable electoral system. However, due to financial constraints and concerns over the misuse of public funds, the government did not fully implement these recommendations. Despite this, the committee's findings reinforced the need for greater transparency in political donations, which later led to stricter financial disclosure norms for political parties.

- Proposed reforms to improve governance

Law Commission Reports and Key Electoral Reforms

The Law Commission of India has periodically reviewed electoral laws and proposed reforms to improve governance. In its 170th Report (1999), the Commission recommended banning candidates with serious criminal charges from contesting elections and called for more internal democracy within political parties. The 255th Report (2015) revisited crucial electoral issues such as political funding, regulation of election-related advertisements, and stronger legal measures against electoral malpractices. These recommendations have played an instrumental role in shaping legislative changes and refining India's electoral policies over the years.

- Independent mechanism for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission and Electoral Administration

As part of a broader governance reform initiative, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008) examined the electoral process and suggested several improvements. One of its key recommendations was to introduce a transparent and independent mechanism for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner and other members of the Election Commission. The commission also highlighted the importance of greater transparency in political funding and called for stricter limits on election expenditure. These suggestions contributed to the ongoing conversation on strengthening electoral governance and institutional accountability.

The Vohra Committee Report: Crime and Politics

In 1993, the Vohra Committee investigated the growing nexus between organized crime and politics in India. The report exposed how criminal elements had penetrated the political system, using their influence to win elections and manipulate governance. The committee called for stringent

- Growing nexus between organized crime and politics

laws to disqualify candidates with criminal backgrounds and urged greater coordination between law enforcement agencies and electoral authorities. Following this report, judicial interventions - particularly Supreme Court rulings - led to mandatory disclosures of candidates' criminal records, increasing voter awareness and sparking public debate on the criminalization of politics.

Electoral Ethics and the Justice J.S. Verma Committee

Though primarily established to recommend changes in criminal law after the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, the Justice J.S. Verma Committee also touched upon electoral ethics. It proposed stricter criteria for disqualifying candidates with criminal backgrounds and urged political parties to take greater responsibility in ensuring ethical elections. The committee's report reinforced the urgency of electoral reforms aimed at eliminating criminal elements from politics and strengthening public trust in the democratic process.

- Disqualifying candidates with criminal backgrounds

Recent Electoral Reforms and Future Challenges

Several electoral reforms have been introduced in recent years based on recommendations from various committees. The inclusion of the None of the Above (NOTA) option allowed voters to reject all candidates if they found none suitable. Restrictions on opinion polls, limits on campaign expenditures, and mandatory disclosures of financial and criminal records have improved electoral transparency. The introduction of electoral bonds in 2018 sought to enhance transparency in political donations, though concerns persist about the anonymity of donors. Additionally, proposals such as holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, as well as allowing online voting for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), continue to be debated.

- None of the Above

However, new challenges such as the influence of social media, the spread of misinformation, and the potential misuse of artificial intelligence in elections require updated regulatory measures. Addressing these concerns will be crucial for ensuring free and fair elections in the digital age.

- New challenges

Electoral reforms in India are an ongoing process that requires the collective efforts of political parties, institutions, and civil society. While past reforms have helped improve electoral integrity, new challenges demand continuous adaptation



- Collective efforts of political parties

and policy evolution. Strengthening the independence of the Election Commission, minimizing the role of money and crime in politics, and increasing voter awareness are essential steps toward a more transparent and participatory democracy. By implementing effective and timely reforms, India can further reinforce public confidence in its electoral system and uphold the principles of free and fair elections.

4.3.2 Election Commission of India and Electoral Reforms

- Established on 25th January 1950

The Election Commission of India (ECI) was established on 25th January 1950 under the leadership of Sukumar Sen. Initially, it functioned as a single-member body but became a multi-member commission in 1989. A major electoral reform was introduced through the 61st Constitutional Amendment in 1989, which lowered the voting age for Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections from 21 years to 18 years, enabling greater youth participation in the electoral process.

- Maintain the integrity of the democratic system

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for overseeing the electoral process in the country and ensuring that elections are conducted fairly and transparently. To maintain the integrity of the democratic system, the ECI has introduced several reforms over the years to address issues such as electoral fraud, the influence of money power, and criminalization in politics. These reforms have been aimed at making the voting process more efficient, transparent, and accessible to all eligible voters. By implementing technological advancements and regulatory measures, the ECI has played a key role in strengthening India's electoral democracy.

- Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)

Key Electoral Reforms Initiated by the ECI

1. Introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) (1999)

To address concerns related to rigging, booth capturing, and invalid votes, the ECI gradually replaced paper ballots with **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)**. These machines have streamlined the voting process, minimized human error, and significantly reduced the chances of election manipulation. The adoption of EVMs has made elections faster and more reliable.

2. Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) (2013)

To enhance trust in the electoral process, the ECI introduced

- Paper slip

the **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** system. This system generates a paper slip that allows voters to confirm that their vote has been correctly recorded in the EVM. The move was made to increase transparency and address concerns about possible tampering with electronic votes.

- Set of guidelines

3. Strengthening of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)

The **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** is a set of guidelines issued by the ECI to ensure fair play during elections. Over time, the Commission has made the MCC more stringent by:

- ◇ Barring political parties from using government resources for election campaigns.
- ◇ Prohibiting inflammatory speeches or appeals based on religion, caste, or community.
- ◇ Ensuring equal access to media for all political parties.
- ◇ Restricting the announcement of new government schemes once elections are declared.

These measures have helped create a level playing field for all candidates and parties during elections.

4. Introduction of the 'None of the Above' (NOTA) Option (2013)

To give voters the right to reject all candidates if they are dissatisfied with their choices, the ECI proposed the introduction of **NOTA (None of the Above)**. This option allows voters to express discontent with all contesting candidates. While NOTA does not currently impact election results, it has increased political accountability by highlighting voter dissatisfaction.

- Express discontent

5. Mandatory Disclosure of Criminal Records (2002 & 2013)

The ECI has played a crucial role in ensuring greater transparency regarding the backgrounds of candidates. It pushed for a rule requiring all candidates to disclose their criminal records, financial assets, liabilities, and educational qualifications. As a result, the Supreme Court made it compulsory for candidates to submit affidavits containing these details, enabling voters to make informed choices.

- Disclose their criminal records

6. Limits on Election Expenditure

To ensure that elections remain fair and do not favour wealthy



candidates, the ECI has set limits on how much candidates can spend during campaigns. These limits apply to both **Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections**. To enforce these rules, the ECI:

- Appoints expenditure observers

- ◇ Appoints expenditure observers to monitor campaign spending.
- ◇ Requires candidates to submit detailed expense reports.
- ◇ Acts against those who exceed the prescribed expenditure limits.

7. Issuance of Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) (1993)

To prevent bogus voting and impersonation, the ECI introduced **Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPICs)**. Over the years, this system has been improved through digitization, and efforts have been made to link voter IDs with Aadhaar to eliminate duplicate registrations and enhance the accuracy of voter rolls.

- Digitization

8. Regulation of Opinion and Exit Polls

The ECI has placed restrictions on the publication of opinion polls and exit polls to ensure that they do not unduly influence voter behaviour. According to its guidelines, the results of exit polls can only be published after all phases of an election have been completed.

- Opinion polls and exit polls

9. Measures Against Paid News and Unregulated Political Advertising

To curb the growing influence of **paid news**, where media outlets promote political candidates in exchange for money, the ECI has:

- Growing influence of paid news

- ◇ Established a Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) to monitor political advertisements.
- ◇ Introduced penalties and disqualifications for candidates found engaging in paid news practices.

These measures aim to ensure that media coverage remains fair and unbiased during elections.

10. Postal Voting for Special Categories of Voters

To increase voter participation among certain groups, the

ECI has introduced postal voting facilities for:

- Postal voting facilities

- ◇ Members of the armed forces and their families.
- ◇ Senior citizens above the age of 80.
- ◇ Persons with disabilities.
- ◇ Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) (a proposal currently under discussion).

This reform has made the voting process more inclusive, especially for those who face difficulties in physically reaching polling stations.

Major Challenges Before the Election Commission of India

- Problem-solvers

- Anonymity of electoral bonds

- Misuse of state resources

- Lacks legal enforceability

- Misleads voters

- ◇ **Populism and Elections:** Populist leaders often present themselves as problem-solvers for all societal issues, influencing public opinion and electoral choices.
- ◇ **Electoral Corruption:** The ECI is concerned about electoral corruption, particularly due to the anonymity of electoral bonds, which affects transparency in political funding.
- ◇ **Misuse of Government Machinery:** A significant challenge for the ECI is the misuse of state resources by ruling parties to gain an electoral advantage, undermining fair competition.
- ◇ **Hate Speech and Rumor-Mongering:** The absence of strict legal measures against hate speech is a serious concern. While the Model Code of Conduct discourages hate speech, it lacks legal enforceability, limiting its effectiveness.
- ◇ **Paid News:** Paid news is another critical issue, as it misleads voters and distorts public opinion. It also hampers the right to accurate information, affecting the democratic process.

To ensure free and fair elections, electoral reforms must be periodically updated to address emerging challenges and strengthen India's democratic framework.

4.3.4 Judiciary and Electoral Reform

The judiciary plays an essential role in protecting the integrity of the electoral process, ensuring that elections are

- Corruption, lack of transparency, and unfair practices

conducted fairly and by the Constitution. Through judicial interventions, Indian courts, especially the Supreme Court and various High Courts, have consistently addressed issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, and unfair practices. These interventions have aimed at improving the fairness of elections—from disqualifying corrupt politicians to regulating election funding. Furthermore, judicial rulings have played a major role in shaping various dimensions of electoral reform in India, ensuring that the democratic process continues to be both honest and reliable.

Key Judicial Interventions in Electoral Reform

- Disclose their criminal records

1. **Mandatory Disclosure of Criminal Records (2002 & 2013):** In 2002, the Supreme Court made a landmark ruling requiring all candidates to disclose their criminal records, as well as details of assets, liabilities, and educational qualifications. This move was intended to ensure that voters had crucial information about the candidates. A further ruling in 2013 required that candidates must publish their criminal records in newspapers and on electronic media before elections, providing voters with an opportunity to make informed choices.

- Influence of criminal elements in politics

2. **Disqualification of Convicted Politicians (2013):** Previously, convicted politicians could remain in office if they appealed their convictions within three months. In 2013, the Supreme Court abolished this provision, ruling that MPs and MLAs convicted of crimes punishable by two years or more would be disqualified immediately. This ruling sought to curb the influence of criminal elements in politics and prevent convicted individuals from exploiting legal loopholes to remain in power.

- Complete trials within one year

3. **Fast-Tracking Criminal Cases Against Legislators (2017):** With an ever-delaying justice system, the Supreme Court in 2017 directed the establishment of special courts to fast-track legal cases involving MPs and MLAs. These courts were instructed to complete trials within one year, ensuring that individuals facing serious charges could not contest elections while their cases were pending.

4. **NOTA (None of the Above) (2013):** In 2013, the Supreme Court introduced the “None of the Above” (NOTA) option,

- None of the candidates were satisfactory

- Public money for advertisements promoting political leaders

- Lifetime ban from contesting elections

- Presenting novel difficulties

allowing voters to indicate that none of the candidates were satisfactory. Although NOTA does not affect the outcome of elections, it provides voters with a meaningful way to express their dissatisfaction, helping to prevent political parties from fielding controversial candidates.

5. **Restriction on Government Ads Before Elections (2015):** In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that the government could not use public money for advertisements promoting political leaders just before elections. This ruling sought to stop political parties from using public funds to gain a political edge, in line with the Model Code of Conduct, ensuring that all political parties had an equal opportunity to present their platforms.
6. **Lifetime Ban on Convicted Politicians (Proposal Pending):** In several instances, the Supreme Court has suggested that politicians convicted of serious crimes should face a lifetime ban from contesting elections, similar to the restrictions placed on civil servants found guilty of misconduct. While this proposal has not yet been adopted, the Court has urged Parliament to seriously consider it as an essential part of addressing the criminalization of politics.

4.3.5 Social Media, Technology, and Electoral Reforms

The swift expansion of social media and technology has significantly influenced voting processes, presenting novel difficulties and potential for electoral reforms. These technology innovations have revolutionized campaign operations, information distribution, and voter participation in the political process. With the increasing integration of social media platforms and digital tools in contemporary campaigns, it is imperative to safeguard the fairness, openness, and integrity of elections from potential technological undermining. Electoral reforms are being contemplated to address the ethical and legal ramifications of these technological advancements.

The Impact of Social Media on Electoral Campaigns

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp enable political parties and candidates to directly connect with and engage voters. These platforms

- Directly connect with and engage voters

provide instantaneous contact, targeted advertising, and the swift dissemination of campaign messages. They also offer a platform for political speech, enabling voters to articulate thoughts, disseminate information, and engage in political discussions. The extensive utilization of social media in electoral campaigns has raised considerable apprehensions. The dissemination of misinformation, fabricated news, and detrimental content can skew public perception and affect electoral results. False narratives, propaganda, and hate speech can rapidly proliferate on digital platforms, jeopardizing the integrity of the election process.

- Transparency in political advertisements

Electoral measures are proposed to control political advertising on social media to address these concerns. These amendments emphasize transparency in political advertisements, mandating clear labelling as political content and the disclosure of source and funding information. This would assist voters in recognizing credible information sources and mitigate the influence of deceptive or manipulative content. Moreover, social media platforms are being encouraged to partner with election commissions and other bodies to oversee and counteract the dissemination of misinformation and hate speech during electoral times. The formulation of standards for social media utilization in campaigns, encompassing the implementation of content moderation policies, is emerging as a pivotal concern in electoral reform dialogues.

- Data privacy and security.

A vital area for reform is the regulation of data privacy and security. As data collection for campaign purposes increases, safeguarding voter information from exploitation is essential. Legislation to secure voter data, prevent unauthorized access, and ensure the ethical use of digital tools for campaigning is essential. This includes the formulation of regulations governing the data collection and utilization practices of political parties and candidates, alongside mandates for transparency in data usage and adherence to privacy legislation.

- Misinformation on digital platforms

Ultimately, addressing the proliferation of misinformation on digital platforms is increasingly essential to political reform. Governments and electoral commissions are investigating methods to collaborate with social media businesses to detect and eliminate misinformation, as well as to advance fact-checking programs throughout elections cycles. Independent entities or committees may be instituted to monitor the use of social media during elections, guaranteeing that these platforms

are employed ethically and responsibly.

- Prospects and obstacles

The convergence of social media, technology, and election changes offers both prospects and obstacles. Although technology has facilitated considerable progress in election administration and civic participation, it concurrently presents novel hazards, especially concerning misinformation, data privacy, and cybersecurity. Electoral reforms must progress to tackle these difficulties, guaranteeing that technology bolsters the integrity of the democratic process instead of compromising it.

4.3.6 Future Electoral Reforms and Suggestions

- Emerging challenges

As India's democracy evolves, it is important to consider reforms that address emerging challenges and reinforce the integrity of the electoral process. With technology advancing at a rapid pace, the political landscape shifting, and concerns over transparency growing, it is crucial to adopt reforms that promote fairness, accountability, and greater voter participation. Future electoral reforms can enhance the system in the following ways.

Transparency in Political Funding

- Lack of transparency

A significant challenge facing India's elections is the lack of transparency in political funding. The introduction of electoral bonds, which allow anonymous donations, has raised concerns about the influence of corporate money and potential corruption. Moving forward, reforms should focus on improving transparency in political financing. Political parties must be required to disclose the sources of their donations, helping voters better understand who is financially supporting political campaigns. Stricter regulations should also be implemented to limit the use of corporate donations in politics, ensuring that only registered and authorized donors contribute to campaigns.

Implementing Online Voting Systems

While electronic voting machines (EVMs) have already transformed the way elections are conducted, the concept of online voting holds the potential to increase voter turnout, especially among those who face obstacles such as age, geographic location, or disability. A secure online voting system could allow voters to cast their ballots remotely, enhancing accessibility and participation. However, such a system would

- Concept of online voting

need to be carefully designed to address concerns regarding voter identity verification, cybersecurity, and data privacy. Safeguards would need to be established to prevent hacking and ensure the process remains secure and fair.

- Individuals with criminal records

Strengthening Laws Against Criminalization in Politics

The involvement of individuals with criminal records in politics remains a growing concern, as it undermines the integrity of the democratic process. Future reforms should focus on implementing stricter laws to prevent criminals from contesting public office. Suggestions may include fast-tracking legal cases against guilty politicians to ensure timely legal action, as well as lifetime disqualification for those convicted. Political parties should be held accountable for fielding candidates with criminal backgrounds, and their choices should be subject to scrutiny by the Election Commission. Removing criminal elements from politics would help restore public trust and strengthen India's democratic institutions.

- Expanding voter education

Enhancing Voter Education and Awareness

For democracy to function effectively, voters must be informed about the political system, the candidates running for office, and the importance of voting. Expanding voter education should be a priority in future reforms. Voter education programs should be integrated into school curricula and community outreach initiatives to engage citizens, particularly first-time voters. These programs should focus on educating people about their rights, how to vote, and the significance of making an informed decision at the ballot box. With the increasing use of digital platforms, these resources could also be disseminated through social media to reach a wider audience.

- Opportunities and challenges

Regulating Digital Campaigning and Social Media

Social media now plays a much larger role in modern electoral campaigns, bringing both opportunities and challenges. While social media allows political parties to connect with a wide audience, it also facilitates the spread of misinformation and can sway public opinion in potentially harmful ways. Future reforms should focus on regulating political advertisements on digital platforms. For example, political ads should disclose the source of funding and provide transparency about their targeting. Social media platforms should also be held accountable for content moderation, particularly during election periods, to

prevent the spread of fake news and political manipulation. Such reforms would foster a more transparent and responsible digital campaign environment.

- Address the evolving challenges

Electoral reforms in India must address the evolving challenges presented by political complexity, technological advancements, and increasing demands for transparency. By focusing on issues such as voter education, digital campaigning, criminalization in politics, political funding transparency, and inclusivity, these reforms will help make India's elections more fair, free, and accessible. These changes are crucial not only to improve the current system but also to ensure that future elections truly reflect the democratic values and will of the people. Through careful consideration and thoughtful reforms, India can continue to strengthen its democratic processes for generations to come.

Summarized Overview

Electoral reforms are essential for ensuring transparency, fairness, and integrity in India's democratic process. Over the decades, various committees like Tarkunde, Dinesh Goswami, and Indrajit Gupta have recommended reforms addressing transparency, state funding, and curbing money and muscle power. The Law Commission and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission have further contributed to strengthening electoral processes. The Election Commission of India has played a pivotal role through reforms like voter ID cards, Model Code of Conduct, and electronic voting. Judicial interventions have reinforced electoral integrity, especially through rulings on criminal candidates and disclosure norms. The rise of social media and digital platforms has introduced both opportunities and challenges for ethical campaigning and voter awareness. Despite progress, issues like electoral funding, criminalization, and voter manipulation persist. Future reforms must focus on stronger regulation, inclusive participation, and adapting to the digital age.

Assignments

1. Discuss the historical evolution of electoral reforms in India and their significance in strengthening democracy.
2. Analyze the major challenges faced in implementing electoral reforms in India.
3. Evaluate the role of the Election Commission of India in driving electoral reforms.
4. Critically examine the impact of social media and technology on electoral processes



in India.

5. Discuss the recommendations of the Dinesh Goswami Committee and their relevance in contemporary times.
6. How has the judiciary contributed to electoral reforms in India? Provide examples.
7. What are the ethical and practical challenges in decriminalizing Indian politics?
8. Propose three future electoral reforms to address the issue of money power in elections.
9. Examine the role of voter awareness programs in increasing electoral participation.
10. Compare India's electoral system with that of the United States, highlighting key differences and lessons for reform.

Reference

1. Election Commission of India. (2020). *Electoral reforms: A historical perspective*. New Delhi: ECI Publications.
2. Ahuja, M., & Chibber, P. (2019). *Electoral politics in India: The resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Singh, V. B. (2018). *Elections in India: An overview*. Sage Publications.
4. Kumar, S. (2017). *Democracy and electoral reforms in India*. Oxford University Press.
5. Rao, K. (2016). *Challenges to electoral reforms in India*. *Journal of Indian Politics*, 12(3), 45-60.
6. Yadav, Y. (2015). *Understanding the second democratic upsurge: Trends of Bahujan participation in electoral politics in the 1990s*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(1), 35-42.
7. Jayal, N. G. (2013). *Citizenship and its discontents: An Indian history*. Harvard University Press.
8. Sridharan, E. (2012). *Electoral reform and the future of Indian democracy*. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 71(2), 345-367.
9. Mehta, P. B. (2011). *The burden of democracy*. Penguin Books.
10. Brass, P. R. (2010). *The politics of India since independence*. Cambridge University Press.

Suggested Reading

1. Ahuja, M., & Chibber, P. (2019). *Electoral politics in India: The resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Singh, V. B. (2018). *Elections in India: An overview*. Sage Publications.
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10. Sridharan, E. (2012). *Electoral reform and the future of Indian democracy*. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 71(2), 345-367.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

Model Question Paper Set- I

Semester I – Discipline Course

Course Title: Issues in Indian Politics

M23PS05DC

(CBCS - UG)

2023-24 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any fifteen questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries one mark.
(1×15 = 15 Marks)*

1. What is meant by 'coalition politics'?
2. Define "New Social Movements".
3. What does FPTP stand for?
4. What is identity politics?
5. Name one regional party in Maharashtra.
6. What is secularism?
7. Define "dominant caste".
8. What is the ideological base of the BJP?
9. Name one state where Naxalite movements were active.
10. Who introduced the concept of "Sanskritisation"?
11. What is the significance of the Women's Reservation Bill?
12. Name one legal safeguard for SCs in India.
13. Mention a constitutional provision promoting social justice.



14. Define social exclusion.
15. What is political mobilisation?

SECTION B

Answer any ten questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries two marks.

(2 × 10 = 20 Marks)

16. Explain the role of caste in Indian politics.
17. What are the features of regional political parties?
18. Write a note on LGBTQ+ rights in Indian politics.
19. Briefly describe any one tribal movement in India.
20. What is the impact of globalization on identity politics?
21. Explain any two objectives of electoral reforms.
22. What is meant by political representation?
23. Discuss the role of media in democracy.
24. What is the political significance of language movements in India?
25. Explain affirmative action with an example.

SECTION C

Answer any eight questions in one paragraph. Each question carries four marks.

(4 × 8 = 32 Marks)

26. Discuss the concept of political participation with examples.
27. Analyse the impact of coalition governments on Indian politics.
28. Compare caste-based and class-based mobilisation.
29. Examine the role of women in Indian politics.
30. Evaluate the ideology and role of the Bahujan Samaj Party.
31. Discuss the socio-political demands of Dalit movements.
32. What are the effects of media on electoral outcomes in India?
33. Write a note on the politics of social justice in India.

SECTION D

Answer any six questions in two pages. Each question carries ten marks.

(10×6 = 60 Marks)

34. Examine the evolution and impact of identity politics in India.
35. Critically evaluate the caste-class intersection in political processes.
36. Analyse the role of regional parties in strengthening federalism.
37. Discuss the impact of globalization on Indian political dynamics.
38. Evaluate the effectiveness of electoral reforms in India.
39. Assess the challenges to inclusive political participation in India.





SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

Model Question Paper Set- II

Semester I – Discipline Course

Course Title: Issues in Indian Politics

M23PS05DC

(CBCS - UG)

2023-24 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

*Answer any fifteen questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries one mark.
(1×15 = 15 Marks)*

1. Who coined the term “dominant caste”?
2. What is meant by political socialisation?
3. Name one caste-based political party.
4. What is the role of civil society?
5. Mention one tribal region with active political movements.
6. Define political ideology.
7. What is “affirmative action”?
8. What is the role of Election Commission in democracy?
9. Name a state affected by separatist politics.
10. Mention any one new social movement in India.
11. What is multiculturalism?
12. Define secular nationalism.
13. What is the significance of political ethics?



14. Name one constitutional body supporting electoral democracy.
15. What is gendered political participation?

SECTION B

Answer any ten questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries two marks.

(2 × 10 = 20 Marks)

16. Define social justice in the Indian context.
17. Mention any two features of the Indian party system.
18. Write a note on the role of civil society in governance.
19. What are the ideological bases of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)?
20. Describe the role of caste in electoral outcomes.
21. What is the impact of social media on Indian elections?
22. Discuss the political significance of language-based identity.
23. Explain any one issue related to tribal representation.
24. What are the challenges of gender equality in Indian politics?
25. What is the significance of political movements in democracy?

SECTION C

Answer any eight questions in one paragraph. Each question carries four marks.

(4 × 8 = 32 Marks)

26. Discuss the features and challenges of coalition politics.
27. Analyse the relationship between regionalism and Indian federalism.
28. Compare left-wing and right-wing political ideologies in India.
29. Examine the changing trends in youth political participation.
30. Discuss the evolution of identity politics since the 1990s.
31. Write a note on the social base of the Indian National Congress.
32. Evaluate the influence of media on political mobilisation.
33. Analyse the representation of minorities in political processes.



SECTION D

Answer any six questions in two pages. Each question carries ten marks.

(10×6 = 60 Marks)

34. Examine the relevance of caste in contemporary Indian politics.
35. Evaluate the role of identity and ideology in the Indian party system.
36. Discuss the significance of new social movements in Indian democracy.
37. Analyse the impact of regionalism on Indian national politics.
38. Critically assess the representation of women and minorities in political institutions.
39. Explore the role of political parties in promoting social transformation in India.

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ISSUES IN INDIAN POLITICS

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ISBN 978-81-986024-5-9



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