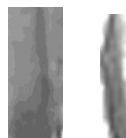


# CIVICS



## Key Elements of a Democratic Government

In a democracy, all people are considered to be equal before the law. They enjoy various fundamental rights and also the right to vote. People in many countries had to fight to establish democratic governments in their own country.

South Africa was one such country where people organised massive protests to establish the principles of democracy. Thousands of people lost their lives in this struggle to establish democracy. Earlier, South Africa was governed by the laws of apartheid. According to these laws, people were discriminated against on the basis of the colour of their skin. While the whites enjoyed all the rights and facilities, blacks were discriminated against. The children of the blacks could not study in the schools of the whites. Further, the hospitals meant for the white people were fully equipped while those for the blacks had only basic facilities.

The latter also did not have the right to vote. The African National Congress was

the organisation which led the struggle against the policy of apartheid in South Africa. Nelson Mandela was its well known leader who fought and inspired many people to fight against the policy of apartheid.



Nelson Mandela fought fearlessly against the policy of apartheid practised by the then government of South Africa.

## Participation of People in a Democracy

People participate in a democracy in the following ways:

- Regular elections are held in democratic countries. People participate in these elections and choose their representatives by voting.
- These representatives then take decisions on behalf of the people keeping in mind the aspirations and the interests of the people who elect them.
- In India, the government is elected for a period of five years. Hence, if the members of the government do not fulfill their promises, the people may not choose them in next elections. In this way, the power of the government is limited by regular elections.
- Apart from participating in elections, there are other ways in which people participate in a democracy. People participate in a democracy by taking part in the policies of the government and criticising them, if required.
- People can organise dharnas, rallies, organise campaigns etc. against the unjust policies of the government.
- Many mediums of communications like the television, newspapers and magazines also play an important role in discussing the policies of the government.
- People can also organise social movements and challenge the policies and the functions of the government. People of marginalised communities like the dalits, tribals, women etc often participate in a democracy in such a manner.



In India, people participate in the democracy through the process of elections.

## Need to Resolve Conflict

- Conflicts are bound to arise in a democratic country. Conflicts occur when people belonging to different religions, cultures, regions or economic backgrounds do not get along with each other.
- Conflicts may also occur when people of a particular community are discriminated against. People may resort to violent ways to resolve the conflict. This in turn may create fear and tension among the other people who live in the same areas.
- Sometimes religious processions and celebrations can create conflicts. The show of power and strength of one community can spark tension and a feeling of ill will in other communities. An incident of stone pelting may further complicate the situation giving rise to conflicts.
- Rivers may also become the source of conflict between two states. The sharing of river water which flows through one or more states may create conflict.
- For example, the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are involved in a conflict over the issue of sharing the water of the river Cauvery. The water in Krishnasagar dam in Karnataka is used for supplying water to Bengaluru.
- The Mettur dam in Tamil Nadu is used for growing crops in some regions. Since both the dams are built on the same river, a conflict has arisen between both the states.
- This is because the dam located downstream in Tamil Nadu can be filled only if water is released from the upstream dam located in Karnataka.
- Under such situations, the Central Government has to step in to resolve the issue in a manner which is acceptable to the governments of both the states.



The states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are involved in a dispute over the water of the River Cauvery.

## Equality and Justice

Equality and justice are the key features of any democratic government. In India, the government guarantees equality and justice to its citizens in the following way:

- The practice of untouchability has been abolished and declared to be a crime punishable by law.
- It was largely due to the efforts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and other eminent personalities that discrimination based on caste was abolished. They realised that the principle of equality could be achieved only when people are treated equally.
- The government provides some special privileges to the discriminated community in order to promote justice and equality. For example, the girl child in the Indian society is discriminated against. Therefore, governments in many states have lowered or completely waived off the school or college fees for girls.



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar vehemently opposed the practice of untouchability in India.