

# Origin of the System of Election

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### Abstract

The most noteworthy feature in the history of democracy namely, elections as well as formation of popular government in the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century has been the steady evolution of suffrage from a narrow and unequal to universal suffrage.

Franchise in some form, undoubtedly existed in the Greek City-States, but the suffrage in the modern sense, that is universal adult suffrage evolved with the advent of popular sovereignty. Most of the countries began with limited franchise, limited by some requirements, such as, ownership of property, Literacy, residential qualification, sex etc. but steadily and surely extended in response to the demand of the time, long agitation, great outcry and public opinion until the present system of universal franchise was accepted and implemented. Virtually, universal franchise is the outcome of several struggles of about one and half century and as a consequence many democratic states at first permitted a small part of the populace to participate in political enfranchisement. The process of loosening the knot of universal franchise remained slow, but gradual. Britain took almost a century to complete the process, because a series of electoral reforms carried out from the Reform Act. 1832 to the Representation of the People Act of 1928. This Act. Extended the franchise to all males. But in 1928 a Bill was introduced to enfranchise women on exactly the same conditions as those already existing for men. In United States adult franchise came in 1850 and female suffrage was granted in 1920. France allowed adult suffrage for men in 1875, but until after the Second World War women were voteless in France and Italy. But the new Republican Constitution, in both the countries have enfranchised them. Spanish women were granted the right to vote in 1932. Women suffrage was introduced in Turkey in 1934. Female franchise implemented in Japan, under American aegis, in 1947. In Russia women who had attained age of 18 years, were granted right to vote under the Soviet Constitution of 1918, (Article-64). Switzerland was the only democratic State in Europe which granted women the right to vote, very late as 1971. After Second World War many African and Asian countries became independent and they introduced universal Adult franchise without much agitation. The modern Indian nation-state, a Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic having the qualification of being largest democracy in the world, came into existence on August 15, 1947, and since then universal adult franchise is granted.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Constitution, Universal Adult Franchise, Greek City- States.

### Introduction

The idea of democracy first flourished in ancient Greece. In the democratic city-states of the fifth century B.C., such as, ancient Athens, all the adult male citizens used to meet together in an assembly in which issues of policy and management of public affairs were debated, decisions were taken and laws were enacted. No citizen could then claim that policies were being foisted upon the community against his will.<sup>1</sup> Garner quotes Montesquieu, who observed that the ancients had no notion of a legislative assembly composed of representatives of the people.<sup>2</sup> The assembly which acted upon proposed laws and gave them their sanction was composed of the freemen themselves in their personal capacity.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the system of election had not evolved in Ancient Greece.

“The beginning of the modern representative systems”, writes Garner, “are found in folk-moots of the early Teutons of Germany.”<sup>4</sup> The Assembly-called in German, ‘Kurfursten’ denoting Electors, was a body composed of German Princes with whom rested the elections of King in Germany.

England also played a significant part in the nourishment of elective principles. F.A. Ogg. Opined that, "England, however, looms as prominently in the political realm as Greece in the domain of thought or Rome in that of law; and no one can progress far toward an understanding of the government under which he lives without knowing its English antecedents or connections."<sup>5</sup>

In Britain it is evident too that, in the early times, monarch occupied the throne not by strictly hereditary right, but by election.<sup>6</sup> The monarch was chosen by an assembly, namely "witenagemot". Garner says: "The Witenagemot of early English history was the assembly out of which in the course of time the first representative legislature known to history- the mother of parliaments- was evolved."<sup>7</sup> It was not a representative body at first, at least, not in the modern sense, it became, with the change of time, a truly representative body.<sup>8</sup> 'The people who chose him belonged to the Witenagemot' or 'council of wisemen' and while they commonly showed preference for members of a given family, they, without any hesitation passed an eldest son if they considered him incompetent or otherwise undesirable and the king issued his, "dooms" only with the concurrence of 'witan'. The Witenagemot, a council of wisemen, was an assembly of the men of repute, lay and leading churchmen. The body lacked fixed membership. There were no elected members. The body consisted of such persons as the king chose to summon to the three or four meetings ordinarily held each year. Thus, the 'witan' had no representative character. Virtually, the functions of the body were almost ill-defined as its composition.<sup>9</sup>

On exploration of the origin of the representative character of the assembly, Garner visualises : "At first chosen probably by the sheriffs of the counties, they came eventually to be elected by the freeholders. Under Simon de Montford in the thirteenth century representatives from the boroughs were added, and finally, by the end of the century, the assembly had come to possess all the elements which enter into the constitution of British parliament today. The clerical element also was represented, so that the Parliament was indeed the assembly of representatives of the three estates of the realm- the nobility, the commons, and the clergy. Early in the fourteenth century the division into two houses was effected and the process of evolution was complete."<sup>10</sup> The transformation was reasonably complete in England by the middle of sixteenth century and in France it did not come until the Revolution, the states- general declared themselves to be the representatives of the nation.<sup>11</sup> For a long time, the deputies of each estate were summoned separately and often occupied seats in different chambers and cast their votes separately. Thus, not only single or double chambered assemblies, but there were sometimes three and four chambers existed. Until 1866, the national parliament of Sweden consisted of four chambers for the representation of the nobility, the clergy, the bourgeois class and the peasant class. Under the medieval system the deputy received a commission from his constituency, he frequently bore instructions as to how he should cast

vote, and he was obliged to render an account of the manner in which he exercised his mandate which was different from the mandate of a modern representative; he had only a specific power of attorney to remedy certain grievances and only rarely a general power of Legislation."<sup>12</sup> Now here outside of England indeed, did the deputies chosen by the estates become representatives of the country at large with general powers of legislation."<sup>13</sup> The idea of a deputy, as a representative of the people, rather than a delegate was generally affirmed in the seventeenth century in England.<sup>14</sup> Quoting Thomas Smith, Garner says that, he had asserted in his remarkable book, "De Republica Anglorum" that each "Englishman was represented in parliament and consequently was personally present by means of his representative."<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

In modern electoral system, we find chiefly two systems of electing representatives. One is single member constituency and the other is multi-member constituency. "A single member constituency is one where only one candidate is elected. But when two or more members are elected from a constituency, it becomes a multi-member constituency. For instance, the members of the House of Commons in Great Britain and the Lok Sabha in India are elected from single member constituencies. The multi-member constituency system prevails in some countries of Europe like Switzerland and previously in West Germany."<sup>16</sup>

The History of electoral system and peoples' representation in the assembly is comparatively recent and its growth in the present form is indeed, a development of few hundred years.

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