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DEMOCRACY

Democracy, literally, rule by the people. The term is derived from the Greek *dēmokratia*, which was coined from *dēmos* (“people”) and *kratos* (“rule”) in the middle of the 5th century BCE to denote the political systems then existing in some Greek city-states, notably Athens.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, Democracy is "government by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them or by officers elected by them."

According to Herodotus democracy is that "government in which supreme power of the state is vested in the entire people."

Concept of democracy:

Democracy comes from the Greek word, “demo and “kratos” meaning “people” and “rule”. In democracies, it is the people who hold autonomous power over legislator and government.

Democracy is a political form of government in which governing power is derived from the people, by consensus (consensus democracy), by direct referendum, or by means of elected representatives of the people (representative democracy). A form of political organization of society based on a recognition of the people as the source of power, their right to participate in the resolution of state affairs, and the provision of a rather broad range of rights and liberties for citizens.

Challenges to Democracy

- Frequent elections and incongruent political ideologies lead to unstable and weak governments e.g. 1990s phase of coalition politics in India lead to short term governments.
- Competitive politics and power play leads to low moral values e.g. crony capitalism: the case of 2G spectrum scandal, bureaucracy-politics-crime nexus.
- Democratic processes lead to delay in decision making e.g. long-drawn process at arriving on consensus on Climate Agenda in UNFCCC despite the pressing nature of the issue.
- Elected rulers may not take decision in the best interest of people, rather cater to their immediate political needs and advantages e.g. inequalities based on caste, class, gender etc.

Democracy as best alternative than other tried forms

- Democracy is more accountable than other governments to its people, responding to their needs, sensitivities e.g. Post-Independence India did not face any famine due to focus on food security while Communist China faced it in the late 1950s
- Rigorous consultation and discussions in a democracy help in better quality of decision making e.g. special status given to scheduled areas and North-East in Constitution of India reflecting their culture, while China trying to curtail freedoms in Hong-Kong and military-dictators doing same in African nations.
- Democracy allows for methods to deal with differences and conflicts e.g. protection to minorities and depressed classes in India, secular nature of Indian state, while in regimes like Nazi Germany

propounding Fascist ideas followed racial segregation policy, similar was the case in Apartheid regime in South Africa.

- Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens. Freedom Rights allow one to develop to their fullest potential and be responsible for their own actions. This removes the potential of any violent fallout in case citizens are disaffected by the ruling government. For instances, the absence of any tool of protest in dictatorship regimes in Middle east led to Arab Spring and downfall of such regimes.
- Democracy allows for course corrections by allowing to rectify mistakes e.g. Indian PM apologizing to Sikh community for atrocities in the mid-1980s, Japanese PM doing same for atrocities in Manchuria and South Korea during world war. On the other hand, China continues to repress Tibetan, Uighur ethnicity.

Aspects of Democracy:-

- **Political democracy** is defined as a democracy in which free and fair election takes place for replacing or choosing government, in which all citizen have equal participation in govt. decision, elimination of tyranny of majority, equality in law and also provide equal opportunity to public office.....
- **Social democracy** is a system of democracy in which state manage/secure its citizens right so as to eliminate any type of discrimination/or glaring inequalities, provide its citizen equal justice, ensure equal representation of all community in public institution and secure rights of weaker section through welfare work....
- **Economic democracy** means all people of state have equal right to practice trade without any barrier and in which absence of oppression by any public authority/people in one's economic sphere....
- To ensure sustainable democracy, coordination between social, economic and political democracy is necessary.

There Are Four Basic Features of Democratic Government

1. The political system where governments are formed and changed through the free and fair election process.
2. Citizens actively participate in civic and political life.
3. All citizens are equal before law.
4. Human rights of all citizens must be protected.

UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE

The right to vote is given to all the adult and employed men and the women and unemployed men are excluded.

UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE

The right to vote is given to each and every adult person even rich or poor.

Definition of Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people. One chief factor common to all democracies is that the government is chosen by the people. It also helps students to demarcate between democratic and non-democratic governments. From the non-democratic government, take the example of Myanmar, where rulers were not elected by the people. Those who were in charge of the army of the country took over as rulers and people had no say in this decision. Dictators like Pinochet (Chile) are not elected by the people. This also applies to monarchies.

Features of Democracy

The simple definition of democracy gives rise to various questions, which are given below:

- Who are the rulers in this definition?
- What kind of election constitutes a democratic election?
- Who are the people who can elect the rulers or get elected as rulers?
- Finally, what form of government is a democracy?

Major decisions by elected leaders

Some countries like Pakistan do not follow this rule. In Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf led a military coup in October 1999. He overthrew the democratically elected government and went on to become the President of the country. In 2002, he also held a referendum in the country that granted him a five-year extension. Meanwhile, after passing of this 'Legal Framework Order' elections were held to the national and provincial assemblies and elected representatives were granted some powers. But the final power rested with military officers and General Musharraf himself. Hence, we can conclude it was not a democratic country. The same thing happens in many dictatorships and monarchies. Thus, we can conclude that in a democracy the final decision making power must rest with those elected by the people.

Free and Fair Electoral Competition

In China, elections are held after every five years for electing the country's parliament, called Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui (National People's Congress). Before contesting elections, a candidate needs the approval of the Chinese Communist Party. The government is always formed by the Communist Party. Alternatively, since its independence in 1930, Mexico holds elections after every six years to elect its President. But until 2000 every election was won by a party called PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Should we consider the elections described above as examples of people electing their rulers? Reading these examples we get a sense that we cannot. Democracy must be based on a free and fair election where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing.

One person, one vote, one value one value

Democracy is based on a fundamental principle of political equality. However, there are many instances of denial of the equal right to vote. Until 2015, in Saudi Arabia, women did not have the right to vote. Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to the Russian minority found it difficult to get the right to vote. In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian. Definitely not a democratic government. The feature of democracy this highlights is that in a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and in turn, each vote must have one value.

Rule of law and respect for rights

Zimbabwe attained independence from White minority rule in 1980 and from then the country has been ruled by the party that led the freedom struggle, ZANU-PF. Its leader,

Robert Mugabe ruled the country since independence. Even if elections were held regularly, it was always won by ZANU-PF. President Mugabe was popular but also used unfair practices in elections. There was a law that limited the right to criticise the President. Television and radio were controlled by the government and gave only the ruling party's version. There were independent newspapers but the government harassed those journalists who went against it and so on. Not a democratic government. Democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional law and citizens' rights.

Hence, we can deduce that democracy is a form of government in which:

- Rulers elected by the people take all the major decisions
- Elections offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers
- This choice and opportunity is available to all the people on an equal basis
- The exercise of this choice leads to a government limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizens' rights

Why Democracy?

Cons of Democracy

- Leaders keep changing in a democracy leading to instability
- Democracy is all about political competition and power play, leaving no scope for morality
- Many people have to be consulted in a democracy that leads to delays
- Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people, resulting in bad decisions
- Democracy leads to corruption since it is based on electoral competition
- Ordinary people don't know what is good for them; they should not decide anything

From these arguments, we can see that democracy of the kind we see, may not be the ideal form of government. However, we will see if democracy is better than other forms of government that are there for us to choose from.

Arguments in Favour of Democracy

A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government: Take the example of India and China famines in 1958-1961. While China was hit badly, India did not fare as badly, despite its economic condition. Reason for this could be that India responded to the food scarcity in a way that the Chinese government did not. Here, we see that democracy is better than any other form of government in responding to the needs of the people.

Democracy improves the quality of decision-making: Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. A democratic decision always involves many people, discussions and meetings and they are able to point out possible mistakes in any decision. This may take time. However, the advantage of taking time over important decisions is that it reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions.

Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts: In any society, people are bound to have differences of opinions and interests. These differences are particularly more in a country like ours with amazing social diversity. People belong to different regions, speak different languages, practise different religions and have different castes. The preferences of one group can clash with those of other groups. How do we resolve such a conflict? Democracy provides the only peaceful solution to this problem. In a democracy, no one is a permanent winner or loser. Different groups can live with one another peacefully.

Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens: Democracy is based on the principle of political equality. It recognises that the poorest and the least educated have the same status as the rich and the educated.

Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct our own mistakes: Even if no government can guarantee that no mistakes will be made, in a democracy one can be sure that it will not be hidden for too long. It makes space for public discussion on these mistakes. There is also room for correction. Rulers have to change their decisions or they could themselves be changed.

Thus, we can correctly infer that while democracy may not be the solution to all problems, it is still clearly better than any other alternatives.

Broader Meanings of Democracy

In this chapter, the meaning of democracy is discussed in a descriptive sense. Students get to learn about democracy as a form of government, thus helping them to identify a clear set of minimal features that democracy requires. The common form adopted by democracy is representative democracy. In democratic countries, all people do not rule. A majority is allowed to take decisions on behalf of all the people through their elected representatives. This has become necessary for the reasons given below:

- Modern democracies involve such a large number of people that it is physically impossible for them to sit together and take a collective decision.
- Even if they could, the citizen does not have the time, the desire or the skills to take part in all the decisions.

Democracy, as a principle, can go beyond the government and can be applied to any sphere of life. People use the word democracy not to describe any existing government but to set up an ideal standard that all democracies must aim to become. However, if the ideals of democracy are considered then no country in the world is correctly democratic. Still, having an understanding of democracy as an ideal will explain why to value democracy. It enables people to judge an existing democracy and identify their weaknesses. It also helps to distinguish between a minimal democracy and a good democracy. The most common form of democracy in today's world is being ruled through people's elected representatives. However, for a small community, there can be other ways of making democratic decisions. All people can sit together and make decisions directly. This is how the Gram Sabha should work in a village.