

# PUBLIC OPINION IN DEMOCRACY

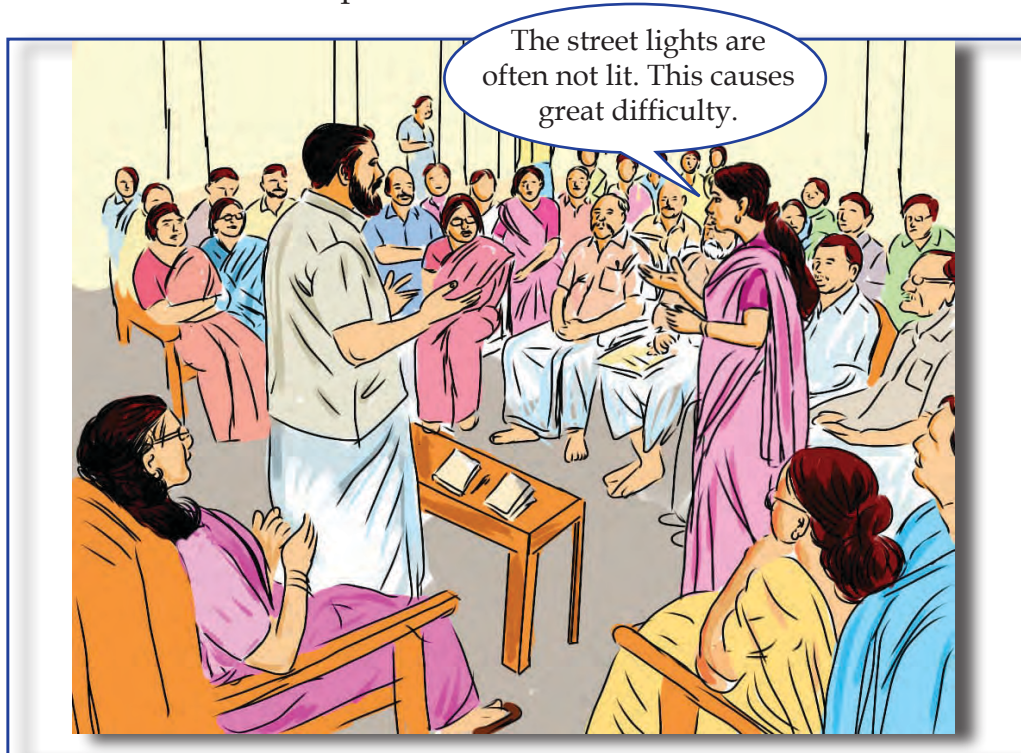
## Select Committee on Public Health Bill; Comments can be given

Kottayam: The meeting of the Legislative Select Committee on the Kerala Public Health Bill will be held at Kottayam Collectorate Conference Hall on September 24, at 10.30 a.m. Officials, members of the public, people's representatives, representatives of various organisations, can make their

comments and suggestions in the meeting. The Public Health Bill and the questionnaire on the provisions of the bill, will be available on the website [www.niyamasabha.org](http://www.niyamasabha.org). Suggestions and comments can be made in writing or via e-mail at [legislation@niyamasabha.nic.in](mailto:legislation@niyamasabha.nic.in).

This news report is issued to gather opinions and suggestions from members of the public, people's representatives, representatives of various organisations, regarding the Public Health Bill. In a democratic system, governments accept public opinions as part of their formulation of policies.

Observe the picture.



The picture given is of a Grama Sabha / Ward Sabha which is a local body where the people of the locality gather. The problems that affect people such as development issues, waste management, environmental pollution, scarcity of drinking water etc. are discussed there. Decisions on such issues are taken by considering the general opinion of the people gathered in the Grama Sabha or Ward Sabha.

Do the authorities seek your opinions regarding the organisation of the school anniversary celebrations? How do you give your suggestions?

- Through school parliament
- Through the class representative participating in organising committee meetings.
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Have you noted the various ways in which your opinions are gathered in organising school activities?

The news given at the beginning of the lesson is related to the topic of public health. The foundation of a democratic system is formed by the views, interests, and aspirations of the people.

Public health is an important issue that affects the society as a whole. The government has sought public opinion in this public issue. Public opinion is the general opinion of the people about the issues affecting them. It can be the position or opinion generally held by a section of society on a particular issue.

Citizens empowered through public opinion will strengthen the democracy. The rationality and scientific perspective of their opinions will positively influence public opinion. This will help to evolve a civil society that is alert to social issues.

### Civil Society



Civil society is an important idea in democracy. It includes organisations, groups, and people who work for the welfare of the society. They do this voluntarily, without government control or profit motive, and they represent different views and ideas.



Discuss and share with your friends your opinions about the transportation and waste management facilities in your area and present the same in the social science club.

## Characteristics of public opinion

The influence of public opinion on social life, governance and politics is enormous. Public opinion is formed when responsible citizens bring out the problems in the society to the attention of others. It is an effective social control over the government and it encourages debate that empowers democracy. Public opinion is considered as one of the essential criteria of democracy.

Let us see the characteristics of public opinion

- ◆ Public opinion reflects diverse opinions.
- ◆ Public opinion is not necessarily the views and opinions of the majority of people but, is the creation of a general consensus on a topic.
- ◆ Public opinion may change with the circumstances, time and new knowledge.
- ◆ Public opinion is always formed not only on political matters but also in relation to Socio-economic and cultural matters.
- ◆ There is no fixed place from where one can express public opinion and anyone can express their opinion from any where.
- ◆ Public opinion ensures democratic communication.

Complete the diagram and discuss the characteristics of public opinion and prepare a chart.



### Characteristics of public opinion

• A reflection of diverse opinions

• Democratic communication



We have discussed that public opinion is the opinion of people on a common issue. Social and cultural background of individuals, attitude, belief, preconceptions, leadership skills, education etc are the factors that influence public opinion.

## Agencies that shape public opinion

Formation of public opinion is not an automatic, highly precise or perfectly timed process. Various sections of the society express their opinion and views whenever a common issue arises in the society. In this process some comments are very much welcomed and it emerges as the public opinion. Thus public opinion is formed through formal and informal processes.

Family and educational institutions play an important role in developing public opinion which, in turn, empowers democracy. Peer groups, media, political parties, social institutions and organisations, opinion polls, art and literature etc. also contribute in this. All these are different agencies that shape public opinion. Let us examine them one by one.

### 1. Family

Listen to a family conversation



Do you often participate in such discussions with parents? A child's socialisation process starts from the family and the traditional beliefs and perceptions of the family, influences

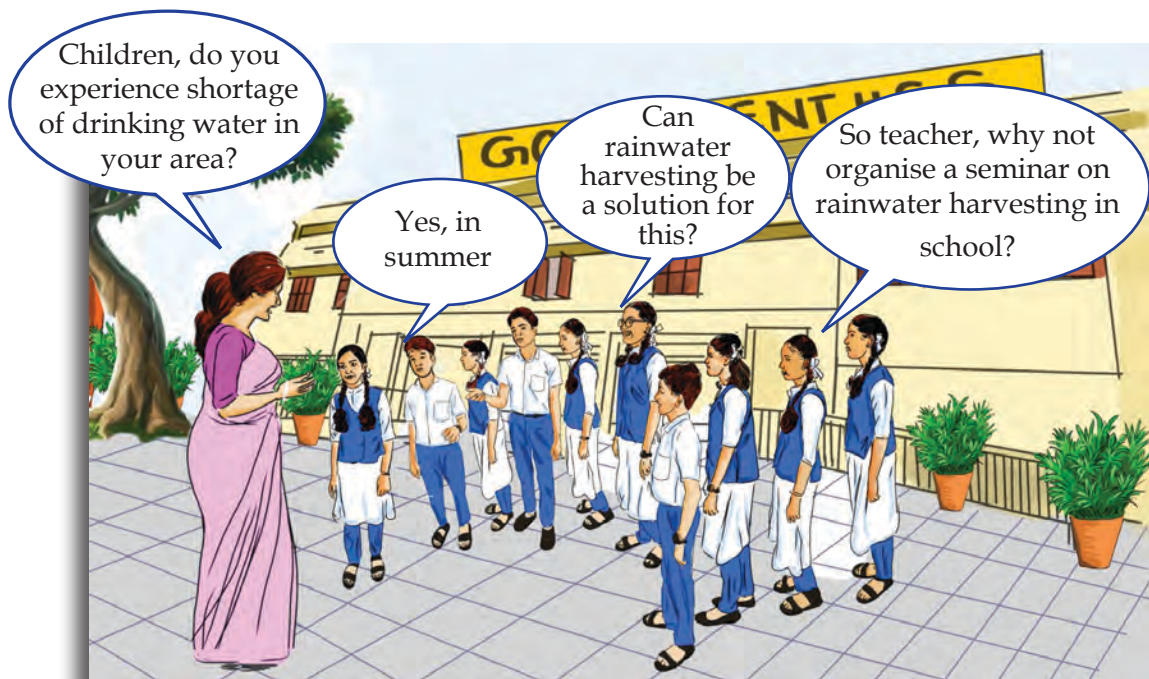
opinion formation. The child is a participant or a witness in the discussion held in the family in which politics, beliefs, religion, literature, etc. are all topics. In this way, the family has the first place in the formation of the child's opinion on various issues.



The first stage of public opinion formation begins with families. Evaluate this statement and make a note.

## 2. Educational Institutions

A conversation between the teacher and the students is given below. Pay attention to the topic of the discussion.



Educational institutions play a major role in shaping and developing the child's knowledge, rights, duties, scientific thinking, critical thinking, and culture. All knowledge and skills are acquired by the child mainly through educational institutions. The process of education helps a person to form an independent and rational opinion on any subject. Educational institutions play an important role in shaping children's understanding of various subjects. Activities in school such as school parliament, club activities, sports and cultural activities act as a platform in

developing democratic and civic sense among the students. Such activities provide enough avenues for the learners to express their opinions and that develops skills in forming public opinion.



Present proposals to make activities of the school library more effective. Discuss it in your class, prepare notes, then present it in the school parliament.

### 3. Peer groups

Listen to your friends' discussion.



Debates and discussions among peer group members are important factors influencing public opinion formation. Peer group members share almost common characteristics in terms of personality, attitudes and behaviour which are important factors influencing public opinion formation. They all share some common characteristics in their personal experiences and social influences. Peer group members can



#### Peer Groups

Peer Groups are groups of similar age and with similar interests and goals. Peer groups tend to be similar in their beliefs, values and ideals.

influence each other on the policies of the government, various social issues and political parties. Such peer group discussions are helpful in eliciting common opinions, correcting existing ones and arriving at correct opinions. This debate and discussion lead to the formation of public opinion.



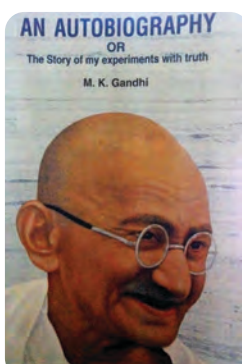
Discuss with your friends about programmes which can be planned in your school and surrounding areas to spread the anti-drug message. List them.

## 4. Media

Media play an important role in shaping public opinion. News, discussions and advertising programmes available through traditional media (print media, radio and television) and new media (Digital and social media) have a great influence on people. Media can bring an issue to public attention and shape public opinion on it.

### 4.1 Newspapers

Newspapers play an important role in bringing all political and social events before the public. Newspapers are able to strengthen the democratic process by bringing current issues to the people



“In the very first month of 'Indian Opinion', I realised that the sole aim of journalism should be service. The newspaper press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countrysides and devastates crops, even so an uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. If the control is from without, it proves more poisonous than want of control. It can be profitable only when exercised from within. If this line of reasoning is correct, how many of the journals in the world would stand the test? But who would stop those that are useless? And who should be the judge? The useful and the useless must, like good and evil generally, go on together, and man must make his choice.”

(Mahatma Gandhi, 'The story of My Experiments with Truth')



and at the same time bring the opinion of the people to the government. Therefore newspapers play a key role in shaping public opinion.

Have you read Gandhiji's opinion about the influence of newspapers? The influence of newspapers help not only in forming public opinion but also in changing and diverting it according to certain interests. Sometimes some news does not necessarily have to be factual and it can mislead the public opinion. Due to vested interest, wrong news might reach people through online newspapers, etc. There is a criticism that impartial approach and accuracy in the news are not often from the side of the media.



Collect news articles on a specific topic from different newspapers in the recent past. With your teacher's support, prepare an analytical note on their presentation style, content and factuality.

## 4.2 Radio , Television

Radio and television are serving as a mirror to social life. While the print media considers only the literate community, radio and television play an important role in forming the ideas and knowledge among the illiterate community. Radio and television play a significant role in sharing the opinions and thoughts of the people in the society about various policies and programmes of the government.

## 4.3 Social Media

Have you noticed the reaction of the public in relation to contemporary news? Today social media and all mainstream media have an important role in forming public opinion. Have you also reacted like this in social media platforms?



Read the news given below



## FACT

Not all schools will have holiday in Kottayam district tomorrow. The news spreading is fake, says the District Collector. The Collector made it clear that only those schools where relief camps are held will have holiday tomorrow (September 1). The Kottayam District Collector informed that the news circulating that all educational institutions in Kottayam will have holiday tomorrow (September 1) due to heavy rain is fake. The District administration came with this clarification when it is noticed that many social media platforms were spreading the news that all educational institutions will have a holiday tomorrow due to heavy rain in the district.

A fake news spreads through social media and the press release by the collector providing clarifications is given above. What are the preventive measures that we should take against the spread of such fake news and messages?

- Finding the real source in order to find the validity of the news and messages.
- If recognised as fake news and messages, do not share it with others.
- Inform official system such as cyber cell.
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In the modern age, almost all people in the society are communicating through digital platforms. Everybody should recognise such traps in the digital world. We have to acquire digital and media literacy. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create new messages and communicate the

messages received through various forms of media. Content creation and the way it shapes our perceptions and how we critically interpret news and messages are all included in this.

Digital literacy is the ability to find information from the digital world and evaluate them efficiently using digital equipment and technology. This includes basic computer knowledge, effective use of internet, navigation of digital platforms, critical evaluation of online content, cyber awareness, etc.

Media literacy includes the way we shape our perceptions and critically interpret news and messages. Digital literacy is how we effectively use digital tools and technology to find out and evaluate information from digital spaces.



Organise a group discussion and prepare a note on 'The role of new media in shaping public opinion.'

## 5. Political parties and their activities

Political parties and their activities are at the forefront of shaping, and mobilising public opinion in the democratic system of government. Both ruling and the opposition parties play a role in shaping public opinion. The main objective of political parties is to make the public think about common public issues politically. Each political party publishes journals, pamphlets, manifestos, posters, write ups etc. to create public opinion in their favour. Along with that conference, demonstrations, rallies and seminars are all organised for the formation of public opinion.

Ruling parties try to propagate government policies in their favour. They also devise appropriate campaign strategies. On the other hand, the opposition parties bring the shortcomings and failures of the administration to the attention of the people and they undertake campaigns and struggles that help in the formation of public opinion against the government.

All political parties have an interest in promoting their own ideals during election stages.

Every party and front tries to gather the maximum support of the people presented through the manifesto. Political parties try to intervene and form opinions on all the important issues facing the society and the state through their election manifestos.

Every party tries to mobilise the people in its favour by presenting their views and ideas and makes them involved in public affairs and ensure participation in the electoral process. During the election campaign parties try to sway public opinion in their favour. Even after the completion of election process the political parties keep on campaigning on public issues. When political parties go overboard and engage in personal attacks and negative propaganda, the election commission intervenes and controls them.

Prepare a speech on the topic "Role of political parties in shaping public opinion" by completing the list given below and discussing it in class.



various methods  
adopted by  
political parties  
to shape public  
opinion

- Demonstrations

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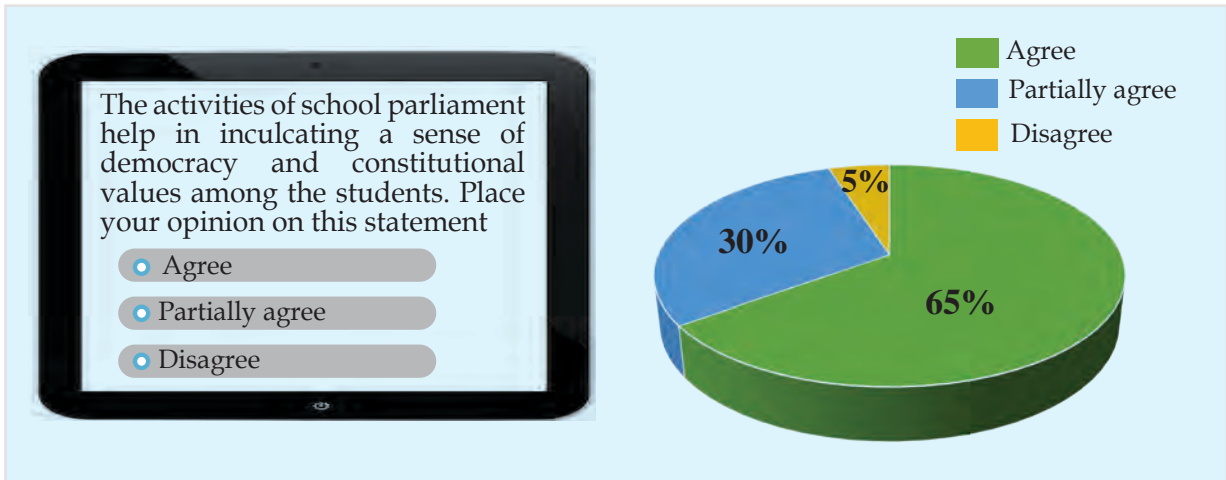
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## 6. Social Institutions and Organisations

Various social institutions and organisations working in society play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. Religious institutions, caste-religious organisations, student movements, youth movements, women's equality movements, trade unions, human rights movements, merchant associations, environmental organisation etc. play their own role in shaping public opinion.



## 7. Opinion Poll



An opinion Poll conducted among the students of a school and its result is shown in the figure.

Opinion polls are a very effective way to gather information about public attitudes and opinions on various social, cultural, political and economic issues. A sample of population is approached for their views regarding specific issues. By using the information public opinion can be formed. There are various professional agencies working to conduct opinion polls.

## 8. Art and literature



“ദാഹിക്കുന്നു ഭഗിനീ കൃപാരസ-  
മോഹനം കുളിർതണ്ണീരിതാശു നീ  
ഓമലേ, തരു തെല്ലെ”ന്നതു കേട്ടൊ-  
രാ മനോഹരിയമ്പരനോതിനാൾ:  
“അല്ലെല്ലെന്നുകഥയിതു കഷ്ടമേ !  
അല്ലലാലങ്ങു ജാതി മറന്നിതോ?  
നീചനാരിതൻ കൈയാൽ ജലം വാങ്ങി-  
യാചമിക്കുമോ ചൊല്ലെഴുമാര്യന്മാർ?

\* \* \* \* \*

ഓതിനാൻ ഭിക്ഷുവേറ്റം വിലക്ഷനായ്:  
“ജാതി ചോദിക്കുന്നില്ല ഞാൻ സോദരി,  
ചോദിക്കുന്നു നീർ നാവുവരണ്ടഹോ  
ഭീതിവേണ്ടാ തരികതെന്നിക്കു നീ.”

These lines are from Chandalabhikshuki by Mahakavi Kumaran Asan. The scenario depicts Anandan, a Buddhist monk, requesting drinking water from a girl who was drawing water from a well beside the path. However, she hesitates, explaining that she belongs to a lower caste and that giving him water would be considered a sin. Anandan, undeterred, says, "I did not ask your caste, but water," compelling her to comply. His response, which disregarded caste distinctions and addressed a lower-caste woman as his sister, was a revolutionary act in the social context of that time.

Chandalabhikshuki is a work which had a strong influence in forming public opinion against social evils based on caste system such as untouchability.

Art, literature, cinema of each era influence the formation of the public opinion of the times. 'Patta Bakki', 'Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku' and so on were some of the plays which had a significant role in changing the social life of Kerala. Literary works of Rabindranath Tagore, Subramania Bharathi and Vallathol Narayana Menon inspired Indian freedom movement. The art forms such as Ottanthullal, Chakyarkoothu, etc could form strong public opinion against the then existing social evils, customs and thereby ignite social revolution. Have various art forms and literary works influenced your taste and interest ?



Discuss with your friends and prepare a note on an art form or literary work that has influenced the formation of your opinions.

## Factors that hinder the formation of public opinion

Democracy will be stronger where public opinion is strong. The limitations of democracy can be corrected and guided in the right direction with strong public opinion. However, there are some factors that hinder the formation of public opinion in society. Let us examine them.

**Illiteracy** - Illiterate people have only limited knowledge about public issues. They may not have the capacity to form rational opinions.

**Digital Divide** - The digital divide is the gap in accessing modern information technology such as the internet, computer, and smartphone. This hinders the formation of effective public opinion.

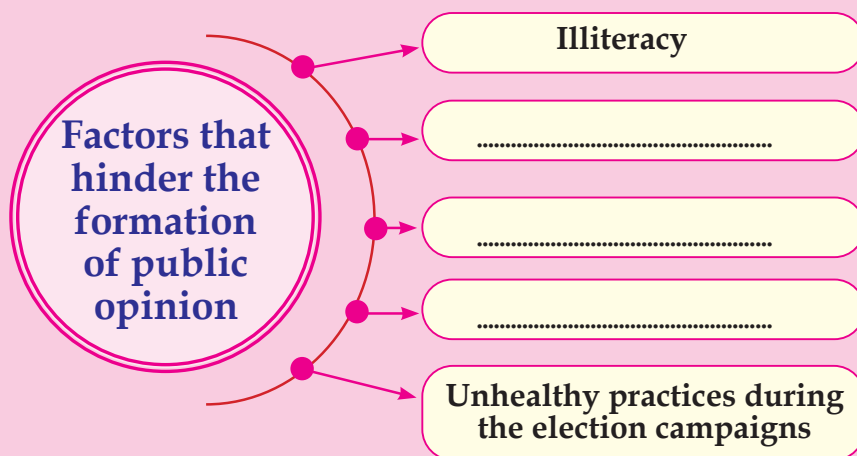
**Poverty** - Groups experiencing poverty are often isolated from public affairs. Hence, they are not able to participate in the formation of public opinion appropriately.

**Unhealthy political activity and lack of democracy in political parties** - Partisanship in political activities and polarisation among the people are factors that hinder the formation of public opinion.

**Unhealthy practices during the election campaigns** - Unhealthy practices that are used to influence voters during election times often hinder the formation of real public opinion.

In addition to these, corruption, regionalism, other socio-economic, cultural and parochial group interests, and hero worship are all factors that undermine true public opinion.

Complete the diagram and discuss it in the class. Find more factors that hinder public opinion



Democracy is a political system that ensures equal participation of all the people of a country. As a system that ensures public

participation, democratic governments formulate their policies and programmes by considering the opinions and interest of the people. In addition, the elections conducted within a democratic system, are also chiefly influenced by the opinions of the people.

In a democratic system, civil society makes the rulers responsible through constant criticism. Public opinion can question the exercise of power and regulate the rule of law. In such a society, the people are fully aware of the rights and duties of citizens. Arbitrary and dictatorial tendencies are prevented in a society with strong public opinion and the rights and freedom of citizens are protected. In a society with strong public opinion, every issue is critically evaluated and it makes political parties responsible. Public opinion, as the consolidated opinion of the people, plays a key role in democratic systems.



Prepare an essay on the topic 'The role of public opinion formation in strengthening the democratic process.'



### Extended Activities

- Conduct a seminar in your class on the factors influencing public opinion during general elections
  - Regional issues
  - Development
  - 
  -
- Prepare a skit that will help shape public opinion against any social evils such as drug abuse or cyber crime and present it in the class
- V.T. Bhattathiripad's play *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathettkku* contributed greatly to the Kerala renaissance. Read the book and respond to the statement.
- Organise a screening of Satyajit Ray's film *Pather Panchali* in the school Social Science lab. Discuss the plot and prepare note of appreciation for the school magazine.