Chapter 5: Universal Franchise and India's Electoral System

Questions — Questions and Activities

Q1 Why is universal adult franchise important for a healthy democracy?

SOLUTION

Universal adult franchise means every adult citizen, regardless of caste, creed, race, religion, gender, education, or income, gets one vote of equal value.

It ensures no discrimination — everyone is treated as equal in the political process.

It gives all citizens the power to determine their own future and choose representatives who can best address their needs.

Elected representatives become answerable to the entire electorate, since any citizen can vote them out in the next election.

It fosters civic engagement: people participate in solving problems in their area and in deciding the nation's future.

In India, universal adult franchise is enshrined in Article 326 of the Constitution and applies to elections from the Lok Sabha down to local bodies.

Answer: Universal adult franchise ensures every adult citizen has an equal vote regardless of background, making representatives accountable to all and giving every person a voice in shaping the nation's future.

Q2 What is the meaning of 'secret ballot'? Why is this important in a democracy?

SOLUTION

A secret ballot is a voting method in which no one — not even the election officer — knows who a particular voter voted for; each vote is cast privately.

In the Suryodaya School example, Ms. Usha set up voting booths and explained that no one would know who voted for whom, ensuring the process was private and fair.

Secret ballots are important in a democracy because they protect voters from pressure, intimidation, or retaliation by powerful individuals or groups.

When voters know their choice is private, they can vote freely according to their own judgment rather than out of fear or obligation.

This keeps the electoral process honest and ensures the result truly reflects the voters' will.

Answer: A secret ballot means each voter's choice is kept private so no one knows who they voted for; this protects voters from intimidation and ensures they can vote freely and honestly.

Q3 Give examples of direct and indirect elections.

SOLUTION

In a direct election, citizens vote directly for their representatives.

Examples of direct elections in India: elections to the Lok Sabha (citizens directly choose their Member of Parliament), elections to State Legislative Assemblies (citizens directly elect MLAs), and elections to local bodies such as gram panchayats and urban local bodies.

In an indirect election, representatives are chosen by elected members rather than directly by the public.

Examples of indirect elections in India: election to the Rajya Sabha (233 members are elected by the elected MLAs of state legislative assemblies, not by ordinary citizens), and the election of the President of India (chosen by an Electoral College of elected MPs and MLAs).

The chapter also uses the school analogy: if class representatives directly vote for members of a school-level council, that would be an indirect election.

Answer: Direct elections: Lok Sabha, State Assembly, and local body elections — citizens vote directly. Indirect elections: Rajya Sabha (elected by MLAs) and President of India (elected by an Electoral College of MPs and MLAs).

Q4 How is the election of members to the Lok Sabha different from that to the Rajya Sabha?

SOLUTION

Lok Sabha members are elected directly by citizens through universal adult franchise; every registered voter in a constituency casts a vote for the candidate of their choice.

India uses the 'First-Past-the-Post' system for Lok Sabha elections — the candidate who receives the most votes in a constituency wins, even without getting 50 per cent of the votes.

Rajya Sabha members, by contrast, are elected indirectly: 233 of the 245 members are elected by the elected members of the state legislative assemblies

(MLAs), not by ordinary citizens.

The remaining 12 members of the Rajya Sabha are nominated by the President of India.

The Rajya Sabha uses a 'single transferable vote system', whereas Lok Sabha elections use the First-Past-the-Post system.

Seat allocation in the Rajya Sabha is based on state population, so more populous states have more seats; there is no such differentiation in the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies.

Answer: Lok Sabha members are directly elected by citizens using the First-Past-the-Post system, while Rajya Sabha members are indirectly elected by state MLAs using the single transferable vote system, with 12 members nominated by the President.

Q5 Why do you think a proportion of seats in the Lok Sabha is reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes? Write a short note.

SOLUTION

Out of 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, 84 are reserved for candidates from Scheduled Castes (SC) and 47 are reserved for candidates from Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Historically, these communities faced systematic discrimination and social exclusion, which limited their access to political power and decision-making.

Reservation ensures that these communities have guaranteed representation in Parliament, so their specific concerns and interests are directly voiced by members who belong to those communities.

Without reserved seats, there is a risk that socially and economically marginalised groups may be unable to compete effectively against more privileged candidates.

This measure aligns with the democratic principle of universal franchise — equal political participation for all — by removing structural barriers that could prevent certain groups from being represented.

Answer: 84 Lok Sabha seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes and 47 for Scheduled Tribes to ensure guaranteed parliamentary representation for historically marginalised communities, so their concerns are directly voiced in the legislature.