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PUBLIC OPINION AND PRESSURE GROUPS

The views, interests and aspirations of the people constitute the core of the democratic system. There are certain groups or associations that try to influence the decision-making or policy formulation by the government in accordance with their specific interests. Such groups are called pressure groups. The government that represents the people carries on administration in accordance with the public opinion expressed by the people. In fact, democracy derives its authority from the people. It seeks people's opinion on various issues of common interest. Infact, no government whether it is democratic or not, can afford to ignore the public opinion and pressure groups. Every government respects the feelings of the public. It is always keen to know their response to various issues that are directly or indirectly related to them. In any political system, public opinion and pressure groups play a very significant role. We shall discuss various aspects of public opinion and pressure groups in this lesson.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- explain the meaning and characteristics of public opinion ;
- recognize the significance and role of public opinion ;
- learn about various agencies that contribute to the formation of public opinion ;
- identify the hindrances to the formation of healthy public opinion ;
- appreciate the significance of pressure groups in India ;
- differentiate between a pressure group and a political party ;
- evaluate public opinion and pressure groups with special reference to India.

21.1 Meaning and Characteristics of Public Opinion

Public opinion is generally understood as the opinion of public, common people or the voice

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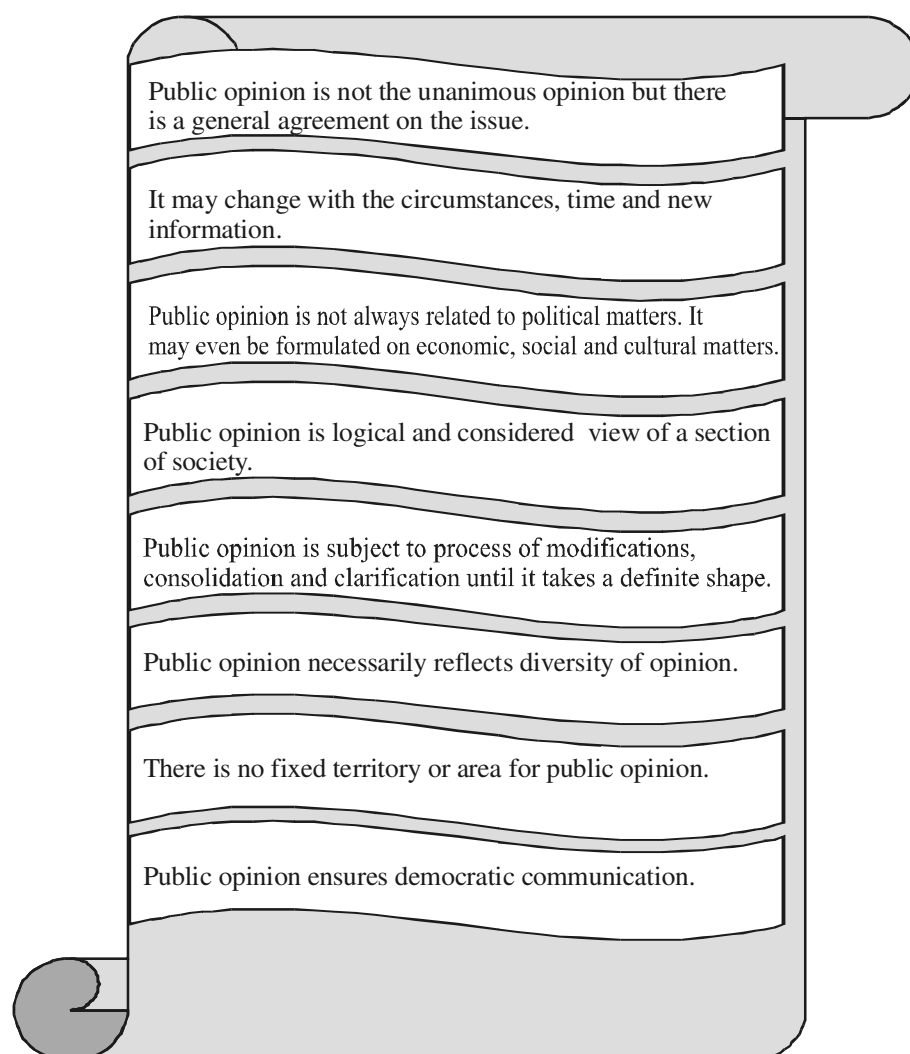
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of the people. But public exactly does not mean people. There is no single public. In fact, there are several 'public'. The total people as a whole do not constitute one single homogeneous public, having similar views or opinion. The public is not a fixed body of individuals. The term 'public' means a section of society, sharing common interests. It holds similar views and opinions on matters of public concern.

It is therefore, not necessary that public opinion will be the opinion of all the people. It is not even the opinion of the majority. As there are many publics, there are also different opinions and different problems. Public opinion necessarily reflects diversity of opinion.

It is also important to understand that public opinion is not the opinion of an individual, though he or she may be a highly respected person. It is not a private opinion. It is also not an expert opinion, irrespective of the wisdom of the expert. Public opinion is an organised and considered opinion of a section or many sections of the people on any public issue or concern. It is genuinely both public and opinion. It is neither a propaganda nor a public relations exercise.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC OPINION





Intext Questions 21.1

Fill in the blanks:

- A public is a section of society, sharing _____ (common/specific) interests.
- Public opinion is an _____ and opinion of a section or many sections of people on any public issue. (organised and considered/ private and expert)
- Public opinion _____ unanimous opinion of the entire people. (is/is not)
- There _____ fixed territory or area for public opinion. (is/is no)



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21.2 Significance and Role of Public Opinion

Public opinion is considered to be the essential element for successful working of democratic communication in the system. Public Opinion is the expression of the views of citizens. No government can afford to ignore it. A sound and effective public opinion can even shake the structures of dictators. The strength of democratic system lies in respecting the mind power of the people. There should be free and fair interaction of thoughts for solving the collective problems. Public opinion acquires great relevance in realising this democratic goal. It promotes wider awareness and invites citizens to examine issues from different points of view. The significance and role of public opinion can be explained as follows:

(a) Guide to the Government: Public opinion acts as the guide to the government in respect of policy formation. Government functions in general on the basis of mandate received in elections and tries to win over the masses to fulfil the promises made during elections.

(b) Helping in Law Making: Government is always under pressure of public opinion and takes note of the same in formulating laws for the common good. Governmental policies are invariably affected by people's opinion on various issues. Public opinion helps the government to enact laws in the given situation.

(c) Acts as a Watchdog: Public opinion acts as a watchdog. It controls and checks the government from becoming irresponsible. While criticizing the wrong policies of the government, public opinion always keeps the government alert. Government is always conscious of the fact that people would not vote for it or bring it back to power again if it goes against the wishes of the people.

(d) Protects the Rights & Liberties: Public opinion acts as the protector of rights and liberties of citizens. In a democratic country, people have the right to criticize or support the government in their own way. More effective and positive use of this right not only encourages or motivates the government but also keeps the government alive towards the rights and liberties of the people.

(e) Acts as a Powerful Force in International Sphere: - Public opinion has acquired worldwide importance. In fact, international relations are influenced by public opinion. In the age of globalization, the issues like promotion and protection of human rights, environment and discrimination based on race, religion or sex, prevention of child labour, terrorism etc. hold international community answerable to public opinion. Therefore, the governments remain conscious of such international public opinion also. Infact, no democratic government can afford to ignore public opinion.



Intext Questions 21.2

I. Fill in the blanks :

- Government takes serious note of _____ while formulating policies and enacting laws. (Public opinion/ opinion of political parties)
- Public opinion acts as a _____ to the government.(watchdog/friend)
- Governments today _____conscious of international public opinion. (are/ are not)

II. Mark True or False :

- The government can easily afford to ignore public opinion. (True/False)
- Public opinion keeps a check on the arbitrary acts of the government. (True/False)
- Public opinion has no impact on protection of rights and liberties. (True/False)
- International relations are influenced by public opinion. (True/False)

21.3 Formation of Public Opinion

There is no definite and automatic process for the formation of public opinion. Whenever an issue of public concern emerges, various sections of society express their views. In the process some views receive larger attention and emerge as public opinion. There are informal and formal processes that mould public opinion.

23.3.1 Political Socialisation

Political socialisation is the basic process through which every individual is oriented with respect to political issues. A human being lives and grows in family, neighbourhood, friends, the locality and the region. The orientation of attitudes, beliefs and values towards the political system acquire shape in association of their groups. The most influential in personality formation and character building are the family and the peer group. They provide the basic mould in influencing the ideas and opinions of the individual. The orientation of individuals through this process determines their views and reactions towards political issues.



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21.3.2 Press

The print media includes newspaper, periodicals, pamphlets, journals, leaflets etc. Press or print media supplies the news regarding all political and social happenings in the world. It throws a flood of light on current issues. In fact press is regarded as the watchdog of democracy by carrying the voice of the public to the government. People express their criticism or support in the form of articles, or comments through press. Hence, make the government responsible and answerable. In fact, government also propagates its policies and programmes through media. It tries to highlight its achievements to make public opinion in its favour.

21.3.3 Radio and Television

Electronic media i.e. radio and television act as a mirror of social life. Print media influences only the educated. The electronic media plays an important part in collecting the information and moulding the thoughts of the uneducated masses also. The audio-visual media is used as a powerful means for bringing about social transformation and setting up a new social order free from social evils. It is used to educate the masses on certain sensitive issues like casteism, communalism violence etc. Through radio and television masses communicate their feelings and opinions towards various government policies and programmes.

21.3.4 Cinema

Cinema has been the traditional medium of entertainment and awareness. The cinema caters to the artistic and intellectual needs of the people. It cultivates new ideas and norms in the society on political and social problems. Feature films and documentary films have their natural impact on the thinking of the people. This audio visual method can even influence the illiterates.

21.3.5 Public Meetings

Public meetings or platforms are effective means of moulding public opinion for different social, cultural, intellectual and political activities. They address the public issues and are able to gather huge crowd through lectures, seminars, symposia, workshops and conferences. They try to establish personal and emotional bond with the public and motivate them towards positive and healthy steps.

21.3.6 Political parties and their activities

Political parties formulate and organize public opinion. They are called mobilisers of opinion. Political parties not only make the people aware of various public issues. Their purpose is to make the people politically conscious to think about public problems. Political parties publish journals, pamphlets, leaflets, manifestoes, posters etc. to mould the public opinion in their favour.

21.3.7 Opinion Polls

Opinion polls serve to indicate public opinion at the time of their being taken. They are a very effective way of gathering information about public attitude and opinion on various political, social, cultural, economical etc. matters. They are normally conducted by professional agencies selecting representative samples of population. Of late they are becoming a very useful and popular method to understand and analyse public opinion.

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There have been instances when these opinion polls have not been able to analyse the situation correctly and the results or predictions have been falsified. But they surely have significant influence on public opinion.

21.3.8 Educational Institutions

They include schools, colleges, literary clubs, study circles, universities and libraries etc. They can mould public opinion to a great extent. The adolescents get easily swayed by the opinion of others. Therefore the right kind of training is very important for this age group. Eminent leaders, scholars and educationists help in moulding their leadership qualities and help in creating public opinion through Debates, Talks, Seminars etc. Various co-curricular activities like Drama, Symposium, Painting/Slogan writing competition etc. also prove very effective in sensitizing the students on important national and international issues.

There are certain limitations on the use of public opinion. It is believed that the public takes interest in local and national affairs. The public is reasonably well informed. The public thinks, with reason and logic and arrives at the rational conclusion. The opinion of the public is expressed through the elections/polls. Public opinion always keeps the government on its toes and the alert government makes the laws based on social and moral principles expressed by it. Public opinion is the voice of interested spectators of action.

Public opinion reflects the plurality and diversity of opinions. Sometimes it is taken very casually. It is more a matter of interpretation. Fault does not lie with the opinion but with the interpretation. At times, sample may also not be appropriate. In modern mass societies people read, listen and see so much that it is not always easy for them to sift facts from fiction. Hence, it poses a great challenge to people to make intelligent discrimination of news and views. However, the fact remains that public opinion is very effective means of communication between the government and the citizens.



Intext Questions 21.3

I. Tick (✓) the correct answer :

- (a) Family and home are the informal agencies of influencing public opinion. (True/False)
- (a) Public opinion does not reflect the diversity of opinions. (True/False)
- (c) The adolescents do not get swayed by the opinion of the others. (True/False)
- (d) Opinion poll is the barometer to check the satisfaction of public towards government. (True/False)
- (e) Electronic media acts as a mirror of social life. (True/False)
- (f) Public does not take interest in local and national affairs. (True/False)

II. Fill in the blanks :

- (a) Television and Radio play an important part in moulding the opinion of the _____ masses also. (educated/uneducated)

- (b) Cinema and documentary films have their _____ impact on the thinking of the people. (natural/unnatural)
- (c) Public meetings establish a personal contact between the speaker and the _____. (audience/spectators)



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21.4 Hindrances in The Formation of Sound Public Opinion

Public opinion will not be a true reflection of the ideas of public until the following hindrances are eradicated :

(a) Indifferent Attitude: Generally, people like to keep themselves away from political activities. They do not take interest in public affairs. Generally they think that their involvement in political decision making is not required. There is a need to change the indifferent attitude and adopt participatory approach. People should be motivated to take interest in the affairs of their own country. People have to be sensitized towards important issues related to unity, integrity and development of the nation.

(b) Illiteracy: Educated and enlightened people are expected to be good voters and citizens. Illiterate people on the other hand, have a limited knowledge and they do not understand the political problems. They are not capable of forming an intelligent and rational opinion and are guided by passion and sentiments. Ignorance born of illiteracy is a curse for social life. A sound public opinion can be formulated only in the environment of knowledge and education.

(c) Poverty: The poor are always isolated from politics. They do not find time to devote their attention to public affairs. They get easily influenced by the tall talks of the political leaders and cast or even sell their votes. The government, non-governmental organisation and pressure groups have to play their effective role. The wide gap between the rich and the poor has to be minimized and the distribution of wealth must be equitable. Sound and healthy public opinion is possible only by alleviating poverty.

(d) Disharmony amongst various castes and communities: The people and political parties, in democracy have to rise above the feelings and emotions of casteism and communalism. They should not divide themselves into narrow walls of religion and sect. Religion and politics should be kept separate. Social harmony in the country would provide a better platform for sound and healthy public opinion.

(e) Free Press: Unbiased, objective and independent press and fearless media play a very significant role in the formation of healthy opinion. Press should not be influenced by religious capitalist or regional interests. Free press should present the authentic and impartial report.



Intext Questions 21.4

Fill in the blanks :

- (a) For sound public opinion, the press has to be _____ (partial/impartial) and _____. (free/biased)

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- (b) The people and political parties in democracy have to rise above the feelings of _____ and _____. (castes and communities / secularism and patriotism)
- (c) Sound and healthy public opinion demands economically _____ society. (balanced/imbalanced)

21.5 Pressure Groups

You have learnt about public opinion that how does it help in influencing government policies. Besides political parties, there are some voluntary groups that exist to protect the special interest of the individuals in the society.

Pressure or interest groups are organized groups, having common and social interests, concerned with influencing decision making by putting pressure from outside. Pressure groups have voluntary membership and are found in every country.

These pressure groups have a limited and narrow focused issue. They have an informal, closed and unrecognized character. They, unlike political parties, do not contest elections. They put pressure on the government through various techniques so are called pressure groups. Despite this, they play an important role in the politics of the country. The pressure groups contribute to the political activities of the political parties and help in mobilizing the public opinion.

Different types of party systems give rise to different forms of pressure group activities. The method and style of work of the pressure groups vary in different political systems. It is controlled mainly by five factors: –

- (i) the pattern of political institutions,
- (ii) the nature of party system,
- (iii) the political culture and attitudes of leaders and people,
- (iv) the nature of the issues and problems confronted and
- (v) the character and type of the concerned interest groups.



Intext Questions 21.5

Fill in the blanks :

- (a) Pressure groups are called pressure groups because they put _____ on the government. (pressure/criticism)
- (b) Pressure groups are different from _____ as they do not contest election. (political parties, non voluntary groups)
- (c) Pressure groups help in mobilizing the _____. (public opinion/ political parties)
- (d) The method and style of work of the pressure groups _____ (vary/ is same) in different political systems.
- (e) The political culture and attitudes of leaders and people _____ (affect/ do not affect) the working of the Pressure Groups.



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21.6 Classification of Pressure Groups in India

As you have already read that there are pressure groups in every country, India is no exception. They influence decision making to serve their own interests. Broadly they can be put into four categories according to their aims and objectives which are given below :

Profession Pressure Groups	Socio-Cultural Pressure Groups
Institutional Pressure Group	Pressure Groups Ad-hoc

(a) Professional Pressure Groups: - This category includes the pressure groups that are formed by the employees of a particular occupation or profession for the protection of their interests. The big business houses with their vast outlay of resources, availability of technical and managerial personnel and due to close links elite groups in government, media, administration and opposition parties have always had the most organized and powerful pressure groups at their command.



Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Several big business houses have a powerful lobby in the parliament and in the legislature. They also have representatives and Public Relations Officers who keep in touch with administration and top bureaucracy. The largest and the most influential organization of private capital in India is the FICCI. It represents more than 40,000 firms. It has a large business corporate world with it. The political parties are dependent on it for funds. In turn they serve their interests in giving them the concession in the form of trade, tariff, investment tax etc. In the contemporary scenario of globalisation and liberalization, the role of FICCI is all the more important. The government seeks the suggestions and advice of this group particularly on major policy issues of economical and commercial nature.

The other known business groups like ASSOCHAM i.e. Associated Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of Indian Industries.(CII) the Tatas, Birlas, DCM, Dalmia and Hindustan Lever etc. They all try to influence the industrial policies and laws of the government.

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Professional pressure groups also includes Trade Unions, Peasant organizations, Teachers and students organizations and also other association like All India Medical Association, All India Postal & Telegraph Workers Union etc. Thus, the influence of big business on financial, industrial and commercial politics of the country over the years has been considerable.

The history of Trade Unions and Peasant Organisations dates back to the period before independence. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in 1920 with the objective to promote socio economic interests of the working class. Hind Mazdoor Sangh, Centre of India Trade unions (CITU) are the examples of these types of Trade Unions. The other trade unions in other parts of the country in electricity, water, banks, insurance etc. are somewhat affiliated to the All India organisations.

It has been observed that political parties have been exploiting the farmers and the peasants for their own interests. So there was a call for them to unite to get their interests fulfilled. They all want their interest in the field of agriculture should be duly protected. Their chief objectives include getting higher prices for agriculture products, subsidy for fertilizers availability of loans and manures etc. Farmer's organizations like Bhartiya Kisan Union in Haryana, U.P. and Punjab, Karnataka Rajya Sabha etc. influence the decisions of the government in the agricultural field. They also contribute to the sharpening of national awareness and class- consciousness. They do not have the money power of the capital but have the will and solidarity to work for the upliftment of the downthrodden.

In the educational field also the students, the teachers, non-vocational staff (school, college, university) have their unions to mobilize the public opinion and also to influence the government for their protection of their interests like, P.F., Gratuity, Bonus, LTC Facility, Leaves opening of more professional institutions, adequate transporation facilities, fee structure etc. e.g. National Students Union of India, Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha, All India Teachers Association, All India Students Union, Delhi University Students Union etc.

(b) Socio Cultural Pressure Groups: There are various kinds of socio cultural pressure groups which are concerned with community service and the promotion of the interests of the whole community. Also there are a few for the promotion of their language and religion. Examples are given below:

Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, Jan Sewa Sangh, Rama Krishna Mission, Arya Samaj, Jamat-I-Islami, Rashtriya Sawayam Sewak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Parsee Anymans, Young Men Christian Association, Bajrang Dal, Sanskrit Sahitya Academy, Panjabi Academy, Marathi Sangh, Bhartiya Adim Jati Sangh, Sernarhi of People Society.

(c) Institutional Pressure Groups: There are certain pressure groups that are working within the governmental machinery itself. They influence the government policies in their favour without directly getting involved in the political system. The pressure groups like Civil Services Association, Police Welfare organization, Gazetted Officers Union, Defence Personnel Association, Army Officers organizations Red Cross Society etc. all came under this category. The decision on matters such as transfers-leave rules, adequate D.A. due to inflation, allocation of duties etc. are influenced by these pressure groups. Although their activities are public, they remain very active within the system.



(d) Adhoc pressure Groups: Some pressure groups come into existence for a very short period with the objective of pressuring the government for a specific task. Once the purpose is served, they cease to exist. In case of any urgency, natural calamity or adversity, these pressure groups pressurize or influence the government policies in their interest. The pressure group like Orissa Relief Organisation, Bhoodan Anuyojna, Kaveri Water Distribution Association, Gujrat Relief Association etc.

21.7 Role of Pressure Groups

Pressure group activity has been referred to as 'Lobby'. Lobby is originally an American term, but now used not only in European democracies but also in Japan and other parts of the world as well. It refers to lobbies in Parliament where the MPs or Legislators meet and discuss matters in relation to the business of the house.

Pressure Groups play a very important role in the Indian political system. They act as a link and source of communication between the masses and the political parties. They sensitize the public towards various socio economic issues thereby educating them politically. They produce very effective leadership and also as a training platform for future political leaders. It also bridges the gap between various traditional values in the society. Establishment of unity and integrity are the key results of the pressure groups. Therefore it is very clear that pressure groups influence both the government and the administrative policies. You have already learnt earlier about various pressure groups working in India.

Political institutions of a country determine the activities of pressure groups and their main targets. In U.K., U.S.A. France and other democracies, the pressure groups have more opportunities of influencing the governmental decisions. In Britain, since the cabinet and the civil services are more effective, rather than MPs, it is more useful to get access to the former rather than the latter. It is more profitable to cultivate members of the cabinet and civil service than lobby in the House of Commons. In the USA, with the strong congressional committee system, and its powerful chairman it is more advantageous to concentrate on them. In U.S.A. the chamber of commerce and manufacturers organizations are supposed to be very powerful pressure group. In France the administration, rather than the National Assembly, is the target of the interest groups.

Although several Pressure Groups and lobbies in USA keep a distant relationship with the political parties yet the powerful trade unions have close ties with the political parties – for example the AFL-CIO-American Federation of Labour Congress of the Industrial organization with Democratic Party, British Trade Union with Labour Party, Roman Catholic Church with Christian Democratic Parties of Germany and Italy.



Intext Questions 21.6

Fill in the blanks :

- (a) Pressure Groups sensitize public towards various _____ issues. (public/private)
- (b) They act as a link between the _____ and the _____. (government, citizens/ government, political parties)
- (c) _____ of a country determine the activities of pressure groups and their main targets. (political institutions/social institutions)



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21.8 Methods of Pressure Groups

It is the constant endeavour of the pressure groups to establish links with the government officials and ministers. The pressure groups adopt various methods to influence the process of the government. These methods are dependent on the nature of political system and the type of society in the country. They send petitions and request letters for the fulfillment of their demands. They are always making efforts of keeping public opinion in their favour. The mass media both electronic and print, is very commonly used by the pressure groups for conveying their feelings and opinions to the government. They try to mould or influence the public opinion by using various publicity measures. The pressure groups, through lobbying try to exert their pressure on the government. The pressure groups have opportunities of influencing the judiciary also to some extent. They try to influence the selection of judges and launch campaigns to influence the judicial decisions. Therefore it can be established that pressure groups have become an integral part of every democratic political system. They also maintain the democratic spirit and ethos of a nation. Pressure groups have also been criticized on certain grounds specially of their uncalled for tactics and double standards to corrupt the bureaucracy. The powerful groups manage to get their demands fulfilled while the weak groups are not even heard. Sometimes, the trade unions and the other associations get even unjust demands fulfilled due to their influence. Actually, the influence of a pressure group depends on the factors like its own organizational strength, discipline, commitment of its members, capacity to collect the people's sympathy and support and financial position and above all its access to decision making bodies.

The pressure groups working for the political cause, persons etc. adopt some extremist measures like rallies, dharnas, demonstrations and hunger strike etc.

The pressure groups working for human causes like peace, environment protection and human rights etc. adopt a method of building enlightened public opinion and creating a good sense of compassion and reasoning. They work through organizing occasional national campaigns and international solidarity activities. Movement against AIDS, Terrorism, nuclear bomb etc. are the examples of such campaigns.



Intext Questions 21.7

Fill in the blanks :

- The pressure groups adopt _____ methods to pressurise the government. (liberal/extremist)
- The _____ pressure groups are able to get their demands fulfilled. (strong/weak)
- The pressure groups try to mould the public opinion by using various _____ methods. (publicity/confidential)



What You Have Learnt

In this chapter, you have learnt about the public opinion and pressure groups in India. Public opinion is a social product due to the interaction of many minds. It has been defined as the collectivity of individual opinions of a designated public. Public opinion may change

with the circumstances, time and new information. Public opinion is considered to be the essential element for successful working of democratic communication in the system. The governmental policies are invariably affected by public opinion on various issues. The agencies like electronic and print media, opinion polls, political socialization, political parties etc. play a very effective role in the formation of public opinion. Public opinion will not be a true reflection of the ideas of public until the hindrances like indifferent attitude, illiteracy, poverty, dishonest and partial press are removed.

You have read that unlike political parties, there exist some voluntary organised groups to protect the special interests of the individuals in the society. They put pressure on the government through various techniques and are called pressure groups. The method and style of work of the pressure groups depend on the pattern and nature of party system in the country. You have read about the pressure groups like FICCI, Trade Unions etc. in India and also in other countries. The pressure groups adopt various democratic and undemocratic methods to set their demands fulfilled by the government. But they play significant role in moulding the policies of the government.

**Terminal Exercises**

1. Define Public Opinion.
2. Examine the role of public opinion in the democratic system of India.
3. Describe the various agencies of public opinion.
4. Analyse the hindrances in the formation of sound public opinion.
5. On what basis do we classify the pressure groups in India?
6. Discuss the role of pressure groups.
7. Evaluate the methods adopted by the pressure groups in India.

**Answers to Intext Questions****21.1**

- (a) common
- (b) organised and considered
- (c) is not
- (d) is no

21.2

- I. (a) public opinion
- (b) watchdog
- (c) are
- II. (a) False

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- (b) True
- (c) False
- (d) True

21.3

- I
 - (a) True
 - (b) False
 - (c) False
 - (d) True
 - (e) True
 - (f) False
- II.
 - (a) uneducated
 - (b) natural
 - (c) audience

21.4

- (a) impartial and free
- (b) castes and communities
- (c) balanced

21.5

- (a) pressure
- (b) political parties
- (c) public opinion
- (d) vary
- (e) affect

21.6

- (a) public
- (b) government and citizens
- (c) political institutions

21.7

- (a) extremist
- (b) strong
- (c) publicity

Hints of Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to section 21.1
2. Refer to section 21.2
3. Refer to section 21.3
4. Refer to section 21.4
5. Refer to section 21.6
6. Refer to section 21.7
7. Refer to section 21.8



Notes



Let us ponder over adolescence issues



By **Peer** we mean a group of people of approximately the same age, status, and interests and **Peer Pressure** is a term describing a person's changes, or temptations to change, in attitude, behaviour and morals as directly influenced by their peer group.