
UNIT 21 ELECTIONS

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Election System in India
 - 21.2.1 Who is Allowed to Vote?
 - 21.2.2 Who Can Contest Election?
- 21.3 History of Indian Elections
- 21.4 Who Conducts Elections?
- 21.5 Election Procedure
- 21.6 Increasing Number of Candidates
- 21.7 How Does the Voting Take Place?
- 21.8 Voter Turnout in India Elections
- 21.9 Who Forms the Government?
- 21.10 Elections and Social Change
- 21.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.12 Some Useful Books
- 21.13 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to understand:

- The significance of elections in India and its relationship with democracy;
- Election system in India;
- The factors which smoothen and hamper the election processes in India;
- The role of caste, class, religion, etc., in the elections;
- The issues in the elections; and
- The changing social profiles and elections.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

Elections are the most significant means of realising the aspirations of the people in a democracy. These enable every adult citizen of the country to participate in the process of the government formation. In India those who have attained the age of 18 are eligible to vote and elect their representatives. This was not possible before the implementation of our Constitution. Earlier only the privileged sections of the society had the role in the formation of the government in our country. The grant of voting rights to all adult citizens belonging to all social groups – castes, sects, tribes, religions and genders has enabled them to elect their representatives, and indirectly participate in the process of governance. All sections of the society have participated in the elections by contesting as the candidates or as the voters. Reservation of the seats to various legislative bodies for the SCs, STs and following the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments for women (33%) and OBCs in the institutions of local governance has further deepened the democracy in India. You have already read in unit 10 about the strength of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

21.2 ELECTION SYSTEM IN INDIA

Elections to the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha are carried out using the first-past-the-post electoral system. The country is divided into different geographical areas, known as the constituencies. Different political parties contest the election, though there is no ban on independent candidates for contesting the election. During election different political parties put up their candidates and people can cast one vote each for a candidate of their own choice, to elect their representatives. The candidate, who gets the maximum number of votes, wins the election and gets elected. So election is the means by which the people elect their representatives.

21.2.1 Who is Allowed to Vote?

While there is no maximum age prescribed for the voter, as per the original provisions of the Indian Constitution, all Indian citizens, above the age of 21 years are entitled to vote at the time of elections. The minimum voting age of the citizens was reduced to 18 years by the constitution 61st amendment act in the year 1988, by the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, which came into effect since 28th of march 1989. Besides to be registered as a voter in any constituency, one should not be disqualified under the law on grounds of non-residence, or a person of unsound mind or disqualified on the grounds of crime or corrupt or illegal practice.

21.2.2 Who Can Contest Election?

You have already studied in unit 10 as to who is eligible to contest election for the Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha, Rajya Sabha and the Vidhan Parishad. All contesting candidates have to make a deposit of Rs. 10,000 if contesting for the Lok Sabha election and of Rs. 5,000 if contesting for the Vidhan Sabha elections. This is considered as the security deposit of the candidates. The security deposit for candidates belonging to either the Scheduled caste or the Scheduled tribe community is Rs.5,000, if contesting the Lok Sabha election and Rs. 2,500 for contesting the Vidhan Sabha elections. This security deposit is returned to all those candidates who get more than one-sixth of the total number of valid votes polled in that constituency. All other candidates lose their security deposit.

Further, the nomination must be supported by at least one registered voter of the constituency from which the candidate wishes to contest, in case of the candidate being sponsored by any registered political party, and at least by ten registered voters in case of independent candidate.

21.3 HISTORY OF INDIAN ELECTIONS

In India, we have a federal form of government, where we have two sets of government, the Central Government at the national level and the State government at the state level. As you have read in unit 18, under the Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, the local self-government had also been given the constitutional status for the third-tier of government. At the moment, we also have the third tier of government in the form of Village Panchayat in the rural areas and the Municipality in the urban areas. All these three levels of government are the popularly elected government, and people vote to elect their representatives for all these three bodies, the Parliament, the Assembly and the Village Panchayat. Here we would concentrate only on the Parliamentary and the Assembly Elections held in our country.

As per the provisions of the Indian Constitution, the routine election should take place after every five years, but in case of the untimely dissolution of the house (Lok Sabha in case of Parliament or Vidhan Sabha in case of State Assembly) for whatever reasons, the next election should take place as soon as possible. The first general elections (Parliamentary Elections) were held in our country in the year 1952. Since then there have been 13 General Elections (Lok Sabha elections) till 1999. Though most of the Lok Sabha elections have been held after the completion of the five years of term of the house, yet there have been elections much before the schedule. When elections are held much before the scheduled, it is considered as the "Mid-term Election". The Lok Sabha elections of 1980, 1991, 1998 and 1999 were the mid-term elections held much before the schedule. Though the 1971 Lok Sabha election was held only four years after the 1967 Lok Sabha elections, this was not a mid-term election. In the history of Indian Elections, only the 1977 Lok Sabha elections was deferred for about two years on account of the proclamation of the National emergency in the country.

Most of the states were created at the time of independence, but there are states, which have been created even after that. As you have read in unit 17 the most recent addition to the list of states had been that of Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand created out of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. At present there are 28 states and 7 Union Territories in India.

In some of the states, there is the bi-cameral house, the Lower house is called the Vidhan Sabha and the Upper House is called the Vidhan Parishad. The states, which have bi-cameral legislature, are Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In all other states, the state legislative assembly constitutes of one single house the Vidhan Sabha. As per the constitutional provisions, the total number of seats in the lower house in any state assembly should not exceed 500, and at the same time the house should not be less than 60 members. The states of Sikkim, Mizoram and Goa are expectation to this as the number of seats in the Vidhan Sabha is less than 60 in all these three states.

As per the total number of members in the upper house in the state assembly (Vidhan Parishad), it should not be more than one third of the total numbers of members in the lower house (Vidhan Sabha), but at the same time it should not be less than 40 members (Article 171). While the members of the Vidhan Sabha are directly elected by the people, the members to the Vidhan Parishad are indirectly elected by an electoral college.

The total strength of the Vidhan Sabha varies from state to state. The Uttar Pradesh has the largest number of 403 Vidhan Sabha seats in the assembly and the lowest number is that of in the state of Sikkim, which has the total of 32 seats in the Vidhan Sabha.

If we look into the State Assembly elections, there have been 263 state assembly elections held in this country till the year 2002.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What did the 61st Constitutional Amendment envisage?

- 2) What do you mean by 'Mid-term Election'?

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21.4 WHO CONDUCTS ELECTION?

The Election Commission of India is the highest constitutional authority to conduct elections in India. The power of superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for conducting all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every state and also of the election to the office of the President and the Vice-President are vested with this constitutional authority.

The Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, as the President may from time to time fix and make appointment. As per the elections laws, if the Election Commission becomes the multi-member body, the Chief Election Commissioner has to act as the Chairman of the Election Commission.

From the beginning, the Election Commission consisted of the Chief Election Commissioner only. But it was only in the year 1989, few weeks before the 9th Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission was made a multi-member body by the then Congress government. The National Front government amended the rules in the year 1990 to again make the Election Commission, a single member body. But in the year 1993, when Congress came back to power, it promulgated an ordinance to again make it as a multi member body. The two Election Commissioners were appointed and since then, the Election Commission had remained to be a three-member body. Till date, there had been 12 Election Commissioners in India. Mr. Sukumar Sen, was the first Election Commissioner of India. At present Mr. J.M. Lyngdoh, is the Chief Election Commissioner of India, who succeeded Dr. M.S.Gill in June 2001.

Besides, the Election Commission of India, there is one Chief Electoral Officer in each state, who is the overall in-charge of conducting the elections in the state.

21.5 ELECTION PROCEDURE

The entire election procedure takes a couple of months to be completed. Though the schedule for holding the election is announced by the Election Commission of India well in advance, the actual process begins by a formal declaration by the Election Commission of India calling upon a constituency to elect its representative. This is what is referred as the Notification.

The second stage is that of *Filling of the Nomination* by those desiring to contest elections. Earlier, ten days period was given to all the candidates for filling of their nomination papers. But with the constitutional 40th amendment act, 1961, the total number of days for filling of nomination had been reduced to seven. As of now, the 7th day from the day of notification is the last day for filling of the nomination papers. In case the 7th day is a holiday, the day immediately after that is considered as the last day for filling of the nomination papers.

The third step is the *Scrutiny of Nominations*. Earlier the second day after the nomination was fixed for scrutiny of nominations, but with the constitutional 47th amendment act, 1966, the day immediately after the nomination is fixed for the scrutiny of the nominations.

The next step is *Withdrawal of Candidates*, which was earlier fixed for the third day after the scrutiny of the nominations, but later amended in the year 1966. At present, the second day after the scrutiny is the last date for the withdrawal of the candidates. In case that day happens to be a holiday the day immediately after that is fixed as the last day for withdrawal.

The next stage of election before the voting takes place is that of *Campaigning*. This is the time when the political parties put forward their candidate and arguments with which they hope to persuade people to vote for their candidates and parties. Earlier the campaign period lasted for three weeks, but since 1996, the time of campaign period had been reduced to only two week's time. As of now, the official campaign lasts for two weeks from the date when the final list is put up by the Election Commission and officially ends 48 hours before the polling takes place. During the campaign period, the political parties and contesting candidates are expected to abide by a model code of conduct evolved by the Election Commission of India on the basis of a consensus among political parties. The model code lays down broad guidelines as to how the political parties and contesting candidates should conduct themselves during the election campaign. It is intended to maintain the election campaign on healthy lines, avoid clashes and conflicts between political parties and their supporters and to ensure peace and order during the campaign and till the results are declared. The campaigning is carried out in the form of slogan shouting, distributing pamphlets and posters, rallies and meetings in the constituency. During this period, the candidates try to travel through their constituency, to influence as many voters as possible to vote in his favour.

In the recent times, the Election Commission had granted all the recognised National and State parties, free access to the state owned electronic media, the All India Radio (AIR) and the Doordarshan to do their campaigning. The total free time is fixed by the Election Commission, which is allotted to all the political parties keeping in view, their performance during the last election in the state.

Though the Election Commission provides free access for a limited time to all the recognised National and State parties for their campaign, yet this does not mean that political parties do not spend anything on their election campaign. The political parties and the candidates contesting election spend large sum of money on their election campaign, but there is a legal limit on how much a candidate can spend on his election campaign. For most of the Lok Sabha constituencies, the legal limit for expenditure campaign has been fixed for Rs.15 Lakhs though in some states the limit is of Rs.6 Lakhs. The legal limit for campaign expenditure for the Vidhan Sabha election had been fixed for Rs. 6 Lakhs and in some states it has been fixed for Rs.3 Lakhs.

The final stage of election is the Voting. With regard to polling, the earlier practice had been to have single day polling, but the recent practice have been for the phased polling in which polling takes place on more than one day with a gap of couple of days between the two days of polling. This facilitates the movement of security forces from one place to another, which is engaged in managing the law and order situation during the polling.

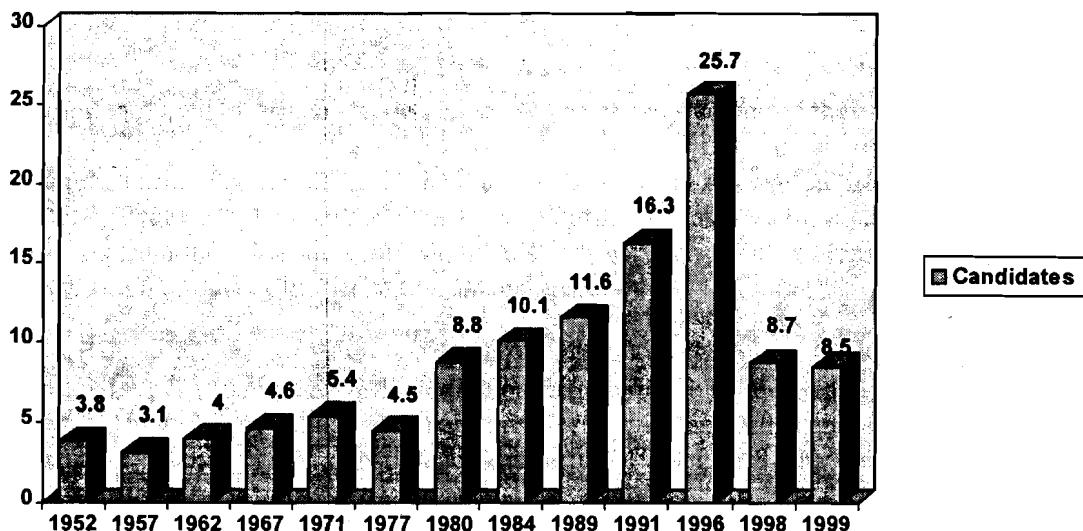
21.6 INCREASING NUMBER OF CANDIDATES

It should also be noted that, during the past fifty years, there had been enormous increase in the number of candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections in India.

During the first Lok Sabha election only 1874 candidates contested the election, which went up to 13,952 during the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. But during this due to some changes in the election law, like increasing the security deposit etc. there had been a steady decline in the number of candidates during the last two Lok Sabha elections. The total number of contesting candidates was 4753 in 1998, which, further went down to 4648 during the 1999 Lok Sabha elections.

The average number of candidates contesting the Lok Sabha election was only 3.8 candidates per constituency, which did not increase much till the year 1977, but went up to as high as 25.7 candidates per constituency. It has further gone down to 8.5 candidate per Lok Sabha constituency during the 1999 Lok Sabha elections.

Graphic 1: Average number of candidates per constituency in Lok Sabha elections, 1952-1999



Source: CSDS Data Unit

21.7 HOW DOES THE VOTING TAKE PLACE ?

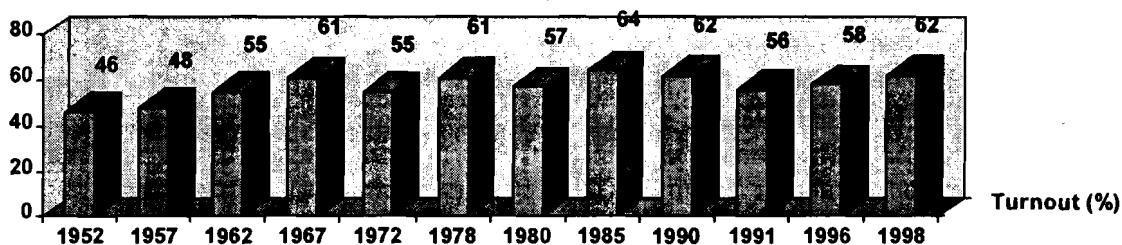
We, in India, have the system of secret ballot, which implies that the vote of all the voters is kept secret. The traditional pattern of voting had been the use of the ballot papers and the ballot box, which in the recent times are being replaced by the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM).

It is the duty of the Election Commission to make all necessary arrangements so that the voters can cast their vote. The Election Commission tries to ensure that a polling booth is located not more than a distance of 2 kilometres of every voter and the polling booth should not have more than 1200 registered voters. On the polling day all the polling booths are expected to be open for at least 8 hours. When the voters go to vote, the entry of his name in the voters list is checked and then allotted a ballot paper and a rubber stamp. The voters are required to stamp the symbol of the candidate they would wish to vote, fold the ballot paper and then put the ballot paper in the ballot box. Once this process is completed, the voter had cast his vote. In the recent times, with the introduction of the EMV, the voter is required to push the button for the symbol of the candidate one wishes to vote and his vote is registered.

21.8 VOTER TURNOUT IN INDIAN ELECTIONS

happen and the large number of registered voters who do not vote due to different reasons. The percentage of those who vote is referred to as the polling percentage popularly called the "Turnout of Voters". If we look at the figures of the last 13 Lok Sabha elections held in our country, we would find that the voters turnout has increased to a great extent in the 80's and 90's compared to the elections held during the early days. The lowest voters turnout of only 45.7 per cent was recorded during the first Lok Sabha elections held in the year 1952 and the highest turnout of 64.1 per cent was recorded in the year 1984 when the Lok Sabha election was held following the assassination of the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. During the last two Lok Sabha elections held in the year 1998 and 1999 the turnout had been fairly high as 62 and 60 per cent respectively. There is no uniform trend in the voter's turnout in the state assembly elections. While some states do register the voter's turnout as high as 90 per cent, we do have assembly elections when the voters turn out remains as low as nearly 45 per cent. Generally the smaller states, and specially the North Eastern hill states had shown higher voter turnout compared to other states.

Graphic 2: Turnout (%) in Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999



Source: CSDS (Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies, New Delhi), Data Unit

After the polling is over all the votes are counted constituency wise. Earlier, when only ballot paper was used, all the votes were manually counted and the counting of about 5 lakhs votes for one Lok Sabha constituency used to take couple of days, but with the introduction of the electronic voting machines, the counting has become much simpler and faster.

On counting the votes, one, who gets the maximum number of vote, gets elected given the system of first past the post, which we have adopted in our country. The majority vote is not required in order to win an election either for the Lok Sabha or for the Vidhan Sabha. There are few candidates who win election polling more than 50 per cent of the valid votes.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note:i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Mention the stages through which the election process passes.

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- 2) What is the alternative to the traditional pattern of voting – use of ballot paper and ballot box?
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21.9 WHO FORMS THE GOVERNMENT?

The political party which has a simple majority, which implies that the party should have won at least one seat more than half the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha in case of the Centre or in the Vidhan Sabha in case of the State forms the government. The results of the 13 Lok Sabha elections held in our country indicates that it is the Congress party which won the majority of seats in Indian election on many occasions, but the party has never managed to get more than 50 per cent of the valid votes polled in the election. The most spectacular victory for the Congress party had been in the 1984 Lok Sabha election when the party won the highest tally of 415 seats, but still it could manage to poll only 48 per cent votes. In fact that had been the best ever performance of any political party in the electoral history of this country.

But there has been a major shift in the trends in Indian politics especially in the 1990s. There had been four Lok Sabha elections in India during last decade, but no political party managed to get the majority. The best performance even during these elections was that of the Congress party during the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, when it won 244 Lok Sabha seats and polled 36.6 per cent of the popular votes. When no political party gets the majority of seats in the house, it is considered as the “Hung House”. Under such circumstances, two or more parties jointly form the government or the political party, with the maximum number of seats, forms the government and is supported by other smaller political parties from outside. When two or more parties jointly form a government, it is considered as the Coalition Government. You will read about the coalition government in unit 23. But, if a party forms the government even if it does not have the majority and gets out side support from other political parties, it is considered as the Minority Government.

21.10 ELECTIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

You will study in the unit 31 that the elections- periodic elections voters' turn out and large scale participation of the people have deepened the democracy in India. Reservation of seats for the SCs, the STs at all levels of the legislative bodies – national, state and the local, and with the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments has enabled even the women and the OBCs to get elected to the seats reserved for them in the village panchayats and municipalities. These sections have not only been elected to various legislative bodies but have become the Chief Ministers, ministers and the President of the country Political Scientist Ashutosh Varshney has argued that with the entry of the groups like dalits and OBCs into the electoral processes, India has become more democratic. However, women's entry has not been a smooth process. In fact, in large number cases, especially in the village panchayats, the women elected members are the proxies of male members of their families.

But the democratic essence of the elections get hampered due to the social and economic inequalities, crimes and corruption. Those who do not possess the resources,

have no connections with the criminals, etc., find it difficult to contest elections or some time vote. Generally the candidates are given tickets by the political parties on the considerations whether the candidates can muster the support of numerically larger castes and communities and possesses enough resources. Even the electorates vote on the caste and communal lines. A large number of elected representatives have criminal background or have criminal cases registered against them. The relationship between the politicians and criminals exists in the elections at all levels – parliamentary, state legislative assemblies and councils, and panchayats and municipalities. Such nexus became conspicuous, especially since the 1990s. This is a reflection of erosion in the credibility of the democratic values. You will also read in unit 32 that the V N Vohra sub-committee also pointed out that there exists a nexus between criminals, bureaucracy and politicians. Because of the decisive role of the crime, caste, communalism and corruption, the real problems of the people – law and order, development- health, education, basic needs of the people are relegated to the secondary position. Though these issues are also raise by the politicians in every election, it is mainly done as a rhetoric.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What impact have the elections in India had on the weaker sections of the society?

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- 2) What are the main constraints of the electoral politics in India?

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21.11 LET US SUM UP

Elections form an integral part of the democratic polity. In India every adult citizen, who has attained the age of 18 has the right to participate in the elections. The elections are conducted by the Election Commission of India. From 1952 several elections have been held in Independent India for electing the representatives to the parliament, state assemblies and councils as well as the local bodies. These have enabled all sections of the society including dalits, STs, OBCs and women to elect their representatives and to get elected as the representatives. This is an indication of the positive relationship between the elections and the social change. But the democratic essence of elections in India is marred by the increasing role of the crime, money and other unfair means. On the whole, elections in India have made tremendous contribution to the social change.

21.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Bhambri, C.P., *Elections 1991: An Analysis*, B R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1991.

Mitra, S. K. and Chiriyankandath, James (eds.), *Electoral Politics in India: A Changing Landscape*, Segment Books, New Delhi, 1992.

Mitra, S. K. and Singh, V.B. (eds.), *Democracy and Social Change in India: A Cross Sectional Analysis of the Electorate*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999.

21.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The 64th Constitutional Amendment reduced the voting age of citizens to 18 years.
- 2) When elections are held much before the schedule, it is called the 'Mid-term Election'.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) The election process passes through the following stages in an order: notification, filling of the nomination, scrutiny of nominations, withdrawal of candidates, campaigning and voting.
- 2) It is the Electronic Voting Machines (EVM).

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) The elections in India have enabled the weaker sections like the SCs, STs, OBCs and the women to participate in the democratic Decision-making by electing their representatives, and by getting themselves also elected as the representatives. It has deepened the democracy in India.
- 2) The main constraints of the electoral politics in India are – crime, black money, corruption, and social and economic inequalities.

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
 - 22.1 Introduction
 - 22.2 What is Caste?
 - 22.3 Main Features of Caste
 - 22.4 Dynamic Relationship
 - 22.5 Regional Variations
 - 22.6 Caste and Class
 - 22.7 Stratification within Caste
 - 22.8 Pressure Group: Caste Association
 - 22.9 Political Parties
 - 22.10 Caste in Voting Behaviour
 - 22.11 Let Us Sum Up
 - 22.12 Some Useful Books
 - 22.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
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22.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to acquaint you with (a) nature and role of caste in Indian politics and (b) in the process how both caste and politics undergo changes. After going through this unit, you should be able to understand:

- To what extent and in what ways caste influences politics;
 - Interrelationship between caste and politics; and
 - How politics influences caste.
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22.1 INTRODUCTION

Theoretically speaking caste and democratic political system stand for opposite value systems. Caste is hierarchical. Status of an individual in caste-oriented social system is determined by birth. It has religious sanction by various holy texts, reinforced by priests and rituals. Traditionally, upper castes enjoy certain privileges not only in religious sphere but also in economic, education and political spheres. Customary laws differentiate individual by birth and sex. That is, certain rules are harsh to women and Shudras and soft to males and Brahmins. On the other hand, democratic political system advocates freedom to an individual and equality of status. It stands for rule of Law. No one irrespective of status is above law. Indian democratic system under the Constitution stands for liberty, equality and fraternity among all citizens. It strives to build egalitarian social order.

However, politics notwithstanding the ideals in any society does not function in vacuum. It operates within social milieu. Therefore, it cannot be devoid of the prevailing social forces. At societal level, politics is related to struggle for and distribution of political power and resources. One of the important functions of politics is to govern society. This calls for resolving conflict among various interests. It identifies needs of society at a given point of time. Needs are prioritised: what is important and immediate to attain and what can wait. In order to meet the needs of society, nature of production system has to be decided – whether the factories, farms or mines are owned privately

by individual for profit or they be owned and managed by community or state or combination of the both. For that rules are made and executed. In short who gets what, when and how in society is the central concern of politics. Though such decisions are taken by the state, people get involved in decision making process in democratic system. They elect their rulers. While electing their representatives people express their material and non-material needs, expectations and aspirations for today and tomorrow. Their expectations are for themselves and also for community - immediate primordial group, caste and larger society that include region, and country. People also build pressure on decision-makers through organised or unorganised struggles, personal contacts and many other ways. Political leaders cannot ignore social forces, as they themselves are part of them. It is imperative for the decision-makers in democratic system to seek and extend support of the constituents for obtaining and preserving their political power.

It however, does not mean that politics is just a proxy or a blueprint of societal forces. It sets goal and priorities. It has a vision for change, a better social order than the existing for the larger good. Politics introduces new values such as equality and freedom; institutions such as political parties and trade unions; government policies like abolition of zamindari system or untouchability undermines the traditional social order and value system. It shifts location of power in society from one group to another. Moreover competitive politics like elections encourage several individuals from a group to aspire for political positions. They compete among themselves so the caste members also get divided. In the process caste cohesiveness gets weaken; and new formation takes place. Thus, not only caste influences politics but the political system also influences caste and induces changes in it. There is no one way traffic. Both influence each other. It is to be seen: to what extent and in which way politics attain its objective of social transformation and to what extent it is influenced by prevailing social forces, particularly caste?

India became a Republic in 1950. For the first time in history all adult citizens of the country have gained the right to vote and elect their representatives for decision making bodies from village Panchayat to Lok Sabha. They also have the right to contest elections so as to become rulers. As a result, large number of social groups who were hitherto deprived of political power began to realise that they could compete with traditionally dominant power elite and also wield power so as to express their grievances, needs, priorities and aspirations. Thus they decide their destiny. Politics has become competitive and open. Moreover, the state has undertaken a number of social and economic programs, which have developed monetary and contractual relationship affecting traditional social ties and monopoly of privileges. And, judicial authority of caste panchayat has been replaced by state judiciary system.

22.2 WHAT IS CASTE?

Caste is an English translation of Indian word Jati. As Indians we all know what is Jati because we all have a tag of Jati by birth. This applies to non-Hindus also. But meaning of Jati is not the same among the Hindus and non-Hindus. Caste does not have religious sanction among the non-Hindus. It is a social stratum. Among the Hindus, it is believed that one's Jati is due to one's Karma (deeds) in previous birth. This is not so among the non-Hindus.

Meaning of Jati for oneself and for others is not always uniform and consistent among all. It varies from purpose to purpose for which the tag is used. Jati has a specific social meaning identifying one's place in social order in village society where one interacts everyday with other members of the local community. For instance in a village in central Gujarat its inhabitant, say Mr. X identifies himself as Khant when he interacts with another villager of neighbouring locality who calls himself a Bareeya

for inter-dining purpose. Mr. X would introduce himself as Kshatriya when he attends political party meeting at taluka or district place. He would call his caste as OBC (Other Backward Caste) when he visits government office to get loan or subsidy for government sponsored program or to get scholarship for his son. There is one meaning of Jati for matrimonial and kinship relationship, a different meaning for economic interaction and a third meaning for political purpose. One does not necessarily have the same meaning when one exercises vote for village panchayat than Lok sabha elections.

Thus it is difficult to give precise meaning of caste applicable in all situations. It is partly a subjective category. Social construct of caste by actors and observers varies from context to context.

22.3 MAIN FEATURES OF CASTE

Notwithstanding difficulties in arriving at precise definition of caste as a unit, there is a consensus among the scholars regarding general characteristics of caste system as a social order. Most sociological writings on caste conclude that homo hierarchicus is the central and substantive element of the caste system. The phrase is used by a French sociologist Louis Dumont to differentiate Hindu social system from other social systems - particularly that of the western society. Hierarchy is the central core of the caste social order. It includes hierarchy of status, values, customs and behaviour on the basis of purity and impurity, interpersonal relationship among individuals in terms of blood, food and occupation; and rituals divided into two orders: pure and impure. Certain occupations or type of food are considered as pure for certain castes and the same are impure therefore forbidden for other castes. It is obligatory for each Hindu to confine relationship and interaction within the restricted circle called Jati, as to maintain purity in marriage relationship; exchange of food and pursuing caste based occupation. There are four essential features of the caste system. They are: (1) hierarchy; (2) commensurability; (3) restrictions on marriage; and (4) hereditary occupation.

22.4 DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP

No social system remains static. Social system changes from time to time with the changing social, economic and political circumstances. This is also true for the caste system. At the empirical level the caste hierarchy has never been static throughout history. Theoretically, all Jatis are hierarchically placed within a prescribed social status. Some Jatis enjoy high status and some occupy low status. Place of the Jati in the social order in the hierarchy is determined by its ritual status based on the observance of customs for interpersonal relationship. Some scholars believe this value system - acceptance of one's station in the life is the result of previous birth - has consensus among all Hindus including the Untouchables. But it is not true. Though the upper castes try to maintain their higher status, the middle and lower castes have successfully tried to change their status. Having improved their economic condition, a dominant section of some of the low castes, including the groups, which were at one time treated as untouchables, imitated customs and norms of the upper castes residing in their vicinity. Sociologists call this process as sanskritisation. One also comes across instances of some castes or even individuals who have succeeded in improving their status even without adhering to the norms and rituals of the upper castes. Acquiring political authority facilitates not only power holder - ruler - but also his kin and relatives to enjoy higher social status in caste hierarchy. One can cite instances in history, which show that Shudras and ati-shudras having occupying position of power have acquired status of Kshatriyas even without following the path of sanskritisation.

The process of sanskritisation which was prominent among the lower castes at one point of time, particularly in the 19th and early 20th century, has been slowed down in the 'sixties and 'seventies'. Earlier many castes hesitated to be called 'backward' despite the poor economic condition of the members. They feared that they would not be able to improve their social status by identifying themselves as 'backward'. But this is no longer true now, as the State has provided certain benefits to the backward castes. These castes have realised that they could improve their status by improving their economic condition rather than observing rituals followed by the upper castes. Now there is competition among the castes to be called 'backward'. Even some of the Brahmin and Rajput Jatis have approached the Government to be classified as 'backward'. The Kolis of central Gujarat followed the rituals of the Rajputs and struggled for three decades to be acknowledged as Kshatriyas. In the past, they used to feel insulted if they were called Kolis. But now they have started calling themselves as Kolis so that they could get material benefits which is the surest way to improve social status. Social status based on the observance of the rituals has increasingly become redundant.

Traditionally caste members have been forbidden to accept cooked food from persons belonging to the Jatis that they considered lower than theirs. These rules have been weakened, particularly in public spheres in urban areas during the last five decades. In their bid to gain broad support base the political elites at district and state level do not hesitate to take food with the caste members belonging to lower strata.

Most of the Jatis are endogamous. A few follow hypergamy generally within the caste cluster. The earlier restrictions on marriage have become flexible. Marriage circles are expanding in some castes. With education and urbanisation, instances of inter-caste marriages among the upper and middle castes have somewhat increased though such cases are still exceptions.

22.5 REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Caste structure in terms of hierarchy and boundary for interaction between the social groups is more or less neat and identifiable at the village level. But it is not so at regional level. And to draw empirically based macro picture of castes at the national level is all the more difficult and hazardous. Caste structure has not developed uniformly in all regions of the sub-continent. Assam has developed a loose caste structure with less rigid hierarchy than that of Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. It is the same regarding observation of caste specific rules.

The number of castes also varies from region to region. Gujarat has a larger number of castes than West Bengal. Different historical experiences have contributed to shaping of the present day socio-political processes in different regions. Moreover, there is and had been uneven economic development in the country and also within the states. Some regions had zamindari and some had royatwari land tenure system. Generally, Rajputs in Rajasthan or Brahmins in Tamilnadu were enjoying dominance in the farmer and peasant castes like Marathas in Maharashtra and Patidars in Gujarat were dominant castes. All castes do not have uniform numerical strength and spread. Some have a larger number of members and some are very tiny. Some are scattered throughout the region and some are heavily concentrated in a few geographical pockets. Hence, the role and position of caste in relation to politics varies from time to time, area to area and caste to caste.

22.6 CASTE AND CLASS

According to some scholars, caste system is essentially a class system. It was essentially so in the early formative years. The classes were: Rajanyas or the Kshatriyas, the aristocracy, the Brahmins, the priests, the Vaishyas, the people at large, mainly peasants and traders, and the Shudras, the service communities. There are various theories of the origin of the system. Some believe that the system was created by the Divine Power for maintaining harmony in society. Accordingly, one gets birth in a particular caste because of one's karma of the previous birth. Others believe that the system has been evolved in course of time with the development of economic surplus. It came into existence with economic divisions; or the invaders to subjugate the local tribal population created it.

A number of village studies of different parts of the country carried out in the post-independent period show a certain amount of overlap between twin hierarchies of caste and land. M.N. Srinivas observes, "The village community consisted of hierarchical groups, each with its own rights, duties and privileges. The caste at the top had power and privileges, which were denied to the lower castes. The lower castes were tenants, servants, landless labourers, debtors and clients of the higher castes." Data from two Tamilnadu villages collected by Sivkumar and Shivkumar in the late 'seventies show that 59 per cent of Mudaliyars (upper castes) and 4 per cent of Palli (untouchable castes) are rich peasants or landlord households. No Mudaliyar is engaged as an agricultural laborer, whereas 42 per cent of Palli households earn their livelihood as farm labourers. A study of six Rajasthan villages carried out by K.L.Sharma in the 'seventies offers a similar pattern'. "Only 12.5 per cent of the lower class households belong to upper castes, 60 per cent of the higher class households belong to the upper castes, 24 per cent of the upper castes belong to the higher class, whereas among the intermediate and lower castes only 6.2 per cent and 1.3 per cent belong to high class respectively."

The Anthropological Survey of India in its Project on "People of India" has studied 4635 communities/castes. The study confirms that the highly placed castes are marked by "(i) a higher position in the regional socio-ritual hierarchy, (ii) better control over land and other resources, and (iii) non-commercial relations with other communities of inferior status.... (The low castes) are placed at the bottom due to their : (i) abject poverty caused by less possession of land and less control over economic resources (ii) socio-ritual degradation based on the notion of purity and pollution, and (iii) traditional engagement in occupations which are considered ritually unclean.

Aggregate data at regional and national level on caste and occupation/land holding give us a similar picture. Table 1 presents caste and occupation data collected by the National Sample Survey (NSS) collected in 1952, analysed by K.N.Raj. The data shows that there is a positive relationship between caste and occupational status. The small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers mainly belong to the low or backward castes and ex-untouchable (scheduled) castes. There is a marginal diversification of occupations among the members of low and the lowest castes in rural areas. However, one should not ignore that a small proportion of lower and scheduled caste households are rich peasants who hire labour and produce marketable surplus. According to the survey carried out by Centre for Social Studies, Surat in Gujarat, 10 per cent of the lower caste and 5 per cent of the scheduled caste households own more than 15 acres of land. The reverse is also true. According to the NSS data 1 per cent of the upper castes and 12 per cent of the middle castes are agricultural labourers. Moreover it may also be noted that there are a few upper castes in some parts of the country whose majority members do not belong to the upper class. Rajputs (upper caste) of Gujarat are a case in point. Their condition in terms of land ownership and other occupation is not significantly different than many OBCs.

Table 1: Occupational Distribution of Different Caste-Groups ++
Among Hindu Rural Households

(Millions)

Occupation*	Upper castes	Middle castes	Lower castes	Scheduled castes	Total
Agriculture Farmer	1.09 (24.38)	0.93	1.69 (6.95)	0.18 (1.54)	3.80 (7.35)
Cultivator	1.96 (43.91)	6.52 (53.30)	10.20 (41.79)	3.19 (27.05)	21.67 (41.35)
Share cropper	0.17 (3.91)	0.76 (6.18)	1.51 (6.17)	1.00 (8.50)	3.44 (6.50)
Agri. Labour	0.05 (1.09)	1.46 (11.91)	4.11 (16.85)	4.27 (36.19)	9.89 (18.70)
Forestry, Fishing & Livestock +	0.02 (0.62)	0.17 (1.39)	0.81 (3.31)	0.28 (2.38)	1.28 (2.42)
Total: Agriculture	8.29 (73.91)	9.84 (80.35)	18.32 (75.07)	8.92 (75.66)	40.37 (76.33)
Others@	1.17 (26.09)	2.39 (19.65)	6.09 (24.93)	2.87 (24.34)	12.52 (23.67)
Total: All	2.26 (100.00)	12.23 (100.00)	24.41 (100.00)	11.79 (100.00)	52.89 (100.00)

Notes: Figures in brackets represent percentage of All-India average in each case.

* The main farming occupations are classified into four groups:

a) Farmer – a tiller who cultivates his own land, mainly with hired labour; (b) Cultivator – one who cultivates land mainly owned by him and sometimes land taken on lease or sharecropping system, with the help of other household members and partly with hired labour; (c) Sharecropper – one who mainly takes up cultivation of others' land on a sharecropping basis and cultivates without hired labour; and (d) Agricultural labourer – one who cultivates others' land either for wages or for customary payment.

+ Includes wood cutters, plantation labour, gardeners, fishermen, animal breeders, cattle grazers and herdsmen.

@ Includes households in the rural sector engaged in administrative and professional services, teaching and medicine, manufacturing – specially of food products and textiles – trade and commerce, transport and communication, construction and sanitation, and mining.

++ According to the NSS, “ The upper castes were defined as those who, according to custom, used the sacred thread, the middle as those from whom the Brahmins take water by tradition and the lower as the other castes who were not scheduled.”

22.7 STRATIFICATION WITHIN CASTE

Industrialisation and penetration of market economy in rural areas have affected traditional occupation of several castes. In most of the castes some members have

given up their traditional occupation. As early as 1950, F.G. Bailey observed in a village situated in a relatively backward state like Orissa, "Not every person works at his traditional occupation. The distillers do not touch liquor. The Knod potters (?) do not know how to make pots. The fishermen do not fish. The warriors are cultivators. Everywhere there is a scope for practising a hereditary occupation not all members of caste engage in the work ". In the 1950s, Kathleen Gough also observed a similar pattern in Tamilnadu. She noted, "The caste community is no longer homogeneous in occupation and wealth, for caste is today a limiting rather than a determining factor in the choice of the occupation. Exactly half of Kumbarpettai's adult Brahmins are now employed in towns as Government servants, schoolteachers or restraint workers. Of the reminder, some own up to thirty acres of land, others as little as three. One runs a grocery store and one a vegetarian restaurant. Among the non-Brahmins, the fisherman, toddy-tapers, Marathas, Kallans, Koravas and Kuttadis have abandoned their traditional work ". Village studies carried out in the fifties and sixties from different parts of the country bear out the same trend. And, diversification of occupation in non-farm sector has increased within most of the castes with the spread of the green revolution.

But there are still several Jatis whose members have more or less similar economic condition. One can find such instances among several Scheduled Castes and numerically small other backward castes. Such castes have still less than 10 per cent rate of literacy and all the households depend on manual labour for their livelihood. On the other hand there are number of castes which are internally stratified. There are three types of economic differentiation within different castes: (1) A caste characterised by sharp polarisation; (2) A caste having a majority of members from upper strata; (3) A caste with a majority members belonging to poor strata. Rajputs and Thakurs of Rajasthan, UP and Gujarat fall in the first category. A few households own large estates and factories and a large number are agricultural labourers. Most of the households of the several upper castes such as Brahmins, Baniyas, Kayasthas are well off. On the other hand a large number of the Backward castes have overwhelming majority households who are small and marginal farmers, tenants and agriculture labourers. Economic stratification affects their cohesiveness on political issues. Dominant stratum projects its interests as the interests of the caste; and gives it priority while bargaining with the government.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the main features of caste?

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- 2) What is the relationship between caste and land ownership in rural India?

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- 3) Give example of one caste showing intra-stratification.

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- 4) What is the difference between social caste and political caste?

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22.8 PRESSURE GROUP: CASTE ASSOCIATIONS

Numerical strength of a group is important in a democratic polity. All the Jatis do not have equal numerical strength and spread in a geographical region - village, cluster of villages, taluka or district. A few are very large, some are small and some are minuscule. Some are concentrated in a village/taluka and some are scattered in four to five households in a village. Numerically large Jatis have an edge over others in political bargaining with the government and political parties. Jatis confined to endogamous character alone cannot muster a very large number at district levels and beyond for political activities. Some of the leaders of such Jatis form caste associations called Sabha or Sangam consisting of cluster of Jatis having similar social ranking in a region. A few caste associations are also consist of multi -castes having different social ranking in traditional order. They may be called caste "federation".

It should be remembered that caste association is not the same as caste panchayat or council. Generally the office bearers of caste council enjoy hereditary position. This is not the case with association. Often the latter has written constitution specifying power and responsibilities of different office bearers. The former has judicial authority dealing with ritual and social aspects related to marriage, divorce and other family disputes of the members. Its decisions are binding to all caste members. Caste associations carry out economic, educational and political programmes. All caste mates are not members of the Sabhas. The decisions of the Sabha are not binding on all caste members. It is not so with caste panchayat. In that sense caste association is closer to voluntary organisation. Many caste associations though hold an objective "to promote and protect the interests and rights of the community," do not necessarily directly involve in electoral politics. Some caste associations are active in electoral politics at one time or another. Rudolph and Rudolph call the participation of caste associations in politics as "the democratic incarnation of caste". Kothari calls it "democratisation" of castes.

The history of caste associations goes back to the late 19th century, though their number has increased after Independence. They are found in all states. Let us take a few illustrations. As the Government decided in the early 1880s to debar Kulmis as Kulmis of Uttar pradesh from being recruited in the police service. The government servants belonging to Kurmis formed the "Sardar Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha" in 1884 to protest against the decision. Another example can be cited of Nadars of Tamilnadu. In order to enhance their economic development, the wealthy Shanars of Tamilnadu formed the Nadar Mahajan Sangam in 1895. In Gujarat, the Rajputs after independence

having lost political power as rulers and ownership of land under land reforms realized a need for a larger numerical support base, as they constituted only 4 per cent of the population. Some of the political aspirant Rajputs formed Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha. The caste organisation embraced various Jatis of Kolis who aspired Kshatriya status. Caste pride and sentiments were invoked through various ways among the Rajputs and the Kolis as the Kshatriyas brethren. Caste associations make representation to the government demanding educational facilities, land ownership and its distribution, government jobs etc. for their caste members. Some of them submit memoranda or organise public meetings demanding infrastructure facilities like irrigation, electricity, loan and subsidy for fertiliser for agriculture development.

22.9 POLITICAL PARTIES

Several castes join together and launch movements. Non-Brahmin movement in Tamilnadu and Maharashtra are the examples. Jyotirao Phule started Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 challenging Brahminical hegemony. In Tamilnadu several peasant castes such as Vellala, Gaunda and Padayachi, trading castes such as Chetri, artisan castes - Tachchan (Carpenter), Kollan (Blacksmith), and Tattan (Goldsmith), individually and jointly initiated non-Brahmin movement. The movement followed several caste associations such as Parayan Mahajan Sabha, Adi-Dravin Mahajan Sabha in the 1890's. In 1916 the Non-Brahmin manifesto was brought out highlighting dominance of the Brahmins in government services and injustice to non-Brahmins who constituted a vast majority. The formation of the Justice party followed in 1916. The party sent a delegation to England in 1919 to present the non-Brahmin case before the joint Parliament Committee which was responsible for preparing the Government of India Bill. DMK is its offshoot. Two factions Vanniyaakkula Kshatriya Sangam of the Nadars formed Tamilnadu Toilers' Party and Commonwealth Party and fought the 1952 elections. They then bargained with the Congress for positions in the state cabinet. Scheduled Caste Federation was formed in the forties by Dr. Ambedkar and the Republican Party formed in 1956 by Dalit leaders. They primarily remained the parties of and by the Dalits. Jharkhand Party formed by Adivasi leaders of Bihar, has primarily remained a party of Adivasis. Bahujan Samaj Party launched by Kanshiram is a party of Dalits aiming at forming alliance of Dalits, minorities and OBCs.

After Independence some caste associations were formed with political objectives to compete in elections. In Gujarat some of the leaders of the Kshatriya Sabha contemplated in the early fifties to form the party of the Kshatriyas. They soon realised that they could not muster enough support to contest elections only on the strength of the Kshatriyas. Similarly, political elite of the Kurmis, Yadavas and Koeris formed the Bihar State Backward caste Association in 1947 to contest elections. The plan did not take-off thanks to the resistance of the Congress leaders belonging to these castes.

Such caste associations are asserted with different leading political parties to see that their caste members get party tickets in elections. These parties initially resisted such pressures because of the counter pressure from the dominant castes that controlled the party. The latter accused the former as castiest or communal. But as the competition among the parties intensify and as the caste association successfully mobilised the members for political activities, all parties began to woo leading aspirants of the caste who could mobilise caste votes. Such political aspirants join different political parties. As they are primarily interested in gaining political positions for themselves rather than serving social or ritual interests of the caste, they either launch a new association or split the existing one. For them caste association is among several instruments to gain political power.

Some of the political parties identify with certain castes for nomination of the party candidates and mobilisation in elections. Bhartiya Kranti Dal evolved an alliance of

four major peasant castes of UP in 1969 elections. The alliance was called AJGAR; that is, Ahirs, Jats, Gugars and Rajputs. In 1977 in Gujarat the Congress (I) formed KHAM alliance of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims. Lok Dal was identified with Jats in Uttar Pradesh in 1977 and 1980 parliamentary elections. Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh was identified with Backward castes in general and Yadavas in particular in 1997 state assembly elections. BJP is generally identified with upper castes and the Congress with the middle and backward castes. That reflected in their support base in the eighties in Gujarat and Maharashtra. In the nineties the BJP has followed the strategy of the Congress of accommodating the backward caste candidates in the elections and successfully getting support of their caste fellows.

There are three consequences of such interaction between caste associations and political parties. One, caste members particularly poor and marginalised who were hitherto remained untouched by the political processes got politicised and began to participate in electoral politics with an expectation that their interests would be served. Second, caste members get split among various political parties weakening hold of the caste. Third, numerically large castes get representation in decision-making bodies and strength of the traditionally dominant castes get weaken. This explains the rise of middle and backward caste representations in most of the state assemblies. Table 2 presents caste composition of MLAs in Gujarat Assembly from 1957 to 1990. The table shows that the strength of Brahmins and Vanias has declined considerably over a period of time, whereas the Kolis and Rajputs together as the Kshatriyas increased their strength by double. In Uttar Pradesh proportion of the upper castes in the State Assembly has gone down from 42 per cent to 17 per cent between 1967 and 1995; whereas the members of the OBCs have increased from 24 per cent to 45 per cent during the same period.

Table 2: Caste Composition of the MLAs in Gujarat Assembly from 1957 to 1995

Caste	First 57-62	Second 62-67	Third 67-72	Fourth 72-75	Fifth 75-80	Sixth 80-85	Seventh 86-90	Eighth 91-95
Brahmin	18(16)	25(18)	20(14)	179(12)	14(8)	20(10)	14(8)	10(6)
Vania	19(17)	16(12)	21(15)	17(12)	26(14)	13(10)	13(7)	7(4)
Patidar	26(24)	27(27)	32(23)	35(25)	49(27)	37(20)	39(22)	44(27)
Kshatriya (Rajput and Kolis)	13(12)	14(10)	19(20)	24(17)	32(18)	38(21)	44(25)	40(25)
Muslims	4(4)	9(7)	3(3)	3(2)	5(2)	11(6)	7(4)	3(2)
SCs	10(9)	11(8)	11(8)	1(8)	14(8)	13(7)	13(7)	14(9)
STs	15(14)	21(15)	22(15)	22(15)	27(15)	29(16)	29(16)	30(19)
OBCs	5(5)	3(2)	3(2)	9(7)	14(8)	16(9)	18(10)	14(9)
N.A.	22	18	26	30	1	-	5	20
Total.	132	154	154	168	182	182	182	182

22.10 CASTE IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Role of caste in elections has two dimensions. One is of the parties and candidates and the second is of the voters. The former seeks support of the voters projecting themselves as champions of particular social and economic interests, the latter while exercising their vote in favour of one party or candidate whether people vote on caste consideration. And if so, how exclusive is it?

As mentioned above different parties accommodate certain castes in distributing party tickets. While nominating candidates parties take into consideration caste of the aspirant candidate and numerical strength of different castes in a constituency. Caste leaders also mobilised their followers on caste lines so that they could show their strength. In the fifties wherever caste associations were able to maintain their unity and did not formally align with any one party they appealed to their members to vote for their caste fellows irrespective of their party affiliation. In Rajasthan Meenas were asked "Do not give your daughter or your vote to anyone but a Meena." Similar slogan was used in Tamilnadu: "the Vanniya vote is not for anyone else". But wherever caste association aligned with a particular party the caste leaders asked caste members to vote for that party. The Kshatriya leaders of Gujarat in 1952 elections asked Kshatriya voters that it was their Kshatriya dharma to vote for the Congress because it was "the great institution and working for the development of the country". In the subsequent elections as the caste leaders split some Kshatriya leaders appealed, "It is our pledge that the Kshatriya of Gujarat vote for the Congress, and not for anyone else." The others appealed that it was the dharma of the Kshatriyas to vote for the Maha Gujarat Janata Parishad (a regional party).

Though there is a trend among the caste members to vote for a particular party, there is never a complete en bloc caste voting. Some castes identify with a particular party as their party. It was expected that it would protect their interests. Jats in Western UP identified Lok Dal as their party just not only because the leaders of the party were the Jats, but also the party raised the issues concerning the peasants. But all the Jats did not vote for the party because there were some who were traditional supporters of the Congress, or they perceived their interests differently than other Jat peasants which the Jats predominantly are.. In UP 51 per cent of the SC voters voted for the BSP in the 1998 state assembly elections. 18 per cent voted for the BJP. The vast majority of the BSP SC voters belonged to poor strata and of the BJP from the middle class. While analysing the election data, Pushpendra observes, "Occupationally, the BSP's voters are mainly unskilled workers, agricultural and allied workers, artisans, and small and marginal farmers. Persons engaged in business and white collar jobs constitute only 2.6 and 1.6 per cent of the BSP voters (in UP)."

In the National Election Survey of the 1972 carried out by Center for the Study of Developing Societies a question was asked, " What was your considerations for voting this candidate/party/symbol?" For a very insignificant number of respondents (less than 1 per cent) candidate's caste was the main consideration. Some of the respondents might have voted for persons who happened to belong to their caste. But it was not caste voting. They voted for the candidate not because he/she was of their caste irrespective of his party and ability. They voted for him/her because he/she was the candidate of the party to which the respondent felt closer for variety of reasons including the feeling that the party would "protect his/her" interests or the party had done good work for the people like him/her. Or, they were in touch with the candidate who might have helped them or they feel that he would help them when they need. Their primary consideration is their perception of their interests. In a given alternative parties/candidates they consider as to who would serve their interests better than others. If the candidate happens to be of their own caste and his/her party is the party, which they identify as theirs, they vote for him/her. If they feel that the candidate

belongs to that party which is either not able to serve their interests or hostile or insignificant in electorate politics, they do not vote for that candidate even if he belongs to their caste. That is the reason why several caste leaders lose the elections in the constituency predominantly because of their caste members at one time or another when they change the party or their party loses popularity. Therefore there is no one to one relationship between candidate's caste and that of the voter's caste.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What is the difference between caste panchayat and caste sabha?

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- 2) Explain "democratic incarnation of caste".

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- 3) How does caste influence voting behaviour?

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- 4) Give names of three parties, which are closer to particular caste.

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22.11 LET US SUM UP

Politics does not function in vacuum. It operates in society in which it is influenced by social forces. Politics influences social forces and change them. If political institutions and political leaders make conscious effort in intervening in social forces they can influence and bring changes in social order and relationship to a considerable extent. Democratic politics in India has been influenced by caste but it also changed the traditional caste system and its values. While participating in electoral processes at different levels structure and functions of caste has changed. Its traditional aspect of

purity and impurity has been considerably weakened. Caste has provided institutional mechanism to the poor and traditionally deprived groups for political participation. Caste has been politicised to pursue economic and social rather than ritual concern of the members. In that sense it is a democratic incarnation of caste. But this process has reached an impasse and caught into vicious circle. Political leaders use caste consciousness for mobilisation but do not pursue vigorously, economic and social problems that the majority members of the caste face. Caste framework has its own limitations. It is divisive and hierarchical. This is a challenge before the caste-oriented politics.

22.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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Centre For Social Studies, *Caste, Caste Conflict and Reservation*, Chapters 1,2 and 8, Delhi, Ajanta Publication, 1985

Kothari, Rajni, *Caste and Politics in India*, Hyderabad, Orient Longman 1970.

Rudolph L.I. and Rudolph S.H. *The Modernity of Tradition*, Delhi, Longman , 1961.

Shah, Ghanshyam, *Caste in Indian Politics*, Delhi, Permanent Black 2000.

22.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) These are four, i.e., (1) hierarchy, (2) commensurability, (3) restriction on marriage, and, (4) hereditary occupation.
- 2) There is a positive relationship between caste and land. The main trend about this relationship shows that the low or the backward castes and the ex-untouchables belong to the agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, and the high and intermediate castes belong to the rich and middle peasants. However, there are instances where the high castes belong to the poor agricultural classes, and the low castes to the rich and middle peasants.
- 3) One example of intra-caste stratification is that of the Rajputs and Thakurs of Rajasthan, UP and Gujarat. Majority of them belong to the upper strata, some own land and a large number of them are agricultural labourers.
- 4) The social caste denotes the operation of the caste at the social level – its role is confined to the social and cultural spheres. When caste becomes the symbol of mobilisation either in elections or for any other political purpose it becomes a political caste.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) All members of a caste are members of the caste sabha; its leadership is hereditary; it has judicial authority dealing with rituals and other social aspects like marriage, divorce and other disputes in the family. Not all members of a caste on the other hand are members of the caste associations; its leadership is not hereditary; its decisions are not binding on all members of the caste; these have economic, educational and political programmes.

- 2) The participation of the caste associations in politics is termed as “the democratic incarnation of caste” by Rudolph and Rudolph.
- 3) The influence of caste in the voting behaviour can be visible in two ways – by allotment of tickets to the candidates, and by casting of the votes by the voters on the caste lines. Generally voters of a caste vote for a party or the candidate on the consideration of caste. But there is never a complete en block voting.
- 4)
 - i) The Congress (I) in Gujarat was identified with the KHAM – an alliance of Khatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims,
 - ii) The Bharatiya Kranti Dal in UP was identified with the AJGAR – an alliance of Ahirs, Jats, Gujars and Rajputs; and,
 - iii) Bahujan Samaj Party is identified with the dalits.

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Forms of Coalition Politics
- 23.3 Coalition Behaviour
- 23.4 Coalition Government: A Comparative Study
- 23.5 Coalition Politics in India (1947-1967)
- 23.6 Emergence of Coalition Governments in India (1967-1977)
- 23.7 Emergence of Coalition Government at the Centre (1977-1979)
- 23.8 The Decline of Coalition Politics (1980-1989)
- 23.9 Coalition Governments and Coalition Politics (from 1989)
- 23.10 Working of the Coalition Governments in India
- 23.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.12 Some Useful Books
- 23.13 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of coalition;
- Discuss different forms of coalition politics; and
- Discuss the nature and emergence of the coalition governments at the state level after 1967 assembly elections.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

The term coalition has been derived from the Latin word ‘Coalitio’ which is the verbal substantive of “Coalescere”-co together, and ‘alescere’-to grow up, which means to grow or together. Coalition, thus, means an act of coalescing, or uniting into one body: a union of parties. In the specific political sense the term coalition denotes an alliance or temporary union of political forces for forming a single Government. As such coalitions are direct descendants of the exigencies of a multi-party system in a democratic regime. Coalition governments are commonly contrasted with single party Governments, in which only one party forms government.

A coalition is a grouping of rival political actors brought together either through the perception of a common threat, or the recognition that their goals cannot be achieved by working separately. In general terms a coalition is regarded as parliamentary or political grouping which is less permanent than a party or faction or an interest group.

23.2 FORMS OF COALITION POLITICS

Constitutional framework and electoral system of a country determines the forms that coalition politics takes. These are three in nature: parliamentary, electoral and governmental.

Parliamentary coalition may occur in a situation when no single party enjoys an overall majority. The party which is asked to form a government makes an attempt to rule as a minority government, relying upon an arrangement with other party or parties for its survival. The Janata Dal government led by V.P. Singh in 1989 was such a government. Such a government may seek support from the opposition political parties for different items of legislation or the government may survive merely because the opposition may not like to defeat the government either to gain political advantage or not to be deprived of their existing political base. The Congress government led by Narasimha Rao in 1991 was such a government in its early tenure.

Electoral coalitions represent two or more than two political parties who enter into an agreement which provides for a mutual withdrawal of candidates in an election so that the concerned parties can avoid splitting of votes in the constituencies where they are strong respectively. Such coalitions are difficult to be formed when the parties having strong local base and organisation do not wish to surrender their rights to put up a candidate. Such electoral coalitions have become common in India in recent past in the form of formation of United Front and National Democratic Alliance.

Coalition governments are commonly contrasted with single party government, in which one party holds office. Such governments should also be distinguished from non-partisan governments, within which the members of the Council of Ministers do not act as representatives of political parties. Coalition governments are the party governments. The membership of a coalition government is conventionally defined as those parties that are represented in the Cabinet. Some parliamentary governments, however, also consistently co-operate with parties that are not represented in the Cabinet.

At the government level, there can be different types of coalition. The first type is the national government in which most, if not all, of the main parties join together to meet a national emergency arising out of war or economic crisis. The rationale behind the formation of such a government is that national crisis necessitates the suspension of party strife and requires the concentration of all forces in a common direction. The coalition governments led by Asquith and Lloyd George during the First World War and by Winston Churchill during Second World War in United Kingdom were the examples of national governments.

Power-sharing coalition governments are formed when two or more than two political parties which are not able to secure majority of their own join together to form a majority government. United Front as well as BJP -led coalition governments in the nineties were such coalition governments. Power-sharing coalition governments strive to implement such policies and programmes as agreed upon among the coalition partners. Continental European countries have experienced such Governments quite often.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly explain the meaning of coalition.

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- 2) Explain the different forms of coalition politics.
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23.3 COALITION BEHAVIOUR

A study of coalition behaviour puts forth the following questions: What are the distinct circumstances which lead to different political parties joining coalitions? Why does a particular party prefer to enter into coalition with other parties? What are the advantages a political party can expect to gain by its entering into a coalition?

A comparative study of the coalition behaviour drawn from the historical experiences of coalition politics in different countries and at different times reveal the following trends:

First, all the political parties who enter into a coalition always aim to maximise their long term influence over decision-making process.

Second, because of the awareness concerning the re-distributive consequences of a coalition, the member parties often compete against each other over the allocation of redistribution benefits.

Third, the competition among the coalition partners is restricted by the degree to which each partner is willing to tolerate competitive demands on the part of the allies.

Fourth, in a situation where the tolerance among the coalition partners remain of high level, competitiveness is rewarded with disproportionately high returns in terms of political influence.

23.4 COALITION GOVERNMENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

In pure or modified two party political systems, such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada, coalition governments are rare in the peace time. In the countries with multiparty systems, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, almost all the governments have been coalitions. There are other European countries with multiparty system like Denmark and Sweden where the governments alternate between coalitional or single-party (often minority) one. In the normal circumstances the coalition governments are formed by two to five parties. However, the countries like India in the recent past have seen the coalition government being formed on the basis of as many as eighteen parties i.e. Vajpayee led Government in 1998. Switzerland is a unique case where all major parties are regularly included in the coalition governments.

Coalition governments are essentially features of parliamentary form of governments, but they have been formed also in the countries like France and Switzerland which have 'modified' parliamentary or 'semi-presidential' system. In the developed countries almost all the parties follow centrist ideology. Power sharing is mostly the main basis of the formation of such governments. However, in the developing countries like India and Sri Lanka the coalition governments have been formed on ideological basis. Some developed countries like Italy, Denmark, France and Sweden have also experienced coalition governments formed on the basis of ideological homogeneity.

Despite the widespread presence of coalition governments in both developed and developing countries, there are not sufficient constitutional provisions regarding the process of formulation and dissolution of coalition governments. German constitution is a significant exception which has provisions which make it impossible for irresponsible parliamentarians to overthrow a government without being ready to support an alternative. In Sweden, 1974 instrument of government attempts to describe the process of formation of coalition government in some details.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note:i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the different trends in the coalition behaviour?

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- 2) Are there any constitutional provisions regarding the process of the formation and dissolution of coalition governments? Explain.

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23.5 COALITION POLITICS IN INDIA (1947-1967)

Indian politics in the period between 1947 to 1967 was coalitional in nature. This was at the level of political parties or political formations. Functionalist political scientists like Rajni Kothari, Morris-Jones and Myron Weiner developed a theoretical model for this level in the late sixties through the idea of a one-party dominant system or Congress system. The dominance of Congress was reflected both in terms of the number of seats that it held in parliament at centre and the governments it formed in the states as well as in terms of its formidable organisational strength outside the legislative bodies. Thus in the first three general elections Congress won around forty five per cent of the votes and seventy five per cent of the seats in the parliament. The Congress barring brief interludes continued to rule in almost all the states and at centre. The Congress system, argued Morris Jones, reflected 'dominance co-existing with competition but without a trace of alternation'. Such a colossal dominance of Congress of the political system reduced other parties to marginality.

It follows that the Indian political system during this period could not be understood in accordance with the standard textbook format of government and opposition. It was the big Congress versus small and fragmented forces of opposition at the State as well as the national level. Congress successfully defined Maurice Duverger's law which expected two party system to emerge in a plurality electoral system by incorporating political competition and consociational arrangements within its boundaries and yet holding it together through a delicate management of factions. Creating and sustaining such a broad coalition of factions was greatly helped by the complexities and ambiguities of Indian society which did not allow polarisation or the formation of

contradictions that might have fractured such an all-embracing alliance. It was also helped, according to Myron Weiner, by traditional values and roles of conciliation that Congress party astutely took up. In a similar vein, Rajni Kothari has also highlighted the consensual politics based on pluralism, accommodation and bargaining followed by Congress party.

Thus, around a central disproportionately large party of consensus were arranged much similar opposition parties of pressure, which imposed a coalitional logic on both the ruling party and the opposition parties and groups. The enormous organisational size, regional spread, and ideological diversity of the Congress transformed congress in a loose organisation with ideologically diverse groups. These ideologically and regionally divergent groups played the role of opposition in tandem with the opposition parties with whom they shared homogeneity in terms of ideology and interests. The small size of the opposition parties ensured that they could influence the political system only by functioning more like indirect pressure groups. As Kothari argues ‘Congress system has always been a system of coalition multi-group in character, and informed by a continuous process of internal bargaining and mobility’. The coalition logic was not only imposed on the groups inside the Congress but on the opposition parties also. During this period the Governmental policies came to be decided more by cross party blocs rather than by inner party voting or a conventional division lines of Government and Opposition.

The coalitional nature of Indian politics was evident when the Congress leadership at the centre often ‘transferred a decision from the space within the party to the space of the political system as a whole if they were sure of the support of winning coalition’. It was in this manner that Congress crises were solved as Max Zins’s study of Congress reveals.

23.6 EMERGENCE OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA (1967-1977)

The 1967 elections witnessed the coalition politics in another form, now involving the non-congress opposition parties. Opposition parties were able to defeat congress in the assembly elections in six States by joining into an electoral coalition. The economic difficulties, the declining legitimacy and the fact that Congress had never received an absolute majority in terms of votes polled explains the setback to Congress.

1967 elections, according to Morris-Jones, led to the emergence of a ‘market polity’ leading to a ‘pretty regular and continuous defectors market’. Thus the formation of power sharing coalition by the opposition parties and the defection of the congress factions led to the formation of non-congress coalition Governments in nine States.

However, the coalition technique which worked so well for Congress did exactly the opposite in case of the opposition parties. This can be explained by the fact that the opposition parties with divergent ideologies did benefit electorally from the widened support base. However the same factor led to the crisis in governance leading to the failure of coalition governments.

Congress, thus was able to come back to power in most of the States where it had lost power in 1967 elections. However, the post-1967 congress followed a new political process which was marked by the replacement of consensual politics by the confrontationalist politics towards opposition. This had to do both with the ‘marketisation’ of polity as well as the over-centralisation of power in the party. The Congress thus adopted a plebiscitary mode of electoral politics which led to the institutional decline in the party. This explains the inability of the State leaders of congress who were ‘nominated’ rather than ‘elected’ in holding the political equilibria

in the States by creation and manipulation of interest coalitions and factional politics. Destruction of State-level Congress organisations by an over centralised political leadership led to the emergence of genuine competition to the congress at the State level.

Although the Congress led by Indira Gandhi reached an unprecedented electoral victory in the 1971 election it was initially seen as the restoration of the Congress dominance, in retrospect it is obvious that the apparent continuity of the Congress was deceptive. The Congress that Indira Gandhi led to power in 1971 was in many ways a new party that had to negotiate a new terrain of electoral politics marked by the presence of a great many new entrants from the 'middle' peasant castes and the regional groups into the game of electoral politics turning it into truly competitive.

It follows that Congress was no longer a single dominant party but throughout the 1970 and 1980's it continued to be the natural party of governance, the pole around which electoral competition was organised. Thereafter, the success or the failure of the attempts by the opposition parties to put up an electoral coalition against Congress made a decisive difference to the electoral outcome.

23.7 EMERGENCE OF COALITION GOVERNMENT AT THE CENTRE (1977-1979)

The third phase in the evolution of coalition politics was marked by the defeat of the Congress in 1977 parliamentary as well as assembly elections (in as many as six States). The introduction of populist, bureaucratic and authoritarian mode of politics in the party had led to the emergency imposed by the Congress government. Both the emergency and a hastily assembled coalition of opposition parties were the main factors responsible for electoral debacle of Congress both at the central and state level.

Janata Party was formed after four opposition parties—the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the Bhartiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party merged. Janata Party subsequently entered in a coalition with the opposition parties at the regional level like Akali Dal to fight the 1977 General elections on a common election symbol and a single list of contesting candidates.

The coalition government led by Morarji Desai could not last its full term as the constituent factions within the party retained their ideological differences—a legacy of their pre-merger days. With the twin objectives taken during emergency being fulfilled once the coalition government was formed and amendment bills were passed—the ambitions of its leaders saw the split in the party and the government fell in 1979.

Defections—an offshoot of the marketisation of Indian polity introduced since 1967 elections—from the Janata Party led to the formation of a coalition government of Lok Dal and Congress (S) led by Charan Singh with the outside support of the left parties as well as Congress. This coalitional arrangement was again marked by ideological incompatibility and it was no surprise that the government fell within three weeks of its formation as Congress withdrew its support.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of the Unit.

- 1) Explain the coalitional nature of politics during the one party dominant system in India.

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- 2) What was the nature of the coalition Governments which were formed in the states after 1967 assembly elections?

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- 3) Why did not Janata coalition government complete its full term?

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23.8 THE DECLINE OF COALITION POLITICS (1980-1989)

The failure of coalition experiment in the form of failure of Janata coalition government to complete its full term gave an opportunity to Congress-recovering from a split in 1978- under the leadership of Indira Gandhi to capture power in the 1980 elections. Congress received a massive victory in 1984 general elections also. Thus for a decade the coalition politics came to an end at the centre. At the state level, however, the coalition politics continued. Congress, for instance, entered into an alliance with National Conference in J and K and with the DMK in 1980 and with AIADMK in 1984 elections in Tamil Nadu. The left parties-led coalition governments were formed in the States of Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal during this period.

It was during this period that the seeds of future coalition politics emerged. Congress despite its electoral triumphs in the plebiscitary elections was continuously losing its ideological and institutional base. As such it was unable to respond adequately to the demands and aspirations of the democratically awakened rural social groups who had been becoming increasingly aware of the significance of their electoral power. Moreover, the over centralisation of power in Congress led to the heightened level of Centre-State tensions.

The ruralisation and regionalisation of Indian politics led to the emergence of regional parties which were supported by the numerically strong and economically powerful rich peasant castes. Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Akali Dal in Punjab, AGP in Assam were among the regional parties which ensured a freer competition between political parties and increased alternation of a tendency towards personalised control of parties and fragmentation of the parties into splinter groups etc. All these factors paved the way for the end of the Congress dominance at the State level.

What emerged in the States was a bipolarity as along with the regional parties Congress even now retained a salience in the party system. It was because Congress continued to command greater popular support than any other party at the national level and also that it was the core around which the party system was structured. That bipolarity at the state level did not, however, yield a bipolarity at the National level as well as became evident from 1989 General elections.

23.9 COALITION GOVERNMENTS AND COALITION POLITICS (FROM 1989)

In the run-up to the 1989 elections another hastily assembled coalition was formed in the form of formation of Janata Dal which came into existence as a result of the merger of several parties like the Janata Party, Lok Dal (A), Lok Dal (B), Janata Dal, subsequently formed an electoral alliance with the parties like DMK, Congress (S), AGP, CPI, CPI (M) and other small regional parties. This electoral coalition came to be called National Front which entered into an agreement with the BJP on sharing seats in the 1989 parliamentary elections. As the Congress and its allies did not stake claim to form the Government it was the National Front led by Janata Dal which was invited by the President to form the coalition Government of National Front led by V.P. Singh which was supported from outside by BJP and left parties who did not join the Government.

National Front minority Government was the first real coalition Government at the Centre as the Janata Government was a coalition Government by Proxy and Charan Singh led coalition Government Lok Dal and Congress (S) fell before proving its majority in the Lok Sabha.

National Front Government failed to laydown a strong foundation of consensual polity, based on democratic power sharing at wider level. It suffered from internal crisis because of change of leadership in Haryana Janata Dal Government. The external crisis built up over the confrontation with the BJP over Ayodhya issue. The intense competition for leadership within Janta Dal finally led to the split in Janta Dal. The newly formed Janata Dal (S) formed a minority Government led by Chandra Shekhar with the outside support of Congress after the National Front Government was defeated in the confidence vote in the Lok Sabha after the withdrawal of support of BJP. Janata Dal (S) minority Government fell as Congress withdrew its support in 1991.

The Parliamentary elections in 1991 again produced a 'hung' Lok Sabha. Congress emerged as the largest party but nowhere near the majority mark. With no coalitions being possible, Congress formed a minority Government led by Narasimha Rao. The minority Government displayed a great skill in Parliamentary Manoeuvres in order to stay in power. After effecting a split in the Janata Dal in its favour as well as victories in the by elections the Government was able to secure a majority of its own.

However, the assembly elections between 1993 to 1995 decisively brought to an end the one party dominant multi-party system of an earlier era. Congress no longer remained the core around which the party system was structured. These elections marked the intensification of the process of bipolar consolidation all over the Country barring few States like Kerala and West Bengal where coalition politics still survived. Thus in as many as twelve States, non-Congress Government ruled by the end of 1995.

Increasing tendency towards a bipolar polity at the State level led to a situation that a two-party system at the national level became improbable. With the effective marginalisation of the Congress from the real arena of competition in U.P. and Bihar

– the two largest States – it was now obvious that Congress on its own could no longer hold its position in the centre (both in the sense of occupying and defining the middle ground and being most significant) of the Indian political system. With the emergence of distinct regional party systems in the States signalled the rise of parties like Bahujan Samaj Party, Telugu Desam Party, Asom Gana Parishad, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Akali Dal at the regional level, the Congress was now one of the many parties with a position in several of those regional systems. It was no longer a pole against which every political formation was defined. Even in those States where there was a direct race between the Congress and its rival, the Congress was no longer the natural party of governance.

The above tendencies were confirmed in the parliamentary elections of 1996. The BJP made a strong showing in the Northern and Western States especially in Bihar and U.P. and emerged as the largest party in the Lok Sabha. The party formed a minority Government which barely lasted two weeks before losing vote of confidence in Lok Sabha. The regional parties i.e., TDP, DMK, AGP and the Tamil Manila Congress in alliance with Janata Dal formed National front comprising of the communist parties. The resultant United Front-was able to form a coalition Government led by H.D.Devegowda first and then by I.K.Gujral with the outside support of the congress and the left parties (CPI for the first time in Parliamentary history joined the Government). The UF coalition Government collapsed after the withdrawal of support from Congress in 1998.

BJP taking a lesson from its 1996 experience entered into electoral coalition with the regional parties like AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, Samata Party in Bihar, Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, Akali party in Punjab etc. Subsequently these parties (eighteen in number) formed a coalition Government which lasted barely for one year as AIADMK withdrew its support in 1999. The 1999 parliamentary elections say that the two parties Congress and BJP, had electoral alliance with the regional parties in such a manner that coalition Government became inevitable to emerge.

A comparative study of the results of the 1996 elections and the 1998 or 1999 elections reveals a major difference between the two. The ‘hung’ Parliament which emerged after 1996 elections was not just a matter of no single party getting a majority but rather of no party or a clear alliance of parties being in a position to govern. In 1998 and 1999 elections, however, BJP and Congress have shown that despite no party getting a majority on its own, two ‘poles’ have become visible-the Congress and the BJP- within the regionalised multi-party system. It is natural then that both have been gradually accepting the imperatives of coalition politics and alliance building.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with model answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) What factors contributed in the emergence of the regional parties?

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- 2) What are the new trends visible in the coalition politics after 1993-1995 assembly elections?
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23.10 WORKING OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA

It has been traditionally accepted that the principles of collective responsibility, homogeneity and secrecy have been a must for effective functioning of Government. Coalition Governments formed in India especially at Centre have been found lacking in this respect. The working of the Coalition Governments has been affected by the need to secure inter-party Consensus. The heterogeneity of the Coalition partners in terms of their social basis and ideologies often has been resulting into disagreements between the Cabinet ministers on political and departmental matters. This has been hampering the deliberative and decision-making process of the Cabinet. The parties entering into coalition either under the umbrella of United Front or National Democratic Alliance had been confronted with a situation of preserving the unity of Government as well as their separated identity as a partner in the Coalition. The Coalition Governments at centre have been formed, not on the positive basis of ideological or programmatic homogeneity but on the negative basis of capturing power (like BJP led coalition Government in 1998) or to keep Congress and BJP out of power (like United Front Government in 1996). This factor has contributed to the lack of efficacy as well as stability of these Governments. The presence of regional parties in the Coalition has also led to a perception that the national outlook has often sought to be overshadowed by a regional outlook and also that personal or party gains have often received precedence over collective ones. The Steering Committee of the Coalition partners, rather than Cabinet often acts as the de-facto deliberative body thus undermining the process of Governance. The Governance also has suffered because of the weakened position of the Prime Minister in the coalition Governments formed in the recent years. Prime Minister has been in no position to choose those as ministers in the Council of ministers who do not belong to his own party as they are chosen by their respective party leaders. This has undermined the authority of the Prime Minister more so as he feels constrained even to dismiss them without inviting the wrath of the concerned party.

In the recent past the coalition governments have been formed on the basis of a common agreement by the coalition partners to implement a Common Minimum Programme (CMP). However, the bickering among the coalition partners has been often obstructive to the process of its implementation. Moreover the very fact that the elections in 1996 and 1998 threw up unwieldy, unstable and short-lived coalition Governments was to a great degree responsible for non-implementation of the CMP.

23.11 LET US SUM UP

The coalition politics operates in two ways – one, by the coalition of the political parties outside the government; two, formation of the government by two or more political parties. The latter is known as a coalition government. The basic aim of a coalition government is to ensure majority control of the legislative assembly/ parliament as well as the implementation of common minimum programme. Coalition

Governments may receive support from outside also. The party system and the political system in India in the first twenty-five years or so after Independence was completely dominated by Congress both in the electoral and organisational sense. Congress acting on its historical legacy represented a broad-based social coalition. The 'Congress system' was based on coalition in political sense also as it followed coalition logic in its relationship with the opposition parties in the process of governance. The period from the later half of the 1980s onwards witnessed the erosion of the central role of the Congress in maintaining and restructuring political consensus. Thus the process of political mobilisation and political recruitment heralded the imitation of a more differentiated structure of party competition. Rapid mobilisation and politicisation of new regional and social groups resulted in to the growth of a new genre of parties and alignments, many of these focusing on individual leaders, who were able to identity with specific castes and communities. The 1990s in particular witnessed a decisive end to the dominant multi-party system of the earlier years. It signified a move towards a competitive multi-party system both at the central and state levels. The General elections in 1989 and the State assembly elections of 1993-1995 confirmed this trend. Along with an upsurge of new social groups and identities the growing regionalisation of the national parties (not excluding the Congress and BJP) also explains the formation of a large number of parties. Consequently, there has been a blurring of lines between the national and state party system, and the process of 'federalisation' in the party system. In this complex and interlocking relationship between the national and state party systems, the change in the latter have been increasingly influencing the former. The coalition politics and the coalition Governments are related to the ongoing process of transformation from a single dominant to a region based multi-party system. Thus there has been an emergence of a bipolarity at the Centre supported by the regional parties - the Congress and the BJP being the two 'poles' – in an increasingly regionalised multi-party system.

23.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Bogdanor, Veron, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Institutions*, Blackwell Reference, Oxford, 1987.

Chatterjee, Partha., *State and Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

Karuna Karan, K.P., *Coalition Government in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1975.

Kothari, Rajni, *Politics in India*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1970.

23.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Coalition means a union of parties. In political sense it the term alliance denotes an alliance or temporary union of political forces to form the government.
- 2) There are three types of coalition – parliamentary, electoral and governmental. Parliamentary coalition is formed when no single party enjoys the majority to form the government. Electoral coalition is formed when two or more political parties mutually agree to withdraw candidates in an election in order to avoid splitting of votes in the constituencies where they are strong respectively. This type of coalition is made when political parties form the government in a situation

of national emergency in a country. In such case the parties strive to suspend their differences for a common nation cause.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) These are: all parties form a coalition; members of the coalition compete with each other over the allocation of redistribution benefits; the competition among the coalition partners is restricted to a degree; and, competitiveness of the coalition partners is rewarded with disproportionately high returns in terms of political influence.
- 2) There are no such provisions, with the exception of German constitution.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) During this phase the Congress was the dominant party both at the centre and in the states. The nature of the coalition of that period can be explained in the light of the nature of the Congress. According to Rajni Kothari it was consensual based on pluralism, accommodation and bargaining.
- 2) This period saw the formation of the coalition of the non-Congress coalition governments in nine states. Unlike the coalition of the Congress system, this type of coalition was formed by the parties with divergent ideologies and support bases.
- 3) The Janata coalition did not complete its terms because of the following reasons: ideological differences between the members of the coalition, and the ambitions of leaders of constituent parties.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) The ruralisation and regionalisation of Indian politics gave rise to the emergence of regional politics. The regional parties have supported largely the rural rich who have large numerical strength.
- 2) These are- end of the one party dominant multi-party system; intensification of bipolar consolidation in most part of the country; and, emergence of distinct regional parties.

Unit 24: WOMEN

STRUCTURE

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Reforms for women in the 19th and early 20th centuries
 - 24.2.1 Against “Sati”
 - 24.2.2 Widow remarriage
 - 24.2.3 Rehabilitation of the prostitutes
 - 24.2.4 Arya Samaj
 - 24.2.5 Prohibition of Child Marriage
- 24.3 Education for Women and Women Emerging with Identity
 - 24.3.1 Women in Literature and Literature by women
 - 24.3.2 Women for Rights
 - 24.3.3 Women for Women
 - 24.3.4 Women in Nationalist Struggle
 - 24.3.5 Women for Equality
- 24.4 Women’s Independent Political Identity
 - 24.4.1 Discrimination against women in politics
 - 24.4.2 Women’s initiatives in politics
 - 24.4.3 Women “terrorists”
- 24.5 Major Issues confronting women’s unity or united movement
 - 24.5.1 Communalism and Casteism
 - 24.5.2 Daily encounters with oppression
 - (i) against alcohol
 - (ii) against dowry
 - (iii) against sexual abuse
 - 24.5.3 Environment and livelihood
- 24.6 Women in politics or politics ‘by’ women
 - 24.6.1 Telengana movement
 - 24.6.2 Bodh Gaya movement
 - 24.6.3 Dalit women’s movement
 - 24.6.4 Adivasi women’s movement
 - 24.6.5 Movement through literature, theatre ad other forms of expression
- 24.7 Key words
- 24.8 Some useful books
- 24.9 Answers to check your progress exercises

24.0 OBJECTIVES

The Unit deals with the role and contribution of women in the various social and political movements in India. After going through this unit, you will be able to know:

- The historical background of women's movement in India.
- Major issues confronting women's unity; and
- Role of the women in Politics.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

It will be easier to understand the role of women in the social and political movements of India if we divide the study into the following categories

First, we shall try to have a panoramic view of the role of women in the 19th and the 20th centuries, i.e. in the pre and post- colonial era.

We shall next, look into these movements from two broad angles, viz, (i) “for” women and (ii) “by” women. (i) The period of reforms and nationalist struggle can be categorised as “for” women since all the benefits and opportunities for advancement were fought for and gifted by social reformers who, inevitably, were men. Women had eager and sincere participation in India’s struggle for freedom, but the leadership was in the hands of men only. Yet, this period is extremely significant as the “beginning of freedom” for women.

(ii) In the post-independence period women concentrated on their own freedom. The foundation for this movement had been laid in the anti-British Raj days when women had started discovering their identity through literature and their activities as “terrorists”. They slowly became part of the world’s women’s movement and their role in the social and political movements in their own country started becoming more and more prominent.

24.2 Reforms for women in the 19th and early 20th centuries

The 19th century could well be called an age for women. Their rights and the wrongs done to them, as well as their capacities and potentials, used to be the subjects of heated discussions in Europe and even in the colonies. By the end of the century, feminist ideas were in the minds of the “radicals” in England, France, Germany and even Russia. In India, the wrongs against women began to be deplored by social reformers. Such movement of ‘for’ women, ‘by’ men originated in Bengal and Maharashtra.

24.2.1 Against Sati

The Indian bourgeois class, that was born out of Westernisation, sought to reform the society by initiating campaigns against caste, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purda, child-marriage, sati and the like. These, to them, were elements of ‘pre-modern’ or primitive society. The foreign missionaries had branded these as examples of “Hindu barbarism” thus creating enough grounds for the colonial powers to rule. Ram Mohan Roy and Bidyasagar managed to receive the required administrative and legal support because of this. In 1817, Pandit Mrityunjay Bidyalankar declared that sati had no

"Shastraic" sanction. One year later Governor William Bentinck prohibited Sati in his province, viz, Bengal. It took 11 years for this prohibition to get extended to other parts of India as the Sati Prohibition Act of 1929.

24.2.2 Widow Remarriage

In 1850s Pandit Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar, like Pandit Mrityunjay, proved from the Shastras that the re-marriage of a widow is allowed. His was a long, difficult journey through debates with orthodox pandits and banter from some of the pillars of then Hindu society. The Vernacular (Bengali) press got filled with songs and satires both in support and against. Such verses appeared in the designs of the woven cloths. They created turmoil in society. Bidyasagar submitted a petition to the Governor General in 1855.

A Widow Remarriage Association had started in Madras in 1871, but was short lived. In 1878, Virasalingam started the Rajamundri Social Reform Association, focusing mainly on widow re-marriage. In 1892, the Young Madras Party or the Hindu Social Reform Association was launched. Aryan Brotherhood Conference, of which Ranade and N.M. Joshi were members, once declared in one of its meetings, "let us no longer live in a fool's paradise in the fond belief that because we have managed to survive so long .. under our present social arrangement, we will be able to survive for ever..."

Forty odd years since the Act was passed, there had been 500 widow re-marriages only, though social reform organisations, championing the cause, had mushroomed all over India. The majority of them were child or virgin widows. Widows from the upper caste, who were not virgins, could not and did not re-marry.

24.2.3 Rehabilitating of Prostitutes

Other notables, who fought for reforms in anti-woman socio religious customs, were Jyotiba Phule, Dayanand Saraswati, Karve and women like Pandita Ramabai, Sister Nibedita and Tagore's sister Swarnakumari Devi. Bengal had witnessed rebellious spirits like Madhusudan Datta and Henry Derozio. They both were powerful poets also. They had invited the wrath of the reformers even by attacking male morality. Madhusudan organised the prostitutes and inspired them to choose the profession of acting, instead.

According to a report in Amrita Bazar Patrika of 1869, 90% of Calcutta's prostitutes were widows, of whom a large number came from Kulin Brahmin families. The "Kulins" were the most detestable group of Brahmins whose socially sanctioned livelihood was to go on marrying and collecting dowries. Their day to day living was also totally free as they kept on visiting their wives' paternal homes as these 'married' women had to continue living in their fathers' house. The number of such 'wives' could very well exceed 100. So, with a single stroke of death (of one husband) at least 100 widows were available in the market as prostitutes.

We must make special note of the fact that Bidyasagar, the first and the greatest protagonist of widow re-marriage felt a moral repugnance towards this scheme of rehabilitation of the prostitutes and did not think of stopping this abhorrent practice of polygamy. Strangely, he could not realise that the number of widows will drastically decline and thus the problem will become much less formidable if polygamy could be strictly stopped.

24.2.4 Arya Samaj

Swami Dayanand was rather revolutionary for his time. He disowned the caste system and prescribed equal treatment to women quoting from the shastras. His Arya Samaj did not impose any duties or obligations on women, which could not be applied to men according to the Hindu lawgivers. In his representative book, “*Satyartha Prakash*” Dayanand insisted that polygamy, child marriage and the seclusion of women did not exist in Aryan India. He called for compulsory education for boys and girls both and that there should be equal stress on tradition and modernity through the compulsory learning of Sanskrit and English. He raised the age of marriage for girls and boys to 16 and 25, respectively.

But Arya Samajis like Lala Lajpat Rai and Lal Chand opposed higher education for women. They believed that if at all, ‘the character of girls’ education should be different, because ‘the education we give to the girls should not unsex them’ Apart from basic literacy, Arithmetic and some poetry, Arya Samaj religious literature, sewing, embroidery, cooking, hygienic, drawing and music were the subjects taught. The Brahma Samaj that started as a protest against idolatry and the backward pulling norms and rituals of Brahminical Hinduism, was not free of this stereotype notion about girls and women. The notion continued till the latter stages of our freedom movement. They only dissident voice was of Subhas chandra Bose. Herin lies the justification behind dividing the ages into “for” and “by” women. The women, at that time, had neither the awareness nor the sensitivity to demand everything that were allowed to or given to men.

24.2.5 Prohibition of Child Marriage

In 1860 an Act was passed fixing the age of consent at 10. Behram Malabari, himself not a Hindu, (a Parsi) started a campaign in support of this Act towards the end of the century. He could manage to convince a good number of lawyers, doctors, teachers and public servants. They believed, which was echoed in the statement by the Jessore Indian Association, that “early marriage weakens the physical strength of a nation; it stunts its full growth and development, it affects the courage and energy of the individuals and brings forth a race of people weak in strength” and determination. In 1891, Tilak had led an agitation against the Act and a modern visionary like Tagore had opposed in words and deed!

Reform movements were so strong in the Bombay-Poona cultural belt that a few had the courage to question even Brahminism the very base of Hinduism G.H. Deshmukh, a socio-religious reformer for example, had argued in the 1840s that the “Brahmins should give up their foolish concepts; they must accept that all men are equal and that everybody has a right to acquire knowledge...”. But in 1871, he succumbed to threat to outcaste him. As a consequence, he mellowed down.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers
 ii) Check your answers at the end of the unit

1. Why can the 19th century be called the age for women?

2. What do you know about the various attempts enforce widow re-marriage.?

3. What was Dayanand Saraswati's contribution?

24.3 EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND WOMEN EMERGING WITH IDENTITY

24.3.1 Women in Literature and Literature by Women

By the late 19th century, social reform movements were beginning to show effects; confidence and determination started getting observed in the life and work of some women. Novelists like Nirupama Devi and Anurupa Devi started getting referred to in the Bengali literary circles and were even given memberships of literary clubs which were dominated by men. Tagore's novels and short stories are full of women characters who excel their husbands and other male admirers. A few examples are "Gora" and "Gharey Bairey" by Tagore, "Anandamath" and "Debi Choudhurani" by Bankimchandra and "Pather Debi" by Sharatchandra. In Tagore's "Char Adhyay", a nationalist woman, seeking identity, is criticised and crushed by male leadership-typical of politics even today, which has largely remained a male domain. Almost all women activist were literary writers also; literature and writings with literary flavour were commonly used as side weapons with most of the male freedom fighters also. Some of the noted names among women were Nagendrakala Mustafi, Mankumari Basu and Kamini Roy. Kashibai Kanitkar was the first woman novelist from Maharashtra. Others were Mary Bhore, Godavaribai Samaskar, Parvatibai and Rukminibai. In South, Kamala Sathinandan, the editor of Indian Ladies Magazine, was a writer also. Sarala Debi, Kumudini Mitra and Madame Cama had made marks in Journalism to promote the cause of revolution.

24.3.2 Women for Rights

Madame Cama had the honour of unfurling a ‘Bande Mataram’ flag at 1907 Congress of the Socialist International at Stuttgart, and, in 1913, Kumudini Mitra, more known as a “terrorist”, was invited to the International Women’s Suffrage Conference at Budapest, Hungary. Sarojini Naidu waited upon the committee, headed by Montague and Lord Chelmsford to demand a series of reforms in the condition of the Indian women. Sarala Debi made representations before the committee on behalf of Bharat Stree Mahamandal. At the sixth National Social conference in 1892, Hardevi Roshanlals, the editor of “Bharat Bhagini” insisted that this platform was ‘more important’ than Congress, because the former understood that:

The woman’s cause is man’s
They rise or sink together,
Dwarfed or god-like, bound or free.

Anandibai Joshi was the first woman doctor. She and Kantibai were stoned when they dared wearing shoes and carrying umbrellas on the streets. These were symbols of male and caste authority. Was women’s position better than that of the lower castes or the untouchables? In 1882, Tarabai Shinde’s book, *Stree Purush Tulana* generated heated discussions all over. She insisted that the faults, commonly ascribed to women, such as superstition, suspicion, treachery and insolence, could be as much found in men. She suggested to the women that, by the strength of their firm will, they remain always well behaved, pure as fire and unblemished internally and externally. Tarabai also suggested that men would have to hang their heads down in shame.

Mai Bhagawati, an “upadeshika” of the Arya Samaj had the confidence to speak in a large public gathering in Haryana. In 1881, Manorama Majumdar, educated at home by her husband, was appointed dharma pracharika by the Barisal Brahmo Samaj. As expected, lot of heated debate followed questioning the ‘wisdom’ of carrying the issue of women’s equality a little too far. Regular participation in the nationalist campaigns and organisations had generated such a spirit that a group of Brahmo women walked through the streets of Calcutta singing and speaking against the evils of purdah. These are indisputable instances of initiatives or movements “by” women. But Indian National Congress and other political parties were not yet prepared to acknowledge that potential among women. Though the women delegates were allowed to sit on the dias, they were not allowed to speak or vote on the resolutions.

24.3.3 Women for Women

Rabindranath Tagore’s sister Swarnakumari Debi launched “Sakhi Samiti” with the aim of training widows to learn, to teach and thus become the most powerful agents of spreading education among women. The Samiti organised crafts fairs in order to promote women-centric cottage industries as a means of developing self-confidence (atmashakti) and nationalism. Congress discovered great value in this kind of “meals”, but the male leaders could not think beyond organising a separate women’s section.

Swarnakumari Debi’s daughter, Sarala Debi, was strikingly rebellious. She wanted to flee the ‘cage’ or ‘prison’ of home and establish her right to an independent livelihood like men. She started a gymnasium in 1902, where women were trained in the use of sword and ‘lathi’. She can be called the architect of militant nationalism or even revolutionary terrorism.

24.3.4 Women in Nationalist Struggle

The 1905-8 Swadeshi movement in Bengal reflects the beginning of a women's participation in nationalist activities on a larger scale. Many of the wives, sisters and daughters started forming support groups for the movement. Middle class nationalism inspired women and girls who gave away jewelry as well as money. In the villages, handfuls of grains came as contributions. Militancy became such a feature of the 'samitis' in which women had active involvement that five such in East Bengal, viz Swadesh Bandhab, Brati, Dhaka Anushilan, Suhrid and Sadhana, were banned in January, 1909.

Purani Agyawati, a woman member of Hissar Arya Samaj, toured almost all over Punjab, pleading mothers to bring up their sons not for government service but as independent manufacturers and traders of 'swadeshi'. She also tried to convince that strict and blind observance of caste norms prevent the mothers from giving great sons to the nation. In Delhi, Agyavati opened a "Vidhava Ashram" to organise widows not only against oppression and for their right to education, but also to train them in militant nationalism. She was described as "a very bold woman" by the government, which was sufficiently alarmed by her activities.

24.3.5 Women for Equality

Speaking to the Indian Social conference at Calcutta in 1906. Sarojini Naidu said, "instruction may mean accumulation of knowledge, but education is an immeasurable, beautiful and indispensable atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being... How then shall a man dare to deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? Your fathers, in depriving your mothers of that birthright, have robbed you, their sons, of your just inheritance. Therefore, I charge you restore to your women their ... rights... you are, therefore, not the real nation-builders... Educate your women and the nation will take care of itself..."

That there was a sense of great achievement among women and of new spaces opening up for them was beautifully put by the Tamil nationalist poet Subramanya Bharati in his poem, "The Dance of Liberation", in 1920

Dance! Rejoice!
 Those who said
 It is evil for women to touch books
 Are dead.
 The lunatics who Said
 They would lock women in their houses,
 Cannot show their faces now.

A discourse on equality began to develop, in the late 1910s and 1920s, amongst women. They used nationalists' arguments to defend their demands for equal rights. Urmila Devi, a militant woman, defined 'swaraj' as self-rule and 'Swadhinata' as the 'strength and power to rule over oneself'. Amiya Debi rightly felt that 'Swadhinata' cannot be given, it has to be taken by force.... If it is left to the "well-wishing" men, then women's adhikarata (dependence) along will get strengthened. The nationalist leaders, who were the first to call women outside their home and household, believed in complementarity and not sameness, which the revolutionary women demanded. The reformers and the 'givers' believed that women's rights should be recognised because of women's socially useful

role as mothers. Women demanded equal rights because, as human beings, they have the same needs, the same desires and the same capacities as men.

Prabhavati worked for a group in U.S.A called “Freedom for India and Ireland” and Renuka Ray was associated with the “League Against British Imperialism” in England. Pabhavati married M.N. Roy, the pioneer of communist movement in India, and got equally involved with the revolutionaries and the communists. She joined hands with Muzaffar Ahmad, poet Nazrul Islam and Hemanta Kumar Sarkar to organise the scavengers as a member of the Workers and Peasants Party.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

- Note:**
- i) Use the space below for you answers
 - ii) Check your answers at the end of the unit

1. Write, in brief, women’s first fight for rights during the colonial period.

2. What was the role of Purani Agyavati in the nationalist struggle?

3. How did women define “Swaraj” and “Swadhinata” during freedom struggle?

24.4 WOMEN’S INDEPENDENT POLITICAL IDENTITY

24.4.1 Discrimination Against Women in Politics

No woman was chosen by Gandhi in his long list of 71 marchers to Dandi. Well-recognised women, like Khurshid Naoroji and Margaret Cousins, protested strongly. But the leader remained firm on his decision arguing that he had allocated a “greater role to women than the mere breaking of salt laws”. But Sarojini Naidu defied and joined the march at Dandi at the final stage and was the first woman to be arrested in that movement. Once defiance cleared the path, and thousands of women joined the salt satyagraha. This is generally remembered as the first time “the masses of Indian women” got involved in the struggle for independence. Husbands now started getting proud of

their wives in the jails; but they resented if their wives had not taken prior permission. A few notable amongst these wives were Kasturba Glandhi, Kamaladebi Chattopadhyay, Nellie Sengupta, Basanti Debi (Roy), Durgabai Deshmukh and Aruna Asaf Ali.

24.4.2 Women's Initiatives in Politics

Lilabati Mitra helped Bidyasagar in 1890s to perform widow re-marriages by sheltering willing grooms. Kamini Roy was active in the Ilbert Bill agitation, organising girls at the Bethune School to hold meetings and wear badges supporting the Bill. She worked with Banga Mahila Samiti in their social reform projects. Aghorekamini Nari Samiti mobilised opinions against the ill-treatment of women workers by the tea planters. Prabhavati Mirza had got inspired by Aurobindo's terrorism.. At the age of ten only she fasted in protest against Khudiram's hanging and later turned out to be a committed trade unionist of the 1930s.

24.4.2 Women "Terrorists"

Kumudini Mitra had organised a group of educated Brahmin women who liaised between the revolutionaries in hiding. Women got increasingly involved with revolutionary groups, popularly known, feared and revered as "terrorists". In December, 1931, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury shot a district Magistrate, Mr. Stevens, who had harassed women more than the law, perhaps, permitted. Mina Das had attempted to shoot the Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson in 1922. They had all acted on their own and the first two were sentenced to transportation for life. Preetilata Wadedar led a raid on a club that the Europeans frequented. The bomb killed one and injured four. Preetilatae, clothed in male attire took cyanide to avoid arrest. A paper stating that the raid was an "act of war" was recovered from her person. On the same day pamphlets were distributed exhorting teachers, students and the public to join the campaign against the British rulers and the Europeans. Sarala Debi and Sister Nibedita were also closely related to and inspired by the Bengal terrorists.

24.5 MAJOR ISSUES CONFRONTING WOMEN'S UNITY

24.5.1 Communalism and Casteism

The issue of communalism was taken up by All India women's Conference (AIWC) in the thirties. In 1932 both their district branches and the annual conference organised protests against the reservation of separate seats for women in the legislatures applying communal criteria. The Bombay branch, for example, got involved in riot relief and the Andhra Pradesh branch started a campaign against religious prayers in the schools. The organisation was, perhaps, the first to raise demands for uniform civil code so that women cannot be subdued and tortured by religious dictums and caste obligations. They demanded exactly the same law for all women of India- whatever may be their caste or religion.

Unfortunately, by 1940s communal tensions manifested among the members themselves, as a result of the increasingly hostile relations between the congress and the Muslim League. By 1944 most of the Muslim women left AIWC. After partition and migration to Pakistan, they formed All Pakistan Women's Conference, thus belying the very purpose of this organisation. The AIWC in India continued to work against

communism, casteism and patriarchal oppression and started getting members from all religious groups, though the Hindu and the Dalits are many more in number.

Communalism and casteism have taken a horribly violent and ugly form ever since the carving out of the country on communal lines; Intolerance of the lower castes and of the religious and racial minorities has increased by leaps and bounds; mobilisation among women in protest and self-defence has also become stronger and wider. The other modes of oppressions, related to and born out of patriarchy and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, have also motivated the women's movement in India. The number of such organisations is so large and the area of their activities is so vast that it is simply impossible to make individual note of them within the extremely limited scope of this lesson. The students will have to rely on their general knowledge and daily newspaper reading.

24.5.2 Daily Encounters with Oppression

i) Against Alcohol

Bhil women were the first known to have raised their voice against the alcohol menace by breaking liquor pots in 1972. We know of so many such after that, the most sustained and successful having been The Anti-Arrack Movement in Nellore in Andhra Pradesh. Alcoholism is understood by women and the men who fight for women's cause, as a major cause behind wife-beating and family violence. Unending or increasing impoverishment of a family is also mainly because of man's income being wasted on this menace. That is why all women's bodies take up alcohol as a major issue, apart from dowry and sexual abuse, in fact all anti-liquor movements gradually get involved in all other problems facing women. Even the movements for environmental protection, e.g the Chipko movement, the movement for equal land rights, e.g the Bodhgaya, and the movement for a separate political entity, like. Uttaranchal, could not separate itself from the age-old day to day problems that have not allowed women, from the socially and economically backward section particularly, to see the light of freedom.

ii) Against Dowry

Progressive Organisation of women, Hyderabad was the first to organise powerful movement against dowry in 1975. It used to attract more than 2000 men and women in their demonstrations and the anger had spread to Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and even to as far as Punjab and Bengal. But the movement took deep and permanent roots in and around Delhi because the problem was, and is, much more acute and gruesome in this cultural belt. Mahila Dakshata Samiti was the pioneer body in Delhi in this regard. Now its scope, like in case of all other similar organisations, has spread over to all other areas concerning women's oppression and subjugation.

iii) Against Sexual Abuse

Rape and other forms of sexual abuse are the most common and frequent of crimes against women and yet, the most unreported. This is the most easily available and ego-satisfying weapon in the hands of male power not merely to overpower women, but even to overpower men from the deprived and oppressed communities. Apart from rapes within the family or due to personal lust or enmity, rapes are quite common occurrence in communal and caste tensions and in police custody. The agitation against rape, for the first time, started against police rape. The rape of Ralmmeza Bi in police custody became a symbol. The movement is ever-increasing in area, support and anger, yet the upward trend in the number of incidents is not getting checked. Shakti Shalini,

Sasbala Mahila Sangha, Janvadi Mahila Samiti are some of the striking names in this field. The last named has been organising women in their political battles also. The latest over-riding issue for women of all categories, of course, has been the reservation of seats in the highest decision-making bodies of the land.

All forms of male domination, in fact, were based on women's economic dependence. The two primary structures of women's oppression were thus, the sexual division of labour and the culture and politics that rationalised it. On the other hand, Mahilal Samata Sainik Dal, like most other women's bodies, believed that men's base desire for sexual pleasure had led them to enslave women. What is fascinating about the movements against various forms of violence and women's movements have basically sprung as an urge to resist and protest is how these have woven together several different kinds of attitudes towards women: from feminist to anti-patriarchal to anti capitalist to utopian patriarchy. The last is held mostly by men who feel it is their duty to protest and care for their women.

A whole new set of personal relationships developed in the feminist movement of friendships which cut across class, caste and cultural barriers, even though, to some extent, these friendships remained unequal. The middle class women, who usually were the leaders or organisers, acted more out of a sense of duty, and the poor from a position of helplessness and gratitude. Yet, the growth of a new sense of 'individuality' was clearly visible.

24.5.3 Environment and Livelihood

As explained by Engels, ownership of land and the means of production controls all categories of human relationships and is, therefore, the basis of patriarchy. Even in the age of highly advanced science and technology, food and all that a human being needs come from Nature and environment. We also know that from the day one of human existence, women have been the food gatherer and food provider; and therefore, women are the worst affected as a result of environmental degradation and indiscriminate robbing of Nature. That is why, women's movement has been most powerful with regard to their and their family's livelihood and the conservation of Nature. It started with women breaking forest laws in pre-independence India. Chipko and Narmada Bachao movements are good examples in this regard. 'Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA)' is the first known organisation in India and South Asia, which united the women workers in the unorganised and the home-based sectors. This perhaps, is the most successful and sustained women's movement since it got closely tied up with 'Mahila Kosh' or women's co-operative bank. It has inspired many similar movements in Bangladesh, Nepal and elsewhere in South Asia. The Self-employed Women's Union of South Africa has copied the model in totality and these two, to gather, have been able to influence ILO to enact international laws, giving recognition and protection to the home-based workers (the majority of whom are women from the most deprived sections of a economy). The 'Grameen Bank' of Bangladesh had become another widely acknowledged model for women's economic independence.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.
 ii) Check your answers at the end of the unit.

1. Write what you know about the activities of a few women terrorists.

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1. Explain why alcoholism has been taken as a major cause for violence against women.

2. What do you think is/are the basic reason/s behind violence against women?

24.6 WOMEN IN POLITICS OR POLITICS ‘BY’ WOMEN

In section 24.4 you have read, in brief about women’s independent political identity or initiative. In this section you will be able know a few instances where such initiatives looked more pronounced.

24.6.1 Telengana Movement

Women’s participation was significant in the Telengana movement for land and related Eco-political rights. Though the leadership was with men, the movement could have died early if not for the strong and sustained motivation from the women. It started against the injustices for the British Raj (1941), and continued against the continuation of the injustices even under their own government (till 1952).

24.6.2 Bodh Gaya Movement

Another landmark movement for land, i.e., livelihood, or economic rights “by” women was the forceful acquisition of the ‘patta’ by the peasant women, who had collected from in and around Bodh Gaya (Bihar). The men were not putting in enough efforts or resources into the land due to drinking and other bad habits. The unexpected success became a terrific inspiration for all united efforts by women. But, the success here was unique and exceptional; in most other cases success was not in their fate, and Bihar continues to be one of the top States in social injustice and oppression of women.

24.6.3 Dalit Women’s Movement

It will not be wrong to say that the Dalit women got first organised by a self-taught Dalit couple, the Phules, in Maharashtra. They (Phule couples) can also be called one of the founders of the movement for women's rights in the 19th Century. At present, Janvadi Mahila Samiti is the strongest supporter of this movement. The Dalit women felt the need to organise themselves separately, both from their men and the other women, mainly because of two reasons: (i) Dalit men, however oppressed themselves, do not stop oppressing their own women; and (ii) The non-Dalit women, however sincere, fail to comprehend the 'double' oppression that a Dalit women invariably suffers.

24.6.4 Adivasi Women's Movement

In the North Cachar hills of Nagaland, Gudiallo, affectionately called 'Rani', became famous for her role in the civil disobedience movement. She got involved at a very early age of 13, inspired by her male cousin Jadonang, who was active in mobilising the villagers in Manipur. In 1931-32, Gudiallo led a 'no tax' campaign, having taken over the reins of leadership from her cousin brother who was hanged by the Raj. These villagers stopped paying the compulsory levies on portage and started refusing to work as forced labour.

This is one of many such indigenous and spontaneous peoples' movements which used to be strongly discouraged and disowned by the 'mainstream' nationalist politics. This trend and the attitude of deciding what is good and what is necessary for the other or others is the foundation of patriarchy and capitalism (and, of course, imperialism), and continues to this day even after independence. That is why the adivasis, the dalits and the women are continuing to fight their battles even after more than half century of India attaining freedom. At present, the war against environmental degradation is fought mainly by the adivasis or the sons and daughters of Nature, because robbing of Nature means robbing of their livelihood and culture. The mainstream government of independent India does not realise that our country is, once again, getting colonised by the world market forces.

24.6.5 Movement through Literature, Theatre and other Forms of Expression

Section 24.3.1 has given us a brief idea about women's contribution to their own movement through literature during the pre-independence social reform and political movement period. There was a bit of a lull in the first few decades after independence. May be the women took a little time to realise that 1947 did not bring any independence for them. Lately, with the rising strength in the women's movement for equality, there has been a spurt in writings, films and plays by women and on women. Powerful women writers like Arundhuti Roy, are trudging the 'women only' field and taking up the cause of humanism or universal human rights much more forcefully than men. Women are making men realise that their good lies in women's good and that women's good lies in the good of the entire humanity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers
 ii) Check your answers at the end of this unit

1. What is the very special problem faced by a dalit women ?

24.8 SOME KEY WORDS

Colonial: relating to or characteristic of a colony. A colony is a territory and a people, occupied and ruled over by an imperialist power or imperialist mentality

Reform: amendment of what is defective, vicious, corrupt or depraved; removal or correction of an abuse, wrong or errors.

Feminist ideas: ideas born out of the belief that women are equal to men with regard to political, economic and social rights.

Gender: the socially established division between man and woman with the implied belief that women are inferior to men in every aspect of life.

Radicals: marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional; a political group associated with views, practices and policies of extreme change.

Bourgeois: one with social behaviour and political views influenced by private property interests and consumerism.

Westernisation: conversion to or adoption of the traditions and the latest culture of the highly industrialised countries, generally in the western hemisphere.

Polygamy: the custom of having more than one wife at the same time.

Suffrage: the right to vote (in political matters or for the formation of a government).

24.7 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Kumar, Radha, *The History of Doing*, Kali for women, New Delhi, 1993.

Sanghani, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in colonial History*, Kali for women, New Delhi, 1989.

Liddle, Joanna and Joshi, Rama (eds.), *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Cast and Class*, Kali for Women, New D`elhi, 1986.

Gail Omvedt: *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*

Gail Omvedt : *We will smash this prison*

24.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) It was called so because attempts to introduce the social reforms for the improvement of the conditions of the women were made during this period. The evils which were sought to be eliminated included tradition of sati, child marriage, ban on the widow-remarriage, purda system, etc.
- 2) Pandit Ishwarchandra Bidyasagar and Pandit Matrunjay proved that the the Shastras approved the widow-remarriage; widow-remarriage associations were formed and the widow re-marriage rules were made.
- 3) He founded the Arya Samaj which attempted to fight the caste system, tradition of polygamy, child marriage, and for the compulsory learning of Sanskrit and English.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) These instances were: in 1907 Madan Cama unfurled the “Bande Matram” flag at the Congress of Socialist International at Stuttgart; in 1913 Kumudini Mitra was invited to the International Women’s Suffrage Conference at Budapest; Sarojini Naidu, Sarla Debi and Hardevi Roshalal were also among the first women to raise the issues of the women.
- 2) As a member of the Arya Samaj she toured almost all over Punjab pleading to the women not to encourage their sons to join the government jobs but to become the “swadeshis”.
- 3) According to them the “swaraj” and “swadhinata” meant self rule , and the “strength and power to rule over oneself “ respectively.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) They participated in the Indian National Movement by killing the British officers, and by appealing to students, teachers and public to revolt against the colonial system.
- 2) Alcoholism has the adverse impact on the entire family. The women revolted against it by launching the Ant-Arrack Movements in several parts of the country, especially Andhra Pradesh and Uttaranchal.
- 3) The violence against women get expressed in the form of rape, dowry death, domestic violence, etc. The main reasons for this lie in their vulnerable social, economic and educational conditions, and the values of the people.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) The dalit women face dual problems of discrimination: they face the general problems which are faced by the women belonging to all castes, and the problems which are faced by the dalit women due to their caste status.

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UNIT 25 DALITS

Structure

25.0 Objectives

25.1 Introduction

25.2 Who is a dalit and what is a dalit Movement?

25.3 Dalit Movement in India

25.3.1 Dalit Movement in the Colonial Period

25.3.2 Dalit Movement in the Post – colonial Period

25.3.3 Causes of dalit Movement

25.4 Let Us Sum Up

25.5 Key Words

25.6 Some Useful Books

25.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise

25.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of dalit movement in India;
- To identify the issues/problems involved in the dalit movement;
- To know various forms of dalit movement;
- To know phases through which the dalit movement has passed; and
- Analyse the role of dalits and their organisations in the electoral politics.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

Last few decades have seen a spate of dalit movement in various parts of the country. This is reflected in their social, cultural and political activities at various levels, i.e., state, local and all India. A large number of social and cultural organisations of dalits, their political parties and leaders have emerged in various

parts of the country. Though in most parts of the country they are not able to assert themselves, yet in the areas where favourable situation exists dalits are asserting themselves. They have become a decisive force in the social and political processes of the country. The contemporary dalit movement is taking place along with the social and political movements of various other social groups like women, tribals, environmentalists, workers and peasants.

25.2 WHO IS A DALIT AND WHAT IS A DALIT MOVEMENT?

Dalits are those groups of people who have faced social discrimination including the untouchability. They largely belong to the economically disadvantaged groups of our society. They are placed in the Scheduled Caste categories in our constitution. The category of dalits was first used by Jyotiba Phule in the nineteenth century. It was first popularly used by the Dalit Panther in the 1970s. But it has come in currency quite recently – from the 1980s onwards. It has almost replaced the category of harijans used for the dalits or Scheduled Castes. The term Scheduled Castes was in common use till the term of dalit became more popular from the 1980s onwards. There are special provisions for the protection of their interests in our constitution – reservation in the public jobs, scholarships, legislative bodies, etc. Universal adult franchise and other constitutional rights have enabled them to participate in political activities.

Dalit movement raises issues of caste-based discrimination and economic inequality. It is a struggle for social justice. The issues on which dalit movement is launched are: self – respect, harassment of women, payment of wages, forced labour or begar, disputes over land, implementation of the reservation policy, promotion in the job, denial of democratic rights like casting of votes, disrespect to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar/his statue, etc. Dalits protest and agitate on these issues in various ways which include mainly informal ways, at individual basis, through the organised ways, satyagraha and litigation, by getting these raised either in the parliament or in the legislative assemblies. Dalit movement/agitation is also expressed through collective action like demonstration, rallies, procession; through signature campaign, protest literature, etc. Some times their agitation result in the clashes between dalits, police and the those elements in the society who are inimical to the interests of dalits.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space below for your answer
 ii) Check your answer with model answer given at the end of unit.

1) What do you mean by the term dalit?

2) What the main issues raised by the dalit movement?

25.3 Dalit Movement in India

Dalit movement in India is taking place at various levels such as those of villages and towns, state and all India (nation). It is taking place in those areas where dalits are in a position to agitate, as still in many parts of the country they are not able to raise their voice. Therefore, certain trends can be identified in the dalit movement in the country from the regions where it has been taking place. Dalit movement in India can be divided into two periods; pre- Independence period and post – Independence period.

25.3.1 Dalit Movement in the Colonial Period

During the pre-Independence period, there were dalit movements at both levels in India – the national and the provincial. At the national level M K Gandhi and Dr. B R Ambedkar attempted to take up the problems of dalits. But Ambedkar and Gandhi followed different approaches to solve them. Gandhi found untouchability as a corrupt form of Hinduism, and suggested that it can be solved by moral reform of the Hindus. He coined the term “harijans” with the purpose to

say that dalits or untouchables were also “people of God” like those of the high castes. Ambedkar on the other hand saw the real cause untouchability in the very nature of Hinduism and suggested that only solution to the untouchability or caste discrimination lay in abolition of Hinduism or conversion of dalits into other religion, preferably Buddhism. Before actually questioning the tenets of Hinduism or advocating conversion Ambedkar had tried to eradicate untouchability within the fold of Hindu region. Regarding this he launched the temple entry movement. The most important incident which drastically changed attitude Ambedkar about the Hindu religion was the Mahad Satyagrah of 1927 in Maharashtra. In this incident Ambedkar led a large number of dalits to enter into the Chowdar water tank which was banned for the untouchables by the orthodox Hindus. Ambedkar’s move was opposed by the orthodox Hindus, who ritually purified the tank. The reaction of the orthodox Hindus forced Ambedkar to burn the *Manusmriti*, and remark in 1935 “ I have been born a Hindu but I will not die a Hindu“. He realised that the basic problem lay with the Hinduism and for dalits to be liberated from the menace of untouchability, conversion was the only panacea. This conviction of Ambedkar resulted in his conversion to Budhhism in 1956 with a large number of his supporters.

There were leaders at the provincial levels also who were involved in combating the problems of dalits. There were also single caste movements in different parts of India – of Nadars, Pulayas, Ezhavas in South; of Namsudra movement in West Bengal; *Adi Darm* movement led by Mangoo Ram and *Adi Hindu* movement led by Acchutananda among the Chamars of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh respectively, Narayana Guru led movement among the Ezahavas in Trivancorer and Ayyakali-led movement among the Pulayas of Kerala. These movement were committed to self-reform in the rituals, advancement of their education, gaining access to employment under state. Dalit movement of Pulayas traced their origin to the pre-Aryan period and described them as the original residents of the country – Hindus or the high castes had come later on. Mangoo Ram traced the religion of the untouchables prior to the Hindu religion. According to him the untouchables were the original inhabitants (*Adi*) of India; they had their own religion - the *Adi Dharm*. The *Adi Dharmis* had been pushed to the subordinate positions by the later arrivals. He tried to revive the *Adi Dharm*. By the mid-1930s the movement had petered out. Sri Narayana Guru (1857-1928) developed a critique of Hinduism in Travancore which had influence beyond his own Ezahava

community to Pulayas, etc. His philosophy was “one caste, one religion and one God for man”. With the emergence of Ayyakali (1863 – 1941) Pulayas also became effective. Pulayas were later attracted towards the Marxists and Gandhians in Kerala. In Hyderabad princely state, P R Venkataswami attempted to mobilise the untouchables. The main plank of his mobilisation were self-reform, education and equality. Dalit movement in South and West during the 1920s and 1930s also focused on permission to enter the temples.

The provincial level dalit leadership also responded to the social reform movements of North India which took place in the early decades of the twentieth century like the Arya Samaj. But finding the leadership of these movements belonging to the high castes, too patronising and their notion of equality too restricted, they parted company with these movement. This was followed by their independent course of action. It happened in UP and Punjab. Similarly in Madras MC Raja found the Non-Brahmin Justice Party inimical to the interest of the untouchables.

Apart from these, the dalits, especially the Chamars, of Madhya Pradesh (Chhattisgarh) had already been under the influence of the Satnami movement since the 18th century inspired by the legacy of the leadership of Guru Ghashi Das. The Satnamis questioned the notion of social and ritual hierarchy in two simultaneous ways: by rejecting the Hindu gods and goddesses, and by rejecting the *puja* and *purohit* within the temple. This was in line with the Bhakti tradition. With the entry of Ambedkar and his conflict with Gandhi over separate electorate to the untouchables, catapulted Ambedkar to national level politics of the untouchables in India. From the 1930s onwards – Ambedkar started his movement with the issue temple entry.

A major area of difference in the earlier years of the twentieth century between Congress and Ambedkar was regarding the issue which had been given priority over the other in the programme of the Congress. Ambedkar believed that the Congress should accord the social issues priority over the political issues. He felt that political rights can not be enjoyed without establishing social equality. Congress on the other hand believed that once political rights have been given to the people, social equality can be established.

Dalit politics in the following period was marked by the conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi. The occasion when the differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi came to the fore was Round Table Conferences of 1930-31. By then

having understood the futility of the temple or tank entry movement, Ambedkar focused on the need for giving representation to dalits, as a separate and minority community in various public bodies.

Ambedkar sought into national prominence following his differences over the nature of electorates at the Second Round Table Conference of 1931 in London; the conference had met to discuss the Simon Commission Report which had suggested joint electorate and reservation for the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar was one of the two Depressed Classes representatives invited to the Conference. Ambedkar demanded separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar's claim was supported by another representative of the Depressed Classes from Madras – MC Raja. But Gandhi opposed Ambedkar's proposal for the separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. Raja changed his position and entered into an agreement with Munje, President of the Hindu Mahasabha to support the joint electorate. Raja – Munje pact divided the leadership of the untouchables. Ambedkar was supported by the Mahar leaders from Maharashtra, *Adi Dharm Mandals* from Punjab and one of the organs of the Bengali *Namsudras*. Raja's supporters included prominent Chambhar leaders from Maharashtra. Gandhi on the other hand set on fast unto death on September 20, 1932 against the Communal Award of the British which advocated the separate electorate. In order to avoid unpalatable situation which could result following fast of Gandhi, Ambedkar relented and entered into a Pact with Gandhi known as Poona Pact. According to it separate electorate was removed and instead reservation was introduced in the legislative bodies for the untouchable castes. The recommendations of Poona Pact were incorporated in the Government of India Act, 1935. As a result there was reservation in the legislative assemblies during the election of 1937. Ambedkar's party Independent Labour Party contested this election. He later converted ILP into the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF). Later on, Raja had become supporter of Ambedkar. After his death, the supporters of Ambedkar formed Republican Party of India (RPI). On the other hand, Congress and Gandhi were patronising towards the untouchables; Jagjivan Ram emerged from such patronage.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with model answer given at the end of unit.

1) Discuss the dalit movements at the provincial level during the colonial period.

2) Discuss the nature of relationship between Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, M.K. Gandhi.

25.3.2 Dalit Movement in the post – colonial Period

Dalit movement in the post – Independence period in India can be divided into three phases, i.e., phase I (1950s – 1960s), phase II (1970s –1980s); and phase III (1990s onwards. There has been a common feature of dalit politics through out the post – Independence period, especially from the 1960s onwards, e.g., to strive to have a party of their own or a party led by the dalits. The shift in dalit support from the Congress to RPI in the 1960s, to the Janata Party in 1977, the Janata Dal in 1989 and to the BSP in the 1990s onwards are examples of this desire of the dalits. Several factors have contributed to the rise of dalit movement, especially from the 1980s onwards. These include emergence of a new generation among dalits, which is conscious of their rights, explosion of mass media and the impact of the ideas of Dr. B R Ambedkar.

Phase I (1950s – 1960s)

Implementation of the universal adult franchise, reservation in educational and political institutions, and in jobs for the Schedules Castes as per the provisions of the constitution enabled a large number of them to take advantage of these facilities in the period following independence. Along with these the state in India introduced several programmes for the betterment of the disadvantaged groups of the society, especially the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Though in Most parts of the country the Scheduled Castes could not benefit from the measures introduced by the state due several practical reasons, yet these did help them wherever suitable conditions existed for them. Besides, the political parties,

especially Congress party attempted to mobilise them as its vote bank. Despite the difficulties in availing of their right to vote in many parts of the country, politicisation of the dalits took place to a considerable extent. Such process made them conscious of their rights. The policies and strategies of the Congress helped it create its social base which consisted of Dalits as major social group. The politicisation of dalits during this phase took as a constituent of the social base of the political parties, especially the Congress. Meanwhile, there emerged the first generation of dalit leadership borne after independence, which included educated middle class professional as well. This group became critical of dominant political parties and the cultural ethos, especially the Congress and the Hindu belief system. They started feeling that the Congress was using them as the vote bank; the high castes were holding the leadership of this party and not allowing dalits to get the leadership. On the cultural front they felt that the Hindu religion does not provide them a respectable place. Therefore, in order to live respectfully they should discard Hindu religion and convert to Buddhism. The advocates of this opinion were influenced by the ideas of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. They formed Republican Party of India (RPI) based on the ideas and principles of Ambedkar. In the late 1950s and 1960s RPI launched a cultural and political movement in UP and Maharashtra for achieving political and cultural autonomy from the dominant formations. A large number of dalits got converted to Buddhism. The RPI emerged one of the important political parties in the assembly and parliamentary elections held in UP during the 1960s. But the RPI could not remain a force in UP after the 1960s because its main leadership got co-opted into the Congress, a party against whom it had launched movement in the preceding decade.

The Second phase (1970s – 1980s)

This phase was marked by the combination of class and caste struggles. In the rural areas of West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh the naxalite movement launched a struggle against the caste and class exploitation. In the cities of Bombay and Pune, the Dalit Panther launched the similar kind of movement.

Dalit Panther Movement

An educated group of dalits – young dalit writers and poets, in two major cities of Maharashtra set up an organisation known as Dalit Panther in 1972. Influenced by Ambedkarism, Marxism and “Negro literature”, they aimed at rejecting the caste system, which according to them was based on the Brahminical Hinduism. Spreading their ideas through the media and communication network, through the

discussions and debate in the public space, i.e., offices, houses, tea shops, public libraries, dalit writers and poets provided the critique of the Hindu caste system and exploitative economic system.

The origin of the Dalit Panther can be traced to a controversy which centered around the articles and poems written by dalit writers in a socialist magazine, *Sadhana*. Raja Dhale's writing was most controversial of these writings. The controversy centered around two points; his comparison of a fifty rupee fine for molesting a dalit woman with hundred rupees – fine for insulting the national flag; another point was repetition of the points which were made earlier at the publication ceremony of the collected poems – *Golpitha*, of Namdev Dhasal, another noted dalit - Marxist writer. The *Golpitah* poems were also related to the exploitation of women.

The high caste middle class felt outraged by the articles and demanded banning of the issue of *Sadhna* which carried the article by Raja Dhale. Dalit youths in reaction also organised a defence march holding a red-on-black Panther flag. In order to give up the conventional organisational nomenclature, they gave a new name to their organisation Dalit Panther. The activists of Dalit Panther belonged to first generation educated youth, whose parents were poor peasants and labourer, who had inherited the lagecy of Ambedkar movement.

Initially the movement proclaimed to have an alliance of exploited people – dalits, backward classes, workers and peasants. Its programme centered around the problems of women, rejection of Brahminical principles of purity and pollution, and fight against all kinds of political and economic exploitation. In the tradition of Ambedakarism, they aimed at achieving the political power. This movement grow in the wake of the failure of the Republican Movement of the 1970s which suffered because of the personality differences of its leadership. With its main leadership having joined either the Congress or any other formation, the RPI movement had become almost an insignificant force. But the seeds sown by this movement resulted in the formation of Dalit Panther and its movement. But like the RPI movement, it had to suffer from the split. Two main leaders of the Dalit Panther Raja Dhale and Namdev Dhasal developed differences on the ideological ground. The former an ardent Ambedkarite accused Namdev Dhasal, a marxist of ignoring the caste problem and helping the communists to peneterate the Dalit Panther movement. This ultimately resulted in expulsion of Dhasal from Dalit Panther in 1974. Raja Dhale formed a separate

group of Dalit Panther. In 1976, the younger members of Dhale group led by Arun Kamble and Ram Das Athavale formed a new organisation Bharatiya Dalit Panther, in an attempt to give it an all India face. It took up the issues relating to education system, facilities to the Buddhist converts, renaming the Marathwada University at Aurangabad as Ambedkar University, and “nationalisation of basic industries”. But this also could not make any dent.

The Dalit Panther could not be able to make an alliance of all exploited. It got divided between the Ambedkarites and Marxists, particularly after the 1974 by election to the Bombay parliamentary constituency.

Naxalite Movement in Bihar

Unlike the dalits of west UP or Maharastra, those of Bihar did not experience anti-caste movement in the colonial period. While the non-dalit peasantry was mobilised by different peasant or caste organisations in Bihar, dalits largely remained the vote banks of political parties. Jagjivan Ram did not make any efforts to mobilise them excepting for getting their votes. It was only since the late 1960s that dalits of central Bihar were initiated into the political movement. But it was not exclusively on the caste lines; it was on the mix of caste and class exploitation. In Bihar there seemed to one to one relationship between caste and class to a considerable extent. The landlords formed their caste *senas* (private armies) in order to protect their class interests. The dalits got organised there on the caste and class lines. It was a backward class leader a koeri, Jagdish Mahto who made first attempts to mobilise the dalits of Arrah district. Influenced by the dual ideologies of Marxism and Ambedkarism, he started a paper called “Harijanistan” (dalit land) in Arrah district. He believed in the violent methods, including murder of the landlords in fighting the cause of the dalits. He raised the issues of low wages to the land less workers, protection of *izzat* of dalit women and social honour. He was murdered in 1971.

Dalit mobilisation in Bihar got momentum again in the 1980s following the spade of attacks by the private army of the landlords such as “Bhoomi Sena” (of the Kurmis), “Lorik Sena” (of the Rajputs) on dalits. In reaction to this the labourers formed “Lal Sena”. As the larger number of the victims of the landlords sena included dalits, they formed the larger chunk of the supporters of the naxalism. The naxalites attempted to unite the middle caste and the middle peasants. They

set up organisations like “Liberation”, “Party Unity” in Patna and Jehanabad districts. Party Unity set up an public organisation Mazdur Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS) in collaboration of ex-socialist Dr. Vinayan. The MKSS along with another organisation (Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha – BPKS) which was formed at that time organised demonstrations in 1981. These two organisations formed underground armies and fought against the gangs of the landlords. They also fought among themselves. In 1983 the Liberation group formed another public front, The Indian Peoples’ Front (IPF). The IPF contested 1985 election. This showed a change in the perspective of the naxalite groups, which changed from emphasis on the “agrarian revolution” to “taking state power”.

Dalit movement in Karnataka

In Karnataka also dalits organised into the Dalit Sanghasrsh Samiti (DSS). It was an organisation which was set up in 1973 and set up its units in most districts of Karnataka. Like Bihar it also took up caste and class issues and attempted to build an alliance of diverse groups of the exploited classes. It also brought dalits of different persuasions – Marxism, socialism, Ambedkarism, etc, under the banner of a single organisation. During 1974 and 1784 it took up the issues relating to wages of the agricultural labourers, *devdasi* and reservation. It held study groups to discuss the problems of dalits. The DSS was formed following the resignation of a dalit leader Basavalingappa, who was asked to do so by the chief Minister Devraj Urs. This leader referred to the literature of the high caste with Bhoosa (cattle fodder). This outraged the students belonging to the high castes, leading to the caste rights between the high castes and dalits. Incensed by consequences of the remarks of the minister the chief minister had asked him to resign. The *Bhoosa* controversy set a strong anti-caste tendency, which was represented a journal *Dalit Voice* set up by a journalist Rajshekhar. *Dalit Voice* attacked Brahmins as “Nazis” and the left movement as “ Brahmo –Communist” and termed dalits as “born Marxists”. According to the editor of *Dalit Voice* the main issue in the dalit-OBC mobilisation is not the alliance between the dalits and the OBCs, the leadership of dalits over the OBCs.

Phase III (1990s onwards)

The 1990s have seen the proliferation of dalit organisations in different states of the country. The case of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh is most important. Though the RPI had been influential in Uttar Pradesh like Maharashtra since the 1950s, the rise of the BSP has been the most striking feature of dalit identity and politics in India. It has been able to lead the government in Uttar Pradesh thrice with a dalit woman Mayawati as the chief minister. The BSP was founded on April 14, 1984 by its president Kashi Ram. Before forming the BSP Kashi Ram mobilised dalits under the banner of two organisations, i.e., the BAMCEF (All India Backward and Minority Employees Federation) and DS4 (*Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti*). These were social and cultural organisations with their focus on the mobilisation of the dalit middle classes. With the formation of the BSP, Kashi Ram changed the social and cultural organisations into a political party – the BSP. The BSP aimed to mobilise the majority other sections of the society, the *Bahujan Samaj*, consisting of the dalits, backward class and religious minorities which excluded the high castes like Brahmins, Rajputs, and Banias. The BSP believes that the minority high castes have been using the votes of the majority communities or the *Bahujan Samaj*. They did not let them become the leaders or the rulers. As in a democracy it is the majority who should rule, the *Bahujan Samaj* should become the ruling class. There was a need to reverse the pattern of power game in the country; the *Bahujan Samaj* should no longer allow the minority high castes to use them as the vote banks. Rather the *Bahujan Samaj* should be the rulers. With this perspective the BSP contested the assembly and parliamentary elections in several states in the country from 1985 onwards. The BSP made its presence felt in North Indian states, especially Punjab, UP, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The BSP has been able to consolidate its position among dalits mainly for its strategy of electoral alliances and the public policies. The most important case of the BSP's electoral alliance has been in the state of UP, though it has attempted electoral alliances in other states as well. From the 1993 assembly election of UP onwards, the BSP has entered into alliances with the major political formations like Congress, the BJP and the Samajwadi Party in UP or the Akali Dal and Congress in Punjab, which could help it win the assembly and parliamentary elections or in the post-poll alliance which helped it form the government. The first alliance which the BSP made was with the Mulayam Singh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party in UP in 1993 election.. This alliance was considered as an

example of the unity of the *Bahujan Samaj* – the BSP identified with the dalits and the Samajwadi Party with the backward classes and the minorities. This alliance, however, continued only till the BSP withdrew support from the Mulayam Singh Yadav-led SP-BSP government in 1995. The fall of Mulayam Singh led-government was followed by its alliance with the BJP, which enabled Mayawati to become the first dalit woman Chief Minister of any state. Immediately after becoming the Chief Minister, Mayawati declared that her party serve the *serva samaj*; it was shift from her earlier position where she vowed to fight for the *Bahujan Samaj*. It was beginning of the BSP's change in the electoral or alliance strategy. In the subsequent elections, contrary to original principles, it gave tickets even to the high castes Brahmins, Rajputs, Banias and Kayasthas gave them representation as ministers in her government.

However, during her Chief Ministership, Mayawati introduced special policies for dalits. The most important of these included: – Ambedkar Village Programmes consisting of the special programmes for the welfare of the weaker sections in the villages identified as the Ambedkar Villages on the basis of the substantial dalit population in such villages, and naming of the public institutions after the low caste historical personalities. It also took prompt action against those who involved in the discriminatory activities against the dalits. The rise of the BSP has imparted a sense of pride and confidence among the dalits in the country. Especial focus of the BSP-led coalition governments in UP on the dalis in its policies has created caused resentment among the non-dalits both the high castes as well as the backward classes. The BSP has been able to counter this by change in its alliance strategy. Unlike its initial strategy, the has been giving tickets to high castes. In fact in the elections held in 2002 to the UP assembly election, the largest group of the MLAs in the UP legislative election belong to the high castes. The main criterion for forging alliance seems to be the ability of the candidates to win the election, which could made possible by an alliance of dalits and high castes candidates who are given tickets by the BSP.

Though the BSP contributed to the politicisation of dalits to a large extent, it could not maintain the unity of the *Bahujan Samaj*. The main reason for its success lie in the electoral strategy of the BSP.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with model answer given at the end of unit.

1. What were the basic features of dalit movement in India during the 1950s and 1960s?

- 2) Discuss the factors responsible for the rise of Dalit Panther.

3. Describe the basic features of dalit movement during the 1990s.

25.4 Let Us Sum Up

The social groups which have faced discrimination including untouchability are called dalits. Last two decades have seen emergence of dalit movement in various parts of the country. Dalit movement forms a part of social and political movements of other social groups like environmentalists, tribals, women and peasants and workers. Large number of organisations of dalits – social, cultural and political have emerged in various parts of the country. The BSP is one of the examples of such organisations. These organisations are autonomous and raise the

issues of dalits exclusively. The reasons for the rise of dalit movement include – rise of a new generation of dalits which is more articulate and conscious of their rights, explosion of mass media and impact of the ideas and life of Dr. B R Ambedkar. The BSP is the most important example of a dalit party which has carved a niche for it in north India. In Uttar Pradesh it has been able to head the state government thrice. The success of the BSP depended on its electoral strategy and pattern of mobilisation.

25.5 KEY WORDS

Dalits: The social groups which have faced discrimination including untouchability are called dalits.

Dalit Movement: It means the protest of dalits against their discrimination of all kinds and for protection of their rights.

Social Justice: It means an absence of social and economic discrimination; conditions which are for the protection and preservation of equality, self-respect and other rights.

25.5	Some	Useful	Books
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Dube, Saurabh, *Untouchables pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central*

Indian Community, 1780-1950, State University of New York Press, 1998.

Omvedt, Gail, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and Socialist Traditions in*

India, M. E. Sharpe, England, 1993.,

_, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution : Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1994.

Mendelsohn, Oliver and Vicziany, Marika, *The untouchables: Subordination, poverty and*

the in modern India, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

Pai, Sudha, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: Bahujan Samaj Party in*

Uttar Pradesh, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002.

25.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Dalits are those groups which have social discrimination including untouchability. They largely related to the economically disadvantaged groups of the society. They belong to the Schedules Castes as enshrined in our constitution.
- 2) These are related to social justice, and some of which include protest against the discrimination of all kinds, struggle for protection of the self-respect, payment of wages, against the forced labour, dispute over land, implementation of the reservation policy, fight against disrespect to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, denial of democratic rights like casting of votes, etc.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) These were single caste movements, i.e., of the Nadars, Pulayas and Ezhavas in South; of Namsudra in West Bengal; *Adi Dharm* movement in Punjab and *Adi Hindu* movement in UP; and *Satnami* movement in Madya Pradesh. These movements were committed to self-reform rituals, advancement of dalits' education and access to employment under state.
- 2) Gandhi and Ambedkar differed in their approach to the problem of caste and Untouchability. According to Gandhi the untouchability was a corrupt form of Hinduism and it can be eradicated by moral reform of Hindus. Ambedkar thought that the real cause of untouchability was the nature of Hindu religion, and suggested that the untouchability and casteisms can be eradicated by the rejecting Hinduism – in the conversion from Hinduism to other religion, preferably Buddhism.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) These were: rise of the beneficiaries, among the dalits, of the state policies like the implementation of the universal adult franchise, reservation in the educational and political institutions and in the government jobs. During this phase dalits did not emerge as an independent political force; rather they were mobilised by the major political parties like the Congress. However, a large number of them had come under the influence of the RPI in UP and Maharashtra.

- 2) These were: the impact of Ambedkarism, Marxism and “Negro literature”, and a controversy which arose from the articles and poems written by the dalit intellectuals in Maharashtra and reaction of the high castes.
- 3) This period has seen the rise of dalits as an independent political force signified by proliferation of dalit organisations in various parts of the country. The rise of the BSP in the North India, especially in UP is the most important example of their rise as an independent political force.