

Chapter 6: Democracy

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Chapter at a Glance

Democracy is a system in which the source of power lies with the people. Citizens participate through elections and other democratic processes. It rests on freedom, equality, justice, rights, duties, participation and accountability.

- India is the world's largest democracy. In 2024, it had over 96.8 crore registered voters.
- The Constitution of India was adopted on 26 November 1949 and came into force on 26 January 1950.
- Democracy is not limited to elections; it also depends on responsible citizens, institutions, public discussion and participation.

1. Democratic Traditions in India

- Vedic assemblies such as Sabha, Samiti and Vidhata involved collective decision-making.
- Early republican states were known as gaṇas or saṁghas; rulers often worked in consultation with assemblies, ministers and officers.
- The Aikyamatyā Sūktam of the Ṛigveda stresses collective thinking, shared discussion and unity of purpose.
- Bauddha Saṁghas encouraged debate, discussion, selection of leaders and decision-making through voting.
- British colonial rule limited people's participation, but the freedom struggle revived and strengthened democratic ideas.
- The Constituent Assembly was formed in 1946. It took 2 years, 11 months and 18 days to draft the Constitution.

2. Constitution and Democracy

The Constitution creates democratic institutions and protects liberty, equality, justice and fraternity. It is also capable of lawful change through amendments under Article 368, helping it respond to changing socio-political needs.

3. Essential Principles of Democracy

Principle	Meaning / Importance
Popular Sovereignty	Ultimate power rests with the people; the State derives authority from citizens.
Universal Adult Franchise	Every citizen aged 18 years and above has the right to vote through a secret ballot.
Rule of Law	No one is above the law; everyone receives equality before law and equal protection of law.
Fundamental Rights	Protect citizens' freedom, equality and dignity and are enforceable through courts.
Separation of Powers	Legislature makes laws, executive implements them and judiciary interprets them.
Accountability & Transparency	Government must answer to citizens; public debate, audits and RTI help citizens examine its work.
Multi-Party System	Several political parties compete and represent diverse social, regional and ideological interests.
Protection of Vulnerable Groups	Government must promote equitable opportunities and protect weaker sections from injustice and exploitation.

Six Fundamental Rights

Fundamental Right	Articles
Right to Equality	14–18
Right to Freedom	19–22
Right Against Exploitation	23–24
Right to Freedom of Religion	25–28
Cultural and Educational Rights	29–30
Right to Constitutional Remedies	32

- Articles 32 and 226 provide constitutional remedies for protection of Fundamental Rights.
- Article 21A ensures free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14.
- Public Interest Litigation (PIL) is a legal action initiated in a court for enforcement of public interest.

Checks and Balances

Separation of powers prevents concentration of authority. Parliament can amend the Constitution, but the judiciary can review amendments and laws for consistency with constitutional provisions. An independent judiciary safeguards citizens' rights.

4. Democratic Processes, Institutions and Values

Process	Institution / Mechanism	Democratic Value
Legislative	Parliament, State Legislatures, Local Bodies	Representation, deliberation, dissent
Electoral	Election Commission of India	Participation, equality
Judicial	Courts	Rule of law, equality, justice
Participatory	Media and civil society	Debate, discussion, freedom of expression
Accountability	CAG, CIC, Lokpal, CVC	Transparency
Decentralisation	Rural and urban local bodies	Grassroots participation
Federalism	Division of powers between Centre and States	Devolution of power

Role of Media

- Media informs people and gives voice to public concerns.
- Newspapers, news channels and social media can raise public issues and contribute to their resolution.
- Because of its role in protecting people's voices and democratic principles, media is often called the 'fourth pillar of democracy'.

5. Types of Democracy

Type	Main Features	Example
Direct Democracy	Citizens directly participate in most decisions; difficult to practise in large countries.	Switzerland
Representative / Indirect Democracy	People elect representatives; periodic elections; government is accountable to people.	India
Parliamentary Democracy	Executive is part of and accountable to legislature; people elect legislature.	India, Canada
Presidential Democracy	Executive is independent of legislature; President is elected by and accountable to people.	United States of America

Examples Around the World

- India: Representative parliamentary democracy; President is Head of State and Prime Minister is Head of Government.
- Canada: Representative parliamentary democracy; federal and multi-party system.
- United Kingdom: Parliamentary democracy with constitutional monarchy.
- Switzerland: Direct democracy with a Federal Council.
- United States of America: Representative presidential democracy with a written constitution.

6. India's Living Democracy

- In 2024, India had over 96.8 crore registered voters.
- On average, one Member of Parliament represented about 25 lakh people (2019).
- Elections are conducted in 22 scheduled languages along with several other languages; election symbols help citizens vote independently.
- More than one million polling stations are set up, including in remote mountains, forests, deserts and islands.
- India has over 2,800 registered political parties, reflecting social and regional diversity.

India's democracy is 'living' because citizens from varied linguistic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds continuously participate in public life. Participatory democracy goes beyond voting and includes local councils, public consultations and community initiatives.

7. Women and Democratic Participation

- Unlike several countries where women struggled for voting rights, India extended Universal Adult Franchise to men and women alike when the Constitution came into force in 1950.
- Voting rights alone do not guarantee equal political participation; social prejudices can still limit women's representation.
- The Constitution provides not less than one-third reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities; several States/UTs have provided 50% reservation in local bodies.

8. RTI and Civil Society

- The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 enables citizens to seek information from government departments.
- RTI strengthens transparency, accountability and democratic governance.
- Civil society and community organisations act as bridges between citizens and the State through campaigns, PILs and community action.

9. Key Terms

Term	Simple Meaning
Sovereignty	Supreme and independent legal authority of a State.
Federalism	Sharing of powers and responsibilities between Union and State governments.
Civil Society	Voluntary groups, NGOs and community associations functioning within society.
Question Hour	First hour of a parliamentary session when members question the government.
Legislation	Laws made by the government.
Civic Responsibility	Responsible behaviour that respects laws, rights, diversity and public interest.

10. Challenges to Democratic Practices in India

- Illiteracy and lack of awareness can restrict informed participation.
- Misinformation and fake news can influence public opinion, create confusion and even cause conflict.
- Poverty, regionalism, gender inequality and social discrimination can create barriers to equal participation.
- Gaps in implementation of laws and policies may reduce public trust in institutions.
- Damaging public property, violating rules, spreading misinformation and remaining indifferent to public issues weaken democratic values.

11. The Emergency, 1975–77

- A National Emergency was imposed in June 1975 on the grounds of internal disturbance.
- A majority of Fundamental Rights were suspended, the press was censored and many political leaders and activists were arrested.
- Democratic institutions came under severe strain and citizens' freedoms were restricted.
- The Emergency ended in 1977. General elections allowed people to express their will, demonstrating the resilience of Indian democracy.

The episode underlined the importance of constitutional safeguards, civil liberties and active citizen participation in protecting democracy.

12. Democracy and You

- Stay informed through authentic newspapers, news programmes and responsible internet use.
- Understand the Constitution and follow Fundamental Duties.
- Be media literate and verify information before sharing it.
- Respect others' rights, obey laws and appreciate India's diversity.
- Participate in school, community and nation-building activities such as NCC, NSS and Bharat Scouts & Guides.
- Take leadership and contribute constructively to community issues.

13. Quick Revision

Remember	Key Point
Power	In a democracy, ultimate authority rests with the people.
Core values	Freedom, equality, justice, participation, inclusion, fairness and accountability.
Indian roots	Sabha, Samiti, Vidhata, gaṇas/saṁghas and Bauddha Saṁghas reflect traditions of consultation.
Constitution	Provides popular sovereignty, adult franchise, rights, duties, rule of law and separation of powers.
Beyond elections	Democracy also requires informed participation, civic responsibility and respect for diverse opinions.
Strength of India	Scale, diversity, constitutional institutions and sustained citizen participation.
Main challenge	Democratic institutions work best when citizens use rights responsibly and remain active and informed.

One-Line Conclusion

Democracy is not merely a form of government; it is a continuous process sustained by strong institutions, constitutional values and informed, responsible citizens.