The Constituent Assembly debates of India

Why in news?

The Constitution Day was celebrated on November 26, marking the adoption of our Constitution on November 26, 1949.

How did the Constituent Assembly evolve?

- In 1934 the seed of forming a Constituent Assembly was first sown by an Indian pioneer of the Communist movement, Mr. M.N. Roy.
- The Constituent Assembly of India came into existence as per the provisions of **Cabinet Mission Plan** of May 1946.
- Its task was to formulate a Constitution for facilitating appropriate transfer of sovereign power from British authorities to Indian hands.
- The Assembly was to have proportional representation from existing provincial legislatures and from various princely states.
- **Rajendra Prasad** was the elected President of Constituent Assembly while VT Krishnamachari and HC Mookerji served as Vice-Presidents.
- The Constituent Assembly of India sat for the first time on December 9, 1946 and held 12 sessions or rounds of sittings.
- The Assembly met for 165 days and spoke about 3.6 million words overall comprising around 8,000 pages of written documents which laid the foundation for our Constitution.
- The Constituent Assembly had precisely taken two years, eleven months, and seventeen days to complete the historic duty of drafting the Indian Constitution.
- Finally the Constitution was adopted on **November 26, 1949** with a Preamble, 395 Articles, and 8 Schedules.
- The Constitution came into force from **January 26, 1950** which is celebrated as the Republic Day.s

How diverse is the Constitutional Assembly?

- The Constituent Assembly was supposed to be a body partly elected, and partly nominated members.
- It comprised of representatives of all sections of the society namely the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsi, Anglo-Indian, Indian Christians, SCs/ STS,

Backward Classes, and women belonging to all of these sections.

- The total membership of the Constituent Assembly was to be 389.
  - 292 members elected through the Provincial Legislative Assemblies
  - The Indian Princely States was represented by 93 members
  - The Chief Commissioners' Provinces were represented by 4 members
- Almost a quarter of the members came from princely states.
- In terms of gender, there were 15 women and around 90% of the Assembly members were Hindu.
- Despite an overwhelming presence of Congress party members, there was great diversity in their ideological positions.

What is the analysis about the Constitutional debates?

- **Words spoken** - When a Lorenz curve is drawn and the number of words spoken by each member is lined up, the graph exhibits an extremely unequal distribution.
- Less than 6% of members spoke 50% of all the words uttered in the Assembly.
- Women members spoke less than 2%. (Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Sucheta Kriplani, among others, didn't say anything).
- The most voluble speakers were Rajendra Prasad and Ambedkar (7.5% and 7.2% respectively).
- Prominent national leaders like Nehru and Patel contributed to merely 2.18% and 1.47% of the debate by word-count.
- The Gini coefficient of the number of words spoken in the Constituent Assembly debates is 0.756 which indicates high asymmetry.
- **Constitutional Ideas –** Mapping the frequency of utterance of Constitutional concepts allows us to see which concepts dominated the talks and which ones were hardly discussed.
- 'Rights' came to be the most invoked word.
- Members spoke considerably about ideas involving 'religion', 'caste', 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' much less than 'freedom'.
- More members uttered 'education' as compared to 'health'
- Words like 'secular' were used a lot more than 'dharma' or 'morality' and 'women' was invoked more than 'adivasis'.
- Interestingly, 'liberty' invocations far exceeded 'equality' which in turn was used considerably more than 'socialism'.

What is the relevance of this analysis?

- These estimates may not signal anything concrete, but they do offer a

window into what occupied the Assembly's collective mind.
- This project aims for deeper research on how we the people came to where we've reached as the path is not as linear as one would think.
- If India is breathing the air of sovereignty, democracy, and freedom along with the rights and duties, it is because of the relentless efforts by notable personalities who had come together to gift India its biggest asset, the Constitution of India.

References

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