



POLITICAL SCIENCE

11

The Idea of Democracy and its Spread

We studied some topics in European history in the History chapters of this Social Science textbook. We learnt that the French Revolution which spread new political ideas across the world. We saw the European monarchies of the time being challenged. In most cases, the attempts were to replace them with governments in which the people chose or elected their representatives. We shall learn about this new political system, called democracy, in this chapter.

We shall try to understand how democratic ideas began spreading in different countries of the world and the kind of challenges the people faced in establishing democratic rule. We shall study the examples of two countries - Libya and Myanmar - to see how the process of democracy takes root. We shall study the struggle to establish democracy in these two countries in recent years.

Some familiar events

The students are playing on the school playground. The bell rings. They all run to their classrooms. The social science teacher enters class IX. The students greet her as they go to their seats.

Teacher: Who is the monitor of the class?

Ramesh: Ramabai is the monitor of our class.

Teacher: Who made Ramabai the monitor of this class?

Komal: I don't know.

Teacher: Who made you the monitor, Ramabai?

Ramabai: I didn't want to be the monitor. Our class teacher gave me this duty.

Teacher: Is there any other way that a student can become the monitor of the class?

Kamlesh: We can ask the students who they want as their monitor.

Which of the two processes of appointing a monitor is more democratic, and why?

Rosy scored 80 percent in her class 10 examination. Her family was happy. They wanted her to study science. But Rosy wanted to study social science. Her parents and other relatives were upset by her decision and tried to pressurize her to study science so she could become a doctor. In the end, Rosy could not study the subject of her choice.

Do you think the family's decision was democratic?

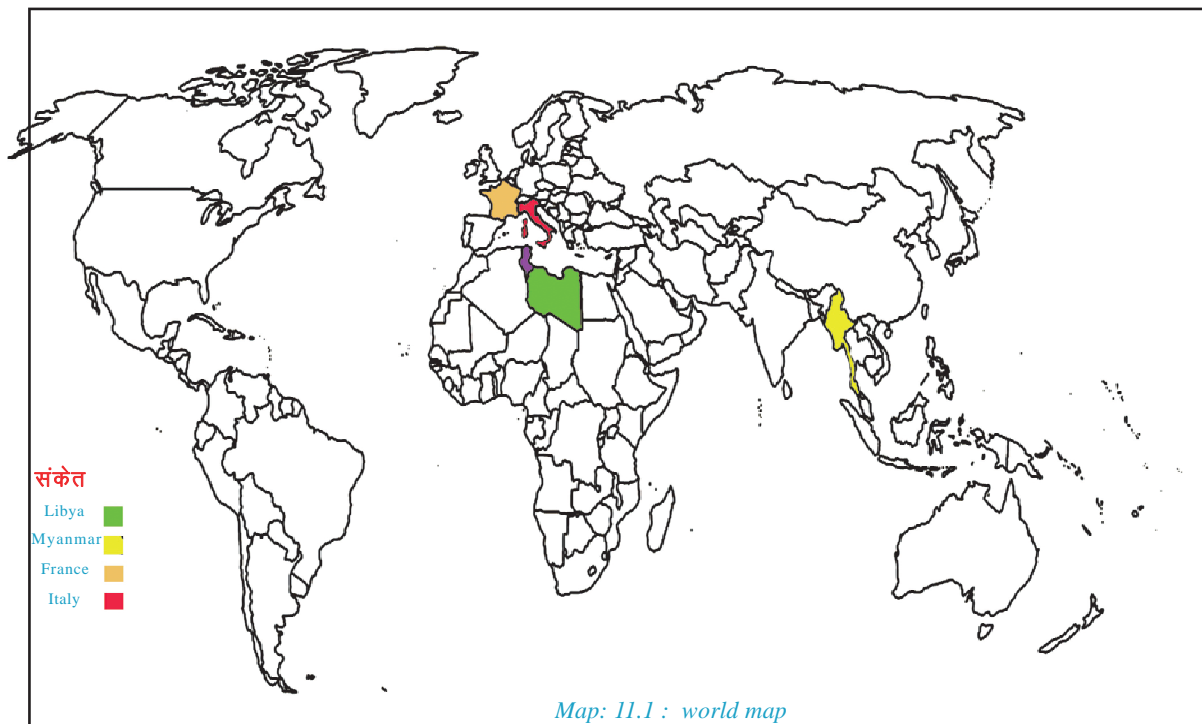
Democracy is a comprehensive idea that is linked to one's personal, family and social life. We also see democracy as a form of government, a political system. In this chapter, we shall try to understand how people participate in a democratic system of governance.

We learnt about India's democratic system in the previous class. We learnt how governments are formed and what functions they perform. The table below lists the different units in a democratic system to which representatives are elected.

No	Unit	Representative's position
1.	Rural (Gram Panchayat)
2.	Urban (Nagar Panchayat, Municipal Corporation)
3.	Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly)
4.	Vidhan Parishad (Legislative Council)
5.	Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament)
6.	Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament)

What is the role of the people in electing the above representatives? Discuss in class.

Map 11.1: Democratic struggles against dictatorships and the spread of democracy in the world



Locate the following countries - Libya, France, Italy and Myanmar in the world map.

We shall now look at the examples of Libya and Myanmar, whose people fought for democracy.

11.1 The Story of Libya

Libya was a poor country in North Africa that was colonised by Italy. It gained its independence from Italy on February 10, 1947. But it remained under the rule of the United Nation's Security Council until December 24, 1951. England and France looked after Libya's affairs on behalf of the Security Council during this period. Libya achieved full independence on December 24, 1951.



Map 11.2: Libya

Establishment of Monarchy in Libya

After independence, King Idris became the ruler of Libya. He dominated the country along with a few elite families. Most Libyans belonged to different tribes. They engaged in farming and animal husbandry and were dominated by their tribal chiefs.

Large reserves of natural oil and gas were discovered in Libya in 1959 and the country became a rich nation. The king and his favoured elite families gained control of all these natural resources. It was during this period that a wave of nationalist movement began spreading in North Africa. Its impact was felt in Libya.

The youth of the country were aspired to set up a modern state for the welfare of the people, free from all exploitative forces. They wanted to bring unity and peace to Libya, ending all tribal conflicts and atrocities against women. They wanted the revenue earned from oil to be used for the benefit of all the citizens.

Libya was a colony of which nation?

What impact did the discovery of large reserves of oil and natural gas have on Libya's system of governance?

What kind of state did the youth of the country want to establish?

Military Coup by Col Muammar Gaddafi

Col. Muammar Gaddafi was one of the powerful leaders of the Libyan army. Along with 70 young officers, he took control of the country in 1969. He called his military junta the Free Officers Movement. King Idris abandoned the throne and fled from Libya. The monarchy was ended and Gaddafi declared a new Socialist Libyan Arab Republic. The army gave its full backing to the revolution under the leadership of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), which consisted of 12 army officers. The RCC declared that Libya would be a modern, egalitarian nation.



Figure 11.1: Col Muammar Gaddafi

Progress and Development in Libya

We read earlier that most people in Libya belonged to various tribes. Their primary concern was the security, respect and well-being of their own tribe. They were mostly poor nomadic pastoralists. Women were veiled and were not allowed to participate in public affairs.

The new government took many important steps that led to Libya's rapid development. They included nationalization of the country's oil wealth. However, despite this, a few rich and powerful families allied to the government continued to exercise control over the country's oil resources, trade and industry. They gained control of the government-controlled oil companies.

The military government used the oil revenues to launch many programmes for the welfare of the people. The nomadic tribes were allotted irrigated agricultural land so that they could live a settled life. Free primary education and free medical facilities were provided to all citizens and many government housing schemes were launched.

Gaddafi made military service compulsory for all Libyans – both men and women. He ensured that women had equal status in society as men and formulated many laws for their benefit. Legally no man was permitted to have more than one wife.

From the time Gaddafi came to power in 1969 until 2011, these welfare schemes saw the average life expectancy of the people increase from 50 years to 77 years. The country's 30 lakh population was provided free medical facilities, education and subsidized housing. The most important change was freedom and equality of women. They now had the right to start their own business, own property and work in government jobs. In 2010, Libya's male-female literacy rate was 90 percent. The country occupied the leading position in the whole of Africa in social welfare.

This period of development in Libya saw the emergence of a new middle class. The government established people's councils



Figure 11.2: A political protest by Libyan citizens

to encourage its citizens to participate in the administration of the country. It also established a legislative assembly in the central government.

However Gaddafi and the RCC had very little faith in democratic institutions. The members of the legislative assembly and councils had to accept the writ of the RCC. They could not take their own decisions. That's why the people began losing faith in these councils. Any leader who appeared to pose a political challenge was suppressed. People did not have the freedom to form their own organisations nor was an independent media permitted to flourish.

The Economic Development and Social Welfare

The rapid changes occurring in Libya because of urbanization, liberalization of the economy and growing job opportunities in the government sector led to the gradual demise of tribal life. The different classes and communities in Libyan society were now living in harmony. Most people were employed in government service. The growing middle class was showing keen interest in business and industry but opportunities were limited.

What steps did Col Gaddafi take for Libya's progress?

What impact did the various initiatives launched by Col Gaddafi have on the people of Libya?

Do you think Gaddafi ruled Libya democratically? Discuss in class.

Military Dictatorship and the Struggle for Democracy

The Gaddafi government had no faith in democratic institutions. It established a parallel administrative body called the Revolutionary Command Council. The military rulers did not tolerate any kind of opposition to the government. They imprisoned and even killed anyone who raised their voice in protest and used the crudest methods to suppress and silence all opposition. The citizens were not allowed to form any kind of organization.

In 2010, a businessman was killed in Tunisia, Libya's neighbour. The incident sparked a revolt that quickly spread across Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. The internet and mobile technology played a big role in its spread since the governments found it difficult to control these social communication media channels that were used extensively to channelize the protest movement. This revolutionary movement came to be popularly known as the Arab Spring.

In January 2011, the Libyan people staged a protest against corruption in the city of Al-Bayda and the delay in constructing homes under a government housing scheme. Also, in Benghazi, people were not getting even the minimum civic facilities. Many people in the city were unemployed. Many families had no regular income. Benghazi soon became the centre of a violent anti-government protest. The police tried to crush the revolt. People across the country began sharing their problems through the internet and their mobile phones. But the government-controlled media was instructed to blank out coverage of all political developments.

The anti-government protests took a more violent turn in February 2011. People in Benghazi staged demonstrations against the police. Some protesters used fire-arms. They were mostly ordinary citizens, but they included soldiers who had deserted the army to join the protests. Many people's organisations opposing the Gaddafi government began to unite and coordinate the efforts.

Protests broke out in many cities across the country. The protesters attacked government buildings and took control of the radio stations. The police and army resorted to firing in many places to quell the revolt. However, the wave of protest continued to spread and intensify. The rebels pressed their

demand to establish a democratic government in Libya. Gaddafi declared a state of war. He used his air force and army to suppress the revolt. The country was soon in the grip of a civil war.

Some powerful democratic nations in the world were keen to end Gaddafi's dictatorship in Libya. They began extending support the rebel organisations, providing them with weapons and money. The United Nations (UN) also declared its support for the rebels, declaring a 'no-fly zone' over Libya, basically to put a stop to the government's aerial attacks and protect the people. But Gaddafi continued his air strikes. The NATO forces of the United States of America, Britain and France together used their airplanes to attack government positions. The rebellion was eventually successful. Col Gaddafi was arrested as he prepared to flee. He was executed.

Libya Becomes Democratic

Libya held its first democratic election in November 2012. Many political parties put up their candidates to contest the elections. Around 200 people's representatives were elected. A new government was formed. It declared an interim constitution which laid the ground for establishing democracy on a permanent basis in Libya. The eyes of the world are now on the country. They are keen to see whether democracy succeeds in Libya or not. Will the Libyan people be able to strengthen the concept of democracy in their country?

Discuss the Arab Spring with your teacher.

Why did the Libyans want democracy?

Why did the Gaddafi government fail to control the rebellion in Libya?

What role did the internet and mobile phones play in Libya's struggle for democracy?

What were the main issues of the democratic movement in Libya?

11.2 Myanmar (Burma)

Like India, Myanmar, too, was a British colony. The country is a prominent producer of rice and is rich in forest resources like teak, minerals like tin, and semi-precious stones like sapphire and ruby. It gained its independence five months after India. It became a parliamentary democracy with two legislative assemblies, just like India. It seemed like Myanmar would emerge as a democratic nation, just as India did. But the country did not have strong political parties, national leaders or a politically conscious society that could steer it along the democratic path.

Democracy in Myanmar

An ethnic Burmese leader Aung San led the movement for the independence and Myanmar gained independence on January 4, 1948 even though Aung San was assassinated six months earlier. Prior to the independence, the leaders of the different ethnic groups of Burma had reached an agreement to guarantee the rights of their tribes and to also include minority communities in the democratic process. The agreement allowed the country to function as a democracy in the initial few years. Many political parties participated in the elections conducted in 1951, 1956 and 1960 to elect democratic governments.



Map 11.3 : Myanmar

In which year and under whose leadership did Myanmar achieve independence?

In which years were democratic elections held in Myanmar?

Military Rule in Myanmar

Myanmar faced many complex problems related to tribal rights. The country required a strong institutional structure to address and resolve these problems. But it did not have such strong institutions. The army took control of many tribal regions and established its rule. Many tribes took up arms to oppose the military takeover.

The army began suppressing the rebels. Army chief Gen Ne Win overthrew the duly elected government in 1962 and took over control of the country. He tried to nationalize the industrial and mineral resources sectors and also declared free universal education and free medical facilities for all citizens. Between 1962 and 1965, many laws were passed to control the powerful landlords and curb money-lending activities. The laws sought to protect the land and property rights of small peasants as well as the interests of sharecroppers.

The military rulers tried to gain the confidence of the people by showing them that they were working for their welfare. They nationalized all industries and mines. This brought all natural resources under army control. But unlike Libya, where army rule led to the welfare of the country, Myanmar saw no progress and the country became increasingly economically impoverished. Poverty forced the peasants to work on the farms, which were now run by the army. Their children were also forced into bondage by the army. There were many allegations of human rights violation against the military administrators. People were evicted from their homes and forced to work as bonded labourers. Child labour was also harshly exploited.

The protests against military rule were mostly spearheaded by students. A major protest broke out in 1988, which was brutally suppressed by the army. Thousands of protesters were killed. Following the protest, one army faction took over the reins of government, promising to hold elections. It was during this period that Aung San Suu Kyi (daughter of assassinated Aung San) launched a movement for political reform in the country. She has since emerged as the leader of Burma's struggle for democracy.

How was military rule established in Myanmar?

What steps did the military rulers undertake to win the support of the people?



Map 11.3 : Ang San Suu Kyi

Why did Myanmar not see much development even after the army nationalised the country's industries and mines?

Myanmar's military rulers declared that elections would be held in 1990. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won 80 percent of the seats in the election. Party leader Ang San Suu Kyi was in jail at the time. The army rejected the demand for her release and did not permit her party to form the government. Suu Kyi was released after the election but kept under house arrest. Her freedom of movement was restricted and she was not permitted to meet or interact with people. She was not even allowed to attend her husband's funeral or meet her two sons.

Many democratic nations in the world put pressure on the military

rulers to release all the imprisoned political prisoners and restore the democratically elected government in Myanmar. International economic and trade sanctions were imposed on the country to maintain the pressure on the army. Myanmar could neither export nor import goods. The sanctions forced the military government to modify its policies.

Who was Aung San Suu Kyi? What did she do to usher in political change in Myanmar?

Why didn't the military rulers permit the National League for Democracy to form the government even after the party won 80 percent of the seats in the election?

What impact did the economic sanctions imposed by the democratic nations have on Myanmar?

Changes in Myanmar

Many changes took place in Myanmar in 2008. The military government announced a public referendum on establishing democracy in the country but the referendum was never conducted. The name of the country was changed from Burma to Myanmar. An election was held in 2010 under the supervision of the United Nations. However, Suu Kyi remained under house arrest and was barred from contesting. She was released only after the election. Her party boycotted the election in protest. As a result, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party emerged victorious amidst accusations of electoral malpractices.

The military junta was dissolved and Thein Sein was elected the new president of the country. But the army continued to exercise control behind the scene. Hence, most countries in the world did not consider the elections to be legitimate.

In 2011, by-elections were held to 45 seats. This time, Suu Kyi's NLD contested, winning 43 seats. Suu Kyi's release and the NLD's participation in the elections marked the beginning of democratic rule in Myanmar.

The political upheavals in Libya and Myanmar are an on-going story that has yet to reach its conclusion. It appears that Myanmar will complete the transition to a democratic nation, with many more political parties contesting future elections. Hence, the possibility of democracy establishing roots in the country is strong.

Comparing Libya and Myanmar

We read about two contemporary democratic struggles in the world. The two nations are different in many ways but there are similarities in the aspirations of their people.

The welfare measures undertaken in Libya fulfilled the fundamental needs of the people. They gave the people the opportunity to improve their living standards through education and employment. Myanmar also initiated some welfare measures, including land reform laws. But the army exploited the people and the country's natural resources. As a result, the people were mired in poverty.

In both countries, the ruling government had the active backing of the army. The rulers did not allow free and fair elections nor did they permit the formation of political parties. Even when elections were held, they did not allow the victorious parties to form a government. Such autocracy stifled freedom of thought, expression and political dissent. It also stifled the evolution of political organisations.

However, Myanmar was different from Libya. Myanmar started with a democratic government but then the military took over the reins of government. In Libya, the army took over power after abolishing the monarchy. Both countries lacked the enabling conditions for a healthy democracy to flourish. Both

countries were deeply divided politically and the possibility of the ruling classes working out a composite solution acceptable to all was low. The people of both nations wanted freely elected governments. They wanted freedom of expression. They wanted the freedom to protest against wrong doing. They wanted political parties that could act freely and independently.

Both countries resorted to large scale nationalization, which put the brake on balanced development. They were also affected by large scale corruption. Even the routine, daily working of the government was affected by corruption. People felt helpless and angry, which strengthened their will to protest against the government. They began to believe that democracy could provide a solution to their problems.

In this chapter, we tried to understand the struggle for democracy over the past few decades in both Libya and Myanmar. In the 20th century, many countries in the world began demanding some form of democratic governance. Democracy was established in most colonial countries after they gained independence. Wherever democracy failed to take root, the struggle to establish a democratic government continues to this day. In the modern era, there is no country in the world whose citizen's would willingly accept the rule of a monarch or dictator.

The Nobel Prize

Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1991. She was under house arrest at the time. In her absence, her son accepted the award on her behalf. The following is an excerpt from his acceptance speech:

"... She would begin by saying that she accepts the Nobel Prize for Peace not in her own name but in the name of all the people of Burma. Theirs is the prize and theirs will be the eventual victory in Burma's long struggle for peace, freedom and democracy.

"... I personally believe that by her own dedication and personal sacrifice she has come to be a worthy symbol through whom the plight of all the people of Burma may be recognised. The plight of those in the countryside and towns, living in poverty and destitution, those in prison, battered and tortured; the plight of the young people, the hope of Burma, dying of malaria in the jungles to which they have fled; that of the Buddhist monks, beaten and dishonoured.

".... Aung San Suu Kyi says, 'The quest for democracy in Burma is the struggle of people to live whole, meaningful lives as free and equal members of the world community. It is part of the unceasing human endeavour to prove that the spirit of man can transcend the flaws of his nature.'"

What were the major policy changes the military government made after 2008?

What did the military rulers do to prevent Suu Kyi and her NLD party from coming to power in 2010 and thereafter?

Why does it seem like democracy can be established in Myanmar? Discuss in class.

EXERCISES

1. Choose the right option in the following:

1. Who was the king of Libya?
a) Idris b) Mussolini c) Col. Gaddafi d) Aung San Suu Kyi

2. In which city did the rebellion in Libya begin?
a) Tripoli b) Benghazi c) Al Bayda d) Rangoon
3. What was the literacy rate (percent) in Libya in 2010?
a) 50 b) 70 c) 80 d) 90
4. Who took over power after toppling the democratic government in Myanmar?
a) Aung San b) Ne Win c) Aung San Suu kyi d) Thein Sein
5. Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize for her contribution in which field?
a) Literature b) Peace c) Social welfare d) Medicine

2. Fill in the blanks:

1. Libya was a in North-Africa.
2. is the current president of Myanmar.
3. The people of Libya were mostly involved in farming and
4. Myanmar was colonized by
5. In Myanmar, farmers were forced to sell their children to the

3. Answer the following questions:

1. Why did Libya witness mass protests in 2011?
2. Why did America want to dismiss the Gaddafi government?
3. How did urbanization affect the people of Libya?
4. Apart from the common people, who participated in the popular movement to oust the Gaddafi government?
5. What were the atrocities committed by the army against the people of Myanmar?
6. Why was Aung San Suu Kyi placed under house arrest?
7. Why did people oppose the Gaddafi government despite the economic and social development initiatives it undertook?
8. Why did America not intervene in Myanmar?
9. Why did democracy fail in Myanmar after independence?
10. Why did America, France and Britain attack Libya?
11. How was military rule in Libya different from Myanmar?
12. Why do you think democracy was not established in Libya even after it gained independence?
13. What were the differences in the social welfare measures undertaken by the military governments in Libya and Myanmar?
14. What role did Aung San Suu Kyi play in establishing democracy in Myanmar?
15. How does literacy and social communication contribute to spreading democratic awareness?
16. Why did the military government refuse to accept the 1990 election verdict in Myanmar?

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