

CHAPTER-15

DEMOCRACY



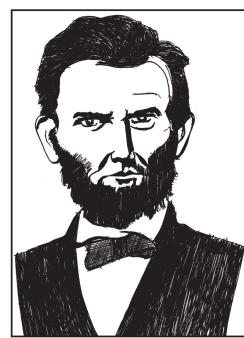
After studying this chapter you learn :

- Know the meaning of democracy.
- Understand the features of different types of governments.
- Identify the different types of democracy and their differences.
- Explain the features, success factors of democracy merits and demerits of democracy.
- Explain adult franchise system and general election system in India.
- Describe the duties and responsibilities of political parties in a democratic system.
- Analyse the responsibilities of mass media in democracy.
- Know about Right to Information Act - 2005.

Democracy is one of the ancient forms of government. Traces of democracy were seen in Ancient India. Ex.: Sabha and Samithi during Sindhu-Saraswathi period. Many revolts and revolutions have taken place in the world to establish the democratic form of Government. The word 'Democracy' is derived from the Greek word Demokratia meaning 'Rule of the people'. Elections play an important role in democracy. Elections provide an opportunity to the people to form their own government. It works on the principle of one man, one vote. The government is formed by the people and the people are the decision makers. Abraham Lincoln, the former President of USA has defined democracy as 'a government by the people, of the people and for the people.' Democracy is a form of government where the supreme power belongs to the people.

Different forms of Government

Monarchy: Monarchy is an old form of government. In monarchy the king heads the government. He enjoys vast powers. He is the law maker. This type of monarchy is called 'absolute monarchy'. In Qatar, Kuwait and in some of the countries of Arab world



absolute monarchies still exist. In the contemporary period the constitutional monarchy exists in Japan and England. In Constitutional monarchy the elected house is the law making body, where a the king/queen remains as the nominal head.

Dictatorship: Dictatorship is the other form of government. Adolf Hitler in Germany and Benito Mussolini in Italy were dictators. In dictatorship the authority rests in the hands of one individual who is not crowned. The dictators have scant respect for democratic values and principles.

Military Dictatorship: In military dictatorship the political power rests with the highest military authority. The people are denied the freedom of expression, freedom to criticizing the government policies and forming associations. Media and Judiciary are controlled by the military. Earlier it was existant in Pakistan.

Communist Government: The people have regulated freedom in this kind of government. Political parties other than communist party do not exist. There is no scope for private ownership. All means of production are nationalized. In China, North Korea and Cuba communist governments are functioning.

All forms of governments have merits and demerits. In democracy merits are more than demerits. It has greater faith in common man and his potentiality. These advantages have made democracy a popular form of government.

Types of Democracy : There are two types in Democracy. They are direct democracy and indirect democracy (Representative Democracy).

Direct Democracy: In direct democracy the people directly participate in electing their government, making polices and laws for their own progress and development. The system of direct democracy can be practised only in countries of small size and population. This system was practised in ancient Greece and presently practised in Switzerland. Direct democracy becomes more effective through referendum and initiative. Direct democracy is difficult to practise in India because of its vastness and size of the population.

Indirect Democracy: Indirect Democracy is most suitable in bigger nations like India, USA and such other nations. In indirect democracy

the people elect their representatives through periodical elections and send them to legislative bodies. These representatives involve in the process of law making and also control the administration. Democracy is defined as a government by the elected representatives through elections conducted from time to time. The elected representatives in turn elect their leader and also the highest executive of the country.

Characteristics of democracy

1. Democracy is based on the consent of the people.
2. It is representative government where people elect their representatives and they make laws.
3. It is based on the principle of universal adult franchise.
4. Elections are held at regular interval in a free and fair manner.
5. Citizens enjoy fundamental rights, hence there is scope for individual development.
6. The government is responsible to the people.
7. People have the right to change and challenge the government.
8. There is rule of law and government's powers are limited constitutionally.
9. It recognizes political parties and entrusts special responsibility on the opposition party.
10. It upholds the sense of dignity in the common man.
11. The main basis of democracy are liberty and equality. The people enjoy maximum liberty and equality. In democracy there is no disparity among the people on the basis of caste, religion and position or status.
12. In democracy, people are the ultimate source of sovereignty (supreme power), and government derives its power from them. For this purpose elections are held at certain intervals. In India general elections take place ones in five years.
13. Democracy is a welfare state and in it special attention is paid to the welfare of the people as a whole and not to a particular class.

Factors essential for the success of democracy

1. People should have an urge to protect democracy.

2. People must always be vigilant.
3. Tolerance is one of the basic qualities needed for the success of democracy. They must work with the spirit of give and take.
4. Success of democracy depends upon good leadership. The leaders must have the ability to understand the problems of the common man. He must possess the qualities of service, patriotism and spirit of sacrifice.
5. Efficient opposition party keeps the governments alert. It checks the ruling party from becoming dictatorial.
6. Well informed and educated electorate contribute to the success of democracy.
7. Success of democracy depends upon the role of the people. People must compulsorily vote during election. People must be free from corrupt practices. The people must elect efficient and non-corrupt representatives who can solve their problems.
8. Free, fearless and unbiased press contributes to the success of democracy.
9. Well organized, efficient and responsible local bodies strengthen democracy.

Merits of Democracy

Many countries have accepted democracy as the best form of government because of its merits. The merits of democracy are as follows:

- It protects the rights and independence of the people through an independent judiciary.
- It is based on the principles of equality.
- It provides an opportunity to people to involve themselves in decision making and framing laws.
- People elect representatives and the government of their choice.
- Decisions are taken after debate and discussion. Decisions are based upon public opinion.
- Opposition checks the misuse of power by the government.

- The fundamental rights provide an opportunity for the development of the personality of an individual.
- It brings about a peaceful change of government through elections and thus reduces the danger of revolution.
- Democracy develops nationalism, patriotism, respect to people and creates unity in the midst of diversity.

Demerits of Democracy : Democracy has certain demerits or defects. The demerits in democracy are as follows:

- Lack of respectable educational qualification, managerial skills, leadership qualities, ignorance of social, economic, political issues and selfish attitude of the representatives weaken democracy.
- The competition among the political parties for power results in favouritism and corruption.
- Interests of the party becomes more important than national interest.
- Defections from one political party to another leads to unstable government.
- The caste factor, the use of money and muscle power in the elections weaken the government in the democratic set up.
- Law making in democracy is a lengthy procedure.
- Conducting elections is expensive and much time consuming.
- The majority party at times becomes dictatorial and the opinion of the minority is suppressed.
- The uneducated poor people are often exploited by the people in power.
- Anti-social elements exert influence on the government with their money and muscle power.

Universal Adult Franchise: In India we have representative democracy. Elections play an important role in a representative democracy. People have the right to vote in elections. In India voting right is provided to all people aged 18 and above, regardless of caste, qualification, creed, religion, language and gender.

Before 1989 the minimum voting age in India was 21 years. Through the 61st amendment of 1989 the voting age is reduced to 18 years from 21 years.

Good government always depends upon the voter. So the voter must not come under the influence of caste, creed, money or muscle power while voting. The voter must be careful while choosing a candidate. He must choose the candidate with good qualities and capabilities as stated below :

- The candidate must have a zeal and interest to serve the society.
- The candidate must have concern towards the problems of the people and should be easily approachable.
- The candidate must be educated, loyal, honest and service minded.
- The candidate must not be corrupt and must be a model to others in selfless service, character and actions.
- The courts should not have declared him/her as a criminal and he / she must be free from criminal activities.
- The candidate must not have indulged in anti-social and anti-national activities.

Elections

Elections are important in the democratic set up. Elections are held at periodical intervals. In India elections are conducted once in five years but this period varies from country to country. Elections conducted once in five years on routine is called General elections. If the elections are conducted to fill the vacant seats within the stipulated term of five years, such elections are called by-elections. The Election Commission is set up by the government of India through the constitutional procedures to conduct elections. Its headquarters is at New Delhi. Presently it has one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners. They are appointed by the President of India. Parliament has authority to decide the number of Commissioners it should have. There is State Election Commission at the state level to conduct election to Panchayat Raj institutions.

EXERCISES

I Fill in the blanks with suitable words :

- 1 The word Democracy is derived from the word _____.
- 2 The party that commands majority in the legislature and looks after the administration is called _____ party.
- 3 The minimum age to vote in India is _____ years.
- 4 The elections conducted once in five years in a routine manner is termed as _____ elections.

II Answer the following questions briefly :

- 5 What are the advantages of democracy?
- 6 Mention the different types of Government.
- 7 How is direct democracy different from indirect democracy?
- 8 What is universal adult franchise?
- 9 List out the essential factors for the success of democracy
- 10 Why is efficient opposition party an essential factor in democracy?
- 11 Mention the Characteristics of Democracy?
- 12 Why are periodical elections necessary in democracy ?
- 13 The success of democracy depends on the votes. Discuss.

III Activities :

- 14 Discuss in groups the salient features of democracy, dictatorship and communist form of Government and decide which form of Government is best suited in the modern context.
- 15 The best leadership contributes to the success of Democracy.
arranged discourse.

IV Projects :

- 16 With the guidance of your teacher prepare a project report on the direct democracy practised in Switzerland.
- 17 Prepare a report on the role of public opinion against corruption in India in 2011.

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