

CHAPTER 1

Constitution: Why and How?

CBSE Class 11 · Political Science · Indian
Constitution at Work · Chapter 1

CBSE · Political Science · Class 11

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

A

Define what a constitution is and explain why no society can function without one.

B

List and explain the four functions a constitution performs.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

1

Define what a constitution is and explain why no society can function without one.

2

List and explain the four functions a constitution performs.

3

Narrate how the Indian Constitution was made by the Constituent Assembly.

4

Justify why we should accept the Constitution as the supreme law — and score 7/8 on this chapter.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

- 1** It is the gateway chapter — the entire book 'Indian Constitution at Work' is an extended study of the functions introduced here.
- 2** 6-8 marks in every Class 11 paper, with predictable question types (functions, making of the Constitution, authority).
- 3** It reframes a common misconception: the Constitution was not 'given' to us — Indians made it for themselves, which is the root of its authority.

TOPIC

A

**What is a
constitution —
and why do we
need one?**

TOPIC

The idea of a constitution

WHAT IT IS

A constitution is the body of fundamental rules and principles according to which a society or a state is governed — the supreme law from which every other law and institution draws its authority. It is written down in a single document in India, though some countries (like the United Kingdom)

WHY SOCIETIES NEED ONE

Whenever a group of people decide to live together as a collective, they face a coordination problem: who decides, how decisions bind everyone, and what protects each person from the rest. A constitution solves this by laying down agreed fundamental rules in advance, so that day-to-

MORE THAN A GOVERNMENT MANUAL

It is tempting to treat a constitution as merely a manual that organises the government, but it is much more. It is also a document of identity — it expresses who 'we, the people' are and what kind of society we aspire to build. The Indian Constitution, for instance, does not only

SUPREME AND SPECIAL

A constitution differs from an ordinary law in two crucial ways. First, it is supreme — ordinary laws made by the legislature are valid only if they conform to it, and courts can strike down laws that violate it. Second, it is harder to change: amending the Constitution requires a special, more demanding

TOPIC

B

The four functions of a constitution

TOPIC

Allocating power · Limiting government

ALLOCATES DECISION-MAKING POWER

The first and most basic function of a constitution is to specify how the government will be constituted and who will have the power to make binding decisions for the whole society. It answers questions like: who makes the laws, who enforces them, who interprets them, and how

SETS LIMITS ON GOVERNMENT POWER

The second function is to draw a boundary around government — to declare what those in power may NOT do to citizens, however large their majority. These limits are fundamental and cannot ordinarily be overridden by passing an ordinary law. In the Indian Constitution this function

WHY BOTH FUNCTIONS ARE NEEDED TOGETHER

Allocation and limitation are two sides of the same coin and must work together. Allocating power without limiting it produces an elected tyranny — a government chosen by the people but free to oppress them. Limiting power without clearly allocating it produces paralysis and

HOW CBSE TESTS THIS

These two functions together are the single most examined idea in the chapter. A 3-4 mark question typically asks you to 'explain the functions of a constitution', and the allocation and limitation functions must each be stated as a clear point, explained in one line, and illustrated with an Indian

TOPIC

Expressing aspirations - Providing a framework of trust

EXPRESSES ASPIRATIONS AND IDENTITY

The third function is that a constitution gives expression to the fundamental identity of a people and the aspirations they hold for their collective future. It declares not only how the country will be governed but what kind of society it wishes to become. The Indian

PROVIDES THE BASIC FRAMEWORK

The fourth function is to lay down the basic framework of rules within which all other coordination in society takes place. Before any specific policy can be debated, there must be agreed ground rules about how decisions will be reached and accepted — and the constitution

BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST

Closely tied to the framework function is the way a constitution generates trust among people who may not know or agree with one another. When everyone accepts the same fundamental rules, each person can reasonably expect others to abide by them too, and this shared expectation makes large-

THE FOUR FUNCTIONS AS ONE WHOLE

It helps to remember the four functions as a single working wheel: a constitution ALLOCATES power, LIMITS that power, EXPRESSES the people's aspirations, and PROVIDES the basic framework that builds trust and coordination. Each spoke depends on the others — allocation

TOPIC

C

How the Indian Constitution was made

TOPIC

Who wrote our Constitution

THE BODY AND ITS COMPOSITION

The Indian Constitution was framed by the Constituent Assembly, formed in 1946. Its members were chosen indirectly — they were elected by the members of the existing Provincial Legislative Assemblies rather than directly by the people, because universal adult franchise

KEY PERSONALITIES

Several figures stand out and are frequently asked in one-mark questions. Dr Rajendra Prasad was elected President of the Constituent Assembly and presided over its sessions. Dr B.R. Ambedkar served as Chairman of the seven-member Drafting Committee and is honoured as the chief

THE PROCESS OF DELIBERATION

The Assembly worked for almost three years, holding eleven sessions, and debated the draft clause by clause in a careful, reasoned and largely public manner. Crucially, decisions were reached as far as possible by consensus and accommodation rather than by simply

ADOPTION AND COMMENCEMENT

After nearly three years of work, the Constituent Assembly **ADOPTED** the Constitution on 26 November 1949 — the day now celebrated as Constitution Day, or Samvidhan Divas. The Constitution then came into **FORCE** on 26 January 1950, the day celebrated as Republic

WORKED EXAMPLE

The road to the Indian Constitution

- 1** Government of India Act 1935 — the colonial framework that preceded the Constitution (not the Constitution itself).
- 2** 1946 — the Constituent Assembly is formed; members elected indirectly by Provincial Assemblies. First sitting in December 1946.
- 3** 13 December 1946 — Jawaharlal Nehru moves the Objectives Resolution, laying down the guiding ideals later reflected in the Preamble.
- 4** 26 November 1949 — the Constitution is ADOPTED (Constitution Day). 26 January 1950 — it COMES INTO FORCE (Republic Day).

TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK

A student writes: 'The Indian Constitution was given to us by the British and came into force on 26 November 1949.' Identify the two errors.

SOLUTION

ANSWER Error 1: The Constitution was NOT given by the British — it was framed by Indians in the Constituent Assembly. Error 2: 26 November 1949 is the date of ADOPTION; it came into FORCE on 26 January 1950.

TOPIC

D

The Preamble — the soul of the Constitution

TOPIC

What the Preamble declares

SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

The Preamble opens with the words 'WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA', and this opening is far more than a flourish — it declares that the ultimate source of the Constitution's authority is the people of India themselves, not any king, foreign power or external grant. This is the clearest constitutional statement

NATURE OF THE INDIAN STATE

The Preamble then describes the kind of state India is: a SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC, REPUBLIC. Sovereign means India is free to take its own decisions, internally and externally, without outside control. Socialist commits the state to reducing

THE OBJECTIVES

The Preamble next sets out the goals the Constitution promises to secure for all citizens: JUSTICE (social, economic and political), LIBERTY (of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship), EQUALITY (of status and opportunity), and FRATERNITY (assuring the dignity of the

WHY THE PREAMBLE MATTERS

Though it is only a single sentence, the Preamble is often called the soul, the identity card, or the philosophy of the Constitution because it compresses the entire spirit of the document into a few lines. It tells us where the Constitution's authority comes from (the people), what kind of

TOPIC

E

Why we accept the Constitution's authority

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

The authority of the Constitution

“ We accept the Constitution as the supreme law for four connected reasons: it is the basic source of all legal authority, it was made through a fair and inclusive process, its substantive content is just, and its wide acceptance generates the mutual trust that holds a diverse society together.

STATEMENT

A constitution commands obedience not merely because it can be enforced, but because (i) it is procedurally legitimate — framed by representatives of the people through reasoned

WHY THIS MATTERS

- This is the central intellectual claim of the chapter: a constitution's authority comes from legitimacy (consent + fairness), not from raw force
- A document imposed by fear alone would not survive
- the Indian Constitution endures because Indians recognise it as

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Do not reduce the answer to 'it is the law, so we must obey it'. That is circular. The examiner wants the procedural reason (how it was made), the substantive reason (what it contains), AND the trust-generating reason — at least three distinct points for full marks.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Why should we accept the authority of the Constitution?

- 1** Point 1 — It is the supreme, basic law and the source of authority for the government itself; without accepting it there can be no stable political order.
- 2** Point 2 — It was made by our own representatives through an inclusive, deliberative, consensus-based process — it rests on the consent of the people, not on outside imposition.
- 3** Point 3 — Its content is just: it guarantees fundamental rights, treats citizens as equals, and limits arbitrary power.
- 4** Point 4 — Its wide acceptance generates mutual trust and coordination, allowing a diverse society to live together peacefully. Conclude that legitimacy, not force, is what sustains it.

TOPIC

Who made the Indian Constitution

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The Indian Constitution was 'given' to India by the British, like the earlier Government of India Acts.

✓ **CORRECT** The British enacted the Government of India Act 1935, but the Constitution itself was framed by Indians — the Constituent Assembly of India, elected indirectly through the Provincial Assemblies, drafted and adopted it between December 1946 and November 1949. This authorship-by-Indians is precisely what gives the Constitution its moral authority over us.

TOPIC

Adoption vs commencement dates

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The Constitution came into force on 26 November 1949.

✓ **CORRECT** 26 November 1949 is the date the Constituent Assembly ADOPTED (passed) the Constitution — celebrated as Constitution Day / Samvidhan Divas. It came into FORCE (commenced) on 26 January 1950, celebrated as Republic Day. 26 Jan was deliberately chosen to honour the 1930 'Purna Swaraj' declaration. Mixing up these two dates is the single most common VSA error.

TOPIC

Ambedkar's role

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Dr B.R. Ambedkar single-handedly wrote the Constitution and is its sole author.

✓ **CORRECT** Dr Ambedkar was the Chairman of the seven-member Drafting Committee and is rightly honoured as the chief architect of the Constitution. But the document was the product of nearly three years of debate by the whole Constituent Assembly; Dr Rajendra Prasad presided over the Assembly, B.N. Rau was the Constitutional Adviser, and hundreds of members debated every clause. 'Father of the Indian Constitution' is a tribute to Ambedkar's leadership of the drafting, not a claim of sole authorship.

TOPIC

What a constitution does

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** A constitution exists only to list the rights of citizens.

✓ **CORRECT** Listing fundamental rights is only ONE part. A constitution does four things: it allocates decision-making power, sets limits on what the government may do (including protecting rights), expresses the aspirations and identity of the people, and provides the basic framework that lets a society function as a collective. Reducing it to a 'list of rights' loses three-quarters of the chapter.

TOPIC

Constitution and ordinary law

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** A constitution is just another law passed by Parliament and can be changed like any ordinary law.
- ✓ **CORRECT** A constitution is the SUPREME law — it is the source of authority for Parliament itself. Ordinary laws are made by the legislature; the constitution defines what the legislature is and limits what it can do. That is why amending the Constitution needs a special, harder procedure than passing an ordinary Act, and why no ordinary law can override it.

TOPIC

The Preamble

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The Preamble is just a decorative introduction with no real importance.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The Preamble is the soul / identity card of the Constitution. It declares the source of authority ('We, the People'), the nature of the Indian state (Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic), and the core objectives (Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity). The Supreme Court treats it as a key to interpreting the Constitution. It is short, but every word is loaded.

TOPIC

Constitution and trust

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** A constitution works only because the government is forced to obey it.

✓ **CORRECT** A constitution succeeds mainly because people accept it as legitimate and trust that others will follow it too — it generates a degree of mutual trust and coordination in society. Its rules are followed not just out of fear of courts but because citizens recognise the Constitution as theirs. This is why the moral authority and the substantive fairness of the document matter as much as its enforcement.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

4-mark question: 'Explain any four functions of a constitution.' (also asked as a 3-mark 'three

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 ALLOCATION OF DECISION-MAKING POWER
1 m</p> | <p>'First, a constitution specifies who has the power to make decisions in a society and how a government is to be constituted.' Add the Indian illustration: it decides that the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, President and Council of Ministers will exercise law-making and executive power, and divides power between the Union and the States.</p> |
| <p>2 LIMITS ON THE POWER OF GOVERNMENT
1 m</p> | <p>'Second, a constitution sets limits on what a government can impose on its citizens — these limits are fundamental and cannot ordinarily be transgressed.' Illustration: the Fundamental Rights (Articles 12-35) bar the government from violating freedom of speech, equality, or life and liberty.</p> |
| <p>3 ASPIRATIONS AND GOALS OF THE SOCIETY
1 m</p> | <p>'Third, a constitution expresses the fundamental identity and aspirations of a people — the kind of society they wish to build.' Illustration: the Preamble's pledge of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, and the Directive Principles, lay out India's collective goals.</p> |
| <p>4 BASIC FRAMEWORK THAT ENABLES COORDINATION AND TRUST
1 m</p> | <p>'Fourth, a constitution provides the basic rules and the framework that allow members of a society to coordinate and to live together with mutual trust.' Without an agreed set of fundamental rules, no stable collective decision-making is possible.</p> |

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-6 mark question: 'Describe how the Indian Constitution was made / the composition and

1 THE BODY AND ITS COMPOSITION

2 m

'The Indian Constitution was framed by the Constituent Assembly, formed in 1946. Its members were elected indirectly by the members of the existing Provincial Legislative Assemblies. The Assembly first met in December 1946. Dr Rajendra Prasad was elected its President, and a seven-member Drafting Committee under the chairmanship of Dr B.R. Ambedkar prepared the draft.' Mention that the Assembly broadly mirrored the social diversity of India.

2 THE PROCESS — DEBATE, DELIBERATION AND CONSENSUS

2 m

'The Assembly worked for almost three years, holding eleven sessions. Every clause was discussed in detail; the proceedings were conducted in a systematic, reasoned and public manner. Decisions were reached largely by consensus and compromise rather than by brute majority — this gave the document wide acceptability. The Objectives Resolution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru on 13 December 1946 laid down the guiding ideals.'

3 ADOPTION, COMMENCEMENT AND WHY IT CARRIES AUTHORITY

2 m

'The Constitution was adopted on 26 November 1949 and came into force on 26 January 1950. Because it was made by Indians, through an inclusive and deliberative process, and rests on the consent of the people, it commands moral authority — that is why we accept it as the supreme law of the land.'

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

3-4 mark question: 'Why should we accept the authority of the Constitution? / Why does a

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 IT IS THE SUPREME, BASIC LAW
1 m</p> | <p>'A constitution is the supreme law that is the source of authority for the government itself; ordinary laws derive their validity from it. Accepting its authority is what allows a stable, predictable political order to exist.'</p> |
| <p>2 IT WAS MADE BY A CREDIBLE, INCLUSIVE PROCESS
1 m</p> | <p>'We accept it because it was framed by our own representatives in the Constituent Assembly through open, reasoned deliberation and broad consensus — it was not imposed by an outside power, so it carries the consent of the people.'</p> |
| <p>3 ITS SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT IS JUST AND FAIR
1 m</p> | <p>'We accept it because of WHAT it contains — it guarantees fundamental rights, treats citizens as equals, limits arbitrary power, and lays down values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity that we recognise as fair.'</p> |
| <p>4 IT GENERATES TRUST AND COORDINATION
1 m</p> | <p>'Finally, when everyone accepts the same set of fundamental rules, it creates mutual trust and allows a diverse society to coordinate and live together peacefully — this self-reinforcing acceptance is what keeps the Constitution alive.'</p> |

PYQ PATTERNS

Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1

Explain any four/three functions of a constitution. (3-6 marks)

Almost every year (CBSE SQP 2019, 2021, 2023; School Annual 2020, 2022)

#2

Describe the composition and working of the Constituent Assembly / how the Indian Constitution was made. (5-6 marks)

CBSE SQP 2020, 2022; School Annual 2019, 2023

#3

Why does a constitution need to be accepted as the supreme law? / Why should we accept the authority of the Indian Constitution? (3-4 marks)

CBSE SQP 2021; School Annual 2022, 2024

#4

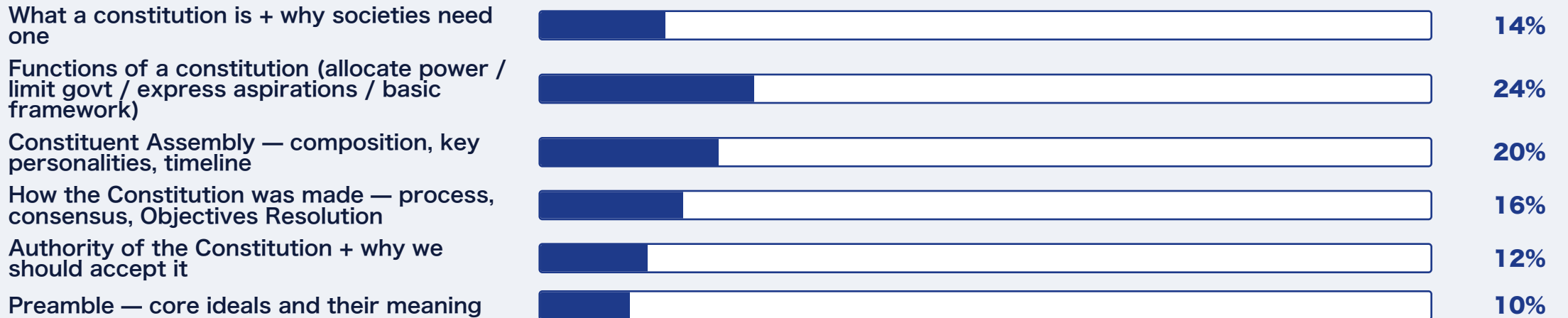
VSA on dates/personalities

When was the Constitution adopted? Who chaired the Drafting Committee? Who moved the

MARKS DISTRIBUTION

10-year marks distribution

10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION



RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

5-line revision

1 What & why — A constitution is the supreme body of fundamental rules; societies need it to settle who decides, protect citizens, express aspirations, and coordinate with trust.

2 Four functions —
Allocates power ·
Limits government ·
Expresses aspirations/identity ·
Provides the basic framework and builds trust. Give one Indian example each.

3 Making & authority —
Framed by the Constituent Assembly (formed 1946, indirectly elected); Prasad President, Ambedkar chaired Drafting; adopted 26 Nov 1949, in force 26 Jan 1950. We accept it for its fair process, just content, and the trust it builds.

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

- Chapter 2 — Rights in the Indian Constitution (builds directly on the 'limiting government' function you met here).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target $\geq 12/15$.
- Then the full Board-Pattern Paper — 30 marks, 60 minutes, real exam pattern.

You now know why a constitution exists — and how India wrote its own.

Prove it. Take the drill, sit the paper, master the chapter.

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