

Chapter-2

Democracy – What and Why ?

Introduction:

In the preceding chapter we learnt what is nature of democratic administrative system? How democracy expanded in the modern world? What was the nature of democracy in ancient India ? And how democracy developed in the modern world ? Now we will know : what is democracy ? What are the features of democracy ? In this chapter we will try to know what will be the correct definition of democracy ? We will begin with a very simple definition of democracy . We will also try to find out : what are the differences between democratic and non-democratic governments? We will know the practical aspects of democracy . Besides, we will also know what are the minimum features of any democratic government ? Toward the end of this chapter we step beyond the statements given for and against democracy and come to a broader idea of democracy .

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

The nature of administrative system can be of many types . There are such administrative systems which are chosen by people and they rule for the benefit of the people . Such an administrative system is called democracy. There are some other forms of government which is not elected by the people but attains power through such mediums like, coup , family heredity tradition , etc and the officers of such governments

rule for their own benefit . Such administrative systems are known as non-democratic governments .After knowing some of the governments of the world we will be able to differentiate between democratic and non-democratic governments.

Let us , through some examples , discuss one by one the working systems of such governments .First of all we can take Pakistan .In Pakistan General Parvez Musharraf led the military coup in October 1999 .He uprooted the government elected through democratic manner and declared himself **the chief executive** of the country . Later on he declared himself the president and thus strangled democracy. Through a referendum he extended his term for 5 years in which there has been forgery and disorder on a large scale. He changed the constitution in 2002 . According to the changed constitution the president became very powerful .The work of the civilian cabinet was supervised by a national security council of whose majority of the members were army officials . In this way we see that Pakistan had elections , elected representatives had some powers , but the final power rested with the military officers and General Musharraf himself .In February 2008, there were general elections in Pakistan in which Asif ali Zardari became the president and Yusuf Raza Gilani became the prime minister. Democracy thus was established there but it is still facing many challenges .

It is clear that Pakistan under Musharraf should not be called a democracy because the people of Pakistan had not elected him .The power to take final decision rested with army officials who were not elected by the people.

This happens commonly in all dictatorships and monarchies in the world . Prior to the present administrative set-up there was monarchy in Nepal where the ruler was not elected but the one who was born in the

royal family became the ruler. Here also in running the administration the general public had no participation. China which had accepted communist administrative system also did not have the people's participation in the equal manner. In the Chinese parliament there are regular elections every five years. The parliament appoints the president. But some of the members of the parliament are elected by the army. Before contesting elections, a candidate needs the approval of the Chinese Communist Party. The government is always formed by the Communist Party. That is why in the important decisions of the country, there is the participation of the Communist Party instead of the people of the country.

We have seen the techniques and ways of the governments of Pakistan, Nepal and China. The government in India and Britain is formed through the medium of elections. For this there are elections every five years in which all adult citizens above the age of 18 cast their votes. The one who gets the highest number of votes wins the election. They are known as the people's **Representatives** and they are the ones who form the government and participate in the working of the government.

Now we can understand that the government with people's participation is democratic while the one without people's participation is non-democratic.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

When Abdul , in the evening , went to the sitting room of his grand-father he saw many people talking among themselves . Karim's father said that in the last elections his vote was casted by someone else . Ramesh was saying that he had casted two votes while Ganesh's uncle said that his name was not in the voter list .After listening to all these I cannot understand why people vote and what are the benefits of voting?

GENERAL DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

Earlier we have gathered information related to democratic and non-democratic governments . Now let us know one general definition of democracy. In democracy people elect their own government through the election. Adults of the country , i.e. , people above the age of 18 cast their votes and elect a responsible person as their representative who can conduct administration. Thus we can define democracy in simple language. Democracy in this sense is that form of administration where people elect the administrators .

In fact, in a democratic set-up people are the centre of administration . We can understand this from the definition of democracy given by Abraham Lincoln, the ex president of America. According to him "Democracy is the administration of the people , for the people and by the people ." This definition, in a very simple manner, differentiates between a democratic and a non-democratic administration. Here we

have seen that the government of General Parvez Musharraf of Pakistan and the military administrator of Myanmar were not elected by the people. In countries with such administrative set-ups those who controlled the army became the rulers. In the decisions of the ruler there was no participation of the people. The same can be applied on the monarchy of Nepal. Prior to this we had seen that before the present administrative organisation of Nepal, there was monarchy in Nepal where the ruler was not elected, but the one who took birth in the royal family became the ruler. We can understand that the administration of these countries cannot be called democracy. In a democracy people elect their representatives and these elected representatives become the administrators. We can understand this like this : through their elected representatives people themselves participate in administration and in the decisions of the administrator there is the participation of the people. Such democratic organisations are called **Representative Democracy** or **Indirect Democracy**. Switzerland is one country where there is Direct Democracy. Here people participate in the administration and make law themselves. That is why it is called **Direct Democracy**.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ramesh came from his school and told his father that his school would be closed on the next day because on that day the representatives of that area would come to his school and deliver speeches. There will be a great crowd to listen to his speeches. Now tell when so many people can sit together then why cannot they take decisions for administration? Why is it necessary to elect a representative for the same ?

FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY

So far we have understood that democracy , in the generally is that form of government in which the administrators are elected by the people. Once we understand this definition of democracy some questions come to our mind, such as, who is the ruler? How are the rulers elected ? Who are the people that participate in the election of the rulers ? what type of government can be called a democratic one ?

Now, let us get the answers of these questions through the medium of the features of democracy .

All of us see that on the day of elections the members of our family who are adult go to cast their votes .These people through their votes elect their representatives. These elected representatives conduct their governance , take decisions for the government and construct laws. Here we must understand one thing that through the votes of the people, representatives are elected .Or we can say that the final decision making power rests with the people . This is a feature of democracy.

When our family members went to cast their votes, then their were many people waiting for the same . Some of them could vote according to their choices while the others could not cast their votes . Still their were some people who were compelled to vote against their choices . Wherever there is such an arrangement of casting the votes , there democracy cannot exist . In a democracy the elections should be withot fear and allurement and according to one's own wishes. Hence, we can say as a feature of democracy that it is based on free and fair elections.

We know that democracy is directly related to franchise. This principle has now come to be accepted almost all over the world. But

still there are many countries where people are denied of equal right to vote . For example, in Saudi Arabia the women do not have the right to vote and in Fiji , the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian .

We have to understand that wherever all the people do not have the right to vote , there democracy can never exist . So it is essential for democracy that all the people get equal right to vote and the importance of their votes be equal . This is also an important feature of democracy.

In a democracy, the administration of a country operates through the constitution and not through any person or any organisation .If any law is made against the spirit of the constitution can the judiciary end such

Do yourself

Ask your Panchayat's Mukhiya or Ward Member : How many times general meeting for people has been called during this month in the Panchayat or Ward area? How many people participated the meeting and shared ideas.

laws? In a democracy there is a guarantee for the basic rights of the citizens . They should be free to think , to have opinions, to express these in public , to form associations , to protest and take other political actions independently . Everyone should be equal before law . These rights must be protected by an independent judiciary whose orders are obeyed by all of us.

In this way we can understand

that in democracy the government cannot do whatever it likes. The government conducts its functions and responsibilities on the basis of prescribed manners. Every major decision has to go through a series of consultations. Every office-bearer has certain rights and responsibilities assigned by the constitution and the law, and each of

these is accountable to the people. Thus we can understand that in democracy the rule of the law operates, and there is a guarantee of rights and a democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional law and citizens' rights.

We saw that in the year 2005 there were elections in Bihar in which the adult people casted their votes. On basis of the votes the representatives won the elections and came into the legislative assembly. Thereafter the government of Shri Nitish Kumar was formed in Bihar. We know that the government of that party is formed who gets a support of representatives that are more than half of the total representatives. This is the same as the government belongs to the one who has a majority [we will study about this in detail in Chapter 5]. Hence, it is a feature of democracy that **the party which gets a majority forms the government.**

Thus we see that whenever there are elections for Lok sabha or Vidhan sabha people campaign for elections through different types of flags and banners. These different flags belong to different parties, such as the five fingers of hand – Congress party, lotus – Bhartiya Janata party, lantern – Rashtriya Janata Dal, arrow – Janata Dal United, etc. All these parties want to mobilise and attract the voters in their favour to get their votes. The leaders of different parties through their election programmes and speeches put forward their policies. The people of the country listen to their speeches and ideas and vote according to their own wishes. At that time the voter has before him a number of alternatives of different parties. Democracy cannot exist wherever there is no multi party system.

In the beginning of this chapter we talked about a simple definition of democracy and also said that democracy is that form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people. On the basis of this definition and through the help of various examples the features of democracy can be understood. Democracy is that form of government where –

- ◆ The decisions are taken by the representatives elected by the people.
- ◆ The elections are free and fair.
- ◆ The government formed through elections works within limits set by constitutional law and prescribed rules and respects the basic rights of the citizens.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

During an election we can see motor cars full of different flags and banners with songs and music moving around villages and colonies. This makes us happy but one cannot understand what is the logic behind contesting by different parties for the same election?

WHY DEMOCRACY?

In the previous chapter and in this chapter we have come to know that there are different forms of government, for example, Monarchy, Military rule, Communist rule and Democracy. We will be delighted to know that among all the governments, Democratic government is the best form of government. There is a tough competition in the world to accept the

democratic form of government. Now the question comes to our mind why is it the best form of government? To understand this we will have to discuss the merits and demerits of democracy as well as the arguments in favour of, and against democracy.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Through the medium of television we see through the medium of radio we listen that in the parliament and in the state assemblies there are hot discussions on any issue. Why are discussions held? What benefits do we have from them?

ARGUMENTS AGAINST DEMOCRACY

When we discuss democracy and democratic governments then some arguments come against democracy. The opponents of democracy argue that in democratic countries the number of illiterate and irresponsible persons are too many. Thus by giving importance to these votes the quality of the government deteriorates.

In democracy the struggle for power and the game for power is a continuous process. There is no place for morality, the only thing that is important is how to grab power. It proves harmful to the people as well as to the country.

The process of taking decision is difficult in democracy. Before reaching any decision there is a lot of debate, discussion, and argument which leads to huge problems.

There is another argument against democracy that it is a very expensive form of government, because lots of expenses are incurred

in the process of elections involved in it. There is another allegation that it becomes a toy in the hands of corrupt politicians. They grab power by arousing the sentiments and by gaining the sympathy of the people.

Here we have come across many arguments against democracy. We also have to understand that democracy has not developed any method or manner related to these problems so that they can be solved. Democracy has neither been able to eradicate poverty nor doubts. In a democracy there is the participation of the people. There is a delay as well as mistakes in taking decisions. But all the decisions are not wrong.

Hence, from the above given points it seems that democracy is not an ideal form of government. Still it is the best form of governments amongst the ones we have to choose.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF DEMOCRACY

In this discussion we will try to understand mainly two points : firstly, why democracy is better than other forms of government? secondly, what are the merits of democracy? We will solve these problems with the help of an example. China's famine of 1958-1961 was the worst recorded famine in world history. Crores of people died of hunger in the famine. A terrific situation similar to this catastrophe due to floods occurred in the months of August-September, 2008 in North Bihar which destroyed property and life worth millions. Lakhs of people were ruined. We have before us the conditions of two forms of governments in two counties. As a result of the democratic government in India Bihar could soon get free from the spoils of devastation, while China took a long time in getting rid of the spoils of the above mentioned famine. In this context the economists have to say that no large scale

tragedy has ever occurred in a democratic country, because in a democracy there are multi - party election system. The opposition parties are strong and there is an independent media to criticize the government.

This example brings out one of the reasons why democracy is considered the best form of government. Democracy is better than any form of government in responding to the needs of the people. A non-democratic government may and can respond to the people's needs, but it all depends on the wishes of the people who rule. Thus we can understand that a democratic government has its first quality that it is a more accountable form of government.

In comparison to non- democratic governments, the democratic government is the best form of government for public welfare. In a democracy people rule through the medium of their representatives. The representatives are well aware of the wishes, sentiments and needs of the people. While ruling they take into consideration the wishes, sentiments and the needs of the people. Hence, in a democracy the government works for public welfare.

We know that nature has granted us some rights, such as, Right to Freedom, Right to Equality, Right to Life, etc. These are also called human rights. [Human Rights has been discussed in Chapter 6]. By using these rights an individual can achieve an all round development of his personality. These different types of rights are granted only in a democracy. Only in a democracy a person can express his views. They can practise political and civil rights equally. This enhances the dignity of the citizens. This is a major quality of democracy. In this context the role of the judiciary becomes significant because judiciary is a constant watchdog of the legislature and the executive.

In a democracy there is discussion and debates held publicly over the decisions taken by the government. If the government takes some rash and irresponsible decision then through public discussion the government's attention is attracted, because of which the government has the alternative of amendment in its decisions. If the government does not change its incorrect decisions then the government is likely to be changed. The example of such a case is when in 1975 Smt Indira Gandhi declared an emergency in India, it was supposed to be an incorrect decision on the part of the people. As a result people did not give their mandate to Smt Indira Gandhi in the elections of 1977, and Smt Indira Gandhi had to quit from authority. Such a system is not possible in a non- democratic government. Hence, in a democracy the government gets an opportunity to improve the quality of decision making.

During the elections, or even on normal days, the leaders deliver speeches. In these speeches they acquaint the people with the policies and programmes of the government which is easily comprehensible to the people whether it is in their interest or not. If the decision of the government is not in their interest they oppose it. This proves that people are aware of their rights and duties. We can understand that democracy is the only form of government in which a political training continues on a regular basis.

Let us sum it up. Democracy cannot get us everything which is necessary for life and is also not the solution to all the problems. But still it is better than any other alternative that we know and which the people have experienced. It offers better chances of a good decision. It is likely to respect people's own wishes and allows different kinds of people to live together. It allows a way of correcting its mistakes and offers more dignity to all citizens. That is why democracy is considered the best form of government. On the basis of all these discussions we can

conclude that democracy is not just a type of government but also a type of political, social and economic system.

BRODER MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY

In this chapter we have considered the basic meaning of democracy. We have also understood that as a form of government democracy is better than any other form of government. Except some, most of the countries have opted for a representative democracy. In representative democracy all the people do not rule, only the representatives rule.

We have understood democracy as the best form of government. Now we have to understand that democracy exists in many countries. Among these countries we would try to know which one is a general democracy and which one a good democracy? Is there the operation of democracy beyond government? To understand these questions we need to turn to broader meanings of democracy. To understand the broader meaning of democracy we can go through some examples:

The marriage of Riti, the elder sister of Prafulla, has been finalised. All the members of the family are happy. At night all the members of the family are sitting together. In that meeting it has to be decided what and how the things are to be for the marriage. All the members get an opportunity to put forward their views. After listening to all the members some decisions are taken with the consent of all the members so that the ceremony would take place in a cordial manner without the shortage of any item.

Another example is that of Dusshera Puja which is going to take place. Durga Puja will be held in the village as well. To arrange this all the people of the village are presenting their views. Some people talk about the cultural programmes to be performed during the Puja, while some others talk about the better formation of the Pandal. The point is that everyone is presenting one's views and in the end a conclusion will be drawn after taking into consideration the viewpoints of all the people present.

In both these examples the basic pattern of a democratic discussion has been focussed. This also makes clear that democracy is not limited to government only, it has its reach to organisations, villages and families. Thus, democracy is such a system which can be practised in any sphere of life.

Sometimes we use the word democracy not to describe any existing government but to set up an ideal standard that all democracies continuously aim to become. True democracy will come to this country when no one goes hungry to bed, every citizen must get equal right to vote, play an equal role in decision making, every citizen gets equal information and basic education.

If we take these ideals seriously, then no country in the world is a democracy. In a democracy these basic weaknesses are identified and also solved which is ideal for democracy. Thus, we can differentiate between general and good democracy.

Summing up we can say that in its broader sense democracy is not just a political system, but also a moral belief and a social situation. It develops dedication in a common man. It is used as a type of living one's life.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following is not true of Democracy?
 - a. A government elected by the people.
 - b. Fair elections.
 - c. Control of someone on the judiciary.
 - d. People's participation in the decision taken by the government.
2. Which form of government is supposed to be the best in the world today?
 - a. A democratic rule.
 - b. Military rule.
 - c. Communist rule .
 - d. Monarchy.
3. How do we differentiate between a democratic and a non-democratic government?
 - a. On the basis of the right to vote.
 - b. On the basis of multi- party system.
 - c. On the basis of elections held within a certain time- frame.
 - d. On the basis of the process of the decision taken by the government.
4. Who rules in a democracy?
 - a. People
 - b. Army
 - c. Judiciary
 - d. Election- commission

5. Who has the authority to rule in a military rule?
- In the hands of the parliament.
 - In the hands of the people.
 - In the hands of the army /military.
 - In the hands of the judges.
6. In the year 2005 in the Bihar Legislative Assembly elections, Anita, along with her parents went to cast her vote. But she was prohibited from voting because she was not of age. Now tell us what is the minimum age for voting in India?
- 20 years.
 - 21 years.
 - 18 years .
 - 16 years.
7. Match the following countries with their respective forms of government?
- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| a. Democratic government | 1. Myanmar [Burma] |
| b. Military rule | 2. Bhutan |
| c. Communist rule | 3. India |
| d. Monarchy | 4. China |
8. The symbols and names of some of the parties have been given below. Match them.
- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Fingers of hand | 1. Bhartiya Janata Party |
| b. Lotus | 2. Janata Dal United |
| c. Lantern | 3. Congress |
| d. Arrow | 4. Rshtriya Janata Dal |

9. Here is some information about four countries. Based on this information how would you classify each of these countries. Write “Democratic”, “Non- Democratic”. Or “not sure” against each of these.
- Country A- where people rule through their representatives.
 - Country B- only military has the right to take decisions in administration.
 - Country C- where the importance of the votes of the males are more than those of the females.
 - Country D- where universal franchise does not exist.
10. Here is some information about four countries. Based on this information how would you classify each of these countries? Write ‘democratic’, ‘undemocratic’ or ‘not sure’ against each of these.
- Country A- in the elections the members of only one party can contest.
 - Country B- there is no independent Election Commission.
 - Country C- people have the right to vote according to their religion.
 - Country D- the senior citizens are prohibited from voting.
11. The following are some wrong statements about democracy. Identify the wrong element in each of them and on the basis of this chapter. Rewrite after making correction.
- There cannot be an equal participation of all the individuals because all the individuals are not equal.
 - If a democratic government takes a wrong decision, it is accepted readily by the people.

- c. Wherever there are elections, it is supposed that there exists democracy.
 - d. There is no control over the government in democracy. The government is free to take its decisions according to its wishes.
 - e. It is not necessary that there should be an independent judiciary in democracy.
12. Following are some arguments. Which of them are against democracy?
- a. In a democracy all the votes are of equal value.
 - b. A democratic government works for public welfare.
 - c. A democratic government acts arbitrarily.
 - d. In a democratic country, the government is accountable to the people.
13. Following are some statements among which some are democratic and some undemocratic. Why are these statements democratic or undemocratic?
- a. In the Indian government, a minister said – the parliament should make such laws which restrict upon the freedom of press.
 - b. There is a mukhia who prohibits a senior woman citizen from voting on account of being illiterate.
 - c. A Commission of depressed classes for the development of depressed classes has been formed in Bihar.
 - d. The women organisations have demanded for their complete participation in parliament.

14. There is a village in Bihar where a single school has not yet opened. The people of the village have held a meeting to attract the attention of the government in this direction and have discussed a number of ideas. Which of these ways is undemocratic and why?
- a. To file a case in the court on account of right to education being a compulsory and fundamental right.
 - b. Organise meetings and public gathering against government.
 - c. To mortgage officials who have come in the village and behave irrationally with them.
 - d. To boycott the next election.
15. Which of the following statements do you consider democratic and why?
- a. A leader – whoever votes for me in this election will get a dhoti, a sari, and a blanket free.
 - b. A farmer to a labourer – your wife will get half of the wages, because she is a woman.
 - c. The workers to the officials – we should get the prescribed facilities by the government during the period of our work.
16. Two items of news published in a newspaper in the month of September 2008 are before you.
- A An adult girl Guddi marries Shanker, according to her own wishes. Shanker belongs to a different caste. The people of the village oppose this marriage, and forcibly oust Shanker's father out of the village.

- B The police forced brutally on the demonstrators demonstrating before the government in favour of their demands.

Consider both these news items and give reasons to your answer whether they are in favour of democracy or not.

17. On 26th December 2008, there was a news published in the Hindustan Daily – “Against the Nuclear Treaty the opposition members of the parliament have seized and demonstrated before the parliament house and have demanded for a meeting of the parliament. Consider this news and state whether the manner of the opposition is democratic or undemocratic. Give reasons to you answer.

Project work:

Find out by asking the responsible persons of your village and colony: How many times have the representatives of your village or your colony have come? Why did they come and what works did they do?