

Democracy

Introduction

- The concept of democracy has been in use in the western political thought since ancient times.
- The term democracy derived from two Greek words '**Demos**' + '**Cracy**' which together forms democracy means People's rule or Government.
- Thus it literally **mean people's rule**.
- Democracy is different things for different people.
- It is understood as a form of government, a form of state, a social order and way of life.

Definitions

- “ Democracy is a Government of the people, by the people and for the people”- **Abraham Lincoln**
- “Democracy is a government in which everyone has a share”- **Prof. Seeley**
- “It is a government of many and not of the few”-**Pericles**
- “It is a rule by criticism and discussions”-**E. Barker**
- It is a form of government in which people are supreme and source of all powers.
- People take active part in the government either directly or through their representatives.
- It is a rule by majority which safeguards not only majority interest but minority interest as well.

Types of Democracy

There are two types of democracy-

- 1. Pure or direct and
- 2. Representative or indirect.

Direct democracy

- Here, people exercises power directly without any representatives.
- Here, the will of the people is expressed directly by themselves. Garner
- All the adult population of the country take active participation in the passing of laws and in the administration.
- Hence, direct democracy is pure and simple.
- These prevailed in ancient Greek city-states.
- At present some symptoms of direct democracy is being practiced in the cantons of Swiss.
- Some such devices are initiative, referendum, recall, plebiscites, etc.

Merits of direct democracy:

- 1. Enables people to directly take part in the affairs of the state.
- 2. Development, law and order are better than in other forms of government – consensus and co-operation is more.
- 3. Every citizen has an opportunity to serve the nation.
- 4. Promotes better sense of nationalism and patriotism in the people because the people themselves are the rulers.
- 5. Popular unrest and revolution can be reduced to the minimum.
- 6. Minimum scope for corruption.

Demerits:

- 1. It is not practicable in large nation states.
- 2. It is practicable only in a community which is highly educated.
- 3. Bureaucracy may dictate term on the people than serving them
- 4. It may cause disorder and chaos if thousands of people assemble in open air.
- 5. Utter wastage of time of the vast majority.

Indirect democracy

- It is also known as representative democracy in which the work of the government is carried out through the elected representatives of the people.
- Most of the modern democracies are indirect democracies.
- Here, also sovereignty belongs to the people but is exercised by their representatives.
- The will of the people is formulated and expressed by these representatives.
- These representatives are elected periodically by the people.
- Representatives govern the people as their trustees.
- They must be responsive to public opinion.

Merits:

- 1. is useful to large states with huge population.
- 2. More economical and less expensive as only a few representatives need to be assembled.
- 3. it tends to be more efficient than direct democracy because of the small group of representatives.
- 4. it will save the time of the people who devote themselves in other productive functions.
- 5. here, responsibility is fixed and hence more accountability is visible.

Demerits:

- There is no guaranty that in the elections the best persons will be get elected.
- Indirect democracy makes voter free only during elections.
- Entire nation has to suffer if the lawbreakers becomes the law-makers.
- Party politics leads to violence and once violence is rampant democracy looses its value.
- Political populism, appeasing voters and vote bank politics and hence no effective measures to deal with the real problems by party in power.
- Of the two, direct democracy more practicable despite its demerits.

Essentials of Democracy:

- It is not only the best form of government but also the difficult form of government.
- Certain conditions are necessary for its successful working.
- There are two categories of requirements-
 - 1. General requirements and
 - 2. Institutional requirements.

I. General Requirements:

- **1. Thirst for democracy-**
- The will to participate actively in the affairs of the state and want to have a say in the affairs of the government.

2. Eternal Vigilance:

- It is the most difficult form of government as the people require to be eternally vigilant to protect it from internal and external dangers.
- They should obey good laws but they should not remain silent when the government commit mistakes.

3. Spirit of co-operation:

- It can survive only in an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence, harmony and co-operation.
- Live and let others to live, mutual tolerance and understand the points of view of others.
- A democratic government to seek the maximum voluntary co-operation and never resort to coercion unless persuasion proves impossible.

4. Public criticism:

- It is a government by consent and criticisms of the people.
- People should protest against the wrong actions of government.
- Democracy becomes a dictatorship when people remains passive.

5. Sound system of education:

- Citizens should be educated and well informed so that they become capable of participating in political activities.
- Ignorance and illiteracy are the worst enemies of democracy.
- Useful in cultivating certain qualities in them like sacrifice, sympathy, tolerance, selfless service to the nation ,etc. essential to a democracy.

6. Decent standard of living:

- Democracy succeeds in a country where there is economic prosperity but tends to fail in a poor county.
- Economic security is essential for the success of democracy.
- People who are poverty stricken are bothered about their daily bread and not about their political rights.
- Poverty keep the people uneducated, backward and timid.

7. Able leadership:

- Able and good leadership needed for its success but poor leadership comes in the way of democracy.
- Leaders must be farsighted, enlightened, effective personality to lead the country.

8. Democratic society:

- It will succeed only in a democratic society
- Liberty, equality, discussion, opposition, tolerance are the qualities of a democratic society.
- Social systems and sub systems should be democratic.

II. Institutional Requirements:

- A written constitution
- Political parties
- An effective opposition
- A legislature with elected members.
- An accountable executive.
- An independent judiciary.
- Local self governments.
- Free and fearless press.

Merits of democracy:

1. Protects the interest of all:

- The representatives of the people in power know the grievances of the people and will try to redress them.

2. Upholds human dignity:

- It respect the dignity of human personality
- In a democracy all are equal, and every one is given the importance due to them.

3. Upholds liberty and equality:

- It upholds liberty and equality.
- Every individual is free to think, speak and act and develop his own personality in the way in which he thinks right.
- Everyone has the freedom to live in his own way.
- All are equal before law, and the same punishment is meted out to all when the law is broken.
- All those who value liberty and equality considers democracy as the best form of government.

4. A responsible government:

- Government is responsible to the people.
- It cannot act against the wishes of of the people.

5. Trains the people:

- It encourages the people to come forward in governing themselves and trains them in the art of government.
- It teaches them how to run their own institutions.

6. Promotion of social welfare:

- Democratic government in modern times are guided by the principles of welfare state.

7. Faith in human capacity:

- It puts faith in human capacity to think and act.
- It does not believe that only a few persons are competent to take part in political activities.
- If the people are intelligent they do not follow blindly their leaders.

8. Less chance of revolution:

- Because, public opinion is respected.
- Also because, everybody is treated equal in a democracy and hence less chance for hostility and revolt against the state.
- If the people are dissatisfied with a government, can remove it through ballots.
- Peaceful transformation of power takes place only in a democracy.

9. Promotion of nationalism:

- Democracy strengthens the love of the country because, the citizens feel that the government is their own creation {JS Mill}

10. Efficient system of government:

- Popular election, popular control, popular responsibility are more likely to ensure a degree of efficiency than any other system of government.
- It is the best form of government [Garner]

Demerits of democracy:

- According to Lecky, it is the government of the poorest, the most ignorant, the most incapable, who are necessarily the most numerous.

1. Rule of incompetent people:

- Plato, Aristotle and others considered it as a degenerated form of government.
- Many citizens do not understand the working of the government, and if they come to power prove to be incompetent.
- To become a representative of people need not require any qualification, due to which incompetent get elected to legislatures.

2. Inefficient system of Govt.

- Since democracy is headed by inexperienced and ignorant men, there is inefficiency.
- It is the govt by ignorant men-James Stephen.
- Men who are efficient, knowledgeable and competent keep themselves away from politics and elections.
- Democracy is often described as the rule by average men who lack the legislative experience required to make laws, frame policies and implement them.

3. Slow Government:

- Since it is a govt. by discussions and criticisms, there is unnecessary delay in reaching a decision in time.
- Delay in arriving at a decision delays the progress of the nation.

4. Expensive system of Govt.

- When it is compared with other forms of govt. democracy proves to be a costly system of govt.
- Huge amount of money is spent on elections at regular intervals.

5. Tyranny of the majority:

- It is a govt. by majority but this majority can prove to be tyrannical.
- If the opposition is weak and disunited then the ruling party may become tyrannical and oppress the minorities.
- Even if the minority is intellectually and morally superior but it has no place in a democracy.

6. Corruption:

- The huge amount of money that is spent during elections is recovered by the representatives through corrupt means.
- At the time of elections political parties depends upon big industrialists for donations and favour them after elections.
- Money power plays an important role in a democracy.

7. Unsuitable in emergencies:

- It is unsuitable in emergencies.
- Any crisis requires quick and prompt action. But democracy is slow in taking decisions.

8. Popular sovereignty a myth:

- People are sovereign only during elections.
- Unorganised mass of people are blindly led by a few people who are skilled in dominating them.
- They are forced to obey the despotic laws made by their representatives.

9. Democracy is only a pretence and not real:

- There is a wide gap between democracy in theory and democracy in practice.
- A false sense of equality is created among the people.
- The tendency to make politics a gainful profession.
- In conclusion we may say that despite its various short comings there is no better alternative to democracy to present. It is the best among the rest.