
UNIT 6 STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH GOVERNANCE*

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Define democracy;
- Enumerate the features of Constitution of India that strengthen democracy;
- Explain the concept of governance and its operationalisation ; and
- Discuss various measures taken for strengthening democracy through governance.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1947, India became nation of equals and chose to be a democratic State. It ordained itself to have a government by popular choice by giving keen attention to the existing melodies and pitfalls in socio-economic arena and to rectify the same through various public policy measures. Our founding fathers decided that in such a diverse country, all aspirations needed to be heard and reconciled. India since Independence has taken a number of measures to ensure growth and development of the country. The efforts taken immediately after independence in 1947 have given many positive results. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country has increased, industrial production went up along with developments in health, education and other areas. The population of India in 1947 was 340 million. Only 12 per cent of the population in India was literate in 1947 which was around 41 million people. According to 2011 Census, India's population is 121 crore and the literacy level has reached 73 per cent of its population.

India's Gross Domestic product (GDP) in 1950 was \$30.6 billion and this increased to \$2.54 trillion in 2017. It is now the fifth largest economy in the world. India has accounted

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for only 3 per cent of the World's Gross Domestic Product (WGDP) at the time of Independence. India now accounts for 8.5 per cent of WGDP (source IMF) in 2017. It has produced about 50 million tonnes of food grains in 1947. Now there is a fivefold increase in food grains production.

At the time of Independence, the incidence of poverty in India was about 80 per cent or about 250 million. In 2017, the number of people below the poverty line (consuming less than 2,200 calories a day) was around 269 million. The percentage of people who are below the poverty line has come down to 27.5 per cent in 2015-16. By looking at the above data, one can aver that, India is progressing steadily in every field. In this situation, it is significant for the learners to appreciate the contribution of governance towards strengthening democracy and development. In subsequent sections, we shall discuss about how democracy has been strengthened through governance. We shall now first define democracy and explain its features.

6.2 DEMOCRACY: DEFINITION AND FEATURES

Democracy is a system of government under which people either directly or through their representatives govern the country. The representatives of the people of various institutions such as parliament, state assemblies and local self governments get elected at periodic intervals in a democratic State. Democracy considers 'will of the people' as supreme. Apart from exercising their political power, all citizens are considered as equals and they have freedom to exercise their choice to participate in development activities in the chosen field such as economy, politics, education etc. Also the citizens get an equal opportunity to get access to education, become learned, and informed by giving constructive criticism to government or their representatives. Learned citizens are an asset to the country because they can contribute to its overall development.

In a democratic State, citizens on attaining minimum required age get an equal opportunity to vote and contest in the elections. Regular elections, freedom of speech, participation in the political activities and expression of opinion and rights are also significant features of the democracy. The rights of the individual are not about exercising their power during election, it encompasses the right to discuss, give opinion and participate in a sustained manner. Free discussion, association and periodic elections make democracy stronger and successful. Democracy provides an opportunity for political participation, political equality and right to people when situation demands to choose alternative government. In a democratic set up every individual in the society shall be allowed to express their opinion. At the same time, everyone in the democratic space is expected to respect each other's opinion. It is the duty of the law-making institution to make necessary laws for every citizen to enable them access education, required health facilities, freedom to use common resources, ensure equality between men and women and other genders, equal opportunity to work, freedom from exploitation and so on. Apart from getting rights, it is important for the citizens to discharge their duties and responsibilities. Participation in the governance process, exercising adult franchise, fulfilling responsibilities and getting required education makes democracy stronger. The political parties, civic organisations, pressure groups and so on provide space for individual to be part of it where they can represent and share their concerns and opinions.

There has been initially some skepticism among political thinkers about the sustainability of democracy in countries which are multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious nature. According to J.S. Mill, "democracy is next to impossible in multi-ethnic societies and completely 'impossible in linguistically divided countries". Robert Dahl opined that "the widespread poverty and illiteracy are anaethema to 'stable democracy'" (Lijphart, 1996). India has challenged such contentions and is able to demonstrate that it can

survive, withstand troubles, sustain and survive. Now we shall discuss about the Constitution of India and its contribution in strengthening democracy.

6.3 CONSTITUTION OF INDIA AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY THROUGH GOVERNANCE

In the previous sections, we outlined India's developments in various fields and features of democracy. Let us now discuss about Indian Constitution and its contribution towards establishment of modern administrative units for the country's governance. The framework of governance, which we have adopted in 1947, has given fruitful results in strengthening democracy as well as ushered in improvements in the various fields. The long struggle to overthrow colonial government has brought out the significance of establishing good governance especially in line with the famous quote of Abraham Lincoln 'of the people, by the people and for the people'. Gandhiji pointed to the establishment self-governance at the village and the *panch*, while Ambedkar looked at the creation of district and state-level institutions to break the power of locally dominant castes.

In India, on attaining independence, the then socio-economic changes and the rapid developments in the world led to the adaptation of modern public administrative system. The independent modern State adopted strategies that not only addressed administrative challenges, but also attempted to strengthen democracy.

The framers of the Constitution have addressed the country's geographical, socio-economic and cultural diversities and added aspirations of every section of the population in the Constitution. It is the fundamental legal document of a democratic country which lays down the principles for its governance. The Indian Constitution, which came into force on 26th January, 1950 has given a framework for governance and has assigned clear cut roles for executive, judiciary and legislature.

The aim of the Constitution which is clearly stated in the preamble gives direction for strengthening democracy. India on adopting the Constitution has become a sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic State. It has also given to all the citizens of India, social, economic and political justice; liberty of thought and expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among all fraternity; assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. It lays down fundamental rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy which reflect the core values of the Indian Constitution. Fundamental rights are justiciable rights. It protects citizens from arbitrary prejudicial State actions. The Directive Principles of State Policy further make the citizens realise their potential by making State to formulate appropriate laws and policies for the socio-economic development. It attempts to ensure social justice to the socially backward communities. Article 38 of the Directive Principles states:

“The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order in which social, economic and political justice shall inform all the institutions of the national life”.

We shall discuss few laws and policies related to education, health, and employment in the subsequent section. The Indian Constitution treats all equally irrespective of their caste, class, gender and place of origin. The Constitution of India provides democratic political framework with three interrelated structures namely executive, legislature and, judiciary to protect the rights and privileges of its citizens.

Along with above said features, it has given direction to modernise bureaucracy and adopted parliamentary form of government with quasi federal structure. Presently India consists of 28 States and 8 Union Territories. Each State is divided into districts which have various small administrative and development units like block, Tehsil and village. The lowest administrative unit in the rural areas is village and in the urban area is town. The organic divisions of country into various units are helping citizens to connect themselves to the nearest government structure to contribute meaningfully for strengthening democracy and the development of the country. Similarly, establishment of various divisions at the central and state levels have contributed towards effective administration. The integration of above said features in the Constitution gives clear direction to the administrative structures. This has given positive results, strengthened democracy and has created confidence among numerous ethnic, religious and linguistic groups for their participation in the political and administrative activities to strengthen democracy.

6.4 GOVERNANCE: CONCEPT AND OPERATIONALISATION

We shall start this section by defining ‘Governance’. We have already discussed about this in detail in Unit 2 of this Course. Governance refers to ‘the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised,’ including: the processes by which governments are selected, monitored, and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern social and economic interactions among them (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Zoido-Lobaton, 1999). India has taken numerous measures to strengthen democracy through governance.

As we have seen in the previous section, the Constitution of India has contributed towards the democratising the State. Still, India and many developing countries have faced governance and the balance of payment crisis in 1980s. It has necessitated India to introduce new set of economic and political reforms. The emergence of the concept of good governance as postulated by the World Bank brought new development discourse. The indicators for good governance include transparency, accountability, and rule of law, administrative efficiency, and also being pro-women, pro-poor, pro-environment. There are various factors and structures in the society that prevent women, marginalised and other sections to participate and bring meaningful changes in democracy and development. In this situation, it is pertinent to make citizens empowered to bring meaningful changes at all levels in the government. The above-mentioned good governance indicators may certainly contribute for democratising the State further.

India post-independence, has realised the need of improving the socio-economic conditions of the country. As we have discussed in the preceding sections, it has adopted a large number of welfare measures along with developing the economy through State led interventions. It has also addressed social justice through various legislative measures. The efforts taken immediately after independence through policies have given desired results. The percentage of people under the “poverty line” has decreased from nearly half of the population in the 1960s to a little over a quarter during the past decade. We shall reflect upon some of the measures taken in the five-year plans to address the same in the next section. The economic crisis in the 1989 and the introduction of neoliberal economic policies in 1990 have posed new challenges to the administrative structures. The growing regionalism and addressing location specific problems in various areas have brought in developmental challenges. Environmental degradation due to rapid economic development has created challenges to the administration. The country has

realised the significance of deepening of democracy by giving power to the people to decide and solve their issues.

The initiatives in the realm of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are ensuring the involvement of bringing citizens and community in the processes of democracy and governance. We shall be discussing these in detail in Unit 8 of this Course.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

1) Explain the important features of democracy.

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2) What are Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy?

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6.5 STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH GOVERNANCE: MEASURES

We have seen the contribution of Constitution to strengthen democracy by its creating appropriate administrative units, laws and governance process in the previous sections. Now let us discuss about measures taken by the government to strengthen democracy through governance process. The Government of India has taken a series of steps towards strengthening of democracy and make citizens participate in the democratic and development processes.

It started with Community Development Programme (CDP) launched in 1952 with the aim of bringing about overall development of rural areas through people's participation. During the First Five Year plan itself the National Extension Service (NES) Programme was introduced in 1953 to address the needs of marginalised, and poor in rural areas. In the CDP, women extension workers like mukhiya sevikas and gram sevikas and mahila samajams were organised for welfare and training activities. The erstwhile Planning Commission in 1957, appointed a committee headed by Balwantrai Mehta to study the CDP and NES programme to assess the extent of people's participation and to recommend ways to ensure this. The Committee recommended three-tier Panchayati Raj System in the country with Zila Parishad at the district level, Panchayat Samiti at the block/tehsil/taluka level and Gram Panchayat at the village level. Thus the three tier

system of panchayati raj came into existence. The Sixth Five-Year plan is watershed for deepening development activities to all. It adopted multidisciplinary and multipronged approach for all in the areas of health, education and employment. It gave special emphasis on literacy and education of the women and marginalised. It referred to the need for increasing enrollment of girls at the elementary level, promotion of functional literacy and encouraging women's education in backward areas. The Seventh Five-year Plan too adopted multi pronged strategy. The plan assessed the success of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and concluded that the women have not benefitted from this programme. Hence, the Eighth Five Year Plan further expanded the development activities. The introduction of the concept Self Help Groups (SHGs) and its formation in various parts of the country strengthened democracy. This was introduced in the ninth plan. The SHGs have developed linkages with various institutions and structures in the society and they were able to foster democratic participation. The Tenth Five Year Plan set monitorable targets like reducing poverty and increasing literacy, ensuring that all villages must have sustained access to potable drinking water within the plan period, providing gainful and high quality employment over the tenth plan period. The 11th Five Year Plan emphasised on inclusiveness in the policy making. Like previous plans, it has also set monitorable targets. The 12th Five Year Plan took cognisance of the complexities of development in the diverse countries like India and the progress that can be achieved through government action along with the contribution of various players in the society like non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private sector. It gave emphasis to inclusive growth and bringing different stakeholders together to achieve growth and development.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (CAAs) enacted in 1992 have created permanent constitutional structures at the rural and urban areas such as panchayats and municipalities to make people participate in the process of governance to deepen democracy. The features of 73rd and 74th CAAs such as creation of Gram Sabha, reservation of seats for women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) at all levels and all positions, uniform five year term for rural and urban local bodies, constitution of election commission at the state level to conduct local bodies' elections exclusively, power to levy taxes, collect and appropriate taxes within their jurisdictions, constitution of State Finance Commission (SFC) to share revenues, further contributed towards strengthening of democracy. The 74th CAA introduced a significant feature in the Constitution. Articles 243G and 243W of 73rd and 74th CAAs make provision for urban and rural local bodies to prepare plans for economic development and social justice at their levels. Article 243 ZD of the 74th CAA requires the establishment of a District Planning Committee (DPC) which will consolidate the plans prepared by the rural and urban local bodies and draft a development plan for the district as a whole. The features of 73rd and 74th CAAs facilitate the citizens to participate in the process of governance to strengthen democracy. The acts provide space for deliberation for strengthening democracy.

According to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, it is mandatory to establish the lowest structure namely "gram sabha" in every gram panchayat. Each state in India notifies the orders to the panchayats to conduct meetings of the gram sabha at regular intervals. All eligible voters can participate, deliberate and make decisions. The gram sabha gives space for women and marginalised to bring their interests in the larger democratic space. The decisions are taken with the participation of all in the larger interest and it becomes collective decision. In India, after independence, the State has concentrated more on welfare programmes and introduced a number of measures to address the needs of the citizens, and bring them closer to administration.

remained comparatively isolated from the mainstream development process and maintain an uninterrupted long tradition of well knit, cohesive social structure and value system backed by their own customs and traditions. They have also several indigenous traditional institutions to resolve their conflict and manage their resources and socio-political life (Saxena, 2018). In 1996, to strengthen the grassroots level local bodies and provide self government by tribals, Part XI of the Constitution that deals with panchayats has been specially extended to the tribal areas through an Act of Parliament called Panchayats Extension to Scheduled V Areas Act (PESA) 1996. Under this, special treatment has been given to the social, political, cultural and economic aspects of tribal life.

The Government of India has changed its strategy after 12th Five Year Plan and established the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) by replacing the erst white planning commission through a resolution of the Union Cabinet on January 1, 2015. It is the premier policy ‘Think Tank’ of the Government of India that provides the necessary policy inputs and technical advice to the central and state governments to take the country forward. According the government, there are governance challenges in the 21st century to address the needs of all. There have been significant developments in technology. . By looking at the rapid changes at the various levels, the government has decided to reform the existing administrative units to address governance issues.

Elections are an important means of ensuring citizen participation in governance. Also it helps in making government accountable and responsive to the citizens. It establishes a two-way relationship based on trust and accountability between those who govern and who are governed. As we have already mentioned in this unit, India has parliamentary form of democracy with regular elections at parliament and state assemblies. The elections are conducted based on Constitutional provisions supplemented by laws made in the parliament. The major laws related to elections are Representation of People’s Act, 1950 and 1951 (Gill, 2009). The elections for lok sabha and state assemblies have to be conducted once in five years. The elections are based on universal adult franchise with citizens having attained the age of 18 being eligible to vote. The process of elections is carried out by the Election Commission of India. Regular elections based on universal adult suffrage have helped the citizens of India to exercise their choice and it is a measure towards deepening of democracy. The electoral empowerment has brought scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and other socio religious minorities in the various social strata into the electoral fray. Differential and horizontal electoral mobilisation of socially marginal groups has resulted in policy changes that further helped in deepening of democracy in India. Over the past three decades, formation of pressure groups and the various regional political parties and their coalition with national level parties have helped address the issues of marginalised like SCs, STs and women. Regular elections have broadened democracy and the voters turn out increased over a period. In the first general election in 1952, 61 per cent of the electorate has exercised their franchise. In 2014 general elections, 60 per cent of men and 56 per cent of women voters exercised their choice to elect their representatives.

In India successive governments have introduced various schemes and programmes to promote the welfare of all citizens and to bring them in the governance process. Let us discuss some of them.

The scheme “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)” was launched in November 2000, in partnership with the states to universalise elementary education. SSA was conceived at the end of the ninth five year plan to improve the educational status in the country through interventions designed to ensure accessibility, reduce gender and social gaps, and strengthen the quality of learning. In continuation of SSA programme, the 86th Amendment Act of the Constitution in the year 2002 inserted Article 21 A in the

Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education for all children between the age of six and fourteen years. This is a fundamental right. Based on the 86th Amendment Act, the State has enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. It has brought equity and equality among all children in the country. As we mentioned earlier, one of the major principles of modern democracy is to provide access to education to all their citizens to strengthen democracy. The major areas for improvement listed in the RTE Act 2009 are:

- 1) Ensuring the availability of teaching-learning materials and aids;
- 2) Appointment of required number of trained teachers and ensuring their continuous availability for comprehensive evaluation;
- 3) Formation of school management committees;
- 4) Maintenance of pupil–teacher ratio (PTR) and teacher–classroom ratio (TCR) and, student–classroom ratio (SCR);
- 5) Provision of facilities such as library, mid-day meals, and incentives for children. The Act directs unaided private schools to admit compulsorily and enroll 25 per cent students from economically and socially weaker sections of society. It makes provision for the improvement of infrastructure facilities like buildings, playground, boundary wall, safe drinking water and separate toilets for girls and boys.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched in 2005 to provide, accessible, affordable and quality health care to the rural population, especially vulnerable groups. The objectives of the mission are to establish fully functional community-owned, decentralised health services by integrating other issues like water, sanitation, education, nutrition, social and gender equality. The above-mentioned two programmes, like many others, have been implemented to ensure the participation of all the stakeholders in the process of governance.

The State has taken an affirmative action in the form of laws and policies to ensure the participation of citizens. One significant programme related to affirmative action is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme/Programme (MGNREGS). It is a rights-based national level rural employment guarantee programme. It was enacted by legislation on 25 August 2005 and implemented in February 2006. The programme guarantees a minimum number of days of unskilled manual labour to each rural household seeking employment in India. Under the programme 30 per cent of the work is allocated to the women. The gram panchayats are the implementing agencies at the village level. It needs to conduct gram sabha meetings regularly to finalise the work and identify the beneficiaries. The programme also guarantees an unemployment allowance if work is not provided to the employment seekers. It is considered as one of the largest social safety net programme.

There are many schemes and programmes being implemented to strengthen democracy especially at the grass root level. There is need to ensure maximum participation of people especially in panchayati raj institutions through initiating new reforms and strengthening the existing systems.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

- 1) Explain the features of 73rd and 74th CAA.

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2) List the major areas of improvement listed in RTE Act.

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6.6 CONCLUSION

We have discussed the features of democracy, Constitution of India, the process of governance and measures to strengthen democracy in India. As we have mentioned in this Unit, the framers of Indian Constitution have ensured to incorporate necessary clauses to strengthen democracy. In accordance with the Constitution of India, the process of governance has ensured to take democracy forward to the lowest unit of the administration and all citizens. Not only the government structures, other institutions and organisations do play a vital role in democratising the State.

6.7 GLOSSARY

Community Development Programme: It was the first major development programme launched by the government of India in 1952 the core objective of which was the overall development of rural areas and peoples' participation. It was formulated to provide an administrative framework through which the government could reach to the district/tehsil/taluka and village level.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): The GDP measures the value of economic activity within a country. It is the sum of the market values, or prices, of all final goods and services produced in an economy during a period of time.

Pressure Group: A pressure group is formed by likeminded people who seek to influence public policy to promote their interests. It attempts to influence government policies through protests, demonstrations and so on.

Social Safety Net: It is a collection of services provided by a community of individuals or State. It works in conjunction with other poverty reduction programmes the primary the goal of which is to reduce poverty. It includes unemployment benefit, welfare and so on.

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6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - Democracy considers 'will of the people' as supreme.
 - All citizens are considered as equals.
 - All adults by attaining minimum required age get an equal opportunity to vote and contest in the elections to exercise their rights.
 - Regular elections, freedom of speech, opportunity to participate in the political activities and giving values to the individual opinion and rights are also significant features of the democracy.
- 2) Your answer should include the following points:
 - Fundamental Rights are justiciable rights.
 - It protects citizens from arbitrary prejudicial State actions.
 - The Directive Principles of State Policy further make the citizens to realise their full potential by making State to formulate appropriate laws and policies for the socio-economic development.
 - It ensures social justice to the socially backward communities.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Your answer should include the following points:

- Creation of gram sabha.
- Reservation of seats for women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) at all levels and all positions.
- Uniform 5 year term for rural and urban local bodies.
- Constitution of Election Commission.
- Power to levy taxes, collect and appropriate taxes within their jurisdictions.
- Constitution of State Finance Commission (SFC) to determine principles to share revenues.

2) Your answer should include the following points:

- Ensuring the availability of teaching-learning materials and aids.
- Appointment of required number of trained teachers and ensuring their continuous availability for comprehensive evaluation.
- Formation of school management committees.
- Maintenance of pupil–teacher ratio (PTR) and teacher–classroom ratio (TCR) and, student–classroom ratio (SCR).
- Establishment of facilities such as library, mid-day meals, and incentives for children.