CHAPTER 10

# Grassroots Democracy – Part 1 Governance

*"rājānam dharmagoptāram dharmo rakṣhati rakṣhitah"*

*"The ruler protects dharma and dharma protects those who protect it."*

*The Mahābhārata*

*"There is no peace without justice;*
*no justice without equality;*
*no equality without development;*
*no democracy without respect to the identity and dignity of cultures and peoples."*

*Rigoberta Menchú Tum*

**The Big Questions**

1. *What is the meaning of 'governance'?*
2. *Why do we need a government?*
3. *What is the meaning of 'democracy'? Why is it important?*

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# Introduction

Human beings have been living in communities for a long time. When a large number of people live together, there can be disagreements and disorder, and rules become necessary to maintain order and harmony in the society.

There are probably some simple rules at home that you are expected to follow. The school where you study has rules too — some for students, others for teachers. In higher classes, students appearing for examinations must follow certain rules. Drivers on the road are expected to obey traffic rules. People employed in all kinds of jobs also need to follow the rules set by their employer, while the employers must also follow rules which they have committed to their employees.

What would happen if no one followed those rules? A simple answer is that society would not be able to function.

## LET'S EXPLORE



- → Describe the two pictures given in Fig. 10.1 on page 151 — what differences do you see between them?
- → How do you connect this with our discussion on rules?
- → What are some of the rules in your school? Who made them?

Who makes the rules and why? How are they made? These are some of the questions we will explore in this chapter. The process of taking decisions, organising the society's life with different sets of rules, and ensuring that they are followed, is called **governance**. The group of individuals or the system that makes the rules and ensures that they are followed is called a **government**. Some of the more important rules are called **laws**.

This does not mean that rules and laws are set once and for all. Just as you might discuss a particular rule at home with your parents, or as a student body might ask the school or



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university management to change a rule, citizens also have a say in the laws and rules governing the society. We will see how this takes place.



*Fig. 10.1*



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*Fig. 10.2*



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**LET'S EXPLORE**



- → Can you identify the categories of public service or other activities that are represented in the ten pictures in Fig. 10.2 on page 152?
- → What role do you think the government plays in each of these activities?
- → Can you think of other aspects of your daily life where the government plays an important role?

## Three Organs of Government

All over the world, digital technologies have been transforming the way societies function. In India, till about 30 years ago, people who wanted to transfer money to a distant relative would have to queue up at the Post Office to send a money order after filling up a form; or if they had to send a payment to some business, they would queue up at their bank to obtain a demand draft, which would then have to be sent by post. You have probably never heard these terms ('money order' or 'demand draft'), because today we have digital means of sending across money instantly!

However, this has also created a new class of criminals who, without even leaving their desks, find digital ways of stealing people's money. This has led many governments to pass new laws in order to fight such criminal activities (called 'cybercrime'). Some of those criminals, who believe in robbing innocent people of their hard-earned money instead of using their skills to contribute to the society, have been arrested and convicted in court. They are usually fined as well as jailed for some years.

Through this example, we can see how the three branches or 'organs' of a government work together:

- The **legislature** is the organ that makes new laws (or 'legislates'). Sometimes it also updates or removes

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existing laws. This is done by an assembly of representatives of the people. We will soon see how the Indian system works.

- The **executive** is the organ that implements (or 'executes') the laws. This includes the head of state (who may be a president, a prime minister or a chief minister), the ministers and any agency responsible for enforcing 'law and order'. (In our example above, that agency is the cyber police.)
- The **judiciary** is the system of courts which decides whether someone has broken the law and, if so, what course of action should be taken, including punishment if necessary. Sometimes it also examines whether a decision taken by the executive is right, or whether a law passed by the legislature is well conceived and fair to all.



## LET'S EXPLORE

Explain how the three government organs are at work in the case of the cybercriminals described above. How do they intervene?

In a good system of governance, these three organs must be kept separate, although they interact with each other and work together. This separation is called the **'separation of powers'** (Fig. 10.3). It is intended to provide a system of checks and balances. This means that each organ of the government can check what the other is doing and restore balance if one organ acts beyond its expected role.

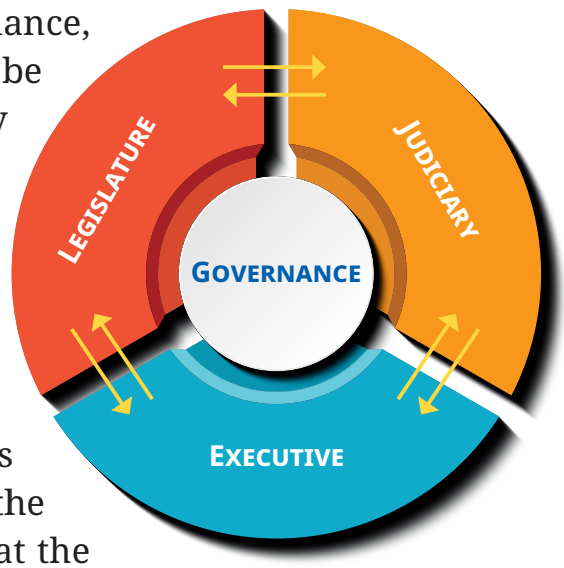



*Fig. 10.3*

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**LET'S EXPLORE**



As a class activity, can you imagine the sort of disorder we might witness if all three organs were under the control of the same group of people? Can you describe any such real-life situation you may have heard of?

## Three Levels of Government

Any government operates at two levels at the least — local and national. In many countries, including India, it functions at three levels or tiers — local, state or regional, and national. Each level deals with different matters. To use a comparison, if a bulb in your home is not lighting up, you will first check the bulb, switch, fuse, etc. If that does not work, you may call an electrician, and if it is found that the problem is not within your home, you may need to go to the Electricity Board and file a complaint. These are also three levels of dealing with a problem.

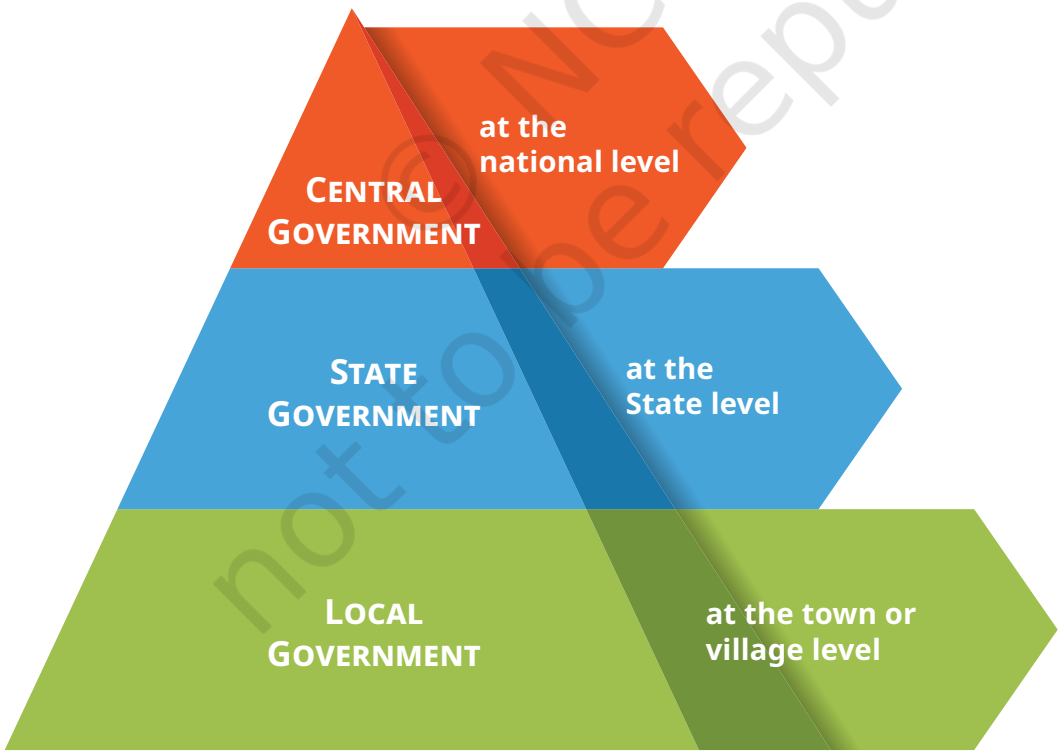



*Fig. 10.4*

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In India, we have local governments, State governments, and Central or Union government (Fig. 10.4 on page 155). Imagine that following heavy rain for a few days, there is a flood in a part of a district. If it is not too severe, the local authorities may be able to deal with it. If it involves several towns and many villages, the State Government will step in and send rescue teams to help affected people. But if it's a massive flood affecting vast areas, the Central Government may also come to help by sending relief supplies, the army, etc. These are the three levels again.



## DON'T MISS OUT

Many of our institutions have mottos inspired by the wisdom of our ancient texts. The Government of India's motto, for example, is *Satyameva Jayate*, which means "Truth alone triumphs". The Supreme Court's motto is *Yato Dharmastato Jayah*, or, "Where there is dharma, there is victory."

The table on the facing page provides in summary a general framework of the main functions of the government's three organs at the national and State levels. Their details (including the precise role of the assemblies) will be studied in greater depth in Grade 7. (Local government is not mentioned here as we will look at it more closely in the next two chapters.)



## LET'S EXPLORE

→ Observe the table (Fig. 10.5). Highlight the functions and responsibilities that affect your life the most.

→ Ask two or three adults about their connection or interaction with the government – at what levels does it take place and for what purpose?

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| | ALL INDIA | STATE LEVEL |
|---|---|---|
| **Judiciary** | Supreme Court of India | High Court |

| | NATIONAL LEVEL | STATE LEVEL |
|---|---|---|
| **Legislature** | Two **houses** – Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha – formulate national laws | One State Assembly or Vidhan Sabha (Note that most States have a single assembly; a few States have two) |

| | CENTRAL GOVERNMENT | STATE GOVERNMENT |
|---|---|---|
| **Executive** | Led by the President of India (**nominal** head and Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces), Prime Minister as the executive head | Led by the Governor (nominal head), Chief Minister as the executive head |
| **Functions and responsibilities of the Executive (the list is not exhaustive)** | • Defence<br>• Foreign Affairs<br>• Atomic Energy<br>• Communications<br>• Currency<br>• Interstate Commerce<br>• Education<br>• Formulation of National Policies | • Police, law and order<br>• Adaptation and implementation of laws made by the Central government at the State level.<br>• Public health<br>• Education<br>• Agriculture<br>• Irrigation<br>• Local government |

*Fig. 10.5*

**House:** An assembly where laws are discussed or passed.

**Nominal:** In name only. It means, in our case, that the President of India and the Governor of a State are not the actual executive heads. They do have certain powers under special circumstances, but normally do not interfere in the affairs of the Central or State government.

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## Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Born in a humble family in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, in 1931, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was a renowned scientist, nicknamed the 'Missile Man of India' for his crucial role in the development of India's space programme, missile programme and nuclear capabilities.

Dr. Abdul Kalam served as the 11th President of India from 2002 to 2007. Despite his high status, he remained deeply connected to the people, and the youth in particular, through his passion for good education and innovation. He inspired millions with his humility, dedication to social causes and commitment to the nation. He tirelessly encouraged young Indians to dream big and work hard to achieve their goals.

Dr. Kalam showed that even though his position as the President of India was nominal, he could play an important role, impacting countless lives.

Let us meditate on a few of his inspiring thoughts:

"Look at the sky. We are not alone. The whole universe is friendly to us and conspires only to give the best to those who dream and work."

"To succeed in your mission, you must have single-minded devotion to your goal."

"If you fail, never give up because F.A.I.L. means 'First Attempt In Learning'. End is not the end, in fact E.N.D. means 'Effort Never Dies'. If you get 'no' as an answer, remember N.O. means 'Next Opportunity'. So let's be positive."

"Dream is not that which you see while sleeping; it is something that does not let you sleep."

"If four things are followed — having a great aim, acquiring knowledge, hard work, and perseverance — then anything can be achieved."

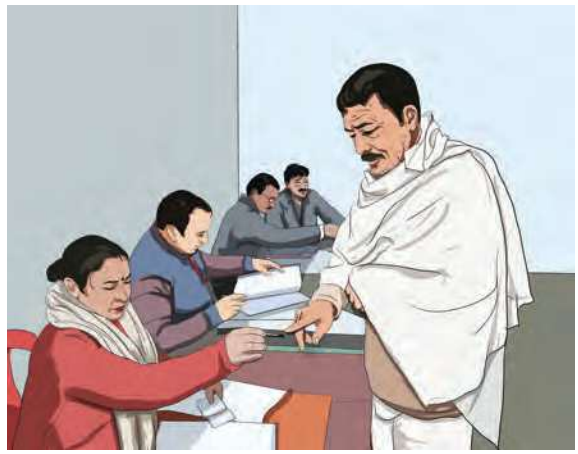
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## Democracy

You may have noticed that we earlier mentioned 'representatives of the people'. This is one of the foundation stones of the system of governance adopted by most countries of the world — **democracy**. The word 'democracy' comes from two Greek words — *dēmos* meaning 'people', and *kratos* meaning 'rule' or 'power'; so 'democracy' literally means the 'rule of the people'.

But can all people actually rule? It is clearly not possible. Imagine there is a problem that your class wants to bring to the attention of your school's principal — maybe there is something wrong with the classroom, or with the school's infrastructure, or perhaps you would like to propose a certain date for a field trip. Will the entire class go to the principal? It would clearly not be practical. In many schools, classes have a 'class monitor' or 'class representative', whom the whole class elected; even if there is none, one representative can be selected for this specific purpose. It will be enough to send the representative to the principal.

It is the same principle at the State or national levels – through elections, people vote for **representatives**, who will be the elected members of their respective assemblies. They are generally called **'Members of Legislative Assembly'** (or MLAs) at the State level, and '**Member of Parliament**' (or MPs) at the national level. All these members discuss laws, problems and solutions in the assemblies, and, through dialogue and debate, try to convince each other whenever there are different opinions.



Like any modern democracy, therefore, India is a **representative democracy**. It is also the world's

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largest democracy, with some 970 million voters in 2024! In principle, all Indian citizens above the age of 18 have the right to participate in these elections.

Imagine that your class is planning to go for a picnic. There are two possible places, A and B. The class discusses the pros and cons — distance, time, cost, availability of basic facilities, etc. It becomes difficult to arrive at a decision. So your teacher decides that voting can solve the problem. The number of students in favour of place A raise their hands, then the number of students in favour of place B raise theirs. The decision is taken by whichever option gets a larger number of raised hands. (This process is called voting.) This is a case of **direct democracy** where every student's opinion was taken to finalise the place.

The term **grassroots democracy** refers to a system that enables and encourages the participation of ordinary citizens — the base of the pyramid we saw in Fig. 10.4 on page 155. In such a system, the citizens can have a say in decisions which affect them.

We will study more features of Indian democracy in the next two chapters and also in later grades.



## Before we move on ...

- No country can run without governance and government.
- A modern government has three organs — legislative, executive and judiciary — which need to work together.
- The Indian government functions at three levels — Centre or national, State and local.
- Democracy is the overall framework for this system. It functions through elected representatives, both at the State and the national levels.

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## Questions, activities and projects

1. Test yourself — What is the meaning of democracy? What is the difference between direct democracy and representative democracy?
2. Recall the three organs of government. What are their different roles?
3. Why do we need three tiers of government?
4. Project: Many of you will remember the lockdown that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Make a list of all the actions that were taken at that time? Which tiers of government were involved in managing the situation? What was the role of each of the organs of government?

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# Noodles

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*‘Noodles’ is our abbreviation for ‘Notes and Doodles’!

