

Revision Notes

Chapter - 2

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY? WHY DEMOCRACY?

DEMOCRACY

1. Democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people.

- Myanmar where the army rules, Dictator Pinochet's rule in Chile, or President Nkrumah's rule in Ghana was not democratic. They were not chosen by the people.
- Hereditary kings, like the king of Nepal or Saudi Arabia, are also not democratic rulers. They rule because they were born into noble families.

2. In a democracy final decision making power must rest with those elected by the people.

- In Pakistan, President Musharraf has the power to dismiss national and state assemblies; so the final powers rest with the army and the General himself. We cannot call it a democracy.

3. A democracy must be based on a free and fair election where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing.

- In China elections are held for its Parliament. But all the candidates are either members of Chinese communist Party or eight smaller allies of the party.
- In Mexico elections have been held every six years since 1980. But the same party, PRI, has won the elections. Obviously there has been rigging and mal-practices, with freedom denied to opposition.
- In both the examples elections are held but one can not claim that they are free and fair.

4. In a democracy people's will is ascertained by each adult citizen having one vote and each vote has one value. Democracy is based on the fundamental principle of political equality.

- Countries like Saudi Arabia, Estonia and Fiji in some or other way deny voting rights to certain sections of its population.

5. A democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional and citizens' rights.

- A democratic government cannot do what it likes after winning the elections. It has to respect certain basic rules and is accountable not only to the people but also to other independent officials.
- Robert Mugabe is President of Zimbabwe. He is ruling there for last 38 years. But in many incidences he has behaved in an undemocratic way and even above the law.

WHY DEMOCRACY?

Points Against

There has been criticism of democracy by various people. The charges are that :

- It creates instability by changing its leaders frequently.
- Democracy is about power play and political competition. There is no scope for morality.
- So many people have to be consulted before any issue is solved. It leads to delay.
- Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people.
- It leads to corruption for it is based on electoral corruption.
- Ordinary people do not know what is good for them, so decision making should not be left to them.

Arguments for Democracy:

- Democratic government is a more accountable form of government.
- Democracy improves the quality of decision making.
- Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts.
- Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens.
- It allows us to correct its own mistakes.

Broader meaning of Democracy :

Democratic ideas can be practised in various decision making processes. In broader sense no country can be completely democratic, The features of democracy are only minimum conditions. A lot can be done towards achieving real democracy.