

**MASTER OF ARTS
SOCIOLOGY
CENTRE FOR OPEN AND
DISTANCE LEARNING
(CODL)**



**MSO 202: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY
BLOCK II**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
TEZPUR, ASSAM - 784028
INDIA**

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MSO 202: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY



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MSO-202: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

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BLOCK II

MODULE III: INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESS

UNIT 7: POLITICAL PARTIES: CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPOSITIONS

UNIT 8: PRESSURE GROUPS AND INTEREST GROUPS

UNIT 9: DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

MODULE IV: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF INDIA

UNIT 10: THE STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA: COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL

UNIT 11: CASTE AND POLITICS IN INDIA

UNIT 12: CLASS AND POLITICS IN INDIA

UNIT 13: RELIGION: DEBATE ON SECULARISM AND COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

UNIT 14: REGION, LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN INDIA

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block comprises of Modules **III** and **IV** of MSO 202: Political Sociology. **Module III** deals with institutions and political process and it consists of three units. **Unit 7** explores political parties. The characteristics and compositions of political parties are discussed in this unit. On the other hand, **Unit 8** is devoted to pressure groups and interest groups, focusing on their political significance. **Unit 9** discusses democratic decentralisation and local self-government.

Module IV discusses political sociology in the context of India. This module is divided into five units.. **Unit 10** deals with the state and society in India, focusing on the colonial and post-colonial developments. An important feature of India, i.e. caste and its role in Indian politics is discussed in **Unit 11**. **Unit 12**, on the other hand, deals with class and politics in India. **Unit 13** discusses religion, focusing on the debate on secularism and communalism in India while **Unit 14** discusses the role of region and language in the context of politics in India.

MODULE III: INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESS

UNIT 7: POLITICAL PARTIES: CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPOSITIONS

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Political parties

7.3.1 Characteristics and Functions

7.3.2 Types of Parties and Party Systems

7.3.3 Organization and Functioning

7.3.4 Indian Political Parties

7.4 Summing Up

7.5 Questions

7.6 Recommended Readings and References

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two modules, we learned many aspects of political sociology. In the first module, we covered the field of political sociology, the basic concepts associated with the field and the various perspectives with which we can look at political phenomena. In module II, we covered the state in elaborate detail and learned the relationship between the state and class structure. In this module, which comprises of three units, we shall be learning about institutions and political processes. In this unit, i.e. unit 7, we will learn about political parties, while in the next two units, we will learn about pressure groups, interest groups and democratic decentralisation. In this unit which is concerned with political parties, we will learn about their characteristics, composition and different ways how we can look at parties. We will also focus on the organisation and

functions of political parties. In the last section of the unit, we will focus on Indian political parties – national as well as regional.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. It would be advisable to quickly go through key concepts in sociology and also the basic concepts in political sociology for you to better grasp the unit.

7.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we introduce you to political parties, their organisation and functioning. We will also focus on Indian - national and regional - political parties. By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- Explain what is meant by political parties;
- Differentiate between liberal and Marxist views of political parties;
- Describe the characteristics and composition of political parties;
- Explain how political parties are organized;
- Describe organisation and functioning of political parties in the Indian context.

7.3 POLITICAL PARTIES

We had introduced you to the idea of political parties in unit 3 where we explained the distribution of power in society across three axes – class, status and party, as given by Max Weber. Weber defines, “parties as groups which are specifically concerned with influencing policies and making decisions in the interests of their membership” (Haralambos, 1980: 46). This means that parties have definite goals and they want to orient their actions that best serve their interests. For Weber, parties are oriented towards the acquisition of social power, i.e. they are meant to influence a communal action (Gerth and Mills, 1946). Parties deal with the conquest of a community; they are always struggling for domination

and hence they are strictly authoritarian (ibid). Thus, we can say that since political parties are primarily concerned with the acquisition of social power, their way of organization and functioning reflect this primary goal. As Weber would say, parties operate in a house of power (Gerth and Mills, 1946).

While these views expressed by Weber are true in general, there is no consensus on what exactly a party is. There are many other definitions of political parties as well. Some of these definitions are older definitions and do not view parties from the angle of power. For example, Edmund Burke defined a political party in 1770 as “a body of men and women united on the basis of their shared political ideas so as to promote the national interest” (Mito, 2000). Thus, earlier definitions looked at parties from a utilitarian sense. However, later definitions mostly focused on the power aspects of parties and hence they are important phenomena for sociological analysis. As Joseph Schumpeter says that a ‘political party is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power’ (Schumpeter, 1966: 283). Similarly while proposing an economic theory of democracy, Anthony Downs sees competition for power as the key characteristic of political party and remarks ‘parties in democratic politics are analogous to entrepreneurs in a profit-seeking economy. So as to attain their profit ends, they formulate whatever politics they believe will gain the most votes, just as entrepreneurs produce whatever products they believe will gain the most profits for the same reasons’ (Downs, 1957: 295-96).

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines political parties as, “formal organizations for representing the aims and interests of different socio-economic forces in the political sphere – although not all societies have a party-political system of government” (Dictionary of Sociology, 1994: 572). Parties are formally organised and they intend to dominate the political arena and aim to provide national leadership (ibid). Various ideologies are propagated through parties and they provide the

organisational means by which candidates for offices are recruited (ibid). Maurice Duverger observes that “A party is not community but a ‘collection of communities’, a union of small groups, dispersed throughout the country (by branches, and local associations, etc.) and are linked by coordinating institutions” (Duverger, 1967). Here, we can see that Duverger focuses on the social aspect of parties. La Palombara and Myron Weiner define political party in a comprehensive manner and identify following as essential features of a political party : ‘(1)continuity in organisation, i.e., an organisation whose expected life span is not dependent on the life of current leaders;(2) manifest and presumably permanent organisation at local level, with regularized communication and other relationship between local and national units; (3) self-conscious determination of leader, at both national and local levels to capture and to hold decision making power alone or in coalition with other, not simply to influence exercise of power; and (4) a concern on the part of the organisation for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support’ (Palombara & Weiner, 1966 : 6).

Many other definitions exist and we’ll not go into detail of all of those. What we have to remember is that political parties, in general, are formal organizations or groups that are involved in the struggle for political power. They try to represent the aims and interests of people and aim to provide leadership. Parties are the agencies and mechanisms through which power is organised and exercised in a democracy (Hasan 2008: 242). They are the principal force that works to structure political alternatives and formulate policies for the people (ibid).

As far as the origins of parties are concerned, political parties emerged in Europe in the 17-18th century. Therefore, as you might have already guessed, it is a western concept. As electoral and parliamentary systems evolved in Europe and United States in the 19th century, parties took their modern form and the emergence of parties is closely tied with these

processes.¹ Even in ancient Greece, although there was a democratic system, there were no parties in the modern sense. There might have been factions supporting one noble family or another, but the modern ideas of political parties were not present. It is only in the 18-19th century do we see the emergence of parties the way they exist today. And since electoral and parliamentary systems have spread all over the world, political parties remain of seminal importance in today's times. How they operate, function and are organised gives us a glimpse of how political power is at play.

Now that we know what political parties are, how and where they emerged, let us look at a few of their characteristics and Functions.

7.3.1 Characteristics and Functions

Some of the important features of political parties are:

- Political parties are organized formally
- They have to be registered with a registered authority. In the case of India, parties are registered with the Election Commission of India (Hasan, 2008).
- Every party has a leader. Also, all the party members are registered members.
- A political party being a 'clientele- oriented' organisation accommodates different types of socio-economic interests (Mukhopadhyay 1977: 141).
- Parties follow their own ideology.
- Parties contest elections and try to win them. Their primary goal is to attain political power.

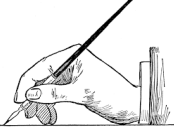
¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-party>

- Parties work within the constitutional framework and seek to obtain their aims within this framework.
- All parties have a manifesto, i.e. they publicly declare their aims and policies.
- All parties have a symbol. For example, the hand is a symbol of the Congress party in India. Likewise, other parties also have their own symbols.

Main functions of political parties are as follows:

- Political party being a representative of diverse interests of the society harmonizes these interests through aggregation of interests (ibid).
- It works as the channel of communication between government and people.
- Political party organizes and articulates public opinion.
- Political recruitment is another major function of political party as in a democratic political system political parties are the main agency of recruiting political elites.
- Political party plays a significant role in the process of political socialization thereby in shaping political culture. It may reinforce the existing political culture or may alter the political culture by introducing new attitudes, values and beliefs (ibid).
- Political party, in a democratic system, works as the major instrument to control government and thus to make it accountable.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. Define political party.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. Write two features of a political party.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>3. Write two functions of political parties.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

7.3.2 Types of Parties and Party Systems

When it comes to types of political parties and party systems, the views of Maurice Duverger, French sociologist and jurist, are quite important. According to Maurice Duverger, there are two types of political parties – cadre-based parties and mass-based parties (Duverger 1967). This classification is based on the type of membership. In many countries, however, these kinds of parties co-exist and often there is rather an overlap between the two. Many parties simply cannot be categorised exclusively as cadre or mass based.

Cadre-based parties are those that comprise of members who have expertise in fighting elections, i.e. they know how to organise campaigns and are able to strengthen the organization. They, therefore, consist of groups of notables (Duverger, 1967) and consist of a relatively small number of party adherents². For example, communist parties all over the

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-party>

world including India are cadre based parties. Similarly, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India can also be called a cadre-based party since, in the functioning and organization of the party, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cadres play an important role.

Mass-based parties, on the other hand, try to appeal to the masses. They, therefore, have hundreds or thousands of followers. Keeping in mind financial and political considerations, mass-based parties seek to influence those who are well known or represent specific group interests as well as any citizen who is eager to be a part of the organization. As such, such parties are more inclusive. For example, in India, we can say that Congress is a mass-based party.

One thing to remember, however, is that a party might have characteristics of both mass-based as well as party-based. Also, a party might transition from a cadre-based party to a mass-based party and vice versa. For example, communist parties which are generally cadre-based parties have in the past transitioned to mass-based parties. This happened in the case of socialist parties in continental Europe in the 19th century.³

Before discussing the types of party system we need to know the meaning of the party system. Party system, in a democratic set-up, refers to the interaction among political parties. It implies a pattern of competition among parties where all political parties take part in an open, formalized genuine election to win power. Political scientists have used different criteria to classify party system. Some of the major criteria are a number of parties, the relation among the parties, the relation of the party/parties with other sections of the society, nature and ideologies of parties, support base of parties, and organisation of parties.

Duverger classified it on the basis of the number of parties. For him, there are three types of party system single party, two-party and multi-party systems (Duverger, 1967). In a single party system, there is only one

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-party>

political party and it has political power. It is actually a kind of dictatorship based on a party (Duverger 1967). We can take examples of the party system in North Korea or in communist China. In the case of the former, it is the Workers Party of Korea (WPK) while in the case of the latter, it is the Communist Party of China. Such party systems also existed during the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy during the 1930s and 40s.

In a two-party system, there are two major parties. It means that the system is dominated by two major parties that have an equal chance to come to power. Such a system is found in the United States where there are just two parties – the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The political system is the United Kingdom, although it is technically a multi-party system, in functioning it is like a two-party system since it is only the Conservative Party and the Labour Party that are the largest parties.

In a multi-party system, there are generally more than two parties that involved in the struggle for political power. According to him, a multi-party system can be of many types on the basis of the number of rival parties: tri-parties (three parties), quadri-partyism (four parties) and poly-partyism (many parties). For Duverger, a two-party system is natural and a multi-party system arises either from 'split' and 'overlapping' in this natural two-way system (Duverger 1967). Splits or overlaps might arise due to various reasons. Examples of multi-party systems can be seen in India, the United Kingdom, Australia, and many more. In multi-party systems often coalition governments are formed when no single party is able to stake claim to power. This is one of the defining features of this kind of a system.

Sartori finds the classification of party system on the basis of only numbers of parties inadequate and argues that variables like number, ideology and degree of fragmentation in parties should be taken into consideration. According to him, party system can broadly be divided

into competitive and non-competitive systems which are further subdivided into the following (Sartori 1966):

Competitive Party Systems	Non-Competitive Party Systems
Polarized Pluralism	Single Party System
Two-Party System	
Predominant Party System	Hegemonic Party System
Atomized System	

Palombara and Weiner present very comprehensive classification of party system on the basis of nature of competition between or among the parties (Palombara and Weiner, 1966). Like Sartori, they also classify party system into competitive and non-competitive systems which are further classified into different categories:

Competitive Party Systems:

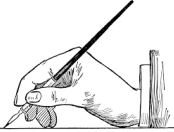
- (1) Hegemonic Systems: (a) Hegemonic Ideological (b) Hegemonic Pragmatic
- (2) Turnover Systems: (a) Turnover Ideological (b) Turnover Pragmatic

Non-Competitive Party Systems:

- (1) One-Party Authoritarian
- (2) One-Party Pluralistic
- (3) One-Party Totalitarian

Thus, there is a number of classifications of party systems but one significant point to remember is that party system cannot be classified only on the basis of the number of parties as it would be an oversimplified way of looking at party system.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. What do you mean by cadre-based parties?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. What is a two-party system?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>3. What are mass-based parties?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

7.3.3 Organization and Functioning

How parties are organised and how they function are also important issues when it comes to political parties. There is no uniform way in which we can say that they are organised. One way of looking is, as mentioned above, to view parties as mass or cadre-based parties. Thus, membership to parties can be based on these two models. Even if a party is a cadre-based party does not mean that it will restrict membership to some people. In spite of their own interests, it is seen that even cadre-based parties look forward to gaining increased membership.

In general, we can say that the functioning of political parties varies according to the way they have evolved, their status as the ruling or opposition party, their support bases, their leadership styles and their geographical location and spread (Hasan, 2008: 248). The organization and support structure of most parties reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of society and the groups they claim to represent (ibid).

One important feature about political parties is that although they have been influential in and part of the democratic process, they themselves have tended to become less democratic (Hasan, 2008: 248). We also see that in almost parties, centralisation of power is quite high and it is the party high – command which provides leadership to the rest of the members. Robert Michels, a German sociologist in his pioneering work on political parties, talks about the oligarchical tendencies of party leaders and officials who tend to dominate the party, as it becomes increasingly bureaucratic in nature (Dictionary of Sociology, 1994: 573). The beliefs and attitudes of the party leaders are directed towards their own personal goals and are less radical than those of rank members (ibid). Also, radical objectives are further inhibited when organisational procedures are used to suppress popular aspirations (ibid). Highlighting the oligarchic nature of functioning of political parties where a powerful minority has the monopoly over the decision-making process, Michels writes that ‘the majorities are only the evidence of that which is whereas; minorities are often the seed of that which will be. In the life of modern democratic parties, it is only a minority, which participates in party’s decisions and most important resolutions are taken by handful members. The great majority of the members will not attend meetings unless some noted orator is to speak, or unless some extremely striking war cry is sounded for their attraction’ (Michels, 1968:364)

Although party membership is based on registration, in many places, particularly in India, very few parties have institutionalised recruitment

and membership procedures (Hasan, 2008: 248). It is seen that no party possesses or maintains membership registers (ibid).

To summarise, we can say that as political parties gain increasing membership, it is organised in a bureaucratic manner and power becomes increasingly centralised. Also, membership loyalty is achieved on the basis of the core values and ideas of the party. In the Indian context, however, this principle doesn't hold and we see loyalty towards leaders more than to core values of the party.

7.3.4 Liberal versus Marxist Viewpoints

Before we go into Indian and regional political parties, let us first look at two contrasting ways with which parties are viewed.

For liberals, political parties engage in competition for power as the representatives of different socio-economic groups in society, along with pressure groups and other interest groups. As a result of open competition, power in pluralist political systems is shared and is non-cumulative (Dictionary of Sociology, 1994: 573). Thus, there is competition among different groups and power is ultimately shared. However, this view is considered too naïve and hence criticised by some other groups, particularly Marxists or neo-Marxists. They argue that the groups that dominate the economic realm dominate the political decision-making process (ibid). They focus on subtle forms of power such as agenda-setting along with observable party politics (ibid).

Therefore, while liberals place an important role to political parties in representative democracies, neo-Marxists argue that parliamentary politics is illusory. They claim that in capitalist societies since the dominant economic power is also the ruling class, parliamentary politics is an ideological strategy that diverts attention away from the real sources of political power (ibid).

While acknowledging that the liberal conception is naïve, some other scholars have argued that the Marxist viewpoint is also not very helpful. They claim that it is possible for the views of the ordinary people to influence political outcomes and therefore political parties play an important role in the political arena of societies (ibid).

7.3.5 Indian Political Parties

Now that we have a fair understanding of political parties and different party systems across the world, let us look at Indian political parties. Instead of focusing on the entire party system, we will focus on certain key features and characteristics of Indian parties since they tend to be different from parties in other parts of the world.

The Indian party system is a multi-party system with numerous national and regional parties all over the country. We have national parties like the Indian National Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Communist Party of India, etc. while there are a host of regional parties such as Akali Dal in Punjab, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Jammu and Kashmir, Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu and many more.

Out of the many parties that exist, few of them have emerged in the pre-independence period. The Indian National Congress is one of the oldest parties in the world, established in 1885. Other parties which emerged before independence are Communist Party of India (CPI) (1925), Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (1932), Shiromani Akali Dal (1920) etc. The Congress provided leadership during the freedom struggle and it continues to play an important role even today. Important changes have taken place in the last few years. The BJP, which was formed in 1980 and which promotes Hindu interests, is at present, in power both at the centre and in around 20 states all over the country and this dominance of a single party in a multi-party system was viewed by scholars as a 'one-


party dominance system'. This is quite significant as previously, it was Congress that was able to dominate the political landscape all over the country. We will learn more about these kinds of issues in the last module. In this part, let us look at how Indian parties function.

- **Coalition politics** - It has been one of the key features in the Indian political system. Although during the initial post-independence phases, the Congress dominated the political scene, starting from the 1980s there emerged many parties all over the country. National parties were marginalised in major states of the country (Hasan 2008: 244). New kind of alliances emerged and the trend continues even today.
- **Pragmatism of Indian parties** – Although parties have their own ideologies, Indian parties have been more pragmatic than ideological (Hasan 2008: 246). Therefore party boundaries are quite flexible (ibid). In many cases, parties do not seem to have any distinct ideology that would distinguish one party from another in the course of election campaigns (ibid). And even if parties claim to stick to their own party ideology, they are actually more practical as they are sometimes willing to give up their ideological stance if it helps to gain power (ibid: 248).
- **Mass-cadre parties** – In India the scheme of mass-cadre parties is not very helpful. Almost all parties are mass parties. Except most probably the CPI (M) and BJP, but even they are not pure cadre parties (ibid: 248).
- **Highly centralised leadership** – All parties in India tend to have highly centralised leadership. There is the widespread prevalence of 'high command' culture, with the high command taking all important decisions (ibid: 249).
- **Loyalty** – Nearly all parties are based on loyalty to leaders rather than loyalty to values or institutions. In India, leaders have their own loyal following and sometimes when they leave a party, their followers follow suit.

- **One person-centred parties** – One peculiar feature which is linked to the point above is the advent of parties centred around one person in India, be it a politician or movie stars turned leaders (ibid: 250). In some cases, parties have become a preserve of families and are compliant to one supreme leader (ibid). We can take the example of family or dynastic rule in Congress. However, it is not just confined to Congress. It can be seen in other parties as well. For example, Abdullah and Mufti families in Kashmir, the Thackerays in Maharashtra, the Sangmas in Meghalaya, the Yadavs in Uttar Pradesh etc (ibid: 250).

Thus, it would be correct to say that lack of intra-party democracy is the common feature of most of the Indian political parties whether national or regional.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. How does the liberals look at political parties?
	2. How does the Marxists look at political parties?
	3. Name three national and three regional political parties of India.
	4. What do you mean by coalition politics?

7.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you were introduced to the concept of political parties. We learned that there are various ways of looking at parties. Scholars like Edmund Burke looked at parties as entities that promote national interests. While other scholars like Weber, Schumpeter etc. looked at parties from an angle of power. In contemporary times, it is the second version that is mostly in vogue. We also learned that parties and party system is a Western concept that has now spread to all parts of the world. We then learned about the major characteristics of political parties. We also learned about Maurice Duverger's ideas on the types of parties – cadre based and mass-based and the different types of party systems such as one party, two-party and multi-party systems. We then learned how parties are organised and they function in general and then we learned the difference between liberal and Marxist viewpoints when it comes to parties. Finally, we introduced to you the Indian political parties and the peculiar characteristics of Indian political parties and party system.

7.5 QUESTIONS

1. How does Edmund Burke look at political parties?
2. What do you mean by political parties? Mention a few of their characteristics.
3. What are the types of parties and party systems according to Maurice Duverger?
4. Do you think parties are bureaucratic in nature? Explain.
5. Contrast the liberal perspective with the Marxian perspective when it comes to parties.
6. Mention a few characteristics of Indian parties.
7. Discuss the major functions of political parties.

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UNIT 8: PRESSURE GROUPS AND INTEREST GROUPS

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 Pressure Groups and Interest Groups

8.3.1 Characteristics

8.3.2 Functions

8.3.3 Political Significance

8.3.4 Indian Pressure Groups and Interest Groups

8.4 Summing Up

8.5 Questions

8.6 Recommended Readings and References

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, i.e. unit VII, we learned about political parties, their characteristics, organization and functioning. We also learned about some of the features that are relevant to Indian political parties. In this unit, we are going to study pressure groups and interest groups. First, we'll learn about the existing definitions of interest groups and pressure groups, how similar and different they are from each other, then we'll learn about their characteristics and functions. We will also focus on their political significance. Finally, we'll learn about various kinds of pressure groups and interest groups that are present in our country and also in different regions within the country.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. Also, an understanding of pluralism is of vital importance because interest groups or pressure groups occupy a central place in pluralist theory. Therefore, it would be advisable to quickly go

through key concepts in sociology and also the basic concepts in political sociology, particularly pluralist theory, for you to better grasp the unit.

8.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to pressure groups and interest groups, their characteristics and functions. We will also focus on Indian and regional political parties. By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- Explain what do you mean by an interest group or pressure group;
- Describe what are the characteristics of interest groups;
- Describe what are the functions of pressure groups;
- The political significance of interest groups;
- Describe the pressure groups and interest groups in India.

8.3 PRESSURE GROUPS AND INTEREST GROUPS

Group theorists see pressure groups as the key actors of politics-which represent diverse interests existing in the society- as a political process consists of articulation of different interests existing in the society, the conflict between them and their conciliation. Arthur F. Bentley can be called the pioneer of this view who in his famous book *The Process of Government* (1908) tried to establish group, and not the individual, society or state, as the unit of the study of politics because for him society is ‘nothing other than the complex of groups that compose it’ (Bentley, 1908: 222) . This view got reinforcement in David Truman’s *The Governmental Process* (1951). However, both the above proponents of group theory did not use the term ‘pressure group’. Perhaps the term was used by Peter Odegard for the first time in his work *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (Mukhopadhyay, 1977: 153).

However, scholars are divided on the issue of nomenclature while few prefer to use the term ‘group’ in place of ‘pressure group’, there are few who prefer using the term ‘interest group’ in place of ‘pressure group’

and there are others who use these two terms ‘interest group’ and ‘pressure group’ interchangeably. If we look at both these concepts- pressure group and interest group- broadly, then there might be some differences between the two. We can say that interest groups are formed to promote a special interest and that these groups may or may not be political in nature. For example, even a local group formed due to a common interest can be termed as an interest group. On the other hand, pressure groups are those groups formed specifically to affect policy and influence policymakers. Therefore, pressure groups can be thought of as a particular kind of interest groups that are political in nature and these groups employ pressure tactics to influence policy.

There are other differences as well. When it comes to purpose, interest groups are formed with the purpose to promote particular interests, political or non-political. Pressure groups, on the other hand, are formed specifically to influence government policy. As far as organisation is concerned, interest groups may have various levels of organisation while pressure groups generally are strictly organised. In terms of the approach, interest groups may use different strategies such as bargaining or persuasive techniques while the approach of pressure groups is to apply pressure tactics. In terms of regulation, non-political interest groups do not need regulation while pressure groups always require federal regulation.⁴

The above-mentioned differences between interest groups and pressure groups are only applicable when we look at these concepts in a very broad manner, i.e. when we take into account the non-political aspects of interest groups. However, in political theory, often interest groups are viewed in a narrow sense, i.e. they are thought of as those groups that are concerned with influencing policy and therefore the political aspects are

⁴ <http://www.differencebetween.net/business/organizations-business/differences-between-pressure-groups-and-interest-groups/>

emphasised. Let us look at a few definitions of pressure groups and interest groups as given by renowned scholars.

Harmon Zeigler defines interest groups as “Formal organisations that seek to influence public policy in democratic policies” (Zeigler, 1964: 377).

S. E. Finer says that “Interest groups are all groups or associations which seek to influence public policy in their own chosen direction while declining to accept direct responsibility for ruling the country” (Finer, 1958: 237).

David Truman says that “If and when an interest group makes its claims through or upon any of the institutions of government, it becomes apolitical interest group” (Truman, 1971: 57).

Jean-Daniel Reynaud says that “When interest groups act at the political level they are called pressure groups” (Reynaud, 1963: 15).

N.C. Hunt says that “An interest group is a shared attitude group that makes certain claims upon other groups in the society” while “a pressure group is that any organization which seeks to influence government policy without at the same time being willing to accept the responsibility of public office” (Hunt, 1956: 114).

Thus, scholars have defined pressure group in a diverse way and few of them have differentiated between pressure group and interest group. But since we are studying political theory, we are more interested in the political aspects of groups. As such, in this unit, pressure groups and interest groups would connote the same meaning and they will be used interchangeably.

With that in mind, let us try to understand interest groups and pressure groups.

Interest groups are voluntary associations with specific and narrowly defined goals which seek to influence legislatures, government agencies

and public opinion (Dictionary of Sociology, 1994: 363). The goals of these groups may vary – from moderate to radical, local to international. Interest groups may represent one segment of the public (such as students or women), or they may represent a value (women's rights) (ibid). We can take the examples of trade associations or professional associations as interest groups. Say, for example, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) can be viewed as an interest group that represents one particular group and it is concerned with their interests.

Interest groups or pressure groups try to mobilise public opinion in support of their aims and to put pressure on decision-making bodies to support their demands (Dictionary of Sociology, 1994: 594).

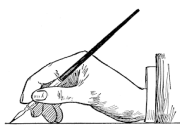
Scholars have classified interest groups into different types on the basis of their objectives, nature of organization, techniques etc. Jean Blondel classified pressure groups into: communal and associational (Blondel, 1969) while Robert C. Bone classified them into situational and attitudinal groups (Bone, 1972). Some other scholars have categorised interest groups into two groups: protective groups and promotional groups (ibid). The protective groups are concerned with protecting the interests of that group. These include trade unions, professional associations etc. The promotional groups promote a cause. These include groups which are concerned with animal welfare, groups arguing for or against censorship, groups against nuclear weapons etc. (ibid). A very comprehensive classification of interest groups on the basis of their structure is given by Almond and Powell (Almond & Powell, 1972: 74-79). They classified interest groups into following categories (a) Anomic Groups which emerge in a situation of stress and discontent in a society where the organized groups are either not existing or are not given due opportunity to articulate their interests. Such groups are more inclined to destructive activities like riots, assassination and demonstration. (b) Non-Associational Groups which usually lack formal structure and organised procedure of action. Kinship, and lineage groups, the ethnic,

regional, status and class groups may be kept in this category. (c) Institutional Groups, such groups grow within the framework of formal institutions like political parties, legislature, bureaucracies. (d) Associational Groups which are characterised by formal specialised structure, the organised procedure of action and full-time staff (Mukhopadhyay, 1977: 157-159)

Here, it is important to draw the distinction between interest groups or pressure groups and political parties. While both are concerned with specific interests, they are not the same. Interest groups represent the homogenous interest and seek to only influence policy, political parties, on the other hand, aim to occupy office and are involved in policy-making (Neumann, 1956: 396). A political party is an organisation of numerous people, openly committed on broad questions of policies and assumes direct responsibility of their policies whereas interest groups or pressure groups strive to protect and promote specific interests without being ready to assume direct responsibility (Ball, 1971: 79).

Now that we understand what exactly are interest groups and pressure groups, let us look at the characteristics of such groups.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who wrote *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League*?

2. Define interest group.

3. What is a pressure group?

4. Write two differences between pressure groups and interest groups.

8.3.1 Characteristics

Few of the important characteristics of pressure groups and interest groups are:

- i. Representation – All interest or pressure groups represent particular sections of society, it could be social, economic or professional. Since a group is concerned with specific interests, it can only represent one section of the society. It cannot represent everyone. For example, a language based interest group will represent only that group.
- ii. Goals and Tactics – All interest or pressure groups have definite goals and objectives. These goals and objectives actually shape how these groups function. If the objectives are more radical, the group might resort to increased pressure tactics. If the objectives are simple, plain bargaining could also work. Lobbying is one of the tactics used by groups all over the world. It is a well-known strategy, particularly in the United States. In fact, the term lobby is also sometimes used for interest groups or pressure groups, implying that any interest or pressure group indulges in some form of lobbying.
- iii. Organization – Depending on nature and strength and objectives, groups can be organised across various levels. Some groups are strictly structured and hierarchical.
- iv. Persistence and continuity – All groups aim to forge a sense of unity and integrity among its members. The common interests

and objectives work as a cohesive tool for creating and maintaining a sense of solidarity amongst its members. However, sometimes, there might be a difference of opinion among the members. As such, all groups try to maintain the unity among all its members for the persistence and continuity of the group.

- v. **Membership** – Interest groups or pressure groups generally do not forbid members from joining other interest groups or political parties. Therefore, it is possible that a person might be a member of various groups at the same time. For example, a doctor by profession can be a member of his professional group, a caste group or a linguistic interest group at the same time.
- vi. **Awareness of their strength** – All groups are aware of their strength in numbers and they employ various strategies to achieve their objectives depending on their strength. Since often there is a clash of interest between various interest/pressure groups, awareness of their strength allows a group to act accordingly.
- vii. **Flexibility** – Depending on the circumstances, groups adapt when it comes to their objectives, strategy and tactics. They try to make the best of a situation and adapt accordingly.

8.3.2 Functions


Some of the important functions that pressure groups or interest groups perform are:

- i. **Safeguarding interests** – The major function of any interest or pressure group is to safeguard the interests of its members. Groups aim to protect the social, economic, cultural or other interests from various circumstances, be it political or otherwise. Say, for example, the All Assam Students Union (AASU), which is a students' body but is also a pressure group which aims to protect the interests of the Assamese community often organises rallies and *dharnas* across Assam to influence the Indian government to protect Assamese interests.

- ii. Uniting members – An interest group or a pressure group comprises of multiple members who generally are from a similar background with a similar interest. Although similar interests work as a medium to forge a sense of solidarity, groups nevertheless try to bring in a sense of unity among all its members so that it may effectively compete with other pressure groups.
- iii. Identity – Interest groups function to provide a sense of identity to a section of the people. Members who belong to a particular group come to identify with that group. Say, for example, a teacher who is a member of a teachers association will identify with that group and the group will help her to express her interests.
- iv. Articulation of interest – While protecting and safeguarding interests is the main function of interest groups, articulation or expression of group interests also occupy another important function of interest groups. Continuing with the example given above, the AASU is not just interested in protecting Assamese interests, it also actively tries to bring to light the various kinds of interests that the Assamese community has. That could mean expressing the interests related to economy, culture or any other.
- v. Communication – Interest groups also function to communicate between members of the group and other concerned groups or individuals. When members express themselves via a group, they are more likely to be heard.
- vi. Lobbying and other tactics – Interest groups indulge in lobbying and other tactics to influence government policy. Lobbying is the modus operandi of pressure groups. This is how groups actually get things done. Successful lobbying reflects in policymaking.
- vii. Leadership training – Pressure groups also function to provide leadership training. Since these groups are involved quite closely with political processes, they provide training grounds to groom

leaders. Many a time, members from pressure groups go on to join politics and political parties.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. Write two functions of pressure groups.
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
2. Write two features of interest groups.	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

8.3.3 Political Significance

In democratic societies, interest groups are of vital importance. Sociologically speaking, interest groups occupy a central place when it comes to pluralist theory. We have discussed pluralism in units 2 and 5 while discussing approaches to politics and approaches to state. At the very core of the pluralist theory is the belief that individuals can best convey their needs and desires to the government through concerted group activity (Zeigler, 1964: 377). Thus, interest groups or pressure groups can be thought of as channels or means through which people realise the legitimate interaction with the government (ibid). These groups function as mediating links between the state and individuals and

hence allow individuals to meaningfully and effectively relate to political processes and the political system.

In a democratic system, according to pluralist theory, different interest groups compete with each other, each trying to promote and protect its own interests. The success of an interest group in achieving its goals will depend on its numerical strength, available resources and also on the other groups that are involved in the political struggle. Therefore, often the state is seen as a neutral arbiter that arbitrates between competing interest groups. State action, therefore, is reactions to pressures from pressure groups.

Since interest groups are involved in the political process, they contribute to the process of decision-making. Often, it is seen there is a close relationship between political parties and interest groups. Interest groups approach political parties with their demands and parties also approach them for their own needs like seeking votes etc. Thus, although interest groups themselves are apolitical in nature, they are actively involved in political processes. The state takes into account the demands of various groups and it reflects in the formal decisions of the government.

We can say that interest groups or pressure groups are therefore of vital importance to a democratic set-up since it impacts the decision making processes of the government. The state cannot simply ignore pressure groups and must take their views into account.

8.3.4 Indian Pressure Groups

The emergence and existence of interest groups or pressure groups in a society depend on the social structure and the social environment. In traditional societies like India, apart from professional and other associations, numerous other groups that are based on caste, religion, language etc. are also present. In fact, there are thousands of pressure groups that exist in the country and all of these influences the decision-making processes of the government, although in varying degrees.

Different scholars have classified Indian pressure groups into different categories.

Hans Raj has classified them into (i) Business Groups (ii) Trade Unions (iii) Peasant Organisations (iv) Student Organisations (v) Religious Groups and (vi) Caste, Language, Gandhian Groups and Anomic Groups (Hanson and Douglas 1971: 88-90).

Similarly, Goyal has classified pressure groups into the following categories: (i) Business Groups (ii) Trade Groups (iii) Peasant Groups (iv) Student Groups (v) Community Associations and (vi) Caste Associations (Goyal 1977: 161).

Other scholars have classified them differently. Let us look at a few of these interest groups.

➤ Business Groups

Business groups are those groups whose primary interests are financial or commercial. In India, they are among the most powerful of pressure groups since they have a lot of financial resources as well as political connections. Examples are Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) etc.

➤ Trade Unions

The trade unions are concerned with workers interests. There are thousands of trade unions in India at present. Some of these unions resort to strikes, bandhs as tactics to protect the interests of their members. Examples of trade unions are All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the Hind Mazdoor Parishad (HMP) etc.

➤ Professional Groups

Associations based on occupation or profession constitute another kind of interest group in India. These groups have the interests of their own

respective professions in mind and try to secure and protect these interests through various means. Examples of such groups are All India Bar Association (AIBA), Indian Medical Association (IMA) etc.

➤ Peasant Groups

Numerous peasant groups exist in India that tries to protect the interests of the peasants. These groups try to pressurise the government in an effort to have agricultural policies that are in their favour. Examples of such groups are All India Kisan Sabha, Bhartiya Kisan Union, Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) etc.

➤ Caste Groups

Since caste plays such an important role in Indian society as well as politics, it is expected that there will be caste based pressure groups. These groups try to secure the interests of their own particular castes. Examples are Jat Sabha, Gujjar Sabha etc.

➤ Religious Groups

There are numerous religious groups who try in their own capacity to influence the government and promote and protect their interests. Examples are Hindu Mahasabha, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Anglo-India Christian Association, etc.

➤ Language

Language-based pressure groups are also prominent in India. Language issues are quite sensitive in the country and different groups have come up to protect the interests related to their specific language. Examples are Assam Sahitya Sabha, Tamil Sangh, etc.

➤ Student Groups

There are numerous student associations all over India and these play a vital role in influencing political processes. Examples are National Students Union of India (NSUI), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad

(ABVP), Students Federation of India (SFI), All Assam Students Union (AASU), etc.

➤ Women Groups

Women issues have to the forefront in recent times and there are certain interest groups that are concerned with such issues. These pressure groups are involved in protecting women's interests and actively lobby with the government to influence policy which will help women in protecting their liberties. Examples are Mahila Mandals, Anti-Dowry Councils etc.

➤ Tribal Groups

Tribal interest groups are specifically concerned with safeguarding the interests of their own tribe. Development projects in central India as well in north-east India have seriously affected tribal groups. These groups use various tactics ranging from peaceful protests to enforcing bandhs in support of their demands. Examples are Nagaland Tribes Council, Young Mizo Association etc.

These are some of the categories on the basis of which we can categorise interest or pressure groups in India. Although there might be other groups as well based on some other criteria, these are the major types of interest groups in India.

8.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about pressure groups and interest groups. We saw that if we look at these concepts from a broader lens, then a pressure group can be viewed as a kind of interest group that is concerned with affecting policy. However, we also learned that in political theory, interest groups are viewed from a narrow lens and their political character is emphasised. As such, no significant difference can be said to exist between these concepts since interest groups are also viewed as

those groups that seek in influence policy. We learned, therefore, that these two terms are generally used synonymously in political theory.

We learned about how different scholars have defined interest groups or pressure groups. We also saw how interest groups are different from political parties. Then we learned about the main characteristics and functions of pressure groups. Apart from that we also learned the political significance of interest groups and that they occupy a vital position in pluralist theory. Finally, we saw the many types of interest groups that exist in India. In India, due to our unique social landscape, various kinds of groups have emerged and they all play an important role in politics.

8.5 QUESTIONS

1. Are pressure groups and interest groups the same? In political theory are they used synonymously?
2. What do you mean by an interest group or pressure group?
3. Mention one important difference between a pressure group and a political party
4. Describe a few characteristics of interest groups
5. What are the major functions of pressure groups?
6. Interest groups are of vital importance to pluralist theory. Explain
7. What are the different kinds of pressure groups that are found in India? Elaborate with examples.

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UNIT 9: DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Objectives

9.3 Democratic Decentralization and Local Self-Government

9.3.1 Decentralisation

9.3.2 Local Self-Government

9.3.3 Theoretical Considerations

9.3.4 Democratic Decentralisation in India

9.3.5 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992

9.4 Summing Up

9.5 Questions

9.6 Recommended Readings and References

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, i.e. unit 8, we learned about pressure groups and interest groups, their characteristics, their functions and why they are so politically significant. We also learned about the numerous kinds of pressure groups that exist in India and what role they play in the Indian political system. In this unit, we will learn about the concept of democratic decentralisation and local self-government. First, we will learn what is meant by decentralisation, the various forms of decentralisation, and the dimensions of decentralisation. Then we will learn about a concept related to decentralisation – local self-government. Finally, we will focus on India and learn the democratic decentralisation process in India which is best understood by learning about the Panchayati Raj system in the country.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. It would be advisable to quickly go through key

concepts in sociology and also the basic concepts in political sociology for you to better grasp the unit.

9.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to democratic decentralisation and local self-government. By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- Explain what is meant by the term decentralisation;
- Describe the four forms of decentralisation;
- Explain the various dimensions of decentralisation;
- Explain what is meant by local self-government;
- Describe the main features of local self-government;
- Describe democratic decentralisation in India.

9.3 DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Democratic decentralisation and local self-government are terms often used in modern democracies. These are terms that are associated with the system of governance and the distribution of power in a country and are inter-related. In today's world, they have acquired immense significance and are thought of as strategies to bring about all around development, including at the grass root level. Democratic decentralisation is important because of three reasons. Firstly, it results in enhancing the transparency of the government and the flow of information between the government and citizens (Manor, 2003). Secondly, it also tends to enhance accountability, the accountability of bureaucrats to elected representatives and the accountability of these representatives to the citizens (ibid). And lastly, when democratic decentralisation works, it makes the government more responsive, the quantity and quality of government response increases (ibid).

Since democratic decentralisation occupies a central place in modern democracies, let us first look at the term and what it means.

9.3.1 Decentralisation

Decentralisation is something which is the opposite of centralisation. Centralisation means that power is centralised or concentrated under a single authority while decentralisation means that there is a diffusion of power at various levels.

Decentralisation is the process where there is the democratisation of political power and which aims at achieving democratic values in practice. It can be understood as the transfer of power and responsibility from the central bodies to the local bodies which results in the expansion of local autonomy. It is both a process and an end.

There are various definitions given by various authors on decentralisation. We will look at a few existing ones.

McFarland says that the term decentralisation means that decision making authority and responsibility are dispersed throughout an organisation (McFarland, 1974: 418).

Davis says that decentralisation takes place when some higher central source of responsibility and authority assigns certain functions and duties to subordinate individuals and groups for performance (Davis, 1951: 301).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines decentralisation as “Decentralisation refers to the restructuring or reorganisation of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutes of governance at the centre, regional and local levels, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels” (UNDP, 1997: 4).

Thus, there is sharing of power and authority by a central ruling group with other groups, with each having authority within its own domain. Decentralisation entails that there is a sub-division of the state's territory into smaller divisions and the creation of political and administrative institutions in those areas (Dubey, 2003: 669). Due to these processes, decentralisation can be expected to increase people's participation in economic, social and political decisions, assist in developing people's capacities and enhance government responsiveness, transparency and accountability, thus overall leading to good governance (UNDP, 1997:4).

The UNDP says that there are four forms of decentralisation: devolution, delegation, de-concentration and divestment/privatisation.

Devolution – Here, lower level units such as provincial, district, local government bodies are legally constituted. There is a transfer of authority to such bodies and this process is called devolution (UNDP, 1999).

In this process, there is a transfer of power and authority from a higher body at the centre to other regional level bodies. The transfer of authority allows the local level units of governance to take decisions regarding finance, management, administration and so on. Thus, we can say that devolution involves the transfer of functions, resources and authority to sub-national levels of government where these local level governments have clear authority over certain issues.

Federal states are an example of devolution. Devolution has a few fundamental characteristics in its purest form: firstly, local units of government are autonomous, secondly, the local governments have clearly and legally defined boundaries, thirdly, local governments have the power to secure resources, fourthly, devolution implies the need to develop local governments as institutions and fifthly, in devolution, there is a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between central and local governments (UNDP, 1999).

Delegation – Here, aspects of governance are assigned or delegated to semi-autonomous lower level units, such as urban or regional development corporations through legislation or under contract (UNDP, 1999). This is a process where authority and decision-making powers are assigned to a lower body from a higher body. It is a technique of administration where authority is granted to semi-autonomous bodies at a lower level that are ultimately accountable to the higher body.

It is a form of decentralisation but it stops short of devolution, but it involves a considerable amount of assignment of authority and responsibility. Thus, delegation refers to the transfer of government decision making and administrative authority for carefully spelt out tasks to institutions and organizations that are either under government indirect control or semi-independent (UNDP, 1999).

De-concentration – Here, lower level subordinate units such as regional, district or local offices of central administration have delegated authority without any significant local inputs (UNDP, 1999).

In this process, there is no or limited transfer of authority from one level to another, rather there is a re-distribution of decision-making authority to the ground level. Responsibility shifts from the centre to the regional and local levels and there is a relocation of offices and officers from the administrative centre to other areas. In the entire process, however, the centre does not give up any of its authority. This is the least extensive type of administrative decentralization and the most commonly found in developing countries (UNDP, 1999).

Divestment/privatisation – Here, units which are not part of the formal government structure such as NGOs, corporations, companies etc. play a role. Divestment occurs when planning and administrative responsibility or other public functions are transferred from government to voluntary, private, or non-government institutions (UNDP, 1999). These phenomena are best not treated as forms of decentralisation but of

divestment (ibid). In some cases, the government might shift responsibility to private organisations, a process often called privatisation (ibid).

Thus, we see that when we talk about decentralisation, we have to understand the various forms of decentralisation as mentioned above. The four forms as described above are different types of decentralisation. However, we can also look at decentralisation from a different angle. Viewed from this angle, we can say that there are three dimensions to decentralisation: political, administrative and financial.

- **Administrative decentralisation**

This type of decentralisation is the most common and accepted form of decentralisation (UNDP, 1999). The four forms of decentralisation mentioned above are based on established definitions of administrative decentralisation.

Administrative decentralisation is defined as “The transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field, units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or non-governmental private or voluntary organisations” (UNDP, 1999: 9).

- **Financial decentralisation**

Decentralisation can also take place in case of financial matters. It is necessary for transparent financial management. Financial decentralisation can take place in the form of generation of revenue through direct/indirect taxes, transfer of resources from central government to local government, and through self-financing.

For decentralised financial management and proper allocation of resources, there must be (i) transparency in terms of allocation (ii)

predictability of the amounts available to local institutions and (iii) local autonomy of decision making on resource allocation (UNDP 1999: 9).

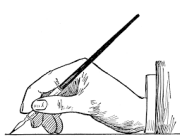
- **Political or democratic decentralisation**

Political or democratic decentralisation is related to the distribution of power from a higher level to lower levels and is linked with pluralism and representative government. It involves the development of pluralistic political parties and local political units, constitutional reforms and strengthening of legislatures and it gives citizens a better chance of participation in formulating and implementing policies.

The UNDP's definition of democratic decentralisation includes all the three aspects – administrative, financial and political. Democratic decentralisation which involves the transfer of administrative, fiscal, and political power is necessary for decentralisation to be successful. The process of democratic decentralisation is immensely strengthened when mechanisms are created at the local level to facilitate local level planning process, linking government staff to civil society (UNDP, 1998).

Thus, democratic decentralisation conforms to the basic tenets of democracy because it gives ample opportunities for people's participation at grass-root levels, autonomy and authority through the transfer of power. The concept of democratic decentralisation is also closely linked with the idea of local self-government.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is decentralisation?

2. What are the four forms of decentralisation according to UNDP?

3. What is financial decentralisation?

9.3.2 Local Self-Government

Local self-government generally operates at the lowest level of society, mostly at the grass-root level. Local self-government is a body that looks after the administration of an area such as a village, town or a city.⁵ In such an arrangement, the local affairs are managed by local bodies that comprise of members elected by the local people. However, it must be remembered that although the local affairs are managed locally, the local government is subordinate to a central authority or, in a federal system, to the state or regional authority.

Some important features of local self-government are:

- i. Jurisdiction – The jurisdiction of local self-government is confined to a definite area, which is fixed by the government. The area of jurisdiction is well defined and could be village, town or a city.
- ii. Authority – In local self-government, the authority is held by a group of elected representatives that are responsible for managing the local affairs. Their authority, however, is confined to their area of jurisdiction.
- iii. Autonomy – In the case of local matters, the local government has the autonomy to take decisions which are deemed fit.
- iv. Accountability – The local self-government is accountable to the local population. Their performance is judged by the people and the elected representative might be replaced in the next elections.

⁵ http://www.mapsofindia.com/Punjab/government_and_politics/Panchayats.html

- v. Basic objectives – The primary objectives of local self-government are to provide basic civic amenities to the local population.
- vi. Finance – The local self-government manages its finances. Since any kind of scheme entails finances, finances are generally raised locally. At the same time, the local governments also get financial aid from the central or state governments.
- vii. Participation – Local participation is of utmost importance if local self-government is to succeed. Adequate and active local participation is required for making such an arrangement successful.
- viii. Leadership – The elected representatives are the ones who provide leadership in local self-government. The leadership keeps changing from time to time.
- ix. Development – A local self-government is concerned with the overall development at the local level. The leadership aims for all-round development in the local area and if this works out, then the local self-government can be said to be successful.

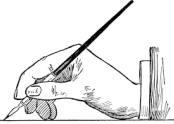
Now that we have a fair understanding of what is meant by decentralisation and local self-government, let us look at the scenario in India. But before doing that, let us briefly see how we can look at these concepts sociologically.

9.3.3 Theoretical Considerations

The concepts of decentralisation and local self-government can be seen from the lens of the distribution of power in a society. If you remember, in the first module we learned about elite theories and pluralism. The same can be applied here. Elite theories claim that there is always an elite or a group of elite that will control and monopolise political power. In contrast, pluralist theories claim that there are many groups involved and none can completely monopolise power. A plurality of factors is involved. Using that framework, when we look at decentralisation and

local self-government, it is in a sense following a pluralist model. No doubt, the delegation of authority at the ground level is at a much lower scale and ultimately the central bodies have considerable influence on the lower level bodies, but none the less, it can be said that there is no complete monopolisation of power; rather power is dispersed at least to some extent. A pluralist understanding, therefore, helps to understand this distribution of power in a society. And this can be applied to decentralisation.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. What is local self-government?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. Write three features of local self-government.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

9.3.4 Democratic Decentralisation in India

The concept of democratic decentralisation is not at all new in India. In fact, it is said that such ideas were prevalent even in ancient India. For our understanding, what is most important is the post-independence era when such democratic decentralisation was implemented in the modern sense. The father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy was a major influence in the decentralisation process in India. Gandhi believed in building India from down below and was totally against centralisation which he believed resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of a few persons. Gandhi believed in the decentralisation of both political and economic power and his idea of village swaraj (village self-

governance) is an integral part of decentralised governance. In fact, even before independence, Gandhi was quite vocal in his demand for the introduction of self-governance in the villages which he believed would improve their economy. He believed that a village should govern itself through elected Panchayats to become self-sufficient and this was only possible if there is decentralisation.

However, when India got independence, Gandhi's views were marginalised and the first draft of the Constitution had no place for Panchayati Raj institutions. After prolonged debate and discussions, they were finally included as Article 40 of the Directive Principles which states that the State shall take steps to organise Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority to enable them to function as units of self-governance. The decades that followed were characterised by a number of developments in this domain and it was only in the early 90s that democratic decentralisation in India received its due with the passing of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, in Indian Parliament in 1992. Let us look at what the path-breaking amendments mean for decentralisation in India.

9.3.5 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992

The institutional framework for democratic decentralisation in India is provided by Panchayati Raj institutions (for rural areas) and Municipal bodies (for urban areas). The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment Acts laid the foundation for such decentralisation.

The 73rd amendment was passed in 1992 and can be considered a turning point in the decentralisation process in India. It was a step taken to reformulate the Panchayati Raj so that the grass root levels are also benefited in the entire process. As a result of the Act, Panchayati Raj got constitutional status and it was mandatory for all states to implement it. This resulted in a kind of uniformity in structure and functions of the

Panchayats all over the country. The following are the important points in this act.

- The state governments must establish Panchayats at three levels- district, block (intermediate) and village levels.
- There must be devolution of adequate power, responsibility and finances upon these bodies by the states so that these bodies can prepare and implement various schemes for the development and social justice.
- States that have a population of 20 lakhs have the option not to have the intermediate level.
- Direct elections must be held in these bodies every five years.
- Seats are to be reserved for scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) in these bodies according to their population.
- One-third of the seats are to be reserved for women.
- A state finance commission to look after financial matters and make recommendations regarding financial matters of the Panchayats and to constitute a district planning committee to prepare a draft development plan for the district.
- The Panchayats are entrusted with specific responsibilities for economic development and social justice in matters listed in Schedule XI of the Constitution.

The 74th amendment was also passed in 1992 and it is concerned with urban bodies. The Act proposes to constitute a uniform structure of Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Nagar Panchayats. With the passing of the Act, the urban local government is granted constitutional status. Currently, there are three categories in an urban local government – (i) Municipal Corporation for a large urban area (ii) Municipal Council for a smaller urban area and (iii) Nagar Panchayat for transitional areas, i.e. areas that are transitioning from a rural to urban.

While these Acts were related to rural and urban areas respectively, some other provisions were also made for the implementation of

decentralisation in the scheduled areas, i.e. the Fifth and Sixth schedule areas. For the Fifth schedule areas, the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) was passed in 1996. At present the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan have Fifth Schedule areas in them and the PESA Act says that there shall be reservation for scheduled tribes (ST) for at least half the number of total seats and that all seats of Chairpersons of the Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for STs.

The Sixth Schedule areas are autonomous councils that are present in four states of north-east India – Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. The autonomous councils have their own style of administration and they are exempted from Panchayati Raj. Therefore, the rules that are applicable to the Panchayati Raj institutions are not applicable to these areas and these areas are excused from such bindings.

9.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about the concept of decentralisation and local self-government. We learned that decentralisation is the diffusion of power at different levels and is the opposite of centralisation. We also learned about the four forms of decentralisation – devolution, delegation, de-concentration and divestment, although divestment is generally considered outside of decentralisation since it involves non-government actors. We then learned that decentralisation can be administrative, financial or political. We also learned about the various features of local self-government. Finally, we learned about the decentralisation process in India, the important amendments such as the 73rd and 74th Acts and the PESA Act. We also learned that in the Sixth schedule areas, the Panchayati Raj system is not applicable.

9.5 QUESTIONS

1. What do you mean by the term decentralisation?
2. What are the various forms of decentralisation?
3. Describe what do you mean by administrative, financial and political decentralisation?
4. What are the features of a local self-government?
5. Mention the importance of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in the context of democratic decentralisation in India.

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MODULE IV: POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF INDIA

UNIT 10: THE STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA: COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives
- 10.3 The State and Society in India
 - 10.3.1 Pre-colonial Period
 - 10.3.2 Colonial Period
 - 10.3.3 Post-colonial Period
- 10.4 Summing Up
- 10.5 Questions
- 10.6 Recommended Readings and References

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first three modules, comprising of nine units in total, we have learned about the field of political sociology, the various perspectives on political sociology and the institutions and political processes associated with the field. In the previous module, i.e. module III, we learned in detail about political parties, interest groups and democratic decentralisation. In this module, i.e., module IV, which comprises of five units in total, we are going to learn specifically about political processes in India. This module is titled ‘Political Sociology of India’ and it begins with the unit which is about the state and society in India. The next four units are related to caste, class, religion, region and language and how these variables affect and in turn get affected by the political processes in India.

In the first unit, we will focus more specifically on the Indian state and India society and their interplay. Both the colonial period and post-colonial period will be the focus of analysis. You already have a fair understanding of the various theoretical perspectives of the state. That background will be useful to understand this unit. For you to get the best

out of this unit, you must be familiar with the last three modules of this paper. In case you feel that you need a slight revision, it would be advisable to quickly go through these modules.

10.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to the state and society in India. By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Describe briefly the Indian state and society in the ancient and medieval periods;
- Explain the functioning of the Indian state during the colonial period;
- Elaborate the Indian state-society relationship in the post-colonial period.

10.3 THE STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA

The relationship between the Indian state and the Indian society is a complex one. We've seen that the state occupies a central place in any kind of analysis in political sociology. This is true for the analysis of Indian society as well. When we talk about political sociology of India and Indian society, which is what this module is all about, the state plays a very important role and many of the issues are centred and tied to the state. This, of course, does not mean that other variables like class, caste, religion, region and language etc. are tied up only with the state. These sociological bases like class, caste etc. have their own significance and affect the functioning of the Indian society in their own way but in today's time, many of these concepts have become closely linked with the state. The issues of these sociological bases, i.e. class, caste, religion, region and language and their relationship with politics will be taken up in more detail in the coming units. In this unit, we focus exclusively and broadly on the nature of the Indian state and Indian society and their interplay.

To understand the relationship between state and society in India, the historical background of the Indian society, economy and polity are necessary. And particularly important is the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent which completely transformed the Indian society and way of life. But before we focus exclusively on the colonial and post-colonial period, let us look at the time period before that.

10.3.1 Pre-colonial Period

The Indian subcontinent throughout history had been fragmented and featured many independent kingdoms at any given point in time. There was no unified system of governance since each of these smaller kingdoms was autonomous and had its own style of governance. This was true for most of history except for some time periods when there emerged larger kingdoms which brought the various smaller states under one umbrella. The most important among these were the Maurya dynasty (322 B.C – 180 B.C), the Gupta dynasty (320 C.E – 590 C.E) and the Mughal empire (1526 C.E – 1707 C.E, extended till 1857 C.E). The territorial boundaries of these kingdoms were not uniform throughout their reign and kept on changing depending on infighting and other political factors, but what is important is that these kingdoms or empires are examples of large state formation in the country. And of course, there were countless other smaller states that existed in the subcontinent throughout India's history. Examples of such smaller states are ancient Kamrup in present-day Assam, the Chola kingdom in South India, the Pala kingdom in Bengal and many more.

Thus, we see that state formation in this region or what we call the Indian subcontinent is not new. Such processes have been going on for thousands of years. The question then is - what was the nature of the Indian state and Indian society and what was the relationship between state and society in these states? The important and most pervading features of Indian society have been and still are caste and religion. India has always been a deeply hierarchical society (although in pre-Vedic

times some scholars say that the society was less hierarchical) with status and status groups being the most important. However, another variable that is entangled with caste is class. If we look at the varna model (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) of the Indian society from the lens of occupational categories, then we see that these four varnas are also class categories. Thus, in Indian society caste and class are entangled and it's hard to separate the two. In the modern period, of course, we do not use these categories when we study class in India but nevertheless, it is important to remember that caste and class are both necessary to completely understand Indian society. Religion is tied up with caste in the case of Hinduism and occupies another central position in Indian society. The religious dimension was considerably altered with the Muslim rule in India and later on with the colonial rule that led to the emergence of communal politics in the country.

Thus, the society in India was a varna/caste-based society where society was divided into the four varnas and there were other groups that remained outside the realm of traditional Hindu society. Religion played a very important role in the everyday life of the people. The Hindu religious life was characterised by four principles – dharma (way of righteousness), Artha (wealth), Kama (sensual pleasure) and moksha (salvation). Although Hindu society was a highly evolved society with a sophisticated division of labour, it was not without conflict and contradictions. The religious order and the religious practices were challenged by others and out of these contradictions emerged other religions like Buddhism and Jainism. Later on, during the Muslim rule, the Indian society experienced further changes.

The states during these times functioned with the help of a bureaucratic-military complex and such an arrangement existed since the time of the Maurya dynasty, although the scope and actualisation of this arrangement varied in other smaller states. The *Arthashastra* by Kautilya actually elaborately mentions about these arrangements. These, of

course, was not separate from the state machinery and encompassed entire society. The priestly class – the Brahmins enjoyed many privileges and they had their say in the affairs of the state. There was a close relationship between the priestly class and the ruling nobility.


During those times, the state-society relationship was primarily instrumental (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 67). The state upheld and protected society and its values, and was constrained by a society whose heterogeneity was prescribed and legitimised in the Dharmashastras, the religious books (ibid). The society was self-regulating within a larger structure and its reality and legitimacy co-originated with the king but they were not his creation (ibid). We can say that the state did not interfere much in the everyday affairs of the society.

With the Muslim rule in the periods of the second millennium, the nature of state and society also changed. The Mughal state was different from earlier states. The Mughals had a centralised military-revenue arrangement, the mansabdari system, which extracted the resources and provided the military force to conquer and hold in stable fashion an extensive empire (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 65). Indian society similarly underwent a lot of social changes due to the changes in the political order.

To summarise, state formation in the Indian subcontinent has a long history and is thousands of years old. State formation was made possible because economic conditions facilitated the production of surplus in the society that allowed the functioning of the state. However, the entire subcontinent was not just one single state, rather there was a plurality of states except for a few time periods when kingdoms like the Maurya, Gupta, Mughal and so on emerged. It was during the colonial rule that the multitude of small states that existed before were all brought under one political and administrative unit. The British rule brought about changes that had a lasting impact on Indian society. Indian society which

had its own logic of functioning was transformed due to changes brought about by the British, for good or for worse.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What is Varna system? ----- -----
	2. Who wrote <i>Arthashastra</i> ? ----- -----

10.3.2 Colonial Period

The Battle of Plassey of 1757 wherein the East India Company defeated the Nawab of Bengal and consolidated its presence in Bengal is generally considered the beginning of the colonial rule in India. The rule of the East India Company continued till 1858 after which the British crown directly assumed control of the Indian subcontinent until India's independence in 1947. Although the East India Company was a private enterprise that was primarily concerned with making a profit, it also ruled the country as a state in a sense that it had acquired attributes of a state like imposing taxes, waging war etc. However, the company was answerable to the British Parliament and Crown, and the latter took over the control of the administration of India in 1858.

The British rule laid the foundation of modern statecraft in India. However, it built on the Mughal rule and many of the features of the preceding Mughal rule were incorporated (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 63). The administrative system of the Mughals provided the base on which the British system was modelled (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987:

65). Although the colonial state was built on the preceding rule, at the same time, it was also radically different from the earlier states. The new state was primarily concerned with profit making with an aim of maximising revenue generation. India with its vast resources was Britain's richest colony. To achieve its aim, the colonial state redesigned existing social structures and political arrangements that drastically changed the dynamics of the Indian society.

The colonial state functioned with the help of force as well as ideologies that sought to legitimise its rule in India. The colonial army and the police were part of the repressive state apparatus of the colonial state. Whenever required, the state did not hesitate to use these entities to maintain law and order or to suppress rebellions. The new state also established a rule of law wherein it codified many of the existing Hindu and Muslim laws. In the case of the Hindus, since there was a plurality of such laws, the upper caste customs were codified and this was applied to all Hindus. One central feature of the colonial state was the establishment of an impersonal rational bureaucracy that formed its steel frame. The bureaucracy was the backbone of the British rule and provided the necessary support for the proper functioning of the colonial state. It must be mentioned that Indians were generally confined to the lower ranks in the bureaucracy while the colonisers occupied the upper echelons. Another important development was the introduction of modern education by the colonisers. The initial aim of establishing schools and colleges to impart modern education was to create a class of clerical officers who can be part of the administrative machinery. However, the education system by introducing modern ideas also helped to legitimise British rule as new and western ideas which were introduced by the British found acceptance among the Indians, at least amongst the classes that benefited from it, if not all.

As mentioned earlier, the colonial state was driven with an aim of revenue generation. A series of changes were brought in over the course

of British rule. The Indian market was opened to British industrial manufacturers. In terms of land, a permanent settlement was established by means of either Zamindari or Ryotwari settlement that facilitated the collection of revenue. Reserved forests were created so that these forests can be exclusively used for the supply of timber for railways as well for the Royal British Navy. Plantation economy was established in many areas and so on. The colonial state thus was driven by maximum utilisation of resources from Indian Territory.

The changes effected by the colonial state had a corresponding effect on existing society and it refashioned existing Indian cultural ethos. It affected all aspects of society. Modern education facilitated the emergence of a newly formed English educated middle class, the members of which were to lead India later on during the nationalist struggle. Zamindars and other landholders became increasingly powerful. Planters, bureaucrats, lawyers, landholders etc. formed the new elite in colonial India. The class structure thus underwent significant changes. Similarly, caste got reinforced due to enumerative techniques like the census which legitimised Brahmanical authority. In terms of religion, the divisive policies of the British led to religion becoming increasingly central in many aspects and led to communal politics.

The colonial state, however, did not really interfere much in the functioning of the Indian society overall. They did initiate social reforms such as abolishing slavery, banning of sati (widow burning) etc. but overall, they were instrumental in implementing only those changes that would help them to rule and administer the vast territory of India efficiently, which in turn would allow it to collect revenue effectively. Yet the changes that were put into practice completely transformed Indian society. The state-society relationship thus, during this period, was different from the earlier times. The modern British state with its classificatory techniques like census and cartography increasingly came

to shape reality for the common people. It was more pervading, despite not interfering profoundly in the functioning of the society.

The colonial rule left its mark on Indian society and this was to continue in the post-independence period.

10.3.3 Post-colonial Period

In the period after independence, the legacy of the colonial rule continued in the state-society relationship but things changed considerably. Compared to the colonial state, the newly formed Indian state became even more salient in the period immediately after independence. It became increasingly powerful. This was because the Indian nationalist leaders, many of whom had a western education, were profoundly influenced by western ideals and values. They visualised an economically strong and developed nation and they felt that a strong state can make such a vision possible. As such, when India became independent in 1947 and later on when the Constitution was framed in 1950, India became a socialist, secular, republic with a parliamentary democracy and a federal structure. The Indian state was vested with certain responsibilities and was driven by certain goals such as national integration, economic development, social reform etc. Unlike the colonial state that often remained indifferent in many matters, the Indian state could not afford to do so. The burden fell on the shoulders of the state. The Indian state, with the help of the centralised bureaucracy, initiated many social and economic reforms. There was the construction of dams, atomic power plants, steel plants and all these were part of modernising the Indian economy. The Planning Commission was set up, five-year plans were initiated and a series of other steps were taken by the state in its efforts to become a self-reliant nation.

Apart from economic reforms, social reforms were also a priority for the Indian state. A series of steps were initiated to achieve equity and social justice. The most important of these were reservations for the deprived

sections of Indian society such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in government recruitment and education. Such positive discrimination for the deprived groups was considered necessary to bring them at par with the rest of the larger Indian society. And it was the Indian state that took steps to materialise it. Thus we see that the modern Indian state became highly interventionist in nature. Compared to pre-colonial times, this development is in sharp contrast. In all matters now, the state is seen as an arbiter and a protector. The modern Indian state therefore now affects almost all matters of the functioning of the Indian society.

While there can be no denying that the Indian state has become quite powerful, the important question to ask is – what is the nature of the Indian state? Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) claim that India can actually be said to be a weak-strong state, which is its central characteristic. The source of strength of the Indian state lies in the centrist (moderate) pattern of partisan politics that minimises the political importance of major cleavages (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 1). Apart from that, the country is agreed on the ideologies of secularism, democracy, socialism, a mixed economy and a nonaligned foreign policy (ibid). The Indian state has a “permanent government” – it’s highly professional technically expert, and well-institutionalised bureaucracy (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 2). Also, almost all of India’s national or regional political parties are centrist or moderate in its views. Moreover, there are no strong national confessional parties, i.e. parties based on religious faith, although some important ones exist at the regional level (ibid). All these features, according to the Rudolphs make the Indian state a strong state. About the last point which is based on confessional political parties, one might disagree and say that the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) which is in power currently at the centre and at many regional states is a confessional party. While it is true that the BJP might have a particular agenda based on religious faith, yet we can say that overall it is still moderate and not strictly confessional.

Apart from the strengths, the Indian state also displays weakness, according to the Rudolphs (1987). The primary reasons for state weakness are: (a) the rule of Indira Gandhi deinstitutionalised the Congress party and state structures; (b) there has been increase in the level of political mobilisation, whereby demand groups have pressed for immediate demands which have created an overload on the state; (c) there has been unofficial civil wars among castes and classes, particularly in North India; and (d) there is rising religious fundamentalism making it difficult for the state to accommodate them (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 6-7). The above points point to the weaknesses of the Indian state, according to the Rudolphs. While a lot has changed over the years and today instead of the Congress, we see the BJP in power. Yet all the above points still hold and point to the vulnerability of the state in today's time. We can say, as many political commentators have pointed out, that India is facing a crisis of govern-mentality today due to its weaknesses.

Thus, to summarise, when we look at the Indian state in the post-independence period, we see that the modern Indian state has certainly become very powerful and is entrusted as the guardian of the Indian society. As a result, almost all issues are now tied up with the state. The state-society relationship can be said to be one where now the state has a say, although it may not always be the final say, in almost all matters pertaining to the society. The Indian state certainly has its strengths but also faces many challenges that threaten to undermine it. It remains to be seen how the state deals with evolving and upcoming challenges in the coming times.

10.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about the nature of the Indian state and Indian society and their relationship. Starting from ancient time till present times, we learned about the changing nature of this relationship. We learned how the nature of the Indian state has transformed and in the

present times, it has all become all-pervading and all powerful. We also learned about the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian state in the present times.

10.5 QUESTIONS

1. What was the nature of the Indian state and Indian society in ancient times?
2. How did the colonial state function in India?
3. During the colonial rule, how did the Indian society experience change due to state interventions?
4. The Indian state can be said to be a weak-strong state. Explain.

10.6 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 11: CASTE AND POLITICS IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Objectives
- 11.3 Caste and Politics in India
 - 11.3.1 Reconceptualising Caste
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11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, i.e. unit 10, we learned about the Indian state and society and their relationship, starting from ancient times till the present day. In this unit, we are going to learn about caste and modern politics in India. We are not going to discuss the caste system in India or how it functions as it has already been covered in the first semester. Instead, in this unit, we are going to focus on particularly the relationship between caste and politics in today's time in the country. We are going to see the interplay between caste and politics, how both affect each other and how caste takes new forms and manifests itself in other ways owing to the influence of modern democratic politics.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. However, you must be aware of Indian society and particularly the Indian caste system, which is covered in your 'Sociology

of India' paper in the first semester. Also, a preliminary understanding of political sociology as covered in the first two modules of this paper would allow you to get the maximum out of this unit.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

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

- Reconceptualise caste in order to understand caste politics;
- Analyse the important developments under the British rule in the context of caste;
- Describe the rise of politics of the peasant castes;
- Explain the significance of Dalit politics;
- Describe the politics of reservation in India.

11.3 CASTE AND POLITICS IN INDIA

When we talk about the political aspects of caste, we mean politics of caste in a modern sense. We want to explore, learn and understand the changing nature of caste and its implications under a modern democratic political framework. This must not imply, however, that there was no relationship between caste and politics in pre-modern times. In fact, caste and politics have been closely intertwined since antiquity. In earlier times, we have examples of the power struggle between various groups such as *Brahmans* (priestly class) and *Kshatriyas* (warrior class). The numerous folklore bear testimony to these political dimensions. There has always been an element of conflict and contradiction amongst the various caste groups in the Hindu caste system. It is seen that in modern times these conflicts have come out in the open.

To understand these dynamics of caste politics, we have to go beyond the usual understanding of the caste system in which it is usually believed that there exists only one hierarchy and that all castes accept their place in this hierarchy without question. In such simplistic models, the inherent

contradictions that exist within the system are unaccounted for and only the functional aspects are looked at. One can imagine a typical caste village in rural India where there are multiple castes, and each group performing its own duties with no conflict whatsoever. Such a scenario, however, in reality, is not to be found. In actuality, it is far more complex. As such, if we are to understand the dynamics between caste and politics, then we must first look at caste from a new perspective. Only then, caste and politics will make sense.

11.3.1 Reconceptualising Caste

According to the Indian sociologist, Dipankar Gupta, to study and analyse the relationship between caste and politics, we must accept that castes are discrete entities with deep pockets of ideological heritage (Gupta, 2005: 412). This means that castes are separate entities and each caste has its own ideas about the caste system, their own origin and so on, and these ideas are not always in agreement with each other. Since the castes are discrete entities, there are multiple hierarchies as each caste always overvalues itself (ibid). Therefore, caste competition amongst the various castes is a characteristic of the caste order and not a later or new addition (ibid).

Thus, caste competition and caste conflict have always been a feature of the Indian caste system and it is not a new addition. Depending on the context and the locality, there were different rankings as decided by the power exercised by different castes to make the ranking and hierarchy work to their advantage (Gupta, 2005: 412). In some cases, it was the Brahmans, in other cases, it was the Jats, or Rajputs, or the Marathas, or the Marwars, or the Lingayats, and so on (ibid). Every caste has its own tales of origin that boast of its once glorious past, of elevated positions that were once held but due to trickery or war, they were demoted to a lower rank (ibid). These origin tales are myths no doubt, but so are the stories and tales of the Brahmans that justify their superiority. And because scholars and intellectuals generally accept the Brahmanical

version, it led to a kind of belief that there was only one hierarchy that operates and all castes accept their position as given to them and hence there is no competition amongst the castes.

Only when we agree that there operates in fact, multiple hierarchies, we can be conceptually ready to understand the relationship between caste and politics. Also, we must shift our focus from caste as a system to caste as an identity to grasp caste politics in modern times (Gupta, 2005: 412). Having acknowledged the multiplicity of hierarchies, it also must be accepted that in earlier times, there were far fewer disagreements over the caste hierarchy. Unlike today, where each caste asserts its identity and superiority, in earlier times, there was no such thing. This was because of primarily two reasons: (a) “The relationships between the castes were played out within the confines of the closed natural economy of the village” (Gupta, 2005: 413). Thus, there was very little scope for the subaltern castes to challenge the dominant castes. (b) “In pre-colonial times, caste hierarchies were contested and renegotiated episodically following war or major social upheaval. As such instances were rare, it gave rise to the illusion that castes have never competed and have been politically inactive” (ibid).

Over time, the closed village economy has transformed much owing to the influence of modern institutions. These changes gradually took place during the British rule. Before we proceed to understand caste politics in contemporary times, let us first briefly go through a few important developments in the colonial era.

11.3.2 A Historical Backdrop

A few important developments related to caste took place during the British rule and it is important to keep these in mind.

Firstly, the British gave the Brahmins precedence over others when it came to caste by taking their advice on what was the correct custom (Gupta, 2005: 413). As a result, it gave Brahmins in certain regions such as South India and Maharashtra a lot of influence that they did not have earlier (ibid). Consequently, anti-Brahman sentiment arose and it led to movements against them from the later years of the nineteenth century (ibid). Thus, caste conflicts were seen during the British rule and this was the beginning of caste politics as we see today.

Secondly, the census enumeration carried out by the British helped to solidify caste identities. During the early part of the twentieth century, many caste associations, sabhas, began to emerge. It was believed that the census was not just about numbers but was also meant to assign rank and prestige (ibid). The caste associations, therefore, arose in order to claim or press for higher status both in census records as well as in everyday interactions (ibid). In North India, traditional peasant castes were seen to forming their associations to claim their rightful status under the British rule (ibid). Thirdly, the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 gave separate electorate to certain castes that were considered marginalised. These castes began to organise themselves as “Depressed classes” and various depressed caste associations emerged in various parts of the country (ibid). And lastly, the British passed a number of laws to lessen the burden of untouchability for the so-called polluting castes (ibid). After independence, untouchability was abolished in India.

Thus, we see that caste politics as we see today in India, with its assertion of identity, has its origin during the British time. Post-independence, with democratic institutions at work, it has taken even more of a pronounced form.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How did the census enumeration carried out by the British helped to solidify caste identities?

2. Why does Dipankar Gupta consider castes as discrete entities?

11.4 THE SCENARIO AFTER INDEPENDENCE

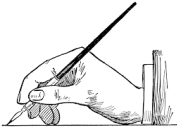
In post-independence India, caste and politics got even more tightly intertwined. After independence, Indian embraced a democratic system of government. Democratic politics necessarily involves traditional structure and its leadership (Kothari, 1997: 64). Two important points are to be noted in this case. (a) The caste system made available structural and ideological bases for political mobilization to the leadership, providing it with both a segmental organization and an identification system on which the support could be crystallised (ibid). (b) The leadership was forced to make concessions to local opinion, articulate political competition on traditional lines and in turn, organise castes for economic and political purposes (ibid). Thus, we see that there emerged a new kind of political organisation, articulated around particularistic divisions, yet giving to these a secular and associational orientation (ibid).

Democratic politics made caste more salient as it provided a support base for political mobilisation. One important change that democracy in India

has introduced in the way caste and politics interact, is that it has made all castes legally equal (Gupta, 2005: 414). Therefore, in today's time, no caste hesitates to assert its equal status. However, at the same time, castes in contemporary times are not concerned with official rankings (ibid). When it comes to caste identities, it is a question of self over others and not self in relation to others (ibid). Caste politics in India is centred on material and symbolic benefits. A caste's involvement in politics is to mainly stake a claim in jobs, educational opportunities, as well as positions of power in government bodies in relation to other competing castes (ibid).

We see that there has been a politicisation of caste in contemporary times. In India, there are three major developments when it comes to caste politics. They are reservation politics, Dalit politics and the politics of the peasant castes.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. How did caste and politics get more tightly intertwined in Post-Independent India?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. How has democracy changed the caste system in Post-Independent India?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

11.4.1 Politics of the Peasant Castes

The traditional upper castes were the ones who benefited the most during the British rule and post-independence they continued to dominate the

political scene all over the country. Immediately after independence, it was the Congress party that was in power at the centre as well as in most of the states. And it was seen that the party was dominated by individuals from upper castes. However, things began to change gradually. In northern India, starting from the 70s and 80s, the political scene was dominated by traditional peasant castes like the Ahirs, Jats, Kurmis etc (Gupta, 2005: 415). In southern India, castes like Vanniyars and Thevars were becoming more dominant (ibid). As mentioned earlier, caste associations cropped up all over the country during the British rule. Now a few decades post-independence, the castes that were not traditionally considered 'ritually pure' could finally wield political power. However, this does not mean that all peasant castes have become politically strong; neither does it mean that all peasant castes are united. Castes like Yadav became powerful in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and became politically important, as seen in the rule of the Samajwadi Party (founded by Mulayam Singh Yadav) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (founded by Lalu Prasad Yadav) in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar respectively. The Kurmis were less represented in these parties (Gupta, 2005: 415), signifying the lack of unity among these castes. The Kurmis, however, are also a powerful group, although not as much as the Yadavs. (The present chief minister, Nitish Kumar of Janata Dal is a Kurmi).

The important question here is what happened that allowed the rise of the peasant castes? Well, post-independence, the zamindari system was abolished in India and there was a ceiling put to land ownership. This undermined the economic and power base of the traditional rural elite who mostly belonged to upper castes (Gupta, 2005: 416). This elite had a strong urban presence as well, however, with the land reforms kicking in, and with their land ownership reduced, they gradually lost their foothold in rural areas (ibid). As they lost their power grip, the peasant castes rose to political prominence. It's not like the peasant castes became suddenly rich and powerful; it's just that the traditional elite lost

its power grip in rural areas and the peasant castes gradually rose to power.

The peasant castes continue to play an important role in today's political scenario. They have high caste consciousness and their biggest strength is their numbers. Political parties are quick to seek out their votes as they can alter a political outcome.

11.4.2 Dalit Politics

Dalit politics refers to the politics of the so-called untouchable castes in the Hindu caste system. Gandhi used the term 'Harijan' (which means children of God) to refer to these castes in order to give them a dignified place in the society. However, the castes themselves do not use the term 'Harijan', instead, they prefer to use the term 'Dalit' which was first coined by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who was a champion for the rights of Dalits. It was Ambedkar who single-handedly fought for the rights of Dalits and after independence, untouchability was abolished and there were provisions made in the Indian Constitution for reservation of seats in the government as well as educational institutions. Reservation was also ensured for the indigenous tribes of India. The untouchable castes came to be known as Scheduled Castes (SC) while the indigenous tribes came to be known as Scheduled Tribes (ST) and the percentage of reservation for them were kept at 15 and 7.5 per cent respectively.

Dalit politics started gaining prominence in the 50s with the formation of the Republican Party by Ambedkar. Ambedkar's efforts made these castes very much politically conscious and he was instrumental in getting many of them to convert to Buddhism. Here, it must be mentioned that most of the members of the Republican Party and the converts belonged to the Mahar caste (Ambedkar's caste) and many other castes such as Mangs, Matangs, and Chamars stayed away from it (Gupta, 2005: 418). Thus, it was not a unified movement but rather confined to a few pockets

and few castes. Nevertheless, this could be thought of as the beginning of Dalit politics in independent India.

After Ambedkar's death, lack of leadership did not allow the movement to reach its full potential. It was only from the 80s that Dalit politics emerged with a renewed vigour and had a lasting impact on Indian politics. In Uttar Pradesh, Kanshi Ram formed the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samit (DS-4) which later transformed itself into the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) (ibid). The BSP is a strong force in UP and has captured state power under the leadership of Mayawati many times.

Dalit politics could gain momentum due to the emergence of a politically conscious middle class among these castes. With the benefits of reservation kicking in, there gradually arose a middle class among these castes and as their numbers increased, they felt confident to articulate their experiences of discrimination at the workplace and other kinds of discrimination they faced (Jodhka, 2010: 9). "They began to form separate associations of Scheduled Caste employees and mobilised themselves in events of discriminatory experience of their caste fellows" (ibid). This was also the time when Ambedkar was rediscovered as a universal icon of Dalit identity (ibid).

One point which needs to be mentioned is that the Dalits are not a homogenous group and there are often conflicts among the groups. The term Scheduled Caste is an umbrella term and encompasses many castes all over the country. As such there are regional as well as class contradictions among the SCs or the Dalits. The Dalit middle class is more concerned with identity and portray themselves as indigenous people while the poor landless Dalit is more concerned with economic exploitation but such issues are not always attended by the Dalit middle class (Gupta, 2005: 418). Hence there is a conflict of interest many a time.

11.4.3 Reservation Politics

As mentioned above, reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were incorporated into the Indian Constitution after independence. This was done since SCs were considered to be marginalised in the traditional Hindu society while the STs were thought to be outside the pale of Hindu civilisation and hence reservation was justified for both of them. Reservation politics, however, got a new push when reservation in government jobs and educational institutes were also ensured for the Other Backward Castes (OBC).

The OBCs are intermediate castes between the traditional upper castes (Brahmans, Kayasthas etc.) and untouchable castes. Their population numbers are hard to say, just like it is hard to make out what are the upper caste numbers since the last caste census was done in 1931 (caste numbers were not recorded after that). However, it is believed that in India, SCs and STs constitute around 17 and 9 per cent respectively; the upper castes constitute 15-20 per cent, while the rest are OBC castes. Therefore OBC makes up quite a huge chunk of the population comprising around 50-60 per cent of the population. OBC castes are also known as the “Shudra” castes and these are generally the peasant castes that we learned about in the section on peasant castes. The OBCs are not untouchables but since they lack a culture of learning due to their lowly peasant status, they are considered backwards and therefore reservation was provided to them (Gupta, 2005: 423).

As early as 1955, the Kalekar Commission was set up to look into the welfare of the OBCs, but nothing substantial came up (ibid). It was with the Mandal Commission’s recommendation in 1980 that reservation politics came to the forefront. The Mandal Commission came up with a list of 3743 backward castes on the basis of social, economic and educational backwardness and it recommended that 27 per cent of the seats be reserved for the OBCs (ibid)). These recommendations were implemented in 1990 by Prime Minister V.P Singh, however, it led to a

series of protests and Mr Singh had to resign. The OBC quota, however, was not withdrawn.

Reservations for OBC gave caste a new life in India. It marked the end of the Nehruvian imaginings of India where caste would wither away and be insignificant. Reservation to OBCs meant an acceptance of caste as a legitimate aspect of state policy and a possible indicator of development and/or the lack of it (Jodhka, 2010: 7). Caste-based reservation, today, is a part and parcel of Indian society and it is impossible to do away with it. No political party opposes it and tacitly uses it for vote-bank. In fact, the present BJP government in the centre has brought up an ambitious plan to count the OBC numbers in the next census of 1921. Such a step is intended to see the deprived sections among the OBCs and is meant for the betterment for these castes in the form of reservation.

One more important point when it comes to reservation politics is related to claiming ST status and this is particularly true in north-east India. In the north-east, numerous groups are clamouring to get ST status, the idea is avail the benefits of reservation meant for the Scheduled Tribes as well as to claim indigenous status. Tribal politics, of course, has its own nuances and must be studied separately but since claiming ST status is also a way of availing government benefits, we must be aware of this type of reservation politics as well.

11.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about the intricate relationship that caste and politics share in India. We learned that in order to look at this relationship, a reconceptualising caste is necessary. We also learned about the few important developments during British rule. Then finally saw caste politics in India after independence as manifested in the politics of the peasant castes, Dalit politics and reservation politics. As you can see, although the traditional caste system does not operate any more in most parts of the country at the same time, caste has taken new

forms and it has been extremely politicised. Such a trend is likely to continue in the coming future.

11.6 QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to look at the caste system from a new lens if we are to understand contemporary caste politics in India?
2. Mention a few historical developments related to caste under the British rule.
3. Explain the significance of reservation politics in India? What is the future of caste based reservation according to you?
4. Briefly outline Dalit politics in India.

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UNIT 12: CLASS AND POLITICS IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Objectives

12.3 Class and Politics in India

12.3.1 Marginality of Class Politics in India

12.3.2 Working Class Politics in India

12.3.3 Agrarian Politics

12.4 Summing Up

12.5 Questions

12.6 Recommended Readings and References

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, i.e. unit 11, we learnt about the complex and ever-changing relationship between caste and politics. We saw that in India caste has been extremely politicised and there has been ever increasing assertion of caste identities in recent times. Class is another key variable that is important when it comes to politics in India. In this unit, we will learn about the relationship between class and politics. We will look at both the rural scenario as well as the urban scenario. As we proceed you will see that in rural areas, class and caste are more tightly enmeshed as compared to urban areas. We will also learn that despite the existence and growing income inequality and despite India being primarily an agrarian society, class politics is not very prominent and in fact, is marginalised as compared to other kinds of politics involving caste, religion, language and so on. It is seen that often these issues like caste, religion, etc. are at the forefront when it comes to politics in India but class politics remains side-lined. We will study the reasons for that.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. However, you must be aware of Indian society and also be conceptually clear about what is class in general. These topics are covered in your ‘Sociology of India’ and ‘Social Stratification’ papers respectively in the first semester. Also, a preliminary understanding of political sociology as covered in the first two modules of this paper would allow you to get the maximum out of this unit.

12.2 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the marginality of class politics in India;
- Describe the politics of the working class in India;
- Explain agrarian politics in India.

12.3 CLASS AND POLITICS IN INDIA

The politics of class is seen all across the world in almost all countries but in varying degrees. Be it in erstwhile communist countries in the East or in democratic countries in the West, class politics has always been an important feature. While it is true that the nature of class politics has changed in many of these countries, nevertheless it remains quite relevant. In India however, class politics is marginalised. Class politics does not get the attention that other kind of politics gets like those involving caste, religion, etc. In India, although there is the Communist Party of India, which claims to represent working-class interest, its influence is confined to just the three states of Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura and out of these, its influence has decreased considerably in the latter two states in recent times. Similarly, the Swatantra Party was the only party that represented the interests of private capital in the country. Its existence, however, was short-lived and it started its operation in 1959 before becoming defunct in 1974. Thus, we see that there is no existence of political parties that represent interests of either labour or capital.

Class politics in India, therefore, is marginalised. This is true for both the urban and rural sectors. In the urban sector, we have the politics of the trade unions while in the rural sector, there is the politics of the peasantry.

There are numerous reasons as to why class politics remains on the sidelines. Let us first look at this aspect first and then we'll look at the politics of trade unions and finally at the politics of the peasantry.

12.3.1 Marginality of Class Politics in India

Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) explain in elaborate detail why class politics in India is marginalised. By politics, they refer to “regulated conflict over the extraction of resources, the allocation of values, and the condition and terms of legitimate authority” (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 20). By class, they refer to “the historic adversaries in industrial democracies – capital and labour” (ibid). They explain that when they say class politics is marginal in India, they mean that “in the context of regulated conflict, India’s parties do not derive their electoral support or policy agendas from distinct class constituencies or from organised representatives of workers and capital” (ibid).

One primary and the most striking feature of Indian politics is its persistent centrism (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 19). Centrism refers to moderate policies and the tendency to avoid political extremes by taking an ideologically intermediate position. Indian politics, therefore, is characterised by a moderate viewpoint. And one of the consequences of its centrism is the marginality of class politics in India. No national party, be it right or left, pursues the politics of class in the country, despite the fact there exist vast inequalities when it comes to wealth in the country.

Class politics is marginal in India because the two forces (actors) that support class politics – organised workers and private financial and industrial capital – are politically marginal (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 2). Organised workers are marginal because of internal divisions by

party, union, and government manipulation (ibid). At the top level, organised labour is fragmented into national federations that are ideologically divided which inhibits organised labour's capacity to act as a body for political or bargaining purposes (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 25). At the mid and bottom level of industries and firms, trade unions are considerably weakened due to state-imposed conditions that encourage multiplication, fragmentation and competition (ibid). This shrinkage of organisational capacity reduces the possibility of collective bargaining.

Private capital, on the other hand, is marginal because (i) Private capitalism lack ideological legitimacy as profit and private gain are viewed as antisocial. (ii) Also, it is the public sector that occupies the prime position in the economy and overshadows the private sector. (iii) And lastly, the private capital is dependent on the state due to the latter's control over the former (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 2). Private capitalism is dependent on capitalism in India and is dependent on the protection and patronage of the state (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 25). It is the state that protects private capital with the help of protectionist trade policies (ibid).

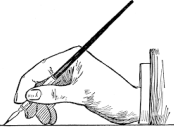
In India, it is a third actor, the state that dominates the other two actors – capital and employment in the organised sector (labour) – and therefore minimises the influence of capital and labour in the conduct of policy, politics, and market relationships (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 2). The role of the state is important in dwarfing the influence of the two ingredients that influence class politics in India. It is seen that out of the entire workforce, less than 10 per cent of workers are in the organised sector and out of which two-thirds are employed by the state in public-sector companies and government services. The Indian state thus dominates the country's financial and industrial capital as well as employment in the organised economy (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 23). The presence of the state makes “the state – rather than private capital – labour's principle counter-player” (ibid).

The Indian state, as an employer, in contrast to private capital, claims to represent workers' interest and it presents itself as their friend and representative (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 23-24). Thus, if we look at it from this viewpoint, the Indian state is not an adversary or class enemy of the working class and organised labour. The state and labour, although they are counter-players, are not in a conflicting relationship (ibid). Because of this dependent relationship between state and labour and the state's dominance of both capital and labour, the scope for class politics in India is very limited.

Another important aspect that deserves mention in this context is the role played by the "bullock capitalists" in constraining the class polarisation between wage workers and capitalist farmers. These bullock capitalists are self-employed cultivators who benefited from land reform and the green revolution and they rely more on family labour and their own human capital than on wage workers and machines (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 2). They oppose both industrial capital (state and private) and urban workers and have played a leading role in the production as well as politics (ibid). This also has an impact on class politics in India.

Thus, to summarise, we see that class politics in India is marginal due to the reasons mentioned above. However, it is not non-existent. It exists but it gets less prominence. In the following sections, we are going to learn about class politics as seen in the working class and in the agrarian sector. The Rudolphs (1987) claim that the politics of the peasantry which can be called the new agrarianism of the seventies and the eighties is more sectoral rather than class based (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 22-23). Their argument is more or less correct. However, the class angle is not completely missing if the class is defined broadly and therefore in our understanding, we will include this in our analysis of class and politics.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What is centrism? ----- -----
	2. Why is class politics marginal in India? ----- -----
	3. Who are 'bullock capitalists'? ----- -----
	4. Why is private capital marginal in India? ----- ----- -----

12.3.2 Working Class Politics in India

As mentioned in the previous section, when it comes to organised workers, they are marginal due to internal divisions by political parties, trade unions and government manipulation. Trade unions are one of the modes of organisation of the working class. A brief history and functioning of trade unions will throw light on the working class politics in India.

Working class politics can only exist in industrialised nations. In pre-industrialised societies, this kind of politics is not found. In India, the seeds of industrialisation were sown by the British and we see the existence of trade unions during the British rule. The first national federation of trade unions was founded in 1920 and was called the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) (Bhowmick, 1996: L-39). It was an umbrella organisation and represented working class interests,

ranging from liberalism to communism (ibid). Although there were some splits initially, it remained united till independence. Around the time of independence, however, splits occurred and this continued to be trend later on.

During the last years of the British rule, AITUC was controlled to a large extent by the communists. The Congress Party was not pleased with the development and decided to set up its own trade union centre and as a result, Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was formed in May 1947 (ibid). The Congress, with its vision for the future of the country, believed that since labour would play a major role in the new pattern of planned development, it cannot allow the communists to lead the trade union movement (ibid). The formation of the INTUC thus was the beginning of the state controlling the labour movement in India (ibid).

After independence, splits in trade unions became the norm. Splits were seen on the basis of political parties and every political party would have its own trade union front (ibid). Furthermore, when political parties split, their trade union fronts would also split up, further fragmenting the working class on the basis of parties (ibid). Many unions popped up. In the late 40s, federations like Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Union Trade Union Congress (UTUC) were formed. In the 50s, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) was formed with the backing of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (Bhowmick, 1996: L-40). Thus, there were many federations that were formed. However, till 1970, INTUC, AITUC and HMS remained the most important trade union centres (ibid). In 1970, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) was formed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and this took away a large section of unions with it (ibid). These splits were at the national level. Similar splits were also observed at the regional level. The Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK) both started their respective trade union fronts. Similarly, the Shiv Sena formed its labour wing called the Bharatiya Kamgar Sena (ibid).

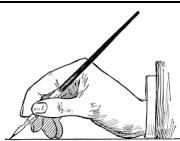
Thus, we see that the trade unions were divided on the basis of political parties after independence and this led to quite a bit of fragmentation and prevented the formation of a larger body that could represent the larger interests of the working class. Apart from this, the role of the state and its interventions are also important in this context. Post-independence, the main goal of the government policy was to achieve high economic growth which required centralised planning along with the expansion of the state sector and the government felt it was necessary to intervene in labour and management relations (ibid). In 1947, the Industrial Disputes Act was passed which provided for government interventions in disputes between labour and management (ibid). The Bill although it allowed for government interference, did have other beneficial aspects for the workers as it attempted to protect worker rights (against employers) and it recognised trade unions as an essential feature of industrial relations (ibid). In 1949, there were two other bills, the Labour Relations Bill and Trade Unions Bill that stressed on collective bargaining and settlement of disputes through bipartite negotiations (between labour and management) were passed, but due to internal differences among trade union federations and government apathy, they were never passed. The scope for a mutual solution of problems between labour and management thus never came into being and the state continued with its right to interference.

Thus, the state in India is an arbiter in disputes involving labour and management in the public sector. This has its positive aspects as wages, bonus, recruitment etc. are streamlined but at the same time, it gives enough leverage to the state to successfully manipulate the trade unions thus hampering the interests of the working class. In the private sector, such as banks, Information Technology (IT), telecommunications etc. however; there are no trade unions (Ali, 2011: 34). Here, the state gives full support to the employers in not allowing the formation of unions (ibid). Thus, we see that the organised sector is fragmented between public and private, with no scope of unions in the private sector while the

public sector is divided along party or union lines. On top of that, the state uses its intervention capacity to its own benefit.

We are therefore now in a position to understand why class politics, at least, the working class politics in India is marginal. We see that labour's primary opponent in India is the state and not private capital. The state's intervention has created problems for the workers and for the trade union movement (Bhowmick, 1996: L-42). Also, fragmentation along the lines of party affiliated unions has further weakened the movement. Many a time, inter-union rivalries are stronger than conflict labour and management (ibid). However, despite the handicap suffered by the working class, there have been moments when the working class has been able to unify and come together. In 2010, CITU organised a meeting of all trade unions and on September 7th, 2010, a one-day general strike was observed where more than one million workers participated (Ali, 2011: 38). Even people from the unorganised sector took part. It was a huge success. This shows that despite the internal conflicts, the working class is able to mobilise in times of need. But these instances are rare. Working class politics, in general, remains marginal. No political party would seek electoral support on the basis of class.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What was the first national federation of trade unions in India? When was it formed?

2. Name two trade union federations of India.

3. Why is working class politics marginal in India?

12.3.3 Agrarian Politics

When we say agrarian politics, we mean the politics involving the peasantry. While it is true that agrarian politics is more sectoral (i.e. confined to the agricultural sector) rather than class based (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987: 22-23), nevertheless, we can still include it under the ambit of class politics if we think of the peasantry as a class. In India, agrarian politics can be understood in the context of the farmers' movement that became prominent in the 70s and 80s. This also roughly corresponded to the rise of the backward castes to which most of these farmers belonged. As you might have realised, caste and class often overlap in India. The politics of the peasant castes has been discussed briefly in the last unit (unit 11). Here, we will look at some of the major aspects in the farmers' movement in India which will allow us to understand agrarian politics in the country.

Peasant mobilisations can be traced to the British rule when there occurred numerous peasant revolts at various times against land revenue, taxes in general etc. These movements were mostly locally confined, and many a time (not always), these were directed against the local landlord and not the government (Gupta, 1988: 2689). There were, of course, some mobilisations that were directed against the government as well. It was seen that in these movements, there was unity amongst the small farmers, middle farmers as well as tenants as they had common interests (ibid). Post-independence, however, the nature of the peasant mobilisation changed.

Two important changes are noticed in agrarian mobilisations after Independence. First, these mobilisations are mostly directed against the Indian state or government and secondly, the movement has become fragmented. Thus, in India, today, we can say that there are two types of agrarian mobilisations. The first one is of the poor agricultural labourers and other rural labour households who demand higher wages and better working conditions (Gupta, 1988: 2690). The second is of the rich farmers who produce a considerable market surplus (ibid). The first kind of movements is generally sponsored by the numerous rural wings of established political parties like Kisan Sabhas or agricultural labour unions of the CPI and CPI (M) (Gupta, 1988: 2691). The second kind of movements which involves the rich peasants are generally the ones involving the Bharatiya Kisan Sabha (BKU) in west U.P, Punjab and Haryana and Punjab, the Shetkari Sangathana (SS) in Maharashtra, or the Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS) in Karnataka (ibid). (The rich peasants are those who benefited from the Zamindari Abolition Act, land ceiling act and from the green revolution).

It is seen that in the case of the poor peasants, political parties like the CPI generally lend support and their mobilisations are generally aimed at a local exploiter. However, it is the movement of the rich peasants that get more attention and in their case, the enemy is not in the village or a local exploiter; it is either the state government or the central government or in other words the Indian state (Gupta, 1988: 2692). Their demands are generally loan waiver, higher prices for their products, reducing fertiliser prices and so on, all of which are aimed at the state. As we can see, these mobilisations of the rich farmers represent only a small fraction since the majority of the peasantry are not sellers of their marketable surplus. But still, because these peasants are quite persistent with their demands and are very vocal, they get more attention. In fact, it is their organisations that have more members than Kisan Sabhas of the CPI which are actually meant for the poor farmers.

The politics of the peasantry thus has very sharp cleavages as seen in the different ways peasant mobilisation takes place. In the first kind, we see a definite involvement of political parties like the CPI. In the second kind, we see direct or indirect involvement or influence of political parties as can be seen from the examples of Bharatiya Kisan Sabha (BKU) and Shetkari Sangathana (SS). The SS was launched by Sharad Joshi in 1979 in Maharashtra and the ideology of the movement was strongly anti-state and steeped in populist imagery. (Arora, 2001: 90-92). It was in this movement where Joshi coined the famous phrase 'Bharat versus India' and he advocated the thesis of peasant unity (Arora, 2001: 92). Joshi was an extremely political person and he was interested to go beyond Maharashtra (Gupta, 1988:2695). In fact, he went on to start his own political party called the Swatantra Bharat in 1994 (Gupta, 1996: 63) and it is still in existence. The BKU, on the other hand, was formed in 1978 by Charan Singh and claims to be apolitical as it is reluctant to side with any political party (Gupta, 1988: 2692, Gupta: 1996: 63). However, in reality, it is far from being apolitical. The organisation does influence (although cannot force) its members when it comes to voting in elections. In fact, its leaders like Mahendra Singh Tikait had time and again come in support of the politician Devi Lal in UP.

Thus, to summarise, when it comes to agrarian politics, there is definitely a class angle to it as seen in the split in the kind of agrarian mobilisations we see in the country. The poor peasants are supported by some political parties but their voices are not heard as much as compared to the rich peasants. It is this group, the rich peasants that have hogged the limelight for many years and quite frequently there are mobilisations seen in the capital city of Delhi where these peasants come down from their villages and demand better prices, waiver of loans and subsidised fertilisers. In fact, the year 2018 saw many of these mobilisations, not only in Delhi but also in other parts like Maharashtra. Peasant politics, particularly of the second kind, is here to stay.

12.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learnt about class politics in India. We realised a very important feature of Indian politics which is the marginalisation of class politics in the country. We examined why this was so, mainly due to the domination by the state of both labour and capital which does not allow class politics to manifest itself completely. Then we saw the working of class politics in the country as seen in trade unions and its functioning. Finally, we learned about class politics in the rural sector as seen in agrarian politics. We saw that agrarian politics is not homogenous and there is clearly a class angle to it. The poor peasants whose interests are different from that of the rich peasants rarely get a voice. It is the rich peasants that are better able to organise themselves and are able to articulate their demands. And their demands are mostly directed at the state and not confined to a local entity. This once again demonstrates how and to what magnitude the Indian state affects class politics.

12.5 QUESTIONS

1. Describe the mutual relationship between the three actors – labour, capital and the state in the context of Indian class politics.
2. Briefly describe the role of the state in the trade union movement in India.
3. What is the difference in the two kinds of peasant mobilisations in India?

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UNIT 13: RELIGION: DEBATE ON SECULARISM AND COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Objectives

13.3 Secularism and Communalism in India

13.3.1 Secularism: Nehru vs Gandhi

13.3.2 Secularism in Constituent Assembly Debates

13.3.3 Communalism in India – Its Origins

13.3.4 Communal Conflict – Some Examples

13.4 Summing Up

13.5 Questions

13.6 Recommended Readings and References

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, i.e. unit 12, we learned in detail about class politics in India. We learned about working-class politics as well as agrarian politics. In the present unit, we will discuss religion and politics in India with a special focus on the various debates on secularism and communalism in the country. When it comes to religion and politics, there is much to cover and it encompasses a wide range of topics. However, we will confine our learning to secularism and communalism alone and not focus on other aspects such as religious fundamentalism. We will begin by first learning about the meaning of the terms, ‘secularism’ and ‘communalism’. Then in the context of secularism, we will learn about the difference of opinion between Nehru and Gandhi and also the debates in the Constituent Assembly as the Constitution was being framed. Then we will focus on communalism in some detail. We

will learn the origins of communalism in India and then finally learn a few examples of communal conflict.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. Also, a preliminary understanding of political sociology as covered in the first three modules of this paper would allow you to get the maximum out of this unit.

13.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we introduce you to religion and politics in India with a special focus on secularism and communalism. By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Define secularism and communalism in multiple ways;
- Explain about the Nehru versus Gandhi debate on secularism;
- Explain the Constituent Assembly debates on secularism;
- Describe how communalism emerged during British times;
- Describe a few examples of communal conflict in India.

13.3 SECULARISM AND COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

When it comes to religion and politics in India, two important concepts are those of secularism and communalism. Let us first understand what these concepts are and then we will discuss the various debates related to them.

In the European context, secularism generally means the separation of the state and the church. However, the meaning of the term is not confined to this understanding alone. In the Indian context, Bipan Chandra (2004) has defined secularism in four different ways, one of which is closer to the commonsensical European understanding of the word.

1. Secularism means that religion must be separate from politics; religion must be separate from politics, economy, education and large areas of social life and culture. Religion should be treated as a private or personal affair of the individual. At the same time, however, secularism does not mean removing religion from life or antagonism to religion (Chandra, 2004: 6).
2. Secularism in a religiously plural society means that the state should be neutral towards all faiths; the state should show equal respect and regard for all religions, including atheism (ibid).
3. In the third sense, secularism means that the state must treat all citizens as equal and it must not discriminate on the basis of religious belief (ibid).
4. In India, there is another meaning of secularism. Secularism also means a clear-cut opposition to communalism (ibid).

As you can see in the last definition, secularism is opposed to communalism. So what exactly is communalism?

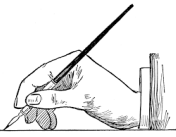
In a broad sense, communalism means “loyalty to a socio-political grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communalism>). However, in the general understanding, it mostly refers to religious loyalty and not any other kind of loyalty. In the Indian context, it is generally understood as conflicts over secular issues between religious communities (Upadhyay and Robinson, 2012: 35). Thus, conflicts on the basis of religion and religious beliefs over secular issues constitute communalism. Bipan Chandra (1990) says that communalism is an ideology and to some extent, politics is organised around that ideology (Chandra, 1990: 38). It is not the same as communal violence, rioting, etc (ibid).

Thus, we see that secularism and communalism are two contrasting concepts. In secularism, religion is separated from politics while in communalism politics is played using religion as an important component. In the former, religion is actively sought to be made a private

affair and removed from social and political aspects of life while in the latter, it is religion that is decidedly used in political aspects resulting in conflicts and violence.

Now that we have a basic understanding of both secularism and communalism, let us focus exclusively on the debate on secularism in India

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What do you mean by secularism? ----- -----
	2. What is communalism? ----- -----

13.3.1 Secularism: Nehru vs Gandhi

There is a diverse range of opinions when it comes to secularism in India. Indian national leaders as they visualised new dawn for the country, held different views as to what should be the place of religion in the newly formed nation. The contrasting views of Gandhi and Nehru on secularism are important for us to know.

Nehru was a modernist and a secular human being and did not have a high opinion of religion. In his ideas of secularism, religion is an erroneous view of the world that will give way to more rational understanding as there is growth in scientific thinking and advance in economic growth (Rudolph, 1987 as cited in Madan, 1987: 747). He

believed as we became modern, religion would be side-lined. He valued the individual and not group identities. Gandhi, on the other hand, held religion in high esteem. For him, all religions are true, that they give meaning to the moral life, and that Indian society can be built on a community of religious communities (ibid). In contrast to Nehru, Gandhi valued group identities more than individual identities.

For Gandhi, religion and politics are inseparable and that religion is superior to politics (Madan, 1987: 752). For him, it is the religion that governs everything, even the tiniest bit of human action and hence it is impossible to separate religion from any aspect of life, including politics. “Religion is the source of absolute value and hence constitutive of social life; politics is the arena of public interest; without religion, politics would become debased (degraded)” (ibid). Gandhi, therefore, believed that religion cannot be done away with; it is an essential aspect of human life. The state must make sure that every religion was free to develop according to its own genius and no religion that depended upon state support for survival deserved to survive (ibid).

Secularism thus for Gandhi, as we can see, is closer to the second and third definition of Bipan Chandra as described above; he was not an advocate of separation of state and church (religion) but believed that the state must be neutral to all religions, respect all religions equally and must not discriminate on the basis of religion. Gandhi might be called a traditionalist in contrast to Nehru who was a staunch modernist. While Gandhi put his faith in the ethically refined individual to create a better society, Nehru considered the shaping of suitable institutions as the best means to achieve a better society (Madan, 1987: 755). And it was the state that he put his faith on among all modern institutions that could be the engine of change (ibid). The state for Nehru was above everything, including religion.

For Nehru, human progress and progress of the country was his cherished dream and he believed that religion is a hindrance to that dream. He was

not very attracted to religion for it was unscientific according to him. However, he was not too worried about religion and its political expression, namely communalism for he believed that as India progressed and Indians became more rational, these issues would gradually go away (Madan, 1987: 755). Nehru was a champion of economic progress and he believed that giving more importance to the economy would side-line religious issues to the background (ibid). Inequalities and the difference might remain, but these will be class-based and not religious ones. Thus, like a typical modernist, Nehru's ideas of secularism were closer to the European understanding that religion and politics must be separate. But he also maintained that 'secular' in India does not mean opposed to religion. A secular Indian state is one which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities (Madan, 1987: 756). Thus, it is nearer to Chandra's first definition as described earlier.

13.3.2 Secularism in Constituent Assembly Debates

Gandhi and Nehru never had a formal debate. Their views as presented above were expressed by them at various times over a period of time. It is their contrasting views on secularism that make it interesting since both have played a pioneering role in shaping the destiny of our country. More formal debates by other important people, also founding fathers, however, took place during the Constituent Assembly debates while the Constitution was being framed. Let us look at a few important aspects in those debates.

- I. The Preamble – There was debate around the preamble and there were three versions of secularism that people adhered to. In the first one, there was a clear line of separation between religion and the state (Jha, 2002: 3176). Religion must be a private affair and it was up to the individual to decide whether to be a believer or not or to adhere to this religion or that (ibid). Therefore the preamble could not contain any reference to god, and neither should the constitution establish links between state and any

religion (ibid). Adherents to this position were G.B. Pant, K.T. Shah, Tajamul Husain and others. There was a second position that was the opposite to the first. There must be a separation of state and religion, not because this would weaken the state but because it would demean religion (ibid). The third position on secularism was the equal respect principle to all religions. In India, religion was a vital component of peoples' lives and therefore the state should respect all religions alike (ibid). People who advocate this third view were K.M. Munshi, L.K. Maitra, H.V. Kamath and others.

- II. Religious Minorities – Another debate that flared up was whether a secular state permits the recognition of religious minorities along with linguistic minorities. Some members were against such an idea but the Minorities sub-committee defined minorities in terms of religion and language and gave them the right to establish and administer educational institutions (Jha, 2002:378).
- III. Uniform Civil Code – There was also wide discussion when it came to the uniform civil code, i.e. a civil code/law that will be applicable to every citizen irrespective of faith, caste, race etc. Members like Ambedkar, Munshi advocated for a uniform civil code but others like B Pocker Sahib and Mohamed Ismail Saheb and Mahboob Ali Baig Bahadur opposed it (ibid). Amidst the opposing views, an intermediate position was also there that the establishment of the uniform civil code must be done slowly, with the consent of communities (ibid).
- IV. Political Safeguard for Minorities – There was a question of whether minorities must be given political safeguard in the country. Initially, in 1948, Articles 292 and 294 reserved seats in the parliament and state legislature for Muslim, Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Indian Christians for 10 years (Jha, 2001: 3179). However, later on in 1949, the reservation for Indian

Muslims and Christians were removed because it was believed it would lead to separatist feelings (ibid).

- V. Religious Instruction in Educational Institutions – Another important topic on which there was a lot of debate was on religious instruction in educational institutions. There were some like K. T Shah who demanded that religious instruction should be banned in educational institutions but others like Mohamed Ismail opposed it (Jha, 2002: 3180).

13.3.3 Communalism in India – Its Origins

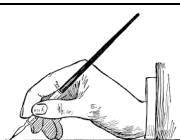
Communalism which refers to the politics involved around a communal ideology became significant only during the colonial period. In the pre-colonial period, “the recognition of a religious community was more limited since language, ethnicity, caste and region were more apparent bonds” (Thapar as cited in Upadhyay and Rowenson, 2012: 37). Religious hostilities as we see in modern times were rare. It is during the colonial times, communalism became so profound. Thus, as many scholars like Bipan Chandra have contended, it is a modern phenomenon. He argues that there is no fundamental difference between Hindus and Muslims and that the construction of a timeless image of conflict created a false consciousness (Upadhyay and Rowenson, 2012: 39). The British played a major role in this and their policy of divide and rule led to the construction of India in terms of communities and it had an impact on the construction of actual communal divisions (ibid).

Many scholars have said that communalism is a conflict over secular issues and it has a material basis. We see economic issues and competition among groups taking a communal angle during the colonial period. Before the British rule, there were hardly any fields/areas that were contested and competed by various groups but with westernisation and modernisation this changed (ibid). New fields of employment and economic opportunity opened new areas for competition. As the socio-

political and economic order gradually transformed owing to changes brought about by the British, communities adopted various means to consolidate their positions.

When the British rule started, there were Muslim rulers in India and the British viewed Muslims as their main opponents. The revolt of 1857 and later the Wahabi Movement's challenge to the British made the latter feel that way (ibid). As such, Muslims were deliberately repressed and systematically kept out of various fields of activity (ibid). Gradually, a new elite of upper-caste Hindus emerged and English education was an important tool for the mobility of this class. This rising middle class had its own stake in strengthening the British administration (ibid). As competition intensified amongst the two communities, communal tension also emerged. "This communal tension was to a certain extent the product of rivalries between the Hindu and Muslim middle classes for government jobs and seats in elected bodies such as municipal corporations and legislatures (Chandra, 2004 as cited in Upadhyay and Rowenson, 2012: 39).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How does Gandhi differ from Nehru in terms of views on secularism?

2. Why is communalism considered a modern phenomenon by scholars like Bipan Chandra?

13.3.4 Communal Conflict- Some Examples

There are numerous examples of communal conflicts in India since the colonial times. Starting from the 1920s and 30s, we see many conflicts taking a violent turn in the form of riots. Post-independence communalism has in fact grown in the country. From the 60s onwards, we see that there were communal riots in many parts of the country. The Jabalpur riot of 1961, Ranchi in 1967, Nagpur in 1968, Meerut in 1987, Bhagalpur in 1989, Sadar Bazar market in Delhi in 1974, Hyderabad in 1978 are a few examples of communal violence in the country (Upadhyay and Rowenson, 2012: 42). However, the most famous incident of all communal conflict between the two communities is the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. On 6th of December 1992, a mob of hundreds and thousands of Hindu Kar Sevaks from all parts of the country destroyed the Masjid because they claimed that originally it was the site of a Ram temple. Following this incident, widespread riots occurred in many parts of the country; it was particularly bad in Mumbai where hundreds were killed. Mumbai also saw a series of bombings in 1993 as a backlash by some groups as a retaliatory measure against the attack on the Masjid.

It is argued by many that BJP's rise to power has led to more communal politics in the nation. In recent times, as BJP has consolidated its power and imprinted its footprint almost everywhere in the country, there is marked religious polarisation. Two very recent examples are the Sabarimala Temple case and the Triple Talaq case. In the Sabarimala case, the Supreme Court gave the verdict that women in the menstruating age who are otherwise not allowed to enter the temple must be allowed

to do as it is their right to pray. This led to widespread protests in the state of Kerala where the temple is located. The right-wing forces mobilised in the name of religion and there was unprecedented support from many quarters and it was many days until two women finally managed to enter the temple in disguise. As we discuss this at present, the issue is not yet over and is still boiling. In the Triple Talaq case, the Supreme Court gave the judgement that it must be banned as it is against women. Even here, there were protests from many Muslim quarters that it is against their faith and that they have the right to practise their own faith as per their law. The Hindu right-wing forces welcomed this verdict as for them it was a political victory. Both the Sabarimala case and the Triple Talaq case are examples of how religious polarisation takes place. Although in these cases, there were no killings or deaths as in communal riots, these issues are communal in nature as they have a religious flavour.

Owing to the present state of things in the country where there are so many communal conflicts taking place, some scholars have argued that secularism has failed in India and communal forces have won the day. Others, of course, don't agree and claim that secularism is very much alive and that in a diverse nation like that of ours, some conflict is bound to arise. What the future holds remains to be seen.

13.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about secularism and communalism in India. We saw how secularism in India has multiple meanings. Further, we learned about the Nehru versus Gandhi debate on secularism. These two great visionaries who shaped the future of our country had contrasting views on religion and politics. While Nehru believed that religion would be side-lined as we progressed and therefore it has no place in politics, for Gandhi religion and politics are inseparable and therefore religion must play a key role in politics. Apart from this debate, we also learned about

the constituent assembly debates pertaining to secularism. And finally, we discussed communalism in India, we learned its roots that can be traced to the colonial period. We wrapped up with a few examples of communal conflict in India such as the Babri Masjid movement.

13.5 QUESTIONS

1. Define secularism in India in four different ways according to Bipan Chandra.
2. Describe the Nehru versus Gandhi debate on secularism.
3. In the Constituent Assembly debate on the preamble, mention the three ways in which secularism was defined.
4. Explain the debate on the uniform civil code.
5. Explain the origin of communalism in India.
6. Taking the demolition of Babri Masjid as an example, explain communalism in India.

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UNIT 14: RELIGION LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Objectives

14.3 Language and Politics in India

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14.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, i.e. unit 13, we learned about religion and politics in India with a special emphasis on the debates on secularism and communalism in India. In this unit, we are going to learn about another very important aspect of the political scenario of India - regional politics and language politics in the country. Both of these issues are significant and in certain cases, we see that there is an overlap between the two, since at many times regional issues emerge from a linguistic dimension. However, language issues are important by themselves and are significant both nationally and regionally. We will begin by learning about the politics of language and will begin with a historical background of how it emerged

in the first place. Then we will learn about language based movements in Indian and some of the political compromises that had to be made due to the linguistic diversity of the country. Then we will focus on regional politics and will learn about a few important characteristics about regional demands in the present time. This is the last unit of this paper and with this, we come to an end of the political sociology paper.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of basic ideas of sociology is enough. However, you must be aware of Indian society in general. This is covered in your 'Sociology of India' paper in the first semester. Also, a preliminary understanding of political sociology as covered in the first three modules of this paper would allow you to get the maximum out of this unit.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to the politics of language and region in India. By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Explain language based movements in India and their primary nature;
- Explain the role of the British in language politics in India;
- Elaborate the major political compromises in India due to language politics;
- Describe a few instances of regional politics in the Indian context;
- Describe the general characteristics of regional demands in India.

14.3 LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN INDIA

Language politics in India is not a new phenomenon. It has its origins much earlier and can be traced to colonial times. In this section, we will learn about how colonial and missionary interventions led to the standardisation of Indian languages, what are the features of language

movements in India and some of the political compromises that have been made due to language politics in the country.

14.3.1 Colonial Role in Language Politics in India

To understand language politics in India, it is of utmost importance to know about the role the British played in shaping or modernising Indian languages. In pre-colonial times, Indian languages had a fluid character. There were no standard languages. Indian languages did have their own scripts and their own grammar but they were not fixed and rigid. It is only in colonial times that there emerged standardised languages, i.e. languages which were written in a particular style and form, that style was the standard. As standard languages emerged, the linguistic landscape of the country changed and in many cases, political communities centred on a language emerged simultaneously. There were clashes and conflicts between communities and language came to play an increasingly important role in the political scenario of India. Before this, one hardly hears about conflicts based on language. This is the genesis of the language politics in India and this was due to colonial interventions.

The primary outcome and result of colonial interventions was standardisation of Indian languages and foundation of a modern system of education in the country. Bernard Cohn in his classic work *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* mentions why it was necessary for the British to standardise Indian languages. The British were trying to make sense of their biggest colony - India and they knew from the very start that without the knowledge of Indian language they would fail to make any headway in the country. From the very start of the British rule, they made an attempt to learn the local languages. They started with the classical languages – Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit and then went on the local vernacular languages (Cohn, 1996: 4). They set up educational institutes, created grammars, dictionaries, primers and the first educational institutes that were established in India were to teach their

own officials Indian languages (ibid). It was necessary for their officials to have knowledge of Indian languages so that they could issue commands, collect taxes, maintain law and order etc (ibid). This knowledge would help the colonisers to classify, categorise, and bound the vast social world that was India so that it can be controlled (ibid).

It must be mentioned that apart from British officials, American missionaries also played a crucial role in this entire endeavour. As pure and standard languages emerged, politically conscious communities based on language began to form. The situation was not uniform everywhere. While in North India, there emerged Hindi-Urdu politics, in other parts of the country there were more localised linguistic politics as in the case of Tamil Nadu with Tamil-Sanskrit politics, Assam with Assamese-Bengali politics etc. Thus, during the British rule, there were numerous language based movements and many of them continued even after independence and as such many political compromises had to be made in the Indian Constitution. Let us now look at a few of the major language movements that shook the country during the last two centuries and then we'll learn about the important political compromises in the Indian Constitution.

14.3.2 Language Based Movements

During British rule, the country saw many language based movements. Paul Brass (2004) has said that “in their initial and developing stages, language movements are vehicles for the pursuit of economic advancement, social status, and political power by the elites” (Brass, 2004: 195). In such movements, elites play an important role and these elites may choose a borrowing strategy or a purification strategy, depending on their economic and political goals and also whether or not they intend to identify or separate themselves from the other group (ibid). Two important developments are crucial here and a kind of a dual movement takes place – language standardisation and language purification. In the first case, elites try to promote a particular dialect to

the status of a regional standard and seek to enlarge, or even create a new speech community through the medium of a regional standard language that encompasses some dialects while displacing others (Brass, 2004: 196). In the second case, elites try to maintain and establish barriers of communication between two groups differently defined who may, in fact, speak more or less the same language (ibid).

Language standardisation and purification are seen across all language based movements. In north India, religion was a major source of conflict, however, this conflict spilt onto language as well. A particular form of Hindi, known as *khari boli* became the regional standard and it encompassed and absorbed within itself many other forms of Hindi such as Haryanvi, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani and many more. This was a result of the competition between the elites (Hindi speaking and Urdu speaking) in north India. The Hindi speaking Hindu elite played a major role in the dual processes of standardisation and purification. A standard Hindi emerged and the language was purified by removing Persian and Arabic based words and instead was replaced by Sanskrit based words. The script was also changed. It was written with *Devanagari script* while in earlier times, it could be written with either the Persian script or the Devanagari script. A similar process was also seen in the case of the Muslim elite who standardised Urdu and this standard Urdu was promoted widely across north India and beyond. Institutions played an important role in the whole process. In the case of Urdu, the Deoband School was a key player (Brass, 2004: 185). Similarly, in the Hindi movement, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Benaras Hindu University were key players (ibid).

Things were a little different in south India. Here caste conflict played its part. In Tamil Nadu, the Brahmins were dominant who identified with the Sanskritic culture of the Indian civilisation. As middle castes rose to power, they challenged the Brahminical dominance and it was done through the medium and vehicle of language (Brass, 2004: 187). Similar

standardisation and purification of the Tamil language were seen. Sanskrit based words were purged and removed from the Tamil language. However, one crucial difference in the case of Tamil Nadu is that it was religiously inclusive unlike in North India (Brass, 2004: 203). Here, Hindus, Muslims, Christians all were acknowledged as Tamilians as long as they acknowledged Tamil as their mother tongue (ibid).

A similar case which was also religiously inclusive was seen in the case of Assam. When the province of Assam was made a part of Bengal in 1936, Bengali was imposed as the state language from 1937. An emerging Assamese middle or elite class challenged this and finally, in 1974, Assamese was given its due. Here again, the Assamese language was standardised and purified. The form of Assamese spoken in upper Assam was chosen as the standard and institutions like the Assam Sahitya Sabha played a major role in the entire process.

14.3.3 Political compromises due to language politics

Language-based movements completely altered the political landscape of the country. And India, since it is such a linguistically diverse country, it was only evident that certain political compromises had to be made.


Four major political compromises that were made are:

- i. Linguistic reorganisation of states – After independence, there was a territorial reorganisation of states and language was used as criteria for this reorganisation. Language as a category began to be used politically but other factors were also taken into account such as geographical contiguity, economic viability, socio-cultural distinctiveness, etc (Sarangi, 2009: 19). Here, it must be emphasized that although language was used as an important criterion to reorganise the states of the country, not all states are based on language. Other political exigencies have also led to the formation of states. For example, states like Nagaland, Jharkhand etc.

- ii. Official language of the Indian state – The lack of consensus on what should the official language led to the adoption of the Munshi-Ayengar formula. It stated that Hindi in the Devanagari script would be the official language of the Indian union along with the continuation of the English language for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution (Sarangi, 2009: 23). The Official Language Act of 1963 stipulated that English would remain alongside Hindi as an official language (ibid). The Official Language Amendment Act of 1967 guaranteed that English would remain as an associate official language indefinitely (ibid).
- iii. Eight Schedule – The Eight Schedule (ES) is another political compromise. Major important languages of the country have been put in this schedule. Languages in ES acquire a sense of prestige and cultural capital since these are recognised by the Indian constitution. In the beginning, there were fourteen languages and presently there are twenty-two. They are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri. Since these languages are valued more than non-scheduled languages, there are constant demands by various groups for the inclusion of their own languages in the ES.
- iv. Language in Education – In the larger domain of language politics, education also becomes a site of politics as the pertinent question is what should be the medium of instruction in schools. In India, as a compromise, the three language formula (TLF) has been adopted. The TLF consists of a mother tongue or regional language, official language of the union, or the associate official language of the union so long as it exists, and a modern Indian language not covered under either of these two and other than used as the medium of instruction (Sarangi, 2009: 34). For

example, a student in Assam would learn the mother tongue/regional language – Assamese, the official language of the union – Hindi and associated official language of the union – English. One important point to note here is that TLF provides choice only from amongst the languages listed in the ES (ibid). And it is interesting to note that English is not listed in the ES.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. Who wrote <i>Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge</i>?</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. How does education become an important aspect of language politics in India?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>3. What was the role of caste in language movement of Tamil Nadu?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

14.4 REGIONAL POLITICS IN INDIA

Regional level politics also occupy an important place in the political scenario of the country. As mentioned earlier, sometimes regional politics take a linguistic turn. Broadly, regional politics can be categorised into two types according to scholars like Dipankar Gupta. He says that they can be either ethnic based or communal based. In ethnic-

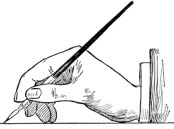
based movements, the nation-state is thematized and the issues raised are those of territory and sovereignty (Gupta, 1996: 54). While in communal movements, it is the government that is thematized and the disputes are primarily over the allocation of government resources between communities (ibid). In both the cases, “the understanding of the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’, or the definition of a community rests on ascriptive factors such as language, religion, or caste” (ibid). Although these two types of mobilisations have their commonalities, the issues raised by these two categories are quite different. Therefore it is important to delink ethnic mobilisations from communal ones because not every movement that is based on ascriptive factors such as language, religion etc. is a threat to the nation-state (ibid).

There have been many instances when regional politics have flared up time and again in the country. The Khalistan movement in Punjab, the Shiv Sena agitation in Maharashtra and the Assam movement are all example of regional level politics. As we will see, some of them started as communal movements but then with due course of time they took a new form and became ethnic mobilisations (Gupta, 1996: 59). Gupta (1996) argues that in the case of the Punjab agitation, it was initially based on secular demands such as water distribution, the territorial demarcation between Haryana and Punjab and hence it was communal movement. However, the way the government at the centre handled the issue was not accommodative; rather it portrayed the movement as secessionist and hence the issue became ethnicized (Gupta, 1996:59-60). Things took an ugly turn and the movement became violent and actually secessionist in nature. “What began as a regional movement by a communal organisation became a full-fledged ethnic one with questions of partisan, secession, and territory beginning to loom large in India’s political consciousness (Gupta, 1996: 60).

Just like the Khalistan movement, the Shiv Sena agitation and the Assam movement are actually a combination of both communal and ethnic

elements. In the Shiv Sena case, which started in 1966, it was initially communal in nature and primarily targeted at South Indians but later on, it was targeted at Muslims and Communists (Gupta, 1996: 61). Similarly, the Assam movement was initially targeted at Bengalis in the late 70s but later on the target group was exclusively Bangladeshi Muslims from across the border and therefore took ethnic attributes (ibid). Just like in the case of the Shiv Sena, the movement grew in strength once it altered course and took on ethnic attributes (ibid). The Assam movement also took a militant turn and the next two decades saw widespread violence and killings in the region.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. What are the two categories of regional politics according to Dipankar Gupta?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. Give a few examples of regional level politics in India.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

14.5 REGIONAL DEMANDS IN INDIA- GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Both region and language play an important role in the present political scenario of India. Often, we see regional demands coming in from various regions of the country, which are in many cases, linguistic in

nature. In such situations, the central government tries its best to resolve the matter amicably so that all stakeholders involved are content with the outcome. In general, when it comes to regional demands, there are four characteristics that have come to regulate the attitude of the central government towards such demands (Brass, 1974: 17). They are:

- i. **Regional demands must not be secessionist in nature** – Regional demands that involve demand of separation from the Indian state are not encouraged; rather they are suppressed, if necessary by armed force. However, demands that are short of secession are allowed full expression (Brass, 1974: 17). For example, secessionist demands in Nagaland were suppressed by armed forces but the central government was willing to grant a new state of Nagaland (ibid).
- ii. **Regional demands based on explicit religious differences are not accommodated while demands based on language and culture is accommodated**– Linguistic and cultural differences are accepted as legitimate criteria for regional demands. The same is not true, however, for demands based on religion. This rule follows from the legacy of the partition of the subcontinent based on religious differences. Thus, the state of Punjab was created in 1966 only after the demand was made on a linguistic line for a separate Punjabi speaking state (ibid). The reorganisation of states based on language has been the general rule in India after independence.
- iii. **Regional demands are not conceded capriciously** – Regional demands are not accepted willy-nilly or haphazardly; they must have a legitimate case as well as have broad popular support in the region (ibid). Thus, only those demands are met that have wide popular support at the ground level. The government of India is willing to accommodate regional demands; however, at the same time, it has also made it necessary for regional movements to demonstrate their strength (ibid).

iv. Regional demands for the division of multi-lingual states must have some support from different linguistic groups –

Thus, there must be support from different groups involved when it comes to demand for states based on linguistic lines. This rule operates in such a way as to promote regional identifications (ibid). Thus, in 1966, the states of Punjab and Haryana were created out of East Punjab since that was the demand of both the Punjabi speaking people in Punjab as well as the Hindi speaking people in Haryana.

14.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about language politics and regional politics in India. We learned that language politics has its roots during the British rule when Indian languages began to be standardised. We also learned about language movements and that in any language movement, a dual movement of language standardisation and purification takes place. Then we learned about a few political compromises made in the Indian constitution due to language politics in the country. Apart from this we also learned about regional politics and saw that regional politics can be classified into ethnic and communal movements. And finally, we learned about the main characteristics of regional demands in the country.

14.7 QUESTIONS

1. Why did the British standardise Indian languages?
2. Name and explain the dual movement that takes place in a language movement.
3. What is the official language of the Indian Union? How many languages are listed in the Eight Schedule?
4. Explain the three language formula in education.

5. In the context of regional movements, what is the difference between ethnic movements and communal movements according to Dipankar Gupta?
6. What are the four characteristics that have come to regulate the attitude of the central government towards regional demands in the country?

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