

CHAPTER 4 – ELECTORAL POLITICS

Election

An election is a process through which people choose their representatives at regular intervals.

What makes an election democratic?

- Everyone should have one vote and every vote should have equal value.
- Parties and candidates should be free to contest elections and should offer some real choice to the voters.
- Elections must be held regularly after every few years.
- The candidate preferred by the people should get elected.
- Elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner where people can choose as they really wish.

What is system of elections in India?

General Election

- Elections are held in all constituencies at the same time, either on the same day or within a few days.

By-election

- Sometimes election is held only for one constituency or two to fill the vacancy caused by death or resignation of a member.

Electoral Constituencies

- The country is divided into different areas based on population for the purpose of elections which are called electoral constituencies.
- For Lok Sabha elections, the country is divided into 543 constituencies.
- Similarly, each state is divided into a specific number of Assembly constituencies.

Reserved Constituencies

- Some constituencies are reserved for people who belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Voter's List

- The list of people who are eligible for voting is prepared by the Election Commission of India before election.
- In India, all the citizens aged 18 years and above has the right to vote, regardless of his or her caste, creed, colour, religion or gender.

Nomination of Candidates

- Anyone who can be a voter can also become a candidate in elections.
- However, minimum age of in order to be a candidate the minimum age is 25 years.

Election Campaign

- The campaigns take place for a two-week period between the announcement of the final list of candidates and the date of polling.

Polling and Counting of Votes

- The final stage of an election is the day when the voters cast or ‘poll’ their vote.

What Makes Elections in India Democratic?

Independent Election Commission

- In India, elections are conducted by an independent and very powerful Election Commission (EC) which enjoys the same kind of independence that the judiciary enjoys.

- The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is appointed by the President of India.

→ But once appointed, CEC is not answerable to the President or the government.

Acceptance of election outcome

- The ruling parties routinely lose elections in India both at the national and state level.

- In India about half of the sitting MPs or MLAs lose elections.

Challenges to free and fair elections in India

- Candidates and parties with a lot of money may not be sure of their victory but they do enjoy a big and unfair advantage over smaller parties and independents.

- In some parts of the country, candidates with criminal connection have been able to push others out of the electoral race and to secure a ‘ticket’ from major parties.

- Some families tend to dominate political parties; tickets are distributed to relatives from these families.

- Very often elections offer little choice to ordinary citizens, for both the major parties are quite similar to each other both in policies and practice.
- Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantage compared to bigger parties.