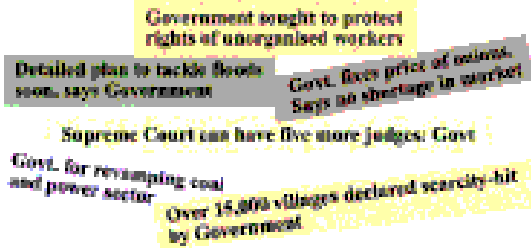


Democratic Government

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



What does a Government do?

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

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

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

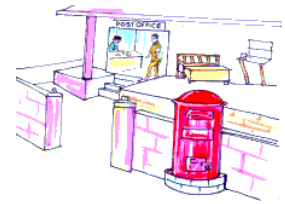


Fig: 12.2 Post Office

- Who runs the school in which you are studying?
- List a few activities of the government that you have come across.
- Look at the newspapers of the last three or two days and collect news cuttings about the activities of the government. Stick them on a large sheet or notebook. Make a list of activities of the government you find in these clippings. Discuss this list in the class to get an idea of all the things done by the government.



Fig: 12.3 Supreme Court .

Some examples of institutions that are part of the Government.

Types of Government

In Chapter 9 we read how the people of a tribal society govern themselves – how male members of different families of the tribe gather to discuss and decide and how the headman implements those decisions and in return gets some people to work for him free. This could work well in situations where the number of people was small. But do you think it will work if the society had thousands or lakhs of families?



Fig: 12.1 Railway station Kachiguda

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

However, if the society had people of different cultures, will it work? Thirdly, the tribal arrangement worked where the interests of the people were similar, i.e. there were no rich or poor etc. But in societies with varying interests like some people are farmers, some are traders or moneylenders, some are industrialists, some are workers without land or other resources, etc., there would be so much differences that they would not be able to arrive at a common solution to a problem to which all can agree.

We also saw how in historic times kings, queens and emperors emerged who made the laws and implemented them with the help of armies and officials. They also decided where to build roads, how much tax to collect from the people. If people did not agree with them or did not follow their orders, the kings punished them. No one could question their orders or disobey them. It all depended on the kings' will. Many of the kings were not satisfied with



Fig: 12.5 A.P. Assembly

ruling their own kingdom and constantly waged war to expand their kingdoms. This form of government is called monarchy. The monarch (king or queen) has the power to make decisions and to run the government. The monarchs also act as the final judges in all important cases of dispute. The monarch may have a small group of people to discuss matters with but the final decision-making power remains with the monarch. Monarchs do not have to explain their actions or defend the decisions they take.



Fig: 12.4 The King of Shalivahana

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- Compare tribal democracy with monarchy-
 - Which of these do you think respect the opinion of the people more?
 - Which of these do you think can work in a large society or a society in which people have different interests or opinions?
 - Which of these has the danger of the rulers becoming oppressive and unjust?
- Can you think of a system of government which can handle the needs of a large and complex society and yet not become unjust or oppressive?
- Do you think there will be more wars in monarchies or tribal societies? Give reasons.

Democratic Governments

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

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

There are millions of people living in our country. The participation by all

citizens in taking decisions may lead to countless number of opinions. They may consume more time without arriving at any consensus. Moreover, all citizens are not in a position to spend time, money, and energy for participating in public affairs. How can we solve this problem?

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



Fig: 12.6 Abraham Lincoln

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

Democratic governments in our times are usually referred to as representative democracies. In representative democracies people choose their representatives through an election process. A village for example will have about two to five thousand people living in it. It is divided into different wards consisting of about hundred or two hundred persons. Each ward will elect one person to represent them. All adults over 18 years

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of age, whether man or woman, rich or poor, illiterate or educated, whatever their religion or language, vote in these elections. The person who gets the largest number of votes becomes the representative of the entire group. These elected representatives meet and make decisions on behalf of the entire population.



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

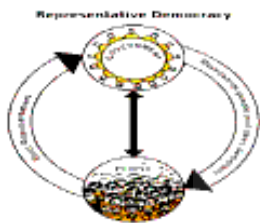


Fig: 12.8 Representative Democracy

Thus free and fair elections of representatives is the basis of our democratic system. Prior to the elections, people are expected to think and discuss

the issues on which a government has to act. Different persons or parties advocating different points of view openly discuss their views. This will enable the voters to decide which point of view they agree with and which candidate they would like to represent them in taking those decisions. The representatives are expected to adhere to the view points expressed by them and the promises made by them and also to consult the people from time to time to know about their view points and problems. The representatives are elected for a fixed period, usually upto five years. After that there will be fresh elections and people will discuss and elect representatives once again.

- Why do you think it is important for people to know the views of the different candidates in elections?
- What will happen if representatives are elected forever?
- Do you think it is possible for the representatives to go against the wishes and interests of the people who elected them?

As you may have noted, the election of the representatives is by a simple majority – that is the one who got more votes even if it were only more by one vote will get elected. Those who voted for the other candidates will have to accept this and abide by the decisions of the majority.

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

For example: If there are twenty members in a village panchayat and a proposal is supported by just eleven persons it will be passed and implemented even if nine members opposed it. Thus modern democracies do not try to get a complete agreement of everyone on any issue but go by the decision of the majority.

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

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

Checks on elected representatives

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

In a democracy, the authority of the people who get elected is also regulated by certain principles which are stated in the constitution of the country. If they go



fig: 12.9 Mass demonstration against price rise

against these principles or procedures the courts can disallow their decisions. Those who disagree with the elected representatives can freely express their views and criticise their actions. This can be done through meetings, TV, newspapers, etc.

Equality and democracy

Democracy requires that all people – men and women, illiterate and educated, rich and poor, beggars and officers, everyone take time off to understand public matters and make up their own minds. It also requires that they have access to all the required information so that they can take proper decisions. It further requires that they can exercise their vote with freedom and without any interference. Unfortunately, these are not always fully possible in most of the countries. For example, many people do not have even the minimum education needed to read newspapers etc. Most of the people are not effectively using the Right to Information Act to check the functioning of different

Map - Showing National Capital



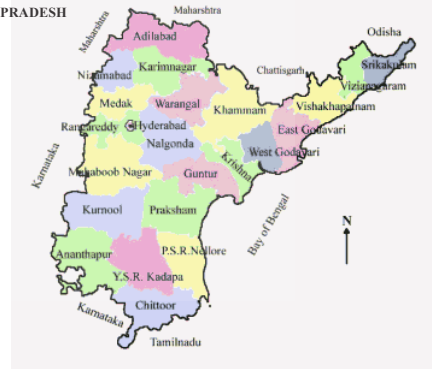
Map 1: Government at National Level

Map - The States of India



Map 2: Governments at State Level

MAP - DISTRICTS OF ANDHRA PRADESH



Map 3: Govt. at District Level

systems. Its effective use ensures the machinery to be on the track. Many people, especially women and the poor just do not have the time or facility to take part in these public matters – they are too busy earning their livelihoods or working for their families. Still in many cases powerful or rich people try to influence the voting by forcing the people or by giving them small benefits before the elections. Sometimes people are persuaded not to decide for themselves but vote according to their caste or religion. All these factors prevent people from using their democratic right of voting after giving due consideration to the issues and candidates.

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

- your class what kind of solutions can be found for these problems.
- What do you understand by 'inequality'? Illustrate with examples.
- What do you think are the main hindrances faced by people in choosing the right candidate?

Government at different levels

The government works at different levels: at the local level, at the level of the state and at the national level. The local level means in your village, town or locality; the state level would mean that which covers an entire state like Andhra Pradesh or Assam and the national level relates to the entire country. Later in this book, you will read about how local level government functions, and when you go into the next

classes you will learn about how governments function at the state and central levels.

- ♦ *How rich and powerful people in the villages try to influence the voters.*

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

- ♦ *An election meeting and discussions with the candidates.*
- ♦ *How people who may not have proper information take their decisions regarding voting.*
- ♦ *Difference between democratic and monarchic government.*

Key words

Democracy
Monarchy
Constitution
Elections
Decision making
Representative

Improve your learning

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between the government in a Gond tribe and in modern democracy.
2. Do you think it is possible to include the minority opinions in taking a decision? Discuss with some examples.
3. How will your school be if it was run by all the students and teachers together? Would you prefer that everyone participates in taking decisions or would you like to elect representatives? Give your reasons.
4. Do you think the decision making in your house is democratic? Does everyone have a say in it?
5. Gopal's father consulted all members of the family on setting up of a shop but everyone had a different opinion. Finally he decided to set up the shop. Do you think he was democratic?
6. Mary's mother asked all children where they wanted to go on Sunday. Two children wanted to go for a film and three wanted to go to the park to play. If you were in Mary's place what decision would you take?
7. Everyone in Seema's house wanted to buy a car as it would make travel easier for all of them. But her father felt that car was too expensive and it was best for everyone to travel by bus only. He decided not to buy a car. Do you think he was not democratic?
8. Classify the following as per the levels of government (Central, State, Local): MP, MLA, Sarpanch, Mayor, CM, PM.

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