

# UNIT 16 SECULAR AND THEOCRATIC REGIMES

## Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Secularism and Secular Regimes
  - 16.2.1 Protestantism
  - 16.2.2 Social Basis of Secularism
  - 16.2.3 Secular Regimes: Meaning and Features
- 16.3 Theocratic Regimes
- 16.4 Relevance and Trends in Secular Polity
- 16.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.6 Some Useful Books
- 16.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

## 16.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit examines the nature of the relationship between state and religion which constitutes an important basis for the classification of contemporary political system. After going through this unit, you should be able to :

- Define secularism and explain its origins;
- Identify the features of secular regimes;
- Describe the meaning and features of theocracy; and
- Recognise the importance and relevance of secular polity.

## 16.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and politics has always been fraught with potential conflict. Religion is acknowledged to be a crucial source of legitimacy and political mobilisation in all societies, ranging from those that are avowedly secularist, such as communist regimes, to those that are theocracies. This factor, combined with the developments in the last three decades or so- the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the late 1970s, the growth of politically committed religious movements in the 1980s, the resurgence of the New Right in the West and the collapse of secular communist regimes- draw our attention to the role of religion in public life. It is in this context that the nature of relationship between the state and religion has emerged as an important basis for classification of contemporary political systems. We will first examine the concept of secularism and its evolution, before identifying the features of secular and theocratic regimes. Later, we will examine the trends in secular polity and relevance of secularism in contemporary world.

## 16.2 SECULARISM AND SECULAR REGIMES

The word secular, from which secularism is derived, refers to something concerned with temporal, that is with matters of this world than with something religious or otherworldly. Secularism as a doctrine can be defined as the attempt to establish a body of principles concerning human behaviour based on rational knowledge and experience rather than theology or the supernatural. In sphere of politics, secularism advocates that the domain of operation of religious influence should be restricted in society, and that in particular the state should be

independent of religion. It must be noted that when we talk here of religious influence or independence from religion, we are referring to religion as an organised socio-political force and not merely as a system of sacred beliefs.

Secularism is a dominant feature of modern times. Secularisation or the decline of the prestige and power of religion began in Europe and is closely associated with the break up of the medieval feudal order in the 14th and 15th centuries. Beginning in the 4th century, when the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as a state religion, Christianity had acquired a powerful hold over medieval Europe. The Church came to combine both spiritual and temporal authority. The Church (and therefore the Pope) directly ruled over small regions around Rome, but its influence extended over the entire Europe. It had more political power than any government in Europe. This was because in those days the power and authority of Emperors and kings was limited by the fact that land was divided into feudal estates. The holder of the estate, the feudal lord, was for all practical purposes, an independent ruler. Most rulers were virtually puppets placed in position by the Church (usually from among large wealthy families who were considered to be benefactors of the Church). With the Church becoming deeply involved in the political and non-spiritual affairs, its leaders like the Popes, bishops and clergy amassed great wealth, indulged in earthly pleasures and behaved like princes and military men. The political intrigues and manipulations, combined with the Church's increasing power and wealth contributed to the bankruptcy of the Church as a spiritual force.

The most important consequence of the domination of religion and the Church was on the intellectual climate of Europe. Man's thoughts and feelings were expressed in terms of religious values. Christianity believed that human mind and its reason are not reliable, as sources of knowledge and that through the help of Christian faith and God's grace alone, human beings can know what is true or untrue. In other words, faith was more important than reason. This attitude dominated so much that the quest for knowledge was mostly confined to 'spiritual' matters like the interpretation of the Bible and of the writings and sayings of Popes and religious writers. In the universities of Padua and Bologna in Italy, Sorbonne in France and Oxford and Cambridge in England teaching and learning was mostly on religious subjects and they trained priests, and theologians (scholars in Christian religious subjects). Although non-religious subjects such as astronomy, geology, medicine, chemistry and law were studied, Christian view of the world limited the scope of human enquiry. No one dared to question the Church (and therefore the Pope) as it was believed to be infallible and in direct contact with God. People who questioned the authority of the Church or disagreed with its teachings were imprisoned, exiled or executed. Many scholars therefore describe the medieval period as the Dark Age.

The seemingly impregnable intellectual and political edifice of Christianity began to crumble under the assault of Humanism, the Renaissance, and the Protestant Reformation. From the 14th century onwards, several developments combined to undermine the medieval feudal order. The Crusades and the contacts with the East established by medieval travellers like Marco Polo, brought to Europe new knowledge and information. It also increased the trading activity. Consequently new towns emerged in Europe, especially, in the Mediterranean region. A new class in society, the middle class began to emerge. It was in these circumstances that there was a revival of Greek learning and values. An important development contributing to the Renaissance or 'rebirth' of classical ideas was the fall of Constantinople, the capital of Eastern Roman Empire to the Muslim Turks in 1453. Many scholars in Constantinople fled westward, carrying with them Greek classics and manuscripts. The rediscovery of Greek learning in Europe changed the intellectual climate of Europe in many ways.

Classical humanist ideas emphasising the dignity of man became popular. These were reflected in literature and arts, which turned to themes about man and nature from themes about religion. The humanist concern with the condition of man here on earth and with enquiries about to make man's life better and happy can be taken as the first manifestation of secularism

The new intellectual awakening in turn created a new spirit of enquiry among the people. Human reason and pursuit of learning, which were not confined to religious learning alone, began to receive priority. This resulted in important scientific discoveries being made and known to people. Discoveries made by scientists like Copernicus, Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin directly challenged the Christian view of the world. We can therefore say that the Age of Faith was effectively questioned and began to be replaced by the Age of Reason because of the Renaissance.

In politics also, important changes were brought about. Several thinkers challenged the authority of the Church and Christian morality over emperors and kings. In the 13th century, Aquinas, the greatest scholar of the age, borrowing from Aristotle, aided in raising the dignity of the civil power by declaring the state a perfect society (the other perfect society being the church) and a necessary good. The Renaissance writer Niccolo Machiavelli advocated the important idea that princes and rulers need not be guided by religious morality but should be able to conduct politics mainly with the purpose of increasing the power of the state. Sometimes, this idea itself was dangerous, as it could mean that kings and rulers need not follow morality in politics. But in another sense this idea was very crucial. It helped to strengthen the powers of the rulers as against the Church. Politics in Europe became free from religious control. This political thinking coincided with the desire of many princes and kings who wanted to become independent. The result was that independent kingdoms based on the idea of nationalism got established in important areas of Europe and gradually spread to other regions.

### 16.2.1 Protestantism

The intellectual stimulation provided by the Humanists provided the spark for the Reformation, which further weakened the authority of the Church. In the 16th century, a pious Catholic priest in Germany, Martin Luther, sought to rid the Church from corruption by re-establishing the Christian concept of the secular and the spiritual found in the words of Jesus: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". He not only attacked corruption in the life of the Church but questioned the role of the Church. He argued that the individual Christian was free to approach God directly without the intermediary role of the Church. Although he left the Catholic Church in 1520, many churchmen joined Luther in challenging the Church. This resulted in the Reformation becoming a great movement. In many parts of Europe, the obedience and loyalty to the Church were withdrawn and a new branch of Christianity arose which was later termed as Protestantism. Protestantism was not a single and unified movement. There were some who joined Luther against the Catholic Church but differed with Luther on some important philosophical and religious issues. Today there are more than a hundred varieties of Protestant sects in the world. But the main point is that the authority of the Catholic Church was successfully challenged in the name of freedom of the Christians to understand the Bible and approach God.

The fragmentation of the Church provided an opportunity for strong rulers to consolidate state authority. For instance, in England Henry VIII ended ties with the Church in Rome and assumed the headship of the Church of England. The

fragmentation of the Church also resulted in a series of wars between the Catholic and Protestant nations between the 16th and 18th centuries. It was only from the 18th century onwards that tolerance of ideas and real freedom of enquiry and thought became pronounced in Europe. These wars of religion furthered the secularisation of state by encouraging the notion of a neutral public power that gave priority to the secular purposes of protecting life and maintaining order. Therefore, by the end of the wars of religion, nation-state had emerged as a primary force influencing the lives of citizens. Christianity that had split into numerous sects had lost its authority to challenge this fact.

### 16.2.2 Social Basis of Secularism

Secularism and secularisation of state authority in Europe was a more complex affair than has been described above. The rise of modern capitalistic economy had an important role in the secularisation of state authority. As we saw, trade and commerce played an important role in stimulating the renaissance and reformation movements. Strong rulers who created the nation-states made active use of the rising middle classes in overcoming the feudal aristocracy, the chief barrier in the unifying process. The strength of the middle class lay in the wealth they accumulated through trade and commerce. The middle classes who did not like the obstacles placed by landed feudal aristocracy in pursuing trade and commerce supported strong rulers who can regulate trade and commerce within and outside country. As the capitalism spread and moved into a higher stage of development, the industrial phase, regulation of economic activity by despotic rulers was seen as an obstacle for further development of industrialisation. Moreover, the new class of men- artisans, industrial workers and middlemen- from humble origin began to demand social and political opportunities. These pressures ultimately gave rise to liberalism and democratic institutions in Europe.

From the above, it is clear that secularism has been a part of a process of human liberation from domination-initially from that of the Church and latter from despotic rulers. In Europe, it has played an important role in checking absolutism, bigotry and fanaticism, in ensuring that the values enshrined in a particular religion did not trump other values and in managing religious conflicts. It has also been an element of the process of democratic transformation.

Even though secularism as a political force had established its hold over most of Europe, there was in practice no formal separation of religion and politics until 1791, when the first amendment to the constitution of the United States was passed. This amendment laid down that the Congress would not pass a law respecting an establishment of a religion, or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

With time, secularism spread to other parts of the world making the laws of the state independent of religion. In most of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, secularism was introduced during the colonial period. In the post-colonial period, these countries found secularism useful to avoid religious conflict and promote national integration.

### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** i) Use space provided below to write your answer.

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

- 1) Define secularism and explain its origins? \*

.....

.....

- 2) How did the Reformation contribute to the growth of secular authority?

.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Why did the emerging middle class support the rise of strong nation-states?

.....  
.....  
.....

### 16.2.3 Secular Regimes: Meaning and Features

A secular state involves three distinct and interrelated sets of relationships concerning the state, religion and the individual. First, a relationship between the individual and religion from which the state is excluded. Second, a relationship between the individual and the state from which religion is excluded. That is, an individual is a citizen independent of membership of any particular religious group. The institutional arrangement for these relationships is a separation between state and religion. That is, there is neutrality of state in matters of religion. There is no state religion.

Some of the characteristic features of secular political systems are as follows:

- a) The secular state is not based on any particular religion. This means that such a state does not owe any allegiance to any particular religion. Nor such a political system adheres to the principles of a particular theology.
- b) Though the secular state does not favour any particular religion, it is not anti-religion or irreligious. It cannot be said to non-religious. We cannot call such a state immoral or an atheistic state. Secular states do follow principles that are characteristic of any religion such as truth, non-violence, love, and morality, but they do not align with any particular religion. In other words, a secular state may tie itself to certain universal ethical principles without allowing any particular religion to dictate its policies.
- c) A secular state does not bother whether its members belong to this religion or that religion. Primarily concerned with an individual's external life, a secular state does not concern itself with religious affiliation of its citizens. Religion is seen as something concerning an individual's internal life, that is, a matter of purely individual and private faith.
- d) Separating religion and politics, a secular state treats all religions alike. It does not allow religion to influence political issue. Religion does not impede or interfere in any decision of the state. To that extent, religious discrimination is absent in a secular state.
- e) A secular state admits numerous religions under its jurisdiction. It advocates religious harmony, accommodation and co-operation. All religious organisations are accorded equal treatment and are equally respected. To that extent, a secular state is multi-religious state.
- f) A secular state by its very nature is a democratic state. It is democratic because it treats individuals as individuals and not as a member of this or that particular faith.

Secularism is the most widely established policy on religion today. In most countries of the contemporary world, there is a strong tendency to limit the role of religion to the 'religious' sphere of society. Secular regimes can be broadly categorised into two- the liberal and the Marxist. The liberal secular regimes are those which regard religion as a societal resource and allow for individual as well as corporate religious freedom to a greater or lesser extent. Religion in these liberal countries may in practice have a significant role in political life. A vast majority of modern political regimes, including the United States of America, Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, most European states and others belong to this category. In the Marxist version of secular regimes, we have countries like the former Soviet Union and China that have an ideologically defined negative view of religion. In these and other countries inspired by a Marxist critique of religion, there is a strong ideological divide between religion and politics, and corporate religious freedom is often subordinated to the prerogatives of political organisations.

### 16.3 THEOCRATIC REGIMES

Theocracy is a society governed by priests, or one whose government is heavily influenced by religious leaders. Originally, theocracy meant a system where divine law was the basis of all humanly enacted law, and in which religious and political hierarchies were merged. Today, the term theocracy is applied to refer to the dominance of religion over state.

A theocratic regime by its very nature is a religious state. It is wedded to a particular religion. It believes and functions on particular theological principles. Theocratic regimes are not merely dominated by particular theology; they are, in fact, controlled by that theology. In other words, in these regimes, politics and religion get assimilated into each other: religion dominates politics and politics is carried on religious principles. Since these states are uni-religious states, allowing only one particular religion to flourish and shape its policies, their attitude towards other religions is one of 'distance'. People belonging to other faiths are treated as second-class citizens. There is neither religious harmony nor any religious tolerance.

Some of the characteristic features of theocratic regimes are as follows:

- a) A theocratic state is associated with a particular religion. It believes in the principles and precepts of the religion it advocates. All the rules and regulations, laws and by-laws framed by the state are in tune with the state religion.
- b) A theocratic regime preaches, practices and promotes the religion it follows. It expects its citizens to follow the state religion. Here, religion is not merely a private faith of the individual; it is a public faith. It is the faith of the state and also of its members. The theocratic state demands its people true and faithful allegiance to the religion of the state.
- c) A theocratic state does not separate religion from politics, nor politics from religion. For such a state, religious precepts become political precepts and the laws of the state are so framed that they do not interfere into the religious dictates of the state's faith.
- d) A theocratic state does not treat other religions, whether within its boundaries or outside, with equal respect as given to its own religion. In fact, such a state treats other religions with the sense of imputability, that is, as a secondary kind of religious faith only to be condemned and curbed.

- e) A theocratic state is predominantly a totalitarian state, or it tends to become totalitarian. It attempts to control every aspect of an individual's life by projecting itself as the torch bearer of not only 'this' world, but also of 'heavenly' other world.
- f) A theocratic state by its nature is a rigid state; and therefore, by those standards, a fundamentalist state, an authoritarian one and hence an anti-democratic one.

Theocratic regimes, with more or less intimate interaction between religion and politics, are few in contemporary international relations. In this category we have pure theocratic regimes as well as other regimes having close relationship with religion. A good example of the former is the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the state apparatus is subordinated to Islam and religious leaders have a decisive say in political affairs. There are also countries where even though there is a state religion, religious leaders and institutions are to some extent subordinated to the interests of the state. Countries with Muslim majority populations like Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia and some predominantly Christian and Buddhist countries such as Sweden and Thailand fall in this category.

### Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use space provided below to write your answer.

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

- 1) What is the relationship between the individual, state and religion in a secular polity?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) Describe the features of theocratic regimes.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Identify a couple of theocratic regimes in India's neighbourhood.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 16.4 RELEVANCE AND TRENDS IN SECULAR POLITY

As we have observed in the earlier section of this unit, secularism has been a part of a process of human liberation from domination and a dominant feature of modern times. Even religion could not remain immune to secular philosophy and outlook. For instance, the Catholic Church in Latin America has witnessed the secularisation of religion. In the 1960s, when great disparities in wealth and

poverty bred social unrest and revolution in Latin America, many Catholic clergymen, bishops as well as parish priests, joined the people in their resistance to exploitation and oppression. In so doing they fashioned a theoretical foundation for their actions in what is called liberation theology. This theology rejected the traditional distinction between religion and politics, and analysed history in terms of the philosophy of Karl Marx as a series of class struggles leading to a classless society. The Roman Catholic Church in Vatican has rejected liberation theology as an approach for social renewal. But the attempt made by liberation theology to combine Christian faith with a commitment to social change clearly reflects the hold secularism has come to have in contemporary times.

At the same time, however, there has been a growth of anti-secularist movements in the last three decades or so. Anti-secular movements seeking to strengthen the political role of religion became pronounced after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Much attention has been bestowed on the Islamic movements in the Middle East with articulate political objectives. However, as we shall see, anti-secular or politically oriented religious movements, often described as 'fundamentalist,' are not limited to a particular religion or region.

In Africa, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria sought to establish a Islamic state based on the sharia. The Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan has similar objectives and has been successful in achieving far reaching Islamisation. In Senegal, a country with more than 90 per cent Muslim population, Islamic groups have been anti-secular and in conflict with Sufism. In Togo, Sierra Leone, the Central African Republic, Liberia and Kenya, fundamentalist Christian Church, even while claiming to be apolitical, has become a strong support base for autocratic rulers. In Tanzania, neo-fundamentalist kind of Christianity has emerged on the political arena to counteract 'Muslim threat'.

Asia has also witnessed the rise of anti-secular forces. In India, since the early 1980s, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has been seeking to strengthen Hindu identity with the objective of establishing a Hindu state. In Sri Lanka, movements aimed at strengthening the political role of Buddhism have emerged, partly in struggles against minority groups like the Tamils. Pakistan has witnessed Islamisation of successive constitutions since the mid-1970s. The most significant development in this regard has been the takeover of major parts of Afghanistan by fundamentalist Taliban groups.

In the United States, a group called the Nation of Islam has voiced strong protests against conservative Christians as well as against secularism and the whole of American political system. In Russia, following the demise of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, Orthodox Christianity in association with Russian neo-liberalism has appeared as the most important political alternative to a Western liberal democratic development in Russia. In several countries of east Europe, there exists a distrust of the West and of the Catholic Church and religious nationalism appears as an important alternative to communism.

The increased significance of religion in politics is partly related to the problems of nationalism and ethnicism. Juergensmeyer, refers to these religious activists, who strive for a revival of religion in public sphere, as religious nationalists. According to him, religious nationalists 'are concerned about the rationale for having a state, the moral basis for politics, and the reasons why a state should elicit loyalty', and they strongly dismiss 'secular nationalism as fundamentally bereft of moral and spiritual values'. Thus, the success of the Islamic movement in Iran, the rise of Orthodox Christianity in Russia and in Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumania and Greece in the 1990s is attributable to religious nationalism based on distrust of the West and rejection of Westernisation.

Elsewhere, the rise of religious activism can be traced to the problem of ethnicity. For instance, minority ethnic groups in Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand believe that they are increasingly coerced into conforming with the requirements of the dominant national group. These groups do not perceive themselves as fully part of the nation, believing that their religious, political and economic rights are violated. Similar sentiments among Sikhs in Punjab and Christians in Nagaland have led to religious activism among minority groups in India. Their activities have often provoked clashes with the government and contributed to violent confrontations between adherents of different religions.

It has been argued by several scholars that one of the reasons for the success of the Islamic movement in Iran was that the religious institutions and leaders were not completely, or even largely, incorporated into and controlled by the state. Hence, it retained the possibility of autonomous action and organisation. A striving for institutional or organisational independence from the state has been a typical feature of the Islamic revival in many countries. Elsewhere, religious movements are serving as important channels of political opposition. This is particularly the case in countries lacking democratic traditions or where the regime has failed in stimulating economic development or in spreading the fruits of economic growth.

In dealing with politically oriented religious movements, secularists have to keep in mind the specific role of religion in politics in a particular context. As we saw, in some cases, it seeks to reform society in accordance with religious tenets and create a tradition oriented, less modernised society. In others, it is part of the democratic struggle, serving as a channel for political opposition or participating in social transformation. A democrat or a secularist must not dismiss religion but must take into account its social base and expose its hegemonic role and differentiate the democratic element wherever available and invite it into struggle against class and social domination.

## 16.5 LET US SUM UP

Religion has played an important role in the life of the individual. It has made his life ethical and has introduced to him the efficacy of a moral life. Its role in politics has been even greater. The medieval period was the period of the dominance of religion over politics; most of the states were part of the Christendom.

With science and reason replacing divine will and divine laws in the modern age, state laws became independent of religion. This marked the decline of theocratic states, though the remains of theocracy are found still.

Observing the relevance of secularism we saw that it gives that political system a democratic and modern culture; it gives the government a popular base; it gives people a code of conduct where they are equal to each other. By providing equal opportunities for all the people irrespective of their membership in a religious group, secularism provides security and guarantees to religious minorities.

During the last two centuries emphasis has been on secular regimes and most democracies today are secular both in theory and practice. However, in the last three decades or so there has been a growth of anti-secular movements in several parts of the world. These movements seek to strengthen the political role of religion and are generally opposed to the idea of a secular state. Appropriate secular programmes have to be launched to counter them.

## 16.6 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Bhargava Rajeev (2000) *Secularism and its Critics*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta

Sankhader, MM (Ed) (1992) *Secularism in India*, Deep and Deep, New Delhi

Madan TN (1991) *Religion in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi

Martin, David (1978) *A General Theory of Secularisation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford

Smith Donald (1963) *India as a Secular State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

## 16.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The attempt to establish a body of principles concerning human behaviour based on rational knowledge and experience rather than theology or the supernatural.
- 2) It freed the individual and the state from the authority of the Church. Individuals no longer regarded the Church as a mediator between them and God. The division of the Church into numerous sects weakened the authority of the church. Conflicts between different sects strengthened the state by freeing it from the hold of religion.
- 3) Feudal lords had become obstacles to free trade. Also, they wanted a strong authority to regulate trade and commerce, within and outside the national boundaries.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) State is not concerned with the relationship between the individual and religion. Religion is not concerned with the relationship between the state and individual.
- 2) The Church or institutionalised religion dominates over state. It preaches, practices and promotes state religion. It does not treat other religions with equal respect. It is rigid and authoritarian and has a tendency to become totalitarian.
- 3) Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Tibet (prior to Chinese occupation).

---

# UNIT 17 ORGANS OF GOVERNMENT : EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY

---

## Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
  - 17.1 Introduction
  - 17.2 Organs of Government
  - 17.3 Executive
    - 17.3.1 Meaning and Types of Executive
    - 17.3.2 Composition of Executive
    - 17.3.3 Functions of Executive
    - 17.3.4 Increasing Role of the Executive
  - 17.4 Legislature
    - 17.4.1 Representation of People
    - 17.4.2 Organisation of Legislature - Unicameral and Bicameral
    - 17.4.3 Functions of Legislature
    - 17.4.4 Decline of Legislature
  - 17.5 Judiciary
    - 17.5.1 Functions of Judiciary
    - 17.5.2 Judicial Review and Judicial Activism
    - 17.5.3 Independence of Judiciary
  - 17.6 Let Us Sum Up
  - 17.7 Some Useful Books
  - 17.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 

## 17.0 OBJECTIVES

---

In this unit, we will examine the three main functions of modern governments, viz., legislation, administration and justice. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the three principal organs of modern governments;
- describe the composition and types of executive;
- recall the organisation of a legislature;
- analyze the functions of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary;
- describe the decline of legislatures and the increasing role of the executive; and
- explain how independence of judiciary is ensured.

---

## 17.1 INTRODUCTION

---

Effective and efficient governance is the expectation of every civilized society. This role is performed by the government which is one of the four essential elements of the state. No state is possible without a government which not only provides security to the people, but also looks after their basic needs and ensures their socio-economic development. Thus, we can say that a government is a set

of institutions that exercises control through legal devices and imposes penalties on those who break the law. For this purpose, social acceptance of the power of the government to control people must be accepted by the people voluntarily and recognized by them. A government normally functions by dividing its functions between its organs, with each organ performing some specific functions. It primarily performs three main functions i.e. making of laws, enforcing the laws, and adjudicating disputes.

This unit attempts to explain the three main organs of a government and the functions performed by it as well as the various provisions related to it. It also explains the relationship between various organs of a government. The organs of government which correspond to its three functions, mentioned in the previous paragraph, are: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

## 17.2 ORGANS OF GOVERNMENT

As stated earlier, there are three organs of a government - the legislature which makes the laws, the executive which implements them, and the judiciary which interprets laws and decides disputes. The organs of the government are so structured that they can adequately perform the functions required of them. This system of dividing powers among the three organs of a government is called "separation of powers". This political tradition is most prevalent in the U. S. There, the Congress makes the laws, the President administers them and the Supreme Court, along with other federal courts, interprets them and imparts justice. The three branches of a government are independent of one another. The legislature should comprise the people's representatives, since they perform the most important duty of making the laws by which the people are to be governed. Thus, efforts are made to secure a fair and wide representation of people in the legislature. The executive implements the laws made by the legislature. It is, therefore, necessary that the executive should comprise competent and efficient people. The third organ of the government, judiciary, interprets the laws and decides cases in accordance with the laws and the constitution.

## 17.3 EXECUTIVE

### 17.3.1 Meaning and Types of Executive

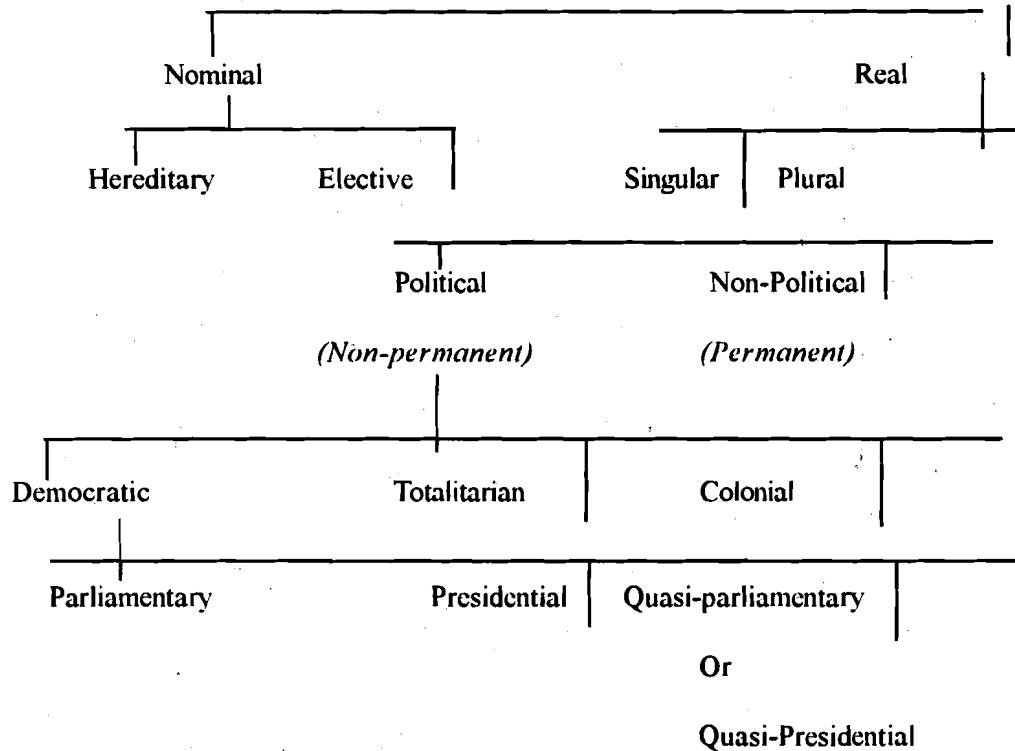
The executive is the implementing arm of the government. It is the executive which formulates and then implements various policies. The dictionary meaning of the word 'executive' is the power to put important decisions into effect, i.e. to execute. As J. W. Garner says, "In a broad and collective sense, the executive organ embraces the aggregate... of all the functionaries and agencies which are concerned with the will of the state as that will has been formulated and expressed in terms of law...thus, it comprehends the entire governmental organisation. Thus tax collectors, inspectors, commissioners, policemen and perhaps the officers of the army and navy are a part of the executive organisation."

Though the term 'executive' is understood both in broad and narrow senses, in the realm of the study of politics, its narrow meaning is applied. It is the executive head and his principal colleagues who run the machinery of government, formulate national policy and see that it is properly implemented.

The following tabular illustration describes various types of 'executive' that exist in the world:

## Executive

**Organs of Government :**  
**Executive, Legislature and**  
**Judiciary**



The nominal executive may be either a monarch or an elected President. What makes him a 'nominal' executive is the fact that he does not enjoy any real powers. He is just a constitutional figurehead, performing some ceremonial duties but enjoying little or no powers, though the entire administration is carried on in his or her name. The monarch may assume office in hereditary succession as in U.K. or through direct or indirect election as in Malaysia. The system of hereditary succession is still prevailing in some countries such as U. K., Nepal, Japan and Saudi Arabia. Wherever there is constitutional monarchy, as in U. K. the real power is not vested in the monarch but in the elected council of ministers headed by the prime minister, and that council is collectively accountable to the legislature.

However, not all existing monarchs in the world are figureheads; there are still some monarchs who enjoy absolute power as they do in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Such monarchs may be placed in the category of 'real' executives, since they enjoy absolute and limited powers.

The real executive may also be divided into two categories - singular and plural. A singular executive is one that is headed by a single leader who does not share his powers with others as in the U. S. In the U. S., the constitution vests all powers in one person, namely the President. In the case of a plural executive, all powers are vested in a group of ministers. Its only example in today's world is found in Switzerland where the authority of the government is shared by seven ministers (called Presidents) who are elected by the legislature for four years. It is known as the Federal Council. One of the Presidents is formally designated as the President of the Confederation and he performs the ceremonial functions normally exercised by the Head of State in any country.

### 17.3.2 Composition of Executive

The executive generally consists of two types of officials: (a) the political executive, i.e. President, Prime Minister, Cabinet or Council of Ministers; and (b) the permanent executive or the bureaucracy which remains in office for a fixed

period of tenure regardless of which government comes to power. The political executive is elected directly by the people as in the U. S. where the Presidential type of government prevails, or he may be elected indirectly by the legislature as in the case of India and Great Britain. In China, the President is elected by the National People's Congress and is the head of state and the highest ceremonial functionary of the state.

The political executive may be further divided into three categories as shown in the tabular illustration given above. It is democratic, when its members are chosen by the people and remain accountable to their constituents. For instance, the British cabinet may be removed from office by an adverse vote in the House of Commons. The American President can also be removed from office, not through a vote of no-confidence but by the process of impeachment. Recently, President Bill Clinton of the U.S. went through the process of impeachment but was able to survive because the Senate failed to convict him.

In a totalitarian state, the real executive can not be removed by the people or their chosen representatives. In such a state, people have no freedom to criticize or censure the conduct of the government. Today, such totalitarian states, with the executive enjoying absolute power, exist in Burma, Iraq, Nigeria or in Afghanistan. In the past, the totalitarian regimes existed in Nazi Germany headed by Hitler or in Fascist Italy headed by Mussolini.

Finally, a colonial executive is one who acts under the authority of the colonial government.

The democratic model may be divided into two categories -parliamentary and presidential forms of government. In the parliamentary form of government, the government is run by a cabinet (under the leadership of the Prime Minister) collectively responsible to the legislature, as in India and U. K. The Head of State is a nominal executive in whose name governance is done by the cabinet. The President of India and the Queen of U. K. are nominal heads of state. The second variety of democratic model, namely the Presidential form of government, exists in the U. S. In the United States, the basis of executive-legislature relationship is separation of powers. The President is the real executive. He is neither a member of the legislature, nor removable by it. His tenure is fixed.

In between these two models, there is the model of French executive that can be called as quasi-parliamentary or quasi-presidential as here the President is the real executive; the Prime Minister and the cabinet are under his control and, at the same time, they are accountable to the Parliament. So, the French model imbibes some features of both parliamentary and presidential forms of governments.

### **17.3.3 Functions of the Executive**

In the modern political system, distrust in executive dominance has been replaced by a confidence in its leadership. Today, the classical theory of the three organs of government with equal powers needs restatement because the executive has now become the government in the real sense of the term. Among its many functions, the first and the foremost function of the executive is to run the administration of the country. The government has to ensure and maintain internal peace and order. The executive has also to conduct external relations, make treaties with foreign states, declare war and conclude peace, mobilize troops, proclaim emergency when required, re-value or devalue currency, fix prices of essential commodities and perform other activities relating to the well-being of the people of the state.

In recent times, the executive has started performing some legislative functions also, even though this work does not fall in its domain. The executive is taking considerable initiative in drafting and proposing laws to the legislature. This is particularly true of parliamentary governments as in the United Kingdom and India. In India, the executive can issue ordinances when the legislature is not in session. Also, the bills passed by the legislature are subject to the veto power of the Head of the State. Even in the U. S., where the separation of power prevails, the President manages to influence the legislative sphere by sending his 'messages' or having a bill passed by the Congress through his 'friends'.

What has added to the expanding functions of the executive is the growth of delegated legislation. The laws made by the Parliament generally do not contain the details which are subsequently filled in by the executive.

The executive also performs some judicial functions. In all the countries, the Head of the State is entrusted with the power of granting pardon or reprieve or amnesty to the offenders. This is called his 'Prerogative Of Mercy.' He also performs functions like the appointment of judges, and a host of disputes are also settled through administrative tribunals. In certain countries, the ministers are given the power to act like appellate tribunals. In France, there is a separate system of administrative laws and courts.

The executive also controls the 'purse of the nation'. It is the executive which prepares the budget and presents it to the parliament for its approval. It is the executive that actually decides the taxation structure of the country; the parliament only puts its seal of approval. Also, it is the executive which has to see that the provisions of the budget are implemented after being passed in the Parliament. For this, the executive also has auditing and comptrolling agencies to act as the financial watchdog of the country.

The permanent executive, i.e. the bureaucracy, is involved at every stage of the decision-making process and maintains continuity in administration. Often, the political executive depends upon the bureaucrats because of their technical expertise and knowledge.

Chester Barnard, in his work titled "The Functions of the Executive" relates the function of the executive 'with the determination of the objectives, the initiation of policy, the manipulation of means, control over the instruments of action, and stimulation of action, and stimulation of coordinated action.'

#### 17.3.4 Increasing Role of the Executive

Today, the representative democracy has been somewhat replaced by what may be termed as 'executive democracy' or even 'bureaucratic democracy', according to R. H. S. Crossman. The executive is the most important organ of the political organisation. As Rodee remarks, "On the one hand, the earlier enthusiasm for the wisdom and competence of representative assemblies has declined, on the other, a century or more of experience with popularly elected executive power has dissipated earlier suspicions and established confidence. Moreover, the rapidly multiplying problems and functions of democratic governments have virtually compelled the transfer of many powers from the legislature to the executive." This is especially the case with parliamentary democracies. The political executive, by virtue of being in the majority in the lower chamber of the legislature, is able to push through all legislations. Strict party discipline, as in the U. K., makes the legislative control of the executive very nominal. Also, usually the executive is united and single whereas the members of the legislature are divided on party lines, and this gives the executive an edge over them. What

Greaves has said about the English model of government is largely applicable to the systems of other countries as well — that the executive “has become in practice the first chamber in our law-making mechanism.”

However, the need of the hour demands a proper check on the leadership of the executive. The fate of the political system depends on the role of the political leaders who are said to be entrusted with three important functions, namely, founding, implementing and stabilizing a regime. What is thus needed is the imposition of proper checks on the authority of the executive. This will enable it to efficiently as well as properly perform the manifold functions entrusted to it, which include the “creation of a welfare service, the extension of social welfare to the whole population, and the ‘restoration of compassion’, in the words of Adlai Stevenson.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

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

- 1) Bring out the main differences between parliamentary and presidential executives.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) Describe briefly any two functions of the executive.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Why has the modern executive become more powerful ?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 17.4 LEGISLATURE

Legislature in the field of comparative politics is technically known as the rule-making department. Legislature, most commonly known by the name of parliament, forms the first important organ of a political organisation. The word ‘parliament’, which originally meant ‘a talk’, is derived from the French word ‘parles’ and the Latin word ‘Parliamenuni’. Framing laws is the most important function of the present day legislatures and they are often known by the quality of their legislation. However, today, the normative interpretations describing legislature as a ‘mirror of the nation’, ‘embodiment of the general will of the community’, ‘a committee of grievances’, ‘a congress of opinions’ and the like.

have been overshadowed by the empirical statements hitting at its real significance as a ‘talking shop’, an institution of class exploitation and oppression, a ‘demised body’ and the like.

#### 17.4.1 Representation of People

In modern states, direct democracy, as it functioned in Greek city-states, is impossible. Therefore, people in a democracy elect their own representatives to perform the tasks of the government. Representation, is actually, “the process through which the attitudes, preferences, viewpoints and desires of the entire citizenry or a part of them are, with their expressed approval, shaped into governmental action on their behalf by a smaller number among them, with binding effect upon those represented.” The legislatures are supposed to reflect public opinion. Elections are held periodically in order to register changes. Devices like reservation of seats or functional representation are also adopted for certain sections of the population who do not get fair representation. For example, in India, seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes/Tribes in the legislature as well as in the bureaucracy.

In a parliamentary democracy, the executive is elected by the people and it is the legislature which claims to represent the sovereign will of the people. Even in non-democratic states, the executive seeks to rely on a body of people who, it thinks, can express popular wishes.

#### 17.4.2 Organisation of Legislature - Unicameral and Bicameral

Legislatures are either unicameral or bicameral. The issue of bicameralism has, however, gained more importance. A unicameral legislature has only one chamber based upon popular representation and is responsible for the entire function of law-making. Unicameral legislatures exist in some countries such as New Zealand, Denmark, Finland, and China. It is also existing in some of the Indian states like Punjab, Haryana, Orissa, and Kerala.

A bicameral legislature consists of two chambers: (a) the upper and (b) the lower chamber. The lower chamber is generally more popular in character and has a greater say in law-making. The lower houses are directly elected as in India, U.K., France, Germany, etc. Upper houses are also directly elected in some countries such as the Senate in the United States. In Britain, members of the upper house, the House of Lords, are nominated. In India, the upper chamber, the Rajya Sabha, is indirectly elected. In a bicameral legislature, there is a lot of party politics and the process of law-making is much more complex, since both the Houses have to give their assent to the bills. The federating units have their representatives in the upper chambers, which enables their viewpoints also to be represented in the parliament, and which also enables them to safeguard their rights. A bicameral legislature easily manages to maintain a balance between the centre and the federating units, which is very essential for the successful functioning of the federal system.

In some upper chambers (as in India), there is also provision for giving representation to learned and well-known individuals, to represent literature, art, science and social services. In India, the President can nominate 12 members in the Rajya Sabha. Thus, the legislature, on the whole, can benefit from their experience and wisdom. The upper chambers, in fact, can act as a check upon the popularly elected lower chambers. However, in actual practice, it is very difficult to say if the upper chambers are really more sober, less partisan or better guardian of states' rights. It is rather a tradition than utility which justifies their existence in many states.

### 17.4.3 Functions of Legislature

The place and significance of the rule-making bodies, from a functional point of view, varies from the 'sovereign' English Parliament to the non-sovereign Supreme Soviet of the erstwhile USSR, or from the 'powerful' American Congress to the 'powerless' Cortes of Spain - a body 'supinely acquiescing in the will of the ruler'. While taking a synthesized view of the functions of legislative bodies, Curtis enumerates them in the following manner:

- 1) Legislatures choose the head of the state; they may also remove him by the process of impeachment, or they can change the law of his succession or election. For instance, the British Parliament can change the law of primogeniture or the method of abdication. The parliaments of India and Israel elect the President of the Republic, the House of Representatives of the United States has the right to elect a President in case no candidate gets absolute majority in the Presidential poll. The legislatures of the U. S. and India can also remove their Presidents by the process of impeachment. The parliaments of Canada, New Zealand and Australia recommend three names to the English Sovereign and one of them is nominated by him/her to act as the Governor-General of the country.
- 2) The Legislatures also approve the choice of the Prime Minister and his ministers in some countries. All ministerial nominations by the President in the U. S. have to be ratified by the Senate. The list of ministers comprising the cabinet has to be approved by the Knesset in Israel. The Federal Assembly of Switzerland elects its seven presidents of the Federal Council. The nomination of the Prime Minister made by the King must be approved by the Diet in Japan. The Prime Minister nominated by the President in France has to seek a vote of confidence in the Parliament. In countries having a cabinet form of government like Britain and India, the ministers can remain in office only as long as they enjoy the confidence of the legislature. Recently, the Vajpayee government lost a confidence motion in the legislature. In a theoretical sense, this provision also applies to countries like Russia and China.
- 3) Legislatures may also influence or control government behaviour or seek to make the executives accountable to them. Votes of no-confidence, censure motions, interpellation procedures, debates on budgets and major policies of the government, process of impeachment, etc. are the various devices in the hands of the legislators to exercise their control over the government. The American Congress took up impeachment proceedings against Bill Clinton in 1998. The exit of the British Prime Minister Attlee in 1949, Eden in 1956 and Macmillan in 1968 confirms the fact that the parliament possesses the controlling authority. Thus, the legislatures also perform certain judicial functions. In India, they have the power to impeach the President as well as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and so on.
- 4) Legislators choose their office-bearers and they can also remove them. They can also disqualify their members on the charge of proved 'misbehaviour' or committing an act of corruption or treason or breach of privileges. Speakers and Deputy Speakers are elected by the rule-making bodies and they may remove them by a vote of no-confidence.
- 5) The most important function of the legislatures is to make rules, because they are the rule-making departments of the government. The bills are moved, debated and then passed with or without amendments. In most of the countries having a 'democratic' form of legislative behaviour, the bills are

given three readings. Often the bills are referred to the committees of the parliament for more detailed scrutiny. In a communist country, as in China, it is not the legislature as such, but its small committee that first adopts a bill at the invisible behest of the party in power, and it is adopted by the legislature subsequently. Also, the ordinance issued by the head of the state when the parliament is not in session has to be ratified by the legislature within a period of six weeks from the date of commencement of the session.

- 6) A Legislature often holds the purse strings. Its approval is necessary for the annual budget or for the imposition of taxes. Through committees, they also scrutinize the expenditure of the government. In India, this is done by Public Accounts Committee. (PAC)

The legislatures also reduce 'tensions', provide reassurance and generally enhance satisfaction with the policies and programmes of the government. They also provide scope for the articulation of interests. They perform 'exit functions', meaning thereby that, when the political system seems to have reached an impasse and the normal decision-making process seems incapable of providing a way out of the situation, the elites sometimes turn to the legislatures for either the substance or the form, or both, of a decision which will take the system out of the impasse. They also serve as a training ground for the future leadership of the country. Besides, they strengthen 'consensual institutional continuity', and they often constitute the only means of administrative overview available in the country.

It is these functions that enable the rule-making bodies of the developing countries to play their significant role. However, Packenham also refers to the obstructionist role of the legislatures. They "tend to represent all over the world more conservative and parochial interests than executives, even in democratic politics. This seems specially to be the case in presidential, as contrasted with the parliamentary, political system. In societies that need and want change, and where political modernisation may be defined as the will and capacity to cope with and generate continuing transformation, it may not make much sense to strengthen the decision-making power of an institution that is likely to resist change."

Legislative bodies all over the world make use of the committee system for the sake of efficiency of work and economy of time. In actual practice, the legislative body is known by the committee it keeps. As More suggests: "No legislature can function effectively without the aid of some committee. Discussion of details is impossible at a large meeting which is too unwieldy to debate anything but broad principles. For this reason all democratic legislatures elect smaller groups to discuss matters in detail and these bring the result of their discussion back to the larger body for decisions."

#### 17.4.4 Decline of Legislature

A very critical examination of the functions and powers of the legislatures, confirms that the old distrust of the executives' has been replaced by a new confidence in their leadership. The strong position of the Cabinet working under the leadership of the Prime Minister in a parliamentary form of government, confirms the doctrine of Ramsay Muir that the emergence of a powerful cabinet has, to a remarkable extent, diminished the power and position of the Parliament, robbed its proceedings of significance, and made it appear that the Parliament exists mainly for the purpose of criticizing the omnipotent Cabinet. The Cabinet has emerged as the main forum where the policies are discussed and finalized, while the parliament merely discusses them, more or less as a formality, and is in no position to alter them if the cabinet enjoys absolute majority in the parliament.

It is the Cabinet that has the final say in a parliamentary form of government. This is applicable to all the legislatures based on the English model. The American Congress has lost much of its legislative autonomy because of the Presidential check on one hand and, the power of judicial review on the other. The legislatures of communist countries do not have even that truncated area of authority; rather, they are used as an agency for propaganda purposes. They are "a rubber stamp for decisions made elsewhere in the Russian political system."

The charge of the decline of the legislature draws support from the following points. Firstly, the area of authority which originally belonged to the legislatures has been usurped by the executives. It is the Cabinet that decides about many things like summoning and proroguing the session of the Parliament, writing the text of the inaugural address to be delivered by the Head of State, preparing a daily time-table of the session of the House and doing a host of other things that constitute the stock of parliamentary business. In a country like the U. S., though the legislature remains separated from the executive, the President vetoes the bill passed by the Congress as per his judgement. He can also send 'messages' to the Congress, and, through his 'friends', get certain kind of bills passed. In a country like France, where we find a mixture of the parliamentary and presidential forms, the President may even go to the extent of dissolving the legislature.

Secondly, the power of the courts to look into the constitutional validity of a legislative measure has affected the authority of the legislatures. Though this factor does not apply to Britain, it applies to the United States where the federal judiciary has been given the power of judicial review, under which it can declare a law 'ultra vires', in case it finds that it is not consistent with, or it violates, the constitution of the country.

Lastly, what has really led to the attenuation of the authority of the modern legislatures is the role of party politics. The top leaders of the party keep the members under their strict control with the result that the latter have no alternative but to toe the official line.

Though the power and prestige of the legislatures is declining, they are working with varying degrees of authority. The legislature is still treasured as a formal centre and focus in every political system. Thus, it is rightly observed: "Decline is in the eye of the beholder and depends on his analytical perspectives."

### Check Your Progress 2

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

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

- 1) Distinguish, with examples, between unicameral and bi-cameral legislatures.

.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) Mention any three functions of the legislature.

.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Account for the decline of the legislature.

## 17.5 JUDICIARY

Judiciary, also known as the rule-adjudication department of the government, in quite simple terms, may be defined as the third organ of government concerned with the job of doing justice. It interprets law and awards punishments for the violation of laws. The primary objective of any political system is to protect the rights of the individual, and this work is done by the judicial organ of the government.

### 17.5.1 Functions of Judiciary

The judges may be nominated by the Head of the State, or appointed by following a process of selection, or elected or co-opted by the fellow judges.

The functions of the judiciary differ from one political system to another, but generally they are as follows:

The first and the foremost function of the courts is the administration of justice. The courts hear and decide cases of all civil, criminal and constitutional nature. In countries having written constitutions, the courts are also entrusted with the power of interpreting the constitution. They act as the guardian of the constitution.

Secondly, though legislation is the work of the legislatures, the courts also legislate in a different way. Where a law is silent, or ambiguous, the courts decide what a law is and how it should prevail.

Thirdly, the courts in a federal system of government also play the role of an independent and impartial umpire between the central and regional governments.

Fourthly, the courts are important agencies of legitimizing the outputs of government. It is expected that the courts should keep themselves aware of the growing urges and aspirations of the people and should interpret the meaning of law dynamically in the light of obtaining situation. They should see that any law or executive action does not infringe upon the various rights of the people.

Fifthly, the courts should also stabilize and support the existing political system. The behaviour of the courts must not be obstructive or destructive so that the smooth running of the political organisation becomes a problem.

The most controversial function of the courts lies in their power of judicial review under which they have the capacity to examine the validity of a legislative or administrative measure, and then declare it, either in part or full, 'intra vires or ultra vires of the constitution.' This power had its origin in the United States and also has its best form there. Its second best example can be found in India. Its weaker instances can be found in other countries also like Italy, Australia and South Africa.

As stated earlier, the functions of the courts differ from one political system to another, though most of them, as described above, are common to all, and that lay down the basic line of distinction between the executive / legislative and judicial powers.

### 17.5.2 Judicial Review and Judicial Activism

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines judicial review as "the power exerted by the courts of a country to examine the actions of the legislative, executive and administrative arms of the government and to ensure that such actions conform to the provisions of the nation's constitution." Ferguson and McHenry defined judicial review as "the power of a court to hold unconstitutional any law or official action that it deems to be in conflict with the basic law, or the constitution." Judicial review is, thus, a power in the hands of the courts to look into the constitutional validity of a legislative or administrative measure and then give a judgement in regard to its being intra vires or ultra vires of the constitution.

The study of judicial review virtually relates to the two democratic countries of the world, i.e. United States and India, both having written constitutions and a federal system of government. Both the American Supreme Court and the Indian Supreme Court recognize judicial supremacy. The American judiciary can also declare an Act unconstitutional, if it fails to satisfy the requirements of the "due process of law". The "due process" clause and "judicial supremacy" has turned the American Supreme Court into a kind of super legislature. In communist countries there is no place for judicial review where judges are elected by the legislatures and they are required to honour the 'will of the people'. In Britain too, the English courts can not look into the constitutional validity of a legislative measure made by the sovereign Parliament. However, they may exercise the power of judicial review over delegated legislation. If an executive action contravenes the law of the Parliament, in letter or in spirit, the courts may strike it down. The Federal Tribunal of Switzerland has the power of judicial review that it may exercise in relation to the laws made by the Cantonal legislatures only. Article 81 of the Japanese constitution also empowers the Supreme Court to exercise the power of judicial review.

This power of judicial review in the hands of courts has led to what has recently been called as judicial activism. In recent years, at times there has been a vacuum in the executive, and the judiciary has on many occasions filled that space. In India, the first push came after the Emergency phase when the Supreme Court came up with the device of public-interest litigation (PIL), a tool meant to ensure justice for the under-privileged and the marginalised. The recent regulations of the Indian Supreme Court and High Courts, like making helmet compulsory for 2-wheeler drivers, no felling of trees, ban on vehicles more than 15 or 20 years old or ban on hoardings on the roadside in Delhi are a few examples of judicial activism. The United States Supreme Court's decision regarding the ban on abortions also shows how activated the judiciary has been in these countries.

It is said that judicial review opens scope for more and more judicial debates, and ushers in a 'paradise' for the lawyers. It leads to a confrontation between the executive and judicial departments. It makes the courts virtually a 'third chamber' or the 'super-house of the legislature'. Thus, there is politicisation of the judiciary that undermines the authority of the chosen representatives of the people. On the other hand, it is by virtue of this power that the judiciary can save the people from the onslaughts of the executive or legislative despotism.

### **17.5.3 Independence of the Judiciary**

The enormous powers and functions of the judiciary make the courts responsible for the well-being and protection of the rights of the nation on the whole. Thus, to perform these functions effectively, it is necessary that it should be independent and impartial. Even though in some countries (e.g., Switzerland and the U. S.) judges are elected, in most others they are appointed by the executive. However, once appointed, they cannot be easily removed except by the process of impeachment on the grounds of proven misbehaviour and incapacity. Their salary and service conditions are placed beyond the control of the executive or legislature. While making an appointment, the President is not guided by party considerations, but by merits and capability of the persons concerned. The salaries and allowances of the judges are placed beyond the control of the executive or legislature so that it cannot be altered to their disadvantage. In many countries like India, an oath is administered so that the judges can perform their duties to the best of their ability without fear, favour, affection or ill-will.

In the words of Shri Aiyar, the Supreme Court of India "has more powers than any other Supreme Court in the world." A comparison of the Supreme Courts of India and America shows that if the former has wider jurisdiction with regard to appeals from the lower courts, the latter has advantage over the former with regard to original jurisdiction which, in addition to the settlement of disputes between the units of the federation, extends to all cases relating to ambassadors, consuls, ministers, treaties, naval forces and maritime matters. On the appellate side, the Indian Supreme Court enjoys wider powers than its counter-part which does not deal with appeals in civil and criminal cases except the constitutional ones. The Indian Supreme Court has advisory functions also which the American Supreme Court does not have. Above all, the Indian Supreme Court is a court of record. The American Supreme Court is deprived of these privileges.

Thus, the courts have a very important share in the political process of a country, though this varies with the nature of the political system and the culture of the people. Cooperation and conflict between the real administrators and the honest adjudicators should go hand in hand so that the political system develops further and is not decayed. It is rightly observed: "The courts are the part of the political process and one should stress cooperation as much as conflict. They interact with other parts of the political system not as illegitimate outsiders but as part of the stable ruling political alliance."

#### **Check Your Progress 3**

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

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

I) What are the main functions of a judiciary ?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2) Describe, with reference to the United States, the working of judicial review.

.....  
.....  
.....

3) How is the independence of a judiciary ensured ?

## 17.6 LET US SUM UP

The governance of any country requires the making of laws, their execution and interpretation which is carried out by the legislature, executive and the judiciary respectively.

The executive includes the political executive and the bureaucracy. It implements the laws and directs the administration. In parliamentary democracies, it initiates laws also. Currently, the role of the executive has increased tremendously.

In democracies, the legislature is elected by, and represents, the people. It claims to represent the sovereign will of the people. The legislature may be bicameral or unicameral. Bicameral legislatures are better because they are supposed to represent special interests; to check hasty legislation and, in federal states, to represent the federating units. Legislatures not only make laws but, seek to control the administration and perform some functions of judicial nature. However, recently there has been a decline in the role of the legislature because of party conflict, dominance of the executive, and other reasons.

The judiciary settles disputes and interprets laws and the constitution. It protects individual rights, and is the guardian of laws and the constitution. It has also got the power of judicial review which has led to judicial activism in recent years. All this requires it to be independent and impartial.

Thus, all these organs of government have their own assigned roles and, at the same time, they are also linked to each other. It is upon their harmonious functioning that a political system acquires stability as well as vitality.

## 17.7 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Almond, G. A., Powell, C. B., 1975, *Comparative Politics: A Development Approach* (New Delhi, Amerind Publishing Co.)

Blum, W. T., 1971, *Theories of the Political System* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall).

Crick, B., 1964, *In Defence of Politics* (Harmondsworth, Penguin).

Deutsch, K., 1980, *Politics and Government* (New York, Houghton Mifflin).

Eckstein Harry, Apter, David, eds., 1963, *Comparative Politics* (New York, The Free Press).

## **17.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES**

**Organs of Government :**  
Executive, Legislature and  
Judiciary



### **Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Parliamentary and Presidential governments are two most popular forms of democracy today. While a parliamentary government is based on intimate relationship between the executive and the legislature, separation of powers is the basis of the Presidential System. India and U. K. have a parliamentary form of government where the Head of State is the nominal executive, while the cabinet, in actual fact, exercises real executive functions, and is answerable to the legislature. The United States offers the best example of a presidential form of government, the tenure of the real executive, the President, being fixed.
- 2) Formulation of internal and external policies: enforcement of law, maintenance of order, regulation of currency, declaration of war and making of peace, are some of the functions of the executive. The executive often drafts bills and ensures their enactment into laws. It controls purse, raises revenues and manages economic planning. The Head of State, in exercise of his prerogative of mercy, may pardon the criminals or reduce their sentence. The political executive formulates policies which are then implemented by the civil servants.
- 3) In the highly interdependent world, the executive everywhere tends to become more powerful. Since it largely controls legislation, finance, war and peace, it tends to acquire more powers. Every major crisis enables the executive to assert its authority, and numerous laws passed by the legislature tend to vest more powers in the executive.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Modern democratic legislatures are either unicameral i.e. having only one House as in China where the National People's Congress is the representative of the people and does not share power with any other House, or bi-cameral in which the legislature has two Houses. The U.K., the U.S.A., India, Switzerland etc have bi-cameral legislatures. The lower house is always popularly elected, while the upper house may be nominated as in U.K., or directly elected as in the U.S., or indirectly elected as in India. The U.S. upper house, the Senate, is more powerful than the lower house, namely the House of Representatives. Generally, the lower house (Lok Sabha in India) enjoys more powers than the upper house.
- 2) Legislature's primary function is to enact laws, and adopt budget. In U. K. and India, the legislature exercises direct control over the ministers, as the lower house can remove the Prime Minister. Legislatures also enjoy some elective powers, e.g. the Indian President is elected by the Union Parliament and State Assemblies. Presidents and judges can be removed only through impeachment.
- 3) Old distrust in the executive has been replaced by a new confidence in its leadership. Legislatures have large size; they have to debate numerous issues and are generally over-worked. Party system often allows great powers to the executive which even controls its party members in the legislature. In one-party states, the party dominates all organs of government leading to the decline of legislature.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) To administer justice, decide disputes and punish criminals. In a federal set-up, the centre-state disputes are resolved by the highest courts as in the U.S. and India. Higher judiciary protects the constitution and can annul laws which are violative of the Constitution. Rights of the people are protected by the courts, and for that purpose writs are often issued by the higher courts.
- 2) The judiciary has the power to review and examine laws and executive orders with a view to determining whether or not they are in conformity with the constitution. Laws which violate the constitution are wholly or partially declared void or unconstitutional by the judiciary. The power to declare a law or an executive action invalid and ultra vires of the constitution originated in the U.S. in 1803 in Marbury vs. Madison case. The Indian Supreme Court also frequently exercises this power.
- 3) Judges should be free from executive and legislative control. They should be appointed by the Head of State on merit; should have fixed and long tenure; should not be easily removable; and should get handsome salaries and allowances. The Judiciary in India, the U.S. and most democratic countries enjoys independence. It acts as the guardian of the constitution and the rights and liberties of the people.

---

# UNIT 18 UNITARY AND FEDERAL SYSTEMS: PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN FEDERAL SYSTEMS

---

- 18.0 Objectives
  - 18.1 Introduction
  - 18.2 Distinguishing Features of Unitary and Federal Systems
    - 18.2.1 Purposive Decentralisation
    - 18.2.2 Centralisation
    - 18.2.3 Source of Power and its Arrangement within the System
  - 18.3 Examples of Federal Political Arrangements
    - 18.3.1 The Concept of Federation
    - 18.3.2 Decentralised Union
    - 18.3.3 Condominium
    - 18.3.4 Other Arrangements
  - 18.4 Changing Nature of Federalism
    - 18.4.1 Johannes Althusius on Federalism
    - 18.4.2 American Federalists and the Theory of Dual Federalism
    - 18.4.3 Cooperative Federalism
    - 18.4.4 Interdependent Federalism
  - 18.5 Distribution of Powers in Federations
    - 18.5.1 Legislative Distribution
    - 18.5.2 Distribution of Finances
  - 18.6 Let Us Sum Up
  - 18.7 Some Useful Books
  - 18.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 

## 18.0 OBJECTIVES

---

The main objective of this unit is to tell you about the basic features of unitary and federal systems. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish between unitary and federal systems;
- discuss different types of federal political arrangements;
- describe the distribution of powers in federations; and
- comment on changing nature of federalism.

---

## 18.1 INTRODUCTION

---

The present unit deals with the unitary and federal types of political arrangements. The distinction between the two is often not clear even to specialists and so, an effort has been made here to clearly explain the contrast between the two types. As you will learn, the distinction between the unitary and the federal political systems essentially rests upon the mode of distribution of powers. Then, there are variations within the two systems. More of these are given in the following pages.

## 18.2 DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF UNITARY AND FEDERAL SYSTEMS

There is no universally accepted definition of the term 'unitary' and 'federal'. This is because there have emerged varieties of political arrangements like unions, constitutionally decentralised unions, federations, confederations, federacies, associated states, condominiums, leagues, hybrids etc., which share or combine the structural features of both these two. Also in their actual workings many unitary and federal systems have developed or deliberately included the features of each other.

### 18.2.1 Purposive Decentralisation

One finds 'Purposive Decentralisation' - a process through which the central or the national government transfers its authority to the local/provincial governments in a given jurisdiction - within an otherwise unitary system such as the U.K. and France. Decentralisation may be effected either through formal constitutional amendments, seeking formal and irreversible devolution of powers or through mere executive orders providing for temporary delegation of central authority. Similarly, we notice marked centralisation of powers within federal polities like the U.S.A. and India.

### 18.2.2 Centralisation

Centralisation, in this context, refers to a growth in the ability of the federal government to exercise its authority and control in the areas, which have been traditionally reserved for provincial competence. Centralisation is due to the implied powers, either judicially constructed as in the case of the U.S.A., or as provided in the Constitutions of India and Canada, of federal government to seek national uniformity in policy making by the provinces, especially on subjects like health, education, environment and forest management, water resources trade and economic development etc., which have inter-state implications and pan-national bearings. The federal government does this either through formal transfer of subjects from provincial jurisdictions to concurrent or federal jurisdiction, or through extension of its executive authority to provide guidelines to the provinces as to how to legislate and what to include within the laws framed by the State.

The federal Constitution of Germany has specifically empowered the federal government to enact framework legislation broadly covering the above mentioned subjects for the Legislation of the States. Article 75 of its constitution provides "if the Federation adopts framework legislation, the States are bound to adopt the necessary State statutes within an adequate time frame stipulated by the legislation." Thus, it is on the pretext of seeking minimum uniformity of law and policy-planning that the federal governments in many federal states have encroached upon the autonomy of the federating units.

Yet, we can broadly attempt to differentiate unitary from federal on the basis of varying methods of allocation of powers and its arrangements within the system. But for a neat distinction between the two, we have firstly to look at the source of power.

### 18.2.3 Sources of Power and its Arrangement within the System

Usually within a federal system, it is the written constitution, which allocates powers, authority and competences to each level of government (federal and

regional governments). Competences here refer to the relative autonomy of legislation and execution by a government on the subjects assigned to it by the constitution. It is, therefore, non-centralisation that is the most important feature of a federal system.

Non-centralisation is quite different from decentralisation in the sense that the latter envisages a power-centre, (usually central government) which according to its need, may either devolve or delegate authority to the lower or subordinate units of government, or when the need arises, it may recentralize the power again. Therefore, decentralisation is always conditional and limited. Contrary to this, non-centralisation is a constitution-based diffusion of power among plurality of self-sustaining centres within a federal system. In this mode of distribution, competence of a regional government can hardly be abrogated or taken over by the federal government. Both the levels of government are coordinate authorities enjoying relative independence and autonomy of decision making. Any change in the constitutional schema of distribution of powers can be effected only with mutual consent of each government, and that too through a very complex process of constitutional amendment. Non-centralisation is usually achieved and secured through the doctrine of separation of powers with checks and balances.

On the contrary, centralisation and hierarchy are two essential features of a unitary system. The powers are heavily concentrated within the central or national government. Unlike the federal pre-requisite of a written constitution, the unitary system not necessarily needs a formal written constitution. The source of power is not the constitution, but to draw the U.K. experience, it is the 'King-in-Parliament' from which emanate all the powers. The local governments draw their authority from the central government. Also within a unitary system, powers are arranged hierarchically where each subordinate structure of the government acts as an extended arm of the superior apex authority i.e., the central government. The regional/ local administration enjoys only limited functional autonomy. As a matter of fact, autonomy within a unitary system is a matter of functional convenience, rather being an essential constitutional principle of 'power-sharing' and 'self-rule'. Therefore, the extent of functional autonomy is relative to the degree of administrative-political decentralisation at a given point of time within a unitary system. Administrative decentralisation is one of the mechanisms of devolution through which the central authority 'off-load' some of its functions to the local government for their better management, and to ensure an efficient national service delivery system. Thus, it is only in the 'off-loaded' area where the regional government enjoys autonomy and independence of decision-making.

Another noticeable difference between unitary and federal system lies in the manner and purpose of territorial delineation of administration. While in a unitary system, territorial administration is formed purely from functional perspective and broadly to serve as an agency of the central government, territorial formation of polities within a federal system is intended to accommodate pluralism within a federal state. It is probably, the reason that the territorial units enjoy considerable constitutive autonomy and competences.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

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

- 1) Compare and contrast a unitary political system with a federal one.

.....

## 18.3 EXAMPLES OF FEDERAL POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS

On the basis of the extended meaning of autonomy and self-rule, varieties of political arrangements are brought within the ambit of the study of federalism. This includes firstly, the federations.

### 18.3.1 The Concept of Federation

It is a compounded polity consisting of strong regional governments and a general or central government, each possessing considerable amount of autonomy in the exercise of competences allotted to them by the constitution. Federation is formed on the basis of sharing of state's sovereignty. The examples include well known federations like India, Canada, U.S.A. etc.

### 18.3.2 Decentralised Union

Next to it is the decentralised union which, though primarily a unitary state, include historic sub-national units enjoying considerable amount of local/regional functional autonomy to manage their exclusive identity. Thus, in the U.K. Scotland enjoys considerable amount of autonomy to manage its own legal system, education, health, local administration, banking etc. The other examples of decentralised unions include Japan, Italy, Ukraine, Indonesia, Netherlands etc. Unions, unlike the above two forms of polities, are compounded polities in which constituent units retain their respective integrities not through the system of self-government, but through the general government. New Zealand and Lebanon are important examples of Unions.

### 18.3.3 Condominium

When a territorial political unit with internal self-rule is governed jointly by two or more external states, it is termed as a 'Condominium.' An example of this is the Andorra, which till the other day (1278-1993) functioned under the joint rule of France and Spain.

### 18.3.4 Other Arrangements

While these forms of political arrangements are operative at the national level, confederations, (eg. European Union, Common Wealth of Independent States, etc.); Leagues (for example, the various regional arrangements like the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Arab League, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) etc.); and Joint Functional Authorities like International Labour Organisation (ILO) etc. are arrangement working at the international and trans-regional levels. All these arrangements, work through a joint-decision making process and are formed through a collective desire of individual countries to address jointly the common economic and political interests and motives.

#### Check Your Progress 2

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

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

- 1) What is a federation? Give examples.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) What is a decentralized union? Explain with examples.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Write a short note on other federal political arrangements you know of.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 18.4 CHANGING NATURE OF FEDERALISM

Federalism, originating from the Latin word *foedus*, meaning ‘compact’, has always been an integral part of thoughts on nation-state, democracy, sovereignty, autonomy and constitutionalism. However, there have been varied views on its nature and type.

### 18.4.1 Johannes Althusius on Federalism

The first ever systematic treatment of the subject was provided by the German theorist, Johannes Althusius (1557-1638). In his celebrated work, *Politica Methodice Digesta*, Althusius holds that every human association is formed by a “pactum expresseum vel tacitum” that is, the pact or covenant is the first fundamental principle of ‘living together’, and subsequent formation of a federal union. From this followed the emergence of federalism as an important political principle of organising society and polity.

### 18.4.2 American Federalists and the Theory of Dual Federalism

The next important stage in the development of federalism is the discovery of ‘federal state’ in America by the Federalists - Hamilton, Jay and Madison, who premised American federalism on the concept of a dual federalism. The theory of dual federalism, according to Edward Corwin, represents the synthesis of four axioms:

1. The national government is one of enumerated powers only; 2. Also the purpose which it may constitutionally promote are few; 3. Within their respective spheres, the two centres of government are “sovereign” and hence “equal”; 4. The relation of the two centres with each other is one of tension rather than collaboration.”

As observed by Carl J. Friedrich in his book *Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice*, 1968, the federalist further argued “that in a federal system of

government, each citizen belongs to two communities, that of his state and that of the nation; that these two levels of community should be clearly distinguished and effectively provided each with their own government; and that in the structuring of the government of the larger community, the component states as states must play a distinctive role. Contrary to the earlier notion... the federal system here is not composed merely of states, as is a league, but creates a new community, all inclusive of the citizens of all the states". This stress on the creation of a larger national/political community had over the years led to the emergence of the notion of cooperative federalism.

#### 18.4.3 Cooperative Federalism

Unlike dual federalism, which viewed two governments as separate and coordinate entities, the cooperative federalism viewed two levels of government as mutually complementary parts of a single federal political system. The basic objectives of cooperative federalism have been defined as: (i) maintaining the union; (ii) promoting common welfare of all the citizens; and (iii) seeking joint solution to a common problem. This system is based on the 'internal give and take' between the federal government and the regional governments. But as its working in the Australian, Canadian and American federalism shows, this notion of cooperative federalism caused the tremendous centralisation of powers and subsequent reduction in the autonomy and authority of the regional governments.

#### 18.4.4 Interdependent Federalism

In recent times 'federal theorists like M.J.C. Vile, Daniel J. Elazar, Ronald L. Watts have developed the notion of 'interdependent federalism' in which two governments would neither be fully independent as is the feature of dual federalism, nor would be subordinate to other, as is the case in the cooperative federalism. Thus, M.J.C. Vile in his book *The Structure of American Federalism*, 1961 defines (interactive) federalism as "a system of government in which central and regional authorities are linked in a mutually interdependent political relationship; in this system a balance is maintained such that neither level of government becomes dominant to the extent that it can dictate the decision of the other. Usually, but not necessarily, this system will be related to a constitutional structure establishing an independent legal existence for both central and regional governments, and providing that neither shall be legally subordinate to the other. The functions of government will be distributed between these levels (exclusively, competitively or cooperatively), initially perhaps by a constitutional document, but thereafter by a political process, involving where appropriate the judiciary; in this process, the political interdependence of the two levels of government is of the first importance in order to prevent one level from absorbing all effective decision-making power".

What is stressed here is the fact that federalism as an institutional arrangement is founded on the principles of, to use Daniel J. Elazar's phrase, self rule plus shared rule, "which, involves some kind of contractual linkage of a presumably permanent character that (1) provides for power sharing, (2) cuts around the issue of sovereignty, and (3) supplements but does not seek to replace or diminish prior organic ties where they exist." (*Exploring Federalism*, 1987). Self-rule is permitted exclusively in the matters of local importance, and shared rule is exercised through interactive partnership between two levels of government to take decisions on matters of common interests. This takes out federalism from a mere structural category to a process "by which a number of separate political communities enter into arrangements for working out solutions, adopting joint policies, and making joint decisions on joint problems." (Carl J. Friedrich, *Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice*, (1968). What appears from the above is

that a federal polity is essentially a participatory polity, attempting always to seek equilibrium between two essential principles of 'autonomy' and 'integration'.

### Check Your Progress 3

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

- 1) What were Johannes Althusius' views on federalism?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) What do you understand by Dual Federalism?

.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Explain what is Cooperative Federalism?

.....  
.....  
.....

---

## 18.5 DISTRIBUTION OF POWERS IN FEDERATIONS

---

The federal-political system is operative in 25 countries namely, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Comoros, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Micronesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, St. Kitts-Nevis, Spain, Switzerland, United States of America, Venezuela and Yugoslavia. The manner of distribution of powers varies across these federal systems. The Constitution may either enumerate only the powers of federal government and leave the rest for the states as in the case of U.S.A. or like the Canadian and Indian Federal constitutions, the powers of both the levels of government along with their concurrent jurisdictions can be enumerated. It is also not necessary that legislative divisions of powers will follow a similar division of executive authority. Thus, while in the U.S.A. Canada and Australia, each unit of government has been assigned executive responsibilities in the same fields in which they enjoy legislative competence, the same is not true in the case of Switzerland, Austria and Germany. In these federal systems, the federal government only broadly lays down the uniform framework legislation 'while leaving this to be applied by the regional governments in ways that take account of varying regional circumstances'. The Indian and Malaysian Constitutions also provide for the state administration of federal laws, especially in the areas of shared concurrent jurisdiction.

### 18.5.1 Legislative Distribution

Generally speaking, in most of the federations, matters like foreign affairs, defence and security, transport and communication, major taxing powers and

regulation of inter-state trade, post and telegraph etc. have been kept within the legislative competence of federal government; and matters relating to social affairs like health, education, culture, social development, local self-government, local administration have been kept within the purview of states' legislation.

However, in federations like India, Canada and Australia the respective constitutions put the matters like civil and criminal laws, personal law, administration of Justice, bankruptcy and insolvency, environment and forest management, protection of wild life, higher education, weights and measurement, factories and electricity, immigration and emigrations etc. in the concurrent jurisdiction. On the concurrent list, both levels of government are competent to make laws, and in-case of an inconsistency between the two sets of laws, the federal laws usually prevail. Further, the residuary powers on matters not enumerated in either list may be vested either with the federal governments or with the regional governments. While residuary power is vested with federal governments in Canada, India, Belgium, it rests with the state governments in the U.S.A., Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Malaysia. But in Spain, residuary power is co-shared by the federal and state governments.

### 18.5.2 Distribution of Finances

Most of the federations provide for the collection, sharing and revenue raising powers of the two orders of government. Usually, the federal powers of taxation include income tax (except the agricultural income in the case of India), custom and excise duties and corporation tax. The state powers of taxation include generally, subjects like excise on alcoholic liquors, taxes on agricultural income, estate duty, sale tax on the sale and purchase of goods within the territorial Jurisdiction of a state, and land revenue. However in all the federations, there have occurred vertical and horizontal imbalances in terms of available resources to the states and its constitutional responsibilities to carry out the costly social welfare programmes. To put more sharply, vertical imbalances occur when the constitutionally assigned revenues of both the levels of government do not match with their assigned expenditure responsibility. Horizontal imbalances occur "when the revenue capacities of different constituent units vary so that they are not able to provide their citizens with services at the same level on the basis of comparable tax levels." (R.L. Watts, *Comparing Federal System*, 1999) Horizontal imbalances may also be because of the varying level of development among the federating units due to the variation in their endowments of natural resources, administrative efficiency, and standards of public services.

For correcting these imbalances, a federal constitution usually provides for the fiscal transfer, from centre to states. To begin with let us note the range of fiscal transfers in India. These include:

- 1) levy of duties by the centre but collected and retained by the states;
- 2) taxes and duties levied and collected by the centre but assigned in whole to the states;
- 3) mandatory sharing of the proceeds of income tax;
- 4) permissible participation in the proceeds of union excise duties;
- 5) statutory grants-in-aid of revenues of states;
- 6) grant for any public purposes; and
- 7) grant for any specific public purpose.

(B.P.R. Vithal and M.L. Sastry, *Fiscal Federalism in India*, 2001).

The above transfers are usually made on the basis of the recommendations of the Finance Commission. Horizontal transfer to the states are computed on several

individual criteria such as population, per capita income, level of backwardness, poverty ratio and revenue deficit ratio. Compared to India, the Australian Constitution specially provides for two types of arrangements to correct the horizontal and vertical imbalances. They are:

- i) tax-sharing grants, calculated on the basis of computation of the basic entitlement; the revenue and expenditure disability of each state; and
- ii) specific purpose grant, an important Australian innovation, aimed at financing social schemes like education, health and infrastructure building in the states. These two modes of transfer, besides correcting imbalances, are also intended to equalize the fiscal capacities of each state. On the other hand, the Canadian Federation has embarked on several mechanisms of fiscal transfers. These include:
  - i) Statutory subsidies paid to each province as part of the terms of confederation;
  - ii) Equalisation grants to less endowed provinces;
  - iii) Stabilisation payments on one-time basis;
  - iv) Established programme financing (i.e. national government's contribution to the provinces) of the hospital insurance, medicare and post-secondary education; and
  - v) Specific matching grants to the programmes especially devised by the provincial governments. Similarly, in U.S.A, mechanisms of fiscal transfer include:
    - i) Categorical grants for insuring uniform level of public services provided across the country;
    - ii) Bloc grants, to be used by the states on discretionary basis, for the community development programmes, health, employment and training and other social services; and
    - iii) General revenue sharing as provided in the statute.

In Germany, revenue from income taxes, corporation taxes and turnover taxes belong jointly to the federal government and the states, besides special grants to weak states to ensure minimum level of financial equalisation among the states. The other federations follow either of the above mentioned methods of fiscal transfers.

#### Check Your Progress 4

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

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

- 1) Examine legislative distribution in federations.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- 2) How are financial powers generally distributed in a federation?
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

## 18.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have read about the unitary and federal political systems. It is hoped that now you are in a position to understand the differences between the two types of systems. You have also studied the different types of federal political arrangements: viz, classical federation, decentralised union, condominium etc. Changing nature of federalism has also been touched upon. Thus, dual, cooperative and interdependent federalism have been explained to you. Overall, basic features of unitary and federal systems as well as patterns and trends in the two types of political systems have been explained to you.

## 18.7 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Austin, Granville, *Working A Democratic Constitution: The Indian Experience*, New Delhi: OUP, 1999

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, New Delhi, OUP, 2000

Burgess, Michael, and Alain-G. Gagnon, eds, *Comparative Federalism and Federation: Competing Traditions and Future Directions*, New York, Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Dikshit, R.D., *The Political Geography of Federalism: An Inquiry into Origins and Stability*, New Delhi, Macmillan, 1975.

Duchacek, Ivo D., *Comparative Federalism: The Territorial Dimension of Politics*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, INC, 1970.

Elazar, Daniel J., ed, *Exploring Federalism*, Tucaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1987

\_\_\_\_\_, *Federalism: An Overview*, Pretoria, HSRC, 1995

\_\_\_\_\_, ed, *Federal Systems of the World: A Handbook of Federal, Confederal and Autonomy Arrangements*, 2nd edn., Harlow, Longman Group Limited, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed., *Federalism As Grand Design: Political Philosophers and the Federal Principle*, Lanham, University Press of America. 1987.

Friedrich, Carl J., *Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice*, New York, Praeger, 1968

Khan, Rasheeduddin, *Federal India: A Design for Change*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1992

Unitary and Federal  
Systems: Patterns and  
Trends in Federal Systems

King, Preston, *Federalism and Federation*, London, Croom Helm, 1982.



Rath, Sharada, *Federalism Today: Approaches, Issues and Trends*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1984.

Srinivasavardan, T.C.A., *Federal Concept: The Indian Experience*, New Delhi: Allied Pub., 1992

Watts, Ronald, *Comparing Federal Systems in the 1990s*, 2nd edn., Kingston, Ontario, Queen's University, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1999.

---

## 18.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

---

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 18.2

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Subsection 18.3.1
- 2) See Subsection 18.3.2
- 3) See Subsections 18.3.2 and 18.3.4

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Subsection 18.4.1
- 2) See Subsection 18.4.2
- 3) See Subsection 18.4.3

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Subsection 18.5.1
- 2) See Subsection 18.5.2

---

## UNIT 19 REPUBLICANISM

---

### Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Republicanism as an Antonym of Monarchy
  - 19.2.1 Monarchy as a Form of Government
  - 19.2.2 Evils of Absolute Monarchy
  - 19.2.3 From Monarchy to Republicanism
- 19.3 Republicanism as a Form of Government
  - 19.3.1 Republicanism: Meaning
  - 19.3.2 Republican Form of Government: Its Characteristics
  - 19.3.3 Democracy and Republicanism: Compared
- 19.4 Republicanism: Strengths and Weaknesses
  - 19.4.1 Merits of Republicanism
  - 19.4.2 Weaknesses of Republicanism
- 19.5 Trends in Republicanism
- 19.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.7 Key Words
- 19.8 Some Useful Books
- 19.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

---

### 19.0 OBJECTIVES

---

The objective of this unit is to explain the concept of republicanism as a form of government, to state its chief characteristics, to distinguish it from monarchical system, relate it both to a theory of government implying popular rule and to a theory of freedom implying a system of inalienable rights of the people.

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of republican government;
- distinguish it from monarchical, absolute and dictatorial regimes characteristic of arbitrary rule;
- relate it to a system of democratic and popular rule; and
- assess its strength and weaknesses within the framework of liberal political theory.

---

### 19.1 INTRODUCTION

---

Government ensures administration and administration implies establishment of systematic social relations of external life. Whatever their forms, governments tend to provide an ordered rule for their people. This is as much true about a monarchical system as is about the democratic one. Even dictatorial regimes make claims of giving their people peace, order and administration. What distinguishes numerous forms of government is not the administration they provide to their people which, in fact, every form of government does, but the manner in which they are constituted, the way they relate themselves to their internal structural institutions through which they function, the objectives they are supposed to achieve, and so on.

Political thinkers and scholars have sought to classify governments from time to time. From Aristotle onward, numerous classifications of government have come our way. A passing mention of these categories and classifications may not be out of place: monarchy; aristocracy; polity; monarchy or tyranny; aristocracy or oligarchy; polity or democracy; monarchical (both absolute and constitutional) and republican; secular and theocratic; democratic and dictatorial; parliamentary, presidential or a combination of two; unitary, federal and confederal; liberal, liberal-democratic and socialist-Marxist. Each such form of government explains the way it administers the affairs of its respective people.

The republican government, as one such form refers to a government based on the principles of popular rule, majoritarianism, sovereignty of the people, inalienable rights, limited government, constitutionalism. It is more than an opposite of the monarchical system, though its origins suggest it so. Understood in the modern sense, republicanism is a theory of government on the one hand, and a theory of freedom of the people on the other. It does imply a democratic system in which there is a synthesis of popular rule and individual freedom. It is, in short, a system which may, very aptly, be associated with a variety of liberal political forms including, among others, parliamentary government, presidential system, radical democracy and limited government with responsiveness and accountability as its chief norms.

The strength of republicanism lies in its belief in and concern for democratic values. Its weakness, on the other, lies in its vagueness for it encompasses a variety of governmental forms, which, at times, contradict one another.

The brief sketch as outlined above should make it clear to you that republicanism is a democratic phenomenon related to every form of government, which claims to have adopted a democratic system. Its essence lies in its being accountable and responsible towards those over whom its government extends its control. Its values are i.e. in a system of self-rule, rule through reason, majoritarian principle, and the right of the people to act as sovereign. We will know more about it as we proceed to understand it.

## **19.2 REPUBLICANISM AS AN ANTONYM OF MONARCHY**

The origins of the idea of republicanism may well be traced to its opposition to monarchical regimes. Monarchy, as understood in historical terms, is not merely the rule of a dynasty, a hereditary rule where the prince son/daughters succeeds the father king/queen. It is the rule of a person with absolute powers over whom there is no check or control. It is an unbridled rule with no limitations.

Republicanism arose, if not as protest but as a contrast to absolutist monarchical systems promising people a government with rules or under prescribed rules. As against monarchy, where there is the rule of man, republicanism instead ensures the rule of law. Monarchy lends and extends support to absolutism; republicanism, to constitutionalism.

### **19.2.1 Monarchy as a Form of Government**

Monarchy is the world's oldest political institution. It is a form of government in which the supreme power is actually or nominally lodged in a monarch. "It is absolute or despotic monarchy when monarch's authority is not limited by laws or it is a constitutional monarchy when the monarch's authority is so limited."

Historically, monarchy means the absolute rule of a king or queen. The rise of republicanism is a reaction to the despotic monarchical rule, though the idea of constitutional monarchy is consistent with that of the republican government in its essence, if not in form.

Monarchy is a form of government where a hereditary sovereign rules and is the absolute ruler of the state. What is particular about monarchy is that it is a hereditary regime: a dynasty rules through successive generations. The monarch rules as long as he lives, unless he is killed or dethroned. He rules with absolute powers. There is no one to challenge his authority and none to make him accountable. Thus the idea of monarchy is the idea of absolute rule. It is the idea where the powers of the monarch are said to be derived from God and where he is made accountable only to Him. The doctrine of the Divine Rights of Kings expresses clearly the idea of monarchy as the rule of the despotic monarch.

Monarchy relates the business of administration to a monarch, usually hereditary and dynamical. It works on the principle that administration is the privilege of a particular dynasty and that the monarch alone knows what is best in the interests of the people. This is why the monarchy possesses the power to make laws: usually his word becomes the law; he alone executes them and he alone issues the quantum of punishment for those who violate the laws ordained by him.

The characteristic feature of monarchy is that the powers of the monarch, absolute as they usually are derived not from the people, and hence he is not accountable to his subjects for what he does. The relationship between the monarch and his people, in a monarchy, is the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, between a dominant sovereign and the docile subjects. In a monarchical regime where absolutism is the major feature of administration, the people have only duties and no rights; they live as subjects and not as citizens.

Monarchy means absolute and totalitarian powers of the monarch, absolute in the sense that there are no limitations whatsoever, and totalitarian in the sense that the monarch can issue any law he likes. Monarchy, thus, is another name for totalitarianism and absolutism.

### 19.2.2 Evils of Absolute Monarchy

The absolutistic nature of monarchy has much to its discredit. It has, on its side, only the past. No one advocates it, nor anyone admires it. Its evils have overshadowed its merits. Because monarchy is hereditary in its character, it is, by that standard, ludicrous. The principle of heredity does not guarantee that a ruler would be good. History has thrown numerous monarchs who were eccentric and despotic. It is ridiculous to believe that great wisdom and good character will be passed from one generation to the other. Thomas Paine had very aptly said once: "An hereditary governor is as inconsistent as an hereditary author."

The absoluteness, in a monarchical regime, of the ruler is a great evil. To be absolute in the exercise of power is natural for a person who is not accountable to anyone. Power corrupts such a person and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Tyrannical rule is next to absolute rule. Absolute monarchy thrives on discriminatory system where only sycophancy matters.

Totalitarianism and absolutism go together. The absolute system has to be totalitarian and a totalitarian regime has to be absolute. The monarchical system is both absolute and totalitarian. The monarch has not only powers, which have no limitations, he has the authority which is not only total but complete as well. The

monarch has all powers over his subjects: his command extends to the region he reigns as well as rules.

Absolute monarchy is undemocratic. It is, in fact, an inherently undemocratic concept. The monarch is neither elected by the people nor is he accountable to them. History shows that a monarch would govern a state in an autocratic manner and would wield vast powers, including powers over life and death.

The idea of a ruling monarch is in direct opposition to the idea of democracy. A monarch knows no idea of responsiveness, and accountability. It is the rule of irresponsibility and of a totalitarian regime with fascist tactics.

Though the idea of absolute monarchy no longer exists, yet absolute monarchy has been assailed, and assailed very severely. Its principle of heredity has been condemned and its autocratic rule, damned. All attempts to project monarchy as having only influence and no powers, as in modern times, have not earned much support. Monarchy has become a pre-modernistic idea; Indeed, a medieval one.

### 19.2.3 From Monarchy to Republicanism

The transition from monarchy to republicanism in western societies has not been alike and always smooth. In Great Britain, the Britishers, without declaring themselves as republicans, became democratic by slashing the autocratic powers of the monarch through Magna Carta (1215), Petition of Rights (1628), and Bill of Rights (1689), and by democratisation of the House of Commons, introduction of local self-government acts, and so on. Britain emerged as a democracy without being a republic gradually over a long period of a couple of centuries. In France, on the other hand, the transition to republicanism was through a revolution in 1789 by abolishing monarchy as an institution. In other European countries such as Germany and Italy (1840), for example, the transition to republicanism was due to intense growing nationalism while in Russia, monarchy was abolished through events like the first World War (1914-1918) and the socialist revolution (1917).

Much before the actual transition from monarchy to republicanism, political analysts had vouched for the cause of republicanism. Machiavelli (1469-1527) sought to revive a form of republicanism based on his admiration of the ancient Roman Republic: he argued that a republic was the best way of reconciling tensions between patricians and the people and that liberty with self-government was possible only in a republican form of government. Montesquieu (1689-1755) had condemned monarchy for establishing a tyrannical rule and denying people their rights and liberties: he argued for separation of powers as a guarantee for ensuring a form of parliamentary and liberal government. Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a British-born revolutionary not only opposed the monarchical system fiercely, but also supported fervently the republican cause: he sought to fuse the idea of individual rights with popular sovereignty. James Madison (1751-1836), an exponent of constitutional republicanism, advocated political liberty as a guarantee for a limited form of government: he thought of “power as a check on power”, and accordingly supported the adoption of the principles of federalism, bicameralism and separation of powers in any form of constitutional government.

#### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** i) Use the space provided below each question to write your answer.

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

- 1) Define monarchy and describe its features. (Your answer should be restricted to ten lines.)

- .....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
**2) What is a monarchical form of government? State its evils. (Your answer should be restricted to ten lines.)**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 3) Outline briefly the transition from monarchy to republicanism in the West. (Your answer should be between 5 to 10 lines.)**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### **19.3 REPUBLICANISM AS A FORM OF GOVERNMENT**

Republicanism arose, historically speaking, as a reaction against autocratic and absolute monarchical system. But to define republicanism as an antonym of monarchy is to give it a very limited meaning. As a form of government, republicanism is a government with an elected head of the state together with a

governmental system echoing the will and sovereignty of the people. As a theory of freedom, it ensures individuals' rights, their liberties, rule of law, free press, and an impartial and free system of election. To that extent, republicanism is another name for democracy, but only as one of its form.

### 19.3.1 Republicanism: Meaning

While the concept of monarchy implies the rule of a monarch, hereditarily decided and through an accident of birth only, republic is a form of government headed by one who is not a monarch, but is one who is taken from among the people. While monarchy is dynastical, republic is, largely, elected; while the former goes along with the period the monarch lives, the latter is a time-bound system: a republican ruler heads the state for a particular period of time. While monarch assumes absolute and total powers, the republican ruler exercises powers as given to him under the constitution or under prescribed rules. While monarchy is unresponsive and an irresponsible form of government, republicanism has to function in a responsive and responsible manner. While monarchy knows only duties meant for the monarch's subjects, republicanism lays emphasis on the rights and liberties of the people. Republicanism, thus, is a form of government which is limited in its power, responsive and responsible to the people over which it rules, functions in tune with the public opinion, ensures a system of rights and liberties for the people, regards the ruled as citizens and not merely subjects. It is a "state in which the supreme power rests in the body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by representatives chosen directly or indirectly by them." (See *The Macquario Dictionary*). The central theme of republicanism is its emphasis on popular rule on the one hand, and on a particular form of freedom where individual liberties are ensured.

As distinguished from monarchy, republicanism is a form of government where head of the state is taken from the common people, usually a choice of the people; it is a government of rules, based on and works through constitutionalism; it is an administration where the liberty of the individual is assured and where peoples' interests are taken care of to their advantage. It has grown with democracy and lives along with it. Republicanism fits in with the framework of democracy, though democracy is much more than republicanism.

### 19.3.2 Republican Form of Government: Its Characteristics

The republican form of government means a government by its people acting directly and personally according to rules established by the majority. Lauding such a form of government, Thomas Jefferson had said: "The best form of government that has ever been devised for protecting the rights of the people has been found to be the republican form." He continues: "While not perfect, it nevertheless gives a voice to the people and allows them to correct the course of government when they find it moving in a wrong direction." The republican form of government, by its very nature, and in contrast to the monarchical form, is a limited government, limited in so far it has limited functions (i.e., it is not a totalitarian state) and, therefore, has powers; it is limited in so far as its powers are vertically shared by other levels of government (say, with constituent states, if it is a federation) and horizontally shared among numerous organs of government.

The republican form of government is democratic: democratic in the sense that those who rule are not only representatives of the people chosen either *pro hac vice* or for a limited period of time, but are responsible to those who elect them. It is democratic because it is elective, responsible and a responsive government. It is democratic because it is established by the people: as and when they want to

have it and as and when as they wish to change. It is democratic because such governments, as are republican, embody the will of the people and a desire to execute it. Jefferson wrote to Benjamin Austin: "A representative (and hence republican) government is a government in which the will of the people will be an effective ingredient." The republican government is essentially a democratic government in proportion as every member composing it has his equal voice in the direction of its concerns. What constitutes a republic? Jefferson has a point when he says: "Action by the citizens in person, in affairs within their reach and competence, and in all others by representatives, chosen immediately, and removable by themselves, constitutes the essence of a republic."

The republican form of government does provide a theory of government, a government democratically chosen; a government, which is representative, responsible and responsive; a government based on and expressed through the will of the people. Such a government provides a theory of rights and liberties of the people. Republicanism and the theory of freedom go together. The advocates of republicanism emphasize that the principles of government are founded in the rights of man. Jefferson says: "The republican is the only form of government which is not eternally at open or secret war with the rights of mankind." Quoting Montesquieu, Jefferson opines approvingly: "In republican governments, men are equal; equal they are also in despotic governments; in the former because they are everything; in the latter because they are nothing."

The essential characteristics of a republican form of government may, briefly, be summed up as follows:

- 1) The republican form of government is a government by the people directly or through their representatives;
- 2) It is a government responsible to those who constitute it;
- 3) It is a government representative in character and responsive to the will of the people;
- 4) It is a government limited in functions and limited in power;
- 5) It is a government limited vertically because its powers are shared by regional and local levels of government and limited horizontally because its powers are exercised by legislative, executive and judicial organs of the government;
- 6) Republicanism is a theory of government as stated above; it is also a theory of freedom so far as it makes a provision for the rights and liberties of the people, assures the people their rights and liberties, and promises them their protection.

### **19.3.3 Democracy and Republicanism: Compared**

Democracy does constitute everything that republicanism has but all republicanism is not democracy. The republican form of government is one form of democracy, though it is not necessary that every democratic government has to be republican. Britain provides democracy, but its government is not republican. A number of constitutional monarchies are democratic systems, but they are not republican.

The affinities between democracy and republicanism cannot be denied. Both seek to establish popular sovereignty; both are representative in character; both respect man's personality as the measure of human development; both regard man's rights and liberties as essential for man's progress; both consider elective government responsive to public opinion; both lay emphasis on accountability of the rulers towards the ruled.

And yet, there is much that separates republicanism and democracy. Democracy is the rule of majority over minority lacking the safeguards of rights of the individual and those belonging to minority; republicanism is also the rule of majority, but it is a majority, which is limited, as against unlimited majority in a democracy. Republicanism assures safeguards of the rights of the minority as well as of the individual. Democracy is the rule of omnipotent majority where there is no protection against its unlimited powers; it is unlimited tyranny of majority. Republicanism ensures the rule of majority, the majority which is itself controlled; it is a continually limited government of representative type; one which is changeable through amendment; a government where powers are divided between three organs - legislature, executive and judiciary, each controlling the other two so as to keep each organ in balance with another. Republicanism, as a theory of freedom assures the protection of rights; inalienable individual rights.

There is a basic difference between a republican form of government and a democratic one. The republic is a representative government ruled by law, the constitution for example whereas a democracy is a government (direct or through representative) ruled by majority mob rule according to some. A republic recognizes the inalienable rights of the individual while democracies are concerned only with what can be done for the people, say their satisfaction of wants/needs or say, public good. A republican form of government is one where authority is derived through the election by the people of public officials best suited to represent them; a democracy, being the government of the masses, is one where authority is derived through mass meeting. In republican government, attitude toward law is that of administration of justice in accordance with fixed principles and established rules; in democracies, attitude toward law is that the will of the majority should prevail. Republicanism leads to values such as liberty, reason, and justice while democracy result in whims such as passion, prejudice, and discontent.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** i) Use the space provided below each question to write your answer.

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

- 1) Distinguish between monarchy and republicanism. (Your answer should be restricted to ten lines.)

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

- 2) What do you mean by republicanism? Give its major characteristics. (Your answer should be restricted to ten lines.)

.....  
 .....  
 .....

- 3) Do you agree with the view that the republican form of government is a form of democracy? (Your answer should be restricted to 5 lines.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 4) Compare democracy with republicanism. (Your answer should be restricted to ten lines.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

#### **19.4 REPUBLICANISM: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

---

Republicanism is a 'standard' form of government found throughout the world. Those societies, which have adopted democratic systems, are adopting republicanism more by choice than by compulsion. This is so because

republicanism helps many societies avoid demagogism and dangerous extremes of either tyranny or monocracy. The framers of the US Constitution knew very well the strength of the republican form of government. Article IV, Section 4 of the US Constitution clearly "guarantees to every state in this union a Republican form of government."

#### 19.4.1 Merits of Republicanism

Republicanism has significant merits. Though it is the rule of the majority, yet it is majority which is limited in itself. The chief purpose of republicanism is to control majority strictly, keep majority under control, under rules already established, under constitution already enacted. Republicanism is the rule of the elected members, and to that extent democratic, but these elected representatives are those who are fitted to represent their electorate, those who are elected for a particular period and those who are both accountable and responsive to those who elect them.

The republican form of government is more than a democratic government.

Unlike the democratic government, which is a government of the majority, a republic is a government which is the rule of majority, but it is a majority which rules under the rules. Accordingly, republicanism provides guarantee against tyrannical rule, tyranny of the majority, its absolution at that. It is also a safeguard against the government of the masses, which while working through majority, is prone to and governed by passion and prejudice. That is why in 1798 the Americans were clear that they were founding a republic, and not a democracy. The republican government is a limited government: limited vertically in the sense that powers are shared between the centre and the regional-local units; limited horizontally in the sense that powers are divided between the three branches of the government, working, thus on the principles of both the theory of separation of powers and that of checks and balances. The idea that works behind the republican form of government is that each organ of the government functions without being autocratic and absolute.

The republican form of government provides not only a theory of government, it also provides a theory of freedom. It assures each individual a system of rights by providing safeguards against their encroachments. Individuals and minority are protected effectively in a republican form of government.

#### 19.4.2 Weaknesses of Republicanism

The limitations of republicanism are no less. There is a tendency of the republican form of government going the democratic way. Both the republican and the democratic forms, representative in character as they are, function through a system of political parties. The culture of a party system is not the culture of either republican or democratic one. Political parties, by nature, are strictly disciplined organisations and democratic as they declare to profess or claim, are usually non-democratic. A republican form of government, working through a system of political parties, tends to become a party government that has a majority. All republican systems, including that of the United States, work through and work within the framework of the party system. It is difficult to believe that political parties do not influence the governments, including the republican ones. The republican form of government, like the democratic one, becomes the government run by parties and not by rules: the representatives chosen by the people become the delegates of the political parties they belong; they are effectively accountable to the political parties and not to those who elect them.

Republicanism has become a vague term. It may not be associated with a particular variety of political form, but to a wide variety of forms including the parliamentary form of government within a limited monarchy on the one hand, and

the presidential form of government within a limited government on the other. Some have even equated republicanism with radical democracy.

Republicanism is said to have provided, in addition to a theory of government, a theory of freedom. Its theory of freedom is really confusing, for it advocates a positive theory of freedom at one time, and professes a negative theory of freedom at another.

To a great extent, republicanism is theoretically unclear, and its political prescriptions are uncertain.

### Check Your Progress 3

**Note:** i) Use the space provided below each question to write your answer.  
ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Describe briefly the merits of republicanism. (Your answer should be restricted to ten lines.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) What are, in your opinion, the weaknesses of republicanism? (Your answer should be restricted to five lines.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 19.5 TRENDS IN REPUBLICANISM

Republicanism is a uniquely dynamic concept. It is different than its classical form. The classical republicanism was concerned with the theory of government while present day republicanism adds, to this theory of government, a theory of

freedom. The trend now is to add further to these theories, a theory of citizenship. Republicanism seeks to propose citizenship, which is not only wedded to individuals' rights, but to their duties as well, their obligations toward the state they belong.

Republicanism is moving from its local arena to a national as well as global one. It is now not confined to a regional form, national-level governments are adopting republican form rapidly. The world, it is hoped, will embrace republicanism soon.

Republicanism is demonstrating its moral concern too. To that extent, it is being expressed in civic virtues such as public spiritedness, honour and patriotism. It attracts because it offers an alternative to individual liberalism. It tempts because it espouses a form of civic humanism, re-establishing the public domain as the source of personal fulfillment.

#### Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space provided below each question to write your answer.

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

- I) Explain briefly the emerging trends in republicanism. (Your answer should be restricted to eight lines.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

#### 19.6 LET US SUM UP

---

Republicanism is a theory of government in so far as it seeks to establish a representative, responsible and responsive government. It is a theory of freedom in so far as it makes the provision of rights and liberties of the people, but assures their protection. It is a theory of citizenship in so far as it aims at a type of citizenship, which is wedded to active public life, and the spirit of patriotism ready to sacrifice everything for the nation. In short, republicans lay emphasis on public and popular rule on one hand and on established and already fixed rules through which administration is carried on, on the other hand It is more than a mere democratic government, for it works through laws and not through majority. It is, thus, the rule of majority, which is limited in powers and also in the exercise of powers.

---

#### 19.7 KEY WORDS

---

**Absolutism:** Exercise of complete and unrestricted powers of government.

**Aristocracy:** A government or a state ruled by a privileged class; a government composed of and ruled by the few, supposedly to be superior.

**Bill of Rights:** A charter signed by the English King/Queen in 1689, after the 1688 revolution, which provides that henceforth, kings would rule on the advice of the Parliament.

**Democracy:** Government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

**Dictatorship:** A form of government in which absolute power is exercised by a dictator not accountable to the people.

**Humanism:** A system or mode of thought of action in which human interests, values, dignity and the like are taken to be of primary importance.

**Inalienable Rights:** Rights, which are important, sacred, and those not to be taken under any circumstances save during emergencies.

**Magna Carta:** The great charter of English liberties forced from King John by the English barons in 1215.

**Mobocracy:** Rule of the illiterate, of the mob, of the masses.

**Monarchy:** A government or a state in which the supreme power is actually or nominally lodged in a hereditary monarch.

**Parliamentary Government:** A form of government in which the legislative and the executive organs of the government are closely related to each other, one where the executive is taken from and is accountable to the legislature.

**Polity:** A form of government where people rule for themselves. Aristotle regarded it as the pure form of democracy.

**Presidential Government:** A form of government where the executive is not taken from the legislature and is not accountable to it. The two organs function independent of each other.

**Republic:** A state in which the supreme power rests in the body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by representatives chosen directly or indirectly by them; one where the head of the state is elected directly or indirectly.

**Revolution:** The change in the form of government or in the life of the people in a society is called a revolution.

**Secularism:** A form or a system where religion and politics are separated from each other; one where religion has no role in politics.

**Theocracy:** A form or a system where religion dominates over politics; government comes to be controlled by the fundamentalists.

**Totalitarianism:** A form of government or a state where the ruling class does every task. Such a system leads, usually to an authoritarian rule.

**Tyranny:** A form of government where the ruler rules in an autocratic manner without any regard for rules/regulations.

---

## 19. 8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

---

Lerner, R. (1987) *The Thinking Revolutionary : Principle and Practice in the New Republic*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Oldfield, A. (1990) *Citizenship and Community: Civic Republicanism and the Modern World*. London and New York: Routledge.

Pettit, P. (1997) *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

## 19.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

---

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) See Sub-section 19.2.1
- 2) See Sub-section 19.2.2
- 3) See Sub-section 19.2.3

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) See Sub-section 19.3.1
- 2) See Sub-section 19.3.2
- 3) See Sub-section 19.3.3
- 4) See Sub-section 19.3.3

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) See Sub-section 19.4.1
- 2) See Sub-section 19.4.2

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) See Section 19.5

---

# UNIT 20 PARTY SYSTEMS

---

## Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Origin of Party Systems
  - 20.2.1 The Human Nature Theory
  - 20.2.2 The Environmental Explanation
  - 20.2.3 Interest Theory
- 20.3 Meaning and Nature
- 20.4 Functions of Political Parties
- 20.5 Principal Types of Party Systems
  - 20.5.1 One Party Systems
  - 20.5.2 Two Party Systems
  - 20.5.3 Multi-Party Systems
  - 20.5.4 Two Party vs. Multi-Party Systems
- 20.6 A Critique of the Party System
- 20.7 Whether Party-less Democracy is Possible?
- 20.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.9 Key Words
- 20.10 Some Useful Books
- 20.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

---

## 20.0 OBJECTIVES

---

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

- recall the origin of party system;
- explain the meaning and nature of political parties;
- describe the functions of political parties;
- list out various types of party system;
- evaluate the merits and demerits of various kinds of party systems; and
- explain the drawbacks as well as indispensability of party system in a democracy.

---

## 20.1 INTRODUCTION

---

The role of party system in the operation of democratic polity is now generally well recognized by Political Scientists and politicians alike. Democracy, as Finer observes, "rests, in its hopes and doubts, upon the party system." In fact, as democracy postulates free organization of opposing opinions or 'hospitality to a plurality of ideas' and political parties act as a major political vehicle of opinions and ideas, party system is the *sine qua non* of democracy. Without party, the electorate would be highly diffused and atomized, and opinions too variant and dispersed. The existence of party-system is, therefore, necessary to bring public opinion to focus and frame issues for the popular verdict. It is, therefore, very useful and interesting for students of Comparative Politics to understand the origin, meaning, various kinds and merits and demerits of the party system.

## 20.2 ORIGIN OF THE PARTY SYSTEMS

Political Scientists have offered several explanations for the origin of the party system. These explanations can be broadly clubbed under three categories as discussed below:

### 20.2.1 The Human Nature Theory

Under this category, three kinds of explanations have been put forward for explaining the origin of the party system. Firstly scholars like Sir Henry Maine argue that what causes parties to rise is the characteristic tendency of human nature towards combativeness. In other words, human beings form parties to give organized expression to their combative instinct.

The second category of explanation under the human nature theory identifies the human temperament as the cause of the emergence of political parties. To put it differently, the diverse temperaments of individuals lead them to form different parties. For instance, while persons having liking for the established order join right of the political divide, others opposing the existing order join left of the political spectrum. In other words, those who do not support change in existing system form one party, and those who want reforms and changes get together in another party.

Third explanation concerning the human nature of origin of parties runs in terms of the charismatic traits of political leaders. Since the dormant masses need leadership to articulate their latent feelings, formation of a political party depends upon the availability of dynamic political leadership who can inspire masses to work towards achieving the goals of a particular party.

### 20.2.2 Environmental Explanation

In addition to the above-mentioned explanations, considerable data is available to show the role of the socio-economic environment in the evolution of the party system. The modern democratic party system, for instance, is the result of at least two significant political developments: the limitation of the authority of the absolute monarchy and the extension of the suffrage to virtually all the adult population. It is thus not surprising to find the historic roots of the party system both in the struggle of the legislature to limit the king's prerogative and in the development of groups within the expanded electorate taking sides in the battle or demanding recognition of their interests. By 1680 the public policy of Britain had become the joint concern of both King and Parliament, and the terms 'Whig' and 'Tory' were commonly applied to those who, respectively, attacked and supported royal policy.

### 20.2.3 Interest Theory

As usual, while the above-mentioned explanations are partly correct, no single explanation is adequate or completely true. Combativeness, for instance, is only one of the various motivations of human behaviour. Similarly, age is an uncertain element as an indicator of political attitude and dynamism of political leader is not permanent.

In view of the inadequacies of the aforesaid explanations regarding the origin of the party system, the "interest theory" is advanced as a widely recognized hypothesis. This theory is based on the basic assumption that various parties are

formed on the basis of various interests. In other words, parties serve as convenient agencies for the expression of individual and group interests. The nature, extent and degree of an individual's political activities are motivated by the range of interests he develops. These interests grow out of interaction of his/her personality with his/her cultural environment. Birth, education or a chance experience may, thus, determine an individual's interest which, in turn, may determine party affiliations.

While the 'interest theory' recognizes the significance of economic interests in influencing an individual or group's decision to join a particular party or combination of parties, this theory does not agree with the Marxist assumption of economic determinism and its concomitant dichotomy of social classes. In fact, to reduce social tensions to two embattled groups of "haves" and have-nots" all along the economic line is to oversimplify a complex phenomenon. One may, therefore, argue that the human beings tend to support and vote for the political party that hold the prospect of achieving their desired economic as well as socio-cultural objectives.

### **20.3 MEANING AND NATURE**

---

Political party is a group of people that seeks to get its candidates elected to public offices by supplying them with a label-a "party identification"-by which they are known to the electorate. This definition is purposefully broad so that it will include both familiar parties (Democratic and Republican in the US for instance) and unfamiliar ones (Whig, Libertarian, Socialist Worker) and will cover periods in which a party is very strong (having an elaborate and well disciplined organization that provides money and workers to its candidates) as well periods in which it is quite weak (supplying nothing but only the labels to its candidates).

This definition suggests three political arenas in which parties may be found. A party exists as label in the mind of voters, as an organization that recruits and campaigns for candidates, and as a set of leaders who try to organize and control the legislative and executive branches of government.

A careful look at the above-mentioned meaning of political party shows its certain hallmarks that distinguish it from similar groups such as temporary organizations, interest groups or factions, etc. For instance, temporary political organizations like Food Price Committee or Famine Resistance Committee, etc., are formed for the single purpose of supporting or opposing a particular temporary issue. Political parties, on the other hand, have some degree of permanence. Secondly, political parties are the only associational groups that are both open to all (at least in theory) and have very wide interests. This is because of the fact that they concern themselves with problems of government and cannot concentrate on specific matters. They are open to all, because they try to enlist the support of as many members of the polity as possible. It is in this context that a political party is different from interest and pressure groups which work only for the advancement of the cause of those groups.

Thirdly, parties must have definite aims and objectives. The objectives are often a mixture of ultimate and immediate purposes. Party programmes contain ideas about law and government, ideas about the shape of political things to come and each party seeks to focus its own brand of political ideas. Fourthly, a recognition of material advantages that go with the securing of the power of government, forms a part of party programme. In fact, as we see in India today more often than not political parties give priority to capturing power though they do this in the name of ideology like opposing communalism. In this sense as well, political

parties are different from interest or pressure groups as the latter do not nurse the constituencies for competing at the polls to form the government. A political party is thus a coalition of group interests pursuing general political policies. Pressure groups, on the other hand, are the living 'public' behind the parties. Like interest and pressure groups, and unlike political parties, factions are also not organized for political purposes. But at the same time they do not possess any continuous stable organizations. Factions may thus be characterized as a group of persons serving sectional interests within a political party rather than aggregate interests which parties usually champion for winning elections.

As the idea of a common interest and national unity sustains the constitutional appeal to the polls, the logic of party system rejects the Marxian doctrine of class struggle. This implies that parties transcend class-barriers and sectional interests by mutual recognition of rights in the sense that in spite of their differences, political parties do not disagree on every thing. On the basic features of the system to which they belong, there must be a consensus. Political parties may thus be defined as a group consisting of cross-sections of human beings, more or less stable and organized, with the objective, in accordance with the constitution, of securing or maintaining for its leaders the control of a government, and of giving to members of the party, through such control, ideal and material benefits and advantages.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

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

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

- 1) Discuss briefly the human nature theory of the origin of party system.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) Define political parties and distinguish between political parties and pressure groups.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

## **20.4 FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

---

Parties contribute to democratic government through the functions they perform for the political system. These functions can broadly be divided under six categories : Firstly, political parties unite sectional interests, bridge the geographical differences, and induce cohesion. In other words, various interests are aggregated through the instrumentality of parties. This ensures both order and system maintenance.

Secondly, political parties contribute to democratic government by nominating candidates for election to public office. In the absence of parties, voters would be confronted with a bewildering array of self-nominated candidates, each seeking a narrow victory over others on the basis of personal friendships, celebrity status or name. Parties minimize this danger by setting up their candidates in different constituencies. They carry out campaigns to win elections. They also defray the cost of contesting elections where the candidate is a poor person.

Again, political parties help democratic government by structuring voting choice-reducing the number of candidates on the ballot to those who have realistic chance of winning. Parties that have won sizeable portions of the vote in past elections are likely to win comparable portions of the vote in future ones also. This discourages non-party or non-serious candidates for running for the office. This in turn focuses the election on the contest between parties and on candidates with established records, which reduces the amount of new information that voters need in order to make a rational decision.

In addition, parties also help voters choose candidates by proposing alternative programmes of government action in the form of party manifestos. The specific policies advocated in an election campaign may vary from candidate to candidate and from election to election, the types of policies advocated by candidates of one party nonetheless usually tend to differ from those proposed by candidates of other parties. In the case of the US, for example, even though the neutrality of the names of major political parties, namely, Democratic and Republican suggests that they are undifferentiated in their policies, in reality, however, these parties regularly adopt very different policies in their platforms.

Besides, parties help co-ordinate the actions of public officials. A government based on the separation of powers like that of the United States, divides responsibilities for making public policy. The President and leaders of the House and Senate are not required to cooperate with one another. Political parties are the major means for bridging the separation of powers, of producing co-ordinated policies that can govern the country effectively. Individuals of the same party in the presidency, the House, and the Senate are likely to share political principles and thus to cooperate in making policy. In a parliamentary political system, where the formation and continuance of the real executive, i. e., the Council of Ministers, depends on the support of the majority in legislature, political parties perform the task of disciplining the members of the majority to keep them united for providing the life line support to the government. This role of political parties has, in fact, made them informal governments in democracies as the powers of the legislature has now been usurped, to a great extent, by political parties. Though victory is certainly the first commandment of a political party, in a democracy defeat of party also does not mean its demise. In that case, a party functions as a critic and watchdog of the government's policy. Political parties thus play an extremely significant role in democracies. While, on the one hand, they have to maintain and strengthen the structure of democratic norms and values; on the other, they have to secure maximal community mobilisation for social and economic development. Political parties have thus to induce both political and socio-economic development.

## 20.5 PRINCIPAL TYPES OF PARTY SYSTEMS

As political parties represent various opinions in a democracy, a variety of political parties should characterise democratic system. In reality, however, number of viable parties differ from country to country in accordance with legal requirements and peculiar circumstances obtaining in a particular country. In Great Britain and

the United States, for example, a two-party system prevails, while in majority of countries including India and France, multi-party system has come into existence. On the other hand, in authoritarian and Communist countries like China one-party system operates. It, therefore, appears useful to examine the relative merits and demerits of these types of party systems.

### 20.5.1 One Party Systems

The one party or single party system is found upon the assumption that the sovereign will of the state reposes in the leader and the political elite. This authoritarian principle found expression first in monarchies, later in dictatorships and more recently in some democracies. As the dictatorship needs a monopoly of power for its survival, it abolishes all political parties. Though elections are conducted even in such a regime if only to show the façade of popular support, the voter's choice is limited to only one candidate.

There may be some variations in the single party system prevailing in different countries, but some of the common features of dictatorial parties in these countries make them unique. These features are : (1) Such party is an official party in the sense that it has a monopoly and is led by the same persons who rule; (2) membership of such a party is usually made an essential requirement for acquiring at least important government jobs; (3) this kind of party supervises the governmental efforts to ideologically indoctrinate peoples; and (4) it is characterized by its elite personality. The essential function of one-party system thus is not to elicit decisions from the mass electorate on the big issue of politics, but to ensure discipline and obedience among the people. In its organization and methods, it is more like an army than a political party.

Obviously, therefore, a one-party system becomes necessarily totalitarian. As the sole operator of a political system, the party extends its authority everywhere. The general policy is decided by the dictates of the party. Every word the party declares is, like the Delphic oracle, taken to be true. The source of all laws is the party, and no aspect of individual and social life is immune from its potential control. Not surprisingly, a single-party system involves the abolition of freedom of speech and expression, press and association. Accordingly, the line of distinction between society and the state is blurred and the latter completely swallows up the former. This type of party system was found in Fascist Italy under Mussolini who assumed power in 1922 and systematically destroyed all parties except his own Fascist Party. In Germany, Hitler came to power in 1933 and destroyed all opposition. In 1934, the party purged itself of scores of prominent members of the party by shooting them down under the pretence that they were resisting arrest. Similarly, there was only Communist Party rule in former USSR and there were several purges between 1936 and 1938 by the Communist Party.

Single mass parties have, of course, come to power in some of the Afro-Asian states in the post-colonial era. These countries include Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Turkey and Mexico, etc. In Turkey, for instance, the People's Republican Party, operated from 1923 to 1946 without killing democracy. Tanzania under Julius Nyerere, who founded African National Union, is another example of single-party democracy. In that country, though TANU was the only recognized party, yet voters did have a choice of candidates from within that party as in each constituency more than one TANU candidate was allowed to contest. In Kenya, the government banned the only opposition party, Kenya African People's Union in 1969, but allowed the members of that party to compete in elections.

One can, therefore, divide one-party system into two sub types : (1) authoritarian one-party systems; and (2) non-authoritarian one-party systems. On the whole,

however, the emphasis of a one-party system is proverbially on the side of authoritarianism. It proclaims its own brand of philosophy and a peculiar way of life to which the whole society is forced to conform. As Barker observes, "The democratic criticism the one-idea State is not a criticism of its object.....it is a criticism of its whole process of life." In fact, the monopolisation of legality that empowers a party to be the sole custodian of truth spells a grave danger for civilisation itself.

### **20.5.2 Two Party Systems**

A two-party system is one where only two parties, despite the presence of other parties, have substantial support of the electorate and expectation of forming the government. Under this system, the majority of the elected candidates at a given time belong to any one of the two major parties which form the government, while the other party remains in the opposition. In such a system, there may exist more than two parties, but actual or likely transfer of power takes place between two giant parties only. The United States and the United Kingdom provide good examples of two-party system. In the former, the Democratic and Republican parties are two giant parties. In the UK, the transfer of power takes place between the two major parties, the Labour and the Conservative.

There are, of course, certain differences between the American and British party systems. While the American parties are not ideologically very much different from each other—they are broker-bargaining parties to the point that each party achieves a basically similar political consensus—the British parties, though also pragmatic, are, generally speaking, ideologically distinct from each other.

Recognising these differences the two party system may be divided into (a) indistinct two-party system in the US, and (b) distinct two-party system in Britain.

### **20.5.3 Multi-Party Systems**

A multi-party system is one in which more than two major parties exist, who struggle with each other for power but no party can alone secure absolute majority to rule. In countries like India and several countries on the Continental Europe, such a system exists, though in a variety of forms.

One can discern two kinds of multi-party systems from the point of view of stability of government : (a) unstable multi-party-systems; and (b) working multi-party systems. As its name indicates, the former does not provide stability. India today provides one of the best examples of this, where recurring 'hung' Parliaments due to plethora of parties has caused political instability at the union level since 1996. France under the Third and Fourth Republics provides another example of this kind of party system, where governments formed by coalition of parties rose and fell with dismaying regularity. Italy provides yet another example, where hardly any party since the Second World War has been able to win a majority of the seats in the Italian Parliament.

The working multi-party systems, on the other hand, behaves like two-party system and thereby tend to provide stability to government, even though they have more than two major political parties. Former West Germany, before the rise of the Social Democratic Party as the government party, had characteristics of a two-party system as two of the three major parties, working together, provided the government and the Social Democrats remained in the opposition. In Norway, Sweden, Belgium and Israel also the existence of various parties have not caused instability.

#### 20.5.4 Two Party vs. Multi-Party Systems

Democracy has functioned as successfully in multi-party systems as in two-party systems. There are, however, certain relative advantages and disadvantages of a particular system. To begin with, the supporters of multi-party system argue that : (a) it more effectively corresponds to the division of public opinion especially in a plural society like India; (b) it represents and satisfies the aspirations of diverse interest groups; (c) under this system, a voter can choose among more parties and candidates than available under the two-party system; (d) it reduces the fear of absolutism of the majority; and finally (e) it is more flexible because under this system groups can be freely organized, can unite and separate in accordance with the exigencies of the circumstances.

In theory the multi-party system, has much in its favour, in practice not so much. As we see in India today, inability of any single party to command absolute majority and consequent inevitability of forming coalition government led to the crisis of stable government in India. The members of the Council of Ministers instead of working under the leadership of the Prime Minister, seek guidance from their party bosses and even a single member of Parliament tries to blackmail the government by threatening to withdraw its support. Not surprisingly, the government does not find enough time to devote attention to the task of governance as it remains busy with keeping its partners in good humour even at the cost of national interest. The major party is also forced to abandon its electoral pledges to cobble a majority in the lower house of legislature. The Cabinet in consequence comes to represent, not a general body of opinions, but a patchwork of doctrines leading to a gap between the electorate and the government.

Notwithstanding all these attempts, such a government falls sooner than later as it is kept hostage by disparate elements trying to extract maximum pound of flesh from the government. Once the government finds it impossible to concede their absurd demands, the dissident party withdraws support from the government as the Congress Party (1997) and All India Anna Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) (1999) have done in India in recent years forcing elections at the cost of great loss to the nation. Government instability and multi-party systems are thus twins. Again, as there are several parties vying with one another, there is no organized opposition and it is not possible to predict which parties are going to constitute the government after the fall of the predecessor. Finally, the multi-party system intensifies the complexity of choice. The general mass of electorate are bewildered by the presence of a multitude of parties. Laski, therefore, concludes that the multi-party system "is fatal to government as a practical art."

On the other hand, the supporters of two-party system argue that it enables the people to choose their government directly at the polls as voter is not perplexed by a multiplicity of candidates and he can simply opt between the two. Secondly, it provides unity of policy in the government since the party in power does not have to depend upon any other. This facilitates effectiveness of the government. Thirdly, two parties hold each other in check and prevent either from being too extreme, since each party shall try to win over the supporters of the other and to appeal to independent voters. Fourthly, as democracy is supposed to be guided by the public opinion, the two-party system provides an ideal condition for debating the issues between two opposite camps. Laski, therefore, observes, "a political system is more satisfactory, the more it is able to express itself through the antithesis of two great parties."

But the two-party system has to pay certain price for the stability provided by it. This system implies that there are only two schools of thought in a country. In

reality, however, there is always a variety of opinions and ideas present in process of political thought and discussion. This is seldom recognized in a two-party system. A certain artificiality is thus inevitably introduced into this system leading to the establishment of vested interests in public opinion which is best illustrated by the American spoils system. In addition, the two-party system brings about the decline of legislature and paves the way for cabinet dictatorship. The party in power backed by a solid majority inside the legislature reduces the latter to its play-thing.

In view of the above-mentioned advantages and disadvantages of the multi-party and two-party systems, it is not prudent to lay down a general rule concerning the desirability of a particular type of party system in all countries. As such the merits and demerits of the various party systems need to be seen in the context of various social, economic and historical forces at work in a given country. The whole world need not be patterned according to English or American way of life. In fact, what is most crucial in this regard is the nature of political culture. If the splintering process in the multi-party structure operates within a broad framework of normative and institutional consensus, the party structure is not likely to experience enormous strain as we find in the case of Scandinavian countries.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

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

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

- 1) Discuss the role of political parties in a democracy.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

- 2) Critically evaluate the merits and demerits of various types of party systems.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

---

## **20.6 A CRITIQUE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM**

---

In recent years the party system has become the object of much criticism almost everywhere. Firstly, under this system the perpetual struggle for political power turns the legislature into a battle field and in the process national interests are ignored. Secondly, it encourages insincerity as specious issues are often raised to divert public attention. Thirdly, parties tend to become autonomous in the sense that principles and national interests are subordinated for the sake of winning elections. Fourthly, parties unnecessarily extend national political issues to local

elections. Fifthly, the practice of rewarding party members, known as the spoils system in the US, constitutes a dereliction from principles. Sixthly, "party spirit is accused of debasing the moral standards", as scruples are sacrificed at the altar of party interest. Seventhly, as parties have to mobilise funds for contesting elections, they have to reward the donors after winning the elections leading to corruption. Finally, parties are often run by leaders and their small cliques in the name of masses thereby frustrating the will of the people for better government.

## **20.7 WHETHER PARTYLESS DEMOCRACY IS POSSIBLE ?**

The aforesaid criticisms notwithstanding, political parties are indispensable in modern democracies. If democracy is regarded as a government by the people, then political parties must be accepted as a necessary institution. Parties act as the major political vehicle of opinions and ideas by framing issues for popular verdict. Parties also bridge economic and geographic gaps of sectionalism and seek a compromise on public policy. Besides, parties are eminent educators as they bring down political issues to the common people. The party system also ensures responsibility as the opposition parties keep a constant vigil on the government. Parties are thus the only means through which the people, who are ultimate political sovereign, can control the government. The party system alone provides a method of securing a change of government by constitutional and peaceful means. That is why, despite the strong disliking of the framers of the American Constitution, party system emerged in the US within a few years of its operation. The talk of party-less democracy advocated by Indian leaders like Jay Prakash Narayan is nothing but an utopia.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

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

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

- 1) Examine the drawbacks of the party-system

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- 2) Explain why party-less democracy is not possible.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 20.8 LET US SUM UP

A political party is an organization through which individuals and groups work to secure political power and, if successful, to translate those policies and programmes into reality. They have come into existence due to several factors that include human instinct of combativeness, their temperamental differences, dynamic leadership, social and political changes like limitations imposed on the monarchy and extension of adult suffrage as also divergent interests of the people.

There are three principal kinds of party systems, namely, single party system, two-party system and multi-party system. While one-party system is generally regarded anti-democratic, bi-party and multi-party systems have their respective advantages and disadvantages. What is crucial therefore is the political culture of a country that determines the suitability of a particular kind of party system for that country. While the party system has certain drawbacks, it is essential for the working of a democracy as parties stand between the electorate and the government.

## 20.9 KEY WORDS

- Political Party** : A group operating to secure the control of a government.
- Party System** : A political configuration that exists in a country as a result of legal requirements and long term influence on number and strength of parties.
- Totalitarian System** : Where a single party rules at the cost of individual freedom and democracy.
- Political Culture** : The sum-total of attitudes, beliefs, norms and values of the people towards the political system and political issues.

## 20.10 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

M. Duverger, *Political Parties* (New York: Wiley, 1954)

Jean Blondel, *An Introduction to Comparative Government* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969)

S. E. Finer, *Comparative Government* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1970)

H. Eckstein and David E. Apter, *Comparative Politics*, (London, 1963)

Roy C. Macridis and Bernard Brown, *Comparative Politics* (Dorsey, 1964)

Amal Ray and Mohit Bhattacharya, *Political Theory: Ideas and Institutions* (Calcutta : The World Press, 1994), chapter 27.

## 20.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Three kinds of explanations are given, (a) tendency of human nature towards combativeness - people from parties to give organised expression to their

combative nature; (b) diverse temperaments of individuals lead them to form different parties - people with similar thinking get together; (c) charismatic nature of political leaders bring followers together.

- 2) A party is a group of people organised to seek political power through electoral process. Pressure groups are groups of people seeking protection of interest of their members. They do not contest elections, and do not seek political power.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Political parties unite sectional interests; they contribute to democratic government by nominating candidates for public offices; they impart political education; they rule, if in majority or offer constructive criticisms if in opposition.
- 2) Single party systems often is used in totalitarian systems and destroys freedom of people. Two-party system provides the alternatives to voters, gives stability to government. But, it pays a price for stability as it implies that there are only two schools of thought. Multiparty system creates political instability, but brings out different shades of opinion.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) Turns legislature into a battle field; principles of parties and national interest are often subordinated to factional interests; moral values are often debased, big donations made by parties lead to use of corrupt practices.
- 2) Parties are guarantees of free democratic governance; bridge gaps between sectional interests and ensure responsibility in administration.